

Legislation jeopardizes safety at local universities

Staff Editorial

At the University of Texas's South Mall, bullet holes dot the concrete railings and sidewalk near the spot where a statue of Jefferson Davis once stood. Left over from the 1966 shooting in which sniper Charles Whitman shot 43 people and killed 13 from the observation deck of the UT tower, they serve as a reminder of the impact of one man and six guns. Nearly fifty years later, they still raise the question: what can be done to prevent such shootings in the future?

The Texas legislature, located only a mile from the tower where Whitman barricaded himself during the massacre, passed a bill on May 31 allowing the concealed carry of handguns on state college campuses. Governor Greg Abbott signed the bill into law at Red's Indoor Gun Range in Pflugerville on June 13, against the wishes of officials at the University of Texas. While the bill allows for designated gun-free zones decided by the university, it is still an unnecessary act that could potentially create a hostile learning environment, contradicts the opinions of school officials and contributes to a vigilante mindset.

While people who carry guns feel safe around firearms, that is not necessarily true for the rest of the population. Often, guns invoke fear or anxiety in others. The possession of deadly weapons on campus could distract students from class or studying, and cause students to avoid class or other public areas. Regardless of whether or not the carrying of firearms prevents or causes crime, their presence can change the positive learning environment into one of fear for those who are not as comfortable with guns as the people who carry them.

The bill does contain provisions that allow the university's board and president to create rules and regulations regarding when and where guns

can be carried, essentially letting them designate gun-free zones, but these rules cannot be so strict that people are restricted from carrying concealed handguns. Without the option to opt-out, or even heavily limit concealed carry, the school officials whom opposed the bill are forced to follow it. Essentially, the school officials that have decades of experience running a university are required to follow the policies of congressmen that do not have the same credentials.

The argument for passing the bill contributes to a culture in which crime is deterred and avenged by citizens rather than trained law enforcement. Students for Concealed Carry, one of the main groups that lobbied for the bill to pass, argues that concealed carry is important to provide protection from crimes. While this is valid in extreme cases such as aggravated assault, it seems that minor arguments could easily escalate with the presence of a gun. The idea that anyone can- and should- stop crimes with a firearm normalizes the use of lethal weapons rather than peaceful tactics.

Rather than allowing guns into schools in order to prevent shootings and other crimes, bills should be passed to increase security by reducing the number of guns on campus. Because most college students are under 21 and cannot get a Concealed Carry License, the argument that shootings will be discouraged if most people carry concealed weapons is invalid. Instead of compromising a safe and positive learning environment, lawmakers should listen to the opinions of university officials and protect students by reducing the number of firearms on campus, instead of allowing more guns on campus.

