

Chair Robert Gerhart statement

"Once again, our nation mourns over another senseless mass shooting at a school -- talking about what just happened down in Florida-- and I for one am sick and tired of all the talk that happens after each one of these events and the same lack of tangible action that follows. Here's where I stand: each time an event like last week's shooting in Florida happens, there's a loud outcry demanding that something be done about it, and generally speaking, nothing of any practical value ever really happens as a result. They're the voices that say 'we need to ban guns,' and regardless of where you stand on the Second Amendment, history has proven repeatedly that government bans on pretty much anything are largely ineffective. The Constitutional prohibition of alcohol in the early 20th century gave us three things: organized crime, a constitutional repeal and NASCAR. The ban on illicit drugs hasn't ended drug abuse. The war on poverty hasn't ended poverty. The ban on carrying a gun into a school didn't work in Florida, Newtown or Columbine, and the ban on murder didn't work either. Even if you still support gun bans, we still have to be intellectually honest enough with each other to recognize that such a fight will probably just end up in a stalemate in which the needle barely moves in either direction. Even if a ban could be done, it would realistically take decades to happen and, in the meantime, nothing of practical value happens for our schools today. Even if a ban could eventually be put in place, it would take several decades to enact. And today's current immigration debate, a lot of people say there's no way the government could possibly deport 22 million undocumented people. And those people are probably right. By the same logic, there's probably also no way to deport 300 million largely undocumented easily hidden passionately defended firearms. And that's not accounting for the inevitable gun smuggling that would likely happen, like it did with drugs. Again, regardless of where you stand on guns themselves, nothing of practical value will happen for our schools today. There are voices that say 'we need more police or armed security in schools,' and this is something I personally agree with for reasons that go beyond just the topic at hand. But again, regardless of what you think of that idea, let's be intellectually honest enough with ourselves to admit that those cops and guards won't appear overnight, nor will the money needed to pay them. These attacks typically end within seconds of the first sight of armed resistance to the shooter, but I think we have to admit that it's unlikely we will ever have enough of such people in place to be within a few seconds of any possible threat without making our schools look like a military base. Again, regardless of where you stand on the idea of having police or guards in schools, the solution does not provide a way to improve safety in our schools today. They're the voices that say 'we need to arm our teachers.' No, just, no, no. Mandates are no more effective than bans and not everyone is cut out for or willing to bear such a responsibility. Such a debate would also run on for years, and even if such an idea won out, it would take years longer to do the training and therefore, would provide no practical increase in safety for schools today. So are we out of luck? No. I have a solution, and here's my proposal. Let volunteers identify themselves privately. Require the volunteers to be 21 or older. Require the County Sheriff's Office to run a background check on each volunteer at the volunteer's own expense. Disqualify anyone who's been convicted of a violent offense. Disqualify anybody who's been convicted of domestic abuse. Disqualify anybody who has a mental illness. Disqualify anybody who has a drug problem. Disqualify anybody who's listed in the criminal gang investigation system. Require the volunteer to provide a certificate of completed firearms training, proven both classroom and shooting range proficiency provided by a certified instructor at the volunteer's own expense. Require that the volunteer

provide their own legally obtained firearm at their own expense. Provide successful volunteers with an identification card and require that these volunteers carry it along with a state issued driver's license at all times that they're in possession of the firearm. And require the volunteers to voluntarily reapply and requalify for this card every five years at their own expense. Now people might ask 'won't all this take years to put in place and do nothing for our schools today? What would this magical card look like?' What if I told you that everything I just told you already exists and it has existed for over a decade. And nobody has been willing the courageous conversation about actually putting it to use. What if I told you the card I talked about already exists, and I've had one for 15 years. The card looks like this (holds it up). It's Minnesota permit to carry a pistol card. I know for a fact that we have teachers across the district and across our state, who carry a similar card, but cannot carry a firearm to protect themselves or their students, even if they wanted to, because it's illegal to do so. But state and federal laws are already in place, also provide a relatively simple but also completely unused way for school administrators to pick and choose which registered permit holders, a subset of the people who are already screened with all these other steps, who can be allowed to simply extend the protection they choose for themselves to the students around them. The method is simple, but goes unused for fear of political or public relations blowback. I for one am tired of the endless talk and inaction. I challenge my fellow board members, our administration and the communities we serve to ask themselves once and for all, 'if school safety today is more important than political bickering?' about ideological some day that never ever seems to come. Let the stuffed shirts in St. Paul and Washington, D.C., debate and filibuster until they're blue in the face. We have the ability to make a difference right here, right now. And while this debate is not on our agenda for today, I challenge all of us to have this conversation openly and honestly. This is action we can actually take that can make a real difference in time for it to matter. I'm sorry, I'm stepping off my soapbox now, but it's something that needed to be said, thank you."