

## **Money spent on background checks would be better spent addressing the root causes of and preventing gun violence**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

In a January 23, 2014 column published by The Oregonian, Sen. Prozanski wrote the Oregon State Police performed 263,343 background checks for firearms transfers in 2013. He noted that 261,128 (>99%) were approved, and 2,215 (<1%) were denied. 261,128 unnecessary background checks were performed on sane, law-abiding Oregonians in order to prevent less than 1% of transfers by licensed dealers. To look at it another way, for every background check that was denied, 117 completely unnecessary background checks on sane, law-abiding Oregonians were performed and approved. Yet Sen. Prozanski labelled the program “successful” and “efficient”.

If those hundreds of thousands of completely unnecessary background checks were free they would simply be a waste of time but not a waste of money. But the background checks aren't free. A fee of \$10 is assessed for each background check. 261,128 unnecessary background checks multiplied by \$10 per background check means \$2,611,280 was spent by sane, law-abiding Oregonians in 2013 for completely unnecessary background checks. And now Sen. Prozanski wants to expand this inefficient, wasteful, and ultimately ineffective (because criminals still obtain guns even in states like California that have so-called “universal” background checks) program to involve virtually all firearm transfers in Oregon.

Instead of wasting \$2.6 million per year on unnecessary background checks, imagine if that money was spent improving our mental health care system in Oregon. Imagine if \$2.6 million per year was spent on suicide prevention (suicide is the #1 leading cause of death from “gun violence” in Oregon and the United States). Imagine if \$2.6 million per year was spent keeping violent criminals in prison longer. Imagine if \$2.6 million per year was spent putting more cops on the street. Imagine if \$2.6 million per year was spent providing armed security at all elementary and secondary schools in Oregon. Any of those uses would do far more to prevent “gun violence” than expanding background checks, more than 99% of which are completely unnecessary.

Supporters of universal background checks seek to prevent violent criminals from buying guns by passing a virtually unenforceable law that creates the new victimless crime of selling a used gun without a background check. But that proposal begs a more important question.

**If some violent criminal is so dangerous that you don't want them to buy a used gun from a private individual without a background check, *why isn't that violent criminal still in prison?*** Why are they running around free trying to buy guns, knives, or any other kind of weapon? If they were kept in prison until they were much less likely to commit a violent crime, no one would have to worry about them buying a gun without a

background check, and the vast majority (>99%) of people selling and buying guns who are law-abiding would not have their harmless activities criminalized.

The law requiring licensed dealers to perform background checks is wasteful and inefficient, but at least it is enforceable. There are a limited number of licensed firearm dealers in Oregon, they operate at known locations, and they are required by law to maintain detailed inventories so they can account for all firearms at the transfer.

In contrast, a law requiring virtually all private firearm transfers in Oregon to undergo a background check would be virtually unenforceable and therefore ignored without consequences by those who are perfectly willing to sell firearms to prohibited persons, regardless of the law. The government cannot monitor every private home, place of business, and parking lot 24 hours a day to see if a background check is being performed when a firearm is being privately transferred. All such a law would do is *increase* “crime”, by creating a new victimless “crime” that criminalizes behavior by otherwise completely law-abiding Oregonians, behavior that harms no one.

I urge you to reject the proposed universal background check law. Instead, let’s work together to address the root causes of gun violence rather than wasting time and attention on expanding an inefficient, wasteful, unenforceable, and ultimately ineffective program.

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