

Episode 193: Gun Control Myths with Dr. John Lott

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:24](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, I'm Bill Walton. We've all been rightly appalled by yet another school shooting, this time in Uvalde, Texas. There're so many troubling aspects to this; the number of children murdered, the profile of the shooter, and the behavior of the law enforcement officers. As ever, there are cries to do something which really means do something about guns. Yet, the gun law now in Congress won't do anything to prevent future school shootings. There's a lot of evidence to show why it won't work, especially when existing gun laws appear to cost more lives than they save.

Bill Walton ([01:05](#)):

Dr. John Lott, my guest today, knows more than almost anyone else about this subject. Dr. Lott is president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, a PhD in economics. He spent 25 years in research and is author of many books on the topics including More Guns, Less Crime which kicked off this debate and Gun Control Myths.

Bill Walton ([01:27](#)):

John, let's start with this. You write that between 1950 and 2019 94% of mass public shootings in the United States occurred in places where general citizens were banned from carrying guns. But the mainstream media, they continually refused to mention when attack occurs in a gun-free zone.

John Lott ([01:49](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([01:50](#)):

I think that's, of all these, yet another one of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of instances. Thoughts?

John Lott ([01:59](#)):

No, exactly. I mean the Tulsa, Oklahoma hospital shooting was another example. You read the manifesto for the Buffalo mass murder there. He goes and spends a great deal of time in his manifesto explaining why he wanted to pick the particular target he did. He wanted to go to a place where he knew victims there, the civilians wouldn't have concealed handguns to go and protect themselves.

John Lott ([02:31](#)):

We have many of those examples where we've gone and read through the diaries or other statements that these killers have made. These people may be crazy in some sense, but they're not stupid. Their goal is to try to go and get media coverage, and they know the more people they kill or wound the more media coverage that they're going to get.

John Lott ([02:52](#)):

The Sandy Hook killer, for example. He had spent two-and-a-half years studying mass public shootings over the previous 40 years. He had done what the police described as akin to a doctoral dissertation. Among the things that he did was he would graph out the relationship between the number of people killed and the amount of media coverage that they got. According to one police report, he wanted to go and kill more people than the Norway killer had killed, who had murdered just with guns 67 people, because he wanted to get more international news coverage than the Norway killer had gotten.

Bill Walton ([03:31](#)):

Well, the typical blowback on that as well, these are suicides. The shooters are planning to commit suicide. What do they care?

John Lott ([03:39](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([03:40](#)):

But what you're showing is that they really do care, that they want to live in infamy.

John Lott ([03:45](#)):

Exactly.

Bill Walton ([03:47](#)):

They drive the numbers up, they'll get whatever in heaven. Or not in heaven, in hell.

John Lott ([03:53](#)):

No, exactly. You can't read these diaries or other things that these people leave and not come away with the obvious fact that they want to commit suicide, but they feel unappreciated. At some point along the line people discovered that if they went and killed a lot of other people, they would get attention, that people would know that they had been here. And so, if you're going to stop these attacks, what you have to do is try to take away the coverage that they're going to get.

John Lott ([04:29](#)):

I'm not talking about banning the First Amendment or something like that, or rewriting it. But if you can get somebody there quickly with a gun to stop them, it can reduce how many people they think they're going to be able to go and kill. The Buffalo-

Bill Walton ([04:51](#)):

You point out that even in right-to-carry states or in concealed carry states, that they still have very tiny pockets of vulnerability, the so-called gun-free zones, and most schools are in the gun-free zone category. That's like putting a sign on the school saying this is open for target shooting.

John Lott ([05:15](#)):

Right. Exactly. Look, let's say, God forbid, somebody was threatening you or your family, was really seriously threatening you. Would you feel safe for putting a sign in front of your home that said this

home is a gun-free zone? Would the prospective murderer go and say, "Well, I can't go in there because I can't take my weapon in there because I'm not allowed to do it"? No. What would happen is the exact opposite. It would actually serve as a magnet for that person to go in there because he knows he'd be relatively more successful, that it would be an easier task for him to go and do it.

John Lott ([05:52](#)):

But look, people know they would never put a sign like that up in front of their home. Well, if you're not going to put a sign like that up in front of your home, why would you put it up in front of other places that you really care about protecting?

John Lott ([06:05](#)):

I understand the debate. You read the legislative debates over things like allowing teachers or staff to be able to go and carry, and there's a whole range of concerns. What happens if the teacher accidentally shoots somebody? What happens if the teacher loses their temper and shoots somebody? What happens if the teacher loses control of the gun and the student gets a hold of it? Those are all possibilities. So much of the gun control debate is about possibilities about things that might happen.

