

Mark your confusion using Thinking Notes.
Show evidence of a close reading with 7-10 annotations.
Write a 1-pg reflection or post a paragraph on the blog.

President, moved to tears by memory of victims, unveils gun control plan

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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Grade Level **7** Word Count **768**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On Tuesday, President Barack Obama announced his plan to tighten control and enforcement of firearms in the United States. During the announcement, he was visibly emotional, even wiping tears from his cheek at one point.

Congress has not passed the legal changes that the president requested in the past. Obama decided to use his presidential powers to make a change on his own.

Obama accused the gun lobby of holding Congress hostage but said "they cannot hold America hostage." He insisted that it was possible to uphold the Second Amendment and make changes. Obama hopes to tackle the frequency of mass shootings in the United States that he said had become the "new normal."

"This is not a plot to take away everybody's guns," Obama said in a ceremony in the East Room. "You pass a background check, you purchase a firearm. The problem is some gun sellers have been operating under a different set of rules."

Remembering First-Grade Victims

Obama wiped tears away as he recalled the 20 first-graders killed in 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. He paid tribute to the parents, some of whom gathered for the ceremony. Obama reminded us that these parents had never imagined their child's life would be cut short by a bullet.

"Every time I think about those kids, it gets me mad," Obama said.

At the center of Obama's plan is a wider definition of gun dealers. The administration hopes that under this new definition more gun sales will be subject to background checks.

Under the current law, only federally licensed gun dealers are required to do background checks on buyers. At gun shows, websites and flea markets, sellers do not always register as licensed dealers. Sellers who are not licensed are not required to do background checks. Without background checks, almost anyone can purchase a gun.

Tougher Gun Buying Guidelines

To help ensure that guns are not sold without background checks, changes are being made. The Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is updating their guidelines. The new guidelines say that the government should consider anyone "in the business" of selling guns to be a dealer. The government will also consider other factors, including how many guns a person sells and whether those guns are sold for a profit.

The White House also put gun sellers on notice that they planned to strengthen enforcement. The stronger enforcement includes 230 new examiners the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will hire to process background checks.

The impact of Obama's plan on gun violence remains a big question, and it is not easy to answer.

How Much Will Changes Help?

If these rules had been in place in the past, they probably would not have prevented the recent mass shootings. The Obama administration could not say specifically how much the new regulations will help. Officials do not know how many more gun sales could be subjected to background checks or how many currently unregistered gun sellers would have to obtain a license.

Obama said every time the issue is debated, gun rights groups have the same argument. No matter what is proposed, they claim that it wouldn't necessarily have stopped the last shooting, "so why bother trying?"

"I reject that thinking," Obama said, arguing it would be worth it if the measures would prevent even a single gun death. "We maybe can't save everybody, but we could save some."

The White House assembled a cross section of Americans whose lives were altered by the nation's most searing recent gun tragedies. Those affected by recent shootings include former Representative Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona and relatives of victims from Charleston, South Carolina, and Virginia Tech.

Taking Matters Into Presidential Hands

Obama quoted Martin Luther King Jr. when he said, "We need to feel the fierce urgency of now."

Obama's package of executive actions aims to curb what he's described as a scourge of gun violence in the United States, made worse by mass shootings in Newtown, Connecticut; Charleston, South Carolina; and Tucson, Arizona, among many others. After Newtown, Obama sought far-reaching, bipartisan legislation that went beyond background checks.

When Obama's effort did not pass the Senate, the White House said it was thoroughly researching the president's powers. Obama wanted to identify every legal step he could take on his own. A more recent wave of gun-related atrocities, including in San Bernardino, California, have spurred the administration to give the issue another look. Obama is seeking to make good on a policy issue that he's elevated time and again but has failed until now to advance.

Response Question:

- Write a short response to summarize the disagreement between any two people or organizations in the article. If you were to support the claims made by only one of these parties, who would it be? Why?

Quiz

1) Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4].

Obama accused the gun lobby of holding Congress hostage but said "they cannot hold America hostage."

How does the phrase "holding Congress hostage" affect the meaning of the sentence?

- (A) It implies that President Obama is afraid of the gun lobby.
- (B) It means that the gun lobby is a dangerous group of criminals.
- (C) It implies that the gun lobby has been using its power unfairly.
- (D) It means that the president is going to make the gun lobby illegal.

2) Read the sentence from the section "Taking Matters Into Presidential Hands."

Obama's package of executive actions aims to curb what he's described as a scourge of gun violence in the United States, made worse by mass shootings in Newtown, Connecticut; Charleston, South Carolina; and Tucson, Arizona, among many others.

What is meant by "curb"?

- (A) stop
- (B) reduce
- (C) explain
- (D) question

3) Which selection from the article represents one argument some people use to argue AGAINST gun control?

- (A) Congress has not passed the legal changes that the president requested in the past.
- (B) He insisted that it was possible to uphold the Second Amendment and make changes.
- (C) Without background checks, almost anyone can purchase a gun.
- (D) If these rules had been in place in the past, they probably would not have prevented the recent mass shootings.

4) How would President Obama likely respond to the criticism of gun owners who are worried about losing their guns under his new plan?

- (A) The Second Amendment was written a long time ago, and it is not very useful in today's world.
- (B) Taking away guns from the American people is worth it if it saves even one life. We already have too many guns.
- (C) This plan does not take away guns. We already have background checks for some buyers, and this plan just changes that to checking all buyers.

(D) This plan does not take away all guns. This plan only takes away guns from the people who fail the background check or who show signs of dangerous behaviors.