

Giron and Morse: profiles in courage

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The China Post brought news last week that two Colorado Democrats lost closely observed recall elections in the state senate, clear victims of gun-rights activists.

On the heels of mass shootings in Colorado and Connecticut, state senator Angela Giron and Colorado state senate president John Morse had voted in favor of moderate gun control reform. The two politicians paid a high price for following their conscience.

The pro-gun lobby in the United States targeted Giron and Morse in recent widely placed negative advertising before the recall vote. Passionate pro-gun rights grass root supporters personally painted and distributed campaign signs to bring the two down. After the election, jubilant supporters of the recall movement quickly leapt onto the Internet and wondered aloud if President Barack Obama could suffer the same fate.

Obama has of course used the bully pulpit of the White House to bemoan the ease with which gun enthusiasts can purchase weapons and bullets (a nasty word, that one) in the United States. He failed in Congress to bring home the bacon on gun control reform, however, and will almost certainly not attempt it again.

Of what laws, we might ask, were senators Giron and Morse “guilty” of supporting?

One of the laws set a limit to 15 rounds of ammunition magazines on new guns sold in the state of Colorado. Would someone please explain to my wooden head how civilians can justify the use of guns that fire more than 15 rounds of ammo at a single time?

The other legislation Giron and Morse favored expanded background checks on people wanting to buy guns on line and for personal use. I am all for privacy rights, individual freedom and all that jazz, but feel it is only reasonable for law officials to know a bit about people who buy guns and such behind the shadowy screen of the Internet.

Bear in mind recent events in the United States that have led to soul-searching on issues related to acts of mass violence, and the proliferation of automatic weapons and gross caches of ammunition on the part of mentally unbalanced individuals. Recall the state of Colorado and the sleepy, nondescript, ho-hum community of Aurora, where a man killed 12 and injured 70 in a movie theater one weekend night in July, 2012.

And then came the Sandy Hook tragedy — only 6 months later — in which 26 children and 6 adults lost their lives to a troubled mind who later ended his life with (sigh) some of his leftover ammunition.

Unbelievable, you say? Well, no. Probably every culture in the world, like every person in the world, operates with a personality of sorts that is occasionally not completely healthy.

The United States is in some ways a sick society. The country has a lot of good in it, and does much good for the world, sure. But our national obsession with guns and violence is a million miles away from the meaning of “healthy.”

From my humble niche in Taipei, about as distant from Colorado as a body can possibly be, I take my hat off to former state senators Giron and Morse. Madame and Sir, you did the right thing with your votes on gun control, even if it got you fired. You are profiles in courage.

As a senator from the state of Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy co-authored a book he published in 1957 entitled “Profiles in Courage.” The actual author of most of the text was his legislative assistant and speech-writer, Theodore Sorensen.

“Profiles” was a collection of biographies of eight United States senators who put their political lives on the line by voting on controversial issues according to their conscience, not according to what would make them popular with their constituents. Subsequent historians have criticized the JFK-Sorensen text on a few sensitive points, but the central light of the book has shone brightly now for over 50 years.

There are times in life when it is especially right to follow a moral conscience. Others may disagree with our decisions, but we must do what seems right in our deepest inner selves.

Ms. Giron and Mr. Morse, profiles in courage, though now tossed unceremoniously from public office, you did the right thing by standing against violence. Many of us are with you in spirit.

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