

The terrible violence in Arizona last weekend prompted much national discussion on many issues. All Americans are united in their sympathies for the victims and their families. All wonder what could motivate such a horrible act. However, some have attempted to use this tragedy to discredit philosophical adversaries or score political points. This sort of opportunism is simply despicable.

We are fortunate to live in a society where violence is universally denounced. Not one public official or commentator has attempted to justify this reprehensible act, yet the newspapers, internet, and airwaves are full of people trying to claim it was somehow motivated by someone else's political rhetoric. Most disturbing are the calls to use government power to censor certain forms of speech, and even outlaw certain types of criticism of public officials. This was the completely apolitical act of a violent and disturbed man. How sad that the attempted murder of the Congresswoman who had just read the First Amendment on the House floor would be used in efforts to chill free speech! Perhaps some would feel safer if the Alien and Sedition Acts were reinstated.

Also troubling are the renewed calls for stricter gun control laws, and for government to "do something" to somehow prevent similar incidents in the future. This always seems to be the knee jerk reaction to any crime committed with a gun. Nonsensical proposals to outlaw guns around federal officials and install bulletproof barriers in the congressional gallery only reinforce the growing perception that politicians view their own lives as far more important than the lives of ordinary citizens. Politicians and a complicit media have conditioned many citizens to view government as our protector, leading to more demands for government action whenever tragedies occur. But this impulse is at odds with the best American traditions of self-reliance and individualism, and it also leads to bad laws and the loss of liberty.

Remember - liberty only has meaning if we still believe in it when terrible things happen and more government security is demanded. Government cannot make us safe by mandating security any more than it can make us prosperous by decreeing an end to poverty.

We need to reaffirm the core American value of individual responsibility. Consider the young man who had the courage to tackle the shooter and prevent further carnage because he himself had a concealed weapon. Without that gun, he could have been yet another sitting duck.

When peaceful citizens are armed, they at least have a chance against armed criminals.

Advocates of gun control would urge us to leave our safety to law enforcement, but eyewitness reports indicate it took police as much as 20 minutes to arrive on the scene that day! Since police cannot be everywhere all of the time, a large part of our personal safety depends on our ability to defend ourselves.

Our constitutional right to bear arms does not create a society without risks of violent crime, and neither would the strictest gun control laws. Guns and violence are a fact of life. The question is whether it is preferable to be defenseless while waiting for the police, or to have the option to arm yourself. We certainly know criminals prefer the former.