Written by Marc H. Morial, NNPA Columnist
Friday, 01 February 2013 15:00

No one hunts with an assault rifle. No one needs 10 bullets to kill a deer and too many innocent people have died already. End the madness, now!"
- New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo

Last week, one month after the shooting deaths of 20 first-graders and six adults in a school in Newtown, Conn., New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed into law the most comprehensive gun legislation in the nation. Passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, the New York SAFE Act strengthens the state's assault weapons ban, reduces gun magazine capacity from 10 to seven bullets, increases penalties for purchasing illegal guns and using guns on school grounds, mandates universal background checks, and takes guns out of the hands of mental health patients deemed likely to commit violent acts.

Two days later at the White House, President Obama unveiled the most sweeping federal gun control proposals in a generation. In addition to calling on Congress to reinstate the assault weapons ban and close background check loopholes, the President signed 23 executive actions to immediately strengthen background checks, make schools safer, increase access to mental health services and reduce gun violence. We applaud the actions of Gov. Cuomo and President Obama to finally address the plague of senseless gun violence and we are encouraged by their commitment to increase resources for mental health counseling and programs that help create safer communities.

As a long-time advocate of sensible gun control measures, the National Urban League stands ready to work with the governor, the president and others to end the epidemic of gun violence in America. Each year on average, more than 100,000 people are shot or killed with a gun in this country. The American people have had enough.

A Siena College survey shows that 73 percent of New Yorkers support the state's expanded assault weapons ban and new limits on high capacity magazines. Recent national polls also show that the American people believe sensible gun control measures are more important than protecting gun rights. Clearly, it is time for state legislatures and Congress to put the safety of

our children and the wishes of the people before the demands of the gun lobby which has used extremist rhetoric to promote a tortured and distorted interpretation of the Second Amendment. And let me be clear: While we understand the desire to promote safety and protect our children, we are adamantly opposed to arming teachers or placing armed guards in schools. Guns do not belong in schools.

As a nation, we have been horrified by the tragedies in Columbine, Aurora, Oak Creek and now Newtown. But as Americans, we should be equally heartbroken and outraged by the daily gun violence occurring in cities throughout the country. Since the Newtown massacre, there have been more than 1,000 additional gun deaths in this country, and several more school shooting incidents. The time for half-measures is over. As the president said last week, “I will put everything I’ve got into this and so will Joe Biden…but this will not happen unless the American people demand it.” We urge you to join the National Urban League in calling on Congress to work with the President to enact common-sense gun reforms. Our goal should be to make America the safest big country in the world.

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.