

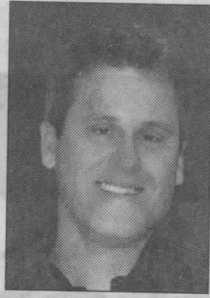
Where do we draw the line?

I fully understand why President Barack Obama, candidate Mitt Romney, Speaker of the House John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid don't want to talk about gun control in the wake of the Aurora, Colo. shootings. I don't want to talk about it either.

Not because I don't think it needs to be discussed, but because we've become inept as a nation talking about anything that stirs emotions. Politicians are concerned with losing votes; I'm concerned about losing the goodwill of friends, neighbors and even family. I'm reluctant to throw more fuel on partisan fires already raging across political divides.

But, the reality is we can't rationally ignore the discussion. As wrong as it would be to jump to conclusions from a news story still unfolding in Colorado, we also can't bury our heads in the sand and refuse to acknowledge the mass murder of 12 people and wounding of nearly 60 others requires serious dialog among our leaders and within the American public. The reaction can't just be: "these things happen."

We'll never know with certainty what caused — and, thus, what could have prevented — the events that unfolded in an Aurora movie theater last Friday night. We won't know anymore than we ever understood Colum-



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bine, Virginia Tech or Fort Hood. We don't understand what internal flaws make someone capable of slaughtering other human beings, nor can we ever isolate the circumstances pushing them to act. But, we can and must explore with an open mind all factors that might contribute.

Police reports indicate alleged Aurora shooter James Holmes purchased more than 6,000 rounds of ammunition through the Internet and a number of guns used in the shooting — including an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle — at various over-the-counter retailers. Thus far, his purchases appear legal under federal, state and local laws.

I know there are those who argue passionately that gun control laws do not curb gun violence. There are even those who insist the absence of a well-armed populace encourages criminal violence. The answers are not crystal clear, and facts can be conflicting. But, the questions will not go away so long as

violent massacres continue to erupt in peaceful settings of everyday life.

The real question is how do we explore cause and remedy if we can't talk about such issues without dividing into camps. Like any subject, weapons laws need to be discussed along a continuum of possibilities, not a binary choice of all or nothing.

The AR-15 is a semi-automatic rifle capable of firing up to 100 rounds of ammunition from a single clip, which the shooter can reload in a matter of seconds. It is, I would argue, a weapon of mass destruction. Remember "WMDs?" We invaded Iraq and occupied that nation for eight years in the name of stopping WMDs. It's something we take pretty serious.

And yet, Congress and President George W. Bush allowed the Assault Weapons Ban against weapons like the AR-15 enacted in 1994 to expire in 2004. Even today, many Americans are staunchly against renewing such a ban.

The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution says: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

However, as an American citizen, I am prohibited from possessing a nuclear weapon. My right to bear arms

of that particular type has been infringed. And, by and large, most of us agree that is a good thing. It is a continuum — not a black-and-white issue. There is a line somewhere. The question is only where our society draws that line.

I personally prefer assault weapons like the AR-15 and AK-47 be kept to the exclusive use of the soldiers we send to war to defend our country. I don't want a 24-year-old loner with possible mental issues to be able to acquire such weapons. That's one place I draw the line.

There are those on the other side of the debate who say they need such weapons to protect themselves. From what, I ask? Some openly declare such stockpiles are necessary as a line of defense against our own government. This is the same government, mind you, controlling the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Don't private citizens need to stockpile those too, then, if protection from the government is the name of the game?

Again, where do we draw the line? Can we at least talk about it this time?

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