

editorial page  
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## Editorial....

### Violence in our schools... Columbine relived this week

The three fatal school incidents over the past week have certainly opened our eyes to what can happen, even in places where violence is the last thing residents would expect. The comments, "how could this have happened here," were echoed from shocked residents in Colorado, less than an hour from where the tragic Columbine shootings took place about seven years ago, from a rural Amish school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and a school in Wisconsin. In each case a weapon was taken into the school, and in each incident people were killed. Where will it stop, and what can we do to make sure nothing like this ever happens in our schools? How can we protect our kids from psychos, bent on making a name for themselves?

After the tragedy at Columbine, school districts far and wide installed security devices in their buildings. Schools were, for the most part, like fortresses. It was very difficult for people who didn't belong to find their way in. The number one priority was to keep kids safe. Quite frankly, for some time after the Columbine massacre, it was very difficult to get into a public school. Many had officers in place, watching for people who looked like they didn't belong.

Even though that may still be the focus, times has a way of helping us to forget. The incidents across the nation during the current school year, and there have been many more than most people realize, certainly indicate that those measures to keep unauthorized people out of school buildings need to be looked at again. We need to demand from our school officials that our kids are as safe as can be expected, that the buildings aren't protected solely by a "report to the office" sign on the door, and that strangers on school campuses are confronted and questioned.

The incident in Colorado last week reflected the nightmares that many of us had after the incident seven years ago. It should never have happened.

A strange man, many claim was homeless, in this 50s, sat in a vehicle in the school parking lot. He didn't go unnoticed, but nobody thought it was odd that this stranger sat alone, drinking alcohol, in a school parking lot while school was in session. At some point he left his vehicle. Armed, he entered the school building, chose a classroom, and took over. He selected a handful of girls, is alleged to have sexually abused or, at the least, fondled them, and then waited for police to make the next move. They did. He managed to kill a popular 16-year-old girl before he cowardly took his own life.

On Monday a very similar incident took place at an Amish school in Pennsylvania. A milk truck driver, said to be a good father, a hard worker, decided it was time to make a name for himself. With perverted sex on his mind, plenty of materials, weapons and ammunition in his hands, he entered the one-room schoolhouse. Like the sicko in Colorado, he chose little girls, between the ages of ix and 13, to be his victims. When the cops showed up he shot each one of his 11 victims. At least five are now dead. He too took the coward's way out with a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The Wisconsin incident involved a teenager mad at his high school principal. He simply took a gun to school and shot the principal dead.

These three incidents certainly have made the headlines over the past week. But I was surprised, no shocked, to learn that there have already been 24 incidents involving weapons at public school in the United States since the school year began. And it's only the first of October! These incidents certainly didn't all result in deaths. Many were quelled before they were started. But enough of them weren't to make us all realize that something needs to be done.

President Bush commented on the problem this week. But it's not up to the Federal government to make policies to address gun violence in our schools. If that were the case, we would be waiting forever for decisions to be made.

I feel it should be up to each individual school district to develop a plan to ensure that they don't end up on CNN because some nut decided to make a name for his (of her) self. Many policies are already in place. Most of the equipment that is needed to make our schools safe is already in place. We need to make sure that it's used as was intended.

When the Columbine shootings happened, our current senior class was not yet in middle school. The current crop of seventh graders were just starting kindergarten. School district officials need to pull their staff, students and community members together to explain policies concerning school safety. Students need to know what to do if something strange ever happens in their presence. That same network that worked so well after Columbine, to make sure someone knows when something doesn't "look right," needs to be reinforced.

Safety in our schools begins at our schools, not with an act of Congress, or in Albany. School district officials need to be sure that parents know their kids are safe when they're dropped off at school each morning, and remain safe all day.

Certainly, no building or individual is ever 100 percent safe. But doing our best to be sure that our kids are not the next victims of a nut with a grudge, a sick mind or a dream that tells him to abuse little girls, can run free through the halls of our schools, armed like a commando, and hell bent on making a name for himself at the expense of school children.

Let's make sure that Gouverneur, Russell, DeKalb Junction, Star Lake, Harrisville, Hammond or any other community in Northern New York where kids go to school, never ends up in the national headlines.

Demand that our schools are as safe as possible. After all, it's our kids who are the potential victims!

-Dick Sterling

### Office of the Aging program

St. Lawrence County Office for the Aging will be managing a disease and care management program funded by the New York State Department of Health.

The program is called "St. Lawrence County Cares" and will provide mental health and physical health support to select Medicaid recipients, age 18 - 64, in St. Lawrence County.

By Rev. Connie Seifert

Jim Jones told his followers to think of him as both Christ and God in human form. He said that the Jonestown community he was creating in Africa would be free of racism and poverty.

