



(Above photo from *VirginiaUnderProgress.org*:
 “Virginia Under The Gun”

[https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2015/10/27/124132/virginia-under-the-gun/.](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2015/10/27/124132/virginia-under-the-gun/))

Gun Control Debate Continues

Written by: Justin Hartsell

Emory, Va. — In Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee, there are debates in understanding if gun control laws are effective and constitutional.

On January 17, 2019, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported that “more than a dozen gun bills” were unsuccessful in being passed through the Virginia House of Delegates within a matter of two hours.

Republicans head the Virginia House of Delegates. However, Democratic members of the House are proposing the bills.

One such bill, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch story, would allow law enforcement to take guns away from individuals who are mentally impaired.

Though Republicans defeated the proposed gun control bills quickly, Democrats did not support Republicans’ decisions—including Virginia Governor Ralph Northam.

Just four days after the House’s decision, WTVR—an affiliate of ABC—reported Northam saying, “If we can’t change people’s minds, we need to change their seats.”

The foundation of these bills being debated lies in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The amendment reads, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Nathan Krauss, a senior at Emory & Henry College studying political science and history, recalls when former Justice Antonin Scalia said in the case of *DC v Heller*, "Although we do not undertake an exhaustive historical analysis today of the full scope of the Second Amendment, nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places ... or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."

Krauss explains, "Scalia makes it clear that barring felons and the mentally ill from owning guns does not violate the Second Amendment ... [it] does not prohibit restrictions on where a gun can be carried, and how it can be bought or sold."

"Therefore being 'pro-gun' and being 'pro-Second Amendment' are two separate things," says Krauss. "It would behoove politicians to stop conflating these terms in their rhetoric."

In the neighboring state of Tennessee, individuals can purchase firearms from licensed dealers unless, "such recipient has been convicted of stalking, is addicted to alcohol, is prohibited under the prohibited categories of federal law or has been judicially committed to a mental institution or adjudicated as a mental defective," according to Giffords Law Center.

Bristol Tennessee Police Chief Blaine E. Wade says, "... there are plenty of adequate laws, but some courts are too lenient with offenders. Also, prisons often release due to overcrowding and the punishment is not carried out sufficiently."

In regards to the safety of society, Wade says, "I believe responsible people owning firearms promotes a more secure society. Criminals will always break laws and will not obey firearms [sic] laws. Criminals are often opportunists who are looking for 'soft' targets. Criminals think twice before victimizing someone who is armed with a firearm."

Wade concludes, "Gun laws are adequate in our community, [but] I believe we need to enforce our existing laws and make sure penalties for using firearms illegally are strong and are followed by our justice system."

According to the National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action, Tennessee is planning to review pro-gun bills being proposed this week.