

Several high-profile political candidates took to campus Friday with midterm elections approaching.

By JORDAN WILLAUER



JACK RODGERS

Captain Mark Kelly, center left, engages in a round table conversation as part of Gabby Giffords' center right, Courage to Fight Gun Violence Campaign at the Graduate Hotel on Friday, Oct. 26.

Minnesota politicians, students and community activists gathered for a round table discussion Friday morning to share stories and discuss the importance of using policy to help end gun violence.

5th Congressional District candidate Rep. Ilhan Omar, DFL - Minneapolis and Minnesota gubernatorial candidate Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., sat down with Gabby Giffords and her husband Capt. Mark Kelly at the Graduate Hotel on the University of Minnesota campus to address the political and societal influence regarding gun violence.

The conversation is part of Giffords' "Vote Save Lives" tour. In 2011, Giffords, then a member of the House of Representatives, was a victim of an attempted assassination and is now a vocal advocate for gun control.

The tour is an effort by Gifford and Kelly to support candidates who are pro-gun control in battleground states leading up to the midterm elections later this month, according to Gifford's website.

Members of "Protect Minnesota," a statewide gun violence prevention organization, gun violence survivors, community leaders and student activists joined the discussion. 3rd Congressional District democratic candidate Dean Phillips also partook in the event.



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Dean Phillips engages in a round table conversation as part of Gabby Giffords' Courage to Fight Gun Violence Campaign at the Graduate Hotel on Friday, Oct. 26.

Proposing legislation that would require background checks on all gun sales was top of the list among the solutions discussed during the hour long meeting. Those present encouraged voting for candidates who support stronger gun regulation.

Gun control has been a widely discussed issue in Minnesota's current election cycle and around the nation following several deadly shootings in Parkland, Las Vegas and Orlando that brought more national attention to the issue.

"We are not anti-gun. We are anti-gun violence," said Rev. Nancy Nord Bence of Protect Minnesota. "We know that by treating gun violence as a public health problem, we can pass sensible legislation that will keep guns out the hands of those who are a risk to themselves or others, while at the same time not impacting our hunters and responsible gun users."

Omar said the state of fear people live in because of gun violence is something that is not right and, because of this, gun violence needs to be addressed

“This shouldn’t be our reality. This shouldn’t be our America. We must have the courage to push for sensible gun laws, we must have the courage to have the necessary conversations, we must have courage to stand up to the gun lobbyists and the special interests [groups],” Omar said.



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Congressional Candidate Ilhan Omar engages in a round table conversation as part of Gabby Giffords' Courage to Fight Gun Violence Campaign at the Graduate Hotel on Friday, Oct. 26.

Omar’s stance on the necessity of gun control drew murmurs of agreement and applause from those gathered at the table.

“We strike a balance between constitutional rights and freedoms. ... You have a constitutional right for kids to be kids, and we’re taking that from you,” Walz said, speaking to a high school and University student at the table. Walz called on the politicians around the room to be the ones to change the status quo in Washington in addressing gun violence.

After the round table event, a town hall discussion was held by members of March for Our Lives and member of Gifford's tour for students to learn about Minnesota’s upcoming midterm elections and encourage voting.

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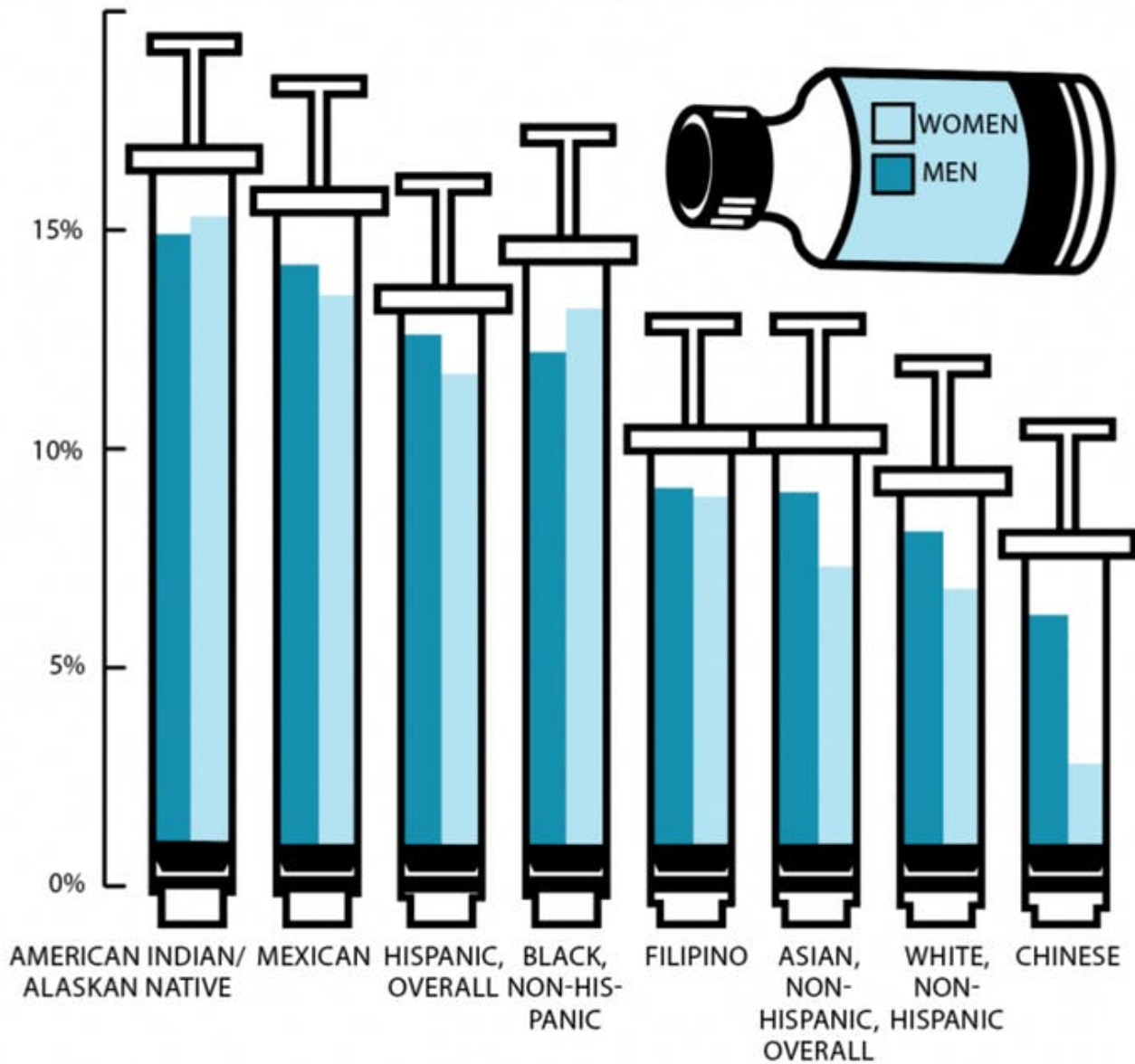
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