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OPINION

# Gun control without waiting for Congress

Wield the buying power of police departments and the military

BY ALEC HARRIS AND THE REV. DAVID BRAWLEY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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ROBERTS, MATTHEW

**The John Jovino Gun Shop in lower Manhattan. Numerous weapons used in criminal activity have been traced back to this gun shop.**

Fifty-five days after Newtown, daily reports of bipartisan support for measures to curb gun trafficking vie with photos of caskets holding the bodies of more young victims of violence.

Meantime, it is becoming clear that the progress of new legislation in Congress will be limited by politicians' fears that aggressive action will cost contributions and votes in pro-gun districts.

Another response, proposed for many years by mayors and our own citizens organizations, does not depend on lawmakers. The purchasing power of the largest buyers of weapons — police departments, the U.S. military and the Homeland Security

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Department — can and should be used immediately to create a code of responsible conduct for gun manufacturers and gun dealers.

Nearly 10 years ago, Mayor Bloomberg told a congressional committee a simple truth: “About 1% of all gun dealers account for almost 60% of all crime guns nationwide.” Congress didn’t listen.

We at Metro Industrial Areas Foundation knew that Bloomberg was onto something. Even as the mayor pressed his case, our Chicago affiliate, United Power for Action and Justice, was engaged in a campaign to shut down the most irresponsible gun dealers in its metropolitan area.

In fact, one of the nation’s top sellers of crime guns at the time was Chuck’s Guns in Riverdale, Ill. From 1996 to 2000, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives had traced 2,370 guns from crime scenes to Chuck’s. Another major source of guns was Bell’s Guns in Chicago’s Franklin Park suburb.

Undercover Chicago cops posing as criminals easily bought scores of large-capacity weapons from these stores, with gun dealer staff providing counseling on how the buyers could use legal loopholes to add to their arsenals.

With the help of then-Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), Bell’s was closed. Its owner was convicted a few years later of exporting 200 guns to Canada, where they were used in violent crimes. Chuck’s, on the other hand, remains open and continues to thrive as one of the nation’s top providers of guns recovered from crime scenes.

Just as a very small percentage of gun buyers end up using their guns to create mayhem, a small percentage of gun dealers actively market their weapons to criminals and straw purchasers. Local and federal law enforcement agencies should convey to firearm makers that they will only do business with them if the manufacturers swiftly cut off sales to dealers who consistently appear on the ATF’s list of the biggest offenders.

The bulk purchasers should also make manufacturers insist that dealers subscribe to a simple code of conduct that would include: Videotaping of all sales and the maintenance of those videos for an extended period of time. In addition to assisting in criminal investigations, this practice would at least make it more difficult for criminals to enlist straw buyers and for dealers to counsel buyers on how to avoid legal requirements; full cooperation with all law enforcement agencies in criminal investigations and firearms tracking.

And gun manufacturers themselves, to be approved suppliers, should be pressured to commit to: ending weapons sales through gun shows, or any outlet that circumvents the background checks required for gun sales through legitimate dealers — a critical measure as long as Congress fails to close the loopholes in the federal background check requirement; imprinting all weapons with a Firearms Identification Number to facilitate tracking; fast-tracking research and development of bullet microstamping and other technologies that would let any bullet be traced to the gun from which it is fired.

While the legislative process has its own rhythm and pace, a pragmatic approach can and should be implemented — now.

*Brwley is co-chairman of the Metro Industrial Areas Foundation. Harris is an organizer with United Power for Action and Justice.*

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