



## Legislative Action

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## **Will the United States have the courage of Australia?**

Orlando, Florida – the magnet city for vacations. Nearby Disney World and a short drive from spectacular white sand beaches make it the destination city of American families. Its airport is always filled with children, many sporting Mickey Mouse ears. Orlando is known as the place where Americans, and particularly, American families, go to “get away from it all.”

Now that gateway city to relaxation and amusement has experienced America’s curse – mass shootings. This time, the numbers are staggering. Fifty dead and over fifty wounded, the worst mass shooting in American history, this time at a gay nightclub filled with late-night revelers.

The shooting has echoes of the 2012 Aurora Theater massacre, where a young man weaponized his hate and rage with lethal tools, including an assault rifle, and rapidly extinguished the lives of many.

In 1996 a lone gunman shot and killed 35 in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Australians grieved for the dead and prayed for their families, but they didn’t stop there. Conservative Prime Minister John Howard led his government into passing sweeping gun control legislation, including a ban on semiautomatic rifles and shotguns accompanied by a government buyback program.

The impact of these changes was phenomenal. In the 10 years following the massacre, firearm homicides dropped by 59% and firearm suicides by 65%. In the 10 years before the Port Arthur massacre, there had been 11 mass shootings in Australia, and in the nineteen years following, there was none.

Does the United States have the courage to act as Australia did?

Assault weapons and high capacity magazines were developed for military use – killing a large number of enemy in a short period of time. Unfortunately, the gun industry has made them not only popular among gun aficionados, but readily accessible to anyone, even someone under terrorism observation by law enforcement. American civilians have suffered grievously: Columbine High School, the Aurora Theater, Sandy Hook Elementary School, San Bernardino, Umpqua Community College, etc., etc., etc.

In the 90’s the United States did have an assault weapons ban. But at the behest of the gun

lobby and a complicit Congress, it was chock full of holes and exclusions. “Having visited a gun show during that time, I couldn’t even tell there was a ban. There were tables after tables loaded with such weapons for sale,” said Eileen McCarron of Colorado Ceasefire. “Australia did it right, it had a total ban.”

Fifty people were murdered when they were out for entertainment at a nightclub. “The gun lobby’s answer to such shootings is more guns,” said Rita Schweitz, also of Colorado Ceasefire. “More guns in nightclubs --just the sort of scenario that took the life of Denver Bronco Darrent Williams and recently injured Bronco cornerback Aqib Talib.”

We join with all Americans in prayers and thoughts for the victims and their families. But prayers are not enough. America is in an epidemic of gun violence. Its causes and potential solutions are many and varied. But we know one thing. Adding more guns is not the answer. When your house is on fire, it’s not time to add more fuel.

*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.*

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