

SOUTHERN NEWSPAPER  
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**Carmage Walls**  
**Commentary Prize**

**2018 Entry Form**

**Name of Author(s):** Pam Sohn

**Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.):** Times Page Editor

**Newspaper:** Chattanooga Times Free Press

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**What is the subject/title of the entry?** Violence

**Date(s) of publication?**

**Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation?** Above

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The Chattanooga  
Times

ESTABLISHED 1869

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YOUR COMMUNITY  
YOUR VOICE

'Chattanooga Way'  
can be useful again

Thank you for the excellent reporting on Chattanooga's unprecedented revitalization, those who made it happen and how it has been systematically distorted by those who had nothing to do with it ("The Lost Way"). What's worse: throwing the baby out with the bathwater or keeping the water and selling it as youth serum?

The "Chattanooga Way" can be a power tool for community problem-solving. The faux engagement practiced by some is no more than cynical attempts to manipulate.

Let's revive the practice and apply it more broadly to education, health and poverty. As Chattanooga's purported "engaged metropolitan university," UTC should take a lead role studying and sharing the "Chattanooga Way."

We did something amazing. Your reporting helps us remember how we did it. Now, we need to do it again for the future of our community.

Dr. Greg Laudeman

Relocate NFL  
teams in South

Perhaps, given the current hostility toward the NFL, the NFL owners should consider relocating the teams that are in the South. Apparently, Southern fans no longer support these teams. Such a move would also benefit the black players since they would no longer have to endure the intolerance of racial discord in the South.

George Adams  
Rossville

Football protesters  
made correct point

Protests are intended to make us feel uncomfortable. In those moments of discomfort, we are forced to pause and focus on what is being exemplified.

Taking a knee during the national anthem was not intended to disrespect country or flag but to highlight a reign of racial injustice perceived to have swept our country.

During the 1960s, I hated the protesters who burned flags and paraded the streets in fake bloodied uniforms while speaking out against our involvement in Vietnam. In hindsight, they were right and I was wrong.

Trump's reaction to anthem protesters was the low road in language and intent. "Fire the son of a ——" has the similar crude and inelegant ring of his pre-election mantra "lock her up." Both are beneath the dignity of the office he sought and now holds. In doing so, he unnecessarily opened a wound that could have been handled in better ways.

Standing up to power is a privilege not enjoyed everywhere around the world. To snuff it out or otherwise silence this descent is to diminish what has made our country great. Like it or hate it, this stand made its point in spades.

Denny Pistoll  
Rising Fawn, Ga.

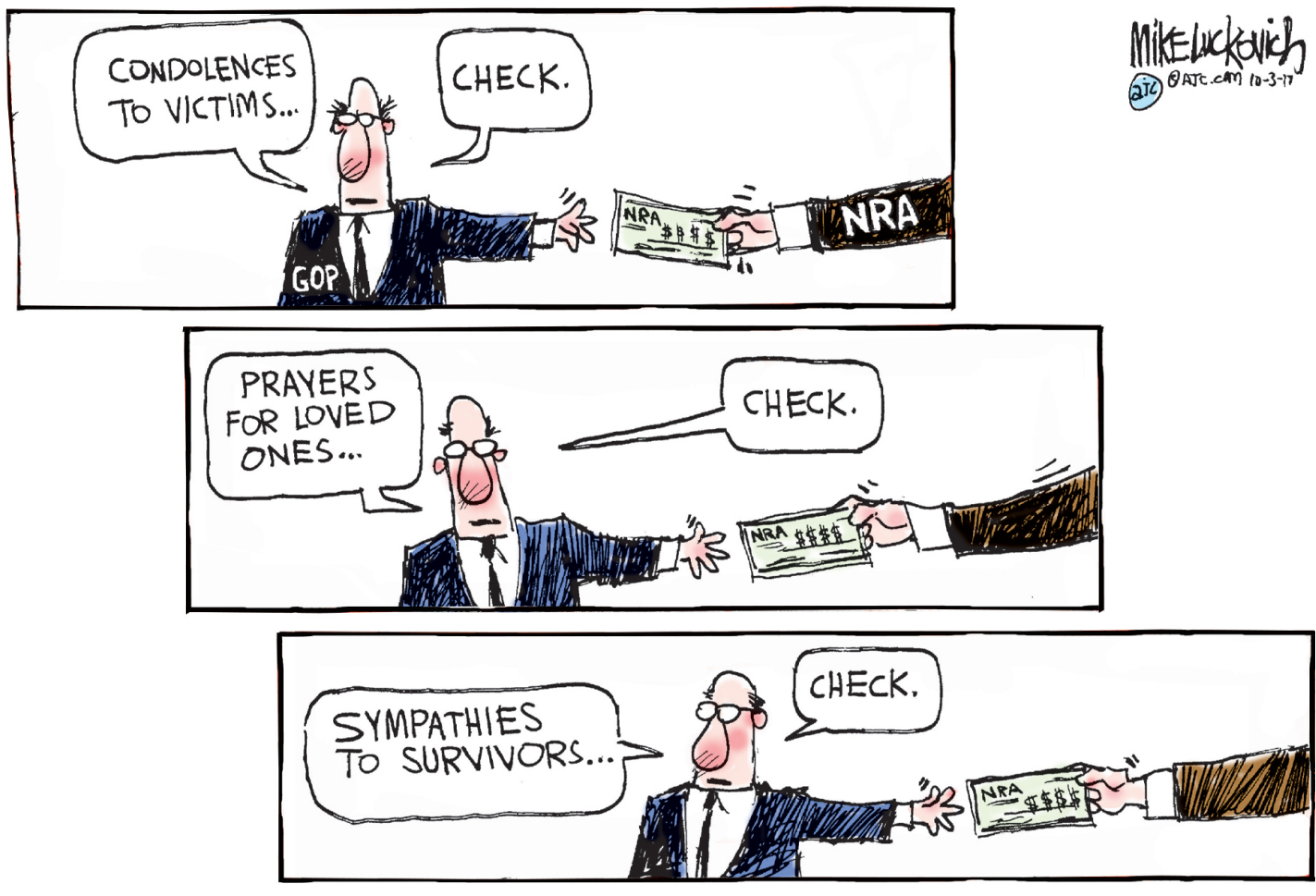
Trump lacks decency  
in San Juan response

Mr. President, from the luxurious (and profitable) comfort of your New Jersey golf club, you launched a series of personal attack tweets on the mayor and people of San Juan, Puerto Rico. You accused them of poor management and of wanting everything done for them.

Mr. President, where is your sense of compassion? Where is your human decency? These are American citizens who are suffering from a horrendous natural disaster. Is your inflated ego so fragile that you cannot listen to any criticism, even from those who are suffering without retaliating?

Mr. President, a real leader has and demonstrates both compassion and decency.

The Rev. Hunter Huckabay Jr.



EDITORIAL

COUNTRY MUSIC SINGS  
NEW TUNE ON GUNS

The world of country music found itself learning a sad and tragic lesson in the aftermath of Sunday's Las Vegas mass shooting.

Guns are not the same as mom and apple pie. And the National Rifle Association is not Dad's old hunting magazine. This is true even in the South, where NRA and Second Amendment stickers abound on the bumpers of pick-up trucks.

Country music guitarist Caleb Keeter, of the Josh Abbott Band, performed at the Country Music Festival in Vegas on Sunday and was still at the venue when the shooting began.

"I've been a proponent of the 2nd amendment my entire life. Until the events of last night. I cannot express how wrong I was," Keeter wrote on Twitter the next day. "We need gun control RIGHT. NOW. My biggest regret is that I stubbornly didn't realize it until my brothers on the road and myself were threatened by it."

Keeter also took on the notion that more guns are the answer.

"We actually have members of our crew with [Concealed Handgun Licenses], and legal firearms on the bus. They were useless. We couldn't touch them for fear police might think we were part of the massacre and shoot us. A small group (or one man) laid waste to a city with dedicated, fearless police officers desperately trying to help, because of access to an insane amount of fire power. Enough is enough."

Speaking up about political issues is rare in country music. Remember what happened to the Dixie Chicks when they spoke out against the wars of President George W. Bush?

But times are changing. And not just on gun attitudes.

Meghan Linsey, a country singer and former contestant on "The Voice," made a statement two Sundays ago when she took a knee in solidarity with the NFL protest of racism after singing the national anthem before the Tennessee Titans and Seattle Seahawks game.

"A lot of people are calling my peaceful protest "un-American," but that could not be farther from the truth. I love this country and the men and women who serve and die to protect our freedoms. Part of that freedom is being able to speak out when things are not right," she wrote afterward to The Washington Post.

On Monday, Rosanne Cash wrote her own Op-Ed in The New York Times, urging country music musicians to stand up to the NRA, which in recent years with "N.R.A. Country" has sponsored country music groups and artists who promote it.

Cash acknowledged that she's been a gun-control activist for 20 years. And she's gotten death threats because of that.

But she says the stakes in America are too high now for country music, which is among the most popular genres in the country, "to not disavow collusion with the NRA."

"Pull apart the threads of patriotism and lax gun laws that [the NRA] has so subtly and maliciously intertwined," Cash wrote.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman sits on a curb at the scene of a mass shooting at a country music festival in Las Vegas on Sunday. At least 59 people were killed and more than 500 injured.

"They are not the same. ... Patriotism and a belief in strong gun control are not antithetical. We need common-sense gun laws."

In 2016, Nielsen listed country as the most-listened to radio format for the eighth consecutive year, topping news/talk radio and Top 40. The genre held 3.6 percent of all listeners.

