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VIN SUPRYNOWICZ: How many more will die in 'gun-free' zones before the media start asking why?

Police have identified Robert A. Hawkins, 19, as the assailant who killed eight people with a semi-automatic rifle (not an assault rifle) at the Westroads Mall in Omaha Dec. 5.

Chalk up eight more deaths to "gun control."

The shooting was at least the fourth at an American mall or shopping center so far this year, including one in February in Salt Lake City.

Once again, the killer chose a "gun-free" zone.

Nebraska issues permits "allowing" qualified individuals to carry concealed handguns. (The Second and 14th amendments reaffirm that carrying a weapon is a right, not a privilege -- states have no more legitimate power to require a "permit" for weapons carrying than they have to require a "permit" to attend church or publish a newspaper.)

Leaving aside this "permitting" scheme, Nebraska law allows property owners, such as the Westroads Mall, to post signs banning permit holders from legally carrying guns on their property.

("Some chains such as Bag 'N Save have posted signs, and shopping malls such as Westroads Mall have added 'no weapons' clauses to their posted codes of conduct," the Omaha World-Herald reported on March 28.)

"The same was true for the attack at the Trolley Square Mall in Utah in February," reports John Lott in his Dec. 6 article at www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,315563,00.html, headlined "Media Coverage of Mall Shooting Fails to Reveal Mall's Gun-Free-Zone Status."

The question is not whether private property owners have a right to bar firearms on their property -- they do.

(Though selective bans on only *some* civilians would surely be easier to challenge; watch to see if government police called to such locales are made to check their weapons before entering.)

Rather, the first question here is whether our government agencies are making it fully clear to the managers of buildings otherwise open to the public -- such as Clark County's courthouses and public libraries -- that they will not be shielded from the financial repercussions should employees or customers die under circumstances where they could otherwise have defended themselves and others with their own firearms.

The second question? Mr. Lott, author of "Freedomnomics" and a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland, put it very well in the Fox News column in question:

"A Google news search using the phrase 'Omaha Mall Shooting' finds an incredible 2,794 news stories worldwide" in the first 24 hours alone, Mr. Lott notes. "But ... none of the media coverage, at least by 10 a.m. (Dec. 6), mentioned this central fact: Yet another attack occurred in a gun-free zone.

"Surely, with all the reporters who appear at these crime scenes and seemingly interview virtually everyone there, why didn't one simply mention the signs that ban guns from the premises?" asks Mr. Lott, who posts the "No weapons allowed" sign from Salt Lake City's Trolley Square Mall (it's rule 10) at <http://johnlott.tripod.com/2007/02/proof-that-trolley-square-mall-in-utah.html>.

"Oh come on, Vin," someone will protest at this point. "It wouldn't matter even if these places did allow people to carry guns. Hardly anyone goes armed, so how often would a plain old non-policeman with a gun really save lives?"

Pretty often, it turns out.

In 1997, Luke Woodham slit his mother's throat, grabbed a .30-30 rifle and headed to Pearl High School in Pearl, Miss. -- another gun-free zone -- to start shooting people.

The moment Vice Principal Joel Myrick heard the first shots, he took off at a sprint for his truck. (Because Mr. Myrick kept a handgun in his truck for just such an eventuality, a deadly stupid federal law required him to park it far from campus.)

Woodham shot until he heard sirens, then ran to his car. His plan, authorities subsequently learned, was to drive to nearby Pearl Junior High School and shoot more kids before police could show up.

Joel Myrick foiled that plan, positioning himself to point his gun at Woodham's windshield. Woodham swerved and crashed the car. Myrick held the killer at gunpoint till police arrived, stopping the killing spree.

In 2002, as Mr. Lott reported in *The National Review*, "Two law students with law-enforcement backgrounds as deputy sheriffs in another state stopped the shooting at the Appalachian Law School in Virginia. ... The students ran to their cars, got their guns, pointed their guns at the attacker, ordered him to drop his gun, and then tackled him and held him until police were able to arrive," thus saving many lives.

At the Trolley Square attack in Utah this year, "Possibly the ban there was even more noteworthy because the off-duty police officer who stopped the attack fortunately violated the ban by taking his gun in with him when he went shopping," Mr. Lott reports.

"There are plenty of cases every year where permit holders stop what would have been multiple victim shootings, but they rarely receive any news coverage," Mr. Lott protests. "When will part of the media coverage on these multiple-victim public shootings be whether guns were banned where the attack occurred?"

Fortunately, we saw the way it works when citizens are armed, less than a week after the Omaha shootings. Shortly after midnight on Dec. 9, Matthew Murray, who had been rejected from a missionary school in Colorado, shot and killed two staffers there. Twelve hours later he drove to the parking lot of the related New Life Church in Colorado Springs, where about 7,000 people were present for the midday service, and opened fire in the parking lot, killing two young women.

Jeanne Assam, 42, a member of the congregation who used to work as a police officer, volunteers to guard the church.

Assam hid. She waited until Murray -- carrying a rifle, two pistols and a backpack with more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition -- entered the church. Then she "came out of cover, identified myself and took him down," she told a packed news conference Monday.

The coroner later reported the wounded assailant took his own life -- but not till Assam had blown him to the ground.

Authorities and her minister say Assam saved untold lives -- lives that would have been lost, had Murray attacked in a disarmed-victim city like Los Angeles, New York or Washington.

If you frequent public buildings or work for an employer who bars you from carrying your otherwise legal self-defense weapon, consider advising your loved ones in writing that -- in the event you should die under circumstances where you could have saved yourself and others with your handgun -- you want the proprietor sued personally.

Guns save lives. Since banning guns costs lives, shouldn't the individuals who ban self-defense -- not the victimized taxpayers -- pay the price?

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