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The Sandy Hook elementary school shooting on December 14, 2012 was the second deadliest shooting in American history, taking the lives of twenty children and six adults. The shooting has horrified the country and provoked the largest push for stronger gun control regulations since the Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994. On January 16, 2013, President Obama proposed a plan to pass new gun control laws. The proposed measures included banning assault weapons and armor-piercing bullets. Although the proposal represents a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough. The American Academy of Pediatrics published an article in 2008 in Pediatrics where they argued that “firearm regulations, to include bans of handguns and assault weapons, are the most effective way to reduce firearm related injuries.” The coming debate over gun control will effect the values our nation holds for the present and future. Any action other than the most effective is a betrayal of the victims and their families.

An understanding of the scope of the firearm related injury and fatality epidemic is necessary to realize the drastic steps that need to be taken. Firearm injuries and deaths disproportionately affect our youth. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, homicide and suicide are the second and third-leading causes of death, respectively, in American teens aged 15-19. Over one-fourth (28.7%) of injury deaths in 2009 of teens aged 15-19 involved a firearm. The deadliness of firearms make for a dangerous combination with the impulsive behavior of teenagers. Suicide attempts involving a gun have a 90% mortality rate.

Opponents of gun control measures often challenge the effectiveness of gun control laws. They cite misleading studies or cultural differences between the U.S. and other countries. Australia provides an excellent case study. According to the Business Insider, before the Port Arthur mass shooting in 1996 that left 35 dead, there were 11 mass shootings in a single decade. There have not been any since, and the gun homicide rate has steadily declined. They accomplished this by instituting a complete ban on assault and semi-automatic weapons. The United States' lax gun laws stand in contrast to other developed nations of the world. The United States has a much larger firearm related death rate than any of the other developed nations. In 2010, there were 10.2 firearm related deaths per 100,000 people in the United States, compared to just 0.25 in the UK and 2.13 in Canada. 2010 saw the United States average 30 gun homicides per day, compared to Australia's 30 all year.

The American gun problem is an epidemic that took the lives of 31,076 people in 2010, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. It is a problem we can no longer hide. It will not solve itself if we ignore it long enough, nor can we wait for someone to solve it for us. It requires strong action, and a willingness to put the safety of the public above the political power of the gun lobby.