

Kathleen Parker

# The Sound Of Silence

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — It is a conundrum of wordsmiths that sometimes events are so horrible that words escape us. Bereft of the tools of our trade, we are left with what is perhaps the only appropriate response to something as heart-stopping as the massacre of children: Silence.

If I could get away with it, I might leave the rest of this space vacant. Call it a day. For this seems the sanest response to the horror. Out of respect for the living and the dead, we simply keep quiet, at least for a while.

But America isn't much comfortable with silence or vacancy. We are all about the talk. We love our talk radio and our talk TV. We thrive on talking points and talk therapy. Talking things through is a religious ritual in the post-Oprah world.

I understand the impulse, of course. Hostage to my own revolution, I write about the very things I rail against. Like so many, I can't seem to land anywhere else. The "fiscal cliff," the new African-American senator from South Carolina, new Cabinet picks — all are important, but suddenly seem trivial.

And so we ramble and sputter and repeat ourselves trying to find words that will make it possible to put this awful thing to rest.

Uneasily, we circle a too-familiar narrative. We've seen this movie before and know the characters well: The cops who speak in the terse, dispassionate language of the clinical investigator. The psychologists who burble banalities: Hug your children a little tighter and tell them you love them. The broadcast media who, forced to fill time and space by some edict from the ratings czars, babble inanities about tragedy, punctuated with corrections of misinformation uttered in previous time-filling excavations.

Meanwhile the scavengers of doom convene — volunteer prophets, prayer leaders and profiteers declaiming the evils of guns or violent games — or finding some way to insert themselves into the drama. Strangest of these was the mother who got herself on TV by proclaiming on her blog: "I am Adam Lanza's mother."

Liza Long, who has blogged about her life as an often-despairing mother, explained that her 13-year-old son, "Michael," is mentally ill and likely to become the next mass murderer.

Regardless of how daunting it must be to fear your son might be headed for serious trouble, Michael surely won't be helped by seeing his mother telling the world about it. Nevertheless, Long was heralded by many as a heroine for finally launching the Long Overdue Honest Conversation about Mental Health in America. This, in the talking-est, confessing-est, sharing-est nation in the history of mankind.

Perhaps Long has reached a



breaking point and is terrified, as she insists. But her foray into the public square, injecting her own child into the conversation as other parents are reeling from devastating loss, feels like stagecraft born of narcissism rather than maternal concern.

Of course Long wouldn't have been more than a viral blip had the media not engaged her to — God help us — share her story. She was the "get" of the day — a blogospheric phenomenon that captured the zeitgeist. Why, everyone was tweeting about her!

In the midst of all this madness were the legions of parents who wisely turned off the television and tossed the newspapers, who averted their gazes and protected their children from the photographs of those other little ones. I've spoken to dozens of such parents who uniformly say, "It's too much. I can't bear it."

Instead, they bundle up their children and place their faith in the abundance of goodness that

usually surrounds them, sending them on their way. In time the talk will turn back to the cliff, the senator and the Cabinet, even as we resign ourselves to the inevitability of the next tragedy.

This is because we know that though laws and policies can make small differences in the total tallies of the dead, the only thing that can displace evil is, as President Obama put it, love. Even this word sounds trite because we have trivialized it, substituting sentiment for meaning with our confectios and paper cutouts.

Love is not just a valentine. It is a covenant with the greater good. It involves charity, compassion, empathy, self-sacrifice and, yes, listening. I don't have any final words of wisdom, but do submit that the more yakking we do, the less likely we are to find the clarity we seek.

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# Investing In Our Future

BY ROBERT B. REICH  
Tribune Media Services

America's children seem to be shortchanged on almost every issue we face as a society.

Not only are we failing to protect our children from deranged people wielding semi-automatic guns, we're not protecting them from poverty. The rate of child poverty keeps rising - even faster than the rate of adult poverty. We now have the highest rate of child poverty in the developed world.

And we're not protecting their health. Rates of child diabetes and asthma continue to climb. America has the third-worst rate of infant mortality among 30 industrialized nations and the second-highest rate of teenage pregnancy, after Mexico.

If we go over the "fiscal cliff" without a budget deal, several programs focused on the well-being of children will be axed — education, child nutrition, school lunches, children's health, Head Start. Even if we avoid the cliff, any "grand bargain" to tame to deficit is likely to jeopardize them.

The Urban Institute projects the share of federal spending on children (outlays and tax expenditures) will drop from 15 percent last year to 12 percent in 2022.

At the same time, states and localities have been slashing preschool and after-school programs, child care, family services, recreation and mental-health services.

