



ENQUIRY

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Free thought and discourse

- ① *Let Them Eat Brains: In Defense of Humans vs. Zombies*
- ② *Pension Crisis in Chicago*
- ③ *Guns and Mental Health*

Let Them Eat Brains: In Defense of Humans vs. Zombies

By **WILL SWETT**
STAFF WRITER

On October 9th, two Physical Plant employees mistook a player of the popular game Humans vs. Zombies for a potential shooter. With the recent shooting at Umpqua Community College and the two other school shootings that had taken place earlier that day, the employees did not hesitate to notify campus safety of the potential threat and initiate the shelter-in-place.

Fifteen minutes after the alarm was raised the all-clear was given and the college returned to normal. Although there was never any threat to the campus, the Physical Plant employees were right to report the perceived threat to the authorities.

The incident should have ended there. But Hamilton administrators, always quick to identify and solve problems where they do not exist, forced the game to end for fear that its continuation might cause more confusion.

HvZ has been played at Hamilton for ten years without incident, so the assumption that the players would cause another shelter-in-place during their final day is ludicrous. It is hard to imagine somebody mistaking a bright yellow Nerf gun for a real gun, but considering the activities of the players, it is possible that once every ten years a misunderstanding could occur.

Hamilton's decision to discontinue HvZ served no practical purpose other than to assure students that the game could never cause another unnecessary shelter-in-place.

According to Dean of Students Nancy Thompson, the game was ended due to the "disruption and upset" the shelter-in-place caused. Although only fifteen minutes long, the campus lockdown order significantly interrupted students, faculty, and staff as they went about their days, so it's understandable why the school would want the game to end.

But there are ways the school could have responded without interrupting the 190 students—almost 10 percent of the student body—who signed up to play HvZ. Physical Plant employees, for example, should have been informed of the nature of the game and that Nerf gun wielding students could be easily identifiable by the colorful armbands they wore.

According to Jeff Landry, Chairman of Hamilton's Emergency Response Team (HERT), "no college policies were violated" by any players during the incident and HvZ was

ended by mutual agreement between Landry, Thompson, and the club's leadership.

Looking at the span of events, however, it would seem that the club had no choice in the matter. The college forcibly cancelled the game via an all-campus email, only two minutes after which did they call the president of the People Who Like To Do Fun Things club, Fain Riopelle, asking him to discontinue it.

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More upsetting than the shelter-in-place order is that, according to Thompson, Hamilton is "reviewing the College's weapon policy given that

continued on back page

Pension Crisis in Chicago

By **WILL UTZSCHNEIDER**
STAFF WRITER

Last Wednesday, the Chicago City Council voted to hit residents with one of the largest tax increases in city history, totaling \$700 million per year. It includes \$588 million in property taxes to be phased in over four years, and new fees on ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft.

Mayor Emanuel's budget also asks for the state of Illinois, which itself has a whopping \$111-billion pension shortfall and is like Chicago on steroids, to pitch in \$800 million to help foot the bill.

Even before these tax increases, Chicagoans pay the heaviest burden of taxes in the state of Illinois, and UBS ranked Chicago as the seventh most expensive city in the world. The city already has the second highest debt per person (behind Detroit) and has been downgraded by Moody's to junk-bond status.

This is not the first time this year that Chicago has tried to pass on costs to its residents. The city recently decided to pass a 9 percent "Netflix tax" for the use of cloud-based services such as Netflix and Spotify.

Why the need for revenue? These tax increases don't come close to fixing the budget deficit of the Chicago public schools, which face a \$10-billion pension shortfall according to the Illinois Policy

This Week's News in 140 Characters

EDITORIAL REPORT



andy levy @andylevy · Oct 29
the mets really jebbed this game

← ↻ 129 ★ 254 ...



Jonathan Chait @jonathanchait · Oct 29
You're from Florida.
Rubio: That is a lie! My parents were born in Cuba!
GOP: Rubio's right, his parents are Cuban, the media is lying.

← ↻ 25 ★ 38 ...



Breaking News Feed @PzFeed · Oct 28
If you see a giant military blimp near Pennsylvania please call 911.

← ↻ 289 ★ 152 ...



