

# The Delray Democrat

## DeSantis Pushes for “Open Carry” Against Record Gun Violence: “From My Cold, Dead Hands”<sup>1</sup>

*June Sandra Neal*

If we thought Governor DeSantis couldn't be any more of a reckless ideologue . . . now he's promised to make Florida a “no carry, no permit” state before the end of his term, with his so-called “constitutional carry.” It came with a thick coat of pandering, even-for-him, when he stopped in Levy County on April 28 to announce his infrastructure funding for rural areas. Indeed. Otter Creek, population 134, got a check for nearly \$1.5 million for improved broadband expansion.

Of course, DeSantis threw in more of his fact-free criticism of President Joe Biden, and the admiring audience apparently saw no irony in the fact that the money came courtesy of President Biden's “Invest in America Act,” the nation's largest infrastructure bill in decades, or that only 32 of the 263 Republicans in Congress supported the bill or that Marco Rubio, Rick Scott, and Levy County's congressman, Neil Dunn, all voted against the bill.

The truly tragic irony was that, on the same day, we learned the latest death-by-gun statistics from the Center for Disease Control, announced by The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. “New Report Highlights U.S. 2020 Gun-Related Deaths: Highest Number Ever Recorded by CDC. Gun Homicides Increase by More Than One-Third.”

“More Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2020 than in any other year on record. The 45,222 total gun deaths in 2020 were by far the most on record, representing a 14% increase from the year before, a 25% increase from five years earlier and a 43% increase from a decade prior.” For the first time, the CDC addressed gun violence as a public health crisis.

So, what does “no training, no background check, no problem” portend? Florida currently requires a license for concealed carry. At a minimum, the applicant must be 21 years of age, unless a servicemember or an honorably discharged veteran; a citizen or meet legal residency requirements; and complete a firearms training class or equivalent. Disqualifiers include felony convictions.

But DeSantis and his fellow extremists believe it's a Second Amendment right to own a gun which therefore removes any requirement for training or government licensing. Madness.

The number of shootings in any state doesn't tell the whole story. It's the governance, and Florida already has a history of Republican incompetence and stupidity when it comes to firearms oversight.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, May 2022, page 5.

**Item.** In June 2017, the Office of the Inspector General found that the FL Department of Agriculture, the agency charged with conducting background checks and issuing licenses for firearms, failed to perform those checks for a year, claiming they couldn't log in! Republican Commissioner Adam Putnam and Governor Rick Scott stayed silent. It wasn't until June 2018 that the press alerted the public. The Tampa Bay Times reported, "For more than a year, the state of Florida failed to review national background checks on tens of thousands of applications for concealed weapons permits, potentially allowing drug addicts or people with a mental illness to carry firearms in public. An investigation found no one was doing any checks because the employees couldn't log in...the lapse covered a period that included the biggest spike in permit applications in Florida history" (emphasis added).

How long might this have continued if the IG's office hadn't found out?

In contrast, the current Agriculture Commissioner and Democratic candidate for governor, Nikki Fried, has suspended 35 gun licenses held by people involved in the January 6 insurrection attack on our US Capitol. Commissioner Fried gave this exclusive statement to *The Delray Democrat*: "As a public defender, I was on the front lines, standing with those facing the stark inequalities of race, money, education, and mental health. The proliferation of guns and gun violence only exacerbated the harsh outcomes of this inequality."

Today, I fear we are seeing the green shoots of that inequality rise again as gun violence and crime are on rise as well. We don't need cowboy policies that only intensify the violence coming from the end of a gun barrel. We need serious leadership and smart policies like a State gun registry, closing the gun show loophole, and going after so-called ghost guns."

**Item.** Florida, Proud Home of the Stand Your Ground Law! Under Republican Governor Jeb Bush, Florida shamefully became the first state in the nation to enact a Stand Your Ground gun law. It's been a disaster. The 2020 briefing by the US Commission on Civil Rights, "Examining the Race Effects of Stand Your Ground Laws," is a scathing indictment. And it goes beyond race to how the Republicans' gun madness threatens us all.

The murder of two unarmed Black 17-year-olds by White men in Florida were central to the review. The murderer said the music from Jordan Davis' car was too loud. He shot at the car 10 times, even as it was driven away, then claimed it was self-defense. Wannabe cop George Zimmerman killed Treyvon Martin, who was unarmed and walking home after buying candy.

The Commission pointed a finger directed at Florida, noting that Zimmerman was issued a license to carry a concealed weapon even though he was arrested in 2005 on a felony for "resisting arrest with violence and battery on a law enforcement officer and was under a domestic violence restraining order." It was Florida's weak "Shall-Issue" regulation that gave Zimmerman his license to kill. (With a Shall Issue policy, the state cannot deny a gun permit if the basic requirements are met, even with concerns about the owner. "May issue" states maintain discretion.)

The Commission's findings should crush any arguments for this public endangerment. "The confluence of Stand Your Ground and concealed-carry laws is, to even the casual observer, an invitation to use deadly force. Seven years after Stand Your Ground passed in Florida, the number of concealed carry permits tripled. In 2019, Florida leads the country by far with nearly 2 million

permits issued for a state population of nearly 22 million – nearly 1 in 10 Floridians carry concealed weapons. Florida is, to no one's surprise, a state that is a Shall Issue state with regard to concealed carry weapon permits. Indeed, of the states associated with Stand Your Ground laws, almost all are Shall Issue or "No Permit" states.

Florida now has 2,692,988 active concealed weapon permits, including those held by security officers, circuit and county judges and others.

In March, Charlie Crist, another Democrat running for governor, unveiled his "Safer Florida for All" plan to address an "unacceptable level of efficiency and lethality." This includes a ban on high-capacity magazines, background checks for all firearm sales, limiting handgun purchases to once a month, mandatory reporting of lost or stolen guns and lengthening the license waiting period from 3 to 5 days. He noted he is a gun owner but "The NRA and the politicians in the pockets of the NRA should not be dictating our conversation around gun violence."

Sen. Annette Taddeo, also running in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, noted, "There is no such thing as 'Constitutional Carry, it's Permit-less Carry and it's the exact opposite of the common-sense gun reforms that we need in our country. Responsible gun owners support background checks and safety training, not ending requirements for it. All this is another desperate attempt by Governor DeSantis to be the main story on Fox & Friends this week and another example of his willingness to compromise the safety of Floridians to further his presidential ambitions."

Governor DeSantis' introduction of the NRA's "constitutional carry" right to an already lethal, gun-infested, blood-soaked society once again demonstrates that his governance is a clear and present danger and that he is unfit for office.