

THE TENNESSEAN

CONTRIBUTORS | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Charlie Kirk was a political commentator. Why is he being honored like a hero? | Opinion

Lowering flags and showering tributes on Kirk sends a message: Celebrity and loyalty trump service and sacrifice. That is deeply disrespectful to those who risk and give their lives for all Americans.

Mark Proctor Guest Columnist

Sept. 16, 2025, 7:03 a.m. CT

I'm upset about Charlie Kirk's death, and not just for the obvious reasons.

Let me be clear: I am truly saddened by his family's loss. No one should endure such a horrific and sudden loss, and no one deserves to be murdered. But even as I grieve for them, I cannot ignore what his passing reveals about our nation's misplaced priorities.

Some Americans seem more shaken by the death of a political commentator than by the endless loss of children to school shootings. One man's death dominates headlines, sparks ceremonies and even flag-lowering orders, while the names of murdered children fade from memory in days.

A Minnesota Democratic lawmaker — a true public servant who legislated, sacrificed and was also killed — received far less recognition when she was killed three months ago. The death of US Rep. Melissa Hortman barely registered compared to the spectacle surrounding Kirk.

Opinion: [Charlie Kirk's death is a tragic sign of our times. Here's how we move forward](#)

Need a news break? [Check out the all new PLAY hub with puzzles, games and more!](#)

I know what public service really looks like. I retired as a Captain with the Tennessee Highway Patrol and worked with many men and women who were faithful public servants. For 25 years, I served this state, including in the Executive Protection Unit, protecting three governors of different political beliefs.

I protected them all because democracy demands it. Our military men and women, troopers, officers, nurses, doctors and countless others serve with purpose — and most do so without fanning the flames of hatred.

Kirk receiving state funeral treatment is "spectacle over service"

But Kirk's legacy troubles me.

He spent years [pushing for more guns in schools](#) — arming staff, adding officers, doubling down on the belief that weapons equal safety. But as someone who carried a firearm professionally for decades, I can tell you: Guns alone will not keep schools safe.

Kirk himself had armed officers and private security around him. It still wasn't enough. If trained professionals couldn't prevent his killing, how can we pretend it will work for our children?

Even more troubling is the hateful rhetoric Kirk used to build his platform. He regularly pushed racist, misogynistic and homophobic views that stoked division. He [dismissed the struggles of marginalized communities](#), [demeaned the LGBTQ+ community](#) and [questioned women's rights](#). His words didn't just divide — they emboldened those who believed in hatred and intolerance, legitimizing voices that harm the very fabric of our society.

Letters: [Charlie Kirk shouldn't have been killed, but he's no martyr](#)

Even more troubling is how we've honored him. Kirk never served in the military, never held elected office and never devoted his life to public service. Yet [his body was flown on Air Force Two](#) — a plane typically reserved for the highest elected officials

— while fallen military members, true heroes, are often returned home in cargo planes.

[Lowering flags and showering tributes](#) on Kirk sends a message: Celebrity and loyalty trump service and sacrifice. That is deeply disrespectful to those who risk and give their lives for all Americans.

This contrast highlights a larger truth: Our society applauds spectacle over service, words over action and fame over sacrifice.

What's truly needed in the wake of Kirk's death

Thoughts and prayers alone will not protect our children or strengthen our communities. We need more. We need action. Even the Bible tells us that “faith without works is dead.”

We must pass stricter gun laws. Close loopholes. Ensure red flag laws exist in every state. Stop the spread of misinformation and dangerous ideologies. Social media and news outlets must be responsible for the content they allow. Invest in media literacy so young people can think critically.

We must shift from more guns to smarter security measures. Schools need counselors, mental health professionals and trained officers who can de-escalate situations. Students and teachers should feel safe because of a network of care, not because they are armed.

Opinion: [Charlie Kirk's assassination wasn't the first. Here's what the past can teach us](#)

We must hold politicians accountable for lies and hateful rhetoric. Any trooper or officer spreading dangerous falsehoods would face discipline such as suspension, loss of pay or termination. Why should elected officials, or those with political platforms the size of Kirk's, be treated differently?

Accountability cannot be limited to the ballot box; it must exist in real time when leaders betray public trust.

Whom we honor reflects our society's values

Finally, we must honor true public service, not the spectacle of celebrity. Celebrate those who dedicate their lives to service — military, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, elected officers and community organizers whose efforts benefit everyone. Not just a select few on the far right or left.

The measure of a society isn't how loudly we mourn celebrities. It's how deeply we value the lives of its children, teachers and public servants.

If we can't summon equal grief for them, then the tragedy isn't just who has died — it's who we've allowed ourselves to become.

Retired Captain Mark Proctor served with the Tennessee Highway Patrol for 25+ years, including in Command roles under Governor Bill Haslam. He is a lifelong Tennessean.