

from our viewpoint...

Shooting brings up 'the dark side'

Saturday morning at a Safeway in northwest Tucson, Ariz., America came face to face with "the dark side" of humanity as a 22-year old man took aim at the head of a Congresswoman and then emptied his magazine into the crowd killing six and wounding 14 more.

The target of the apparently pre-planned attack was Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was rushed to the nearby University of Arizona Medical Center where surgeons worked to save her life and treat the 10 others who were brought there in the aftermath.

Prayers for Giffords recovery are being heard all around the country as she remains in critical condition at the hospital. The doctors say they are optimistic about her recovery, but know it will take time and be a lengthy recovery once she is out of danger.

The bullet went through Giffords head from the back and came out the front as the gunman took his first shot at her before turning the gun on the crowd.

In the rampage, that lasted about 12 seconds, the gunman hit a total of 20 people ultimately killing six and wounding another 14 including Giffords. Among those killed one was a federal judge, a congressional aide and a 9-year old girl.

Sheriff Clarence Dupnik of Pima County, where the shooting occurred, said authorities were all but certain the man acted alone, saying "he's a typical troubled individual who's a loner."

Dupnik said in a news conference on Saturday he felt the vitriolic political rhetoric may have contributed to the gunman's actions.

"I think the tone of rhetoric that's occurred in this country over the past couple of years affects troubled personalities," he said.

The comment set off a side story about the dangers facing all Congress members as they try to work with the voters they represent.

Giffords, who narrowly won her third term in November, was holding the first of her "Congress on the Corner" public meetings, and had no special security at the scene.

The gunman was to be charged Monday afternoon in federal court on a charge of attempted assassination of Rep. Giffords and murder of U.S. District Judge John Roll, 63, and Giffords aide Gabe Zimmermann, 30. Other state charges are expected to be added dealing with the other three killed, and those wounded.

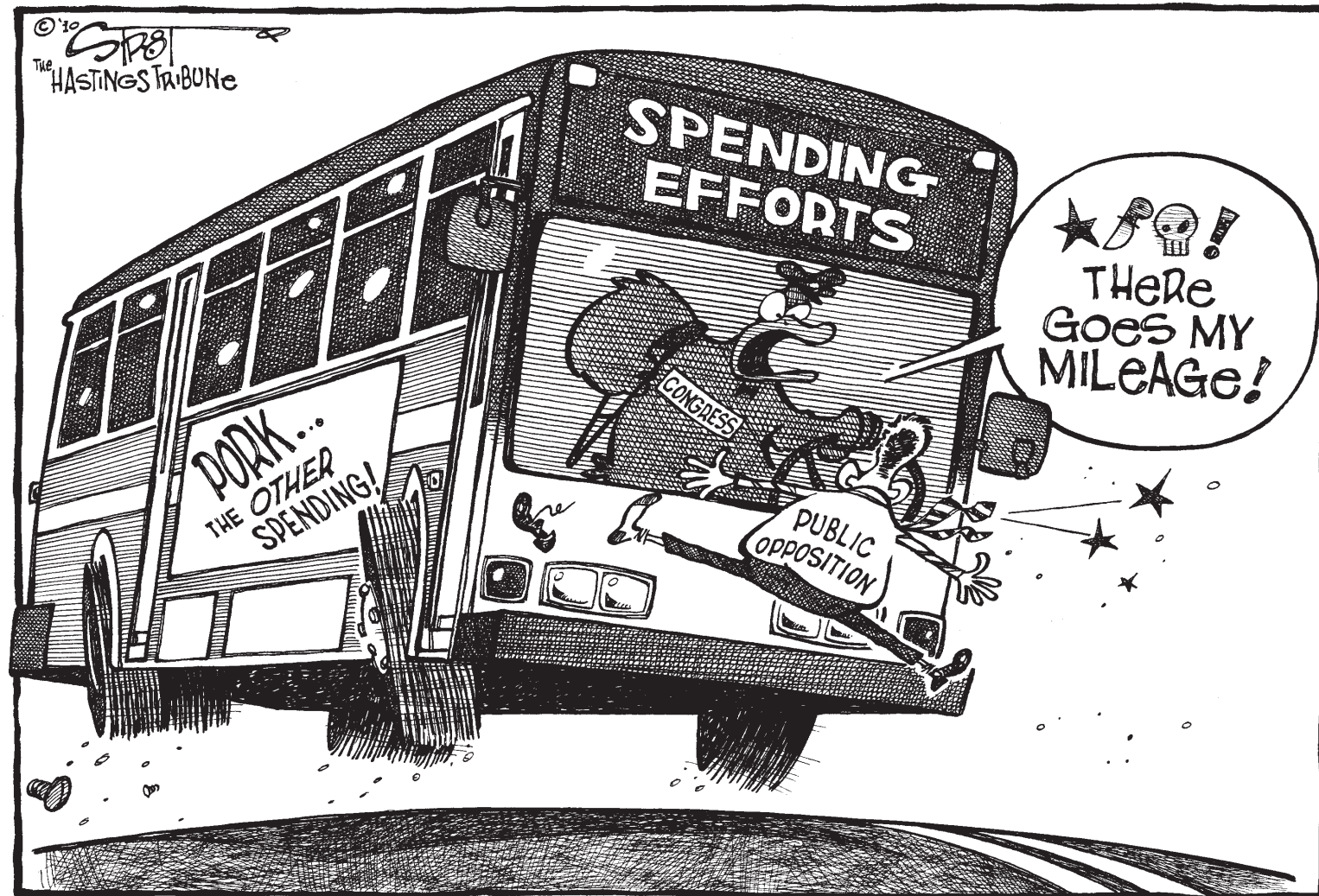
The outcry about the shooting mirrors other incidents which have occurred across the country, but this one rises to another level because of the apparent prior planning and targeting of an elected federal official.

