

Chairman Don Beyer – Prepared Remarks

“The Economic Toll of Gun Violence: How Our Nation Bears the Costs”

July 20, 2022

Recognitions

This hearing will come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to the Joint Economic Committee’s hearing titled **“The Economic Toll of Gun Violence: How Our Nation Bears the Costs.”**

I want to thank each of our distinguished witnesses for sharing their expertise today.

Now, I will turn to my opening statement.

Statement

It is abundantly clear that the United States is facing a gun violence crisis that is unique in its deadliness and scale.

While mass shootings capture international attention, the use of guns in homicides, suicides and accidental shootings imposes widespread and long-lasting costs.

Loss or injury to gun violence is immeasurable, but the economy-wide harms are real and calculable.

According to new estimates from Everytown for Gun Safety, gun violence costs our economy **more than half a trillion dollars every year.**

This is a staggering figure, one that is both gut-wrenching and entirely avoidable.

To put it in context, at more than half a trillion dollars, gun violence costs our economy more than the national GDP of nearly 90% of countries in the world.

From health care to education, business development to housing, the toll of gun violence is borne by survivors, their families and our entire economy.

Each year, gun violence costs survivors and their families more than \$1 billion in just initial hospital care.

It contributes to worse mental health outcomes, including higher rates of diagnosed psychiatric disorders in both survivors and their families.

For children exposed to a fatal school shooting in their local area, antidepressant use increases significantly for years following an incident.

Gun violence burdens our broader health system, stretching its capacity and taxing our frontline health care workers.

And because treatment for firearm injuries costs more than double that of other types of hospital care, this epidemic further stretches our public insurance programs.

Gun violence has also been shown to negatively impact the educational and life outcomes of children, particularly in instances of school shootings.

Students that experience these incidents experience more frequent school absences and have a greater chance of repeating a grade, and they are less likely to graduate from high school or attend college.

Gun violence reduces new businesses development and directly hurts jobs growth.

Areas that experience gun violence are more likely to see businesses scale back and fewer new businesses form. Research has shown that one additional gun homicide in a neighborhood resulted in 80 fewer jobs the following year.

Just gunshots being fired—even if there are no injuries—reduces home values.

Because homeownership is *the* primary way to build wealth in this country, this has the power to reduce economic opportunities for generations.

Tragically, we know that the economic toll of gun violence is rising.

As firearm deaths, gun injuries and mass shootings have increased in recent years, the gun industry has made money hand over fist.

During the worst of the pandemic, gun sales spiked, leading to record-high profits for the two top gunmakers.

As sales have surged, so too, has gun violence.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives documented a connection between pandemic gun sales and increased violence: It found that guns sold in 2020 were more likely to wind up at crime scenes within a year of purchase than in any previous period.

And like a storm creating its own weather, increased gun violence spurs a corresponding increase in gun sales.

For example, it is a well-documented trend that gun sales rise after mass shootings.

Investors also anticipate this effect, which drives up the share prices of gun and ammunition companies. For example, shares of the two largest gun companies rose more than the market average in the immediate aftermath of the massacres in Sandy Hook, Connecticut; San Bernardino, California and Parkland, Florida.

This self-perpetuating cycle is not an accident.

After gun purchases plateaued in the early 2000s, the gun industry took action to revive sales, lobbying for the successful passage of legislation that granted gun manufacturers and sellers immunity from legal accountability for the harms caused by their product.

The immunity provided by the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act is markedly different from the treatment of nearly all other industries. While other industries can be held accountable for products or practices that result in harm to consumers, gun manufacturers cannot.

For example, tobacco companies were famously held accountable for the harms caused by smoking, which led directly to changes in the way tobacco products are marketed and sold.

Protection from accountability has facilitated the launch of a new and booming market for increasingly lethal weapons.

In the past, gun companies focused their marketing efforts almost exclusively on the sale of guns for hunting and recreational shooting purposes.

Yet their marketing tactics have shifted in recent years. Manufacturers now push guns for personal protection, self-defense and concealed carry. This has created a new civilian market for products that had previously been seen exclusively as weapons of war. The firearm industry has met the growing demand by flooding the market with more lethal weapons.

The human toll of gun violence is unbearable. So, too, is the economic one.

Today, the United States will spend \$49.3 million on just the medical care, first responders, ambulances, police and criminal justice services related to gun violence.

We will pay this price tomorrow, the next day, and every day thereafter until we, as a nation, decide to address this epidemic.

Last month, for the first time in nearly 30 years, Congress took action to curb gun violence. This is an important step, but more is needed.

To address the growing violence and its significant costs, we must work together to pave a more peaceful path forward.

Now, I would like to turn it over to Senator Lee for his opening statement.