

# When is a concealed weapon not worth the risk?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

This probably will do no good.

But there's a young mother who is never coming home and a young boy who one day will be told of his role in a horrific tragedy at the Hayden Walmart last week.

The death of Veronica Rutledge is not going to reverse a two-decades-long push toward enabling citizens to carry concealed weapons - any more than Idaho State University assistant professor of chemistry Byron Bennett shooting himself in a classroom last fall is going to repeal Idaho's guns on campus law.

But at least consider what you're not hearing from the National Rifle Association, which casts every argument, whether it's arming college students or resisting background checks at gun shows, as a referendum on the Second Amendment.

Look past the politicians who get caught in the polarization - either getting in line with the NRA or getting nailed as soft on gun rights at their

next campaign.

And delve beyond the people who want to make a profit through the manufacture, distribution and sale of handguns.

These people won't level with you about the risks of carrying a concealed weapon.

For instance, the number of people packing guns in this country has grown exponentially. As the Christian Science Monitor reported last week, only a few hundred thousand people had a license to carry concealed weapons 15 years ago. Now it's more than 10 million.

And the kind of handguns being manufactured are more prone to discharge accidentally. Rutledge was carrying a 9 mm Smith & Wesson M&P Shield semi-automatic when her 2-year-old son apparently reached into her purse, grabbed the gun and fired it. M&P - as in military and police - is a market that prizes a weapon that is ready to fire. Hence gun manufacturers have engineered striker-fired - as opposed to the old hammer-fired - pistols. It translates into less pressure required to get off the first round. If you're an experienced, trained shooter, that's a benefit. But if you're not, it can lead to more mishaps.

As the Spokesman-Review and Idaho Falls Post Register reported last week, Smith & Wesson's website said pulling the 9mm M&P Shield's trigger requires 6 1/2 pounds of pressure. Kootenai County Sheriff's Office spokesman Lt. Stu Miller said that was well within the grip of a small child.

Nobody is going to tell you that with any handgun, "accidental discharges" are not infrequent occurrences - even among law enforcement professionals at training ranges.

And nobody is going to spell out for you this simple equation: In a low-crime state such as Idaho, does possessing a concealed pistol put you or others at more risk? The answer is unknown. Since 1996, the NRA's supporters in Congress have blocked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from even studying why and how guns are used to kill people.

You'll hear these incidents in Hayden and Pocatello are isolated. They are statistically irrelevant.

OK. But here's one undeniable fact: Without a gun, Bennett would have walked away from an uneventful class session. Without the gun, Rutledge would have seen the new year.

This isn't about changing the law or blaming the victims. But even the most committed gun enthusiast has to be willing to ask himself whether carrying a concealed weapon is warranted in each and every situation. Start with this question: Does the remote possibility of facing an armed intruder warrant putting a handgun within reach of

a toddler? - M.T.