

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on Gun Violence Prevention Efforts in Monterey Park, California

March 14, 2023

Good afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. Please have a seat, if you have one. *[Laughter]*

Good afternoon. Saturday, January 21, 2023, Lunar New Year, a time to enjoy. A ballroom dance studio, a place of happiness, friendship, and belonging. People across backgrounds and generations celebrating their cultural roots and bonding through ballroom song and dance.

A place of refuge where immigrants have lived for years, supported new immigrants who just arrived, becoming not just friends, but family.

But as we all saw, a day of festivity and light turned into a day of fear and darkness. A holiday of hope and possibilities marked by horror and pain. Vibrant dances and music replaced by vigils and memorials. Eleven souls taken. Nine injured. Private mourning made public.

That sense of safety shattered. Survivors who will always carry the physical and emotional scars. Families left behind who will never be the same.

One of the worst mass shootings in California history. A tragedy that has pierced the soul of this Nation, here in Monterey Park, in the San Gabriel Valley, the heart of the Asian American community.

My dear friend Judy Chu, former mayor of Monterey Park and your Congresswoman and chair of Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus [Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus; White House correction]. Senator Alex Padilla, a champion for this community and the entire State. My good friend, Supervisor Hilda Solis, and all elected officials, law enforcement, first responders, faith leaders, community members all here today.

You've shown up for this community, and I know you always will.

To the families of victims who spend time—I get a chance to meet with today and whom Vice President Harris spent time with a few weeks ago, I'm here on behalf of the American people to mourn with you, to pray with you, to let you know you're loved and not alone.

Every case is different, but I know what it's like. I know what it's like to get that call. I know what it's like to be told. I know what it's like to lose a loved one so suddenly. It's like losing a piece of your soul. It's like a black hole in your chest you feel like you're being sucked into.

Suffocating, hardly able to breath. The anger. The pain. The depths of the loss so profound it's hard to explain. The suddenness tends to magnify the grief.

And, as time passes, the shock and numbness slowly make way for the sobering reality of their absence. That empty chair at the dinner table. The birthdays, the anniversaries, the holidays without them.

Everyday things, small things, the detail you miss the most. The scent when you open that closet door. The park you go by that you used to stroll in. The morning tea you shared together. The bend of his smile. The perfect pitch of her laugh.

As Judy shared with me, this is a tight-knit community, with intergenerational households and deep reverence and respect for its elders. A community that's opened its heart and its homes to friends and neighbors and stood strong throughout the pandemic as anti-Asian hate crimes rose. A community that in the face of horrific tragedy has become a symbol of hope and resilience, pushing forward together, healing together.

People from all faiths and backgrounds rallying to show their love and support, raising money for funeral costs and memorials, providing counseling and translation services to the victims' families. Providing and proving that even with heavy hearts we have unbreakable spirits.

As a nation, we remember them: immigrants from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, all of whom found a home in America.

Mr. Ma, age 72. A pillar of the community. A beloved manager and dance instructor at Star Ballroom. He walked patrons to their cars at night. Helped new immigrants find jobs. His children and grandchildren will carry on his legacy in the spirit of one of his favorite Chinese proverbs, "Cherish the people in front of you." Cherish the people in front of you.

Andy Kao, 72. "Mr. Nice" for his kindness, his positivity, his infectious smile. A free spirit always ready to lend a helping hand. He died shielding his dance partner.

Xiujuan Yu, 57. Devoted mom, wife, sister. A woman of faith. Always there to help others bringing food and newspapers to family members who had trouble walking. Always—always working tirelessly with her husband to build a future for their three children.

Nancy Jian, 62. Known as "Sister Sunshine." She loved to play cards, piano, and a weekly volleyball game. Always sharing her homegrown plants and vegetables with neighbors and friends. A dedicated mom, married nearly 40 years, a husband and wife who were always together, even in their last dance.

Valentino Alvero, 68 years old. A servant of God. Life of the party. Storyteller who made the whole room laugh. A man devoted to his children and his grandchildren.

Mymy Nhan, 65. Bedrock of her family and friends. Eternal optimist. Avid dancer who'd visit the studio every weekend, often leaving snacks behind for her classmates. She radiated positive energy through her laughter, her kind words, and her smile.

Muoi Dai Ung, 67. Refugee, community builder, cherished friend, known for her kindness, her sweetness, her generosity. Her beloved family, the center of her world.

Diana Tom, 70 years old. Devoted daughter, wife, mother, grandmother who loved to sing karaoke. A giver and an adventurer who loved to explore new foods and travel the world.

Charles Yau, 76. Grateful. Reflective. Believed in living to the—life to the fullest. He constantly showed his family and friends and showered them with warm words of encouragement, hope, and love.

Tau [Wen-Tau; White House correction] Yu, 64. A lifelong learner, he retired as a business manager and was pursuing a second career as a pharmacist while caring for his elder mother—elderly mother. A man beloved by his wife, children, and friends for his compassion, his determination, and his wisdom.

