Opinion: Make the debate over guns worthy of our son

By Mark Barden and Jackie Barden

Wednesday's Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on gun violence is the latest in a series of events following the Dec. 14 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Our 7-year-old son, Daniel, 19 of his first-grade classmates and six educators were killed in the tragedy. We believe this hearing is an opportunity to rise above the hard-line rhetoric and intransigence that too often lead to inaction and hopelessness, and we hope that our leaders and our nation will start a new conversation with a chance of achieving real change.

Our Daniel was a constant source of laughter and joy. He was intelligent, articulate, incredibly affectionate, fair, thoughtful toward others and unfailingly polite. Daniel believed in holding doors open for strangers. He talked to the person sitting alone. He loved to help clean up a mess, and he made sure there was enough milk for everyone before adding it to his cereal.

His kindergarten teacher recently wrote to us: "He is the kind of student that should come wrapped in ribbon because he is a gift to his teachers. I can remember leaving notes for our substitute to 'ask Daniel' if she or he needed help with anything."

Motivated by Daniel's empathy and kindness, one of our relatives created a Facebook page, "What Would Daniel Do?," to inspire others to reach out as our youngest son did.

As lawmakers and others discuss what can be done to curb gun violence, we hope Americans will ask, What would Daniel do?

Daniel would listen and be respectful. Our country needs a new dialogue, one that doesn't follow the tired script of political squabbling. Any improvement to our laws, no matter how small or reasonable, should not be decried as the forward wave of an attempt to "ban guns" or "take away rights." Even those of us who have lost the most are suggesting no such thing.

Daniel would be honest. We know that there are no easy answers to these multifaceted issues. Anyone who suggests that a single law would "solve the problem" isn't telling the truth. But neither is anyone who says that changes in our laws can't make a difference.

Daniel wouldn't give up hope. We refuse to accept the status quo. Making our society safer will require sustained, comprehensive action by individuals as well as by communities and government. As parents, there is nothing more important to us than our relationship with our children. Every parent can start right there, in their own home. On a broader level, it is urgent that we address the gaps in our mental health system and examine school security. We must have the same open dialogue about gun responsibility and accountability. The parental desire to love and protect our children is common ground for gun owners and non-gun owners alike.

We have joined with other families, neighbors and friends in making the Sandy Hook Promise (www.sandyhookpromise.org). We hope every member of Congress and Americans nationwide will join us in pledging to honor the lives lost last month by coming together to end these violent tragedies.

Our Daniel wanted to be a fireman like his uncles. He played drums in our family band, and he could run like the wind. Until Dec. 14, Daniel's future was limited only by the size of his dreams.

Our son's future was stolen from him: There will be no

firehouse, no more rock band, no Boston Marathon.

But if our nation uses this moment to make the future brighter for other children, Daniel's life and the lives of his classmates and educators will have meaning for years to come.

Our nation's ability to deal with gun violence is limited only by the civility of our discourse, the scope of our ambitions and – as Daniel would have done – our willingness to come together and take action.

Mark Barden is a musician and Jackie Barden is a teacher. They live in Newtown, Conn. This column first appeared in the Washington Post.

Vegetarians less likely to die from heart disease

By Huffington Post

Now this is a finding Bill Clinton can attest to.

In a new study confirming the heart-healthy benefits of a plant-based diet, researchers found that vegetarians are 32 percent less likely to die or be hospitalized because of heart disease.

The findings, which are published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, show that vegetarianism's positive effects on the heart largely lie with its cholesterol- and blood pressure-lowering abilities.

"The results clearly show that the risk of heart disease in vegetarians is about a third lower than in comparable non-

vegetarians," study researcher Tim Key, deputy director of the Cancer Epidemiology Unit at the University of Oxford, said in a statement.

The study included 45,000 people from England and Scotland who were part of the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC)-Oxford study. Of those people, about 34 percent were vegetarian. They all had their blood pressure taken and blood samples drawn to measure cholesterol levels for the study.