Political leaders in the GOP — and of course the NRA — are saying this is not the time to talk about gun control and gun safety. Don't politicize the mourning; Remember the victims, they intone.

The only folks who've politicized the victims were the shooters — the shooters who have been religious fanatics or white supremacists or homophobic or child bullies or the mentally ill seeking suicide by police.

On the contrary: Talking about gun safety and gun control is a very constructive way of remembering the victims.

As of Monday, we have seen 477 sunrises since June 12, 2016, the day when a gunman opened fire in an Orlando nightclub and left 49 dead. That Orlando shooting was, until Sunday night in Las Vegas, the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

And in those 477 days, American has had 521 mass shootings — mass being defined as a shooting in which four or more people were injured or killed in a single event at the same time and location, according to Gun Violence Archive.

If today is not the right day, when will we get one? Sing it, Nashville.

COMMENTARY

SADLY, THE CARNAGE WILL CONTINUE

WASHINGTON — We will never know why. We already know how, but we don't care about that. And we know, beyond the slightest doubt, that it will happen again.

There can be no rational motive for mass murder, which means that asking why Stephen Paddock turned the Las Vegas Strip into a killing zone is ultimately a futile exercise. He may have had nominal or imagined reasons for his homicidal anger. But nothing can really explain the decision to spray thousands of concert-goers with automatic weapons fire, killing at least 59 and injuring hundreds more.

Investigators and reporters will now sift through Paddock's life for signs of chronic mental illness or sudden psychological deterioration. But what will that search tell us except the obvious? Of course Paddock was disturbed. Who in his right mind mows down innocent strangers at a country music festival?

But of the many people who are not in their right



Eugene Robinson

minds, which ones are violent enough to commit such a heinous act? There is no reliable way to tell. An announcement like "I'm about to explode" is hardly ever followed by actual detonation.

What we do know about Paddock, 64, is that he lived in the nearby town of Mesquite and often came to the Strip to gamble and attend country music shows. We also know, according to Clark County Sheriff Joseph Lombardo, that Paddock brought 23 firearms to his room on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

So the "how" of this tragedy is simple: Our nation is flooded with guns, and the constitutionally protected right to "keep and bear arms" — established in the age of single-shot blunderbusses and muskets — has been deemed to include military-style semi-automatic assault rifles and other high-powered weapons.

Sound from cellphone videos taken during the Las Vegas massacre clearly indicates that Paddock was using a fully automatic rifle — meaning that squeezing and holding the trigger unleashed a long, continuous burst of gunfire. Such machine guns were outlawed

in 1986, but there are two huge loopholes: In some states, it is legal to buy and sell machine guns that were made before 1986; and internet merchants sell kits that convert semiautomatic rifles into fully automatic killing machines.

No deer hunter or target-shooting enthusiast needs a weapon intended for war zones — a weapon designed and optimized for use by soldiers against enemy combatants. But if the Newtown, Conn., massacre of 6-year-olds and 7-year-olds didn't even lead to universal background checks for gun purchasers, let alone a ban on assault weapons, I don't see why anyone should believe things will be different this time around.

The Supreme Court has stated explicitly that reasonable gun-control measures are permissible under the Constitution. But can you imagine this Congress and this president doing the right thing? Neither can I. We'll need a different Congress and a different president to make progress.

But even if I could snap my fingers and change the law, there would still be an estimated 300 million guns in the United States — roughly one per person. Which means that

the quotidian carnage would continue.

Assume Sunday was an average day. If the Las Vegas killings had not happened, nearly 100 people around the country would have been killed by firearms. About two-thirds of those deaths would have been suicides; nearly all the rest, homicides — about 12,000 a year. We have become emotionally and intellectually numb to this appalling toll.

A mass shooting or a terrorist rampage, on the other hand, rivets the nation. Television networks shift into continuous "breaking news" coverage. Newspapers rush to profile the shooter, then the victims. The president makes a statement expressing the nation's grief. Gun-rights advocates pre-emptively declare that this is not the time to talk about gun control, accusing anyone who does of politicizing tragedy. Gun-control proponents ask: If not now, then when? Everyone agrees we should do something about mental health, but we end up doing nothing. A long series of sad funerals ends the ritual.

We go back to our routines as if there won't be a next time. But there will. And we all know it.

Washington Post Writers Group



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COMMENTARY

PROTECT SOUTH CHICKAMAUGA CREEK

We hear a lot these days from folks concerned about federal clean water protection programs. They say things work best when decisions are made at the local government level. One size doesn't fit all, they say. In some cases, that may be true.

Still, it's surprising that special interests, such as the Homebuilders Association of Chattanooga, have chosen to speak out against Chattanooga's locally-decided stormwater protection measures. As I understand it, their argument isn't founded on new or better local science or information, but simply on the fact that some of Chattanooga's protection requirements are more stringent than others.

In coming up with what was right for Chattanooga, the city's water quality staff studied scientific information and creek data. After public input and careful analysis, they presented an ordinance to the Chattanooga City Council that was adopted in 2014. Among other things, the ordinance established guidelines for property development and redevelopment requiring that, where feasible, stormwater stay on property after a rainfall. Such a practice allows water to seep into the ground instead of carrying pollutants and sediment to neighboring properties and natural water bodies.

Further, according to ordinance, the stay-on-volume (amount of runoff) that must be held on a property is the equivalent of 1 inch of rainfall for most of the city, but 1.6 inches for South Chickamauga Creek.

Why did the city decide the South Chickamauga Creek watershed should have a greater retention requirement than the minimum suggested by state regulators? Because South Chickamauga Creek is highly floodable, is home to endangered species, has been found to be impaired by sediment and habitat alteration, is the source of much of the drinking water for Chattanooga residents, and is part of sewage consent decree remedies.

Finally, the existing ordinance requires that stormwater calculations, and associated building fees, be determined based on the whole property size. Proposed changes to the ordinance, strongly supported by home builders, would use only the area of planned impervious surface as a basis for calculations, hence reducing the amount of water to be stored as well as home-building fees. This change, however, significantly reduces the effectiveness of stormwater management, resulting in poorer control of property runoff, with likely reduced protection downstream.

Much to their credit, Chattanooga's leaders have long taken to heart their mission to provide for the health and safety of the city's residents and environment. That includes their decision to transition away from the traditional practice of routing stormwater directly into urban waters (along with motor oil, lawn fertilizer, sediment, trash and assorted other pollutants) and instead adopt newer and smarter ways of managing stormwater runoff: pervious pavers, rain gardens, bioswales, plant buffers, green roofs and similar innovations. Such green landscaping tools have been shown not only to cost less, but look more attractive and require less maintenance over time. By releasing less water over a longer period, they significantly reduce the risk of floods. (Think Houston.)

Unless and until the city has a thoughtful reason for doing otherwise, officials should maintain the 1.6-inch stay-on volume for South Chickamauga Creek. The current ordinance, based on careful analysis and citizen input, protects South Chickamauga Creek and serves the citizens of Chattanooga well. It would be very short-sighted to relax existing regulations at this time. One size does not fit all.

*Dr. Barbara Miller is the retired lead water specialist and program manager for the World Bank and a former TVA manager of flood risk reduction.*



Mental health is the issue.

EDITORIAL

GUN TALK IS NOT 'TOO SOON'; IT'S TOO LATE

"It's a little bit too soon" after Sunday's Sutherland Springs mass shooting in a church to start talking about gun control measures, according to our president.

Actually, it's a little bit too late. Ask the families of the 26 people killed and the 20 others who were injured.

It's also too late for the 58 slaughtered last month in Las Vegas, and the five police officers killed by a sniper in Dallas in July 2016, and the 49 killed by a madman in Orlando the month before that.

It's too late for the 14 killed at a 2015 Christmas party by a radicalized terrorist in San Bernardino, Calif., and for three killed at a Planned Parenthood Center days before in Colorado Springs, Colo., by a man shouting "save the babies."

It's more than two years too late for 10 who died on a Roseburg, Ore., college campus who were asked about their religion before being shot.

It's also two and a half years too late for five military servicemen killed in Chattanooga by a Kuwaiti-born, naturalized U.S. citizen who self-radicalized right here in our city years after graduating from Red Bank High School and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

It's long too late for another 65 killed in senseless mass shootings in Charleston, S.C.; Marysville, Wash.; Isla Vista, Calif.; Fort Hood, Texas; the Washington Navy Yard, Santa Monica, Calif., and the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

We could go on, but you get the message.

The fact is, it is too late for the more than 33,000 who are killed or kill themselves with guns each year — about 93 a day. More Americans have died from gun violence, including suicides, since 1970 (about 1.4 million) than in all the wars in American history.

But we don't do anything to stop the easy proliferation of guns or to tighten where they can be carried or to slow their firing or anything else. Rather, we do more to spread gun violence.

Our president called for America to "do something" just hours after a foreign terrorist drove a rented truck through a bicycle lane in New York, killing eight. He wants to tighten our borders and what else — maybe ban truck rentals to people with foreign accents?

But each time there's a mass shooting, he and other politicians — mostly Republican — say it's "too soon" to talk about or "politicize" gun safety laws. Apparently it's OK to be politically correct when we're talking about gun deaths at the hands of white Americans — even those who've been

court-marshaled for domestic abuse.

Instead, the politicians of our GOP-controlled government loosen gun safety laws, as Trump did in February when he signed legislation that rescinded an Obama-era requirement that the Social Security Administration report to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System the names of disability applicants who are unable to manage their finances due to a mental health condition. The Obama rule gave gun sellers a measurable tool with which to limit gun sales to those with mental illness. Now that's gone.

