

From the editorial advisory board: Aurora shooting

This week's question: The mass killing and wounding of theater patrons in Aurora has made international news, and has re-ignited debates on everything from gun laws, to violence in the media and crime and punishment. What do you think?

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The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the accompanying Bill of Rights passed in 1791 never envisioned automatic firearms. Guns in 1791 were single shot weapons, loaded through a muzzle, and fired by means of a flintlock. They would not be revolvers, have interchangeable parts, use percussion caps, or load bullets from a clip. Times and weapons have changed. Shooter-rewarding video games, high violence movies and macro-firepower TV programs have become more and more violent in order to satisfy the apparent appetite for increasing violent behavior. I have a hypothesis that there is a connection between increased gun violence in our communities and increased gun violence displayed in our many media forms.

Some people object to government intervention. However I believe the time has come for the federal and state governments to say *enough* to excessively violent films and video games. The electronic media must review and act on its negative impacts on society. We seem to forget that government has intervened and passed laws to ban proven killers such as tobacco, lethal pesticides, driving without seat belts, nuclear waste dumping, and toxic public water supplies.

So NRA get out of the way! Support legislation that would ban automatic assault weapons and other mass killing firearms. It is time to do everything possible to prevent further heinous acts like those seen recently in Aurora and elsewhere. I challenge those in Congress and state legislatures to act now!

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Want safer theaters? Blogger Ari Armstrong suggests that theaters offer free tickets and popcorn to armed off-duty police officers, and publicize the policy.

Gun prohibitions won't work. "At the very least, federal lawmakers ought to outlaw the high-capacity magazines," argues a Denver Post editorial after the Aurora homicides.

After a mass shooting, England went well beyond "the very least" by effectively banning civilian gun ownership in 1998. Soon after, a Telegraph headline read "Gun crimes soaring despite ban" -- a 40 percent increase. In the 2010 Cumbria shootings, a man killed twelve in northwest England.

Criminals ignore both gun bans and so-called "gun free" zones. Mass shootings have occurred in "gun free" zones such as schools and malls. And now movie theaters. The Aurora Cinemark theater "bans firearms on the premises," reports the New York Times. Such "gun free" zones leave peaceful citizens defenseless against violent criminals. Hence the title of professor Dave Kopel's law review article: "Pretend 'Gun Free' School Zones: A Deadly Legal Fiction."

Kopel provides examples of heroic armed citizens stopping mass shootings. In 2007, a man opened fire in a Colorado Springs church parking lot and entered the crowded church. A volunteer security guard shot him, saving many lives. The Cato Institute's "Tough Targets" study provides many instances of armed citizens thwarting criminals.

Regarding high-capacity magazines, Governor Hickenlooper is correct about the bomb-making Aurora killer: "If it was not one weapon, it would have been another."

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To stop more deaths , we can't be distracted by political agendas. These agendas, to increase gun control, stiffen retribution, and censor entertainment, are emotion-based and ignore the facts. There are gun laws galore, which determined killers circumvent; there are numerous punishments, which this type of killer cares not a whit about; there are millions of moviegoers who are nonviolent. Solving this problem requires focusing on mental health.

Mental derangement is the gorilla in the room, We're reluctant to face it, because it brings us into the equation. It requires that we pay attention to others, and in our live-and-let-live society, we're hesitant to do that. When we notice something amiss, we seldom act because no one else is acting. We worry we might be sued or accused of meddling. If we

approach them, they might get mad, or even hurt us. Besides, it's someone else's job, the government's. In our society, individuals who police others are not cool.

If we seriously want to stop the James Holmes', Jared Loughners', and Seung Hui-Chengs', we must focus on ourselves. When we notice a pattern of unusual behavior, we should feel obligated to speak to that person, a family member, or mental health professional. All of these killers left a trail of danger signs, but no one who noticed took the responsibility to act. While it's a cliché, it couldn't be truer than in this case: "we are our brother's keeper." *Cinda Kochen*

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Whether he receives a fatal injection or rots in a prison cell, James Holmes should never, ever be allowed back into society. Alarmingly, if he's declared insane and thus incompetent to stand trial, someday he could be declared "rehabilitated" and subsequently released. Would anyone (especially his victims) feel good about that outcome? This is an instance when we should, at minimum, lock up the perpetrator and throw away the key.

Gun proponents seem incapable of grasping that the Second Amendment was adopted in 1791--221 years ago--during much different times. Today, guns serve no purpose in our everyday lives. We don't need them to shoot rattlesnakes on the range or to duel in the streets. And we certainly don't need AK-47s to protect our homes or families. Until Democrats and Republicans are willing to challenge this outdated right and significantly temper it, we're stuck with psychos having easy access to military weapons.

Media violence, including movies and video games, is a mounting concern. How can emotionally disturbed people be repeatedly exposed to extreme, lifelike aggression and not be influenced at some level? We've been here before -- and way too many times. Sadly, given our freedom-of-speech laws, the popularity of these mediums, and the immense commercial profits to be made, don't expect censorship of violent programming anytime soon.

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Six thousand rounds of ammunition. Two Glock handguns. One pump-action shotgun. An AR-15 (M-16) with a 100-round drum capable of firing 50-60 rounds per minute. All acquired within the past two months. Is there no division at Homeland Security in a position to connect these dots?

Elected officials are so intimidated by the NRA that their instinctive reaction was to immediately disavow any attempt even to tweak the nation's gun control laws. The NRA has expanded its focus to promote legislation exonerating those who intentionally shoot others. The organization's absolutely tone-deaf response to the Aurora slaughter of innocents was to express dismay that no one else in the theater was packing. As though more bullets from other sources firing blindly in a darkened theater filled with smoke would have reduced the carnage? Somalia is not the answer.

The shooter was deranged. His planning was diabolical. Yes, he might have found other means had the weaponry listed above not been so readily available, but why shouldn't we raise the bar? Does anyone hunt ducks, deer or elk with an AR-15? The 2nd Amendment's right to keep and bear arms is premised upon a belief that "a well-regulated militia (is) necessary to the security of a free state." If you want access to assault weapons, join the National Guard. Keep M-16s and multiple round ammo clips under lock and key where the Guard gathers for training. This madness has got to stop.

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(The Camera's editorial advisory board members are: Judy Amabile, Anne B. Butterfield, Ed Byrne, Jimmy Calano, Dave Ensign, Clay Evans, Steve Fisher, Spense Havlick, Cinda Kochen, Marc Raizman, and Brian T. Schwartz.)