John Lott ([06:41](#)):

Well, we don't have to guess. We have 20 states that, to varying degrees, have teachers and staff carrying, some of them had it for decades. You can go and look to see. You don't find one single example of any of these types of concerns actually occurring in the thousands of schools that have teachers and staff carrying.

Bill Walton ([07:03](#)):

Well, you're making a case, a statistical case. I think, to me, part of the problem is this, most people are not very numeric, most people don't do that well in math. If you look at the statistics, they overwhelmingly support the idea that guns make you safer, not putting you at more risk. What we see is when you get a bad anecdote, a kid kills himself with a gun in the closet, then all of a sudden, we're supposed to ban all guns in all closets and we're supposed to have trigger locks. Those laws that are supposed to protect people are aimed at incidences which might be one-tenth of one percent of the number of lives that might be saved by not having gun locks, by not having the laws.

Bill Walton ([07:54](#)):

Even our existing gun laws which are meant to so-called protect people, end up hurting more people than they save.

John Lott ([08:02](#)):

A lot of these are empirical questions to try to go and figure out what the net effect of these things are. I mean, I can look across countries, for example. We have data on what's called hot burglaries. These are burglaries that occur while the residents are in the home. Burglars in the United States spend about twice as long casing a home before they break in compared to their British counterparts. What's the reason that they give? They're worried about getting shot, and one way to try to protect yourself and prevent yourself from getting shot is make sure nobody's home, because then nobody's there to fire a gun at you. The British burglars don't care about that too much, and they also break in a lot more.

John Lott ([08:46](#)):

So, look, as you mentioned, I'm an economist. One of the things that's... There are a couple of ideas that economists have, but probably one of the simplest is just that if something's more costly, people do less of it. The greater the reward, the more they do it. If you make it costly and risky for criminals to commit crime, either with higher arrest rates or higher conviction rates or in terms of the fact that a victim might be able to go and defend themselves, you can also make it risky for them to commit those crimes and reduce it.

Bill Walton ([09:19](#)):

Well, I suffer from the same issue you do. I studied finance and statistics, and so I tend to look at these things in terms of cost, trade offs, and benefits. I mean, your statistics are overwhelming in terms of the concealed carry, for example, allowing guns in public spaces which would prevent the mass shootings, but you've gotten a lot of pushback. You paid an enormous personal price for this. I mean, you were an economist at the federal Crime Sentencing Commission and then you were at Wharton as a professor.

Bill Walton ([09:59](#)):

When you published your first book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, everybody came out of the woodwork and began attacking you. Tell me what that was like and who were the opponents and what were the lines of attack.

John Lott ([10:15](#)):

Oh, it's a long story. I mean, I guess the most important part of the story is it basically ended my academic career at the University of Chicago. My book *More Guns, Less Crime* came out in May 1998. In November, 1998, Mayor Daley called up Hugo Sonnenschein, the president of the University of Chicago and spent, I'm told, 45 minutes talking about all the wonderful projects that the city wanted to do with the school. And then at the end of the conversation said, but Lott's continued presence at the University of Chicago was going to do "irreparable harm" to the relationship between the city and the school.

John Lott ([11:03](#)):

A couple days later, I get called into Dan [inaudible 00:11:06], meeting with him and another professor. Dan basically said, "Look, John, you're probably one of the worst treated people in academia. I'm really sorry to have to do this, but we're going to have to let you go." I said, "This is in the middle of the school year. You can't do this in the middle of a school year." He said, "You'll destroy my career."

John Lott ([11:30](#)):

Anyway, I'm not going to go through all the back and forth, but after a few days, the agreement was that if I promised not to talk to the media anymore about my work, they would let me stay there through the end of the school year.

John Lott ([11:48](#)):

So, if you look from May when the book came out until November, I was doing a lot of media, and then I basically go radio silent. You may not remember, but in 1999 there was a lot of push on new gun control laws. I would get a lot of calls from Max Boot who was the op-ed editor at the *Wall Street Journal* at the time saying, "John, you got to write a piece for us." Okay. So, I ended up going to Yale.

John Lott ([12:25](#)):

The second year I was at Yale, I was asked to testify in Hawaii on a couple gun registration licensing bills that they had. Before I went there... I'm sorry. If you wanted me to stop.

Bill Walton ([12:44](#)):

Well, no, no, it's interesting. I just wanted to point out, I'm not doing this to put you through your personal hell again, but the cancel culture that we're seeing today with regard to, pick a topic, vaccines, different views on Ukraine, whatever, it started way back.