It is ironic that Trump said Sunday's mass shooting at a church "isn't a guns situation" but instead "a mental health problem at the highest level."

When it comes to guns, Congress seems disinclined to limit gun sales at all — even to people on the terrorist watch and "no-fly" list.

Even in the wake of the San Bernardino and Chattanooga terror attacks, our spineless Senate in December 2015 voted down what should have been a slam-dunk measure to put identified possible terror suspects on the U.S. "no-fly" lists also on a no-buy gun list. (More than 2,043 suspected terrorists who were on the suspected terrorist list successfully passed tests to buy guns between 2004 and 2014, according to the Government Accountability Office.)

Only one Republican, Mark Kirk of Illinois, supported the terrorist gun ban. Our tri-state senators — Lamar Alexander, Bob Corker, Saxby Chambliss, Johnny Isakson, Jeff Sessions and Richard Shelby — all voted no. The measure failed, as did another that would have expanded background checks to gun shows and internet sales.

Americans — even gun-owning Americans — know that gun safety is as important as auto safety: In recent polls, 93 percent have favored background checks for all gun buyers, 89 percent agreed with preventing the mentally ill from buying guns, 88 percent said they are for a nationwide ban on the sale of guns to people convicted of violent crimes, 82 percent favor barring gun purchases for people on watch lists, and 77 percent want background checks for private sales and at gun shows. A majority even agrees with creating a federal database to track gun sales and says Congress is not doing enough to reduce gun violence.

It is not too soon to talk about our problem with guns. But it will forever be too late for the worshippers at Sutherland Springs' First Baptist Church.

How many more innocent people will we be too late to help?

COMMENTARY

THE TERROR OF ONLINE RADICALIZATION

What makes a terrorist? Can anyone really say?

There are generalities about poverty, but well-to-do men have gone on killing sprees.

There are accusations about being raised in certain countries, but terrorists pledge fealty to groups halfway around the world.

Religious fervor is cited as a motivator, but not every terrorist is motivated by faith.

And while the "angry loner" is a common movie profile, we regularly see terrorists who have wives and young children. It doesn't seem to stop them.

There is one motivator, however, that is increasingly common in today's breed of terrorist: influence through the internet.

Stories are now emerging about Sayfullo Saipov, the Uzbek immigrant who last week, using a rented truck, mowed down innocent cyclists and pedestrians in New York City, killing eight and wounding many more.

I took interest in this CNN piece detail: "Authorities say they found a trove of videos and pictures related to ISIS on Saipov's phone: 90 videos full

of propaganda, beheadings, instructions on explosives and about 3,800 images, including the ISIS flag and images of the ISIS leader."

Here, folks, is your new terrorist incubator.

In the palm of your hand.

...

We all remember, in the aftermath of 9/11, the stories of terrorist training camps in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Grainy images of men in masks, holding rifles, shooting at targets, usually in a desert or mountain setting, suggesting it took a four-hour, blindfolded ride to get there.

Today, all you need is your iPhone password. Ninety videos? Who keeps 90 videos of anything on his device? But 90 videos of beheadings and propaganda, viewed Lord knows how many times in the comfort of an apartment, or on a train, or during coffee breaks? Well. Think about the gradual influence that has on a person.

Think about the call to action he regularly viewed, urging him to destroy the society he lived in, telling him it was justified, that America had it coming.

Saipov arrived here



Mitch Albom

through legal means, had his proper paperwork, drove a truck for a living, got married, and had kids. And not once before last week were his fingerprints on a terrorist act. He was suddenly radicalized without ever visiting a training camp, without ever taking a blindfolded ride, and in a few short minutes he wreaked the worst havoc on our nation's largest city since 9/11.

This is a guy who, according to reports, comes from a well-to-do-family, went to a respected university in Uzbekistan, dressed in fancy clothes and at least when he first got to America, wasn't particularly attentive to Islam.

Something changed. He's a bona fide murderer now. And the scariest part isn't what he did. The scariest part is how easily he may have been influenced to do it.

...

Authorities say Saipov's truck attack was an almost step-by-step enactment of ISIS instructions in a manual called "Just Terror Tactics," which ISIS published last year.

Saipov himself has reportedly been speaking proudly of what he did as he recovers from his gunshot wound by police, even asking if he could display ISIS flags in his hos-

pital room. Unrepentant. And created, at least in part, by the internet. Right here. In Florida. In Ohio. In New Jersey. All places where he lived.

With the computer as an activation agent, what are we supposed to do? How do we swat that overwhelming power? Is the answer to squeeze internet access here, as they do in China? Make all sites have to go through a federal test? Monitor it all day and all night? Track people's site searches?

That hardly seems plausible. We are a nation forged by the ignition of free expression, even if we are now being singed by it. How do we close access without closing liberty?

And yet that same liberty has been turned on its dark side — freedom for a beheading video to inspire you, freedom to download an instruction manual to murder, freedom for the devil himself to whisper in your ear.

It is front and center in our battle against terror growth. And it may be our greatest challenge. Because it is not in some hidden jungle or sweaty desert. It's right here on the home soil, plugged into our outlets.

Detroit Free Press



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COMMENTARY

HARVARD TAKING THE RIGHT STEPS ON SOCIAL CLUBS

In the dual op-ed commentary in last Sunday's Times Free Press Perspective section, two women, Lisa Wade and Jenna Robinson, debated the pros and cons of Harvard University's ban on fraternities and sororities. Their debate examined gender on campus and highlighted a wide range of contemporary issues including sexual harassment, tolerance, students' rights and the university's role in oversight of those clubs. What the dialogue didn't explain was that Harvard was an all-male campus for centuries before absorbing the women's college Radcliffe in the late 1960s.

My mother attended Radcliffe before its merger with Harvard. In the 1930s, no women were allowed to be present in Harvard classrooms. The Harvard professors would teach the male students and then go to the Radcliffe classrooms to teach the women. Harvard's clubs were havens for the sons of the rich and influential. Those young men were usually graduates of elite prep schools and used the clubs to associate with their peers. According to a Harvard Crimson article in 1958, few Jews or African-Americans were invited to join and guests were limited to one time only. That rule applied even to a young Dwight D. Eisenhower who caused a kerfuffle by being a guest twice.

The clubs were still an all-male elite institution when I was a Radcliffe freshman in 1966. The merger changed the culture, but there were only about 400 freshmen "Cliffies" to about 1,000 male Harvard freshmen in my class. In the ongoing transformation, the demographics became more equitable and the numbers are now evenly split between men and women. The growing gender equity later resulted in co-ed dorms. But the campus culture hasn't entirely embraced the spirit of equality. Lisa Wade observed that most sexual assaults on campus occur in those dormitories. The current day version of those clubs, which now admit some women, are the second most dangerous place for women on campus. Almost half of the women who have entered those clubs report being sexually assaulted. She questions the ethics of allowing the clubs to continue.

Jenna Robinson asserted that regulating and removing the clubs pushes a progressive position on gender and is intolerant, especially coupled with the university's monitoring of private communication, online and otherwise. She questioned the ethics of Harvard's rejection of incoming freshmen because of their involvement in social networks and obscene private group chats. While I don't agree with Robinson that Harvard has abandoned the pursuit of truth, which she defines as the most fundamental mission of education, I do agree that technology is changing the debate considerably.

Having spent years on that campus myself and experienced the transition from a male-dominated culture, I'd urge readers to consider Harvard's ban on those clubs as a positive step. That transition is an ongoing process that is engaging with the changing tone and advanced technology of our challenging time. A balance must be found, but as a former Cliffee, I must insist that it not be at the expense of harming, threatening or harassing the women on campus.

My own experience of sexual harassment on that campus went unacknowledged and unchecked. A bastion of male empowerment, defining women's roles on campus was in its infancy with its research library having only men's bathrooms. Harvard's culture has changed substantially to the point of having its first female president, but the process is ongoing. Harvard's ban is proactive and my hope is that the university will continue to address gender differences in a manner that is sustainable and replicable by other universities.

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EDITORIAL

DALTON TEACHER WAS ARMED — AND DEPRESSED

Dalton High School just became the poster child for why arming teachers to protect students from would-be school shooters is a bad idea.

No, not a bad idea — a terrible idea. Dalton's popular 53-year-old social studies teacher Jesse Randall Davidson barricaded himself in his classroom with a gun Wednesday morning and fired a shot out the window — not toward anyone.

Davidson, a 14-year teaching veteran, had a history of depression and apparent mental illness. Authorities say he brought a .38 revolver to school in his computer bag, taught his first-period class, then at the end of a two-hour planning period, closed the door to his next wave of students.

The principal came to the door and turned his key, but as he tried to open the door, Davidson slammed it shut again and yelled just before firing the gun. The school was placed on lockdown. Students, who knew only that someone had a gun and had used it, slammed desks in front of doors and sought hiding places.

Police officers negotiated with Davidson for about a half hour before he gave himself up. Police charged the teacher with aggravated assault, carrying a weapon on school grounds, terroristic threats, reckless conduct, possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime and disrupting a public school.

Rush Limbaugh, the conservative radio talk show host, later Wednesday suggested the incident might have been "faked."

"What if the teacher is a radical leftist and does this to give the [media] a news story that they can then point to: 'See, we can't arm teachers.' ... I wouldn't be surprised," Limbaugh said.

Really, Rush? We know Limbaugh won't understand this, but fact is stranger than fiction, and most Americans already know without any examples — faked or real — that teachers need to teach, not become conscripted armed security guards.

