

Arizona requires a deeper look

Written by Mike Honda

The tragic shootings in Arizona are a sad reminder of the culture of violence that prevails in this country and propagates such actions. It has made all Americans ask fundamental questions regarding public safety, crime prevention, and mental health, such as why an individual with mental health issues can so easily purchase a handgun and large capacity ammunition clip and why is there a lack of sufficient mental health services to identify and assist people who display signs of mental distress. As our country continues to heal and respond to this tragedy, it is important for us to look closely at the systemic issues at play here and address them collectively. There are critical gaps and inconsistencies in our current gun control procedures, in particular the absence of a role for mental health screenings as a key factor in the gun permitting and purchasing process.

As an avid outdoorsman and hunter myself, I believe in the rights granted to us by the Second Amendment, but in the wake of the Arizona shootings, I question the sufficiency of the background checks that are being performed on legal firearms purchasers. I also believe that we should look closely at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' system for monitoring firearms trafficking to determine whether we are devoting resources properly to effectively address interstate gun trafficking and to proactively identify gun traffickers and problematic dealers to protect individual and public safety.

We must also determine how the system to identify behavioral alerts that could have prevented this tragedy broke down. The New York Times has reported accounts from friends of Jared L. Loughner, the accused Arizona shooter, that paint the picture of a person who was paranoid and isolated. Even when warning signals were identified, as was the case with Mr. Loughner during his time at Pima Community College, school officials interviewed by the New York Times stated that they did not have the resources or authority to take proactive steps to force him into mental health treatment; the school was only able to expel him and required him to get mental health treatment before he would be allowed to return. We must reform our mental health system so that the proper diagnosis is made early on so that family members, friends, and other concerned individuals can tap into proper mental health resources. I have always advocated for the equal treatment of mental illnesses under health insurance plans, and to make these services accessible. It is time that we understand the effects our own mental health and that of our fellow Americans can have on our every day actions and how we must weigh our mental

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health as equally as our physical health.

The national dialogue over these events will continue during the coming weeks and months, and it is my hope that we can make sense of this tragedy and respond intelligently and compassionately to avoid similar situations in the future.