🇺🇸 DON'T LET THE KIDS DOWN AGAIN!

By Steve Bakke 🇺🇸 **April 10, 2018**

Important and controversial "stuff" is happening and I'm asking myself, "What should I think about this?" Distinguish that question from "What DO I think about this?" I'm trying to move from a quick emotional reaction to an objectively reasoned opinion.

There's a major student youth movement afoot concerning mass violence, specifically in schools. It's been ominously labeled "March for Our Lives." A perceived lack of progress dealing with the problem has created a leadership vacuum, and some teens seem to have welcomed an opportunity to fill it. If kids getting involved is a catalyst for making meaningful improvements, especially in schools, so be it – and their sincere effort should be acknowledged. We have to be careful, however, not to let the kids down again? What's the most likely way that could happen? That's the question I'm trying to address in this brief commentary.

The student leaders are emboldened by the emotion and reaction, which has led to their use of bullying techniques. And some youth leaders have become (dare I say) almost demagogues. I'm concerned the "adult response" will be emotional and heavy on repeating old mistakes. I'm worried we will just create more gun regulations, without evaluating what has worked, what could work if effectively administered and enforced, and what won't work.

Will the "March for Our Lives" movement distract us away from accurately defining the problem, measuring it accurately, and using good information to move closer to a solution? More specifically, will we be distracted from examining what has been learned from the Parkland, Florida school mass killing?

The Parkland massacre shined a light on some failures in our system. Some schools have disciplinary policies that are too lenient. It's known that warning signs have been ignored by schools, police departments, and the FBI. Reports indicate that communications between and within law enforcement agencies missed opportunities to possibly forestall violence. It's clear that important background check information lacks proper follow-up. And something that's a huge concern for me is whether these kids will officially discourage consideration of important school security methods – e.g. guards and metal detectors – even arming willing and qualified teachers.

Finally, my biggest concern is mentioned but seldom focused on. Along with evaluating firearm regulations, we should consider less tangible causes of violence and gun deaths. We can't let this movement distract us from considering important cultural considerations and questions such as: Have moral boundaries been "fuzzied," leading to an expansion of acceptable activities? Is violent behavior becoming more easily forgiven, or rationalized, by today's society? Has a de-emphasis on a traditional family structure led to changes in attitudes affecting violence? Have there been changes in the definition and sanctity of life, with a cheapening of the value of human life?

We have problems that require wise solutions. It's unfair to rely on children to carry the torch, or to be a moral authority. They need protection, not a shove to the front lines. We must remember that violence doesn't automatically bestow wisdom on victims or survivors. They have valid questions but shouldn't be relied on for answers. Sadly, some anxious folks get comfort from the prophesy from Isaiah, "And a child will lead them," but that's totally out of context here. The kids should step out of the spotlight.

We've been awakened by these kids' well-intentioned outrage and demonstrations, but we must take care not to let them down once again. How might that happen? Here are three ways: creating more ineffective solutions by refusing to learn from past mistakes; ignoring cultural changes that give momentum to violence, and......letting the kids "call the shots."