April 23, 2007 The senseless and horrific killings last week on the campus of Virginia Tech University reinforced an uneasy feeling many Americans experienced after September 11th: namely, that government cannot protect us. No matter how many laws we pass, no matter how many police or federal agents we put on the streets, a determined individual or group still can cause great harm. Perhaps the only good that can come from these terrible killings is a reinforced understanding that we as individuals are responsible for our safety and the safety of our families. Although Virginia does allow individuals to carry concealed weapons if they first obtain a permit, college campuses within the state are specifically exempted. Virginia Tech, like all Virginia colleges, is therefore a gun-free zone, at least for private individuals. And as we witnessed, it didn't matter how many guns the police had. Only private individuals on the scene could have prevented or lessened this tragedy. Prohibiting guns on campus made the Virginia Tech students less safe, not more. The Virginia Tech tragedy may not lead directly to more gun control, but I fear it will lead to more people control. Thanks to our media and many government officials, Americans have become conditioned to view the state as our protector and the solution to every problem. Whenever something terrible happens, especially when it becomes a national news story, people reflexively demand that government do something. This impulse almost always leads to bad laws and the loss of liberty. It is completely at odds with the best American traditions of self-reliance and rugged individualism. Do we really want to live in a world of police checkpoints, surveillance cameras, and metal detectors? Do we really believe government can provide total security? Do we want to involuntarily commit every disaffected, disturbed, or alienated person who fantasizes about violence? Or can we accept that liberty is more important than the illusion of state-provided security? I fear that Congress will use this terrible event to push for more government mandated mental health programs. The therapeutic nanny state only encourages individuals to view themselves as victims, and reject personal responsibility for their actions. Certainly there are legitimate organic mental illnesses, but it is the role of doctors and families, not the government, to diagnose and treat such illnesses. Freedom is not defined by safety. Freedom is defined by the ability of citizens to live without government interference. Government cannot create a world without risks, nor would we really wish to live in such a fictional place. Only a totalitarian society would even claim absolute safety as a worthy ideal, because it would require total state control over its citizens' lives. Liberty has meaning only if we still believe in it when terrible things happen and a false government security blanket beckons.