

THE COST OF GUN VIOLENCE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Signs of spring abound and, in spite of a long lasting warm fall, we are ready for it. But we have serious business this spring—primary elections that may be more complicated than ever and an ugly fight that appears to be looming regarding the ninth Supreme Court justice.

Today, as I write this, another mass shooting has occurred. It is past time for our elected officials and the citizenry to recognize the incredible price that our society pays every day for the lack of reasonable regulations. For every individual shot by a firearm, there are hidden costs. If an individual survives a shooting, there are medical bills, often a lengthy rehab, lost wages, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a total disruption of one's personal life. And when the shooting leaves the victim permanently disabled, the cost is even greater to both the victim and his or her family. If the victim dies, the family is often faced with having to reconfigure its life often without a network of support (moral or financial) in addition to an enduring grief and loss.

In the space of time it took me to write the first paragraph, another mass shooting has occurred, the second in 5 days. This time three workers were killed and fourteen were wounded. Seventeen families must face the wounds inflicted by the psychological trauma of sending a loved one to work—an ordinary, everyday activity—and having the workday interrupted by gunfire. Indeed, the community at large must confront the reality that no one knows a murderer's dark intentions even when working alongside this person.

“What Does Gun Violence Really Cost?” asks an article in *Mother Jones* (May-June 2015). Until 1996, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collected data concerning gun violence but the National Rifle Association used its considerable influence to ban the CDC from collecting such data. “Through executive order, Obama lifted the ban two years ago, but the funding still has not been made available. Last month, the House Appropriations Committee rejected an amendment that would allow the CDC to study the causes of gun violence” (*U.S. News and World Report*, Kimberly Leonard). Violence is a public health threat whether involving firearms or not, according to the CDC and the World

Health Organization. We can use any of the following verbs—coerced, bullied or bribed, but the majority in Congress is acquiescing to the belief that ignorance is bliss when it comes to understanding the scope of the destruction wrought by gun violence. Research by Ted Miller, of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, estimates that each murder, on average, costs \$441,000 through direct costs. Miller factored in costs of police response, emergency transport, medical and mental health expenses, legal services and adjudication, and incarceration. Taxpayers pay 87% of the costs--mostly for incarcerating the accused (*Mother Jones*). Indirect costs include potential wages and household productivity losses, costs to the employer, and losses in quality of life. Nationally, this adds up to \$8.6 billion in direct costs, \$49 billion in victims' lost wages and productivity, and \$169 billion in lost quality of life for a grand total of \$221 billion. Ted Miller arrived at these figures through educated estimates and assumptions about the perpetrator and victim based on age, gender, and earning capability. Consider that in 2014, Apple's net worth was \$105 billion; gun violence is costing the U.S. a tremendous amount both in human capital and dollars. The first step is electing people who will take gun violence and its repercussions seriously.

I hope all of you will come to our discussion of the Trans Pacific Pact at the Chapel Hill Public Library on March 19—a most relevant mini-economics course!