Report about Pam Simon from NEA Retired President Barbara Matteson

NEA Retired president, Barbara Matteson expressed sadness and horror at the shootings of Saturday, Jan. 8.

Having known Pam Simon for many years, she gave the following report:

Pam Simon, AEA Retired member and Outreach Coordinator for Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, was present at the Safeway shooting. She was shot in the wrist and underwent surgery on Saturday.

She is recovering well, but does not know a date for her release from the hospital. She is very grateful for her well-wishers and wishes to let everyone know how much they mean to her.

She is, however, overwhelmed with the numbers of people who wish to speak to her, including many, many media folks.

Idea: contribute to dinners for her and her family for after she is released from hospital. She may not have full use of her wrist, so dinners, or housekeeping services may be appreciated. This will let Pam know how much she is respected by AEA Retired, long after everyone else has moved onto another story, while she is at home recovering.

If you would like to contribute, please do so. We will pass an envelope at today's meeting.

Barbara will deliver envelope and card from AEA Retired to Pam.

Barbara wished to direct your attention to an excellent article by E.J. Dionne, who is a columnist for the Washington Post. **He was the keynote speaker at the 2008 NEA Retired Annual Meeting.**
The article is copied below.

E.J. Dionne Jr. / 'Whoa, let's take a step back here'

After the attack on Rep. Giffords and others, it's time to drain the rhetorical swamps

Monday, January 10, 2011

WASHINGTON -- There is one commentator whose words should enlighten us on the meaning of Saturday's shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and the savage murders that took the lives of, among others, a federal judge and a 9-year-old girl.

The person is Rep. Giffords herself.

In an interview last March, the Arizona Democrat anticipated almost everything being said now and explained why what happened on Saturday is a violation of our national

self-image as "a beacon." Our pride, she said, is that "we effect change at the ballot box" and not through "outbursts of violence."
She spoke on MSNBC after the front door of her Tucson office was destroyed. Rep. Giffords had strongly supported health care reform, which made some of her constituents very unhappy

Asked if leaders of the Republican Party should speak out more forcefully against violence, she replied that this task fell as well to Democrats and "community leaders." "Look, we can't stand for this." There were problems with certain ways of "firing people up," she said, and then offered an example close to home.

"We're on Sarah Palin's targeted list," she said, "but the thing is that the way she has it depicted has the crosshairs of a gun sight over our district. When people do that, they've got to realize there's consequences to that action."

MSNBC's Chuck Todd pressed her then, noting that "in fairness, campaign rhetoric and war rhetoric have been interchangeable for years." He asked what she thought Ms. Palin's intentions were.

"You know, I can't say, I'm not Sarah Palin," Ms. Giffords replied evenly. "But what I can say is that in the years that some of my colleagues have served -- 20, 30 years -- they've never seen it like this. We have to work out our problems by negotiating, working together, hopefully Democrats and Republicans.

"I understand that this health care bill is incredibly personal," she continued, "probably the most significant vote cast here for decades, frankly. But the reality is that we've got to focus on the policy, focus on the process, but leaders -- community leaders, not just political leaders -- have to stand back when things get too fired up and say, 'Whoa, let's take a step back here.' "

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Can we please take that step back now?
Let's begin by being honest. It is not partisan to observe that there are cycles to violent rhetoric in our politics. In the late 1960s, violent talk (and sometimes violence itself) was more common on the far left.

But since President Barack Obama's election, it is incontestable that significant parts of the American far right have adopted a language of revolutionary violence in the name of overthrowing "tyranny."

It is President Obama's opponents who carried guns to his speeches and cited Jefferson's line that the tree of liberty "must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

It was Sharron Angle, the Republican candidate against Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in Nevada, who spoke of "Second Amendment remedies." And, yes, it was Sarah

Palin who put those gun sights over the districts of the Democrats she was trying to defeat, including Giffords'.

The point is not to "blame" American conservatism for the actions of a possibly deranged man, especially since the views of Jared Lee Loughner seem so thoroughly confused. But we must now insist with more force than ever that threats of violence, no less than violence itself, are antithetical to democracy. Violent talk and playacting cannot be part of our political routine. It is not cute or amusing to put crosshairs over a congressional district.

Liberals were rightly pressed in the 1960s to condemn violence on the left. Now, conservative leaders must take on their fringe when it uses language that intimates threats of bloodshed. That means more than just highly general statements praising civility.

In honor of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, the effort to drain the rhetorical swamps should be as nonpartisan as she was in her interview. It is wrong, at any point on the spectrum, she said, to "incite people and inflame emotions."

There are, she said, "polarized parts of our parties that really get excited and that's where, again, community leaders, not just, you know, the political leaders, all of us have to come together and say, 'OK, there's a fine line here.' "

It is not misusing an overly invoked word to say it is tragic that a politician so attuned to the costs of political violence became its victim.

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