

A year since Parkland: we have a solution

BY REP. BRIAN BABIN (R-TEXAS), OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 02/14/19 10:35 AM EST
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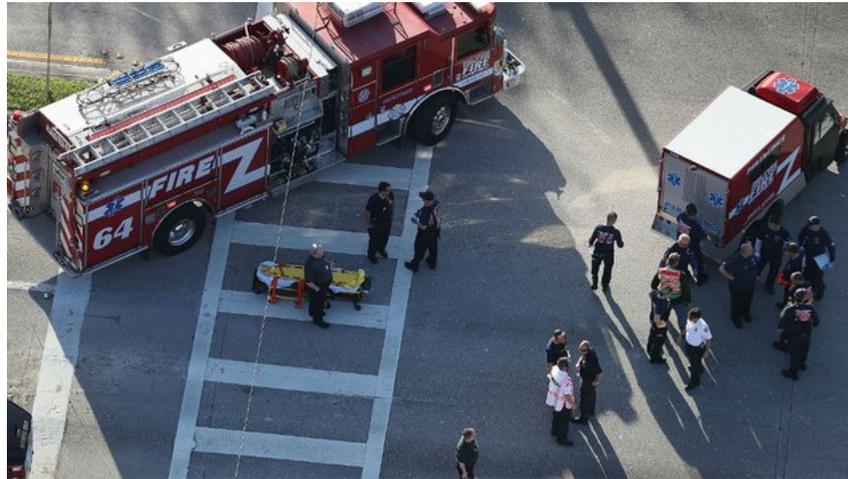
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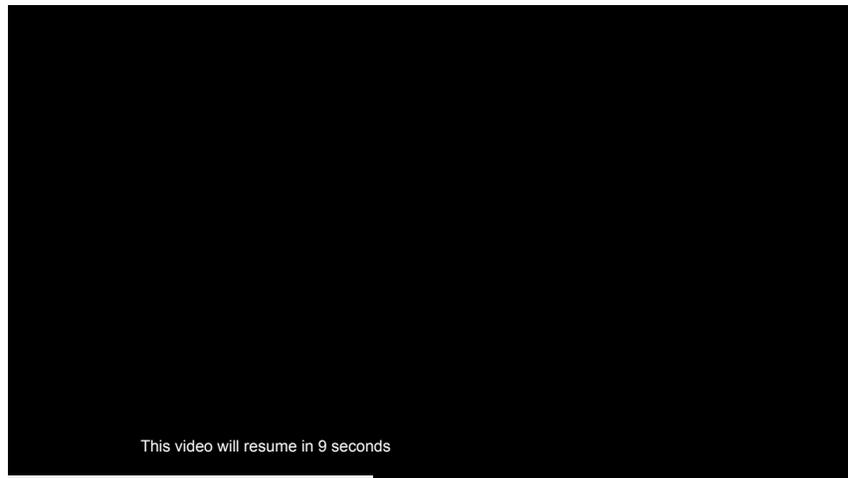
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On the afternoon of Feb. 14, 2018, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School community experienced a veritable hell-on-earth scenario. Survivors watched friends and classmates perish in a storm of horrendous violence and confusion. A helpless nation watched, waiting for details, asking why, unable to offer more than thoughts and prayers to those affected by senseless violence.

Days after Parkland, a friend and retired career U.S. Secret Service agent called me with a simple message: "I know why these tragedies keep happening, and I know how we can stop them." Our conversation lasted for hours as he explained the scientifically-validated process of behavioral threat assessment, how the U.S. Secret Service created it to identify and mitigate posed threats against presidents, and how it has been adopted and utilized across the federal government with great success.

The political aftermath following the Parkland tragedy is all too familiar. Some entertain nothing but gun control, while others dig in their heels on the need for arming teachers or physical hardening. While strong emotions are justified after such a tragedy, political bravado and overheated rhetoric prevent any substantive discussions of how to put a stop to these tragedies. Drowned out by the loudest voices in the room, what ends up being left out of the conversation entirely is prevention.

Columbine. The Pulse Nightclub. Sutherland Springs Church. The Boston Marathon. Washington Navy Yard. The attack on Rep. Gabby Giffords. Sandy Hook. The Aurora movie theater. Virginia Tech. West Nickel Mines Amish School. The Charleston church massacre. Santa Fe High School. All of these horrifying events, and many others, have the same thing in common: either the attacker displayed, or someone close to the attacker warned of, behavior or indicators of an impending tragedy. Research shows that in the overwhelming majority of these situations, the attacker displayed clear signs or indications that they were on a pathway to violence. In effect, the attackers self-identified in some way or another that they intended to harm people. With training and support in behavioral threat assessment and management and a focus on prevention, we can connect the dots BEFORE an attack can occur.

This is not a new concept. In his 1999 address to the nation following the Columbine Massacre, President Bill Clinton said, "We have to do more to recognize the early warning signs that are sent before children act violently." This April, will mark 20 years since President Clinton's statement and unfortunately, there is still not enough being done on the state and local level.

Now is the time to change that.

Last month, with Rep. Val Demings (D-Fla.) and Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), and Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) by my side, I introduced the [Threat Assessment, Prevention, and Safety \(TAPS\) Act of 2019](#). This bipartisan bill will equip our communities with the training, support, and resources needed to identify and interrupt those on a pathway to violence before they can carry out the tragedies of the future.

While physical hardening and gun control issues will remain in the public debate, reactive measures are inherently insufficient. We must be proactive. Simply stated, when the first shot is fired it is too late, we have failed.

Babin represents the 36th District of Texas.

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