As the story continues to unfold it should cause everyone to stop and give a moment of silence for those who died and those who survived this tragic event.

Elected officials at every level are exposed to threats, and most feel it is a part of being an elected representative of the people. For those who serve it is important to be able to hold the public meetings, and at times we are sure the elected person has to face some ugly and angry citizens asking or shouting at them.

At the end of the day the important thing we need to learn from this incident is we need to look beyond the tone of the rhetoric and understand we can disagree with anyone without being disagreeable.

As a people we much find ways to get beyond "the dark side" and look for the good in our fellow man without encouraging those who feel alone or isolated to turn to violence. - Tom Betz



My special New Years resolution

If I could make one New Year's resolution for the world, it would be this:

That everyone of us would spend the year, not trying to improve others, but to improve ourselves.

OK, I know that's not very realistic.

Critiquing someone else's life is so much easier than changing our own. The whole world is pretty much busy trying to figure out how to make the other guy live right.

I know I'm not very good at living my life. I'm overweight, I waste way too much time, some days I'm thoughtless, I drive too much, talk too much on my cell phone and I stay up too late. And I'm sure my wife could add a few things to that list.

It's not that I don't try to be a better person. I've downsized my cars over the years. When I was 28, I lost all my extra weight. Couple of years later, I decided to quit smoking.

You can guess what happened to my waistline after that, but I haven't had a cigarette in more than 30 years. And for more than 25 years, Cynthia and I have made an effort to get out and walk every day. Don't always make it, but we try. We shoot for 25 miles a week and feel pretty good about 20.

I'm not svelte, but I have lost about 12 pounds in the last year. And after "the holidays," I hope to lose another 12 this year. Maybe it will stick, but all that holiday food and cookies and candy, it's tough to get through this



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time of year without gaining anything.

None of that even begins to make me a saint, I know. I'm perfectly aware of my failings, and if I should forget, there's always someone around to remind me.

It's hard to change yourself. Really hard. Which, I suspect, is one reason why so many people - all of us, perhaps - put so much effort into schemes to change everyone else.

As a nation, we want to change other nations. We don't approve of their leaders, their lifestyles, their politics. Most are not as well off as we are, but our attempts to "improve" their state often come off as clumsy and self-centered.

Americans are not alone in this, by the way. It's a fine old tradition, going back to the British, the Spanish, the Romans, I could name a few more. We pay little heed to the damage we do, whether it is in destroying huge parts of Iraq (and killing thousands) to change that country, or in destroying much of Mexico and Colombia to stop their gangs from sending drugs to our country.

In trying to improve our own land, we often do no better. Take the current movement to

"improve" American schools. Time was when teachers, parents, principals and school boards got to decide their own priorities. The system worked well enough to produce the strongest economy in the world, and more Nobel prizes than any other country has won.

Then, there is our war on drugs. It isn't working. It never has. It won't work. But Americans, listening to a century of drug-czar propaganda, believe we can pass laws to protect people from themselves.

And if what we're doing doesn't work, the answer always is, "do more of the same."

