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How do we stop the killing?

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Make federal laws to reduce gun access

GIVEN THE huge number of easily accessible and virtually unregulated guns in the United States, it is surprising there aren't more than 30,000 gun deaths and 100,000 gun injuries each year. Most US cities have experienced an increase in gun violence, and this deadly trend is likely to continue until we enact uniform national gun laws that address easy access to guns by criminals and confront race, poverty, and the lack of economic opportunity in our poorest neighborhoods.

Although Massachusetts has enacted one of the most effective gun violence prevention laws and initiatives in the country, it is surrounded by states where it's easy to buy and sell guns. Moreover, the federal government has allowed easy access to guns and actually restricts law enforcement's ability to reduce the number of gun traffickers. Indeed, there are no federal minimum mandatory gun trafficking statutes, and the US Justice Department requires that the FBI destroy National Instant Check gun purchase records after 24 hours — making it nearly impossible for police to track gun traffickers and illegal multiple gun sale patterns. This is largely due to the influence of the National Rifle Association and the gun lobby over Congress and the Bush administration. As a result, what few national gun laws that do exist are rendered useless. Sadly, law enforcement is unnecessarily at risk because criminals have easy access to more powerful weapons than police are issued.

According to Boston police and federal law enforcement agencies, guns traced to crime are coming from the following sources:

- They are stolen from homes, cars, or gun dealers and then sold to criminals.
- Straw purchasers (buyers with clean background checks) lawfully purchase guns from federally licensed dealers or private sellers and resell to people without a background check or documentation. Historically, about 1 percent of federally licensed dealers are responsible for about 50 percent of guns traced to crimes.
- Guns are purchased at gun shows, flea markets, and other "secondary sale" markets in states where no background checks or documentation is required. There are more than 5,000 two-day gun shows in the United States each year, where more than half the guns sold are transferred by "private sellers." Thirty-two states, including Maine, Vermont, and New Hamp-

shire, allow "private sales" of guns without background checks or documentation. In addition, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is prohibited from regulating "private sales." The Bureau projects that 50 percent of crime guns in Massachusetts originate from within the state and 50 percent come from out of state. However, because of the many gun sale loopholes and poor record keeping, there is no way to know definitely.

So what's the answer to gun trafficking and the increasing gun violence in urban centers?

The federal government must enact uniform gun laws similar to what has worked in Massachusetts. It should:

- Require background checks for all gun purchases, especially at gun shows and flea markets.
- Require safe storage of all firearms — unless they are in the owner's direct control — to reduce gun thefts from homes, cars, and dealers.
- Allow the FBI to maintain gun purchase records that can be accessed by

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law enforcement.

- Develop effective federal gun trafficking laws with minimum mandatory sentences for unlawful multiple gun sales.
- Limit gun purchases to one per month per person.
- Create incentives for gun manufacturers to produce "personalized" and "child-proof" guns that only the intended user can fire.

The federal government must also create economic opportunities, job training, and mentoring programs and close the "equity" gap for the poor urban neighborhoods where virtually all the gun violence and gang activity take place.

These solutions require the political will and courage to stand up to the greed, ignorance, and shortsightedness of the gun lobby and their supporters in Congress and the White House. We must recognize that if gun violence were killing mostly suburban white kids and not urban kids of color, there would be an uproar that Congress and the president could not ignore. There should be an uproar to quiet the sound of gunshots in our inner cities.

John Rosenthal is a gun owner and cofounder of the groups Stop Handgun Violence, Common Sense About Kids and Guns, and the American Hunters and Shooters Association.