John Lott ([13:02](#)):

Oh, yeah, no. I mean, it's not just-

Bill Walton ([13:04](#)):

You were an early victim of that.

John Lott ([13:06](#)):

Right. I'll finish the story about Yale and then I'll give you a story from the Los Angeles times, which is also relevant. So, anyway, before I went out to testify in Hawaii, I told the state legislators who were inviting me out, "Look, you're going to have the Honolulu police chief testify in favor of the bill. You don't want to sandbag them. You want them to be able to go and do research on this, but tell them in advance that there are two questions that you want to ask. One question is how many crimes have you been able to solve since registration licensing went into effect in 1960 in Hawaii? The second one is how much does it cost each year to go and run the program?"

John Lott ([13:55](#)):

I basically knew the answer to the first question. Anyway, he gets there, because I wanted to force him to be able to answer the question. I didn't want him to be able to say, "Well, I have to look at it and get back to you." Anyway, he gets up there and testifies, and he said he'd look. He couldn't find a single crime that they'd been able to solve as a result of licensing and registration. I think I can go through and explain why that's the case, if you want. Then, he also was asked how much is the cost, and he said it costs about 50,000 hours' worth of police time each year.

John Lott ([14:31](#)):

So, the trade off, at least if you could point to thousands of crimes that you had solved or hundreds or a couple dozen or at least one or two, then there'd be some trade off. But 50,000 hours of police time each year, that's a lot of crimes that you could have solved with 50,000 hours' worth of police each year. So, the cost benefit there, you could just feel the air go out of the room.

John Lott ([14:58](#)):

One last story about the LA Times. I used to write somewhat regularly for the Los Angeles Times for four or five years. I have a few pieces in a year or whatever. Then, Nick Goldberg, who was the op-editor at the time, called me up and he said, "You know what, John, we run your pieces. We get about 10 times more mail and emails and phone calls than we get from anybody else, which is good. They hate you but it's good that we get that."

John Lott ([15:35](#)):

Apparently, what had happened was George Soros' Open Society and a couple other groups would organize these types of campaigns that were there. Nick put up with that. But then, he said, when they weren't getting a response from him, then they would start contacting the publisher. And when he would run one of my pieces, the publisher would basically call him into the publisher's office and he'd have to spend a half hour or an hour dealing with that. He said, "John, I just don't have time to go and spend an hour in the publisher's office explaining to him why we ran your piece when we do that. So," he just said, "we're not going to be able to run your pieces anymore."

John Lott ([16:22](#)):

I've had that same type of story happen time after time in different types of outlets across the country. The thing is, people didn't have specific things saying Lott is made of factual mistake or something like that. They just would say, "You have to stop. It's horrible that you're running his pieces." Anyway, just...

Bill Walton ([16:50](#)):

Well, let's speculate. You're watching The Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Dr. John Lott who's a very, very thoughtful expert on the effect of gun control on crime, and guns and crime, and we're talking about that. We're also talking about the incredible blowback he got for coming out with what I believe is the truth about guns.

Bill Walton ([17:14](#)):

John, you've been at this now for almost three decades. I want to speculate. I mean, what is it? Is it just people are uncomfortable with guns and they're afraid of guns, and so, therefore, anything having to do with it is verboten, or is there something deeper going on about... Is it a Second Amendment issue where they really don't want America to be armed at all and they being, I guess, the elites? How much of this do you think is political and how much of this do you think is just personal aversion to guns?

John Lott ([17:52](#)):

I think there are a lot of aspects to this question. As a general point, I think there's a fundamental difference between conservatives and liberals in terms of who they trust to make decisions.

John Lott ([18:05](#)):

You take something like Obamacare or how liberals approach healthcare issues. Obamacare, they basically tell you exactly what the insurance has to cover. They don't trust the consumers to decide what is going to be covered. The only choices you have is the size of the deductible that you can pick between the different types of plans that are there. The conservative basically would say, look, a 65-year-old woman probably doesn't need to be covered for childbirth. If you want to go and have alcoholism covered or something like that or other issues, that's your choice. You pay for it. It's more costly to have all those other things covered, but you may have other things you want to go and do with your money.

John Lott ([18:57](#)):

But if you don't trust individuals to make decisions on even what their health insurance is going to cover, are you going to trust them with weapons? I mean, in some sense, the ultimate thing you can trust people with is in terms of whether you trust them with a weapon or not.

Bill Walton ([19:15](#)):

Well, you point out-

John Lott ([19:15](#)):

And not... Go ahead.

Bill Walton ([19:18](#)):

You point out that, again, getting back to the statistical argument that the 25 or 30 million concealed carry permit holders in the United States have an incredible record of safety and they are virtually never the ones that commit murder or a gun crime.

