

Rep. Mark Pocan, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin and community leaders call for action on gun control at downtown rally



- PHOTO BY SAIYNA BASHIR

Michael Johnson, president and CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, speaks outside the Madison City-County building during the National Day of Action rally on gun violence prevention.

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U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan speaks outside the Madison City-County building during a National Day of Action rally on gun violence prevention.

To Jim Nosal and his wife, gun control is an issue that is all too personal. Their daughter, Caroline, was shot earlier this year. Just 24 years old, she was killed at the Metro Mart on Cottage Grove Road in February.

On Wednesday night, Nosal attended a rally at the City-County Building for gun violence prevention. Organized by U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, community leaders, activists and citizens gathered to express their support for what Pocan called “common sense measures” of gun legislation.

“What my wife and I have been through, I wouldn’t wish that on anyone, so that’s why I’m here,” Nosal said.

Last Wednesday, House Democrats staged a sit-in for almost 26 hours in an attempt to force a vote on gun control legislation following the recent mass shooting in Orlando. They were unsuccessful, and the House adjourned for the fourth of July. Democrats promised to continue their fight on their return. In the meantime, House Democrats across the country organized a nationwide Day of Action to highlight the issue in their home states.

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan took part in the House sit-in and organized the rally in downtown Madison.

“We’ve decided we’re going to take it to the streets,” Pocan said to the audience.

Over 100 legislators throughout the state staged similar events, including sit-ins in their office, town halls and press conferences. Rep. Pocan thought a rally downtown would be in line with the “spirit of Madison,” said David Kolovson, Pocan’s communications director.

The purpose of the day was to bring awareness to America’s gun violence epidemic and to support legislation making it illegal to sell guns to individuals on the FBI’s no-fly list and to expand background checks.

The event was sponsored by organizations including Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church, Breaking Barriers, Our Lives Magazine, Outreach, Moms Demand Action and Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort (WAVE).

Pocan was the first to speak, and recalled his reaction to the Orlando shooting.

“I knew the next day when I went back to Congress we would do absolutely nothing,” he said. Pocan supports limitations on gun ownership, noting he was not trying to interfere with hunting traditions or personal handguns.

Multiple speakers followed, citing statistics on gun violence and death, and calling the audience to action.

A gun violence survivor was the first to address the crowd after Pocan. Jackie Millar, who was shot in the head during a robbery at her friend’s house, spoke of her injury, weeks in a coma and arduous recovery process. She focused on the regret of the man who shot her, whom she regularly visits in jail.

“The first thing Craig does when he sees me, he hugs me because it is his way of saying how sorry he is for having shot me,” Millar said.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin also spoke. He had [previously addressed](#) the Orlando shooting, blaming the “obscene firepower available” in this country and the influence of organizations like the NRA for continued gun violence.

On Wednesday, he emphasized that the Second Amendment references a well-regulated militia, and was not intended to guarantee lack of scrutiny in obtaining firearms, especially for troubled individuals.

“All we’re asking is that there be reasonable, responsible steps that will protect any person in the country that we know, that we love, and that we care about,” Soglin said.

Patrick Farabaugh, publisher of Our Lives, a magazine focusing on Madison's LGBT and allied community, spoke of the sorrow and hurt he felt when he heard of the Orlando shootings, stating that boys need to be taught alternative ways to deal with their emotions that don't end in violence.

"America has a culture of toxic masculinity that tells our boys that emotions and crying make them weak, and that's it's not OK to be gay," Farabaugh said.

He also warned against hasty action that could further harm already hurting minority communities.

"Let's take mindful steps to ensure that they do not become collateral damage against well-intentioned actions by white people," Farabaugh said.

Dane County Circuit Court Judge Rev. Everett Mitchell spoke of the young men he has buried over the years who have died due to gun violence. He warned against apathy and inaction, quoting James Baldwin, an African-American author.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced," Mitchell quoted.

Michael Johnson, president and CEO of Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, brought attention to the fact that a third of gun violence victims are under the age of 20.

"Something has to be done, because people are losing their lives and children are being robbed of their futures," Johnson said.

State Rep. Terese Berceau and Veronica Lazo, executive director of UNIDOS Against Domestic Violence, also spoke.

Crowds held signs that said, "We can end gun violence" and "#disarm hate." Some signs were decorated with rainbows, and others were held by children, some brought by their mothers who are members of Moms Demand Action.

"I'm a mom. I've got two kids that are in grade school and they're doing lockdown drills, and that terrifies me. That's not what they should be focusing their time and energy on," said Chris Krasovich, a spokeswoman for Moms Demand Action.

She said she and others came from Milwaukee as an expression of gratitude for the stand Pocan had taken.

"We want to let him know that he has a lot of support out there," Krasovich said.

Pocan ended the rally by indicting House Speaker Paul Ryan for not allowing the issue to be heard in the House. He read pro-gun control legislation comments from Ryan's constituents, posted on social media, saying that if Ryan didn't have to listen to other legislators or Wisconsin citizens, he still had to listen to his own constituents. He ended with an ultimatum.

"Let us have no more moments of silence and only moments of action. If we don't, the blood is on the hands of Congress," Pocan said.

Nosal is similarly passionate about the need for the public to tell legislators they've had enough.

"Wherever we go with this, it's a start. If we don't do anything, what we're saying is that my daughter's death was justified," Nosal said.

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