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OPINION

America's Calling Card of Violence

Gun control laws are not enough

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

In the wake of the Las Vegas massacre, as in the wake of all the high-profile mass shootings that preceded it, the big question looms: Why?

John Whitehead puts the question this way: "What is it about America that makes violence our nation's calling card?"

This is the enormous question — you might call it the \$700 billion question, which is the size of the 2018 military budget recently approved by the Senate — that most media and law enforcement personnel do not ask or acknowledge, as they search for clues about the motive behind Stephen Paddock's rampage on the night of Oct. 1 amid the scattered wreckage of the killer's life.

He was a "lone wolf." He was a "psychopath."

He was an American.

And he was in possession, in his various dwelling places, of 47 firearms, some of which were used to kill at least 59 people and injure more than 500 others as they attended a country music concert. And

some of these firearms were modified by "bump stocks," a cheap, legal device that allows a semiautomatic rifle to fire like an automatic.

Why?



Whitehead puts the answer out there with terrifying clarity: "Perhaps there's no single one factor to blame for this gun violence. However, there is a common denominator, and that is a war-drenched, violence-imbued, profit-driven military industrial complex that has invaded almost every aspect of our lives."

This is America, a global empire engaged in endless war, with an entertainment and news media that sells violence as a spectator sport and a consequence-free solution to pretty much every problem you can think of. We believe in having enemies — not in a personal sense but in the abstract: people who are different in some defining way and symbolize, in their differentness, the cause of our troubles. In other words, we dehumanize. We call people gooks or ragheads or . . . we all know the list of obscenities, past and present.

Sociologist Peter Turchin, in the wake of the Sandy Hook killings nearly five years ago, wrote: "On the battlefield, you are supposed to try to kill a person whom you've

never met before. You are not trying to kill this particular person, you are shooting because he is wearing the enemy uniform. . . . Enemy soldiers are socially substitutable."

And mass murderers behave the same way as soldiers, except the "orders" they are obeying are their own or those of some marginal hate-community. The defining characteristic of mass murder is not that it's senseless or random, but that, to the murderer, the victims symbolize evil. This sort of behavior, in other circumstances, is publicly celebrated. Suddenly, for instance, I'm thinking about the outpouring of praise Donald Trump generated from much of the media when the U.S. dropped a MOAB bomb — the most powerful non-nuclear bomb in the American arsenal — on Afghanistan. Some commentators declared that he became "presidential" after this action. The poor slob who died because of it couldn't have mattered less to the cheering spectators.

And a serious segment of the national economy depends on the continual flow of enemies and their elimination. It depends on selling weapons.

For instance, William Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, pointed out in a recent Democracy Now! interview that the Trump administration has elim-

inated human-rights restrictions on small-arms exports, putting them under the control of the Commerce Department rather than the State Department, as well as "restrictions on fighter planes and bombs and the large weapons, the kind that are being used by Saudi Arabia to kill civilians in Yemen."

Remarkably, domestic gun sales had slumped after Trump's election — gun owners apparently became less fearful that the government would take their weapons away — so "gun manufacturers are desperate for more foreign sales. And they don't care who the guns go to," Hartung said. "And I think that's really the problem."

He concluded by quoting Martin Luther King's speech against the Vietnam War: "I can't in good conscience fight violence at home if I don't stand up to my own government, which is the greatest purveyor of violence around the world."

Only in this context does it become relevant to talk about gun control legislation. By themselves, such basic regulations as universal background checks, a reinstating of the assault-weapons ban and required permits for gun ownership feel like a frail wall against American violence and the ease with which the next "lone wolf" can plan his assault.

Indeed, gun control laws are basi-

cally just stopgap measures perpetually debated by a violence-addicted society. They swell in significance because they're so viciously opposed by the NRA. I'm not against them, but they're not enough.

"And I awoke Monday hoping that maybe this shooting is the one that will persuade America to reclaim the mantle of global leadership that has been at our core since our origin," Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy wrote in the Washington Post the day after the Las Vegas massacre, calling for sane gun control legislation.

