

Shooting at Connecticut School has Americans Re-Examining Gun Laws

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS in Special English.

This week, families and friends buried victims of the second worst attack on a school in the United States. A gunman killed 20 young children and six adults at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut last Friday. Police believe 20 year old Adam Lanza killed his mother at home then took some of her guns with him to the school. They say he used a military-style assault rifle to carry out the shooting spree. Such weapons can fire ammunition quickly, without the shooter having to reload.

The attack shocked Americans whose opinions on gun laws have changed in the past week. A recent survey found that 52 percent of Americans questioned said they supported "major restrictions on guns or making them illegal."

President Obama says he recognizes the need for change. He has called on Congress to reestablish an assault weapons ban that ended in 2004.

"We may never know all the reasons why this tragedy happened. We do know that every day since more Americans have died of gun violence. We know such violence has terrible consequences for our society. And if there is even one thing that we can do to prevent any of these events, we have a deep obligation, all of us, to try."

The president has named Vice President Joe Biden to lead an effort to propose gun law reforms. He also called for background investigations for anyone buying weapons from a private dealer.

No matter how hard the president tries, he will face opposition from gun rights activists. The second amendment to the Constitution protects the right of Americans to carry and use arms.

The 4,000,000 member National Rifle Association is one of the most influential organizations in the United States. On Friday, the NRA's chief executive, Wayne LaPierre, told reporters that armed guards can prevent tragedies like the one in Newtown.

"The only way -- the only way -- to stop a monster from killing our kids is to be personally involved and invested in a plan of absolute protection. The

only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.”

Mr. LaPierre blamed movies and video games for creating a violent culture for children.

The NRA has protected the rights of gun owners for over 140 years. The group is widely recognized as a major political force. Observers say the NRA spends millions of dollars on television advertising and campaign donations every year to influence members of Congress.

One thing the NRA cannot control is the sale of gun manufacturers. This week, an American investment company announced plans to sell the manufacturer of the rifle reportedly used in the school shooting.

Cerberus Capital Management said it was “shocked and deeply saddened” by the attack. Cerberus said it has no desire to take part in the debate over gun ownership rights. But the company said it immediately plans to start looking for a buyer for Freedom Group, the country’s biggest manufacturer of guns and ammunition. Cerberus bought Freedom Group with the help of the California State Teachers’ Retirement System and other investors.