

SOUTHERN NEWSPAPER
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2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Santa Fe Shooting

Date(s) of publication? May 19, 2018; May 21, 2018; May 27, 2018

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

Less than 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

These editorials dealt with issues arising a May 18, 2018, shooting at Santa Fe High School in which 10 people were killed.

Today is a day to mourn our losses

Slug: 180519-opi-edit

Print depth: 20.00 (2700 characters)

Start date/time: May 18, 2018 11:45 PM

Section tags: opinion/editorials/free

Authors: michael.smith@galvnews.com

Byline: By MICHAEL A. SMITH

Content

It should have been just another beautiful spring day on the Texas coast. It should have been a day for high school students and their teachers to think about the coming summer break. All the dread should have been about final exams, the outcome of those state-mandated tests that had seemed so vitally important just a few hours before.

It should have been a day of excitement and anticipation in the season of renewal and rebirth. Instead, it was a day of violence and death unlike and far more awful than any experienced here ever before. Ten of our children and neighbors shot dead on a beautiful Friday morning in the early days of summer. Another 10 wounded, some in life-changing ways, by gunfire in the halls of a small-town high school.

Officially accused of causing all that carnage is a boy of 17.

It seems impossible.

Most of us probably assumed it was impossible. Most of us probably thought these horrific crimes can only happen elsewhere. Sadly, most of us were wrong.

Friday, May 18, 2018, is a day we all must carry forever. It was a day that will force us into a blinding national spotlight and into the incendiary debate about school violence that has riven the nation for far too long. That is inevitable.

The days ahead may divide us more still and wound us yet again.

The days ahead will test the ability of our elected leaders in offices from Austin to Washington to find solutions to a problem so irrational that it seems at times to be beyond solution.

The days ahead will test the rest of us as well. Can we set aside our deeply held and comfortable personal beliefs for long enough to talk, to discuss, rationally the whole collection of things that might be solutions?

We need to talk about guns, especially about access to them.

We need to talk about mental health, and especially about access to mental health services.

We need to talk about improving school security, especially about how to do that without making our schools even more like prisons than they already are.

We need to ask and keep asking what on Earth is turning children who've yet to experience much of anything about human existence into cold-blooded killers. It seems to us that a solution will evade us all until we can answer that question.

We must, in these coming days, calmly discuss everything that might keep these horrific crimes from continuing to rip and tear at the fabric of our nation.

As urgent as it is for that debate to move quickly, calmly and smoothly toward changes that we can hope will be solutions, that is for another day.

Today is a day to mourn the dead, to mourn the loss of that sadly naive belief that it couldn't happen here and to be grateful about those who lived.

• **Michael A. Smith**

Tagline

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Child images

Santa Fe School Shooting



We should study how mass killers come to be

Slug: 180521-opi-edit

Print depth: 20.67 (2790 characters)

Start date/time: May 20, 2018 10:15 PM

Section tags: opinion/editorials/free

Authors: michael.smith@galvnews.com

Byline: By MICHAEL A. SMITH

Content

Specious arguments, it seems, are a natural byproduct of terrible events such as the shooting Friday at Santa Fe High School in which eight children and two adults were shot dead and more than a dozen others were wounded.

Among the most predictable of those is the idea that we — meaning everyone in society but especially the news media — should ignore the person or persons who have committed or been accused of committing whatever the terrible thing was.

The notion seems to be that leaving the bad actors in awful crimes such as mass murders in public school buildings unnamed and unexamined would somehow render them and their abominable work powerless and beside any point; almost as if it hadn't happened, or was the result of unconscious forces, almost like an act of nature.

Rather than attempting to learn something about and from people who act in such deviant ways, the argument goes, we should call them evil, shut them away, and call it a day.

We argue the opposite is true.

One of the bedrock truths about all mass shootings is that the victims all were going about their normal lives and their own mundane human business right up to the point the shooting began. We should mourn them, honor them, remember them and tell their stories, but there is very little they can teach us about how to prevent the same thing from happening again.

The killers are a different matter. They alone can answer the one question that really matters in such cases — why.

We should grill them and study them and every aspect of their lives, their minds and, if we can find it, their souls in attempt to answer that question.