There is no end to the number of people who want to change us. Some conservatives want to regiment our lives and be sure we don't break any of their taboos. Some liberals want to tell us what to drive, what to produce, even what to eat.

Some day, maybe we'll see the folly of all this. Mandates seldom change behavior. Education can, but people have to care enough to want to change.

The focus on drunk driving has reduced the problem greatly, but harsher and harsher penalties fail to reach the core of problem drivers. Billions spent on drug enforcement only made the cartels unimaginably wealthy.

Will we ever figure this out?

I can't say. Right now, I need to go write an editorial and tell people what to think about the new governor.

Thanks to the people of Sherman County

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Genesis-Salvation Army Board, we want to thank the people of Sherman County for all the generous donations for the Christmas Project.

On December 18th, we gave out food and toys to 180 families. That included over 512 individuals, 220 of which were children.

What an amazing effort it took for all of the volunteers, clubs and organizations, busi-



from our readers

• to the editor

nesses and individuals in the community to accomplish.

We want you all to know how grateful we

are for the support you give for this project and throughout the year.

All the cash donations you gave to Genesis and The Salvation Army will be used in the county this year.

Thank you all again for all you do to help. Joy and Richard Hayden
Linda and Mel Pfau
Genesis-Salvation Army Co-coordinators

Want to fix our politics, start with the voters

We've just had three "change" elections in a row, but you don't get the sense Americans are any happier with politics and government. In late December, a Gallup poll found just 17 percent satisfied with the way things are going in the United States - well below the average of 40 percent since Gallup started asking the question in 1979.

So it's no surprise Congress is polling at record lows or political leaders in general get blamed for the country's problems. After all, we elected them to govern well, and there's a broad - indeed, bipartisan - sense their decisions have not met the nation's needs.

Yet I'd like to suggest our attention needs re-directing. You never want to let our political leaders off the hook - not in a democracy - but if you want to make change in the political realm, you can't start with them. Their habits and responses to the pressures they face are too ingrained. Instead, change starts with you and me: the American voter.

Here's what we need to remember: While a lot of media attention goes to those on the extremes, the voters who actually decide most elections are not the strong liberals, strong conservatives, or Democratic or Republican activists. The key voters, the ones in the middle, don't have a passionate attachment to either party, a vigorous identification with any particular ideology - or even a strong interest in politics. They're busy with their families, their community responsibilities, their jobs... or their job hunts. They don't have the time or inclination to argue the finer points of ideology or analyze the nuances of the policy debates that so entrance Washington.

But they do decide the outcome of elections.



lee hamilton

• commentary

And they have a few key stances worth considering. They want our country to succeed, both in the world and at home, and just as important, they want it to work. They're pragmatists who don't care so much how you arrive at a solution to a given problem as the solution produces positive results. And they want government itself to work - not to be burdened by favoritism, partisan posturing or ideological preconceptions that undercut its effectiveness.

So it shouldn't be a surprise they've been unsatisfied with a status quo filled with too many instances of bureaucratic fumbling, partisan gridlock, and political grandstanding. They want the United States to do better.

It can, if we exercise our responsibilities as voters. To begin, everything depends on exercising discriminating judgment. While on any given issue the voice of the average voter may appear weak, in broad measure our system moves in the direction voters want. So it matters where we as voters come down - and it matters whom we choose to represent us in Washington.

Above all, we want to make sure the tone our representatives set accords with the best interests of the country. Cooperation and the ability to find common ground are absolutely vital skills for politicians, and we need to expect they'll use them. Our nation is too diverse for any one faction or ideology to dictate the

way forward, so choosing political leaders who know how to compromise when necessary is key to changing the tone of our politics.

So is refusing to buy into the apocalyptic rhetoric all too common around election time these days. Political contests in this country are rarely, if ever, death-matches between good and evil; the future of civilization is not at stake when we enter the voting booth. The country will survive - and who knows, it might even prosper - even if the other side wins the election. No election has permanent results in our system.

Finally, voters should know how to listen - to the candidates, to party leaders, to media commentators - but know when to stop listening. All those different points of view can inform our thinking, especially those whose perspectives are different from ours. But they can't do our thinking for us. As voters, we need to be true to our own perceptions, our values, and our judgment of what the country needs.

Which is a reminder we need to have some sympathy for how hard it is to be a politician - because it's their job to balance all the views of people whose discriminating judgments often lead in different directions. It is extremely hard to make this country work, but as voters we can help it along by choosing political leaders who are more determined to make the country succeed than to have their personal views enshrined.

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