

Ellison town hall on gun violence gets contentious

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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The tension was palpable during a packed town hall meeting to discuss federal efforts to reduce gun violence.

The town hall, called by US Rep. Keith Ellison, who represents Minnesota's 5th Congressional District – a district that has been home to its share of gun violence – took place inside Temple Israel, 2324 Emerson Ave. S. And though the meeting was inside a place of worship, the mood was far from serene. And in a room with walls adorned with statistics on gun violence and names of those killed by guns and with a son of a man gunned down in a mass shooting offering his personal experience with gun violence, one might think the call for gun control would have been unanimous, but that was far from the case.

In a meeting that lasted nearly two hours and was, on a couple of occasions interrupted by outbursts from those opposed to any changes in the nation's gun laws, the most poignant voice might have been that of 17-year-old Sami Rahamim. Rahamim's father, Reuven Rahamim, was one of six people gunned down this past fall in a mass shooting at Accent Signage Systems in Minneapolis.

"Nothing can prepare you to hear your father has been murdered with a gun," said Rahamim, who said when he heard of a shooting in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood, he sent a text message to his father telling him to be careful because there was a shooting in the area. "By passing legislation we will be preventing other families from getting the phone call (notifying the family of Reuven Rahamim's murder) my family received."

Reuven Rahamim, who immigrated to the United States, founded Accent Signage Systems in 1984 and turned it into a multi-million dollar company.

"My father lived the American dream, but died the American nightmare," said Sami Rahamim.

Sami Rahamim, along with Protect Minnesota, has been lobbying law makers at the state capitol to enact stricter state gun laws. Together, the group is calling on federal legislation that will put an end to the so-called gun show loophole that allows buyers to purchase guns without a criminal background check, a ban on assault type weapons like the ones used in mass shootings in Aurora, Col., and Newtown, Conn., and a maximum limit of 10 rounds for gun clips and magazines.

But not all in attendance were so eager to acquiesce to such changes.

"In this rush (to pass legislation) we're missing the target," said Lee Burke, who said the problem is not being tough enough on crime. "We're not going after the criminals in this country. I had two friends murdered and both of their killers are walking the streets today. We're ignoring God's law that murderers should be put to death."

Theresa Cutler said she is opposed to any changes in gun laws because of her need to protect her family.

"With all due respect to the police and law enforcement, I'm the first responder if someone tries

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to harm my family,” said Cutler. Cutler said having an assault type weapon is a deterrent to criminals looking to do harm.

In his support of tougher gun laws, Ellison pointed out that he is, in fact a gun owner himself, but he said calling for restrictions is not calling for a ban.

“The reality is, we’re going to have to make some changes in our laws,” said Ellison. “It’s now time for us to show fortitude and put some reasonable laws in place.”

Ellison said since the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, there have been well over a thousand gun deaths in the nation. The Sandy Hook shooting took place on Dec. 14.

“We can talk statistics, but really, we’re talking about people. We’re talking about an empty chair at the dining room table,” said Ellison.

“Enough is enough, the proposals we present are common sense,” said Rahamim. “We have the power to save lives.”

Ellison announced that Rahamim will be his guest at the president’s upcoming State of the Union address.