

### **Treasure in the Tucson Tragedy**

The tragedy in Tucson reminds us of the essence of Ecclesiastes, "... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

This is not the first time heinous inscrutable acts have ended the lives of innocents. It is not the first time, ignoring readily available evidence to the contrary, pundits, politicians and media personalities and their toadies of whatever stripe have run their mouths in every medium recklessly seeking to sling ropes up the nearest tree in hopes of publically lynching opponents. It is not the first or last time politicians and citizens will attempt to morph the murderer into a weak willed victim falling prey to dark forces spinning sinister plots in susceptible minds.

In each of the following well publicized cases of violence in just the past two years, incendiary rhetoric by one side wrongly blamed inflammatory oratory and bombast of the other as the cause of tragedies: Richard Poplawski's murder of three Pittsburgh police officers; Jiverly Voong's murder of 13 folks in a Binghamton N.Y. immigration center; James von Brunn's gunning down of a security guard at the Holocaust Museum in D.C. Washington; Maurice Schwenkler's window-smashing vandalism attack at the Denver Democrat party headquarters; Professor Amy Bishop's gunning down of three of her colleagues at University of Alabama-Huntsville; Joseph Andrew Stack's suicide flight into an Austin Texas IRS office; Muslim jihadist Faisal Shahzad's attempted bombing in Times Square and Chris Power's firebombing of Missouri Rep. Russ Carnahan's office.

The real culprit in these and Tucson is clear; severe mental illness

This is not the first time shallow thinking politicians called for papier-mâché policies and laws they erroneously think will vitiate future violence. Politicians packing heat at town hall meetings, encasing the Peoples House in Plexiglas or trampling of first amendment rights is ridiculous. It feeds the fear and hysteria. The tragedy in Tucson is not a lesson about how the use of metaphors of war and combat construe anything except American politics reflecting our nature.

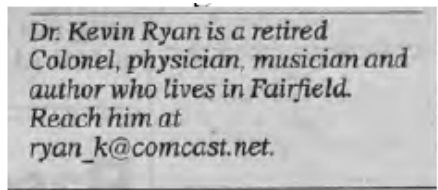
However, the tragedy in Tucson does present a possible treasure trove awaiting national discovery and discourse; the recognition and more expedient disposition of those with severe mental illness.

Arizona and Texas have the lowest standards for committal of the mentally ill who demonstrate ominous warnings of violence. The system failed. This young man publically erected screaming marquees of mental anguish and instability for years to friends, junior college security services and faculty, local police and of course, his parents.

This nation has had a dramatic shift in the handling of severe mental illness. It was felt we were denying inherent rights to those with severe mental health diseases and treatment made the “sick sicker and the sane insane.” Deinstitutionalization followed. Mental hospitals closed in droves. Today, about 4 million people suffer from serious mental illness and 1 percent (40,000) is violent. One-third of homeless men and two-thirds of homeless women have serious mental illnesses. Our assurance of their autonomy has granted them the right to be raped, assaulted, set on fire and die of exposure and more as the past half century witnesses a 46 % increase in rampage killings by the severely mentally ill.

Tucson has shown us what we already knew about conviction without collection of evidence. Perhaps it can lead us to a national conviction based on the evidence that severe mental illness is non partisan. We can improve on earlier diagnosis and treatment of it without trampling on rights. National databases, better public education, facilitated communication across all strata of society and revamping of biased mental health medical insurance practices are a start.

In this tragedy where nothing seems new under the sun, perhaps our treasure lies in a national discussion of how civil society best deals not with the supposed sad outcomes of political rhetoric, but the ravages of severe mental illness



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