

OPINION

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Gun Laws for the Safety of All

Learning lessons from mass shootings

BY BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN



The current debate about Second Amendment rights, gun control law, and the ability to properly diagnose mental health has stirred public opinion in such a way

that people are now talking about possible changes.

The tragedies that occurred at a shopping plaza in Arizona, on a military base in Texas and on a college campus in Virginia have a common link-access to guns by the mentally unstable. Many have heard the saying, "guns don't kill people; people kill people." While I am not looking to argue on that point, mental illness is a subject worthy of discussion.

It has been awhile since I've been hunting, but I admit it is an exciting sport. The rule I hunt by is kill only what I expect to clean and eat. Further, I've never been a proponent of using automatic or semi-automatic weaponry. It's about the thrill of the hunt and the skill of the hunter, not about slaughtering the animal.

Obviously, I support the Second Amendment right to bear arms. But having a gun to protect myself and family against a home invasion is a very different issue.

Along with the privilege of owning guns one must familiarize one's household with rules of gun ownership, especially when children are young. The tragic shootings in Tucson have reopened this discussion.

The issue in this case is the mental state of the gun owner. In fact, some people support the adding of a mental health component to the application for acquiring a gun license.

Prior to my becoming an ordained minister, I had to pass a rigorous mental health test. It was mentally exhausting to say the least.

The questions went over and over the same things. But the point of repetition of questions was the consistency of my answers. Fortunately, I passed. This was good news for me and the parishioner's whose souls I had been charged to care for.

A mental health examination is required for women and men in ministry; however to procure a gun license, we overlook a person's mental health status. Isn't the safety of American citizens as important as where we spend eternity? Comparably, these topics are apples and

oranges. Nevertheless, they are equally important.

Some are asking that we become less vitriolic and more mindful with our speech. There is an earnest attempt to bring a civil and respectful tone into our national political debate. But civility does not address mental illness.

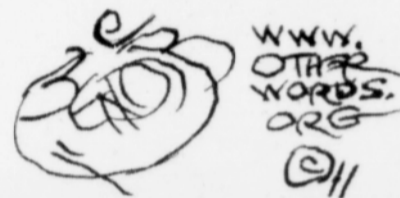
In my experience, concerns about people who are paranoid schizophrenic and hearing voices in their minds have little connection with the ability to debate civilly. True, it cannot hurt us to be civil. But we must not lose this opportunity before us to regulate

gun ownership for the mentally ill.

The precious life of Christina Taylor Green and the rest of our nation's children demand that we take action.

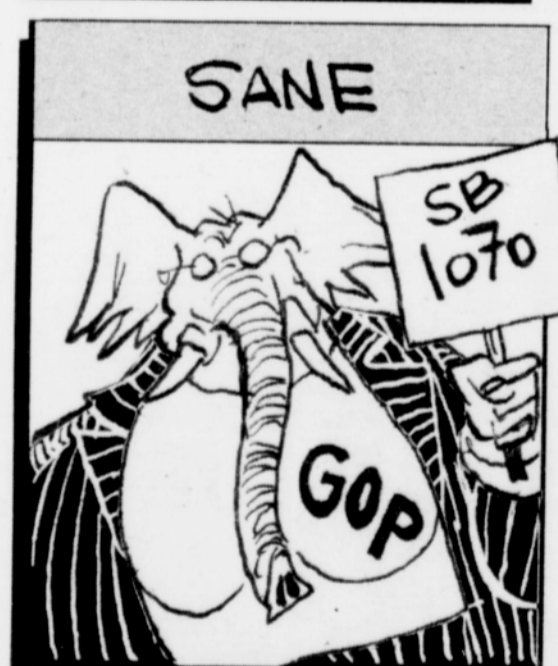
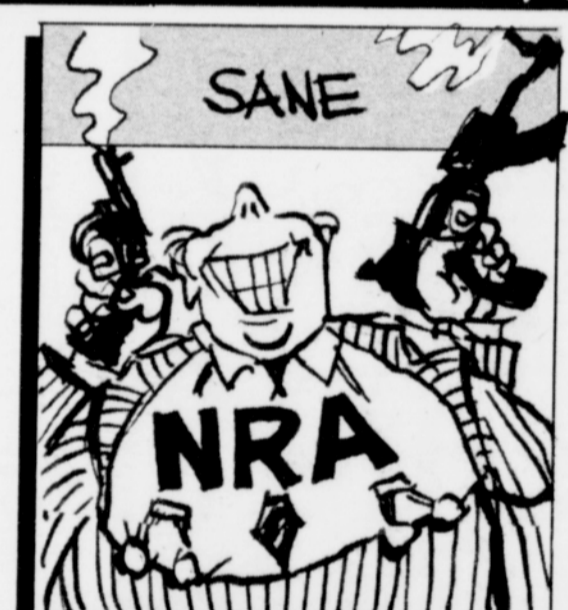
It is a wise nation that learns from lessons of its past that is destined not to repeat them. Let us be the great republic we are and make necessary changes to our gun laws for the safety of all. For such a time as this, we cannot afford to fail.

Bentley de Bardelaben is the executive for administration and communications in Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ.



THE WEAK LINK

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