Political Math @politicalmath · 3h
I'm done with @politifact. They are transparently playing politics w/ the truth. They are murdering the theory of honest fact checkers.

← ↻ 14 ★ 12 ...



Charles Murray @charlesmurray · Oct 26
When are the Trumpers going to figure out that he's a RINO? Actually, on a lot of issues, a statist.

← ↻ 52 ★ 65 ...



Howard Kurtz @HowardKurtz · Oct 29
I praised the CNN debate. I'm not a CNBC-basher, wrote a book in part about the network. But this was not a good night for the channel

← ↻ 65 ★ 76 ...



Christina H. Sommers @CHSommers · 20h
So far, girl trick-or-treaters tonight have been princesses, mermaids & ballet dancers. Boys: superheroes & sports stars. Problematic.

← ↻ 165 ★ 469 ...

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PENSION CRISIS IN CHICAGO cont.

Institute.

Despite increased revenues and increased contributions from the state of Illinois into the system, the pension problem has been growing for years, as the city has mismanaged its funds. The city has spent over a billion dollars on pension pickups by contributing a majority of what teachers were supposed to contribute to their pension.

The problem in Chicago is not uncommon. Many public pension programs have become political slush funds.

In addition, the Chicago public schools on several occasions enacted pension holidays, diverting money intended to fund the pension system to increasing salaries, which in turn caused pension benefits to grow at an unsustainable rate. On top of all of this, the number of teachers paying into the system is small compared to an increasing number of beneficiaries retiring into it.

Unfortunately, the problem in Chicago is not uncommon. Many public pension programs have become

continued on back page

Guns and Mental Health

By **SAM BENEVELLI**
STAFF WRITER

In the wake of yet another mass shooting a few weeks ago, pundits and politicians from the left and right are rushing the microphone to show support for victims and their families. They call for policy changes, more enforcement, and stricter laws. They want to see a safe America. They can't have this happen again.

What do I expect from these speeches? Absolutely nothing.

For years, politicians have been blowing hot air trying to push through anti-gun legislation to no avail. There is significant push-back from the right and gun rights lobbying organizations. These groups argue that it is not the guns obtained legally that are the problem—it's those obtained illegally, on the black-market or through theft, that allow these mass shootings, and no amount of background checks or loophole closures is going to fix that.

The story in Oregon is common at this point—a socially distant young white man, most likely mentally disturbed, took weapons from family members and opened fire. How many

continued on back page

toy guns have created confusion” as a result of the incident. Although Nerf guns are suitable for young children, they are apparently too dangerous for college campuses.

Director of Campus Safety Fran Manfredo recommended that Hamilton should “no longer allow guns, no matter what they look like or their purpose, on campus.” It is unclear what disciplinary action would be taken on a student caught carrying a bright yellow foam dart blaster around campus but apparently these toys need to be taken as seriously as if they were real guns.

The recent school shootings around the country may have also prompted the school to take steps against toy guns, but for a campus as remote as Hamilton these restrictions would be completely unnecessary. The college is not based in a city, and so the likelihood that a police officer would come across a student with a Nerf gun and shoot him is negligible.

The prevalence of gun ownership in our rural area also makes it unlikely that anyone would mistake a Nerf blaster for a real gun. The shelter-in-place of October 9th was an accident that could have been avoided by better communication between club leaders and Hamilton staff, but it does not warrant any further action by Hamilton.

This incessant hand-wringing over toy guns and the creation of new rules reflects Hamilton’s complicity in infantilizing college students. Humans vs. Zombies may seem like a childish game but if Nerf guns are banned, the school would be further extending the protective bubble over its students, who it encourages to fear everything. Now it seems that even a toy gun can cause “a jarring experience,” and the accidental shelter-in-place could be deeply upsetting for certain individuals.

From trigger warnings to Nerf guns, the college regards anything that has the potential to cause emotional distress as impermissible. Just as trigger warnings seek to protect students from scary ideas, a ban on Nerf guns is another hollow step towards protecting students from the outside world. The game may be immature, but banning Nerf guns would not make the school any safer, and serves only to treat students as children.

