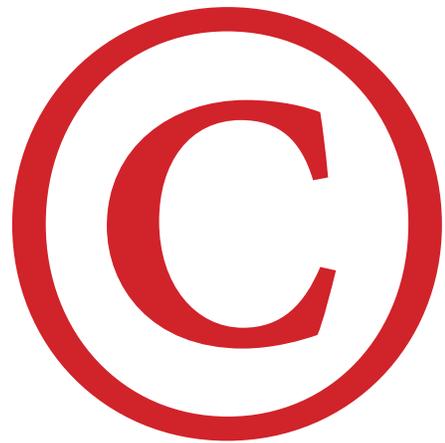


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No right or need to bear firearms on college campuses

By David R. Keller

In a recent vote, the faculty at Utah Valley State College endorsed by a 2-to-1 margin the University of Utah's ban on firearms. This majority position is correct two reasons.

First, it is extremely dubious that the presence of armed citizens makes campuses "safer."

Imagine a scenario in which shooters, like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, or the characters in Gus Van Sant's movie "Elephant," open fire at school. The image that comes to mind is utter chaos, with scores of students, faculty and staff dashing for cover in every direction. If the attack occurred in an auditorium or stadium, that number would be hundreds or thousands.

In such a situation, state Sen. James Evans, R-Salt Lake City, believes the presence of armed civilians would be beneficial. As he put it, "I wonder if a janitor or teacher at Columbine had a concealed weapon how many children's lives would have been saved."

Unfortunately, such optimism is dangerously misplaced. Attackers are not likely to be standing alone out in the open, providing an easy target. Rather, they probably would be in the midst of a panicking crowd.

An armed citizen would have to evaluate such a rapidly changing scenario in a split second, and be incredibly accurate in discharging a weapon to avoid accidentally shooting an innocent person near or behind the attacker.

The decision to open fire in a complex, rapidly evolving situation requires exhaustive training and skill. It is the kind of intensive training and experience that we require of our law-enforcement officers and military personnel. And it is precisely the kind of training a teacher, janitor or the vast majority of people with concealed weapon permits are unlikely to have.

Simply obtaining a permit hardly prepares one for hitting a moving target in a churning crowd.

Hence, the claim made by W. Clark Aposhian, the chairman of the Self Defense Instructors Network, that there is nothing to fear from law-abiding citizens with guns, could not be farther from the truth. A shoot-out between a criminal and an armed civilian increases the potential for carnage, instead of decreasing it.

And despite the best of intentions, if a person inadvertently kills an innocent bystander, she or he could be tried for manslaughter. This realization is presumably the rationale of the Jordan School District to renounce liability for the actions of armed employees.

Second, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, it is far from clear that banning concealed weapons from campuses is a violation of constitutional rights. The wording of the Second Amendment, which states, "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed," must be taken in context.

At the time of its framing, the patriots needed desperately to rebuff Great Britain's well-equipped infantry. Their best hope was to form a militia from the ranks of an armed civilian population.

So the intent of the Second Amendment was to ensure the existence of a well-regulated militia to protect Americans from invading foreign forces, not to protect us from one another. That is the job of law enforcement. The right to bear arms does not equal the right to bear arms at all times in all places.

In the end, the claim that "more guns mean less violence" is seriously misguided. If our legislative leaders are really serious about reducing the possibility of violence at schools, then they should act to increase the number armed professionals on campus, rather than incorrectly assuming that a heavily-armed citizenry is up to the challenge.

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