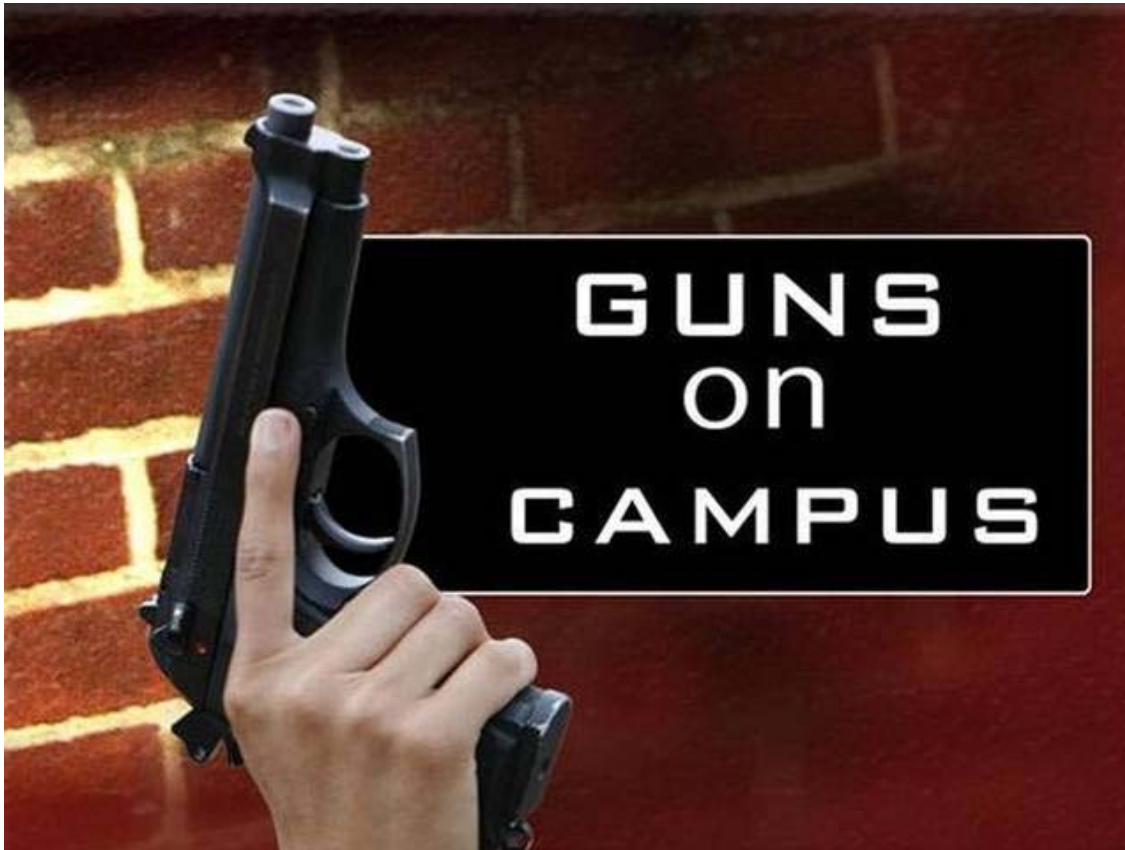


**OP-ED**

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# Guns don't belong in college students' hands



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Almost three out of four Floridians, according to a recent poll, don't want guns on our state college and university campuses. Virtually all of state college and university presidents don't want them there. Same goes for the vast majority of faculty members and student government associations. Police chiefs and sheriffs associations don't want them on campus either.

Who does? The Republican majority in the state Legislature, along with a handful of Second Amendment-loving Democrats. These gun-rights zealots have made the right to keep and bear arms on campus — and even carry them openly — their *cause celebre*. They are OCD about it. The public isn't crying out for guns on campus, but lawmakers are. It seems counter-intuitive in the wake of the latest college massacre in Oregon (and subsequent college shoot-outs), but gun-rights supporters insist that gun-free campuses invite mass shootings and that having guns handy will make campuses safer.

But that flies in the face of empirical data and common sense. The answer to the growing tsunami of gun violence is not more guns. Allowing them on state college and university campuses is sheer madness. Any lawmaker who doesn't think so should think back to his or her student days when most of us experimented with drugs, drank too much, argued loudly into the night, stressed out before exams, pulled all-nighters and sank into fits of depression when love affairs ended. Do you really want to add guns to that picture?

Congressman Ted Deutch, a Democrat from Boca Raton and former state lawmaker, just wrote a persuasive letter opposing the open-carry bill to its House and Senate sponsors, Sen. Don Gaetz and his son, Rep. Matt Gaetz. "Research suggests that guns are rarely employed by private citizens for self-defense purposes," Deutch wrote, "and are usually far likelier to be used to harm one's self or others." FBI statistics back him up. There were 259 instances of self-defense related homicides across the country in 2012, while criminal homicides accounted for 8,342 deaths.

Unfortunately, it looks like no amount of research will change the minds of the Gaetzes or their like-minded colleagues in Tallahassee. They are hellbent on protecting us with guns whether we like it or not. Among those who don't are George Hanbury, president of Nova Southeastern University, who says he wants only sworn police officers on his several campuses. Eduardo Padron at Miami Dade College feels the same way. FIU doesn't want kids coming to class strapped. Nor does John Thrasher, president of FSU and a former state Senate president and GOP conservative. Last year, Thrasher stemmed the tide that tried to pass a campus-carry bill, but looks outmanned in the session beginning in January.

Legislative committees have already approved two gun-related bills. One would make it a misdemeanor to shoot a gun in a dense, urban setting if it was done as "recreation or celebration." I wonder how the family of Rickia Isaac feels about that. She was the 5-year-

old from Liberty City who was shot and killed in 1997 by a bullet fired into the air in celebration of MLK Day. Could anyone honestly say her death should be no more than a misdemeanor?

The other bill passed out of committee recently is the open-carry bill. Should it pass, which seems likely, it's possible students or anyone else with a concealed-weapons permit could walk openly around our college and university campuses with a loaded gun on his or her hip. Would anyone really feel safer? Scholars at Stanford who looked at 20 years of data on gun laws and violent crime concluded that "right-to-carry (RTC) laws are associated with higher rates of murder, aggravated assault, robbery and burglary."

The best argument against guns on campus is that they're simply incompatible with the mission of higher education. Campuses must be places where learning in all its guises is paramount and takes place without the threat of gun violence. Yes, crimes occur on campus, and police must be close by to handle it. Police responded almost instantly when a deranged man opened fire in the FSU library last November, wounding three students. The gunman was shot dead by police. It's doubtful they could they have acted so quickly had they arrived at the crime scene and found several people brandishing weapons.

If you believe as I do that guns should not be allowed on state college and university campuses I'd urge you to contact your state representative and senator. You might tell him or her that no constitutional rights, including those guaranteed by the Second Amendment, are absolute.

We all have a right to free speech, but can't cry "fire" in a crowded theater. Someone who passes a background check has the right to own a gun, but shouldn't keep or carry it on campus. That's been the law in Florida for years and shouldn't be changed. As Justice Robert Jackson once said, "The Constitution is not a suicide pact."



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