W. UTZSCHNEIDER *cont.*

political slush funds, in which the politicians increase pay and benefits, and in turn the public employee unions exert their considerable political influence in endorsements and campaign contributions—all at the expense of the taxpayers.

Instead of taking on the reforms that need to be taken—such as renegotiating pensions and switching city employees to a 401 (k) style pension program—the city continues to kick the can down the road and continue a vicious cycle by increasing the cost of living in the city, which

will no doubt hurt job growth in a state that has been steadily lagging behind other Midwestern states.

While Chicago is not the only city or state suffering from massive unfunded liabilities—there are too many—hopefully it can serve as a lesson of what not to do.

S. BENEVELLI *cont.*

times do we have to hear this story before we recognize that we can help prevent these tragedies?

Recognizing mental health problems can be extremely difficult. But in recent cases, professionals have not had any problem recognizing that these men had mental health issues. Jared Loughner was flagged for schizophrenia before he killed 6 people in Tucson. James Holmes was noted to be “shifting insidiously into a frank psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia” as noted by a psychologist who treated him before he murdered 12 people in Aurora. Adam Lanza had been treated for severe mental health problems for years before 20 children died by his gun in Newtown.

These men had people looking after them; their family members were present. They also happened to have family members who did not properly secure a firearm.

The problem does not have to do with gun legislation. It is not something our elected officials can fix. This is an issue of personal responsibility and a need to destigmatize mental health discussion. If these men could have gotten the help they needed, maybe those lives would have been saved.

On *Last Week Tonight*, John Oliver pointed out that the only time we do talk about mental health is in the aftermath of a mass shooting. When we discuss mental health in the shadow of such a tragedy, we only see those with mental health problems with a shadow of violence. This stigma can dissuade people from getting the help they desperately need or to seek help for a loved one.

The rhetoric we use in reference to mental health can intentionally or absent-mindedly be stigmatizing, but typically has a negative connotation. In 2014 during a Q&A about the rising number of school shootings, President Obama said, “The United States does not have a monopoly on crazy people. It’s not the only country that has psychosis.”

We use words like crazy, spastic, retard, insane, and the list goes on and on, to label people as something other than normal. If we really want to change the discussion of mental health issues, we need to first recognize that progress will only be made with a respectful and informed language.

We often try to push aside those with mental health problems because significant resources and time are necessary to help these individuals. Sending those with mental health struggles to prison has become a

common solution.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, 56 percent of inmates in state prisons are struggling with mental health problems of any kind. In federal prison, 45 percent of inmates grapple with the same issues. This does not correspond, however, to people with mental health problems committing violence at a significantly higher rate than mentally stable individuals.

According to a 2012 study, “The odds of a person with mental illness experiencing physical, sexual, or domestic violence were 3.86-fold higher than among adults without any disabilities.” But instead of properly funded programs to help those with mental disabilities stay safe in their communities, while keeping those around them safe as well, it is much easier to send these people to prison.

A number of new programs have been implemented to help stabilize the lives of individuals living with mental health problems. New York is currently implementing one such program—Assertive Community Treatment (ACT).

This program allows teams of professionals to meet with treatment recipients to customize a treatment plan. The plans can range from daily meeting with a psychiatrist, group meetings, or simply help paying bills on time.

ACT attempts to keep people in their homes and engaged in their community as much as possible to ensure that when an individual’s treatment plan changes, he or she is able to adjust to a “normal” living situation.

The best part about this treatment track is that it works. This model has proven effective in reducing hospitalization, is no more expensive than traditional care, and is more satisfactory to consumers and their families than standard care. Unfortunately, this program is not uniformly available to those who may need it because of an ongoing debate about its cost efficiency and resource dedication.

We have programs that work. There is a national consensus that we want to change something about the current status quo. The only component missing is the will to do something.

It is the responsibility of each individual to begin a positive mental health discussion outside the context of violence. It is the discussions that we have, not our laws, that will make a difference in the slow process of destigmatizing mental health.

In the cases of recent shootings, professionals have not had any problem recognizing that these men had mental health issues.

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The opinions expressed in these articles are the views of their authors and do not represent the views of Enquiry or the Alexander Hamilton Institute.

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