

Foreword

The state flag of West Virginia, where I live, prominently features two hunting rifles crossed in front of a boulder etched with the state's founding date. The mascot of West Virginia University (WVU), where I serve as president, is the Mountaineer, who carries a muzzle-loading rifle and fires it to rally the fans at WVU sporting events. WVU's rifle team, which I celebrate every year, is the most decorated intercollegiate rifle team in the country, with nineteen national championships and more than sixty All-Americans.

As these examples illustrate, guns are a deep and abiding part of West Virginia's culture and history and also of WVU's identity. For these reasons and many others, I approach the issue of campus carry with great appreciation for its complexity, the diversity of strongly held opinions that it elicits, and above all the importance of getting this issue right—for our campuses, our states, our nation. And for these reasons, I am grateful to Patricia Somers and Matt Valentine for this timely volume.

In West Virginia, campus carry crested as an issue in 2019. During the 2019 legislative session, the full House of Delegates passed a campus carry bill by a fifty-nine to forty-one margin, demonstrating the bill's substantial political support in that chamber. A few days later, after extraordinary debate and political soul searching, the state senate's Judiciary Committee voted nine to seven not to advance the bill, signaling the close division of opinion in that chamber. (In chapters

4 and 8 of this volume, readers will learn about the pivotal impact of testimony from WVU public safety officers on our legislature's debate.) In the end, campus carry did not become law in West Virginia in 2019.

I believe this was the right result. I also acknowledge that there is honest and passionate disagreement about this outcome. Respecting the authentic divergence of opinion about this issue is the first step toward getting it right.

The basis for my opinion on this issue was grounded in one of the guiding principles of my more than forty years as a university president: the importance of local control on any issue that relates to the university. I have advocated for this because I believe local control best reflects and responds to a university's needs, interests, aspirations, and culture.

In the context of higher education, "local control" is multifaceted and implemented in coordination among a variety of groups, including governing boards, faculty senates, classified staff councils, and student governments, among others. This means the people closest to the campus, literally and figuratively, are the ones who should have the greatest say over what happens on the campus.

That is the primary reason why this book resonates with me. The coeditors have collected perspectives and insights on campus carry from students, faculty, administrators, researchers—in other words, people who live and work on the campuses where the guns are carried (or will be, if legislation passes). The repercussions of campus carry are not an abstraction or theoretical exercise. They are everyday realities. Listening to these perspectives is at the heart of local control, and I thank Somers and Valentine for providing a platform for these voices.

This book also resonates with me because it contains specific, practical advice for local constituencies. As Amanda Gailey writes in chapter 3, engagement on this fraught issue is "not for the faint of heart." This is certainly true, as I can personally attest. What should faculty and staff expect when they get involved and express their opinions? Where will the reactions come from, and what form will they take? How do the unique identity and structure of community col-

leges affect the campus carry discussion? What legal remedies can local constituents pursue? How will campus carry affect perceptions of personal safety among people of color? Answers to these questions and many others are found within these pages.

Equally valuable are the data and analysis that this volume presents. From campus crime rates and public attitudes about guns to the number of gun-related homicides and impact of gun access on campus suicides, this book provides a valuable service by gathering together a range of relevant and compelling data. Readers should use these data, in turn, to inform their arguments and sharpen their advocacy. As Somers and Valentine write, “We choose to arm ourselves with reason.” Amid heated rhetoric in our politics and media and cynically crafted messages from special interest groups, data and the conclusions drawn carefully from these data can be a tonic. This volume supplies both.

A final reason I find this volume valuable is its interdisciplinary approach. All universities and colleges should be “honest brokers” of data and information, from research results to lessons learned across disciplines, that help to solve society’s problems. WVU has the additional distinction of being a land-grant university, which carries with it an obligation of research and service to our state’s citizens. As we progress deeper into the twenty-first century, land-grant institutions—and all postsecondary education institutions—are being called upon to engage with a new and different set of interdisciplinary challenges. How to promote campus safety and reduce gun violence are two of these challenges. Campus carry brings this issue squarely within the walls of academe.

In many ways, I believe our institutions are uniquely suited for this work. Our social scientists can provide context. Our political and constitutional experts can examine the policy and legal implications. Our philosophers can explore the ethical dimensions. Our artists can offer creative ways of depicting and interpreting our fears and hopes. All of this, of course, is in addition to the essential work of our public health researchers and higher education scholars, who are operating at the critical intersection of this issue, where what we mean by “campus”

meets what legislators mean by “carry.” Ultimately, campus carry is an interdisciplinary topic. Contributors to this volume come from the arts, humanities, social sciences, education, law, and other fields. As this book demonstrates, the best answers to the questions raised by campus carry are to be found where all of these disciplines converge.

Everyone involved in the great enterprise of American higher education is affected by campus carry. The coeditors and authors of this collection recognize that fundamental reality. Together, they have prepared a series of thoughtful, provocative, and enlightening chapters on a complicated topic. If, as I still believe after four decades of firsthand experience, universities and colleges are marketplaces of ideas, then this volume and its authors have set up their shop in one of the marketplace’s most contentious quarters. Buyers should celebrate, not beware.

—*E. Gordon Gee, President of West Virginia University*