

What's the answer to gun violence? More guns

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Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

That emotional, knee-jerk reaction you're hearing to the massacre of a dozen people and the wounding of five times as many in a Colorado movie house isn't coming from the gun-control crowd.

Oh, you'll hear a few scattered voices arguing that had the Brady bill not been allowed to lapse almost eight years ago, suspect James E. Holmes might not have carried an assault weapon equipped with a 100-round drum magazine into a crowded theater.

But Republicans are wedded to the National Rifle Association, Democrats are scared witless of the gun issue and many Americans aren't sure laws already on the books function adequately.

No, what really stands out is the number of people who are willing to use this rampage as a springboard for even fewer restraints on guns.

Take Congressman Louie Gohmert, R-Texas. He was less curious about how Holmes acquired his weaponry than why someone else in the auditorium wasn't armed as well.

"Well it does make me wonder, you know with all those people in the theater, was there nobody that was carrying that could've stopped this guy more quickly?" Gohmert said.

Then there's Idaho Carry, Open and Concealed founder Tony Snesko of Hidden Springs near Boise, who elsewhere on this page writes that the carnage just shows the need for more guns in public.

"Holmes may have reconsidered his attack in that theater had the open carrying of guns in Colorado been allowed and as prevalent as it is in Arizona and as we are promoting in Idaho," Snesko said. "A 'No Firearms' sign translated means, 'You may not defend yourself or your family on these premises.'"

Who can forget state Rep. Marv Hagedorn's reaction to last summer's murder-suicide at Moscow? Before turning a gun on himself, former University of Idaho psychology professor Ernesto Bustamante shot and killed his former lover, Katy Benoit, and then roamed the community with an arsenal in his car.

"I would recommend that instead of running away from the Second Amendment of our nation's Constitution and the Constitution of Idaho, that the U of I use this terrible experience to embrace

both and start teaching gun safety and proper use that ALWAYS includes the ugly side of the misuse of a gun such as has happened in this case," Hagedorn wrote UI President Duane Nellis.

Hagedorn, R-Meridian, was at the vanguard of Idaho's response to the killing of 32 people and wounding of 17 more when Seung-Hui Cho opened fire at Virginia Tech in 2007: equipping college students on Idaho's public campuses with concealed weapons. Pleas for restraint from Idaho's college and university presidents as well as the State Board of Education didn't dissuade Hage-

dorn and his House colleagues from passing it. Over in the more sober Senate, the measure disappeared.

But it's a cinch you're going to see more of this kind of thing. With backing from the gun lobby, the laws governing concealed weapons are being loosened. Only a handful of states still give cops the right to say "no" to a permit request. Most states, including Idaho, issue concealed weapons permits as a matter of right to any upstanding citizen.

Not to mention measures aimed at requiring states with more restrictive concealed weapons laws to honor rights of people holding permits from other states.

Or even the "stand your ground" laws at the heart of George Zimmerman's defense in Florida.

Not that it's going to help stop the next lone gunman. If a contingent of fully armed and trained Secret Service agents couldn't prevent John Hinckley from critically wounding President Ronald Reagan in 1981, how will a group of ordinary citizens perform in a moment of blinding insanity? What's to stop well-meaning citizens from shooting other innocents? And how will cops arriving at the scene tell the good guns from the bad guns?

Idahoans of a certain age remember being shouted down by seemingly irrational gun-control zealots who were reacting to political assassination and inner-city violence of the 1960s.

Today, the voices are just as loud and just as irrational. But they're coming from the other side. - M.T.