

How many lives will be further ruined by the lack of mental health care screening, treatment?

Five children were injured in May in two separate incidents involving bounce houses, those huge inflatable amusement devices often rented for carnivals and parties. Sure, parents should be concerned about allowing their children to play on a potentially dangerous device. The Consumer Product Safety Commission will open an investigation, according to USA Today, in light of the fact that at least 10 inflatables collapsed or blew away in 2011, and injuries more than doubled from 2008 to 2010.

It's great that a trend was identified, and action taken fairly quickly to look into the aspects of inflatables that might cause harm.

But that doesn't happen every time someone is injured or killed. Some we get used to.

When two students created a massacre at Columbine School in 1999 - 15 years ago now - killing 13 and injuring at least 24, one would have reasonably expected that Americans - politicians and citizens; parents and children; law enforcement, gun advocates and gun critics - would have all come together to take action to stem such senseless violence. But in the intervening years, names and places such as Tucson, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech and the Columbia Mall have added more faces to the tragic stories. Add Isla Vista, Calif., to that list, where 22-year-old Elliott Rodger allegedly stabbed his roommates and then shot three more people while injuring 13 in the area around the University of California Santa Barbara, before killing himself May 23. The ready availability of guns and other weapons, combined with inadequate mental health screening and treatment results in tragedy after tragedy after tragedy.

The evident pain expressed by Michael Martinez, the father of Isla Vista victim

Christopher Michaels-Martinez, might have been prevented had the law-enforcement authorities who did a “wellness check” on Rodger had done a better background check. Rodger’s parents expressed concern over videos their son had made and posted on YouTube, prompting the visit to the young man’s home. The authorities apparently didn’t watch the videos for themselves, or check a database that showed that Rodger had recently (and legally) purchased several weapons and ammunition. Rodger eventually admitted before his rampage that had they entered his home and seen his weapons, they would have foiled his plans to wreak havoc.

How much more outrage will it take for Congress to act to plug the holes in the universal background check system to eliminate the shield for private sales? When even an attack on a federal congresswoman – doing her job, listening to constituents at a public forum at a grocery store – cannot prompt action, then Congress must be stalemated indeed.

How many lives will be further ruined by the lack of mental health care screening and treatment programs? Life is tough for all of us; for some those challenges can become crippling. And for some, when their disease is not under control, they become dangerous, to themselves and to others.

“When will this insanity stop?” Richard Martinez asked after his son was shot. “When will enough people say, ‘Stop this madness; we don’t have to live like this’? Too many have died. We should say to ourselves: Not one more.”

According to Catholic News Service, since the May 23 shooting in California, the state’s lawmakers have been busy re-examining the state’s gun-control laws. A new bill was introduced May 28 in the state Legislature that would allow friends or family members concerned that someone may commit a violent act to notify law enforcement officials. The bill also would allow police to investigate the threat and request a restraining order from a judge preventing the person from purchasing a firearm or keeping one they already own.

Will such laws be enough, without additional public support for enhanced mental health treatment? Who needs to be convinced that this problem begs for a solution? Can we begin today?