

I so deeply wish I did not have to write this message, but as an advocate, I feel impelled to do so.

In less time than it takes to microwave a baked potato, a deeply disturbed young man terrorized Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and massacred 17 people - 14 students and three adults.

On a bright Valentine's Day afternoon in sunny South Florida, a day when love for others should have been celebrated, this young man decided that vicious hate would be his dominant emotion. Murder is the ultimate act of rage. Mass murder of innocent victims is far and away the most heinous of all crimes.

The details of this abhorrent rampage are still unfolding yet it is becoming apparent that sins of omission were committed by authorities whose inaction may have contributed to the horrific result.

I am not in a position to analyze the facts...that task will fall to experts far more qualified than I. My perspective is one of an interested citizen and policy advocate who is committed to positive outcomes despite the challenges we face.

The searing emotions felt by family members, peer witnesses and a wide diversity of individuals in the Parkland community and in all corners of the world are too complicated to express.

What is not complicated and undeniable is the deep feeling of sorrow...if only this and other acts of mass murder did not happen. But the reality is that we live at a time when the death and wounding of innocents has become all too routine.

We live with a generation of young people whose lives have been imperiled too many times...almost to the extent that they have a fatalistic expectation of their future. Fear is commonplace in too many young minds.

Youth Voices Should Be Respected

What I also see, however, is a growing sense of hope rooted in a newly planted spirit of activism. I sense the era of young people being seen but not heard is coming to a swift conclusion.

Young voices in Parkland and elsewhere are being heard and, to some degree, listened to.

Today's youth self-advocacy energy is by no means new...there is historical precedent in civil rights, gender respect and sexual equity, juvenile and child welfare rights, fighting tobacco marketing as well as environmental activism, where the voices of the young have questioned the wisdom of status quo norms when justice demands change.

I attended the Never Again rally in Tallahassee and heard a deeply passionate articulation of outrage at the violence our youth witness not only in schools, but in homes, the streets, in the media.

Their tone and verbiage may be a bit brash for older ears but the messages are clear and convincing...Our youth feel they are inheritors of policies which have resulted in easy access to weapons of mass murder and substances feeding rampant drug addiction. The youth are angry and assertive, calling out adults for what we have not done to prepare for a safe and more sustainable future.

Statements of self-defense and determined defiance by young voices are filling the airwaves in rallies, interviews and gatherings the town squares of our communities.

The status quo is being rejected by a new generation of vocal and vociferous activists who feel betrayed by adults who they perceive as all talk no action when it comes to steps which are long overdue to ensure the safety, protection and preservation of their fragile young lives.

When schools, houses of worship and concerts are transformed into shooting galleries, young people no longer believe that the rhetoric of self-righteous political voices is enough to make positive change in our laws and systems.

There is a swelling chorus of discontent which is growing into a true movement desecrating the absence of leadership in our traditional political hierarchies.

Like the tale of the Emperor Who Wore No Clothes, it's taking young voices stating the obvious to bring attention to the inadequacies of transparent power.

Rejecting this perspective may be convenient for some traditional parents, grand elders and the political ruling class, but the better response is mutual respect...listening and learning across the generations...so grievances are understood and solutions sought.

The Positive Paths Forward

As the father of two sons who attended public school and university in an era of relative safety and an advocate of positive family policies for some 40-years, I'm extremely engaged.

As a new grandfather, I consider my ardent advocacy a legacy opportunity. Our sweet baby Julianne has become an added inspiration for my commitment to doing the right thing.

One lesson is clear. It's essential to recognize that our children and youth need every opportunity to grow to be healthy and positive adults. There are so many ways we can, from pre-natal care through quality education and special services, increase the odds for all children.

The costs of our failure to provide quality services for those who need them most are far greater than the amount we could and should invest in successful policies and programs for our children.

While we grieve for this tragic loss of life, I sincerely believe we must energize our resolve to take action to reform our laws and encourage voter participation.

Our policy leaders should be emboldened to enact prohibitions on gun show purchases without background records checks, limitations on the sale of super multi-round ammo magazines, as well as enact restrictions on access to military-designed automatic weapons.

Aurora, Colorado
Newtown, Connecticut
Orlando, Florida
Sutherland Springs, Texas
Las Vegas, Nevada
San Bernardino, California
Parkland, Florida

In every single one of those mass shootings, the shooter used an AR-15 or semi-automatic equipped with a bumpstock.

We should join forces with our law enforcement, public health allies, reform advocates and families affected by firearms violence in this fight to bring needed legal redirection.

Legitimate gun ownership for self protection, historic collections and sport hunting is not at issue....but what is clear is we are at a point in our lives when logical lines of defense must be drawn.

The debate should not be whether any change is needed.....but to what degree are we willing to recognize that slaughter can be prevented if we mesh quality mental health services and school safety measures with strong and enforceable firearms laws.

Valuable Resources

Here's a link to the [Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#) for additional information on sensible firearms reforms.

[Moms Demand Action](#) for Gun Sense in America was created to demand action from legislators, state and federal; companies; and educational institutions to establish common-sense gun reforms.

Finally, [How to Reduce Shootings](#) a column by Nicholas Kristoff – The New York Times - a compendium of data which creates a compelling case for reform.

My best for your good works. Please let me know how I can be of service in pursuit of your advocacy goals. Let's discuss options and opportunities.

Your response to my messages is always welcomed. Just touch the reply key and tell me what's on your mind. Your feedback comes directly to me!

Feel free to share my messages with family, friends and colleagues....

I value our communications. If your contact information is changing, please jot me a note so I can update my directory, OK?

Jack

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The Advocate's Credo:
Thou art my child, my parent, and my elder,
I love thee best,
But could not love thee half as much,
Loved I not all the rest.