The participants began the study in the 90s and were tracked until 2009; by that time, 1,235 had developed heart disease. Of those people, 1,066 people were hospitalized for heart disease, while 169 people died from heart disease.

After taking into account outside factors like age, exercise, socioeconomic background, smoking status, alcohol consumption and education level, researchers found that vegetarians had a 32 percent lower risk of being hospitalized or dying from heart disease over the study period.

And when taking body mass index into account, they still had a 28 percent lower risk of developing heart disease than their meat-eating peers, the researchers found.

Of course, plant-based eating has also been linked with other health benefits, including living a longer life and having a lower risk of cancer.

USFS, ski resorts at odds

over water rights

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

The U.S. Forest Service will soon launch a national public process as it renews efforts to install a ski-permit rule requiring operators to transfer water rights used on public land to federal government.

A U.S. District judge in Denver last month overturned the new Forest Service rule, arguing that the agency had ran afoul of procedural guidelines when it sculpted new 2011 and 2012 permitting regulations requiring ski area operators to transfer water rights to the federal government as a condition of the ski area permit.

Judge William Martinez sided with the National Ski Areas Association, which had sued the Forest Service in January 2012 to stop the new permit water rules. The Forest Service this week announced it would begin a public process this spring – following federal procedural rules this time – gathering input from ski areas, ski area communities and others as it sculpts a regulation addressing water rights.

The agency will work to develop rules that keep water connected to the land, not the permit-holder.

“We would like to keep a situation where the water that is being used in the future – that is necessary and dependent for that ski area to operate – stays with that ski area for snowmaking and ski area operations,” said Rocky Mountain Regional Forester Daniel Jirón. “With climate change and other thing we are seeing, being able to maintain water at the ski area is going to be really, really important.”

The national process this spring will gather ski-area operators, business and residents in resort-dependent communities and anyone who depends on outdoor recreation,

Jirón said.

Geraldine Link, public policy director for the National Ski Areas Association, said the group welcomed the public process and was eager to participate.

“We hope that all water rights owners will participate in the public process given the significant percentage of water that arises on National Forest System lands,” she said.

The process launched this week when the Colorado House agricultural committee heard testimony on a water rights bill. House Bill 1013 would prohibit a landowner from conditioning a special-use permit on the transfer of privately owned water rights. The bill was amended and a vote delayed until next week.

Jirón, who testified before the committee on Monday, said he wants to work closely with the state’s 22 ski areas operating on national forest land and the communities that rely on the $1.5 billion generated by those ski hills. He also said any new water-rights regulation would comply with Colorado’s complex water laws.

Jirón hailed the state’s ski area executives as “extremely professional, dedicated people … committed to skiing and committed to the industry.” But he wondered who would be in charge in 40 years.

“We have seen lots of changes in other kinds of industries,” he said, noting that ski-area permits last for 40 years and the Forest Service needs to think “long haul” about the future value of water and whether future owners could be compelled to sell water instead of run a ski hill. “It is not unreasonable to envision corporate changes where we are not working with these same people. Would they have the same dedication or would they see it as an asset? You see that in other industries. We have to look longer than just the current group or even the next group.”

Chicken wing consumption spikes during Super Bowl

By Huffington Post

Rumors of a chicken wing shortage are likely unfounded, so wing fans can breath a sigh of relief. And these wing fans are serious about their devotion – the National Chicken Council estimates that 1.23 billion chicken wings will be consumed over Super Bowl weekend this year.

This is down slightly from 2012, when the NCC estimated that 1.25 billion wings would be consumed. If 1.23 billion wing segments were laid end to end, they would stretch from Candlestick Park in San Francisco to M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore – 27 times.

“Chicken companies produced about one percent fewer birds last year, due in large part to record high corn and feed prices,” said Bill Roenigk, chief economist and market analyst at the National Chicken Council, in a press release. “Corn makes up more than two-thirds of chicken feed and corn prices hit an all-time high in 2012, due to two reasons: last summer’s drought and pressure from a federal government requirement that mandates 40 percent of our corn crop be turned into fuel in the form of ethanol. Simply put, less corn equals higher feed costs, which means fewer birds produced.”

