

In our society, fact is no match for fear

It was the kind of a statistic that would have left a sane country stunned and shamed.

This country barely noticed it. It came last month, courtesy of the Washington Post, which reported that, as of mid-October, toddlers in America have been shooting people this year at a rate of one a week. You know how the story goes. Little one finds an inadequately-secured gun and starts playing with it, too young to know that death lurks inside. The thing goes off with a bang, leaving a hole — sometimes a fatal one — in human flesh.

Sometimes it's Da-da. Sometimes, it's Nana. Sometimes, it's the toddler himself.

That's how it was for Darnal Mundy II. As detailed by Charles Rabin in Tuesday's Miami Herald, Darnal, age 3, was looking for an iPad one morning in early August when he climbed a chair and opened the top drawer of his

father's dresser. Instead of a tablet computer, he found a Smith & Wesson. With the gun pointing directly at his face, he pulled the trigger. A .40-caliber bullet struck him between the eyes, exiting the left side of his skull.

Improbably, Darnal survived. More improbably after brain surgery and rehab in a Miami hospital, he is walking, talking, laughing and playing and has recently begun feeding himself. Darnal still lacks full use of his right arm and leg, but seems, in most other respects, to be perfectly fine, not counting the depressed area on the left side of his head where doctors removed a piece of his skull.

He and his family, it seems superfluous to say, were very lucky. Indeed, they were blessed.

The gun that so nearly proved fatal is now kept disassembled in a safe. We do not know why Darnal's father, who works as a fitness atten-



Leonard Pitts

dant, feels the need to own it in the first place. But who would be shocked if it turned out that he keeps it for home security? Putting aside the crackpots who think they're going to have to defend Texas against the U.S. Army, that seems the most common rationale for gun ownership. People fear being caught empty-handed when the bad guys come.

It is, of course, a fear completely at odds with statistical fact.

Like the fact that, according to the FBI, crime has fallen to historic lows and your life, property and

person are safer now than they have been in decades.

Like the fact that, according to the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, for every gun that is used to wound or kill in self-defense, four are used in accidental shootings.

Like the fact that toddlers are now shooting themselves and others at the rate of one a week.

But it's not just that fact is no match for fear; it's that we live in a media culture that has the effect of maintaining fear in perpetuity, keeping it a low-grade fever simmering within the body politic, a heat that abides, but never abates.

A 2014 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, for instance, found that exposure to violent crime on TV dramas intensifies the fear that one may become a victim. "CSI," anyone? And a 2003 study from the same source found that the more people watch local

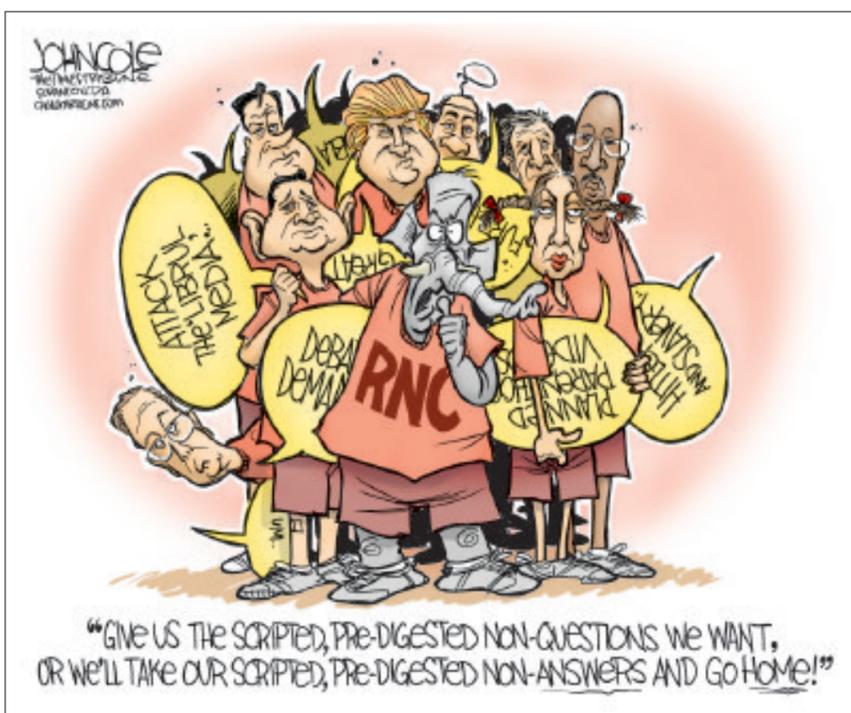
TV news — where if it bleeds, it leads — the greater their fear of crime.

