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OPINION

No Business as Usual with Gun Violence

Turning our tears into action

BY MARC MORIAL

A movie theater in Aurora, Colo., a Sikh Temple in Wisconsin, a shopping mall in Oregon, a political event outside a supermarket in Tucson, Ariz., the streets of big cities like Chicago, and now an elementary school in Newtown, Conn. When will the madness stop?

When will we take "meaningful action" to end gun violence in America? The latest high-profile mass shootings have taken the lives of too many innocent victims. And when those victims are small school children and their teachers, the weight of grief



is almost too much to bear.

"These neighborhoods are our neighborhoods and these children are our children," President Barack Obama aptly put it. "We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this."

A weight of responsibility also falls on our shoulders. Immediately after one of these mass killings, someone always says it's too soon to talk about sensible gun control measures. We must take time to grieve first. But after we're done flying flags at half-staff and holding tearful memorial services, we invariably go back to business as usual. I say, not this time.

As a father, a former mayor, and a life-long advocate of a safe and quality education for

every child, I too am in mourning. But at the same time, I call on our leaders in Washington and in states across this nation, to take immediate action to protect our children and prevent the kind of senseless carnage we saw last week.

Even before this latest tragedy, for years, the National Urban League, which I lead, was a longstanding proponent of sensible gun control. In fact, on the day after the recent presidential election, I sent a letter to President Obama and the leaders in the House of Representatives in which I said: "The scourge of gun violence cries out for a comprehensive approach to community safety and crime reduction. This requires stronger enforcement of existing gun laws and re-enactment of the assault

weapons ban."

We've asked Obama and Congress to make this a top priority for the next four years.

Gun violence has often been associated with poor, urban neighborhoods, and it is true that urban violence is much too prevalent. But most of these mass shootings have occurred in quiet, suburban towns where crime is typically low and gun ownership is high. Gun violence can happen anywhere and to anyone. The one common denominator is easy access to guns.

In a nation of 312 million, there are 270 million privately held firearms. It's no coincidence that America has the highest gun-related murder rate of any developed country. And it's not just criminal gun violence. There are a substantial number of gun-re-

lated suicides and accidental deaths.

Just last week, a 3-year-old Oklahoma boy found a gun in a relative's home, shot himself in the head, and died. Clearly, fewer guns in America and none in the wrong hands must be part of the solution. We are pleased that Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has pledged to introduce a gun control bill on the first day of the next Congress that would limit the sale, transfer, and possession of assault weapons, along with high-capacity magazines. She expects Obama to back this law.

We hope so. It's time to turn our tears into action.

Marc Morial is the president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League and the former mayor of New Orleans.

A Cry for Help across the Entire Country

No more talk, the time to act is now

BY ORRIN HUDSON

The recent massacre in Newtown, Conn. is a cry for help across our entire country.

President Obama during a memorial service, said, "I'll use whatever power I have to prevent the type of tragedy that occurred... We all need to contribute in some way, shape or form to the betterment of our nation and communities."

He was right!

Too often now, we are hearing about such massacres in different parts in the country. Sometimes, they occur at schools, malls and even workplaces. Sometimes, the shooter



is a child, sometimes he or she is an adult.

Regardless, we as a national community must start pushing the message to "think it out, don't shoot it out."

The problem is that many of us think we are separate from others; but we are universally one.

We normally realize this when a tragedy strikes, but really we should realize this all along. Instead, we are walking in fear, not walking in love. We should be walking in love. We must move away from anger and fear towards each other.

We must embrace and promote life lessons, communication skills, and coping skills.

We must teach to each other how to deal with life challenges, and solve problems peacefully. We must adapt slogans such as "Brain Before Bullets", and as mentioned before, "Think It Out, Don't Shoot It Out".

We must do more than talk; we must act and the time to act is now.

Parents, talk to your children regularly and address their emotional needs. Learn how to identify the signs of depression and mental illness. Be on alert for signs that show mental instability, uncontrolled anger, and even unreasonableness. If needed, take action to get them the medical attention they need.

Also, take caution with the movies, video games, and mu-

sic that your children are involved with. Garbage in, garbage stays! Take caution when buying toy guns and such for your kids. Such activities can stimulate violent desires and fantasies in your children. Teach them to walk in love.

Teachers, pay attention to your students. Don't teach at them, teach to them. Inspire them. Challenge them, but don't discourage them. Don't overwhelm them. Don't create unnecessary stress for them that they can't handle.

Always remember that, in addition to school, students have a life at home. They are people, they are real. Be a friend, be a counselor.

Teach them to walk in love. For members of our commu-

nities, embrace each other. Pay attention to each other's needs. Eat meals together, and talk to each other - in person. If there is a problem or disagreement, settle it. And if someone has mental challenges, assist them. Don't allow problems to go on unsettled.

Also, don't be abusive in your speech towards each other. Words cut like knives, and some wounds never heal. Be effective. Be compassionate. Be the solution. Teach each other to walk in love.

This isn't where it ends, but it is definitely where it starts. So, let's start here, right here, right now!

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