



P.O. Box 7501
Denver, Colorado 80207
303-380-6711
web: www.ColoradoCeasefire.org

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Colorado Ceasefire Takes Issue with Mayor Suthers' Gun Rights Statements

Colorado Ceasefire was discouraged and concerned to see Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers' comments regarding the "open carry" of firearms only hours after a second mass shooting in his city within four weeks.

In the last month, Colorado Springs has endured two horrific mass shootings:

October 31st: A man openly carried an assault rifle on a near-downtown street. The 911 dispatcher remarked that "Colorado is an open carry state" and coded the situation as non-urgent, likely contributing to the deaths of three individuals, all of whom were shot and killed 10-15 minutes after the initial 911 call.

November 27th: A man entered the Planned Parenthood clinic armed with an assault rifle and other weapons. A 5-hour siege ensued, in which one police officer and two civilians were shot and killed. Another nine individuals were wounded. Given the nature of the site, this shooting is easily categorized as domestic terrorism. Details of the shooting are still emerging.

Although there are many differences between the shootings, two stark commonalities are that both involved assault weapons which were openly carried, and both targeted random individuals.

The Gazette reported that Suthers said that he "supports the state Constitution's provision that allows Coloradans to openly carry weapons." Contrary to what Mayor Suthers said, our Colorado constitution does *not* provide for openly carried weapons. What it does say is the following:

Article II, section 13. The right of no person to keep and bear arms in defense of his home, person and property, or in aid to the civil power when thereto legally summoned, shall be called in question; but nothing herein shall be construed to justify the practice of carrying concealed weapons.

As Justice Scalia stated with regard to the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, "Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited."

We at Ceasefire note that the open carry of firearms cannot be a federal constitutional right, as it is prohibited fully or partly in nineteen states. It cannot be a Colorado constitutional right, as it is prohibited in the city and county of Denver, a prohibition that has been upheld in court.

Furthermore, there appears to be no provision for open carry in the Colorado Revised Statutes. Our examination of these indicates that open carry appears to exist by lack of a prohibition. That is a situation the Colorado General Assembly should address and rectify.

Carrying a rifle, especially a military assault rifle, in the public arena is not normal behavior, and should invoke an urgent response. Tom Mauser, who lost his son Daniel at Columbine High School, said "this is what happens when we try to normalize abnormal behavior."

The day after the Halloween mass shooting, Mayor Suthers was stated he has "no appetite" for addressing open carry regulations in Colorado Springs. After enduring two mass shootings within a month's time involving openly carried assault weapons, the citizens of his city may have a different perspective.

On Saturday, President Obama responded to the Colorado Springs shooting by saying “This is not normal. We can’t let it become normal ... we have to do something about the easy accessibility of weapons of war on our streets to people who have no business wielding them. Period. Enough is Enough.”

Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers echoed some of Obama’s words, by stating “We need to do a much better job of screening for mental health situations.” Unfortunately, the Mayor’s stance is one often taken by gun rights groups, as a tactic to divert attention from other efforts, such as universal background checks.

We at Colorado Ceasefire take Mayor Suthers comments about mental health seriously and think it is an excellent idea to increase mental health scrutiny in firearms and ammunition purchases. Such mental health checks could be part of a licensing procedure. Colorado does not have licensing for firearms, although other states do, and some include mental health assessments. It is time we take the advice of President Obama and Mayor Suthers and make significant adjustments to our laws to deny firearms to people who are a danger to themselves and others.

Eileen McCarron, president of Colorado Ceasefire, said “Hopefully, in the days ahead, our nation, our state and the city of Colorado Springs will endeavor to find the means to address the awful toll of gun violence in our communities, on persons robbed of their lives or their abilities and on the families so disastrously affected. May we all be granted the wisdom and the courage to begin saving lives.”

We at Colorado Ceasefire continue to hold the Colorado Springs community and the families so very tragically affected by these shootings in our hearts and prayers.

Colorado Ceasefire, an all-volunteer statewide organization, has been fighting for freedom from gun violence since 2000. Ceasefire initiated and was instrumental in the enactment of the 2013 Colorado firearms laws, which included universal background checks, a high capacity magazine ban, and domestic violence firearms relinquishment. Colorado Ceasefire is a member organization of States United to Prevent Gun Violence.

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