

from our viewpoint...

A call to action on mental health treatment funding

Like most of America, we watched the news in shock on Friday as reports came in of a school shooting in Newtown, Conn.

In all, 26 people – many of them children – were killed and more injured by shooter Adam Lanza, who also died at the scene.

Those of us who have experienced these tragedies before know the pattern of what follows. First there is the shock of the nation and the grief of the victims. Then there is the blame – which is foisted on just about everything. Then there are the calls to action. In this case, as in all previous cases, the calls to action are centered around gun control.

But the debate should not be about gun control but about mental health treatment. It is far easier to get access to a gun in this country than treatment for mental illness. In Kansas, organizations like High Plains Mental Health have had to endure drastic spending cuts from the state in recent years. High Plains serves 20 counties with a budget of less than \$100,000. Specific state programs like the Children's Mental Health Initiative are getting axed left and right.

That organization is not the only one, of course, but it is indicative of a general problem across the country. How can we expect to prevent tragedies like Newtown if we don't commit the resources necessary to recognize and treat the underlying problems.

The warning signs are always there. Watch the news this week and you'll likely see a parade of people who knew the shooter telling about the things they noticed about him and ignored in the weeks and months leading up to the shootings.

Katherin Newman, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Johns Hopkins University, says that these shootings are never spontaneous. Newman has extensively researched mass shootings, and in most cases, she writes, the shooting "is the last act in a long drama: a search for acceptance and recognition. The earlier acts fail miserably. But once a shooter starts to talk about killing people, ostracism can turn to inclusion. Suddenly, he is getting the attention he has been craving."

The clues are there before hand, whether its an offhand comment or a posting on Facebook, but how can we recognize the signs, get these people the treatment they need and in so doing prevent these tragedies if the resources aren't there to do so?

We call upon the state Legislature to consider mental health treatment funding when they come back into session in January. We know there is never enough money to go around, but if our mental health professionals have the resources to find and prevent tragedies like Newtown, the expense will be worth it.

–Kevin Bottrell



Retirements mark end of an era for base

The last two Cuban workers who walked into the Guantanamo Naval Base every day to work are retiring at the end of the month bringing to close this connection to Cuba.

The two workers have been working on the base for 54 years, and were both there when I served on the base for 13 months from 1970 to 1971. I am sure I saw them or may have even met them while I was a Navy Journalist as I met many of the more than 300 who were walking into the base every day while I was there.

Cubans made up about 2,000 of the work force on the base until Castro closed the gates in the early 60s. Guantanamo has been a U.S. Navy base since Dec. 1903, and was used as a coaling station and training facility for many years.

When I served on GTMO there were about 6,000 sailors, 1,000 Marines, 1,500 dependents and civilians and about 500 Cubans including those who walked about three-quarters of a mile each day to enter the base. About 2,000 Jamaicans were on the base handling many of the maintenance and routine jobs replacing the Cubans.

The two Cuban workers live in Guantanamo City and have driven to the base every day. Many of the Cubans we met on base had friends or family who had self-exiled themselves back when Castro took over. One such Cuban worked with the base recreation department



tom betz

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and met family members each day who came to work on the base. He once said some of his family had climbed over the fence and been flown out to the U.S. mainland where they were living in Kentucky.

The story about the two Cuban workers retiring was on the Associated Press wire on Friday, and brought back many memories of our time at GTMO. The time I was there was my first station, and for being an isolated base was a great place to work. Over the years much of the base has changed, and the number of people has actually been shrunk to about 6,000 total.

Questions about what to do with the detainees on the base has made GTMO somewhat controversial, but even if the prison is closed the U.S. Navy can continue to utilize the base for training. The treaty giving the U.S. the 45-square mile base does not have a deadline, and the only way it will be closed is if the U.S. Navy decided to give it back to Cuba. We actually hope the U.S. keeps the base, and as we seek to normalize relations with that island nation

it would serve as a good place to once again open the gates and allow Cuban workers to come on the base. Of course, it would be really wonderful to be able to return to GTMO someday and walk out the northeast gate to visit the nearby towns.

Reading the story about the retiring Cuban workers led us to a project that began several years ago the Guantanamo Public Memory Project that has opened a new traveling exhibit "Why Remember GTMO?" on New York City's Washington Square developed by over 100 students from 12 universities nationwide highlighting the long and varied history of the now infamous base and its unknown history to most Americans.

Columbia University and New York University held a National Dialogue on Thursday and Friday to go with the opening of the exhibit. The idea of The Guantanamo Memory Project is to build public awareness of the history of the U.S. naval station and start a dialogue on the future of this place and the policies it shapes. The traveling exhibit will be going to nine cities across the country through at least 2014.