Publicly he was committed to helping the downtrodden and disadvantaged of his day. Away from he public eye, he brutalized those who disagreed with him. He was addicted to drugs. In 1977, he was responsible for the deaths of over 900 people. He gave them poisoned drinks. Jim, himself, was found with a single gunshot wound to the head.

David Koresh was excommunicated from the Seventh Day Adventists when he was a teenager. As an adult, he proclaimed himself to be the Christian Messiah. Followers later reported that he claimed any woman he wanted from among their wives and daughters.

In 1993, 76 of his followers died with him in a fire after a 51-day siege in Waco, Texas. Autopsy reports showed that at least 20 had been shot including five children. His surviving followers continue to wait for his return to earth.

Timothy McVeigh grew up a devout Roman Catholic. He was a registered Republican and a member of the National Rifle Association. On April 19, 1995 he blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building killing 168 people, injuring 850 others and damaging 300 buildings in Oklahoma City.

There is an email circulating now which begins with a list of terrorist attacks. All are attributed to Muslims, and were, in fact, carried out by terrorists who followed the Islamic faith. Readers of this email are encouraged to boycott a certain holiday stamp, which commemorates two Muslim Holy Days.

The letter begins with this statement: "How ironic is this? They don't even believe in Christ but they're getting their own Christmas stamp...." "They" refers to Muslims.

Since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001, those who are Muslims have been subject to discrimination and hatred. This email is one example.

Not all Muslims are terrorists anymore than all Christian ministers are murderers like Jim Jones, or fanatics like David Koresh. Nor are all terrorists Muslims. The citizens of Oklahoma City know this.

The stamp we are being asked to boycott is not a Christmas stamp. It was designed long before there was a 9/11 bombing, at a time when we honored and respected different world religions. It is part of a Holiday Celebration Series, which includes stamps for Hannukah, Kwanzaa and Thanksgiving. The Arabic words on this particular stamp mean, "blessed festival."

The two Muslim holidays commemorated are Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha.

The first is a three day celebration which comes at the end of a month of fasting and praying called Ramadan. It will be celebrated on October 23rd of this year.

The second holy day comes after an annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. It is a remembrance of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. (The Christian story tells of the near sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac.) The Muslim holy day of Eid Al-Adha will be celebrated on December 29th of this year.

The terrorists who blew up the World Trade Center, as well as those who committed the other acts of terror listed in this email hated everyone who did not think exactly the way they did. They were willing to kill innocent civilians. They were willing to die themselves.

Their children and grandchildren will inherit this legacy of fanatic hate. Their descendants may or may not become terrorists. But the fact remains that there are 2-6 million Muslims living in the United States. They are not all terrorists. They do not all hate Americans. Most of them are law-abiding American citizens themselves.

This email stirs up the same kind of blind hate that fuels terrorism. It blames the Muslim religion as a whole instead of the terrorists who did the killing. Do we blame Christianity for people like Jim Jones, David Koresh or Timothy McVeigh? They all claimed to be followers of the God who sent Jesus.

Do we need to outlaw the Republican party or the National Rifle Association because of Timothy McVeigh? Of course not. Nor do we want to make a big deal out of the fact that Timothy was Roman Catholic. He was a terrorist who was responsible for the deaths of innocent people.

This Christmas stamp email implies that Muslims had some part in designing, selling and thus

profiting from the sale of this stamp. There is no Muslim connection. The stamp was designed, marketed and all proceeds go to the United States Postal Service.

This email suggests that a patriotic American and/or a good Christian will want to boycott this stamp. It implies that this postage stamp commemorating holy days of the Islamic religion an evil enterprise which supports and promotes terrorism.

Terrorism is an evil enterprise. All religions may be carried to extremes by extremists. Since 9/11 we have become highly suspicious of the Islamic faith and the words contained in their holy book, The Koran. All holy writings may be taken out of context, are open to interpretation and may be used as the justification for terrible actions.

Christians fought against Christians during the Civil War. Both sides used the Bible as justification for their viewpoints - upholding slavery as an institution blessed by God; or as an unacceptable way to treat other human beings.

Did you know that the Bible condones a father selling his daughter into slavery? (Exodus 21:7) Slavery was part and parcel of daily life when the Bible was written. Slavery became part and parcel of our economy in the early days of this nation. It took a long and bloody war to change that. There was no blanket condemnation of The Holy Bible or all Christians because of slavery. The blanket condemnation of The Koran and Muslims fails to understand the wholly human face

### Letter to the Editor Dirty water cited at GHS

To the Editor,  
I hope, with the next round of renovations at Gouverneur Central School, the management picks a contractor that at least knows that water runs downhill!

Every night, when I clean the brand new change rooms, I have to try and sweep the shower water from room back into the shower room, and then uphill, back into the drains.

As taxpayers, we should be real proud that our kids have to walk through somebody else's dirty water!

I hope when they put in the new roofs they work better than this.

Ed Jones  
A disgusted worker  
And taxpayer  
Gouverneur

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