

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

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FROM THE EDITOR

Drop by drop

Shocking, sickening, saddening – these are the common initial reactions to events of the past weekend.

The shootings in Arizona reminded many of us of the same kind of senseless loss of life we've seen here and, because this act was political in nature, reminded those of us old enough to remember of days when madmen with guns changed everything.

There are several threads to this story – guns, violence and, most importantly, mental illness. Their confluence is never good.

The focus, at least in the first few days, has been on the hate-filled discourse permeating political debate. For now, we have no way of knowing whether the young man accused of this horrific massacre was motivated by the animus that swirls thick in the desert air. But hate and its various handmaidens certainly have mainstreamed the idea of “Second Amendment remedies,” ramped up fear and glorified the notion of taking up arms against a government elected by the people. We may find that what finally drove this young man over the edge was not politics, but that doesn't make this act apolitical. It happened at a political event and the victims included federal officials and a group of citizens assembled peaceably to interact with their representative.

And it is undeniable that keeping firearms – including those with 33-shot clips – easy to obtain and the neglect most states have shown to the treatment of those with mental illness are the results of politics. Decisions, like the one to allow the assault rifle ban to expire, are the direct result of heavy lobbying and campaigning by the gun lobby and the successful exploitation of the issue to gain political advantage. Had that common-sense law stayed in effect, there likely would have been 20 fewer bullets sprayed through that Safeway parking lot.

And if politicians would have considered funding an adequate mental health system rather than constantly shortchanging it, perhaps the entire incident would never have taken place. Those in this state contemplating further cuts to mental health programs ought to think twice about that.

The sad truth about the Arizona shooting is that at second glance it is not so unbelievable. There are unstable people in our society, readily available guns and no shortage of ranters ginning up hatred against the government. We can and should do something about all three parts of this equation. For the saddest thing is not that the actions of a madman changes everything. The saddest thing is if those actions change nothing.

On Monday, we remember a man of peace cut down in his prime by a man seething with racial hatred. At the time, it seemed like the death of Martin Luther King Jr. was the death of the idea of non-violent change itself. On that awful night in April, riots spread across most major cities in this country. There was a notable exception.

From a flatbed truck parked in the heart of the black community in Indianapolis, Robert Kennedy, who himself would die a few months later from an assassin's bullet, informed the gathered crowd of King's death and then gave what is among the greatest soliloquies in our political history. He quoted Aeschylus:

Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget/falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

Kennedy spoke of his own pain and anger over the loss of his brother and offered this simple remedy that is as true today as it was then:

“What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness, but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another.”

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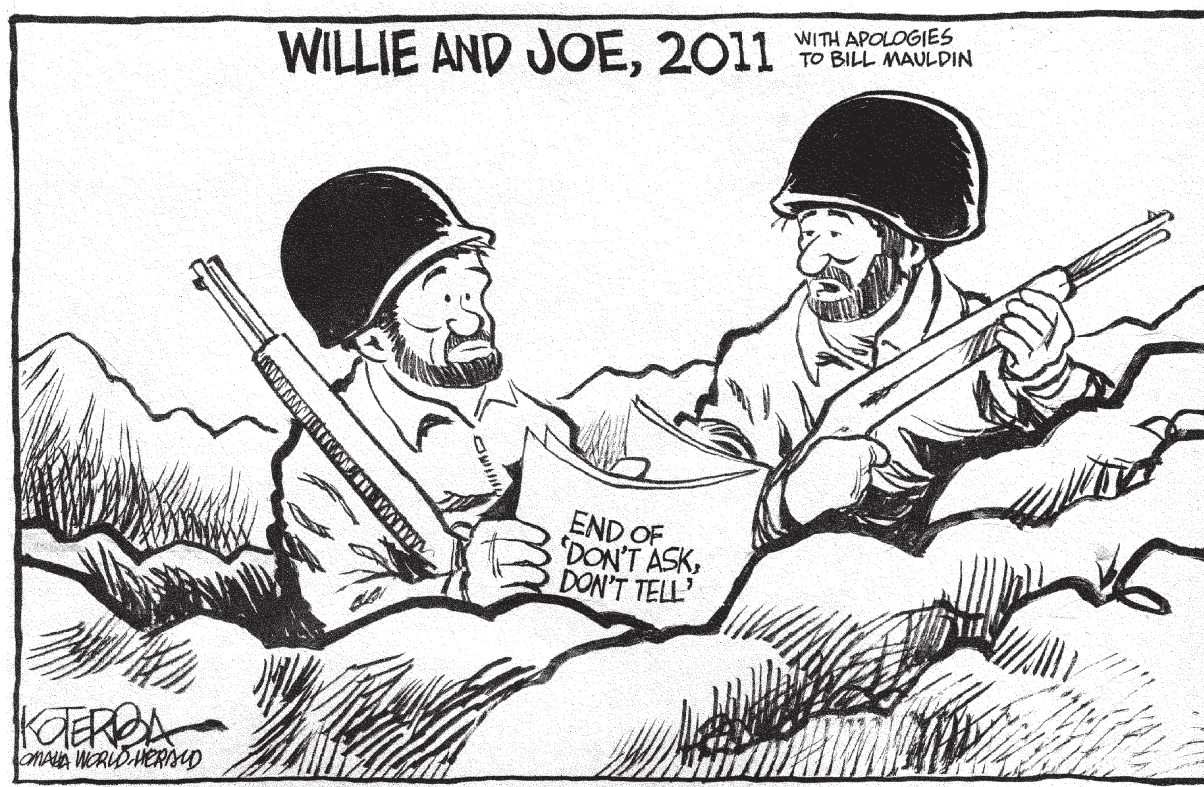
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Economy, diversity and collaboration