John Lott ([19:39](#)):

Right. Well, I mean, the type of persons wanting to go through the process. I mean, if you're going to go and commit a crime, why are you going to bother going through the process, paying a fee, doing the background check, getting training if it's required. You're just going to go and commit the crime.

John Lott ([20:02](#)):

My guess is the whole gun debate that we have right now would be very different if the media would cover a few things differently. One would be, once in a while when we have these gun free zones attacks mentioned that's occurring, it's often the easiest thing for the reporters to find out. Usually they'll go and talk about how people obtain the gun to begin with or what gun was used frequently [inaudible 00:20:27]. But for something like the Texas school shooting, I was able to find that out within literally just a few minutes by just going through the website for the school to go and see their firearms policy that was there. The same with the Tulsa Hospital shooting.

John Lott ([20:47](#)):

These are not difficult things to go and find out, but you will search in vain to find those types of cases. Other instances would be at our website at crimeresearch.org. We have literally dozens of cases over the last few years where people with permanent concealed handguns have stopped what otherwise would've been a mass public shooting. But you'll find that those usually only get local news coverage, and the few times that they do get national news coverage, the national news coverage often botches the story.

John Lott ([21:27](#)):

We have the Parkland shooting. Few people would know that just a few months after that, there was this attempted school shooting at an elementary school gathering that was very close to Parkland. It was at a park right next to the school. A man came up, started firing his gun. Hundreds of students, parents, teachers were there. Fortunately, there was a vendor there with a permanent concealed handgun who stopped the attack. It only got local news coverage.

John Lott ([21:57](#)):

You look at the Pulse Nightclub shooting, which at the time was the worst mass public shooting in US history. A week later, there was a similar attack at a nightclub in South Carolina. Three people were shot, the fourth person was being shot at when a permit holder pulled out his gun and seriously wounded the attacker. Again, only local news coverage.

John Lott ([22:22](#)):

The difference between Florida and South Carolina? Florida is one of 10 states that banned permitted concealed handguns in establishments that got more than 50% of their revenue from alcohol. South Carolina was one of the 40 states that allowed people to be able to have that.

John Lott ([22:38](#)):

You would think, both Parkland and the Pulse Nightclub shooting were still getting coverage when these other events happened. You would think, geez, we've just had another school shooting that ended very differently nearby, or a nightclub shooting that ended very differently that it might get covered because they don't-

Bill Walton ([22:58](#)):

It seems like all these laws or the cost of good intentions; or, as an economist, the law of unintended consequence or the seen and the unseen, I mean, you think you're doing something good, you're going to ban guns and bars. Well, that'll make it safer. Well, in fact, it does just the opposite.

Bill Walton ([23:18](#)):

Let me touch a third rail here, if I might. It seems to me, as I read through your work, that there's an awful lot of distortions in average gun statistics in America. When you look specifically what's happening in America's inner cities, most of the gun crimes are black on black murderers. And so, when people talk about average deaths or average deaths of children even, they say, "Well, there are 15 children killed by guns every day." Well, in that, they include teenagers and most of those gun crimes are gangland murderers-

John Lott ([23:56](#)):

Exactly.

Bill Walton ([23:57](#)):

... who's in their teens. So, we've got this notion that there is happening everywhere, but it's not happening everywhere. It's happening in the inner cities disproportionately.

John Lott ([24:06](#)):

Oh, yeah. No, murders in the United States are very heavily concentrated, much more so than other countries. We have over half the murders in the United States take place in about two percent of the counties at 60 out of the 3,140 counties.

John Lott ([24:24](#)):

If you ever look at murder maps for those counties, what you'll find is that about two thirds of those murders occur in 10 block areas. Murderers are very heavily concentrated and they're very heavily gang related. People fight against each other over controlling drug turf that's there. You may have collateral damage when you're in Chicago, some 10-year-old girl that's been shot by drive-by shooting. Well, the drive-by shooting is almost invariably related to gangs fighting against each over their drug turf, and there was some little girl that simply got caught in the cross fight that's there.

John Lott ([25:08](#)):

Right now, we hear all these statistics about the number of mass shootings in the United States. They'll say that there's been over 200 of them. Usually, the way it's phrased, to begin with, is people will bring up the Texas School shooting or Buffalo shooting or others and then they'll say there've been 200 mass shootings, making people think that there's basically 200 and some of those types of shootings.