President Trump suggested arming teachers in the wake of the Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School shooting in Parkland, Fla., on Feb. 14 that killed 17 students and teachers. But Parkland survivors have started a movement that likely will have far more impact.

On Wednesday afternoon, Dalton students joined them.

"my favorite teacher at Dalton high school just blockaded his door and proceeded to shoot. We had to run out The back of the school in the rain. Students were being trampled and screaming. I dare you to tell me arming teachers will make us safe," tweeted one Dalton student.

"What happened at Dalton High School today was very REAL. My classmates were shoved into dark classrooms not knowing if they're were going to make it out alive and were literally posting their goodbyes on social media. Don't you DARE make this into

a conspiracy theory," tweeted another.

"shots were fired at dalton high school today. by a teacher. if you still believe teachers should be armed, you truly do not care about students' well being," yet another tweeted.

A fourth wrote: "So are we still going to give teachers guns? I'm on the bus evacuating Dalton high school."

Still another tweeted: "I'm a Dalton High School student and after the mass shooting in Florida happened I didn't think it was a bad idea to arm teachers. I thought it would make kids feel secure and protected. My mind has been changed today."

While the Dalton tweets rolled, Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Hammond revealed that he and schools Superintendent Bryan Johnson have been discussing the possibility of arming teachers in county schools — an option cheaper than school resource officers.

Teachers critical of the plan indicated the money would be better spent on student opportunities, counselors, psychologists and social services in schools. Hamilton County's 79 schools and about 45,000 students now share just 96 counselors and 41 psychologists.

School resource officers known as SROs — the euphemism for police and deputies assigned to patrol at schools — aren't the answer either.

There is no one answer. But two really fine starts are stricter gun laws and more comprehensive mental health systems.

A recent ProPublica/Axios look at the Parkland school shooting and recent gun legislation found that America's pessimism about gun violence empowers the pro-gun crowd — especially the National Rifle Association.

Of the more than 360 access-related gun bills proposed by Congress since the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting in 2012, only one has become law, and all it did was make it legal for federal law enforcement officials to carry federally issued firearms during their furloughs.

That's why we need to listen to these brave, determined and youthful voices. We need to let their clear-eyed outrage help us shake off our fatalistic view that nothing will change on gun access in this country.

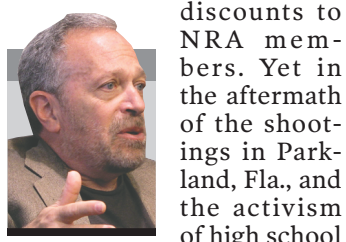
ProPublica points to a speech by Parkland student Emma Gonzalez that has gone viral on the internet: "Maybe the adults have gotten used to saying 'it is what it is' — but if us students have learned anything, it's that if you don't study, you will fail. And in this case if you actively do nothing, people continually end up dead. So it's time to start doing something."

She's right. And we have a lot of work to do. Arming teachers should not be an item on the to-do list.

COMMENTARY

THE MORAL MOVEMENT AGAINST VIOLENCE GAINS STEAM

For years, big corporations had welcomed the opportunity to accumulate more customers by giving discounts to NRA members. Yet in the aftermath of the shootings in Parkland, Fla., and the activism of high school students, corporations are bailing out of their deals with the NRA.



Robert Reich

As we've seen with the corporate firings of sleazebag movie moguls and predatory television personalities, nothing concentrates the minds of CEOs like a moral protest that's gaining traction.

Since Donald Trump became president, the NRA has behaved like a subsidiary of the alt-right. At last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, NRA president Wayne LaPierre cloaked his pro-gun address in paranoia about a "tidal wave" of "European-style socialists bearing down upon us," telling his audience "you should be frightened."

Most Americans know this kind of talk is bonkers.

Trump's response to the slayings in Parkland has been to urge schools to arm teachers. It's a proposal that's not only wrongheaded — more than 30 studies have shown that additional guns increase gun violence and homicides — but profoundly immoral.

If the only way to control gun violence is for all Americans to arm themselves, we would all be living in a Darwinist hell.

The moral void of Trump has been a catastrophe for America in many ways, but it's contributing to a backlash against the systemic abuses of power on which so much of the violence in American life is founded.

The Parkland students are insisting that adults stand up to the immorality of the NRA. Corporations are responding. So are politicians. "We get out there and make sure everybody knows how much money their politician took from the NRA," said David Hogg, one of the students.

Similarly, the #MeToo movement is insisting that America wake up to the immoral behavior of powerful predatory men.

Harvey Weinstein and his ilk aren't killers, but they

are accused of assaulting or even raping women whose careers depended on them. For years, these women didn't dare raise their voices. They were told this was the way the system worked, much as we've been told for years that there's no way to take on the NRA.

Would the #MeToo movement have erupted without the abuser-in-chief in the Oval Office? Maybe. But Trump's personal history — 19 women have accused him of sexual misconduct — has helped fuel it.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement predated Trump, but our racist-in-chief, who attacks black athletes for protesting police violence, has given it new meaning and urgency as well.

The NRA's position that everyone should carry a gun contrasts with the reality that a black man brandishing one is likely to be shot and killed by the police.

The cumulative and growing force of these three intertwined movements comes from a basic premise of our civic life together, which Trump's moral obtuseness has brought into sharp focus.

In order to survive, people

need several things — food, water, a roof over our heads. But the most basic of all is safety. That's why governments were created in the first place.

If Americans can't be secure from someone packing an assault rifle, or from the predatory behavior of powerful men, or from the police, we do not live in a functioning society.

Make no mistake. This is all about power — a powerful political lobby that has bullied America for too long, powerful men who haven't been held accountable for their behavior, police who for too long have been unconstrained.

A moral movement is growing against the violence perpetrated by all of them, making it necessary for both government and business to take action.

It is being led by people whose moral authority cannot be denied: students whose friends have been murdered, women who have been abused, the parents and partners of black men who have been slain.

It is already having a profound impact on America.



The Chattanooga  
Times

ESTABLISHED 1869  
ADOLPH S. OCHS  
PUBLISHER 1878-1935

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COMMENTARY

HIERARCHY OF VIOLENCE

People were furious that Breana Harmon Talbott was raped by black men.

She actually wasn't, but we'll get to that. For now, let's concern ourselves with the way some folks responded after the then-18-year-old white girl from Potttsboro, Texas, stumbled into a church last March clad only in bra, shirt and panties, bleeding from cuts and claiming to have been abducted by three African-American men in ski masks.

"This is going to be a brutally honest post," her mother wrote on Facebook. "Today my daughter, Breana Harmon Talbott, was taken by force by 3 black men. 2 raped her and she is cut head to toe by a knife."

The "brutally honest post" struck a chord with the far right. Social media lit up with angry demands for vengeance upon the nonexistent black men.

"Lord find these animals give them what they deserve," said one.

Said another: "IF THE RACES WERE REVERSED, THIS WOULD BE NATIONAL NEWS. THESE MEN DESERVE TO BE HANGED."

One railed about "black thugs," another mused, "Whites need a mafia ... so if you want to rape a white girl like Breana Talbott, the white mafia finds you and your family and puts you down."

Actually, they tried that idea already — it was called the Ku Klux Klan — but leave that aside. Instead, let's confront the glaring moral hypocrisy at the heart of all this outrage.

Meaning that these people were angrier at the idea that the girl was raped by black men than at the idea that she was raped. Again, she wasn't actually raped at all. Rather, she staged a crime — complete with abandoned car and self-inflicted cuts — after arguing with her boyfriend.

Police doubted her tale almost from the beginning. She was arrested two weeks later. Last week, she pleaded guilty to multiple felonies stemming from tampering with or fabricating evidence.

But though the case now stands resolved, that moral hypocrisy is anything but. As has been noted before in this space, this country has evolved a hierarchy of violence wherein we assess threats by race and culture.

In that hierarchy, black and Muslim are automatically dangerous. People outside those demographic boxes are innocent until proven otherwise.

Consider the carnage in Parkland. The FBI ignored multiple tips that 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz was planning a mass shooting. Ask yourself: Would the agency have been so laggard had it received the same tip about a 19-year-old named, say, Muhammad? Doubtful.

Similarly, for many people, the notion of this girl being raped was significantly less awful than the notion of her being raped by black men. Would any actual rape victim ever feel that way? Would any woman ever say, "I feel traumatized, violated and angry — but I'm thankful my rapist was white?"