Wings are currently the highest priced part of the chicken, which is somewhat ironic since they first became popular as a cheap byproduct of rising demand for boneless, skinless

chicken breast in the 1980s. Apparently, there’s such high demand for wings now that some restaurants sell chicken breast meat branded as boneless wings.

The NCC estimates that more than 13.25 billion chicken wings will be sold (as wings, not as components of a whole chicken) throughout the year. To truly comprehend the power of the Super Bowl, the NCC has created this graph based on grocery store and supermarket 2012 chicken wings sales. It’s clear that an outsized share are sold Super Bowl weekend.

Wine tasting benefits Sugar Pine Foundation

Ben’s Fine Wines & Spirits in Reno is hosting a fundraiser for the Sugar Pine Foundation.

The March 8 event will start at 5pm and will feature a wine tasting from El Dorado County vineyards, hors d’oevres, a photography expose and commentary about the Sugar Pine Foundation. The live auction and raffle will close at 8:30pm, though the event continues until 10pm.

A suggested donation of $20 will support the Sugar Pine Foundation.

X Games snowmobiler dies

Updated Jan. 31 11:40am: Caleb Moore died this morning. More details are in this story.

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By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

ASPEN — Rose Battersby snapped a picture from the top of the eight-feature X Games slopestyle course Sunday and tweeted, “Feel the fear but do it anyway.”

Later that night, the 19-year-old New Zealand skier was rushed to a Denver hospital with a fractured back she suffered during practice after coming up short on the second of the course’s four massive jumps. That same night, 25-year-old snowmobiler Caleb Moore’s condition worsened as a cardiac injury he suffered in a crash Thursday night during the X Games freestyle competition led to a brain complication. He remains in critical condition in St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction.

The 17th version of the winter circus of snowsport and the 12th at Aspen’s Buttermilk ski area saw many crashes but few serious injuries. But Moore’s injury has skiing’s, snowboarding’s and snowmobiling’s most accomplished athletes under the microscope as they examine the escalating risks of the vaunted contest.

“When is enough enough?” professional snowmobiler Paul Thacker said was a question he and his competitors talked about.

It’s a heavy question for the 36-year-old Thacker, who once held the world record for jumping his snowmobile 301 feet. He returned to the Winter X Games last weekend to compete in adaptive snowmobile racing after a 2010 training accident left him a paraplegic.

“I’m always asked the question, ‘Where’s the ceiling?’ And every year we are like, ‘It’s not going to get any gnarlier,'” said the Anchorage resident. “They are never going to do a double back. They are never going to do a frontflip. But then it happens.

“It’s kind of like you tell me I can’t do something and I’ll show you how I can. It’s how we are wired.”

Thacker reflected the somber mood blanketing the freestyle family as their friend fights for his life.

“It’s unfortunate that it takes something like this to kind of snap everybody back into reality and show everybody just how gnarly it is, because the guys that are good at it make it look super easy, and it’s not,” Thacker said. “Every time you throw a leg over, it might be the last time.”

Wrestling with the danger is a daily mental game for snowsports athletes, especially X Games competitors who arrive in Aspen ready to set themselves apart.

They train for months, in the gym, on the hill and using airbags, foam pits and trampolines, preparing themselves for the moment where they can shine under the brightest spotlight in their sport. Sometimes that moment can prod athletes to push too far after logging endless hours preparing their bodies to answer that call.

“It’s a gradual slope. We build up very slowly and very carefully,” said Heath Frisby, who at last year’s X Games threw the first frontflip on a snowmobile and this year earned best trick bronze with another first: an underflip on the 75-foot gap jump.

