

When backpacks are bulletproof

By SHERALYN ROMAN

A draft of this week's article was already underway that thankfully, has absolutely nothing to do with Caledon, when news broke about two separate mass shootings in the US. We planned on discussing the sad state of affairs when manufacturers there, capitalizing on an already fearful nation (and sadly, on an identified need) began their 'Back To School' marketing on the first of August with this year's latest trend - the bulletproof backpack. Convinced it was a joke or a meme, I did a little bit of research and found that indeed, it was no joke. If you're sending your kids to school, anywhere in the US, purchasing a backpack might just have become a life and death decision.

What a sad state of affairs. What are we to make of the decision by at least one manufacturer, called BulletBlocker, to capitalize on the very real potential need for such an item? Should we applaud their initiative at keeping kids safe or berate them for fuelling the hysteria of worried parents across the nation? Such parents no longer worry about bullying or whether their kid makes the cheer squad but rather - whether their kid will come home from school at all. One wonders if there are other options besides building bulletproof backpacks, like oh I don't know? banning the sale of guns? Or gee, maybe consider changing the Second Amendment, an archaic law written during a time that is no longer relevant and for a political climate that no longer exists? Maybe, just putting it out there, the US might at the very least consider banning the sale of AK 47 (and similar) assault rifles because I've gotta think if one is merely purchasing a gun to go deer hunting, such a weapon would leave very little of the carcass left to use. In other words, unless the US is about to declare war on the entire world, why do its citizens need to possess such weapons of mass destruction? Because, that's what they are. Assault rifles serve no other purpose than to wreak havoc and mayhem on absolutely anything that is even remotely within its sights.

This past week's tragic turn of events with not one, but two mass shootings is - if you can believe it - the 255th (273 fatalities) mass shooting in the US THIS YEAR! Yes, you read that right. We had to go back and check that statistic for accuracy and sadly, it's 100% true. Hence, one assumes, the very real perceived need for bulletproof backpacks. Manufacturers like Armor Me and Guard Dog, as well as BulletBlocker stand behind their claims that they will help keep kids safe although independent testing showed they were actually only good for stopping bullets from certain types of handguns - not the assault rifles that tend to be the weapon of choice for school shooters everywhere. By the way, since we're talking statistics, a mass shooting is considered to be one when more than four people are shot. Just a few days prior to El Paso and Dayton, 12 people were shot in Brooklyn but that one didn't even make the headlines!

Before you think I've gotten too preachy or forgotten about bullets that have flown through school corridors right here close to home - I have not. I lived within a stone's throw of one of the worst school shootings in Canadian history and that was in the '70's. Of course we all recall the terrible events of December 6th 1989 when 14 female students lost their lives to a madman. Bad things do happen here - but rarely. While any loss of life is tragic, the key difference here in Canada is that when bad things happen, fewer people die. As well, fewer bad things happen, in part because access to guns (especially assault rifles and their ilk) are not only very closely monitored but largely restricted. Further, the Ecole Polytechnique incident resulted in much stricter gun laws, with Bill C-68 implemented in 1995 a direct result. Makes sense to me. Makes sense to most of my Democrat neighbours to the south. Sadly, it doesn't seem to make sense to most of the rest of America. These are the parents who would rather go back to school shopping with just one thing in mind - finding a pretty pink or blue backpack (or even a tie dye version which seems truly ironic) not just for crayons and computers but which can also be used as a shield while your kids run for their lives. A sad state of affairs indeed.