

# OPINION

## THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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### OUR OPINION

## Title Fight

### Ridiculous Texas plan to ban swaths of books must be shelved

If you want to help kids, regulate social media. Teenagers seem more interested these days in being on social media apps than reading classic novels.

But on those rare occasions that a 14-year-old may actually want to pull, say, "Lonesome Dove" off the school library shelf, he may not be able to if Rep. Jared Patterson's READER Act becomes state law.

The Texas epic contains some sexual content and mentions prostitutes so it "might need" to be banned, the Frisco Republican said this week during a contentious Tuesday night hearing of the House Public Education committee meeting.

It was a surreal moment that revealed just how ridiculous the book ban debate has become. "Lonesome Dove" won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Patterson's law would require vendors to "rate" titles containing sexual content; those deemed "sexually explicit" could not be sold to public school districts. Schools would have to get parental permission before a student could access "sexually relevant material" in

the library.

Roughly 80 people spoke at last week's hearing, which continued past midnight and ended with the bill pending in the committee. That's where it should stay.

Lawmakers have legitimate concerns about some titles. But swaths of books, including many classics, would undoubtedly get caught up in the wide net they're casting.

Parents are in the best position to decide which books their children should or shouldn't read. Getting them to read at all is a battle in itself.

Which brings us back to those social media apps. A recent study by the child advocacy group Common Sense Media found that about three-quarters of U.S. teens have watched online pornography by 17. Social media was the second-highest source for this content, behind porn websites.

If Patterson and other legislators were serious about protecting children, they would be more concerned about the way tech companies serve kids violence and sex on a platter and leave school libraries alone.

— Dallas Morning News



## School shooting questions rhetorical now

We can stop asking certain questions. They've become rhetorical at this point.

"What's it going to take?"

When it comes to enacting any laws attempting to end — or even limit — school shootings, we've already gotten our answer.



GARY STALLARD

If descriptions of little school children getting ripped apart with 5.56-caliber rounds fired out of a rifle designed for battle can't spark any changes, the answer to "What's it going to take?" is non-existent. It's just another talking point for anyone wanting to appear concerned while getting in their TV time.

"What can we do?" is another of those questions with no evident desire for a real answer. Truthfully, there isn't any one acceptable solution. One group will scream about banning weapons, knowing it will never happen in this country. Another group will scream for more weapons. Arm the teachers. Yes, let's add "combat training" to every teacher's certification process. Some educators can't even get their districts to buy them classroom supplies. Those districts suddenly gonna cough up the expenses to buy more weapons? Yeah, right.

Not to mention, educators got into their profession to change lives, not to take them.

There's even been a "solution" offered regarding doors. Yes, doors. "If only every school had stronger doors, none of this would happen." Seriously?

Or — get this — having districts cough up more money to hire full-time armed guards at every single school.

And what are any of these suggestions supposed to do?

Keep little kids from getting massacred while they're in a classroom. Not on a battle field. Not in a war zone.

In a classroom.

Every so-called "solution" coming from certain groups has been reactive. Ideas for what to do after a shooting, rather than how to try and prevent one in the first place. More

weapons. Better doors. Classroom training teaching children — yes, children — how to attempt to survive someone shooting at them.

In a classroom. Where they're probably carrying bullet-proof backpacks with pink unicorns on them (yes, those exist).

Not everyone in position to actually make those changes wants to address any proactive measures — namely, making at least some kind of effort to keep weapons away from the wrong people.

Would that alone work? Of course not. "If we outlaw guns, only outlaws will have guns." True enough.

"Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

Exactly. So why aren't we making even the slightest attempt to make sure the wrong people don't get their hands on a weapon?

It's hard to accept: Someone suffering from severe mental illness or some kind of anger issue has the power to decide when another's life stops, whether it's a 60-year-old school director or a 9-year-old school kid — neither of whom ever considered a classroom as a place to die. We were horrified the first time a mass shooting occurred at a high school. Now we're down to elementary schools, and we're still asking the same useless questions.

So why, after nearly 400 shootings on school campuses since 1999, are we still hearing, "What's it going to take?" Why won't some of those in leadership roles make even the slightest effort to make some changes?

Maybe because they're getting paid to offer nothing more than "thoughts and prayers."

Yes, some of our nation's lawmakers accept donations from the country's largest gun rights advocacy group. A lot of the donations are worth millions of dollars. And that particular group benefits from the production of more weapons. Since 2000, the production of weapons has tripled, according to The New York Times. In the same span, incidents of violent crime increased by nearly 30%.

Now, I'm not the sharpest crayon in the box but I know a correlation when I see one. More weapons equals more violent incidents — not fewer. Duh.

