

In wake of Parkland school shooting, Republicans and Democrats call for boosting police powers

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26 February 2018

In response to public outrage over the school shooting tragedy in Parkland, Florida, federal and state authorities, along with the media, are calling for increased police powers, particularly in the nation's schools. On February 14, Nikolas Cruz, 19, entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and proceeded to kill 17 people and injure 14 others with a semi-automatic assault rifle.

Protests by students broke out at many high schools and middle schools across the country last week in response to the latest in a string of school shootings in the US. According to the group Everytown for Gun Safety, so far this year there has been on average one school shooting every 63 hours, more than double the rate for the previous three years.

Students are seeking a political road to address one of the most malignant expressions of the social breakdown in America. Stoneham Douglas pupils have been particularly outspoken in their anger over the inability of the authorities to protect students. They traveled to the state capital Tallahassee last week to lobby lawmakers and have made numerous television appearances.

Parents, students and teachers are asking why the shooter, despite numerous tips to the FBI and local police and run-ins with school officials, was allowed to obtain weapons and carry out the horrific attack. The calls of grief-stricken parents and classmates of the victims for a ban on assault rifles and checks on the ability of the mentally unstable to obtain weapons are entirely understandable.

However, these calls are being exploited by the Trump administration, Florida Governor Rick Scott and politicians of both big business parties to demand an

increased police presence on school grounds. Left in the hands of the parties of the ruling class, gun control, if enacted, will serve as a cover for increased militarization of the schools and society at large.

What is not being addressed in the official debate are the social issues that lie at the root of repeated eruptions of mass violence in America.

President Trump's proposal, thrown out last week at a White House "listening session," that teachers be armed has been met by widespread opposition from educators and students. Speaking later in the week at 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 authorization to carry guns into schools or other public buildings.

Governor Scott, a Republican endorsed by the National Rifle Association (NRA), released a plan on Friday that also called for beefing up the police presence in schools. It 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.

Much has been made of the apparent inaction of Broward County Sheriff's Deputy Scot Peterson, who was stationed outside the Parkland high school as a school resource officer. Video shows him remaining outside the school as the shooter was firing inside. His actions are under investigation by the Broward County Sheriff's Office and he has retired.

Police from the neighboring city of Coral Springs have reported to the media that when they responded to the shooting, they saw, in addition to Peterson, three other Broward deputies waiting behind cars outside of

the school. These assertions are also being investigated.

Jake Tapper, the host of CNN's Sunday interview program "State of the Union," grilled Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel on his office's response to the shooting. Tapper challenged Israel on the inaction of Deputy Peterson and possibly others, as well as the sheriff's office's failure to follow up on repeated police calls made to the Cruz residence concerning Nikolas Cruz's behavior.

Tapper also criticized the PROMISE program put in place by the Broward County School Board, saying it "encouraged warnings, consultations with parents and programs on conflict resolution, instead of arresting students for crimes."

Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran and 73 state Republican lawmakers have called on Governor Scott to suspend Israel. Israel, a Democrat, has rebuffed calls for his resignation.

Details continue to emerge of the multiple warning signs pointing to the potential for Cruz to carry out a deadly shooting. The Broward County Sheriff's Office received a call in November warning that Cruz was collecting guns and knives and "could be a school shooter in the making." The previous year, another tip to the sheriff's office warned that Cruz "planned to shoot up the school."

Acting FBI Deputy Director David Bowdich said this week that the agency made mistakes in its handling of a January warning about Cruz. The FBI failed to investigate a tip from an individual who was concerned that Cruz wanted to kill people, owned guns and could carry out a school shooting. This person told the FBI that she worried Cruz was "going to explode."

Months earlier, the FBI was alerted to a YouTube comment in which someone using the screen name "nikolas cruz" wrote, "I'm going to be a professional school shooter." The agency said it was unable to verify at the time the identity of the poster.

The Broward County Sheriff's Office reported Thursday that it had received 23 calls relating to Cruz or his family dating back to 2008, when he was only nine years old. In a 911 call to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, a woman said that her son and another young man, reportedly Cruz, got into a fight and she was "afraid he's coming back and he has a lot of weapons."

The Florida Department of Children and Families

opened a file on Cruz in 2016 after being alerted to his Snapchat posts showing him cutting his arms and saying he wanted to buy a gun, according to a state report obtained by the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*. Agency investigators who visited Cruz at his home ultimately identified him as a "vulnerable adult due to mental illness," including depression, autism and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, for which he was receiving medication.

Despite this, state investigators closed Cruz's case two months after opening it, determining that the "final level of risk is low," as Cruz "resides with his mother, attends school and receives counseling." Ms. Cruz died this past November, apparently from the flu, leaving the young Cruz devastated.

One of the reasons Cruz may have flown under the radar was that his case is not particularly unusual. Teenagers in cities and towns across the US are part of a generation that was born into a world in which mass shootings are the norm. They have known nothing but constant war, the glorification of the military, police brutality and worsening economic inequality.



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