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Deny easy gun access to dangerous people

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It's too early to determine whether different gun laws could have averted the deaths of 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus Monday. Like most such shootings, the rampage was carried out by an apparently disturbed individual who possibly could not have been stopped by any legislation. But it's not too soon to wonder whether we are doing everything we can to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people, and perhaps avert a similar tragedy. We would be derelict, in fact, if we failed to do so.

On that score, there is clearly work to be done in both Springfield and Washington. Congress should start by overturning a spending bill amendment that since 2003 has prevented the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives from sharing most information about gun traces from police agencies. The ban inexplicably and inexcusably prevents police from using the data -- which is collected by departments across the country -- to help them figure out where illegal guns are coming from and to go after gun traffickers. Congress should also renew the assault weapons ban that it shamelessly allowed to expire.

In Springfield, the Illinois Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence is pushing several worthwhile bills. They include requiring background checks on private handgun sales, licensing handgun dealers, banning .50-caliber rifles, restricting bulk sales of handguns, requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen weapons, and requiring the safe storage of weapons in homes with children. The group's poll shows that those proposals are not only supported by a majority of Illinoisans, they're supported by a majority of gun owners.

We favored these commonsense gun measures well before the Virginia tragedy exposed, yet again, the dangers and folly of not having sensible gun control laws. Their value is all the more apparent following this week's carnage in Virginia.

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