

EDITORIAL

# America is failing its students

School safety must take center stage — not false arguments that sensible gun control will lead to tyranny

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Parents of Northport High School students received an email on Wednesday, intended to calm their fears about school safety, that was as scary as it was reassuring.

The letter from the principal said rumors circulating about a student planning to harm other students were false, and that the Suffolk County Police Department investigated and "found no evidence of potential threats involving students or staff."

Parents who were aware of the rumor perhaps felt a bit better. Those who hadn't heard about the threats likely found a new reason to worry.

"I want to take this opportunity to tell you no such threat exists," the email said. The intent was to debunk a particular rumor, but the wording suggested a certainty that's no longer possible.

That's the lesson of these massacres, including the shootings at Parkland, Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that killed 17 students and faculty members on Feb. 14.

More than 150,000 students attending at least 170 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus since 1999. Politicians and parents try to reassure students that they need not worry when they return to class on Monday, that they will be kept safe. But why should blanket reassurances without accompanying action make students and teachers feel safer? The possibility of mass murder in the United States is real. What's fake is the fear the National Rifle Association is peddling: that any attempt to prevent gun massacres is the first step to losing every personal liberty Americans hold dear.

At an annual conservative convention Thursday in Maryland, NRA chief executive Wayne LaPierre declared, "Their goal is to eliminate the Second Amendment and our firearms freedoms, so they can eradicate all our freedoms." At a CNN forum the previous night that included student and faculty survivors of last week's



Nassau Police County Police Officer Todd Atkin patrols Carle Place High School on Feb. 15, a day after the massacre in Florida.

violence, NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch, while combative, repeatedly assured the crowd that she supported better background checks and doing more to keep guns from the mentally unstable. In reality, the NRA has tirelessly opposed universal background checks, bans on suspected terrorists buying guns, restrictions on those with mental health issues purchasing and possessing firearms, and proper funding to enforce federal gun laws.

The United States does not have more crime than similar nations. It does not have more violent crime than similar nations. And the violent video games and movies youngsters see in America are just as eagerly consumed elsewhere. But the United States holds 5 percent of the world's people, has been the scene of 31 percent of its mass shootings, possesses 48 percent of its civilian-owned guns and has a gun homicide rate 25 times that of other industrialized nations. The difference is the laws.

LaPierre said something else Thursday: "To stop a bad guy with a gun, it

takes a good guy with a gun." Then, hours later, the Broward County sheriff revealed that an armed deputy assigned to Stoneman Douglas High School had remained outside and never tried to stop the killing.

More security and prevention at schools are needed now. We can't pretend otherwise. But we do not need to arm teachers, as President Donald Trump demands, any more than we would arm tellers to protect banks, lawyers to protect courthouses or reservations agents to protect airports.

We need to make sure people buying guns are safe, stable adults. We need to make sure the power and firing speed and magazine capacity of the guns are appropriate to hunting and self-defense, not mass murder. We need to stop the stockpiling of thousands of rounds of ammunition and dozens of weapons. Even most gun enthusiasts know this.

Florida Republican Gov. Rick Scott said Friday he will seek to end gun purchases by people younger than 21, ban the "bump stocks" that turn rifles into machine guns, and ask for \$500 million to fund mental health and

school safety measures, including posting at least one armed officer per 1,000 students at every public school. That is a start toward showing how even gun-rights advocates can compromise so the nation can put the Columbine era in the history books.

Scott's plan, which echoes some statements Trump has made in the past week, raised the ire of the NRA, which opposes limits on gun purchases by people ages 18 to 20 and has used its influence to deter bans on the bump stock device, which enabled the killing 58 people in Las Vegas in October.

We need to live up to the reassurances we give our children by taking steps to keep them safe. We need the help of law-abiding gun owners to debunk and defeat the NRA argument that any attempt at reasonable regulation will lead to the enslavement of the people by a tyrannical government.

The death toll is real. The paranoid delusions are the calculated fear tactics of an organization that will say anything to keep insanely lethal products legal, cheap and easily accessible to all.