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## DeSaulnier gun violence conversation draws large crowd

By Pippa Fisher



Attendees queue up outside Stanley Middle School Feb. 24 prior to the town hall meeting on gun violence. Photo Pippa Fisher

U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier's message at the recent town hall meeting was clear - the time for silence is over.

DeSaulnier was addressing the issue of gun violence, including suicides, homicides and unintentional shootings. But much of the focus was on mass shootings.

Stanley Middle School's multi-purpose room was packed Feb. 24 for the discussion on preventing gun violence, just 10 days after the tragic high school mass shooting in Parkland, Fla. that left 17 dead. Nearly 900 people attended the town hall, including many children.

Joining the congressman on the panel was Griffin Dix, co-chair of the Oakland/Alameda County chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and Rose Kagawa, from Violence Prevention Research at the University of California, Davis.

The three took questions from the audience. A 16-year veteran teacher brought the crowd to its feet in agreement when he said, "Arming teachers is a B.S. idea."

DeSaulnier agreed. "It's a sad day in America when we have to arm our teachers," the congressman said.

Many in the audience asked how stricter gun laws and assault weapon bans can be brought about.

"The only way we will have this discussion nationally is if you, citizens of the United States of America, are engaged in a passionate civil discourse with people who disagree with you and force us to have that discussion in the open with evidence based on research to drive the discussion and pass the laws," said DeSaulnier.

Over and over DeSaulnier repeated the need to be engaged and to pay attention. He answered one member of the public who asked if signing petitions makes a difference with an unequivocal yes. He urged people to mobilize and to join the national "March for our Lives" on March 24.

Amid the overwhelming support for tighter regulations and a ban on assault weapons was one lone vocal dissenter. For the most part DeSaulnier was preaching to the choir.

DeSaulnier expressed some hope that Senator Diane Feinstein's assault weapon bill might have real possibility and said that, given comments the president has made recently, he is optimistic of at least getting rid of the loophole on background checks.

On the subject of mental health DeSaulnier pointed to California's attempts to address this, especially at the high school level.

Schools in the Lamorinda area are well aware of the importance of monitoring mental health issues among students and identifying those at risk. Los Lomas High School has recently opened a Wellness Center, which works with the counseling department and health office. The other three high schools will be opening their own over the next few months. And all the high schools now conduct "active shooter" drills.

As lawmakers head back to Washington D.C., DeSaulnier expects the conversation on gun control to continue. He says he is inspired by actions taken by surviving Parkland high school students as they continue to make their voices heard.

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