

## We can make a difference!

Written by Editors

Thursday, 20 December 2012 21:34

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Safety in a free, democratic society cannot rely solely on armed security agents or gun laws. Laws require the consent of those who are governed by them, and the police cannot be everywhere all the time. Like it or not, our safety is based on an unspoken social contract.

This contract carries the implicit understanding that in exchange for living with order and safety, we give up some degree of freedom. That “freedom,” if we want to call it that, requires us to exercise control over impulses that might lead to us harming others.

For the most part, these unspoken rules have worked. We usually go about our lives without worrying if we will be attacked walking the streets, shopping, watching a movie or going to school.

The shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, serves as a pointed reminder that our social contract is breaking down. That is because the most recent shooting was not an isolated incident. Earlier this month, an armed assailant killed two people before killing himself at a shopping mall in Portland, Oregon. In July, a gunman slaughtered 12 people in a crowded movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. The list goes on and on.

Given the frequency of these attacks it is clear that they can no longer be treated as aberrations or simply explained away as actions by a deranged man who had easy access to

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weapons.

Of course, part of that is true. In each case, mentally ill men with easy access to semi-automatic assault rifles devised ways to take innocent lives.

That is why those who think that we can solve this problem through additional security and gun control alone are fooling themselves. Who knows when or where the next mentally ill killer will plot an attack?

We live in a violent society with far too many guns, far too much anger and way too much alienation. The real problem is that the social contract is falling apart. The bonds that should prevent individuals from harming one another have deteriorated.

If all we do to seek solutions to the threat of violence is enact increased security measures, we continue to ignore the real source of our security— civic solidarity.

Each of the assailants in these mass shootings was described as a loner. This is important to consider because human beings are inherently social beings. People need people to survive. We need contact with others to sustain ourselves and to remind us of what it means to be human.

Schools are in some ways the most important social institutions in our society.

Our schools teach our children how to be members of society, and while some of what is learned may be problematic, schools nonetheless play a vital role in a society as diverse and complex as ours. That is why when our schools are attacked and when the safety of children can no longer be taken for granted, it is devastating to the social trust that is essential to hold our society together.

We must find ways to strengthen our bonds, to increase our connections to each other, to

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embrace the alienated and to care for the mentally ill.

When millions of new immigrants came into our society and when America

decided to stop segregating our society by race, our schools led the way in carrying out this work. We must turn to our schools once again as we seek to find a way to restore and revitalize the bonds that protect us and should hold us together.

The solution to the increasing violence in Baltimore, in Newtown and throughout the country must be found in reaffirming our dependence on one another.

In Washington there will be new laws put on the books but in our lives, in the places where we socialize, gather and work, our task is to strengthen our communities and rebuild the social bonds that hold us together.