

VIRGINIA TECH MASSACRE A DARK DAY FOR NATION

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FULL TEXT

Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va. (8th CD), issued the following column:

VT Massacre a Dark Day for NationBy U.S. Rep. James Moran

It was a dark week for the Commonwealth. On Monday, one of the state's premier centers for higher learning, Virginia Tech, was struck a magnitude of gun violence which has never been seen before on U.S. soil.

We lost 32 of our best and brightest, both teachers and students. The senselessness of it all is mind-boggling. What drove one human being to seek out and murder so many of his university peers, without any provocation, will likely remain a mystery.

The Virginia Tech community, shaken to its core, has responded with the strength and grace of the great institution it is. University President Steger has been faced with what no university head ever wants to have to deal with - having to console the families of his students. I commend his leadership in this time of crisis.

Hindsight being 20/20, we may learn of things that should have been done differently. Governor Kaine has initiated an independent review of the school's handling of the situation. This is entirely appropriate and comes at the request of the University. If mistakes are identified, they will enable Virginia Tech and other universities across the country to take steps to ensure they are never repeated.

In the days and weeks to come, there will be much grieving. The 31 students who died Monday come from all walks of life and every part of the state. We are just now starting to learn their names. There undoubtedly will be a number from our Northern Virginia community.

As a legislator, I look at every situation affecting Northern Virginia and the country from the perspective of what could be done to improve the public good. Though we are still in the process of learning the full details of the shootings, I am of the opinion that the proliferation of guns in our society contributes to these tragedies. It appears that the ammunition clips used by the shooter were banned under the Assault Weapons Ban. Unfortunately, that law was allowed to expire in 2004.

We need a national conversation on guns in our society. Some pro-gun advocates have said that the solution to Monday's tragedy is to have more people armed with concealed weapons. Encouraging college kids to carry guns to class strikes me as an idea that takes us in absolutely the wrong direction.

There also needs to be greater outreach to troubled children and adults in our society. In many of these situations,

there are warning signs that an individual is emotionally disturbed. At least one of the shooter's teachers was so disturbed by his writings and behavior that she approached university officials. Unfortunately, because he had not explicitly threatened to hurt anyone, the officials were unable to take any action other than removing him from the class. Clearly, schools need to be authorized to take stronger action when these warning signs arise, to prevent the kind of crisis that occurred at Virginia Tech.

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