

DOES JUSTICE DEPT. PROTECT ITS GUNS MORE THAN ITS PEOPLE? GUN BACKGROUND CHECKS NEED TO IMPROVE



Even though three days have passed since the horrific massacre, the country has still not been able to come to terms with it. Undoubtedly, Christmas this year will not be the same and there is unlikely to be a single home that does not remember those martyred when Christmas day dawns. The question on everyone's lips, one that all America is asking is, have we learnt any lessons from this? Can we do, are we doing something to ensure that this does not happen again – or will these innocents too, die in vain, just as the Aurora did, when blasts from legally-owned weapons snuffed out their lives. It would do well to remember that in Newtown, Connecticut, the weapon which the killer used with such deadly results, a Bushmaster .223, is a rifle, which does not require the owner to have a permit to carry – meaning he was not in contravention of the law, when he drove to the school with the weapon. Surely such laws need to be changed? The tragic massacre has at least made the powerful gun-lobby and gun-owners, at least concede that sensible gun safety rules are the need of the hour. However, the American's fascination for owning a gun is hard to understand. During Black Friday shopping weapons were the most preferred choice of purchase and shopping trends lead one to, rightly presume, that guns will be the most popular item on the gift list this Christmas. Shopping data reveal that FBI received 154,873 requests for background checks, from shoppers wanting to buy guns for themselves or their loved ones. That's one-in-five requests more than last year. What is worrying is that upwards of 60 percent of the background check requests were for shotguns or rifles, like the ones that was used in the school shooting. Strangely, the FBI does not monitor the number of weapons sold. It only stores the data of the background requests it gets. But the number of guns in people's hands is much more than the number of requests, as with a single background check, gun lovers can buy more than one gun. A CNN investigation earlier this year showed that the increase in gun sales did not necessarily mean that there were more first-time buyers, but that existing gun owners are buying more guns adding to their stock. The gun-lobby has always been very vociferous in its claims that there should not be any restrictions, other than legal ones, on individual wanting to own guns. However, the recent spate of violent mass-killings and the public outrage has forced them to do a re-think and water-down their earlier rigid demands. New background checks systems that have received endorsement from some of their members and that could ensure that the guns do not fall into the wrong hands include checking if the gun-owners and the employees working in gun selling shops have any criminal records against them. People on terrorist watch lists and people plausibly assumed of being caught up in terrorist activity should be barred from acquiring guns and that it should be made compulsory for gun-owners to immediately inform the police, if there gun is lost or stolen. Moreover, concealed carry permits should not be issued to people who are younger than 21 years and that only those who have successfully completed a safety training course and that such licenses should never be given to persons responsible for violent wrongdoing or individuals who have been charged with domestic violence. Gun-owners who responded to the survey, to their credit, agreed that whilst it was justified that their rights to own a gun be respected, it was equally important that the weapons be kept out of the hands of potential killers. It waits to be seen if the President will follow up his tearful assurance that he accepts all to rise above politics, to take significant action to thwart more such heartbreaking happenings. Does the White House have the courage to take on the powerful gun-rights lobby or will the fiscal cliff again take precedence over the lives of innocent Americans?