Use whatever analogy fits your mood — study them as we would a deadly virus; study them as we would a venomous insect; study them as we would a lethal genetic mutation.

We might even study them in context of what they often actually are — young adults born and reared right here with the rest of us in the land of plenty, the land of opportunity; one of the wealthiest, safest nations the world has ever known, and a nation, which, despite some flaws, accommodates the individual to a far greater extent than most.

Facing that fact is a far more daunting prospect, requiring far more courage and dedication than does turning away.

It should be clear by now that our schools have become a locus of rage, something akin to lightning rods.

These killers, when we are fortunate enough to have a live one, should be compelled as much as possible to explain why that is; to explain how — despite all the advantages that come to Americans just through luck at birth — they came to be.

We should not ignore them, shut them away and forget them. We should, as best we can, make them serve some good purpose for the communities against whom they have inflicted so much harm.

• **Michael A. Smith**

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A solution lies between **
no-guns, more-guns extremes**

Slug: 180527-opi-edit

Print depth: 29.16 (3937 characters)

Start date/time: May 26, 2018 10:15 PM

Section tags: opinion/editorials

Authors: michael.smith@galvnews.com

Byline: By MICHAEL A. SMITH

Content

The shooting May 18 at Santa Fe High School, during which 10 people were killed and even more wounded, poses problems for people pushing extreme single-solution arguments about how to prevent such mass killings.

It poses a problem for gun control advocates who have long argued a solution lies in banning certain firearms, such as AR-15-type rifles, and accessories such as the magazines that hold ammunition for autoloading weapons.

It had become an article of faith among gun control advocates that if we could just pass a law banning semiautomatic rifles and handguns — the ones that look most lethal, the ARs and the AKs and the Glocks — and “high-capacity” magazines, the problem would be solved.

From what we know now, the weapons used in the Santa Fe shooting were a common pump shotgun and a .38-caliber revolver — a contemporary version of the six-shooter.

This shooting proves some of what law-abiding gun owners have argued for years. One is that the types of weapons don't matter much when the victims are caught by surprise, unarmed and can't escape. The Remington 870 shotgun that investigators have said was used in the May 18 shooting is among the most common. It comes in variants designed for everything from bird hunting to police and military applications. We don't know which variant the Santa Fe killer used and doubt that detail matters at all.

Any attempt at a solution built around bans and other restrictions on private ownership would have to include every type of firearm. Advocates of that method need to explain in good detail exactly how they envision such a law playing out on the ground.

The shooting poses problems for people such as Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick who was in Santa Fe beating the “arm-the-teachers” drum just hours after the shooting. “We have to arm our teachers,” Patrick said. “If another person has a gun, the best way to stop that person is another person with a gun. An even better way is four people with a gun to stop that person.”

That message probably plays well with Patrick’s core supporters, but that’s its only virtue.

For one thing, the final logical destination of the argument is to arm the students, which is no more nutty, just more clearly nutty.

Another problem lies in the fact two armed, trained police officers were on campus the day of the shooting and responded within minutes, according to the county sheriff.

Yet another is that two laws already exist allowing school districts to arm teachers and other employees who aren’t law enforcement officers. One is the Guardian Program under which school districts can allow designated employees with a little training to be armed on campus.

More interesting, however, is a state law passed five years ago allowing school districts to appoint employees, who have been more thoroughly trained than required under the Guardian Program, to act as campus marshals charged with preventing “the act of murder or serious bodily injury on school premises.”

At last count, less than 200 of the state’s 1,100 or so school districts had taken advantage of either of the laws, although Santa Fe may have been working toward the marshal program.

Two things probably account for that lack of action: A lack of money and general disagreement among professional educators and elected schools leaders that the solution lies in putting more guns in our schools.

So, like the gun-control advocates, those wanting to arm the teachers need to get specific. Should we compel school districts to arm whether the local leaders want that or not; compel teachers to be armed whether they want it not; arm only those who’re really excited about being armed?

Our position remains that a solution lies somewhere between attempting to round up every firearm in the United States and putting lots of them in schools.

To his credit, Gov. Greg Abbott is, with the roundtable discussions he held last week, at least making an attempt to find that third way.

- **Michael A. Smith**

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