

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

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## **Two Tragically Lost Children: Christina Taylor Green and Her Killer**

Posted: 01/13/2011 6:46 pm EST

Today we Americans weep for the parents of Christina Taylor Green in Arizona as they bury their little 9-year-old girl, who tragically lost her life on January 8th because of the frightening and fatal actions of another lost child, mentally disturbed 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner. It is human nature to vilify the perpetrator of such a vile crime and to try to find who or what else to blame to ensure justice is served. The ignored "elephant in our living room," is our broken mental health care system and substance abuse, not Sarah Palin or the Tea Party.

We must look deeper into the breakdown of our mental health system that was dismantled to save public money with the intent that families and community based health care would be able to care for the millions of mentally disabled Americans. This has not happened. Unless our laws are changed and there is responsible funding this will not happen. The laws that were enacted have actually prevented families from caring for their loved ones even if they were able to help with financial support for their treatment. Family knows when a loved one is in need of medical care. Yet their hands are tied because the sick person must "voluntarily" submit to treatment. The trouble is that usually the person is too mentally disabled to admit they need treatment.

Jared Loughner is a perfect example. He would have had to be acting rational enough to seek the medical treatment required to control his violent thoughts and delusions. People with severe mental disorders often believe they are fine and that the rest of society is messed up and out to get them.

We must commit the time and resources necessary to find the solutions to fix our broken mental health care system to prevent future tragedies. We must look at our societal shortcomings and ask ourselves what would I do if either of these young people, Christina or Jared was one of my loved ones.

Christina Taylor Green was born on September 11, 2001, a day that will always live in infamy as the worst attack on innocent life in America. Yet we learn from her grieving Mom and Dad that Christina, a shining light, preferred for her birthday to be considered a day symbolizing "hope" with a unified resolve as a nation to work together for a better world, irrespective of political party

affiliation. Christina Taylor Green will be remembered as a symbol of patriotism with enduring faith, unwavering hope and pure love for her country and all of her fellow Americans. The legacy of her brief life should be to inspire others to take action especially for the most vulnerable in our society, our children and those who cannot help themselves, the mentally disabled.

What do we know of Jared Lee Loughner? He is a severely disturbed young man with a history of smoking pot and therefore failed a drug test, which kept him out of military service. His teachers and classmates feared or ignored his disruptive outbreaks. Contrary to Christina, he lived in darkness and in it he was inspired to commit the most horrifying crime on January 8th killing 6 people. During the gruesome attack, he shot a bullet into the brain of beloved Representative Gabrielle Giffords, leaving her in critical condition.

How did Jared remain in our midst with his obvious untreated mental illness? The mentality "as long as it doesn't hurt me, it's not my problem" must change if we are to be a nation that values life, justice and charity.

Many Americans have not yet been confronted with helping people who struggle with "dual diagnosis" mental health issues and several have been convinced that substance abuse is not a big issue. This allows the advancement of the attitude, "So what if the kid smokes pot?" It is prudent to determine whether pot or other substances including alcohol can be a trigger for bizarre, psychotic and violent behavior. This is a controversial debate. It is known that mental disorders are brought on by various factors including stress. There were enlightening studies conducted by Swiss psychiatrist Professor Dr. Wulf Rossler. The clinical research discusses the correlation of combining chemical imbalance with substance abuse, leading to serious mental disorders. The findings are documented in "[Dual Diagnosis, The Evolving Conceptual Framework: Social Decline, Alcohol & Street Drugs, Mental Disorders](#)" *Bibliotheca Psychiatrica* 172, published in Switzerland.

I validated the findings of this "dual diagnosis" research with the doctors at UCLA Neuropsychiatric Hospital who treated one of our family members. A bright college student who was a computer whiz but chose to smoke pot and at a rave party tried ecstasy. How are cities allowed to give permits for rave parties that always result in death and destruction of our young? Rave parties actually promote destructive behavior. The doctors at UCLA and Cedars-Sinai made it quite clear to us that substance abuse is extremely dangerous for mental health and triggered the psychotic break for our loved one. Non-compliance of the medication required for mental diseases is the most heartbreaking and stressful situation for families. They feel helpless. Law enforcement and doctors are legally required to deem someone to be a serious harm to themselves or others or they are left to fend for themselves. This policy leads to homelessness or prison rather than a healthcare facility. A doctor at Cedars-Sinai Hospital told us, "unfortunately, they have to literally hit rock bottom, be eating out of a dumpster or even worse, be sexually or physically assaulted before the severely mentally disabled are willing to be treated, the laws prevent us from helping them." This is a national and international tragedy. As caring Americans, we must take action to help those affected by mental disabilities including their families. These diseases of the brain attack people from all demographics in our society. Every family with experience of mental illness is familiar with the signs of irrational rantings, delusional ramblings and abnormal behavior as demonstrated by Jared Loughner before he committed this horrible act. I personally have tried to secure the assistance of law enforcement and

PET (Psychiatric Evaluation Team) to help obviously ill people be treated before they possibly harm themselves or others. If anyone would have called these professionals in Tucson on the morning of January 8th before the event occurred and informed them of Jared's aggressive or angry behavior they would have been asked if he is actually in the process of harming himself or others. From my experiences, only if the answer was affirmative, could a team come and evaluate him. But it is important to note that many people with mental disorders when confronted by lawful authority are able to temporarily collect their thoughts enough to avoid failing the "5150" psychiatric evaluation for involuntary admission to a hospital. This statute only allows for the sick person to be held and treated for 72 hours before they are released to a family member or to the streets. It is impossible for them to be balanced enough and for doctors to properly diagnose and give them the right mix of medications and for the meds to work in that brief period of time. They simply go through the revolving door still sick. That is the biggest failing of the system. The mental healthcare laws of America must be changed.

Jared and Christina's lives are tragically linked as two children with unfulfilled dreams. Let us try to help Christina's dreams of hope and harmony become a reality and at the same time let us help Jared and those like him receive medical treatment so they are able to live in reality. We must change our mental health laws in the memory of Christina to give hope to a nation trying to heal. We must treat the mentally disabled with compassion as we want our children and ourselves to be treated when we are sick with any affliction. Christina Taylor Green's activism and passionate concern for her country is something we can all embrace to help save other lives from being lost. The critical condition of mental healthcare is the "real" elephant in our shared house, America, and is the colossal beast our recently elected House of Representatives need to focus on in the upcoming hearings on life threatening issues and life saving solutions to help heal our shared pain and recover from our wounds. In the wise words of Mother Teresa who devoted her life caring for others, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we all belong to each other."

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