DAN COLEMAN

One of the challenges of coming to grips with sustainability is understanding the importance of diversity. There are estimated to be tens of millions of species on Earth, with only a scant fraction as yet identified by scientists. Many of these species develop and can survive in only very limited areas. Neither penguins nor palm trees thrive in Carrboro.

Historically, human societies have diversified along paths that followed the necessities of local geology, climate, flora and fauna. Examples are well known, whether the fur ushankas (“ear hats”) of Russia as compared to the broad-brimmed sombrero of Mexico, or the pueblos of the Hopi as compared to the longhouses of the Iroquois.

It is well understood that our contemporary global economy is destructive of both social and ecological diversity. As the rainforests are turned into grazing land, indigenous species and cultures are equally at risk. The Fair Trade movement, which seeks to support indigenous growers in developing nations, is one initiative seeking to reverse this dynamic.

Those who wish to preserve unique cultures around the world understand that we must preserve our own as well. This attitude thrives in Carrboro. Few who know Carrboro were surprised when a *Mother Earth News* spokesperson said recently that their magazine “focuses on cool things you can do to live wisely and create community, and we think our readers will identify with a place like Carrboro.”

This is also the understanding that informed a recent statement from Randee Haven-O'Donnell, a fellow member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen. Discussing suggestions that some new entity might take over economic development for all jurisdictions in Orange Coun-

ty, Haven-O'Donnell said, “We need to navigate very carefully any discussions of collaboration because we don't want to lose our identity and be swallowed up by bigger fish in the game.”

Carrboro's unique cultural and economic attributes are significantly rooted in its geography, located as it is on the far side of Chapel Hill from RTP and nestled between the Triangle region and rural Orange County. The consulting firm Regional Technology Strategies found Carrboro's distance from I-40 to be a “deterrent to business” and a disadvantage from which we suffer. But what makes Carrboro unattractive to Costco or IBM creates a niche where initiatives like The ArtsCenter, the Carrboro Farmers' Market and Weaver Street Market can bloom.

It makes Carrboro a place where, as Mayor Mark Chilton said recently of the high-tech companies springing up downtown, “they're bringing in top-notch talent to work for them, and part of their pitch is ‘you get to work in downtown Carrboro.’”

Carrboro's relentlessly local orientation is bringing growing recognition to our town. That localism, while still a long way from freeing us from participation in the destructive activities of the global economy, nurtures our commitment to a local living economy that, as I have detailed in previous columns, provides a host of economic and social benefits.

Haven-O'Donnell is correct that the idea of an over-arching economic-development agency should be viewed skeptically. After all, isn't the notion that bigger is invariably better exactly the mindset we are trying to get away from?

This does not mean that close communities like Carrboro and Chapel Hill cannot work together advantageously as each seeks to strengthen its local economy. But such collaboration must be targeted in pursuit of areas of mutual

interest rather than through a top-down agency. Chapel Hill Town Manager Roger Stancil stated this well in a recent email:

The Town of Chapel Hill believes in and supports collaboration with anyone to advance our economy and our ongoing efforts to build a sustainable community. I believe each entity, public and private, has a role and responsibility in economic development and our best energy would be devoted to more clearly defining those roles and responsibilities so we can maintain the individual attractions of each community without duplicating efforts.

A case in point, on Feb. 26, Chapel Hill and Carrboro will be cohosting an Energy Fair at the Carrboro Century Center. This event will connect a variety of local energy-efficiency providers to businesses and homeowners in the context of the towns' current collaboration in developing energy-efficiency revolving-loan programs.

With collaborations like this already underway, the time ahead should be an exciting one for economic development in our community. Orange County has signaled an interest in being more supportive of economic-development efforts in its southern reaches. An understanding is spreading that prioritizing the local over the global economy is tantamount to choosing a sustainable rather than a destructive way of life.

In Carrboro, groups like Transition Town, NC Powerdown and Carrboro Greenspace are leading the way in connecting ecology, economy and community. Truly, these are the connections that must inform all of our endeavors.

Dan Coleman is a member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

LETTERS

Respect your neighbors

I stood at the edge of a North Greensboro Street crosswalk as several cars and trucks whizzed past me on their way to the red light at North Greensboro and Weaver streets. Finally, I stepped onto the road and, thankfully, both oncoming cars stopped. As I crossed the street, I reflected on the risk of crossing this busy, fast-paced street on foot.

This point was driven home the same evening when a man was hit by a car as he crossed the intersection at North Greensboro and Weaver streets.