And here, it bears repeating: We have less to fear from crime now than we've had in many years.

But, though lacking cause to fear, we fear just the same, fear all the more, making life and death decisions about personal security based on perceptions that have little to do with reality. We fixate on stopping the stranger kicking in the front door. Meantime, there goes the toddler, balancing atop the chair, chubby little hands closing on the gun in the top drawer.

The irony is as sharp as the bang of a gunshot down the hall. We fear so many things. But some things, we don't fear nearly enough.

(Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald. Readers may contact him via e-mail at lpitts@miamiherald.com.)



It's a cruel apprenticeship where the boss is fired

It seems Jobs "Rn't" theirs at Toys "R" Us.

Breitbart News uncovered a particularly flagrant example of H-1B visa abuse at Toys "R" Us. The story is particularly timely in the wake of the exchange between Donald Trump and Marco Rubio at the CNBC Inquisition.

Rubio wants to greatly expand usage of the H-1B visa program that ostensibly brings in foreign workers to do jobs Americans are not qualified to perform. Rubio justifies his support with the rationalization that if there are abuses, those companies shouldn't be allowed to participate in the program.

I can only conclude, sadly, that Marco is not among the readers of my column.

Exploiters of the H-1B loophole use foreign workers to fill jobs that Americans are fully capable of filling. Even the state of California does it as you can read here.

According to Breitbart, "Other companies that have displaced American workers in favor of H-1B visa laborers include Disney in Florida,



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Southern California Edison, Harley Davidson Wisconsin, Cargill in Minnesota, Pfizer in Connecticut, and Xerox in New York."

And in spite of Rubio's recycling H-1B supporters' false claim that we need more Americans trained in the IT and STEM fields, the truth is "there are far more U.S. graduates with STEM and IT degrees than there are jobs available."

I will give Toys "R" Us credit for creativity in tossing Americans on to the unemployment heap. Where Disney and Southern California Edison subjected its employees to the exquisitely cruel assignment of training the people one-on-one who would be filling your desk chair before it had time to grow cold, Toys trained the trainer.

Employees in the account-

ing department (American's can't do bookkeeping? Who knew?) were stalked by employees from the Tata Consultancy Services who watched their every move and then produced "intricate manuals" for TCS workers back in India who would then perform the work Americans were perfectly willing to do.

As one employee who had worked for Toys for almost 12 years lamented, "Why am I sitting here showing this man how to do my job when they are taking it away from me and sending it to India?" Once the information extraction was complete, 67 citizens lost their jobs.

Before Marco Rubio comes out in favor of tripling the size of this American displacement program again, I suggest he meet individually with laid off employees from Disney, Toys, Harley Davidson or Xerox and ask them how well the program is working.

(Michael Reagan is a political consultant. Send comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.)

Who would want this job?

It's like a train wreck. Fascinating, repellent and loud, all at the same time. Talking about the American presidential sweepstakes. And, as ratings for the last few debates seem to indicate, very hard to look away. It was Winston Churchill who called our election process, "a circus wrapped in a game show covered in poisonous weasel glitter." And if he didn't, he should have.

Look at how we treat these poor people. Gang debates. Smug interrogators. Partisan witch hunts. Hostile examinations. Substandard lecterns. Marathon fund-raisers with cold congealed Swedish meatballs in a watery mustard sauce.

What we end up with is scarred, dehydrated, emotional wrecks confused by simple math and their shoes. And that's another question: Who would want this job? What kind of crazy masochistic flippo-unit voluntarily undertakes this mission of barbarous self-flagellation? Not just jumping into the flaming crucible of brutish internecine combat, but dragging their families along with them? You would not be far off concluding that anybody who can be elected president, shouldn't be.