John Lott ([25:34](#)):

That's simply very misleading because any type of death is bad, but the vast majority, I'd say in the high 80% range, of those mass shootings that they talk about are gangs fighting against each other over drug turf. Is that bad? Yeah. But the causes and solutions for why gangs fight against each other over drug turf are dramatically different than these types of mass public shootings where somebody, in a way to commit suicide, but in a way to commit suicide in order to get media attention and have people know that they were there, causes and solutions are dramatically different.

Bill Walton ([26:20](#)):

Well, we've had 187 kids murdered over the last 40, 50 years in school shootings. This year in Chicago alone, there have been 254 people killed. Rich Daley is no longer mayor, but the mayor in Chicago is now worse. It's just so maddening that these big city mayors want to have this gun control laws when they know the people most hurt by them are residents of the inner city; blacks, Hispanics, whatever. Those are the ones most hurt.

John Lott ([27:00](#)):

They're hurt in many different ways. I mean, it's not just the direct victims of crimes, but who owns many of the businesses that are shut down or destroyed? Who works in those businesses? Who shops in those businesses? Who owns houses in those areas whose property value is knocked down as crime rates go up in those areas? These are overwhelmingly relatively low-income blacks and Hispanics that are being harmed in many different ways there.

John Lott ([27:31](#)):

You mentioned Daley. When the younger Daley became mayor, the arrest rate for murders were about 62% in the city. When he left, it was down to 30%. When Rahm Emanuel, who ended up leaving being mayor, it was down to 20%. It's been down to like the low teens since then. There are lots of things that they've done which have made the job of arresting people much more difficult.

John Lott ([28:05](#)):

One of the things that's happened that Rahm Emanuel did was that whenever a police officer would stop and talk to somebody, they have to fill out paperwork. This is an agreement that he made with the ACLU. You have two pages, legal size pages, of paperwork. It talked about who you stopped, why you stopped them, where you talked to them about, what you talked to them about. It would take 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes to go and fill out the paperwork that's there.

John Lott ([28:36](#)):

So, you're a police officer and you talk to four people in the morning. Your afternoon is taken up filling up paperwork. What does that do to your incentive to even go and talk to people that's there? What does that do in terms of taking police officers off the street there? They've had this now for years, and as far as I know, nothing's ever come of them going and taking all that paperwork there. The ACLU thought, I guess, that they'd be able to bring lawsuits and stuff with the information that they were

gathering. Again, this is the type of thing where there's been huge cost in terms of removing police from the streets.

John Lott ([29:20](#)):

The thing is, so many Democrats claim that they care about poor minority individuals and yet they go and do things like this that really have real bad consequences. Just one quick point and that is, we're living in a strange world where we have people who want to make sure that law enforcement's not able to go and defend people, and those same people don't want to let the individuals themselves defend themselves. You at least think that there'd be some trade off there. If we're not going to let the police defend people, at least our law enforcement, prosecutors, at least let the people themselves defend themselves, but they won't let either occur.

Bill Walton ([30:06](#)):

Well, I'm going to... Is there a third rail? Is there a fourth rail? I mean, I think a lot of this is political. If you look at the left-right divide and who owns guns and who doesn't own guns, it looks like a lot of this is aimed at taking guns from conservatives.

Bill Walton ([30:21](#)):

It's a little bit like the vaccines were used in the Pentagon to drive a lot of people out of special forces because they didn't want a vax. It was almost a litmus test for who had the correct political beliefs or did not. The guns are just a piece, a subset of that larger agenda, I think.

John Lott ([30:45](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([30:47](#)):

Let's go to the law enforcement and the police. Because one of the things I mentioned at the outset, the behavior of the law enforcement officers in Uvalde was strange. I haven't studied it and I don't have the expertise to figure what they should have done or shouldn't done. Is there anything that, because we've been demonizing police the way we have, that they were less likely to go in and do something?

John Lott ([31:13](#)):

I don't know if that... My own belief is, probably, people are human and we like to all think that if we were in that type of heroic situation, we'd run in and we'd save the day. It's there. Not everybody's like that, and we may not be when it actually comes down to it.

John Lott ([31:34](#)):

The bizarre thing was... I mean, police were waiting outside for over an hour. It finally ended because an off-duty border patrol agent, against orders, went in and rescued his family that was inside and killed the murderer that was there. I mean, you have these calls from these young kids on their cell phones and they're pleading with somebody to come in and help them. The murderer there is hearing them make phone calls and then killing the kids. It just ripped your heart out to know that the officers were out there.

John Lott ([32:17](#)):

But look, here's one of the reasons why it's important to have teachers and staff be able to go and [inaudible 00:32:23] and that is, it's one thing to require somebody to have to run ahead to a dangerous situation, to run towards the gunfire. But if you're a teacher or a staff person who's in the classroom, you have no choice. Either you go and defend yourself and your students that are there or you're dead. It's not like you just can go and hide behind the desk that's there and everything's going to be fine. And so, your incentive to actually go and use your ability, whatever weapon you have, to stop the attack there, you have a very strong incentive to do that, at least a lot stronger than somebody from the outside to do it.