I also have issues with the way some folks insist on displaying their weapons. More than one elected official has posed for photos while holding one of those rifles — with some of those weirdos having Christmas cards made with every member of the family showing off their weapons. Anything for those checks, right?

I've encountered guys out in town strapped up as if they're heading off to storm an enemy beach somewhere. I've asked some about their service in the military or in law enforcement. Very few of them have served either. I wonder if they realize their big, scary rifle isn't a supplement for those male enhancement pills. Probably not.

I'm not a hypocrite. I'm a weapons owner. The other weapons owners I know are responsible individuals. By no means am I proposing anything other than at least a little effort to keep weapons out of the wrong hands. Give us something other than what a Tennessee representative offered after the latest child killing: "There's not much we can do."

Really? How will we know until we at least try? What if some new common-sense law managed to keep one weapon away from a person intent on a massacre? What if such a law had stopped the Uvalde shooter? Just one stop, right? But that one alone would have meant the 19 children and two teachers would still be here with us.

Just one. Doesn't sound like much, does it? Unless we ask some of the victims' family members. Then "one" sounds pretty damned good.

Tragically, the payments those lawmakers receive clearly supersede all other concerns, including the lives of little kids. As long as the checks keep coming, having a virtual bounty on a school child's head won't be enough of a reason to make any attempt at changes — not in laws, nor in attitudes.

So we can stop asking, "What's it going to take?"

It's going to take leaders prioritizing taking charge over taking checks.

Gary Stallard is a regular contributor to the Opinion page of The Lufkin Daily News. His email address is garylstallard@yahoo.com.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Support for teachers

A recent editorial published in The Lufkin Daily News examined the findings of Gov. Abbott's Teacher Vacancy Task Force and rightfully highlighted that while better pay is important to all teachers, they also crave additional training and support throughout their careers.

We must recognize that supporting teachers starts with setting them up for success in the classroom. This is where WGU Texas is different from other programs. In addition to the accessibility of completing most of their degree online, bachelor programs in our Teachers College require in-classroom observation and full-time demonstration teaching. This experience allows our students to retain lessons quickly and

graduate with confidence in their classroom abilities.

Most WGU Texas education students complete their degree in 26 months with little to no debt. We not only want teachers to be good educators but we also want them to be successful professionals with room for continued growth. Helping students earn their degrees at about half the cost of other comparable online universities nationwide allows WGU Texas to attract and graduate a more diverse pool of teaching candidates each year.

Last year, Western Governors University graduated 11,979 from our Teachers College nationwide. Prioritizing teachers' needs will help us recruit and retain this critical workforce for Texas.

Linda Battles, regional vice president and WGU Texas Chancellor

### HEADLINES IN Local HISTORY

#### MARCH 31

##### Five years ago

- Lufkinite Gilmore Cox crashes ultralight plane in a field near the 1900 block of FM 706.
- Bonner Elementary School students raise \$1,704.54 through their Pennies for Patients campaign for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

##### Ten years ago

- Lufkin High School Senior Jonathan Gray

(contra bass clarinet) earns chair in the All-State Concert band.

- Lufkin's unemployment rate drops from 6.7% to 6.4% this past month.

##### Twenty years ago

- Main Street Lufkin sponsors "Music in the Park" with live entertainment.

From the pages of The Lufkin Daily News, compiled by The History Center, TheHistoryCenterOnline.com.

### TODAY IN HISTORY

The Associated Press

Today is Friday, March 31, the 90th day of 2023. There are 275 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 31, 1991, the Warsaw Pact military alliance came to an end.

On this date:

In 1814, Paris was occupied by a coalition of Russian, Prussian and Austrian forces; the surrender of the French capital forced the abdication of Emperor Napoleon.

In 1968, at the conclusion of a nationally broadcast address on Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned listeners by declaring, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

In 1993, actor Brandon Lee, 28, was accidentally shot to death during the filming of a movie in Wilmington, North Carolina, when he was hit by a bullet fragment that had become lodged inside a prop gun.

### Have your say

To submit a letter to the editor, bring it to us at 300 Ellis Ave. in downtown Lufkin, or mail it to P.O. Box 1089, Lufkin, TX 75902-1089. Or you can email your letter to news@lufkindailynews.com.

The Lufkin Daily News welcomes letters of up to 250 words. All letters are subject to editing for length and clarity, and unsigned letters will not be used. Unless you stipulate "print only" on your letter, we reserve the right to publish in print or online. An address and daytime phone number must be included so the author's identity can be verified.

Only one letter per writer will be published during any 30-day period. Letters about politics, political campaigns or candidates will not be published once early voting begins in a primary or general election.



### MALLARD FILLMORE

By Bruce Tinsley