Carrboro is a small town that has grown much busier and more congested in the past few years. Cars drive incredibly fast down streets shared by walkers, bikers and children playing in their front yards. This latest accident is an unfortunate but inevitable result of high speeds downtown and limited enforcement of pedestrian crossings. Please, respect your neighbors – drive slowly downtown and share the road.

ALENA STEEN

In support of IFC

For nearly half a century, the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service has led Orange County in addressing the hunger and homelessness that are as much a part of our community as the ivied halls of UNC and the quiet neighborhoods of Chapel Hill. Since 1985, various public groups and task forces have searched for a location for a men's residential facility that could offer a greater range of services and programs than our current location in the Old Municipal Building can provide.

Now – thanks to the efforts of UNC trustees, the Town of Chapel Hill, local congregations, business leaders, IFC staff and volunteers – a facility like this is planned for 1315 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in Chapel Hill, a site that, while buffered from residential neighborhoods, will afford clients access to public transportation for jobs, classes, necessary social services – and a safe haven in which to learn the skills and receive the support they need to resume useful places in the community.

Because I've been involved with IFC as a volunteer and board member for more than a decade, I see this development as a dream come true. But to many in the community, it seems the knell of doom, and many are determined to derail the project. I understand the fear that underlies such opposition.

But I invite those who oppose the IFC's plans to remember the transparency that has charac-

terized the project's planning and the community meetings IFC has hosted. And I invite you to join us for lunch at Community House. Everyone is welcome: The food is good and free. You will see that IFC's clients are not an amorphous, threatening mass, but just folks, many of them in unfortunate circumstances, but as worthy of a place in this community – and as willing to be a good neighbor – as you or I.

ANN HENLEY
Chapel Hill

Mobility is crucial

Over the past 10 years the IFC, the Town of Chapel Hill and numerous community organizations have been planning and searching for a new site for a transitional housing facility for homeless men. One of the specific needs identified during this process was access to public transportation. The mobility of the homeless is often constrained by certain social and geographical factors, including the location of public services and lack of access to reliable, affordable and easy transportation options. Mobility is crucial to the ability of homeless people to move between stigmatized and non-stigmatized places, such as employment. Public-transportation services offer a critical outlet for homeless individuals with limited resources who must use public transit to access services, shelter, affordable housing, education and employment.

The proximity of 1315 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., the proposed Community House location, to a major transportation artery satisfies the critical public-transportation need identified above. Locating the Community House at this site makes sense because it means future residents will be able to conveniently take a bus to work, to a class at Durham Tech's Orange County Campus or UNC and to access common household necessities.

I support the IFC's Community House proposal and I hope that the advisory boards and the town council approve it.

Carlo Robustelli
Chapel Hill

From both sides

With the Tucson shootings fresh in our hearts and minds, I am concerned with the comments going on out there.

Before we even knew that Gabrielle Giffords was alive, Paul Krugman said, “We don't have proof yet that this was political, but the odds are

that it was.” Keith Olbermann, regarding Palin's “target map,” said she needs to repent “of her role in the tragedy.” The very popular liberal blog, the Daily Kos, also blamed Sarah Palin.

Interestingly enough, the Democratic Leadership Council used an identically styled “target map,” denoting their candidates are “behind enemy lines.” Obama just called GOPers “enemies.” With this kind of tone coming from the left, there have indeed been many violent acts committed against representatives – one of the most notable, a gunshot fired at Rep. Eric Cantor's office – yes, a gunshot.

Most shockingly, Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik referred to “vitriol that comes out of certain mouths about tearing down the government” and called Arizona “the Mecca for prejudice and bigotry,” apparently referring to their immigration policy, thus labeling half the country as such. He later said that he had no proof that the accused, Jared Loughner, was politically motivated. It is unclear if Dupnik violated Loughner's rights to a fair trial. But once it reaches this level of misinformation, the message is sent, and the game is over.

To be sure, our politics appear to be more uncivil than usual. But they are not of an exceptionally vitriolic tone. The Internet lets us see more opinions, but we are a far cry from the riots and assassinations of the '60s.

Mark Chilton said in a Facebook post that “the words of Palin and Company” gave Loughner “aid and comfort.” On day three, there is absolutely zero evidence of this. He went on: “The danger of the Tea Party rhetoric is not that it will cause reasonable and well-adjusted people to take up arms, but that it will cause unreasonable, mentally ill people to take up arms.” What of the DLC's target map and Obama's remarks? Again, nothing has linked Loughner to any political party. In fact, one of his fellow classmates believed he was a “liberal.” But this is inconsequential.

I don't wish to take away from the real tragedy, but this is exactly what many are doing. They are doing it by spreading misinformation for political gain at the expense of others.

We can talk about quelling political rhetoric all we want, but until we understand that it comes from both sides, nothing will ever change. Let's wait for the facts to emerge before we assign blame, and not let ill-advised commentators, that think that they are above the fray, drag us all down.

CHRISTOPHER MCQUEEN
Carrboro

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be no more than 425 words in length and must be accompanied by the author's name, address and contact information.

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