John Lott ([33:07](#)):

I have to say, one of the things people will point to, like the Buffalo case, the grocery store where there was an armed guard that was there. A lot of the gun control advocates will say, "Well, see, this proves that a good guy with a gun can't stop a bad guy with a gun." I've been writing about these for years, and it's pretty frustrating. If you have one person in uniform guarding a place, they have an incredibly difficult job. These attacks-

Bill Walton ([33:42](#)):

That person is also known as the target.

John Lott ([33:45](#)):

Exactly. Exactly. Having one guy in uniform is like a neon sign above him that says shoot me first. Because if the killer believes that you're the only person with a gun there, who does he go after first? In the Buffalo attack, he had already cased the grocery store, he knew where the guard was stationed. The first person he killed was the guard.

John Lott ([34:13](#)):

If you have one police officer at a school and he's in uniform, he has a very boring job. He's there day after day. The odds that any one school is going to get hit is incredibly low. And you don't have eyes in the back of your head. The attackers there have real tactical advantages there in terms of the timing, who they go after first. They can wait for you to leave the area or they can go and pick another target, or they can take that person out first.

John Lott ([34:52](#)):

If I were to make one plea, and that is because right now the Senate is talking about having a funding for one police officer in each school. My plea would be, please mandate that the person not be in uniform, please mandate that the person blend into the school. You could have them as a PE coach or as a janitor or something.

Bill Walton ([35:21](#)):

Like an air marshal on an airplane.

John Lott ([35:23](#)):

Yeah, something like that, but make it... And have signs out in front of the school that say, rather than a gun-free zone, say, a selected people at the school have concealed handguns and will use them to protect the students and others here at the school. But you don't want to make the person identifiable.

Bill Walton ([35:46](#)):

Sticking with the Congress and Senate and what's in this bill, have you done any work on the Red Flag laws.

John Lott ([35:56](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([35:56](#)):

Tell us about that.

John Lott ([35:58](#)):

Well, I don't think most people know what the existing laws are even before you have red flag laws. All the states and the federal government have what's called involuntary commitment type rules. What happens is that if you are concerned about somebody being a danger to themselves or others, people will call up the police, the police will go and investigate.

John Lott ([36:24](#)):

If the police believe that they have "a reasonable suspicion," which is like a 20% probability that there's a real concern there, they can take the person in for a mental health evaluation. You'll have, depending upon the state, any place from one to three mental health professionals that will evaluate the individual. If the mental health professionals believe that there is a concern there, there can be an immediate court hearing, literally an immediate court hearing. If you can't afford a lawyer, one is provided for you. And then a judge has a range of options. The judge could say, "Look, I'm concerned. But if you agree to go and seek mental health counseling, then come back in a couple weeks and we'll re-evaluate the situation." They could take away the person's guns, they could go and involuntarily commit the person. There's a whole range of options that they have there.

John Lott ([37:22](#)):

What Red Flag laws do is they essentially got all those protections. What happens is that a complaint is made, a judge sees the written complaint in front of him. There's no testimony, there's no cross-examination. The person who the complaint is being leveled against doesn't even know that a complaint has been made. The first he'll know about it is when the police show up at 5:00 in the morning at his house to go and retrieve his guns. And then within a month or so, there'll be a hearing. No legal counsel is automatically provided to you. There's no mental health experts involved in the process in any of the states that are there.

John Lott ([38:09](#)):

These Red Flag laws are overwhelmingly used for concerns about suicide. The only thing that happens to you if you lose is your guns are taken away. Now, there are a couple of points to make on this. One is, if you're concerned about somebody being suicidal, if you're really concerned about it, is simply taking away a person's guns a serious response to this? I mean, there are so many different ways people can commit suicide there. If you're concerned about it, you better get mental healthcare professionals involved and you better maybe even think about involuntarily committing the guy if you're doing that. But yet, these laws do not require, do not have mental healthcare professionals involved.

John Lott ([38:57](#)):

The other thing is, the cost. I've talked to lawyers involved in these types of hearings. The legal costs you're talking about are often \$10,000. Let's say you're somebody who has a complaint against them. You want to keep your guns, but the only thing that happens to you, if you lose is you lose your guns. You have a choice; I may want to keep my guns but is it worth \$10,000 to go and change the odds? And so, the vast majority of people who go through the process there don't hire a lawyer to go and deal with this.

