

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### There are no easy answers here

By Steve Haynes

Last week's Virginia Tech massacre set a record for a gunman run amok, 32 innocent lives.

The nation reeled in shock and horror, but the incident — as many do — revealed both the worst and the best about our society.

Seung-Hui Cho showed again what a demented gunman can do. Others emerged as heroes, taking action and saving lives while the carnage progressed.

In one classroom, senior Zach Petkewicz and his fellows in his class in Norris Hall barricaded the door, saving their lives and perhaps others. When the gunman tried to shove his way in, they shoved back, working together and thinking on their feet.

In another classroom, Liviu Librescu, who had survived the holocaust as a young man, blocked the door to give his students time to escape. All lived — except the professor.

Mr. Librescu was buried Friday in Israel, hailed as a hero. And he was.

There will be much second guessing, but no one yet has explained why people sometimes go crazy and decide to kill innocent people. Mass murder is nothing new, but these crazed gunmen seem to become more lethal with every try.

Seung-Hui Cho was not particularly heavily armed. He carried just a couple of pistols — not the shotguns and machine guns sometimes favored by the criminally insane — but he used them with great effect.

As usual, he did not stick around to answer for his crimes.

Gun control advocates will call for new laws, but most people seem to see the futility of that.

University officials and security forces will take a beating for not sounding the alarm sooner, but the first shooting, involving just one victim and a dormitory resident assistant who investigated, hardly seemed cause for a campus-wide lockdown.

Others are second guessing NBC's decision to air photos and tapes sent in the mail between the two sets of shootings.

Some say the networks should have held back, ditched the tapes, turned them over to the police or buried them.

That's foolish. The images are disturbing, that is certain. But we need to see them. People need to know how crazy some of us can be.

No purpose would be served by censoring the tapes. It would not bring one person back to life.

If society can learn from them, from the senseless killings, from the fact that many saw this man as deranged and possibly dangerous, but still authorities did nothing, then perhaps all is not in vain. Perhaps.

Society has a difficult time dealing with the issue of people who might be crazy. How can we predict who will be next to "go postal?" And if we could, would we be able to lock them up, change them, protect ourselves?

There are no easy answers here, but there's no benefit to sticking our heads in the sand. We need to look for those answers. And pray. — *Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press*

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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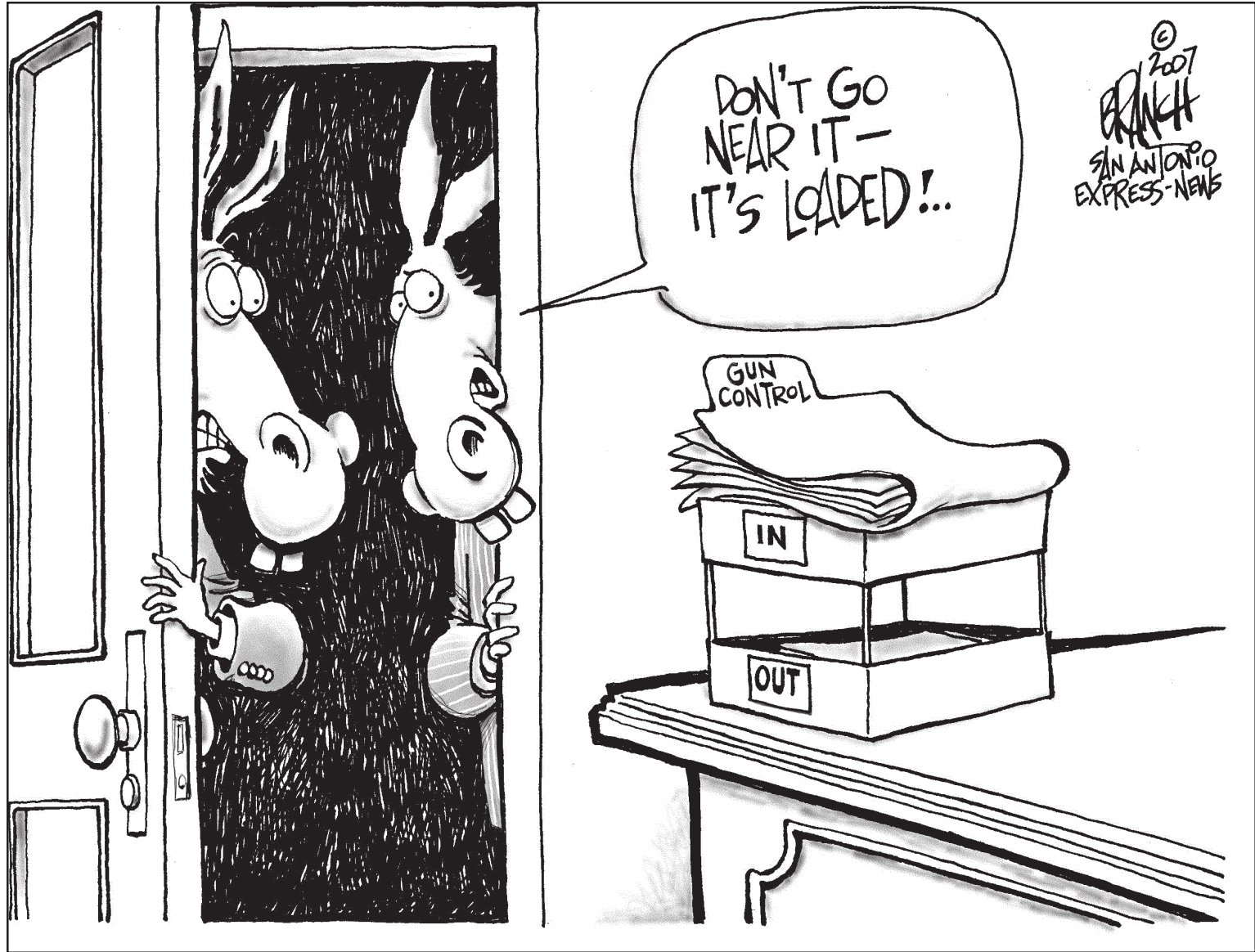
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## Gang initiation has no boundaries

Drivers beware

Ever get an e-mail that you questioned the authenticity about? I have and recently did.

