



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 23, 2013

## Study to Resolve Mental Health Loophole and Gun Ownership Touted

The front page of Sunday's *New York Times* led with a nearly 5,000-word essay by two journalists amping up the volume in the latest attack on the Second Amendment entitled with "[When the Right to Bear Arms Includes the Mentally Ill](#)." The motive was clear from the beginning: There's a mental illness "loophole" in the law that allows crazies to walk the streets and something must be done about it.

The article opens with the story of a psychiatric patient, Mark Russo, who threatened to shoot his mother if police tried to take the arsenal of weapons he had cached at her home. He was off his meds for paranoid schizophrenia, said the authors, and that caused him to go crazy. But now that he's back on his meds, wrote the horrified investigators, he'll be able to get his guns back shortly. They added:

The Russo case highlights a central, unresolved issue in the debate over balancing public safety with the Second Amendment right to bear arms: just how powerless law enforcement can be when it comes to keeping firearms out of the hands of people who are mentally ill.

The Gun Control Act of 1968 [restricts](#) "prohibited persons" from purchasing firearms, including those addicted to "controlled substances," those involuntarily committed to a mental institution or who have been judged to be incompetent or dangerous, and those who have received a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity. The "problem," according to the authors, is that the states have differing and constantly changing definitions of mental illness, and many of them don't report those who suffer from such illness to the national gun registration database, the [NICS](#). This "loophole" puts the public in danger, according to the authors, who invested hundreds of hours poring over more than 1,000 court and police records "in which guns were seized in mental-health-related episodes." What they found were cases where individuals deemed mentally ill were allowed to have their weapons returned to them even though they might possibly be dangerous.

There was the story of Ryan Piatt, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, who suffered from depression, anxiety, and paranoia upon his return to the states. He had done simply awful things, according to the reporters, such as making "intimations of violence to his psychiatrist" — the authors fail to note exactly what they were — and trying to renounce his citizenship. Despite these extreme examples of mental instability, according to the writers, Piatt was able to have his guns returned to him.

There was one Curtis Zetterman, a resident of Caribou, Maine, who, according to the article, "was sent to a hospital after talking about shooting people" and "later [was] accused of threatening a neighbor with a gun." The charge that Zetterman illegally possessed the firearm was dismissed, and he never went to jail. This conflicts with the story [reported by Maine's Bangor Daily News \(BDN\)](#) which the reporters apparently overlooked while doing their research. According to *BDN*, the judge in the case, U.S. District Court Judge John Woodcock, sentenced Zetterman to five years of probation after he pleaded guilty to the charge, adding that if the defendant ever possessed a gun again, "nobody will



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prevent me from sending you to jail.”

Apparently that didn't fit the narrative and so the *Times'* story was modified to make it fit.

Reference was made in the article to a study conveniently released earlier in December from a consortium of college professors, mental health “experts,” and gun control advocates, innocuously entitled “Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness: An Evidence-based Approach for State Policy.” That study was released [following a conference](#) at the University of Virginia more accurately entitled “From Virginia Tech to the Navy Yard: New Approaches to Keeping Guns from Dangerous People.” Said UVA law professor Richard Bonnie, head of the conference and leader of the consortium:

We want to make a contribution to this debate by finding common ground on policy proposals that would really have a prospect of reducing the risk of gun violence — not only among people with mental illness, but *also among other people who are at an elevated risk of gun violence*. [Emphasis added.]

The time is right. These are sensible recommendations. And there's nothing [in the report] that's too big a stretch....

There's going to be a set of policies that relate to the federal background check system and we want to make that more effective.

Clarifying the report's intent to address mental illness, restrictions on gun ownership, and enhanced background checks, another professor who contributed to the consortium's study, Johns Hopkins professor Shannon Frattaroli, said:

[Despite the fact that] people with mental illness are responsible for only about 4 percent of the violence in society ... we want to do a better job of keeping guns out of the hands of people with mental illness ... *but we think the focus should not be exclusively on people with mental illness*. [Emphasis added.]

That the consortium's study was going to be polemic rather than balanced was clear in its introduction:

These rare events [the Navy Yard shooting, Sandy Hook, etc.] need to be seen in the context of the broader problem of firearms-related injury and mortality in the population: an estimated 31,000 people die and 74,000 suffer non-fatal gunshot injuries each year.

On the day of the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December, 2012, an estimated 85 other people died of gunshot injuries throughout the US, including gang shootings, intimate partner attacks, and suicides, another 85 died the day before, and the day after.

Mental illness is only the excuse for this gathering of left-wing professors; it's much more about using it as an opening wedge to get at the real problem: citizens owning guns. From the report:

Although major mental illnesses are associated with increased risk of violent acts, *policies targeted at this group alone will be ineffective at reducing the vast majority of violence towards others....* [Emphasis added.]

Current federal policies do not adequately reduce access to firearms by individuals.... Future gun violence prevention policy efforts should use evidence-based criteria shown to increase the risk of violence ... to disqualify individuals meeting those criteria from purchasing or possessing firearms.

In addition, new mechanisms to remove firearms from individuals at immediate risk of harming themselves or others should be created. [Emphasis added.]



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In the report's summary full evidence of the target — innocents currently legally owning guns — is in view:

Successful implementation of any firearm prohibition or expansion of state law depends upon a) states entering all relevant records into the NICS firearm background check system, and b) all firearm sales requiring a background check.

The reason for the *Times*' full-throated attack on the Second Amendment and the *Times*' link to a report issued by a gaggle of liberal professors can be found in an incident from history: When President George H. W. Bush was running for reelection in 1992, rumors surfaced about a movement to remove Vice President Dan Quayle from the ticket. Insiders manufactured a poll that allegedly showed Quayle as a liability, despite there being no such poll in existence. As John Birch Society President John McManus wrote in 2003:

Lying is not out of the question. In his 1995 memoir, [Call the Briefing](#), former presidential Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater told of a plan to concoct a poll to create a supposed need to dump Vice President Dan Quayle for the 1992 Bush reelection effort.

Secretary of State James Baker and campaign manager Robert Teeter actually created a fictitious poll to demonstrate that Quayle was a drag on the ticket. Fitzwater wrote that the president's son, George W. Bush, was in on the plot.

The fact that Quayle stayed on the ticket misses the point, according to McManus. It illustrates instead the willingness of insiders to create such a poll, counting on a gullible public to buy it:

Though this planned fraud wasn't employed and Quayle wasn't dumped, these men were willing to sway the public's attitude by means of a fake poll. They intended to rely on the fact that a skyrocketing number of Americans allow themselves to be swayed by real or concocted popular opinion.

The parallels to the *Times*' story and the consortium's study are obvious: Once a decision has been made to promote a point of view, evidence must be conjured to support it. Once that support has been manufactured, the next step is to lend it credence, preferably through a mouthpiece of mainstream journalism. If that gains purchase in the public mind, all that is needed to complete the loop is proposed legislation to solve the "problem" from someone favorable to the cause.

Readers should therefore not be surprised if Senator Charles Schumer, the notorious anti-gunner from New York, would then offer a bill to close the loophole, in the name of mental illness, forcing states to report all such cases to the NICS, and expanding background checks to everyone at the same time.

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