

After Parkland shooting, Trump calls for teachers to be armed

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President Donald Trump is leading the charge to flood schools across the country with armed teachers and staff as the supposed solution to the epidemic of deadly school shootings in the US, a week after a shooting by 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz killed 17 and injured 14 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

The president's draconian proposals to further militarize schools come amid a growing wave of popular protests and student walkouts across the country, led by survivors of the Parkland shooting who are demanding stricter gun control laws and an end to school shootings. Nationally coordinated student walkouts and demonstrations are planned for March 14 and 24.

Walkouts were reported across the country Friday, including at schools in Austin, Texas, Greensboro, North Carolina and Palm Beach, Florida. Lawyers in Wisconsin have offered free legal assistance to any students in the state who are punished by school administrators for walking out of class.

Stoneman Douglas High survivors have confronted legislators, primarily Republicans, over their opposition to gun control measures and for receiving funding from the National Rifle Association (NRA), a far-right run political lobbying organization which has immense sway within the US political system, among Republicans as well as Democrats.

Speaking Thursday at the annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference, Trump repeated his call for the elimination of the federal "gun-free zone" law which makes it a crime for anyone who does not have explicit authorization to carry guns into schools or other public buildings.

"It is time to make our schools a much harder target for attackers," Trump declared. "We don't want them

in our schools. We don't want them. When we declare our schools to be Gun Free Zones, it just puts our students in far more danger. Far more danger."

Trump argued that allowing teachers and staff, in particular those who are military veterans, to carry concealed weapons with them in the classroom would deter potential school shooters and protect students. "You do a conceal carry permit. And this would be a major deterrent, because these people are inherently cowards. If they thought like if this guy thought that other people would be shooting bullets back at him, he wouldn't have gone to that school." Trump suggested that teachers should be offered a bonus to induce them to take up arms.

Trump cited reports that sheriff's deputy Scot Peterson, who was on duty at Stoneman Douglas High at the time of the shooting, did not run into the school to try to stop the attack, to justify arming teachers. "I would rather have somebody that loves their students and wants to protect their students than somebody standing outside that doesn't know anybody and doesn't know the students," Trump declared.

He also called for schools to be fortified in order to foil potential killers, stating, "we need a hardened site. Has to be hardened. Can't be soft. They'll sneak in through a window, some way, and you are standing there, totally unprotected."

Later Thursday, in a roundtable discussion at the White House with state and local law enforcement officials about school safety, Trump declared that the percentage of teachers in a school who are armed might have to be as high as 40 percent to deter shooters. He insisted that gun-free zones were as enticing as "ice cream" for prospective school shooters. Trump also promised to strengthen background checks, increase the legal age for purchasing long guns from 18 to 21, and

eliminate bump-stocks, which turn semi-automatic rifles into rapid-fire weapons.

Trump's proposal for arming teachers drew a quick response of horror and opposition amongst educators. "The day they ask me to carry a gun in the classroom is the last day I teach," Kristen Frazier, eighth grade teacher in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, told the *Boston Globe*. "Period. End of story."

Teachers Olivia Bertels and Brittany Wheaton responded to Trump's proposal with the hashtag #ArmMeWith on social media, demanding teachers be given much needed books, school supplies and time needed to address students' emotional needs, instead of guns. Bertels told *USA Today* they felt it was necessary to counter the "absurd notion being espoused by largely NRA-funded politicians" that schools would be safer with armed teachers.

The proposals which Trump are now touting as his own ideas were first outlined by the fascistic Executive Vice President of the NRA, Wayne LaPierre, when he offered to provide armed guards to every school in America in the aftermath of the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre. An NRA task force later tempered this offer, instead recommending that every school have at least one staff member volunteer who is armed.

In fact, Trump's remarks at CPAC were preceded by LaPierre, in his first public remarks since the Parkland shooting, who frothed at the mouth against "socialists" who were plotting to take away Americans' gun rights in order to "eradicate all individual freedoms." LaPierre concluded by reiterating his demand for the deployment of armed guards to "immediately harden our schools," the key demand which has been taken up by Trump.

Florida's Republican governor, Rick Scott, who has been endorsed by the NRA, released a plan on Friday that would mandate the presence of one police officer in every one of the state's public schools, and one additional officer at large schools for every 1,000 students. The plan also follows Trump's proposal for raising the legal age for purchasing guns to 21, with exceptions for members of the military and police, and outlawing bump stocks. A competing proposal put forward by Republicans in the state legislature would allow teachers with law enforcement training to carry guns with them in school.

Scott's proposal, which is estimated to cost \$500 million, would also establish a "violent threat restraining order," which could be used to block someone who is determined to be mentally ill from buying or possessing a firearm or other weapons. A mere \$50 million of the proposed funding would be dedicated to establishing mental health initiatives.

Meanwhile the Democrats have maintained their exclusive focus on gun control. Florida State Senate Democratic Leader Oscar Braynon rejected the Republicans' proposals, saying that they did not go far enough. "Unfortunately, both plans omit a third, critically important piece of legislation Democrats have been and continue to push for: a ban on assault weapons and high capacity magazines," Braynon declared. While such measures would possibly limit casualties when school shootings and other murderous rampages occur, they will do nothing to address the social crisis which is the fundamental causes of such violence.

While there has been much fervor over the issue of gun control and the arming of teachers, little has been said about Nikolas Cruz's involvement in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp at Stoneman Douglas High, where he was a member of a marksmanship team that trained in shooting air-rifles. Cruz was wearing a JROTC t-shirt when he was apprehended by the police.

According to the *New York Times*, Cruz's fellow cadets gave him the nickname "Wolf." The marksmanship program was made possible with more than \$10,000 in funding from the NRA Foundation in 2016, the last year that Cruz was a member.

There are approximately 1,700 high school-based JROTC programs nationwide, which receive funding from the US military and in which students wear military outfits and are drilled by retired military officers. The NRA Foundation provided \$2.2 million in 2016 to schools in 30 states for a variety of gun-related programs, including underwriting air rifle teams.



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