

COMMENTARY By DR. DHANPAUL NARINE

Guns in America and the Washington Talkathon

Here's a suggestion: Let gun control be the main policy issue in the 2016 presidential elections. In this way the American public will get the chance to decide on policies regarding gun control. The voters will have the opportunity to send a clear message to the gun lobby and the politicians as to how they feel about the proliferation of guns in America. Unless guns become the focus of policy there will be the usual babble and waffle as lives are lost in the pile up of tragedies.

Orlando is the latest tragedy. There are broken bodies and spirits. Tons of newsprint report on the pain from every angle and the politicians from Washington keep popping up on the screens. These are the people we elected to represent us; we put our faith in them to carry on the business of the country.

Our Congressional leaders promise to work for change, to effect laws to control guns, to make our streets safer and many of us believe them. But after the tears and the funerals it's business as usual. These 'do little' politicians are versed in the art of the double-speak; they know how to court the media for self-promotion and how to play the game. They get little done and take a lot of time to do it!

Is it any wonder that Americans have a distrust with Congress? According to a Gallup Poll conducted in June 2015, 'Congress is the institution in which Americans express the least confidence this year, with 8 per cent doing so, one point above its 7 per cent rating in 2014—the lowest Gallup has ever measured for any institution.' The military and small businesses are rated the highest with over 67 per cent each.

How prevalent are guns in America? According to the Harvard Injury Control Center, 'there's a gun for every man, woman and child in America, around 300 million of them.' In a short span of three years (2010 to 2013) the manufacture of guns was doubled from 5.5 million to 10.9 million. What is alarming is that after a tragedy gun sales increase.

After San Bernardino, for instance, gun sales went up by around 50 per cent. A official that run gun shows in Maryland and Pennsylvania says

that the increase could be due to two reasons: it's because people need to protect themselves or they are afraid that the government is going to take their guns away.

President Barack Obama has had the unenviable task of presiding over 14 mass killings. This amounts to two per

President Obama said that 'we are grateful to the men who tackled the gunman as he stopped to reload.'

In July 2012 there was a shooting in Aurora at a movie theater in which the President described the killings as 'senseless.' A month later another shooting occurred at a

It was at Roseburg that Mr. Obama made his strongest call for gun legislation. He referred to Columbine, Tuscon and Newton and said, 'It cannot be this easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun.' He argued that the gun issue should be politicized as it is relevant to the body politic. Then came San Bernardino in December 2015 and Mr. Obama was calling for common-sense gun safety laws and stronger background checks.

The mass killings reached Kalamazoo in Michigan in February 2016 and Mr. Obama was again making the case for bi-partisan support to

After San Bernardino the majority of Americans wanted legislation to control guns but the Republicans in Congress had other ideas. Speaker Paul Ryan said in December 2015, 'there are still too many unknowns about the San Bernardino shootings but one common theme among many mass shootings is mental illness.' He recommended that resources be spent to combat mental illness instead. What about barring gun purchases by people on no-fly terror lists?

Speaker Ryan was opposed to this as well. He said, 'government officials put people on such lists without any due legal process and so denying those listed the right to



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allow the Attorney General to prevent the sale of a gun to someone that is a known or suspected terrorist. This became stalled in arguments that led Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid to conclude, 'The American people are desperately looking for help, some help, any help' and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy said that his task force will look at the proposals without giving any guarantees.

President Obama has stated that gun control laws remain the greatest frustration of his presidency.

Despite the worse shooting in American history and a filibuster in Congress little has changed to bring about gun control. It was more talk and little action. In June 2016 the politicians met and the nation held its breath that at long last there would be the passage of gun control legislation. But this was not to be. The Senators could not muster enough votes to pass the laws.

This inaction led Senator Chris Murphy to comment, 'I'm mortified by today's vote but I'm not surprised by it. The NRA has a vice-like grip on this place.'

The strength of the National Rifle Association could be seen in the 2014 elections when the candidates it backed won in seven states. They were Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Dakota. The NRA isn't going anywhere. It has much of Congress in its pockets.

There will be the usual noises but if Americans are concerned about gun control it must become the number one issue in the November elections. If not, he who pays the piper will continue to call the tune.

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the THE WEST INDIAN.



Orlando is the latest in a series of tragedies caused by the proliferation of guns in America. There are broken bodies and spirits. In photo President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden place flowers at a memorial Thursday, June 16, for the victims.

year and there is another six months left in his administration. What does a president say that can bring solace to those that suffer loss? He could offer words of sympathy but they are not enough. He could keep saying that 'this was an act of terror and an act of hate' but the country wants to see changes in the gun laws. People are fed up with the blame game and excursions into lofty verbiage.

In November 2009 a US Army Major kills 12 soldiers and a physician assistant at Fort Hood military base near Texas. President Obama said that love 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.' In January 2011 a gunman attempted to assassinate Congresswoman Gabby Gifford and ended up killing six persons.

Sikh temple in Wisconsin; Mr. Obama responded by calling on us to respect each other. In December 2012 the Sandy Hook School shooting occurred, President Obama wept and reminded the nation that young lives were cut short and the 'we have endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years.'

In September 2013 there was the Navy Yard shooting and in April 2014 another shooting at Fort Hood. The Jewish Community Center shooting occurred in the same month and in June 2015 there was a church shooting in Charleston. These were followed by more killings in Chattanooga in Tennessee in July 2015; in October 2015 the Roseburg Community College became the scene of another mass shooting.

change the gun laws. The latest tragedy in Orlando is the most deadly shooting in American history. Mr. Obama reminded Americans that the latest massacre, 'is a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people in a school, or in a house of worship, or in a movie theater, or in a nightclub.'

The examples that were provided show how easy it is for someone to get a gun and 'shoot the whole day down.' The question then becomes: why is it that action is not taken to control guns? This simple question raises issues about bureaucratic officialdom, intrigue and entanglements that relate to the Second Amendment and the political tentacles of the National Rifle Association.

bear arms would violate their rights.' If someone was planning an attack, he said, law enforcement officials should make an arrest.

Mr. Obama responded by saying that people on no-fly lists can go in a store and buy a gun and the law permitting this needs to be changed. But there was more opposition as Senator Mike Rounds argued that 'we focus on the gun when we probably should be focusing on the person that's using the gun.' Senator Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, asked which of the past tragedies would the proposals have stopped? He concluded that, 'in so many cases very few of them or none of them.' Senator Dianne Feinstein offered an amendment that would