Why? Conservatives want to blame parents for not doing their job. But this ignores politics.

The NRA, for example, is one of the most powerful lobbies in America — so powerful, in fact, that our leaders rarely have the courage even to utter the words "gun control."

A few come forth after a massacre such as occurred in Connecticut to suggest that maybe we could make it slightly more difficult for the mentally ill to obtain assault weapons. But the gun lobby and gun manufacturers routinely count on America's (and media's) short attention span to prevent even modest reform.

The AARP is also among the most powerful lobbies, especially when it comes to preserving programs that benefit seniors. We shouldn't have to choose between our seniors and children — I'd



Robert REICH

rather focus on jobs and growth rather than on deficit reduction, and sooner cut corporate welfare and defense spending than anything else. But the brute fact is that America's seniors have political clout that matters when spending is being cut, while children don't.

At the same time, big corporations and the wealthy know how to get and keep tax cuts that are starving federal and state budgets of revenues needed to finance what our children need. Corporations systematically play off one state or city against another for tax concessions and subsidies to stay or move elsewhere, further shrinking revenues available for education, recreation, mental health and family services.

Meanwhile, advertisers and marketers of junk foods and violent video games have the political heft to ward off regulations designed to protect children from their depredations. The result is an epidemic of childhood diabetes, as well as video may-

hem that may harm young minds.

Most parents can't protect their children from all of this. They have all they can do to pay the bills. The median wage keeps falling (adjusted for inflation), benefits are evaporating, job security has disappeared, and even work hours are less predictable.

It seems as if every major interest has political clout — except children. They can't vote. They don't make major campaign donations. They can't hire fleets of lobbyists.

Yet they're America's future.

Their parents and grandparents care, of course, as do many other private citizens. But we're no match for the entrenched interests that dominate American politics.

Whether it's fighting for reasonable gun regulation, child health and safety overall, or good schools and family services, we can't have a fair fight as long as special-interest money continues to poison our politics.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future." He blogs at [www.robertreich.org](http://www.robertreich.org).

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

## Oil Production And A Flawed Dream

For those of you who dream of an energy-independent America, here's some good news and, naturally, some bad news.

The good news is that U.S. oil production is skyrocketing. It was reported last week that analysts with the Bank of America Merrill Lynch say that the price for oil should average about \$90 a barrel over the next two years, but could sink to as low as \$50 a barrel because of major production boosts in North Dakota and Texas.

Now here's the bad news. That low price may only impact U.S. oil, but prices paid at the pump are generally influenced by world oil prices, which are expected to remain high because of overall stagnant production levels that aren't keeping pace with demand.

Why the disconnect? Because, according to CNN, only a small percentage of the oil produced in the U.S. is used to make gasoline for this country. The price for oil that is used for U.S. consumption remains high. One must also assume that U.S.-produced oil is either headed to other countries or for other, non-automotive uses.

This would seem to be a prime moment to make the argument for energy independence. As we've mentioned before, this is the goal that has long been dreamed of by politicians and weary American consumers for decades. We've always felt that we are at the mercy of foreign oil sources, especially those found in the volatile Middle East.

But the dream is just that. The U.S. has become a major exporter, of all things, of oil, last year shipping out more oil than it imported for the first time since the 1940s.

(As an aside, the Bakken shale reserves in North Dakota, which is currently transforming that state economically, has some drawbacks to it. A big one involves the difficulty in transporting that oil from North Dakota to Cushing, Okla., which is a hub for several oil pipelines. Thus, there is more to marketing oil than simply taking it out of the ground.)

What are the chances of turning American-produced oil over for domestic use? That doesn't seem likely, according to reports. In fact, the low price of our oil may force the U.S. to ramp up exports because a barrel price of \$50, if it ever drops that low, wouldn't be enough to cover costs. So, it would go elsewhere, not here.

The point here today is that energy independence, which gets so much lip service during election cycles, is really something of a red herring, at least in terms of petroleum. To hear some of that campaign rhetoric, you'd swear the U.S. is falling down on the job and not producing enough oil to carry its own weight. But that's not the case. Nevertheless, we still import oil, are still reliant on the world market and are still at the mercy of volatile international events and trends.

One gets the sense that the only real path to energy independence is by achieving petroleum independence. We are still enslaved to fossil fuels, and those would be fine shackles to break. But this is a long-term vision — it would take decades — and maybe it, too, is just a dream. But now would be the time to start pursuing it because the alternative ultimately seems like an expensive and frustrating dead end.

kmh

## TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 19, the 354th day of 2012. There are 12 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Dec. 19, 1972, Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific, winding up the Apollo program of manned lunar landings.