John Lott ([39:32](#)):

I know the Senate is talking about having due process-type protections in there where there would be a hearing and stuff. That's fine, but it still doesn't get to the basic problem with Red Flag laws, and that is only concentrating on guns as a solution. I understand why gun control people want to frame it that way. They want to make people think, well, if you only take away the gun, then the problem is solved. Unfortunately, I think it can actually be counterproductive sometimes. Go ahead.

Bill Walton ([40:11](#)):

Well, I want to just see if I can boil this down. It's the old CEO in me.

John Lott ([40:17](#)):

Sure. I'm an academic, I go on too long sometimes.

Bill Walton ([40:23](#)):

I love academics, that's part of the reasons I'm doing the show, to get to talk to smart people like you. But it seems like the essence of this is If you aim at the perpetrator or aim at the gun, the instrument, you don't end up producing any result as you [inaudible 00:40:40].

John Lott ([40:39](#)):

Exactly.

Bill Walton ([40:40](#)):

I think you've written there two-and-a-half million schizophrenics in the United States-

John Lott ([40:44](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([40:44](#)):

And half of the mass murderers we've seen were already under some sort of psychiatric care. So, that doesn't produce anything. Yet, if you focus on people's ability to defend themselves, which would be concealed carry, and having plain clothes police in a school... Just the plain clothes policeman solves a problem where people say, oh, we can't give teachers concealed carry. Well, if you had one plain clothes cop in there, it seems to me the ability to defend knocks out 99% of the cases that would occur. Is that-

John Lott ([41:25](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([41:25](#)):

... a fair summary of-

John Lott ([41:27](#)):

No, I think that's an excellent summary of what I've been saying. Yeah, no, I think that's an excellent summary. [inaudible 00:41:35]-

Bill Walton ([41:34](#)):

How can we get the word out? Who are allies in this? I've seen you and I've been unbelievably impressed with them. I mean, your books are fascinating. You look at them on Kindle and it'll say you've got an hour left to go. Okay, that's fine. But then, you look at the larger version of it and you've got two-thirds of the book is research and footnotes and cross-references and studies. I mean, you've done more analysis of this than anybody on the other side of the gun control debate.

John Lott ([42:03](#)):

Well, I don't know. I mean, it's been a long process, but-

Bill Walton ([42:08](#)):

Who else do we have on our side? Let me see if I can boil it down. How do we develop a consensus to get your point of view into more people's minds?

John Lott ([42:21](#)):

Right. Well, it's an interesting problem, and that is there is a lot of research that supports my side, academic research, but academics are afraid to go and speak out on this publicly because of the backlash that they'll get in many different ways.

John Lott ([42:47](#)):

So, they publish papers. I can point to the papers, but the thing is, the media has really changed over the last 10 or 20 years. There'll be a paper that gets published that claims that concealed carry is bad, and there was another paper that had gotten published in a peer-review journal, even before that paper came out that use the same data-

Bill Walton ([43:16](#)):

But when they said concealed carry is bad, I don't see anybody that has the kind of numbers that you have.

John Lott ([43:23](#)):

The thing is, when you do these studies, you're seeing how crime rates change in states that are changing their laws relative to all the other states that are there. And so, the implicit assumption is, is that when a state changes its law during the period that you're looking at adopting concealed carry, you're seeing a much bigger increase in the number of concealed carry permits in that state relative to the comparison groups that you have.

John Lott ([43:51](#)):

The problem is, is that the later states are much more restrictive. Some of these states got dragged, kicking and screaming, into having concealed carry. Like Illinois, for example, was the last state to do it. It cost \$450 to go through the process to get a concealed carry permit, 16 hours of training. You're banned for most of the time for getting training in Chicago. You can't take it on public transportation. All sorts of restrictions that are there.

John Lott ([44:24](#)):

And so, you compare Illinois to Indiana, neighboring Indiana, 22% of the adult population is a concealed carry permitted, Illinois is like 4%. Well, it's simple, Illinois costs \$450 and Indiana costs \$12.95 cents. You also see a change in the mix of who gets it. Illinois, it's much more wealthy, suburban whites and Indiana, it's much more inner-city poor people that get concealed carry permits.

John Lott ([44:59](#)):

But the point is, is that you have to really look at the percent of the population with permits, not just whether the law gets changed. Because when you have these late states make it very difficult, they had an increase in permits, but you had an even larger increase in permits for the comparison group for the earlier years that are there. And so there, you would expect a bigger drop in crime for the early states even though you think you're measuring just the change, what the academics call dummy variable. Just a one zero variable for the states is there.

