

Rep. Sargent: People are dying, yet partisan antics work to keep us divided

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Everyone in our nation deserves to live without the fear of gun violence and without losing someone they love to suicide by firearm. Even so, gun violence continues to be a pervasive issue that touches every corner of our communities. Devastatingly, in my own personal life, I have:

- Held in my arms the crying parents of a young woman who was murdered here in Madison due to a senseless act of gun violence.
- Lost loved ones due to suicide by firearm.
- Consoled family, friends, and neighbors as they cope with the loss of a suicide related death.
- Heard the firsthand accounts of doctors, first responders, and law enforcement officers, who have been on the front lines responding to the horrible tragedies of gun violence and suicide in our community.
- Witnessed my four sons grow up in worlds that seem to be light years apart- as my two older boys went about their young lives never thinking twice about their safety. Today, my youngest children continue to be subject to fear each and every day at school, the park, the grocery store, the movie theater, and more.

But my story here is not unique, this is Wisconsin's story- we all have been impacted by gun violence in some way, and we certainly all know many others who have as well. As a member of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention, I have heard story after story of those whose lives have been personally impacted by suicide in our state. These individuals overwhelmingly asked the Task Force to take

action to reduce suicide deaths in our state, specifically with sensible policies such as Extreme Risk Protection Orders.

People in our state are dying. Yet, partisan antics here in the state Capitol continue to work to keep us divided and prevent us from enacting the will of the people of our state. Yesterday, Governor Evers, Attorney General Kaul, Senator Taylor, and I introduced a lifesaving bill to address the issue of gun violence and suicide prevention by introducing Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) legislation. Rather than asking us thoughtful questions about the bill— a result of countless hours of collaboration and deliberative policymaking— the press seemed more interested in pitting Democrats and Republicans against one another, creating a narrative that went against the very pragmatic piece of legislation we had gathered to talk about.

Furthermore, Speaker Robin Vos and Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald [responded](#) in immediate defiance stating that “it’s widely known that we believe this legislation poses threats to due process and the 2nd Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens”. While this statement completely disregards the will of the people of Wisconsin, it also brings grave concern, as the fact of the matter is that this piece of legislation is mirrored directly off of existing processes in our state, including those for domestic violence injunctions. It is clear that partisan bickering and divide has taken precedent in the news cycle over what truly matters— that lives are being lost, and immediate action is needed.

However, we cannot continue forward allowing these tragic stories and partisan divide to be our new reality. We cannot continue on this path of inaction and complacency. And we cannot continue to stand idly by as our communities struggle to adapt to a world in which gun violence is the new norm.

We know that doing nothing is not working. We also know that there are sensible policies that can make a real difference when it comes to preventing gun violence and suicide by firearm. While no one single law will stop these tragedies completely, we know that Extreme Risk Protection Orders are vital measures that have saved lives. We know that ERPOs have a significant impact in preventing tragedy in the 17 other states who have enacted them. We know that suicides rate in Wisconsin are increasing at an alarming number, and that nearly half of all suicide deaths in our

state are by firearm. We know that the gun violence epidemic is a public health issue that must be addressed. We know that people across Wisconsin, regardless of their political stripes, regardless of if they are a gun owner or not, want to see meaningful action, including the enactment of ERPO laws, in our state.

And most importantly, we know that we don't have to choose between upholding the 2nd Amendment and preventing gun violence in our communities. There is no excuse for inaction.

Too many lives have been cut short by the horrors of gun violence and suicide, too many others forever changed. The time for action is now.

For my Republican colleagues in the Wisconsin state legislature, if now isn't the time to talk about gun violence, when is? My door is always open to discuss how we can work together to find long-term and sustainable solutions— not band aid fixes—when it comes to gun violence and suicide prevention. If President Donald Trump, former Governor Mike Pence, Governor Rick Scott, Senator Lindsay Graham, and so many other Republican leaders across our nation (and right here in our state behind closed doors) can find merit in the idea of Extreme Risk Protection Orders and come together for bipartisan action, why can't we?