

An interview with Daniel Biss on gun control

by Eleanor Kaplan

New Trier News: What role do students play in the fight for gun control?

Daniel Biss: “The lesson from Parkland is that students are leading the fight for gun safety. After generations of stagnation on this issue, lines have been drawn and the debate hasn’t really moved anywhere. The new generation is doing the right thing and rejecting that notion of what is possible and building a new politics to change the face of this issue. It’s tragic that it takes the nightmare that happened in Parkland, Florida to spur this activity and it’s embarrassing that so many generations before have failed. But it’s unbelievably inspiring to see that as a result of the activism of a new generation, we are going to see some real progress and as a result lives are going to be saved.”

NTN: Do you support the school-

wide walkouts?

DB: “For years, opponents of gun safety legislation have been really good at getting attention for their cause. Its supporters have been quiet. They’ve lost in the legislative arena even though they’ve won in the court of public opinion. For students across the country to stand up and make their voices heard in a really obvious way—that’s powerful and motivating and theatrical in a positive way. I stand in support of students across the country who are taking that bold step.”

NTN: What measures should be taken to reduce gun violence at the federal level?

DB: “The most important thing we can do is pass gun safety legislation. Today, a gun dealer licensing bill was passed in the Illinois general assembly for the first time – a bill that would create a state-level gun dealer license so that we would not be powerless in the face of the knowledge of certain gun stores in the suburbs. We passed

that law, that will help. We need to ban high-capacity magazines, we need to ban bump stocks, we need to ban assault rifles. These are common sense things that the state can do around gun legislation that have been way too long coming and are finally possible in part because of the activism of students.

“We also need to provide the kind of counseling and mental health services that are lacking in so many schools and as a result of this absence, troubled young people are too often able to get to a place where their behavior is dangerous. Something the state should be absolutely committed to is that we allow schools to have the resources to provide these services, because some schools go without.”

NTN: What role should the state government play in facilitating improvements to school safety?

DB: “Let’s start with universal background checks, closing gun sale loopholes, banning assault rifles,

high-capacity magazines, and bump stocks. We should make sure that the federal government is living up to what the overwhelming majority of Americans want – which is an interpretation of the 2nd Amendment that says we’re going to do everything we can to make sure guns are kept out of the hands of people who should not have access and that gun safety is handled like the public health crisis that it is. That means more steps as well. That means mandating insurance coverage for gun owners and doing real public health research about the costs of gun violence. The federal government has been mostly inactive and sometimes violent on this issue because of the power of the NRA and it’s time for us to change that.”

NTN: As governor, how high would gun control be on your list of priorities?

DB: “Gun safety would be high on my list of priorities. The governor

of Illinois has two opportunities: one is to advocate aggressively with the congressional delegation—the 18 members of the House of Representatives and the 2 Senators who are from Illinois—to ensure that they are doing everything they can to change the dialogue on this issue in the US capital in Washington. Secondly, the state of Illinois is in many respects the capital of the Midwest. It should be the Midwestern leader on policy. Cooperation with neighboring states is necessary. The governor of Illinois should go to neighboring states and say that while we cooperate on issues of regional economic growth, we also need cooperation from you around gun safety because the streets of Illinois are not safe enough. If the state government acts as a regional leader we will see regional change which is necessary. The borders of states are not impermeable.”

NTN: Have you or would you in the future take money from the NRA?
DB: “No.”

Gubernatorial candidates’ positions on gun control

Jeanne Ives

“We need to think holistically about law enforcement. Give police, prosecutors, public defenders and judges the resources they need and hold them accountable for performance. Sanctuary city and state designations, the absence of police, the failure to clear violent crime cases, the turnstile justice of light sentences for violent criminals who commit crimes with guns are received by the small numbers of violent criminals in our communities as signs of weakness,” Ives told Chicago Tribune.

Christopher Kennedy

“As someone who comes from a family that has been deeply impacted by gun violence, Chris Kennedy is committed to addressing the challenge of violence in our state. Chris believes we need to combat violence in three key ways: addressing violence as a public health issue by providing trauma treatment and mental health services; curbing illegal gun access; and revitalizing schools and communities afflicted by gun violence,” according to Kennedy’s official website.

JB Pritzker

“Far too many communities across this state are all too familiar with gun violence, especially in Chicago. I would adopt a public health approach to addressing the violence. First, we need to make sure that communities across Illinois are growing and thriving economically so that people don’t feel like they have to turn to violence. We must increase access to mental health and social services so that people don’t resort to gun violence,” Pritzker told Chicago Tribune.

Bruce Rauner

Bruce Rauner does not have a publicly stated stance on this issue.

The Illinois constitution states in Article 1 section 22, “Subject only to the police power, the right of the individual citizen to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” More specifically, according to Illinois gun laws, you must possess a Firearms Owner’s Identification Card (FOID) to purchase any firearm or ammunition in Illinois. The requirements for a FOID are numerous. To name a few, the applicant cannot be a felon, undocumented immigrant, addicted to narcotics, cannot have been a patient of a mental health facility within the past 5 years, and must be at least 21. If the applicant is under 21, they must have the written consent of a parent or legal guardian who themselves has never been denied a FOID. There is a waiting period of 72 hours after buying a handgun to take possession of it, and in Illinois, you cannot legally open carry a handgun, with or without a FOID.

Jan Schakowsky

“I support common-sense gun safety legislation, and I believe Congress needs to act immediately to stop the proliferation of weapons that threaten the safety of our communities. This is a public safety issue and a public health issue, one that threatens our families and neighborhoods every day. Like the majority of Americans, I support renewing the assault weapons ban. These extremely dangerous, semi-automatic weapons are specifically designed to kill as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. They pose a grave risk to our communities, which is why the overwhelming majority of Americans support limiting the sale of military-style assault weapons,” according to Schakowsky’s official website.

Brad Schneider

“There are specific, commonsense solutions available that would help curb gun violence in our communities and save lives, including universal background checks, banning military-style assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, bump stocks and funding mental health care. I’ve supported such legislation and personally introduced bills that would help prevent stolen guns and close the ‘ghost gun’ loophole. These are all proposals with broad support from the American public, but the political will is what’s missing. After Sandy Hook, after Las Vegas, and now after Parkland, Congress’s response has been deafening silence and inaction,” Schneider told New Trier News.