

The Trumpet

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CONGRESSMAN CHARLIE DENT COMMENTS ON TRAGEDY IN TUCSON, AZ

by Alexander Hess

Representative Gabrielle Giffords, an Arizona Democrat, and at least 17 others were shot on January 8, 2011 outside a supermarket in Tucson, Arizona.

Giffords had set aside that Saturday morning to speak with her constituents during the first of a series of town hall meetings. The shooter has since been identified as Jared Lee Loughner, 22, who has suffered a long history of psychological problems.

The tragedy in Tucson has evoked deep reactions from members of the United States House and the Senate alike.

"I am horrified by the senseless attack on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and members of her staff. An attack on



photo courtesy of US State Dept.

one who serves is an attack on all who serve," said new House Speaker John Boehner to the *New York Times*.

Fellow Arizona public officeholder Senator John McCain issued one of the strongest statements, saying: "I am horrified by the violent attack on Representative Gabrielle Giffords and many other innocent people by a wicked person who has no sense of justice or compassion. I pray for Gabby and the other victims."

He furthered that Laughner is "a disgrace to Arizona, this country and the human race."

Despite the initial shock and emotional outburst resulting from the incident, US Congressman from PA Charlie Dent believes that it has had something of a "calming effect" on Congress.

"It's forced us all to examine our political rhetoric," said Dent. "We try to make sure that it isn't too inflammatory or that there's not too much anger in it. We realize that this could happen to any of us."

"Though," he added lightheartedly, "most members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, do talk to each other civilly, believe it or not; the consensus is that we need to play better together."

The attempted assassination has brought to light the security concerns that public officeholders must face through their term. The increasingly toxic, partisan political climate of the United States has only made matters worse for representatives who express strong viewpoints.

"It reminds me of the risks we all face," said Dent. "Sadly, public officials can be the subjects of violence."

Like the married Giffords, Dent has a staff and family of his own, including a daughter Kathryn, a junior at PHS, and sons William, a freshman, and Jack, ten. "I try to see to my personal security and the needs of my staff," he said, "and you always worry about your family."

Yet, Congressman Dent has not let the tragedy that befell Congresswoman Giffords impede dialogue with his own constituency.

"I still do town hall meetings," he said. "I've had three or four in the past week. I inform law enforcement beforehand." Dent furthered that he, like most of his peers, holds his meetings in a government venue, and that the location of Congresswoman Giffords' meeting, outside a local grocery store, stacked another risk factor against her.

As a former member and present contributor to the House Committee on Homeland Security, Dent remains unsure whether such incidents can be completely skirted in the future.

"To be perfectly candid," he said, "if there is a lone-wolf operation, be that a terrorist or a deranged person like Laughner, plotting to attack a public official, there is not much that can be done to prevent that. It's not secret where we live."



photo courtesy of US State Dept.

He believes, however, that there are ways to mitigate the risks that public officials take by serving their community. He stresses that elected officials should focus on securing their homes and district offices because they are more obvious targets for terrorist or extremist activities.

Despite shooter Laughner's apparent extreme political leanings, Dent does not consider his actions an act of terrorism. "My sense of it is that [Laughner] was motivated more by the inner demons that possessed him rather than anything political," he said. "He seems to be deranged and mentally ill."

In response to the attempt on Gifford's life, some public officials have called for reforms to modify the current rights to bear arms, which the congresswoman herself has supported. Congressman Dent, however, believes that, more than gun regulation, mental-health legislation should be the primary area of concern.

"We do have a second amendment," he said in defense of present gun rights.

Since the shooting, Congresswoman Giffords' doctors have been optimistic about her recovery, though they are unsure as to whether her recovery will be complete. As of February, she has begun lengthy rehabilitation in at TIRR Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, TX and has recovered some cognitive function and the ability to speak.

WEEKLY WEATHER

Friday Feb 25



Rain

High
51°F
Low
24°F

Saturday 26



Partly Cloudy

High
40°F
Low
29°F

Sunday 27



Few Showers

High
45°F
Low
38°F

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