

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD: College presidents want guns kept off campus



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In December, the 7th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Illinois could no longer sustain a complete ban on the public carrying of concealed weapons. Judicious as that ban was, it could not withstand the court's ruling. As a result, the Illinois General Assembly must develop legislation to balance public safety and what the court interprets as the constitutional right to bear arms.

Judge Richard Posner of the 7th Circuit, calls upon Illinois to develop restrictions on concealed carry on school property. While I regret the court decision to force Illinois to join the other 49 states in permitting concealed carry, the major point of this column is to seek legislation that prohibits the public from bringing guns of any kind anywhere on university campuses. That means not in the buildings, not on the quads, not in the parking lots and not in cars driving through the campus.

Gun advocates argue that guns don't kill people; people kill people. The truth of the matter is that people with guns kill people.

The tragedy of Newtown, Conn., is fresh in our minds. Arming teachers or principals would not have prevented that disaster. The assailant coolly planned his assault.

Research shows that armed civilians who are taken by surprise are more likely to injure innocent bystanders than they are to stop the perpetrator.

While we are thinking about Newtown, let's support legislators who want to ban the kind of weapon of war that the Connecticut killer used.

And, for essential public protection, let's insist that high-capacity magazines be banned. A shooter is most vulnerable when stopping to reload.

U.S. Rep. Gabby Gifford's assailant was reloading when unarmed citizens overpowered him and stopped the Tucson massacre.

Just think how many 6 and 7-year-olds might have been spared in Newtown if a high-capacity magazine had been unavailable to the shooter.

Fareed Zakaria, in a Dec. 23 syndicated column published by the Washington Post Writers Group, reported, "A few hours before the Newtown murders last week, a man entered a school in China's Henan province. Obviously mentally disturbed, he tried to kill children. But the only weapon he was able to get was a knife. Although 23 children were injured, not one child died." People with guns kill people, including children.

At Illinois universities, we have our own gun-related tragedy. I will always remember the evening of Feb. 14, 2008, when I received the heart-wrenching call about the shootings at Northern Illinois University. On May 5, 2011, the NIU President John Peters, wrote a letter to argue against HB 148, which would permit Illinoisans, age 21 and over, to carry concealed weapons: "Supporters of this bill argue that it will make it easier for responsible owners of registered weapons to protect themselves. I know from bitter experience, however, that any such law is more likely to put all of us at greater risk from irresponsible, undertrained or inexperienced gun owners."

Now that the 7th Circuit has ruled against a total ban on concealed carry, all university and college presidents can do is underline our opposition to guns on campuses — all campuses, public, private and community college.

We will continue to do what we can through supporting the professional work of our campus police and through campus threat assessment teams to deal with recognizable degrees of threatening behavior. But we need legislative help in keeping people with guns off campus.