

The *Columbus Republic* [editorialized](#) about the violence, vandalism and threats that have occurred recently with regard to the debate on health care reform:



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[Violence, threats don't belong in debate](#)

U.S. Rep Mike Pence, R-Ind., is to be commended for his comments relating to the criminal acts committed in the wake of passage of the health care bill.

In a statement released by his Washington office Thursday, the Columbus native - who is also the third-ranking Republican in the House of Representatives - said:

"The American people don't want a government takeover of health care. The policy, the backroom deals and the arrogance have angered millions.

"But that is no excuse for bigotry, threats or acts of vandalism, and I condemn such things in the strongest possible terms. People who engage in such acts undermine our cause and should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Sadly, the perverse reaction - which included phone threats to congressional offices, windows

smashed by bricks and bigoted diatribes - has crossed political parties.

Although the majority of criminal acts appear to be against those who voted for the bill, a number of those who opposed it were also on the receiving end.

There is quite simply no defense for these actions. Nor is there any defense for those who tolerate them and even in some cases encourage them.

In explaining the actions of these bigots, some have used the famed quote of conservative icon Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., who said in his speech accepting the 1964 Republican presidential nomination that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."

He was talking about political ideologies, not throwing bricks through windows or wishing an opponent dead.

Those who commit such acts are not patriots. They're idiots and likely very sick people.

It is the latter who should be of particular concern to those leaders in the political and media entities who run dangerously close to inciting violence through their cleverly crafted messages.

It is reprehensible, for instance, that a Web site associated with former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin would post a map of the United States dotted with a series of rifle cross hairs.

One of those cross hairs was positioned directly over the portion of southern Indiana represented by Rep. Baron Hill, D-Ind. Hill was one of those who supported the health care bill, along with representatives whose districts were similarly targeted and his office also reported receiving threats.

Some have argued in defense of the posting that no facial images were used and that the use of cross hairs is a common political device. Such distinctions do not matter to deranged individuals who could be triggered into action by such a tactic.

This is, indeed, a matter of free speech, but it has become overshadowed by blatant criminal actions.

Criminal actions have no place in the exercise of free speech.