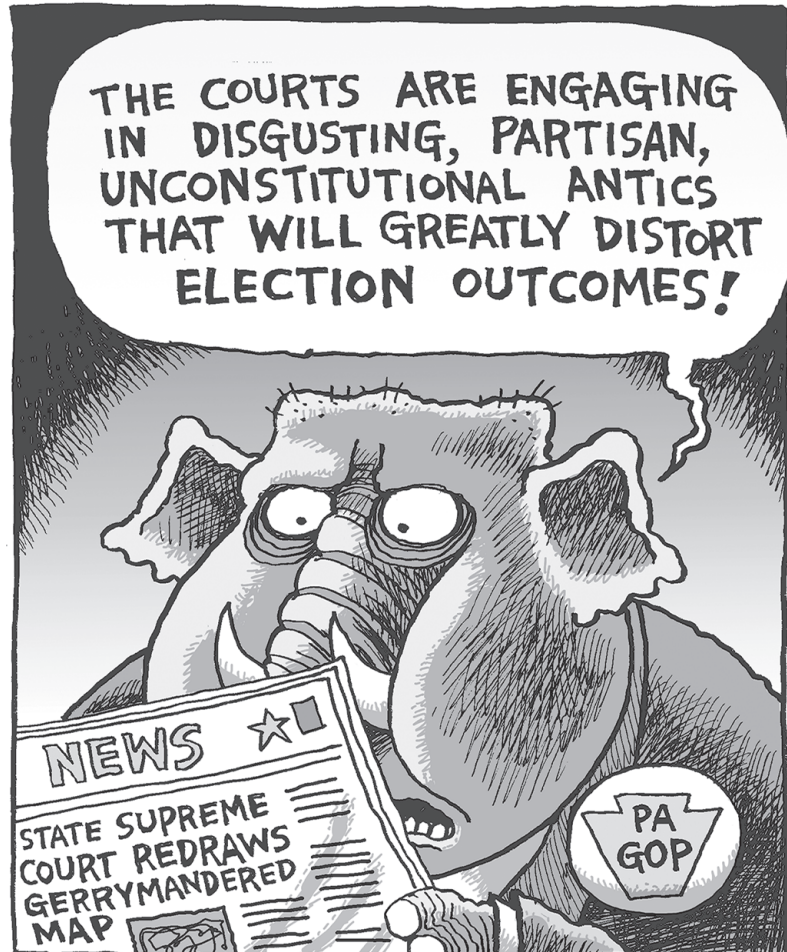
It's a ridiculous idea, but where race and culture are concerned, Americans are often a ridiculous people. Unfortunately, our hierarchy of violence is not just ridiculous, it's also dangerous.

In linking certain crimes with certain people, we miss threats right in front of us. Again: consider Parkland.

Talbott understood this hierarchy, if only instinctively. And there is, for African-Americans, a terrible resonance in what she did. No one will ever know how many black men have been lied into jail — or onto lynch ropes — by white girls and women just like her. And yes, the occasional white man — as in the Duke lacrosse team — has endured the reverse injustice, albeit without the lynch ropes.

Under her plea agreement, Talbott will receive probation or deferred adjudication. Either way, she will see no jail time. Nor should we be surprised.

There is a hierarchy of justice, too.



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EDITORIAL

ALL BUT LAWMAKERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GUNS

A growing number of teens and parents — led by the brave and determined Parkland, Fla., students who know what it's like to be under fire from a madman with an assault rifle — get it.

They understand that someone has to do something to stop America's gun mania and violence. Think about it. In the span of just three and a half days last week, we had two local gun scares. Hamilton Place mall was evacuated after a man brandished a gun and Dalton High School was put on lockdown when a teacher known to struggle with mental health issues fired a gun out of a classroom window.

A strong majority, 70 percent, of Americans get it.

They support generally stricter gun laws, according to a new CNN poll. The more specific the gun measure suggested in the poll question, the higher the support ticks up: 87 percent back laws to prevent convicted felons and people with mental health problems from obtaining guns, 71 percent support raising the firearm purchase age from 18 to 21, 63 percent want a ban on the sale and possession of high-capacity or extended ammunition magazines, and 57 percent back a ban on the manufacture, sale and possession of rifles capable of semi-automatic fire, such as the AR-15 used in the Parkland and Las Vegas shootings.

Corporate America also gets it. Even when it potentially hurts the corporate bottom line.

Dick's Sporting Goods, the nation's largest sporting goods retailer, on Wednesday adopted a new policy of raising the minimum age for all gun sales to 21 — no matter what state laws allow. Dick's also stopped selling assault-style weapons on its own, and will not sell high-capacity magazines that allow shooters to fire far more rounds without reloading.

"We know there will be some backlash," Dick's CEO Edward Stack said on CNN, noting that the Parkland school shooting survivors' push for stronger gun control measures was the catalyst for the company's action.

"As we sat and talked about it with our management team, it was — to a person — that this is what we need to do. ... These kids talk about enough is enough. We concluded if these kids are brave enough to organize and do what they're doing, we should be brave enough to take this stand," Stack said. "We don't want to be a part of this story anymore. We have a responsibility to these kids."

Dick's isn't alone. Walmart has followed suit, and a number of companies that had sponsorship relations with the National Rifle Association severed those relations in recent days. First National Bank offered two NRA cards, each with a \$40 bonus for NRA members. Not anymore. The rental car company that operates Enterprise, National and Alamo dumped the NRA, as has Symantec (a security company that owns Norton and Lifelock), Simplisafe, MetLife, Chubb, and Teladoc joined them. More than a dozen companies — including Delta Air Lines — took action. Responsibility.

Everybody seems to get it. Every group from almost every walk of life — except government. Most notably, Republican-majority

government.

President Donald Trump thinks the answer is more guns — wielded by teachers. His support for other reforms remains unclear from day to day.

Georgia's state legislature and its lieutenant governor, Casey Cagle, seem to think the gun safety reform answer lies in protecting the NRA.

After Delta, headquartered at "the world's busiest" Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, said it would stop offering discounted fares to NRA members, Cagle, a GOP gubernatorial candidate, vowed to kill state legislation designed to provide a \$50 million sales tax exemption on jet fuel, of which Delta would be the primary beneficiary.

"I will kill any tax legislation that benefits @Delta unless the company changes its position and fully reinstates its relationship with @NRA," Cagle tweeted. "Corporations cannot attack conservatives and expect us not to fight back."

Someone might just as well have handed Cagle an AR-15 and turned him loose in the state house. Delta is one of the largest employers in Georgia, employing more than 33,000 in 2015. Cagle's opposition effectively prevents the tax break from becoming law. And can anyone spell one more way Georgia's Republican legislators could persuade Amazon to strike Atlanta off of its new 50,000-job second headquarters shortlist?

But Georgia lawmakers' near-blackmail choice to Delta isn't just stupid, it also is an unethical, evil, stomach-turning version of quid pro quo: Be nice to our NRA buddies and donors if you want this government tax break that we control.

Children shot? What children? Could Georgia's response be any closer to the disconnect between common sense gun safety reform and the very government neglect that the Parkland students and parents are rallying the nation against?

As usual, city governments — where the law enforcement rubber meets the road — do get it.

Sam Massell, the former Atlanta mayor who is now the head of the Buckhead Coalition business group, told The New York Times the Delta quagmire is "embarrassing."

"I don't believe in blackmail, and I'm sorry to use such a dirty word, but that's almost what it tastes like," Massell said. "That's terrible. That's not Georgia's image. That's backwoods stuff that doesn't belong at all."

In Dallas, city officials told the NRA its group will be "met with opposition" if it holds its scheduled May conference there.

Right now, some 40 competing bills and amendments are currently sitting in limbo on Capitol Hill as lawmakers, most of them Republicans, refuse to consider — let alone vote for — any meaningful new legislation.

Resist. Fight with your votes. And fight with your pocketbooks. Reward the Dick's Sporting Goods of the world, and boycott the exploiters of gun violence and death.

COMMENTARY

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY ...

When the cat's away those mice sure do play, don't they?

One need look only at the decision last Sunday by China's Communist Party to abolish the country's presidential term limit, which will enable Xi Jinping to remain in power indefinitely, to appreciate that it's springtime for strongmen — and nobody has to worry what America thinks about that.

Just being "president" or "prime minister" is so passe now, so 1990s. Xi wants to be emperor, not president. Russia's Vladimir Putin wants to be czar, not president. Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to be caliph, not president. Egypt's Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi wants to be pharaoh, not president. Hungary's Viktor Orban wants to be king, not prime minister. And Iran's Ali Khamenei already has the most coveted title du jour, supreme leader, and he's bent on keeping it.

Martin Luther King Jr., once observed that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." If so, it



Thomas Friedman

seems to be taking a detour this decade in some really big important countries. "The arc of history looks less like it's bending toward justice and liberty and more toward the 1930s," observed Michael Mandelbaum, the author of "Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era."

Tempting as it might be, one can't blame this trend on Donald Trump alone — although he is not only comfortable with foreign strongmen, but in the case of both Putin and Xi, seems to be awed by them, and may even be envious of them.

Truth be told, Trump is reflecting a widespread exhaustion in the country with democracy promotion. "It started post-9/11, with Bush getting bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan," argued Mandelbaum, a historian of U.S. foreign policy. "Then the great financial crisis of 2008 exacerbated it. Obama believed that America and the Middle East would both be better off if we withdrew our involvement there. And then we got Trump's pointless self-infatuation and tendency to judge foreign leaders not on human rights or support for democracy, or even on support for America, but on how

much they praised him."

At the same time, though, who'd look at our democracy today as a model for emulation? It takes \$1 billion to run for the White House, Congress has become a forum for legalized bribery, the president has uttered roughly 2,000 lies and misleading statements since taking office — and his own party doesn't care — a gun cult holds Congress hostage, and computer-designed gerrymandering enables candidates to pick their voters, not have voters pick them.

Other trends are at work as well. One is the quest for stability. In places like Egypt, Russia and Iran, for instance, people reflect on their own recent failed democratic revolutions and they utter a famous Arab proverb or its local equivalent: "Better 100 years of tyranny than one day of anarchy."

In addition, the combination of climate change and governance breakdown in swaths of the Middle East, Africa and Latin America has resulted in more refugees on the road around the world today than at any other time since World War II.

These refugee flows have proved to be a useful boogeymen for all these strongmen, who combine a kind of aggres-

sive nationalism of historical destiny — "Only I can return our country to its rightful place in the world" — with an aggressive defense of national boundaries. This approach works to tighten their grip on power and on their borders, and to deflect attention from how much they and their cronies are stealing.

