

Voice Of The Left

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The Virginia Tech Shootings: A Wake-Up Call for America

The bodies were still warm when President Bush took the opportunity to promote gun rights. But if this wasn't callous enough, that ole' gutter dweller, Rush Limbaugh, once again revealed his true shameless self by proclaiming that the shooter "must have been a liberal." We shouldn't be shocked. It wasn't all that long ago that Caesar Bush strummed away on a guitar while thousands of our fellow countrymen lay drowning and starving to death. As for Rush, his drug-crazed, morally-depraved mind has shown repeatedly that it is utterly incapable of compassionate thought.

So, what are we to make of this nearly indescribable act of carnage and the incredibly insensitive reaction of our reactionary counterparts?

The first lesson society needs to learn is that the so-called "family values" crowd will stop at nothing to promote their extremist agenda. Of course, many of us have known that for a long, long time. But there is a far greater realization that our nation needs to come to grip with – that acts of carnage such as the massacre at Virginia Tech are inevitable in a society utterly awash in guns.

Yes, it is true that the university's administration and local law enforcement fell asleep at the switch upon the discovery of two murdered students. Yes, it is also true that federal regulations ought to have prohibited the killer, Seung-Hui Cho, who had previously been ordered by a judge to receive psychiatric treatment, from purchasing the two firearms in the first place. Needless to say, there was a serious misstep on the part of Virginia authorities as well. But with most of our existing gun control laws virtually written by the lobbyists of the gun manufacturers and their right-wing lackeys in the National Rifle Association (NRA), incidents like the recent one in Blacksburg are bound to be repeated.

Stricter control of firearms is imperative.

While some conservative pundits have suggested that more minimal gun controls – specifically the elimination of gun-free zones like college campuses – could have reduced the likelihood of such a killing spree, the reality is that having fewer guns in school zones and in the public arena at large will make for a safer and less violent society. To work towards this goal, states must work more closely with the federal government to ensure that federal gun regulations are correctly enforced. Gun control laws that states misinterpret or ignore do little to make America safer.

How do we do this?

For starters, federal and state governments need to do more than simply ensure that their laws are in sync. They must make it more difficult and time-consuming to obtain a gun in the first place. Buying a gun should not be like buying a Big Mac. At the absolute minimum, the federal government should impose a waiting period of seven days before a gun can be purchased. The government also should severely limit the quantity of firearms, especially handguns that a customer can obtain in a given period of time. Only the Rush Limbaughs and Michael Savages of the world can conceive of a legitimate circumstance that would call for the simultaneous purchase of multiple handguns.

Then again, it is also mind boggling to comprehend the need for personal ownership of assault weapons. Renewing the federal ban on such weapons should be a Congressional priority. Background checks must be thorough and make use of all available resources – they should not be “instant” enough to be completed in 15 minutes or less. Finally, the federal government must end the indefensible exceptions that surround gun shows, where in many states there is no waiting period whatsoever.

At this critical juncture, it is essential that Democrats in the House and the Senate immediately implement tougher gun control legislation. The killings at Virginia Tech have shown us the costs of a society with little or no restrictions on gun ownership.