**On this date:** In 1777, Gen. George Washington led his army of about 11,000 men to Valley Forge, Pa., to camp for the winter.

In 1813, British forces captured Fort Niagara during the War of 1812.

In 1843, "A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens, was first published in England.

In 1910, the artificial fiber rayon was first commercially produced by the American Viscose Co. of Marcus Hook, Pa.

In 1932, the British Broadcasting Corp. began transmitting overseas with its Empire Service to Australia.

In 1946, war broke out in Indochina as troops under Ho Chi Minh launched widespread attacks against the French.

In 1950, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was named commander of the military forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In 1961, former U.S. Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., 73, suffered a debilitating stroke while in Palm Beach, Fla.

In 1971, "A Clockwork Orange," Stanley Kubrick's controversial movie adaptation of the Anthony Burgess novel, had its world premiere in the U.S.

In 1984, a fire at the Wilberg Mine near Orangeville, Utah, killed 27 people. Britain and China signed an accord returning Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997.

In 1986, Lawrence E. Walsh was appointed independent counsel to investigate the Iran-Contra affair.

In 1998, President Bill Clinton was impeached by the Republican-controlled House for perjury and obstruction of justice (he was later acquitted by the Senate).

**Ten years ago:** Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Iraq in "material breach" of a U.N. disarmament resolution. After a prosecutor cited new DNA evidence, a judge in New York threw out the convictions of five young men from Harlem in a 1989 attack on a Central Park jogger

who'd been raped and left for dead. Roh Moo-hyun won South Korea's presidential election.

**Five years ago:** President George W. Bush signed legislation increasing fuel-efficiency standards for vehicles and requiring wider use of ethanol. An explosion and fire at a chemical plant in Jacksonville, Fla., killed four workers. An express train derailed in southern Pakistan, killing at least 40 people. Former Hyundai CEO Lee Myung-bak won South Korea's presidency. Rescuers found Frederick Dominguez and his three children, who had been lost in the mountains for three days during a snowstorm, alive in a northern California ravine.

**One year ago:** North Korea announced the death of leader Kim Jong Il, two days after he died; North Koreans marched by the thousands to mourn their "Dear Leader" while state media proclaimed his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, a "Great Successor." Paroled American Lori Berenson, who stirred international controversy after being convicted of aiding Peruvian guerrillas, left on a flight to the United States for her first visit back home since Peruvian authorities arrested her in 1995.

**Today's Birthdays:** Country singer Little Jimmy Dickens is 92. Actress Cicely Tyson is 79. Rhythm-and-blues singer-musician Maurice White (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 71. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak is 71. Actress Elaine Joyce is 69. Actor Tim Reid is 68. Paleontologist Richard E. Leakey is 68. Rock singer Alvin Lee (Ten Years After) is 68. Musician John McEuen is 67. Singer Janie Fricke is 65. Jazz musician Lenny White is 63. Actor Mike Lookinland is 52. Actress Jennifer Beals is 49. Actor Scott Cohen is 48. Actor Robert MacNaughton is 46. Magician Criss Angel is 45. Rock musician Klaus Eichstadt (Ugly Kid Joe) is 45. Rock musician Kevin Shepard is 44. Actress Kristy Swanson is 43. Model Tyson Beckford is 42. Actress Amy Locane-Bovenizer is 41. Actress Alyssa Milano is 40. Actor Jake Gyllenhaal is 32. Actress Maria Sokoloff is 32. Rapper Lady Sovereign is 27.

**Thought for Today:** "Serious-minded people have few ideas. People with ideas are never serious." — Paul Valery, French poet and critic (1871-1945).

## FROM THE BIBLE

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

## YOUR LETTERS

### Entitlements

Joanna Thomson, Bloomfield, Neb.

We keep hearing about "Lets cut out the entitlements." Let's look at some of them.

Medicare — What many seniors, that have worked all their lives, depend upon.

Medicaid — What, in many locations, people that have lost their jobs, or work at below living wages, such as at Wal-Mart in many locations, depend upon.

Food Stamps — For many working poor (again a lot of Wal-Mart em-

ployees) and those that lost their jobs due to outsourcing, depend upon to feed children. (NOTE: it is part of the Farm Bill.)

Oil Company Subsidies — Nothing they need with their fantastic income, yet the GOP keeps giving it to them.

Farm Bill — Entitlements to farmers. Such a complex bill that it is in a dire need of revamping.

That is just a small list of the largest entitlements. Lets stop and think what would happen, AND to WHO, cutting them out would effect.

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