Frisby expressed dismay with best-trick competitor Jackson Strong, a motorcross athlete who trained a mere four hours on a snowmobile before trying – and failing – a pair of audacious backflip tricks. On his first trick, Strong bailed at the apex

of his jump, flailing through the air as he tumbled. His unmanned sled caromed off the course, snagging the wire-lined safety fence and injuring a 13-year-old spectator.

“You can tell he wasn’t ready. It’s not something we are taking on all of the sudden,” said Frisby, who competed Sunday with a Texas flag to honor Moore. “We have rode all our lives. We are not trying to jump in over our heads and do something realistically we have no business doing.”

Moore and his younger brother, Colten, once were those newbies from Krum, Texas – training a mere month on a snowmobile before transferring their lifelong ATV-racing skills onto snow in the 2010 X Games. Caleb won bronze that show. Last year Colten took gold.

“They are still green, but they are very capable of being the best riders in the field,” said Frisby, who has been competing in the X Games for eight years.

In a statement released Tuesday, ESPN X Games officials stated: “We’ve worked closely on safety issues with athletes, course designers and other experts for each of the 18 years of X Games. Still, when the world’s best compete at the highest level in any sport, risks remain. Caleb is a four-time X Games medalist who fell short on his rotation on a move he has landed several times previously.”

Moore family spokeswoman Chelsea Lawson said a website has been set up where fans can help the athletes’ family with support.

“People have been asking for an outlet to help with the medical bills,” she said of the site giveforward.com/calebmoore.

Last year’s X Games was blanketed in grief after the death of freeskiing pioneer Sarah Burke only a week earlier after a seemingly innocuous crash while training in the superpipe in

Park City. She cratered in the pipe, suffering cardiac arrest. She died nine days after the accident.

Assessing and mitigating risk is a big part of the X Games. As athletes explore the very edge of their sports – defying gravity with trickery once considered impossible – they are upping their risk levels.

“As pro athletes doing what we do, I think we all accept and understand that these are inherent risks in the sport, and I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t believe in myself,” said Canadian freeskier Kaya Turski, who has three X Games gold medals in slopestyle. “Still, it is a fine line, and I’ve crossed that line a few times.”

Turski on Sunday spent more than 30 minutes in the starting gate of the slopestyle competition as Ashley Battersby – no relation to Rose – was treated by medics. Ashley suffered a knee injury on the landing of the final jump.

Rose Battersby late Monday night posted on her Facebook page that her spine has been put “back together and I am pleased to say that my toes can wiggle!!!”

Athletes once again raised the bar in skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling at last weekend’s X Games.

In 2000, Frenchman Candide Thovex won ski best trick with a rare 900-degree spin. This year, Swede skier Henrik Harlaut won big air gold with a 1620-degree spin while backflipping three times. Snowboarder Shaun White not only stuck his signature back-to-back double-backflip 1260s but soared to a record 24 feet above the superpipe. Snowboarder Elena Hight stuck the first double backflip for women in the pipe. Snowmobilers threw first-ever tricks like Joe Parsons’ backward-landing “Gator Hater.”

“We are modern-day explorers,” said Jimmy “Blaze” Fejes, one of the first to backflip a snowmobile. “There are no new

places in the world to see and discover, so you have to try to create new things. That's who everybody is."

Fejes said the X Games snowmobile freestyle course "could not have been any safer." Years of competition have honed ramp positions, landing ramp angles and distances to a science.

The human factor can trump that science. Even the best athletes can hiccup, as Moore did when he underrotated a backflip and flew over his handlebars Thursday night, tumbling with his 450-pound sled. The tiniest bobble or miscalculation can trigger tragedy, especially when spinning and flipping 40 feet above cement-like snow.

"The jumps have never been safer," Fejes said. "Everything was perfect. Caleb has thrown that trick hundreds of times. It was just a very fluke accident."

Watch when you eat, researchers say

By Mary MacVean, Los Angeles Times

Some popular diets advise against late-night snacking or even eating after 6pm. Now, there's some research to confirm that when you eat could matter as well as what you eat if you're trying to shed pounds.