At the same time, rapid changes in the workplace, and around social norms, have come so fast for some people that they're looking for leaders who will erect a wall that can stop the winds of change and bring back the 1950s.

Lastly, there's technology. It's been great for mobilizing protesters into the square — and for autocrats to use facial recognition, cyberspying or data mining to more efficiently track, arrest and silence all of them.

In the long run, I'm still hopeful that this phase will pass and that the free flow of ideas and people, and regular rotations in power, will prove superior vehicles for the greater good. But it won't happen unless we reaffirm their validity here in America. Today, that's not the case.

The cat's away for a reason. It's lost.



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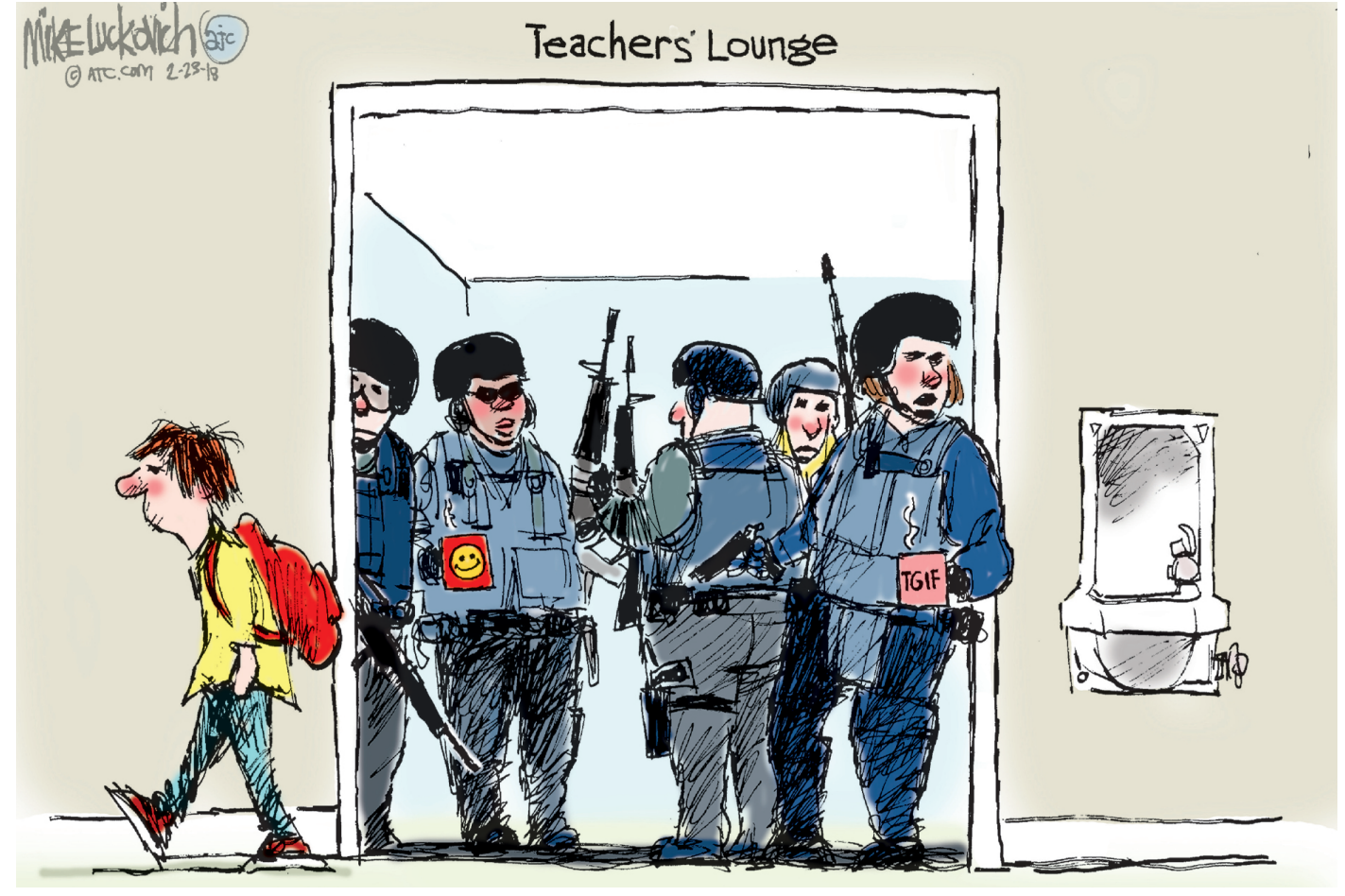
COMMENTARY

AMERICA  
IS THE GUN

The current push for stricter gun control is aiming too low. I'm convinced that we must think big and systemically. We must treat gun violence in this country as a public health crisis, because it is. First, we must repeal the NRA-backed Dickey Amendment, named for the man who sponsored it, former Rep. Jay Dickey, R-Ark. It reads: "None of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control."



The legislation "stripped \$2.6 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — the precise amount budgeted for a study of the health effects of shootings," The New York Times reported last year. This is a ridiculous, disastrous piece of legislation because it chokes off funding for research on this crisis and ways to stem it. By comparison, The Washington Post sought to provide an estimated cost of Donald Trump's asinine proposal to arm a fifth of all teachers, and this is what they concluded: "If we assume the cheapest training and the discounted Glock, we're at \$251 million to arm 718,000 teachers. If we instead assume the full-price, more expensive training and the full-price firearm, the tab creeps past \$1 billion." By the way, the Post estimates that this would put 718,000 guns in our schools and could put hundreds of millions into the coffers of gun-makers. Where are our priorities? Even Dickey came to regret the negative effect of his disastrous amendment. He co-wrote an op-ed in The Washington Post pointing out that: "Since the legislation passed in 1996, the United States has spent about \$240 million a year on traffic safety research, but there has been almost no publicly funded research on firearm injuries. As a consequence, U.S. scientists cannot answer the most basic question: What works to prevent firearm injuries?" We also must allow the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to track gun sales, and keep the data it collects electronically and also searchable. At present, it is prevented from doing so. As Kate Irby wrote last week for McClatchy: "No one has any idea how many assault rifles are in circulation. That's intentional." Knowing would require a registry, and the NRA and conspiracy-minded anti-government groups see this as a step toward confiscation, or at least facilitating the possibility. As Irby put it: "The National Firearms Act forbids 'any system of registration of firearms, firearms owners, or firearms transactions or dispositions be established.' Several restrictions added to congressional appropriations bills also prohibit ATF from requiring gun dealers to submit their inventories to law enforcement. The effect is to prevent ATF from setting up a system that would allow electronic retrieval of gun owners' personal identification information, and from consolidating or centralizing records provided by firearms dealers." Still, she writes, "The NRA estimates that between 8.5 million and 15 million assault rifles are in circulation, based on manufacturer data." Finally, we need to empower a permanent commission, possibly under the Department of Homeland Security, to bring all the data together, in consultation with law enforcement, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education and any other relevant parties, to make ongoing policy and regulatory recommendations to reduce gun violence. I know well that none of this is likely to happen. It is by the barrel that this land was acquired. It is by the barrel that the slave was subdued and his rebellions squashed. And that is to say nothing of our wars. We have venerated the gun and valorized its usage. America is violent, and the gun is a preferred instrument of that violence. America, in many ways, is the gun.



EDITORIAL

HAMILTON PLACE AND  
CHATTANOOGA DODGED A BULLET

For local evidence that American nerves are frayed over the prevalence of guns and gun violence in our lives, look no further than Hamilton Place mall on last week's busy Saturday night. It began with an argument outside a store. It ended with a warrant for an 18-year-old's arrest on a charge of aggravated riot. It was what happened in between — when people ran screaming out of the mall and social media reports falsely claimed multiple casualties — that gave grim testimony to our growing fear and paranoia. Consider these social media posts that began shortly after 6 in the evening:   
» "me & [a friend] were at hamilton place mall when there was a shooting. we heard the gunshots. ... it was the most terrifying experience of my life. I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GO TO THE MALL W MY FRIENDS W/OUT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT THIS."   
» "We were at Hamilton place mall. there was a fight right beside us. then a guy that was carrying pulls his gun out and shouts 'drop your weapon' then shots[sic], then we got out."   
» "Was just in the middle of a shootout at Hamilton Place mall in Chattanooga. Unbelievable. Anarchy. I can't even begin to describe the absolute terror I saw in people's eyes. Wow. #HamiltonPlaceShootout   
» "Never thought I'd be inside of Hamilton place mall with an active shooter inside. ... scariest thing of my life."   
» "My mom and I were at the Hamilton Place mall earlier today when all of a sudden we heard people yelling "run." I looked back, there was chaos and this lady said there was a shooting. I took my mothers hand and we sprinted out. I've never been more frightened in my entire life."   
The mall was evacuated and locked down. Police did find a gun in the parking lot and a shell casing. But officers said it is unclear if the casing was related to the incident. Officials said video footage captured by cameras in the mall showed the incident began with a large fight which escalated when the named suspect waved a firearm, Chattanooga Police Chief David Roddy said Monday.   
The suspect also faces warrants charging him with altering a firearm's identification, unlawful possession of a firearm and reckless endangerment. The riot charge stems from minor injuries sustained by a girl who fell to the ground in a rush to get out of the building. Witnesses told police that several people shouted "Gun! He has a gun!" which escalated the panic.   
Roddy said wild posts on social media of casualties added gas to the fire.   
Clearly, more guns — now banned on posted private property like the mall — won't help.   
And clearly, the wildfire known as social media doesn't help either. Even the police were unsure for a time by the onslaught