We hope to get a chance to view the exhibit, and possibly participate by adding our memories and photos of the time we spent on that island.

'The Hobbit' is a must-see

It was with great anticipation that I entered the theater Friday night to see "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey."

I've been a fan of J.R.R. Tolkien for as long as I can remember. My parents are to blame. My dad had read The Hobbit in high school and the Lord of the Rings trilogy later. He introduced my mom to the books, and they read them to me and my brother at the dinner table and before bed. When we got old enough, we began to read the books ourselves.

So you can imagine how excited I was when the first Lord of the Rings trilogy came out in theaters. Growing we had the old animated versions of the Hobbit, the Fellowship of the Ring, which included some of The Two Towers story, and The Return of the King. I recently



kevin bottrell

• simple tricks and nonsense

re-watched those old movies, and they're not nearly as good as I remember. But you look at things differently as an adult.

The live-action films are not only better by comparison, but are great movies in their own right, and the latest one, in theaters now, is a fine way to start the new trilogy.

Ironically, I found exactly what I expected in

"An Unexpected Journey." I knew going in that director Peter Jackson would make changes to what was in the book, and greatly embellish things that might have gotten one sentence in the original text. That's Jackson's style. He takes what was there and pumps it up to 11.

What he did with The Hobbit is at times a wild ride, but oh so much fun to watch. The actors are great, the visuals are incredible, the story has that light, adventurous tone of the book (as opposed to the more serious tone of the Lord of the Rings trilogy), and you can never say enough good things about Howard Shore's music.

Whether you're a fan of the book or just like a good movie, do yourself a favor and go see The Hobbit.

All we want for Christmas is a farm bill

Though critical to farmers, ranchers and consumers, the farm bill has not been at the top of the list of issues on Capitol Hill. Instead, lawmakers are debating how to avoid what's known as the fiscal cliff. In case you haven't heard, this fiscal cliff is a series of tax increases and spending cuts set to take effect Jan. 1.

Many farmers are hoping lawmakers will see passage of a five-year farm bill with its \$20 billion-plus in savings as one way to keep from going over the economic precipice.

In any case, agriculture will be looking at a one-year extension of the farm bill, according to Mary Kay Thatcher, American Farm Bureau Federation senior director of Congressional Relations.

"We have 38 programs in the 2008 farm bill that expired in October," Thatcher says. "There is no funding and no plan for continuation at this stage."

And while disaster assistance for livestock producers may be one of the biggest concerns for Kansas producers, every one of these 38 programs have proponents clamoring to make sure their interests will be in the extension, or next farm bill.

The other key issue yet to be resolved is how to pay for it. Livestock disaster assistance alone is estimated to cost between \$600 and \$700 million.

In spite of the dwindling funds available for agriculture, Thatcher believes Congress is well



Insight this week

• john schlageck

aware of the crisis impacting livestock producers. She is hopeful this will translate into some form of livestock disaster assistance.

And while most people in farm country are betting there will be a one-year extension of the farm bill, hammering out the details may be even more difficult because of the polarized Congress. An example of this is the struggle on how much to cut from the food stamp program.

Only one in three children pays for his/her school lunch, Thatcher says. And only one in 16 pays for his/her school breakfast.

Now that direct payments have been cut dramatically during the last couple years, crop insurance is the next farm program to be targeted.

"Crop insurance already has a big bull's eye on it," Thatcher notes. "It's the same idea behind why people rob banks. It's where the money is - it's easy picking."

Farmers must continue to voice their opinions to members of Congress about the importance of crop insurance. Thatcher says the number of producers who contacted their

congressional delegation on farming issues dropped off during the past summer. She says this is a trend that must be reversed.

"While your Kansas congressional delegation is well aware of the stakes involved in the next farm bill, your own neighbors, friends and those people in your urban and suburban areas are not up to speed," Thatcher says. "Take time to tell them what's happening in agriculture."

Some of these Kansans could be the guy who sits behind you in the pew at church. They may be from rural America but that doesn't mean they understand 78 percent of the farm bill goes toward nutritional programs.

"We've got to start (telling our story) somewhere," Thatcher says. "Five years ago, less than one half of farmers or ranchers knew that less than 1/2 of 1 percent of the HSUS money goes to animal shelters."

Others believe if some farmers are doing well, all farmers are prosperous, Thatcher continues. That's not necessarily the case.

Kansans all know livestock producers are paying dearly for the feed for their stock. The drought has caused ponds to dry up and pastures haven't provided adequate grass for three years in some regions of the state.

There's a story to tell about agriculture and no one tells it better than engaged, knowledgeable farmers and ranchers, Thatcher says. Today, everyone must step up and speak out.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day; (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company