A study in Spain followed 420 men and women on a diet for 20 weeks. They were grouped into early eaters – those who had

their main meal before 3pm – and late eaters – those who had it after. (The participants followed the Mediterranean diet, in which the main meal was lunch.)

Researchers looked at what the participants ate, their activity, their sleep habits and other characteristics. The dieters also attended weekly group therapy sessions.

It turned out that the late eaters lost less weight – 17 pounds – and at a slower rate than the early eaters, who lost almost 22 pounds, the researchers wrote Tuesday in the International Journal of Obesity.

“Recent studies link energy regulation to the circadian clock … emphasizing that the timing of food intake itself may have a significant role in weight regulation,” wrote the authors, led by M. Garaulet of the University of Murcia in Spain.

“No significant differences were found in age, gender distribution, obesity-related variables and metabolic syndrome characteristics between the early and late lunch eaters,” the researchers said. But they said the late eaters had small breakfasts or skipped breakfast – and that long period from the first meal to the second might be at work.

The researchers noted that their study was based on observing the dieters, and that more work is needed to figure out the cause of the difference between the groups.

STHS student competes against professionals and wins

South Tahoe High School 10th-grader Austin Allen’s photograph “Hope Valley” was purchased by Marshall Medical Center in Placerville.

The hospital and El Dorado Arts Council had a contest for all California artists to enter artwork to be purchased for permanent display in the hospital. Professional artists submitted artwork

STHS is the only school to have a student submit a photo.

Ski report: End the month on the slopes

End the month with corduroy.

Here is the Jan. 31 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Councilwoman takes issue with loop road talk



Alternative 2 of the loop road proposed by the Tahoe Transportation District.

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – One thing rang loud and clear Wednesday – Tahoe Transportation District and South Lake Tahoe officials are not on the same page when it comes to the proposed loop road on the east side of the city.

Carl Hasty, leader of the TTD, was the guest speaker Jan. 30 at the Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe meeting at Harveys.

City Councilwoman JoAnn Conner was a guest of the Soroptimist. She was sitting next to newly appointed, though not yet sworn-in, Councilwoman Brooke Laine.

Hasty spoke about Alternative 2, the original route his agency brought forward and how the city doesn't like it. But it is still on the table.



Carl Hasty, Tahoe Transportation District executive director, talks Jan. 30 to Soroptimists about the loop road. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The TTD is an independent agency and does not take its direction from the city. The city has one vote on the TTD board. That member is Councilwoman Angela Swanson.

TTD can go forward with the loop road no matter how much the council protests. If properties would need to be obtained by "force", either the city or Caltrans would need to implement eminent domain. The city says it won't do so. Alternative 2 would affect more than 80 properties – some residential, some commercial.

Then Hasty spoke about the triangle alternative.

"The city says they would like this in the environmental documents," Hasty said.

Conner looked quizzical, and shared with tablemates that that alternative has not been before the council.

During the question and answer period she told Hasty she had no idea what he was talking about when it came to Alternative 3.

Hasty said he plans to be back in front of the council in February or March to discuss the loop road.

The idea is Highway 50 would be rerouted behind the casinos, with most proposals going only behind Harrah's and MontBleu. The current highway by Heavenly Village and in front of the Stateline casinos would be narrowed and become a city street.

Hasty called the loop road an opportunity and that those in the room should see it that was as well.

Making the area more pedestrian and bike friendly are goals, as is the ability to close down the road and have events on the city street.

But what is never discussed is why today events don't occur on the current loop road – behind any of the Stateline casinos.

After the council gets an update, the TTD board will hear a presentation, the results of the economic analysis should be out in the spring, then alternatives will be refined.

"We are not at the detail level yet," Hasty said. That will come with design charettes as well as when the city and Douglas County work on their respective area plans.

The goal is for the loop road to go through the environmental process in 2014, funding would be sought in 2015, with construction to follow when money is in hand.