Yes, this is crucial. But I can't help but note that Murphy was one of the 89 senators, including, of course, most Democrats, who voted last month for the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, bestowing \$700 billion on the U.S. military next year, an increase of \$80 billion, which is even more than the Pentagon or Trump requested.

"Mass shootings," Murphy acknowledged, "happen almost nowhere else but the United States."

This is not because of tepid gun laws. It's because the country funds — and benefits from — endless war and violence of all sorts. Occasionally the violence comes back to haunt us.

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Congress Holding CHIP and Children Hostage

Vital insurance program in crisis mode

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Dr. Lanre Falusi knows firsthand the anxiety families face when the future of their child's health insurance is in jeopardy. A pediatrician at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Dr. Falusi recently had a routine visit from a seven-year-old patient with asthma. For the last few months this little girl has been fairly stable thanks to her daily controller and rescue medication covered through D.C.'s Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). But she often has tough winters and her mother was trying to plan ahead having heard CHIP's future funding was uncertain.



to extend funding for CHIP pass at midnight on Sept. 30h leaving nine million children like Dr. Falusi's young patient uncertain about their health coverage. For months Congress has been busy debating whether or not to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and destroy Medicaid as we know it. While the death of the Graham-Cassidy health repeal bill in late September was a major win for 37 million children who rely on Medicaid for their health coverage, in the midst of that major fight, funding for CHIP was left by the wayside.

There is bipartisan support for CHIP. If Senate and House members, Republicans and Democrats alike, agree on what we need to do for children's health, let's do it now and for the children's sake forget the need for political wrangling.

Although the deadline has come and gone, most states still have some carryover funds to continue to operate their CHIP programs

in the short term, leading many in Congress to erroneously believe the Sept. 30 deadline was arbitrary when in fact it has immediate implications for real children and families. Some other states have taken steps to put families on notice and are even prepared to modify or end their CHIP programs because of continuing uncertainty.

Every day Congress delays action makes a difference.

Dr. Falusi added: "We haven't fallen off a cliff yet, but the uncertainty that there is a cliff looming ahead makes it harder to help parents think proactively about their child's health. For me as an individual provider, it can affect the positivity — the certainty of saying 'See you back in six months for the two-year well-child visit,' when I don't know if they'll still be insured and able to afford it, or if they'll be trying to decide between whether they can afford transportation to the pediatrician's office or transportation to work."

The Minnesota State Health Department was the first to send

a letter to Congress warning that despite predictions that said otherwise, its CHIP funding would run out Sept. 30 and it would have to take "extraordinary measures" to continue coverage in October including the possibility that pregnant women could "be at risk of losing coverage all together."

Utah officials have said they will end their CHIP program if Congress doesn't provide new funding, and officials in a growing number of states have said they may need to follow suit.

Parents are getting the message and now that fear is showing up in places like Dr. Falusi's exam room.

"The urgency is palpable from the family perspective . . . We know kids have colds, flu and asthma attacks that cluster in the winter. Right now is really the worst time for families to either fear or know for sure their child is about to lose their insurance coverage," says Dr. Falusi. "Even if there's a shortfall of a couple of months, in a couple of months a child's asthma can go from controlled to the

intensive care unit, which I've seen when kids go off of their medications. . . . In the life of a child, even a couple of months can have some long-term lasting effects."

Congress must not leave children, families and their doctors in this dangerous political limbo a minute longer. CHIP has been beloved for 20 years and the CHIP extension has bipartisan support.

Why are we letting it get caught up in political posturing and debates? Tell Congress to pass CHIP now and not hold it hostage to partisan disagreements over how to pay for it or any other policy issues.

Both the House and Senate will be back at work the week of Oct. 23 and passage of the CHIP extension must be first on their agenda. Please let your members of Congress hear from you why CHIP must be passed now — children need their health care! Congress must stop playing politics with children's health.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.