Opposing View: Guns on College and University Campuses

Michael Brawer, CEO
Association of Florida Colleges
Mbrawer@myafchome.org

Our state colleges and universities are run by some of the smartest people I have ever known. They are liberal, conservative, moderate, progressive, right, left, and every stripe in-between. It is an insult and naive to characterize every higher educator as an unabashed liberal. As a group of really smart people, one might conclude if allowing people to carry concealed weapons on our campuses is a good idea, after 220 plus years of public higher education in America, it would be a fait accompli.

Forbes Magazine, a conservative business publication, states in a February 21, 2013 article, “Colleges and universities are far safer than most public spaces in the United States. The campus homicide rate is about 1 death per 1 million people, compared to 57 deaths per million in the general population. In the college-age population in general, moreover, homicide is the second leading cause of death, while on college campuses it remains a rare event.”

That article also cites a statement from a former provost at Idaho State University to the Chronicle of Higher Education that, "there is no recorded incident in which a victim or spectator of a violent crime on a campus has prevented that crime by brandishing a weapon.” The Chronicle also quotes Regina G. Lawson, chief of police at Wake Forest University, who said at a 2008 conference on higher-education law, “When you’re responding to a situation like that, and someone’s in plain clothes with a gun, who’s the bad guy? Who are you going to take out to save the lives of the 10,000 other students you’re trying to protect?” The Florida gun lobby wants you to believe the cops do this every day and can easily determine the bad guys with the guns from the good guys with guns. Forbes also stated Time magazine reported in January 2013 that in gunfights New York City police hit their target only 18% of the time. The average student, professor, or staff member carrying a weapon is likely to be far less accurate, substantially raising the odds of more innocent victims.

The Florida gun lobby has made no fact-based argument. Citing constitutional rights is the most common. Fear mongering by playing to women and the possibility of warding off sexual predators is just that, fear mongering. It is desperate as a rationale and demeaning to women to paint them as unable to protect themselves any other way. Making the assumption that thousands of college-aged women are going to get concealed carry permits and purchase a Saturday Night Special to ward off potential rapists is simply absurd. Is this the type of campus we want? The culture of fear? Just look at the pictures of ISIS and other extremists for a glimpse of a fear mongered, gun-toting society. I find it hard to accept as an American value.

We have tens of thousands of college and university employees, and over a million students who are very frightened about the prospect of knowing gun-toting students could be sitting in their classrooms or in their offices, the bookstore, the library, the gym, the dorm, etc. The Forbes article suggests letting colleges and universities decide their own gun policies for their campuses. I am reluctant to even go that far. Leave well-enough alone. In my sector, the voices are loud and clear. Colleges and universities are for teaching, learning, free thought, research, and student growth. Say no to concealed weapons carry on our college and university campuses.