John Lott ([45:43](#)):

So, for over 20 years I've been trying to argue, "Look, guys, when you look at this stuff, these laws vary a lot across states. You really need to look at the percent change in the population with permits there to get an idea of how the risk for criminals is changing. Even better, look at what population groups." Because if I have more permits for wealthy whites that live in the suburbs who aren't likely to be victims of violent crime, I'm not going to see the same impact on crime as I'm going to see if I have people who live in high-crime urban areas getting permits.

Bill Walton ([46:22](#)):

Right. So, you can't compare Illinois with its demographics with Indiana and its demographics and see how much effect it would have-

John Lott ([46:33](#)):

Right.

Bill Walton ([46:36](#)):

... because it's not helping the people that it should help.

John Lott ([46:38](#)):

So, I've tried to make that argument, but it's impervious to some people. To me, some of these things just seem so obvious, but it's just you do what you can on it.

John Lott ([46:52](#)):

But the thing is also just the media. Even 10 years, 20 years ago, there used to be this ethic in journalism where you'd interview people on both sides of an issue. You read the New York Times and Washington Post and stuff.

John Lott ([47:12](#)):

I talk to my kids and I say... One of them will go and say, "Well, dad, look at this article in The New York Times." I'll say, "Yeah. Okay, I read it, and I'll say to him, "Do you really believe that there's only people on one side of the issue that this reporter could have interviewed? The reporter could have interviewed your dad," for example, as somebody who would have given something on the other side of this because he'd been doing something with law enforcement or something.

John Lott ([47:45](#)):

I think a lot of people come away now these days thinking that there's really no argument to be made on the other side for these things. The thing is, even when reporters would interview people on both sides, they had lots of games that they could play. If you go and interview somebody for half hour, there's certain things that the person being interviewed would make stronger statements than other statements, you could pick the weakest thing that you would put in there to say, "Well, I interviewed both sides."

John Lott ([48:16](#)):

You mentioned you looked at my book, The Bias Against Guns. One of the things that I looked at there, I had gone through and looked at reporting on different things, the New York Times, for example. When they would go and do a report, a news story on a new study on gun control, first of all, they'd only do news articles on gun control studies that showed what they wanted to show. But then, they would still interview people on both sides, but on the gun control side, they'd interview a couple academics. On the other side, they'd interview somebody from the NRA and a gun store dealer. You say, "Well, I interviewed people on both sides." I mean, your reader's going think, I have a couple possibly unbiased academics, but a gun store dealer and the NRA?

Bill Walton ([49:08](#)):

And the NRA. Oh, my God, the NRA.

John Lott ([49:10](#)):

Yeah. Right. I mean, how is that balanced?

Bill Walton ([49:14](#)):

Well, it's happening everywhere, John. The law school is now... Yale, we were there. The law school now there is a big movement saying they don't have to defend all-type clients. It used to be everybody was entitled to advocacy and a lawyer; and now they're saying, well, if these people hold unacceptable views, they're not entitled to representation. That's a lot like what's going on here.

John Lott ([49:40](#)):

Right, but it's just part of the [inaudible 00:49:42].

Bill Walton ([49:42](#)):

Well, we've got to get the word out. We've got to get more people because your books are unbelievably persuasive. Now, we can find you on guncontro.org.

John Lott ([49:54](#)):

Oh, no. On crimeresearch.org, crimeresearch.org.

Bill Walton ([50:00](#)):

Crimeresearch.org, and then you're appearing a lot on a lot of radio stations around the country, but I'm very, very happy you could be here. Unfortunately, we've got to wrap up, and I think you're going to catch a plane to go on vacation, so I want to let you get to that.

Bill Walton ([50:17](#)):

Anyway, thanks for joining, John. I think we'll continue with this, I hope sometime in the future when the next big thing comes up. This has been-

John Lott ([50:27](#)):

Well, thank you for your time.

Bill Walton ([50:28](#)):

Well, thank you. This has been The Bill Walton Show. As always, you can find us on Substack and YouTube and Rumble and all your major, wherever you get your podcast, Apple, Spotify. Hope you found this illuminating. I certainly did, in doing a research. I think we need to think about guns differently and we need to think about guns in a way that say they can make us safer and they're not that dangerous. So, stay tuned for what's true, what's right and what's next. Thanks.

Bill Walton ([51:00](#)):

I hope you enjoyed the conversation. You want more? Click the subscribe button or head over to thebillwaltonshow.com to choose from over a hundred episodes. You can also learn more about our guests on our interesting people page, and send us your comments. We read everyone, and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and subscribe there. In return, we'll keep you informed about what's true, what's right, and what's next. Thanks for joining.