of those panicked and incorrect reports. Flashing blue lights surrounded the mall, and 911 call logs at the time showed reports of "active shooter ... at the mall."   
We shouldn't be surprised.   
Parkland, Fla., families have just finished burying 17 students and teachers killed when a real active shooter strode into a high school with a AR-15 and began shooting.   
Within days, our president began calling for armed teachers in all of our schools. When the president of the United States calls for a Wild West gunslinger-like approach to school safety, why wouldn't we be curling into fetal positions as those social media posts began rolling over our cellphones at our Saturday night parties or quiet dinners at home?   
Somehow we have to reclaim our country — and our composure.   
Georgia, one of the most gun-friendly states in the nation, has made a beginning with proposals to tighten some of its gun laws, including background check extensions (beyond five years) for those involuntarily committed for mental health treatment. Georgia also will look at taking guns from those convicted of domestic abuse misdemeanors, along with banning assault rifles and bump stocks.   
Tennessee lawmakers, on the other hand, seem quite intent on making guns easier to have and carry. They want to reduce the misdemeanor fines (from \$500 to \$250) for carrying without a permit in Tennessee, despite criticism from the governor's office, a sheriffs' association and a gun law reform group. The move would effectively permit permit-less carry.   
Tennessee also will consider lowering the age limit to obtain a carry permit from 21 to 18 for some teens — military service members. And our lawmakers are thinking of permitting businesses to allow concealed weapons but not open carry, allowing people to carry handguns in airports and allowing a person to challenge a government entity that refuses to make property available for Second Amendment activities.   
But we — and Hamilton Place mall — dodged another bullet earlier this month. On Feb. 14, with news breaking of the Florida school shooting, a Tennessee legislative subcommittee rejected a proposal to allow handgun carry permit holders to take their weapons almost anywhere in Tennessee — including onto private property like the mall which now is posted as gun-free. The rejected proposal, similar to a previously introduced bill dubbed "carry-like-a-cop" legislation, would have allowed a permit holder to carry a gun anywhere except judicial proceedings and, under certain conditions, on school grounds.   
Perhaps we need to transfer some fear and paranoia to our lawmakers. At the voting booth.

COMMENTARY

IT'S NOT CONSERVATISM. IT'S EXTREMISM.

WASHINGTON — It is time to say last rites over the American conservative movement. After years of drifting steadily toward extreme positions, conservatism is dead, replaced by a far right that has the Republican Party under its thumb.   
Conservatism is a complex creed, some of it less than appealing and some of it noble. The less attractive kind involves an ideology whose main purpose is to defend existing distributions of power and wealth and to resist reforms that might redress the grievances of those facing discrimination and marginalization.   
The enticing brand of conservatism is rooted in an affection for a particular place and its way of life. This conservatism is not always opposed to reform since reforms are often required to preserve the arrangements its exponents revere. Conservatism's positive function is to warn against measures designed to fix things that are wrong, but whose main



effects are to undermine institutions that are widely valued. Sometimes, seemingly sensible changes can unintentionally cause new problems.   
Obviously, these two forms of conservatism cannot be easily separated. What I have called the attractive kind often serves the needs of dominant groups.   
But — again, at its best — conservatism is supposed to be resistant to extremism precisely because it is, in principle, the antithesis of a revolutionary creed. Conservatism is more about tweeds and a good scotch. Neither brings to mind incitement and divisive anger.   
Yet for two decades, the tweedy sort of conservatism has been giving ground to the extremists who want not simply to defeat their adversaries but to crush them; who traffic in conspiracy theories rather than in respect for facts and history; and who are willing to destroy the very institutions they claim to be trying to save.   
The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) over the last several days was a clear demonstration of the far right's success in displacing anything that deserves to be called conservative.   
Before Donald Trump, it

would have been shocking to see Marion Marechal-Le Pen, a leader of the French neo-fascist National Front, appear at the same event with traditional conservatives like Vice President Mike Pence and Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and also with the president of the United States. But thanks to Trump, European-style ethnonationalism has become so much a part of the movement that her visit seemed almost natural.   
Encouraging responsibility in the sale and use of firearms would seem to be a thoroughly conservative cause, an effort to maintain order and protect the innocent from violence. But the National Rifle Association is one of the most powerful forces within the Republican Party and the conservative movement.   
Shamefully, Wayne LaPierre, the NRA's top gun who is increasingly becoming America's extremist in chief, showed few signs of being moved by the slaughter of high school students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. On the contrary, he had the impudence to say that those who think it's time for some mod-

est reforms in our weapons statutes were "saboteurs" and "socialists" using the deaths of young people to forward a dangerous agenda.   
What should worry us is that the radicalism of the NRA is not exceptional on the American Right. It is what the right is all about.   
And The Washington Post's Dave Weigel reported on an otherwise little-noticed CPAC speech by White House counsel Don McGahn linking Trump's judicial appointments to his dismantling of regulation.   
"There is a coherent plan here where the judicial selection and the deregulatory effort are really the flip side of the same coin," McGahn said. Remember when conservatives criticized the politicization of the judiciary? McGahn is describing a judicial branch that is little more than an instrument of right-wing executive power.   
The movement toward extremism has been gradual, so it has not been sufficiently acknowledged. But if those who still believe in moderation don't face up to it now, they will be complicit in the far right's ascendancy.

Washington Post Writers Group



The Chattanooga  
Times

ESTABLISHED 1869

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COMMENTARY

‘EXCUSES FOR DONALD TRUMP’

“We kind of gave him — ‘All right, you get a mulligan. You get a do-over here.’”  
— Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, on the white evangelical response to Donald Trump’s alleged tryst with a porn star.

“He’s new at government, and so therefore I think that he is learning as he goes.”  
— House Speaker Paul Ryan on allegations that Trump sought to interfere with an FBI investigation.

“(Politicians) say things during the course of campaigns that may or may not be fully informed.”  
— Chief of Staff John Kelly on Trump’s promise to build a border wall.

“He’s a human male. ... So he’s not perfect.”  
— Pennsylvania voter Joey Del Signore on Trump’s boast of sexually assaulting women.

“It’s not policy. It’s social media. You know the difference, right?”  
— Former aide Sebastian Gorka on why people should not take Trump’s alarming tweets seriously.

“All people lie.”  
— North Carolina voter Bill Wallace on Trump’s frequent untruths.

“Let’s not judge the president on what he says.”  
— Ohio Rep. Jim Renacci, on reports that Trump called Haiti, El Salvador and Africa “s\*\*\*hole countries.”

“I’m not going to blame him. Absolutely not.”  
— Pennsylvania voter Pam Schilling on Trump’s failure to deliver on his promises.



Leonard Pitts Jr.

Our topic for the day (as if you couldn’t tell): “Excuses for Donald Trump.”

Spoiler alert: There aren’t any. Unfortunately, that hasn’t stopped people from trying.

Indeed, 16 months into this crisis presidency, one of the most troubling things about it is not the revolving door White House, the indictments, the lies, the sex scandals, the racism, the decline in American prestige, nor the daily drumbeat of war, but rather, the refusal of his followers to hold the Dear Leader accountable for any of it.

Consider the excuses above, each more threadbare than the last. It’s a litany of rationalizations and justifications of a sort depressingly familiar to anyone within earshot of a Trump believer.

“He’s not perfect, but ...”

“He says crazy things, but ...”

“What about when Hillary ...?”

“What about how Obama ...?”

“What about ...?”

Granted, Trump, a rich man’s son with a long history of walking away from responsibilities and debts, has probably never known what it is to be held accountable. But his failure to take responsibility is a personal problem.

The failure of 89 percent of Republicans — Trump’s most recent Gallup approval rating — to demand responsibility is a national scandal.

Christian leaders are breaking faith, political leaders are sacrificing moral authority, average people are doing violence to decency and logic — all to excuse the inexcusable and explain away the objectively awful. That’s not political loyalty. Would so many people have so readily dismembered conscience on behalf of Reagan, Clinton, Bush or Obama?