Even the serious candidates quickly turn into bewildered patsies sentenced to months of trudging through Iowa and New Hampshire mud. Constantly dodging teams of opposition researchers looking for anything



Will Durst

resembling dirt. And forced to eat gas station sushi.

There has got to be a better way to pick the leader of the free world. The system we have now is much too long, totally fractious, unseemly, indecorous, vicious and unbecoming. Put those all together and what do you get: Television.

If we're going to run this like a reality show, let's run it like a reality show. We already got them jumping through hoops, all we need are enough cameras to capture the action. It's an award-winning, mini-series waiting for the right producer.

Auction off the rights to the highest bidding network and let them fold it into one of their signature franchises. "America's Next Top Politician." "Dancing With the Office-Seekers." "Keeping up with the Roosevelts." "So You Think You Can Negotiate with Putin?" "Hell's Campaign Trail." "America's Got BS." The Real Hypocrites of Washington D.C." "Project Inauguration." Just insert some loophole that keeps CNBC out of the running.

"Apprentice" morphed into "Celebrity Apprentice," why not "Presidential

Apprentice"? Let Donald Trump experience the joy of being fired from both ends. CBS could transform their hour each week to "The Amazing Race: Oval Office." Only a few disgruntled campaign managers would quibble with calling it "The Biggest Loser."

Many shows wouldn't need any alteration. "Big Brother" sort of already tangentially fits. As does "The Real World," in a vague ironic sense. "Shark Tank," definitely. "American Idol," yeah, right, dream on. "The Voice," or more aptly, "The Lack of Voice."

With the show's emphasis on backstabbing and blindsiding, "Survivor: Foggy Bottom" is almost a perfect fit. We could even mimic the format and offer clues to help contestants find hidden immunity idols. "Congratulations. You may skip Nevada and South Carolina and go straight to Super Tuesday."

A number of reality show conventions could be adopted and/or adapted. The weekly weigh in when they strip down to their undies would immediately trigger Must See TV.

And finally, forget the hand on the Bible, on Jan. 21, 2017, Chief Justice Roberts offers up to the incoming president ... one single red rose.

(Will Durst is a columnist and comedian. Email Will at durst@caglecartoons.com.)

Your Opinion

Treat teachers with dignity, fairness

Editor:

I write about the contract talks between the Newton Board of Education and the Newton Education Association. As someone with negotiation experience spanning public defense to Wall Street, I am certain that the board's choice to highlight Dr. Jake Mull's compensation was a significant moment.

If negotiations are to produce a fair resolution, respect and transparency are crucial. The board's tactic was anything but that. First, the move was clearly intended to cause the Newton Education Association members to turn on one another and, in so doing, destroy their bargaining power. This was simply a bully tactic.

Furthermore, the board was deceptive, as it did not explain what Dr. Mull's compensation includes (i.e., what he earns for teaching extra classes, coaching two athletic

and two academic teams, completing additional duties, and completing advanced degrees). Should we not compensate educators commensurate with their workload and level of training? Ignoring these factors would be illogical. Shame on the board for thinking that the Newton Education Association and the public would be so naive as to swallow this misleading figure whole.

I would not be where I am today without the foundation that the Newton High School teachers gave me. I arrived at Harvard with a Newton education, not an elite prep school background. These teachers armed me for success. If we are to hope that they will be able to do so for future students, we should be treating them with dignity and fairness.

Board members, how long until you truly fail the Newton students? By causing these educators to shift their focus from the classroom to your attempts to strong-arm

them, I believe you already have.

**Rachel Endick
Newton High School
valedictorian, Class of 2007
Harvard College,
Class of 2011
Harvard Law School,
Class of 2016**

Sharp left turn

Editor:

The 1961 presidential inaugural speech by John F. Kennedy will long be remembered for the famous quotation, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

In listening to the current presidential debates, one cannot help but to wonder how the Democratic candidates took such a sharp turn to the left. Sounds like their philosophy is now, "Ask not what you can do for your country, ask what your country can do for you."

**Mary Burkhardt
Sandyston**

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