I received an e-mail from a friend saying to be sure and not flash my headlights at any car without its lights on. That's a practice I've typically done all my life, but after reading the e-mail and checking it out I won't do it any more.

While my friend failed to remove the original author's name and title, I did contact his office and ask about the warning's validity. Sure enough, police officers across the country who work with the DARE program (the program to educate children about drugs) are cautioning people to avoid flashing their headlights at oncoming cars who don't have their lights on.

I've verified there is an initiation game being used by a gang referred to as the Bloods whereby a new gang member drives along with no headlights, and the driver of the first car to flash its



**Jan Katz  
Ackerman**

• **From Where  
I stand**

headlights becomes a target.

The police officer I talked to said the gang inductee is instructed to turn around and chase and spot the car and shoot and kill every individual in the vehicle in order to complete his or her initiation requirements.

Sick, isn't it?

And one would think that this would only happen in a huge city, but I've worked with enough law enforcement officers over the years to know

that gang activity is crossing the country, even through our little towns in northwest Kansas we call safe.

Reportedly new Blood gang members nationwide are being told to use the tactic Friday and Saturday nights. While we are used to offering a courtesy flash to oncoming cars without headlights, maybe this notice to you will do the same as it did me, that of being a little more aware of one's surroundings.

Tell your loved ones this information, not just the ones across town, but particularly those who live in large cities.

And, while I do trust God to protect me, it states in the Bible that we are not to test God, and to me, not using verified information as a way to avoid activity of lunatics is doing nothing more than testing God. So please, drive safe.

*Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press*

## Human decency is a basic need

What caused the tragedy at Virginia Tech? Who or what is responsible?

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

That was a popular retort some 60 years ago when I was in school. Teachers seldom ever addressed verbal abuse on the playgrounds. Name calling, teasing, and insults were tolerated by school officials and parents, at least the parents of those doing the deeds. We were all both perpetrators and recipients at one time or another. Most of us grew up with no apparent lasting damage.

You notice I said "no apparent."

That environment has left us callused and unaware of the subtle ways we continue improper comments and attitudes. Imus, Limbaugh, Fallwell, rap singers, and many others, with celebrity status, seemingly have been free to insinuate the inferiority of individuals and groups. I don't normally drink coffee with anyone with celebrity status, but I regularly hear insulting and demeaning comments made about

**Ken  
Poland**

• **Ken's World**

people based on political, religious (usually Muslim), ethnic, gender, physical appearance, etc. We find it even in our church group activities.

Look at what has happened in schools across the nation and now even in colleges. Public attitude is definitely contributing to these problems. Those committing these horrendous acts are quite often striking out as a last defense. No, their acts are not acceptable, but neither is ignoring the ridicule they have been subjected to acceptable.

Bruises, cuts, and scrapes eventually heal. Even the scars will fade. But words spoken and

the mental scars never go away.

Undoubtedly, mental and verbal abuse is an over used claim to justify acts of violence, simply because it works. But to say the issue is not a valid reason for needed protection from the abuser is verbal and mental abuse from those denying the fact.

Human decency and respect is a basic need of everyone, regardless of their status in society. No one should be held captive in an environment that does not honor those needs. Even our prisons, both military and civil, should recognize and guarantee humane treatment, free from prejudice and emotional abuse.

We are all quick to respond, "Not me" when the question is asked, "Who is responsible?" But, are we? We learned to tolerate verbal and mental abuse, as children, simply because we had no recourse. Do we have recourse today? We are, everyone of us, members of society, and society is responsible!

*Ken Poland occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press*

## Your turn

## More needs done for our youth

**Bill Snyder  
former Kansas State University football  
coach and chairman of Kansas Mentors**

Recent media reports about the tragedy at Virginia Tech or previous reports about Columbine remind us that we need to do more for our youth. And we can do more.

Research has shown that the reason many young people resort to violence is because they did not have an adult to turn to in times of difficulty.

That's where mentors come in. Governor Kathleen Sebelius and I have launched Kansas

Mentors in an effort to give every young Kansas access to a quality mentor. And we need your help to do so.

This May, we will be administering regional training sessions in Wichita (May 1), Garden City (May 2), Salina (May 10), Hays (May 11), Girard (May 15), and Kansas City (May 22).

These sessions will provide people the tools they need to start a mentoring program in their community, or to enhance their existing programs.

The trainings are free of charge, and I would encourage anyone interested in the develop-

ment of Kansas youth to attend. For more information about the training sessions and to register please visit [www.ksmentors.ks.gov/news.htm](http://www.ksmentors.ks.gov/news.htm). or contact Kansas Mentors at (785) 296-8873.

As we continue to look for explanations regarding school shootings, the answer may very well lie in the attention we pay our youth. All children can benefit from having an adult in their lives to help instill the appropriate values in them. Thank you for your assistance in making a brighter future for our youth and better communities for us all.

**Mallard  
Fillmore**

• **Bruce Tinsley**