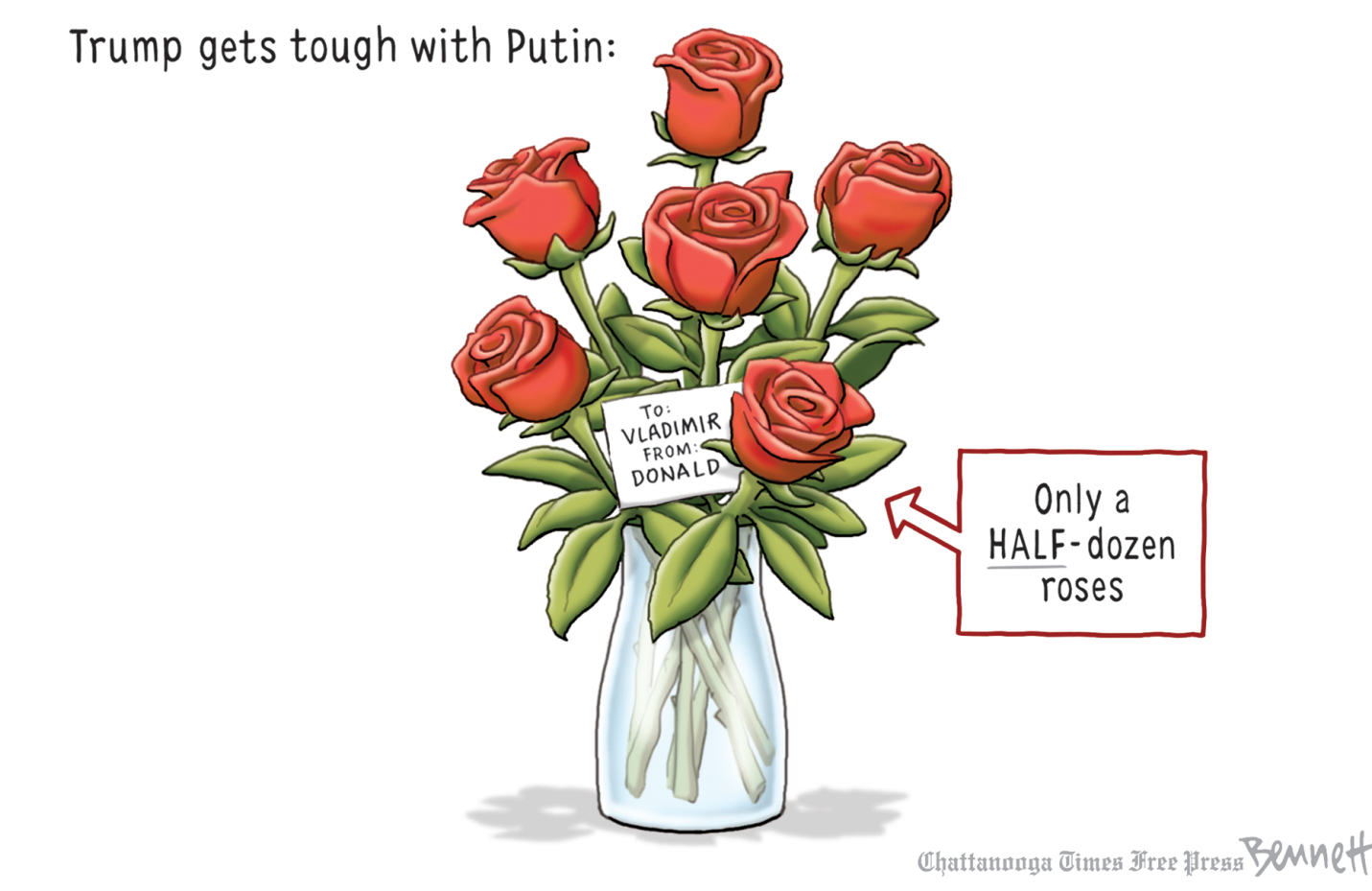
No. So, the explanation for this lies beyond reason. This is less a presidency than a cult.

We often talk about people “drinking the Kool-Aid.” The young among us may not know the origin of that term, how it came into the language after cult leader Jim Jones led over 900 people to their deaths by inducing them to drink punch laced with cyanide.

The moral of this is this: Unquestioning obeisance to unaccountable power is a recipe for disaster, a lesson we may be poised to re-learn.

No one can say what form some new disaster might take, but that one is coming seems more likely every day. If and when it does come, nine out of 10 Republicans will be its authors.

Something else for which there will be no excuse.



EDITORIAL

IS SCHOOL SAFETY WORTH A QUARTER A DAY?

Would you spend \$90 a year on your son or daughter’s school safety? Your grandson’s or granddaughter’s school safety? The well-being of a niece or nephew?

Pull it apart a little. That’s about a quarter a day for little Johnny — and all the rest of Hamilton County’s 44,400 or so Jacks and Janes — to have an SRO in school every day.

That 25 cents a day would pay the \$4 million that Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Hammond says it will take to put a trained, armed and ready school resource officer in every public school here.

The \$4 million figure looks formidable until we break it down by student, but it seems like a no-brainer if you calculate it like lunch money.

Now some Hamilton County and Chattanooga officials — along with the representatives of a national school safety consulting firm — are beginning to put the hard sell on residents and other officials about classroom safety — especially in the aftermath of the school shooting at a Parkland, Fla., high school in February that left 17 students and teachers dead.

Since that tragic Valentine’s Day shooting, school safety has been a hot topic in local conversations that have ranged from school funding and mental health to arming teachers.

The debate is not a bad thing. What would be bad would be having no thoughtful community discussion at all.

We certainly can’t say, “Oh, that won’t happen here.”

Well, it did. We never imagined that a terrorist-inspired young man would gun down five U.S. servicemen here. He did.

We can and must have serious discussions, and action, to protect our children from what is a clear and apparently growing threat, thanks to too many guns, too much bullying, too much mental illness, too much violent TV, too little love — whatever.

Frankly, the cause of these school shootings — 33 in 2018 alone, and 306 since 2013, according to Everytown, a gun safety advocacy group — is too much and too little of many things. But causes aren’t really the point right now. If they were, the price tag for “real” fixes might be closer to \$4 million per child, not \$4 million for a countywide school SRO program.

Might a \$4 million program — year after year — still not be enough? Of course. There are no fail-safe guarantees.

Are there cheaper options? Sure — but very few of us want to see armed teachers. And “volunteers” — even retired police and veterans — are good only until it’s time for their vacation fishing trip or their doctor’s appointments. Besides, would you want a “volunteer” doctor to be on call for your next emergency room visit?

We do already have a bit of a jump start. Hamilton County has 29 schools with SROs. But hiring, training and paying SROs in the other 50 schools will cost about \$4 million a year, Hammond says.

What’s more, training is key. Not just any officer makes a good SRO. Nor is the standard law enforcement street training exactly the right fit for the halls of a school. An SRO must be more than a deputy or police officer. He or she also becomes a mentor, a role model, a safety instructor.

To help make this sell, Hammond and Weston Wamp this week brought some school safety experts to town. Hammond and Michael Yorio, president of SSI Guardian, talked with a group of county, city and school officials on Monday morning. They met with editors of the Times Free Press on Monday afternoon, then held a town hall at East Hamilton Middle High School in Ooltewah.

It was a good beginning, though the town hall was scheduled at an inconvenient time for teachers and students with parents who might be still at work and unable to attend a 4 p.m. meeting. As a consequence, the discussion included little input from those very vital stakeholders.

The experts, Yorio and SSI safety instructor Todd Evans, talked about the training available both for SROs and for teachers, who need to learn and gain confidence in their ability to facilitate lock downs anywhere — even in classrooms without locking doors.

The security consultants also help local officials plan in advance how to quickly determine who will be in charge of response and responsible for coordination and followup in communities like ours where a county school system spans multiple municipalities.

It’s easy to call for greater security in our schools. It’s harder to determine what exactly that security should be, and how to achieve it.

Hamilton County has lots more talking and planning to do. But it has to be done right now — not next month, next season or next year.

And, no, a quarter a day is not too much to spend on the safety of each of our county school children — not to mention our 3,000 or so teachers.

Lives may well depend on it.

YOUR COMMUNITY › YOUR VOICE

Moving his local TV news preference

The local newscasts of Channel 9 and Channel 61 recently have lost all credibility with me. I would have bet the stations had principles but would have lost. I’ll source my local news from elsewhere and will try to avoid any business or product that advertises on either of these stations. I invite you to join me in this effort.

Allan Baggett  
Trion, Ga.

Another state ‘boondoggle’

Lawmakers in Nashville are pushing TennCare work requirement legislation to promote their own careers. Sounds good, but it’s a cynical rip-off of taxpayers, as the politicians well know.

The legislature’s own fiscal analysis acknowledges that nearly 90 percent of TennCare patients are kids, people with severe disabilities or the elderly, and that those who can work already do. Less than 3 percent are unemployed adults, and that includes people who have chronic illnesses, are caring for a frail senior or disabled child, or are victims of domestic violence. In the end, the

legislature expects the law to cut off only 3,700 (.2 percent) of TennCare’s nearly 1.5 million beneficiaries.

To achieve that, the legislature will create a huge new bureaucracy to monitor TennCare families and process the mountains of paperwork. That will cost taxpayers \$39 million, or more than \$10,000 for every person removed. That’s twice as much as it costs for their TennCare coverage. And once uninsured, if they get seriously ill or injured, the cost of their care will be spread over the bills of paying patients.

TennCare work requirement bills are the very definition of a “boondoggle”: “a project that wastes money, yet is pursued for political motivations.”

Jim Webster  
Signal Mountain

Gravitt ‘honest, man of his word’

We have had the privilege to know Marc Gravitt for almost 30 years, and his family even longer. In business he was always honest and a man of his word.

Marc is a veteran who served in uniform to defend our great country. Marc has also served as our East Ridge city councilman, vice mayor

and as state representative. During Marc’s time as state representative, I’ve had to ask his assistance twice in dealing with the state of Tennessee. After trying to resolve issues with the state and getting no results. I called Marc for help as a last resort. Every time I called, Marc answered the phone, listened to my issue, and within 48 hours my issues with Tennessee were resolved. That is truly what public service is all about.

Marc has served the citizens of Hamilton County and Tennessee with honor, truthfulness and dedication to duty. Marc will make an excellent Hamilton County register of deeds.

Jim and Pam Winters  
East Ridge

Mother’s advice right after all

Years ago my mother advised me to avoid discussing my views on religion and politics, and to this day I do not really know what her views were. I have learned the hard way in the last couple of years how right she was. I am trying hard to keep those subjects out of my conversations.

Happy Mother’s Day to her in advance. May she rest in peace.

Ralph Hetzler

Submit Letters

Keep them topical, short (200 words or fewer), legible and not more often than one every 30 days. Letters chosen for publication may be edited and should not previously have been published.

Must be signed with name, address and telephone number.

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