Lily Li, 63. A matriarch with absolute strength, optimism, and grace. Her daughter wrote: "Stolen is the grandmother whose granddaughter fell asleep many nights nestled between her loving arms. Taken away is the opportunity for her grandson to feel her love and warmth."

All of them lived lives of love, sacrifice, and service for their families, for their community. They represent a bigger story of who we are as Americans, embodying the simple truth that our diversity—our diversity—is the strength of this Nation.

We saw that strength in Maria Liang, owner of Star Ballroom, who I want to thank for pouring her heart into creating a warm, welcome space to bring the community together, especially seniors.

And we saw that strength in Brandon Tsay, who met me at the airport, whom Jill and I have gotten to know. Twenty minutes after the rampage at Star Ballroom, Brandon saw the same shooter walk into his family's own dance studio just 2 miles away, pointing a gun at him. In an instant, he found the courage to act and wrestled the semiautomatic firearm away. Brandon saved lives. He protected the community.

At Half Moon Bay, just 2 days later—[*applause*—you've got it. Brandon, stand up.

At Half Moon Bay, just 2 days later, we saw heroism from police officers, firefighters, and other first responders who rushed into the danger to save lives.

As many of you know, Jill and I invited Brandon as our guest at the State of the Union message because we wanted the country to know all of you—not just Brandon, all of you. The character of this community. The faith you have in this community. The pride. We see across—we see it in you across all of American life.

Just this week, a film about resilience and power of the Asian American immigrant family made history at the Oscars, echoing the heart of so many in this community.

But we also hear a message we've heard too often, including 2 years ago this week, after the spa shooting at the Atlanta—in the Atlanta area: Enough. Do something.

We remember and mourn today, but I am here with you today to act.

Last year, after the mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, I signed into law, after being in both places, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the most significant gun safety law in almost 30 years. That was in addition to me signing more executive actions to reduce gun violence than any of my predecessors at this point in their Presidencies.

Today I'm announcing another Executive order that will accelerate and intensify this work to save more lives more quickly.

First, this Executive order helps keep firearms out of dangerous hands, as I continue to call on Congress to require background checks for all firearm sales. And in the meantime—[*applause*]. In the meantime, my Executive order directs my Attorney General to take every lawful action possible to move us as close as we can to universal background checks without new legislation. I just—it's just common sense to check whether someone is a felon, a domestic abuser, before they buy a gun.

The Executive order also expands public awareness campaigns about the "red flag" orders—the laws—which my son, when he—before he died—attorney general of Delaware—was a great proponent of it and instituted it. So more parents, teachers, police officers, health providers, and counselors know how to flag for the—a court that someone is exhibiting violent tendencies, threatening classmates, or experiencing suicidal thoughts that make them a danger to themselves and others and temporarily remove that person's access to firearms.

And it promotes—this Executive order—safe storage for firearms, something every responsible gun owner agrees with.

The second thing it does—the Executive order ramps up our efforts to hold the gun industry accountable. It's the only outfit you can't sue these days. It does that by calling out for an independent Government study that analyzes and exposes how gun manufacturers aggressively market firearms to civilians, especially minors, including by using military imagery.

And it directs the Attorney General to public release—publicly release Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms inspection reports of firearms dealers who were cited for violation of the law. That way, policymakers can strengthen laws to crack down on those illegal gun dealers and the public can avoid purchasing from them.

Third, the Executive order improves Federal coordination to support victims, survivors, and their families and communities affected by mass shootings, the same way FEMA responds to your natural disasters in California and all around the Nation. And it will help folks recover and build after wild—that—they help folks recover and build after wildfires and superstorms and droughts.

For example, we need to provide more mental health support and grief—for grief and trauma and more financial assistance when a family loses the sole breadwinner or when a small business shuts down due to a lengthy shooting investigation.

There's more in this Executive order, but I'm not stopping there.

Last week, I laid out in my budget that we invest more in safer communities and expand access to mental health services for those affected by gun violence. Congressional Republicans should pass my budget instead of calling for cuts in these services or defunding the police or abolishing the FBI, as we hear from our MAGA Republican friends.

But let's be clear: None of this absolves Congress the responsibility—from the responsibility of acting to pass universal background checks, eliminate gun manufacturers' immunity from liability.

And I am determined once again to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. I led that fight in—to ban them in 1994. In the 10 years that law was in place, mass shootings went down. Our Republicans friends let it expire, and it—and 10 years later, and mass shootings tripled since then. Tripled.

So let's finish the job. Ban assault weapons. Ban them again. Do it now. Enough. Do something. Do something big.

Folks, let me close with this. Scripture says, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." A lot of us have been there.

As we gather here today, I know your hearts are broken, but I know your spirits are strong. And as you remember and heal, I know the light of your loved one is once again going to lead you forward.

It takes time. I tell everyone—at least it did with me—it takes time. But I promise you—I promise you—the day will come when the memory of your loved one brings a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye. The tear will never fully go away. But when you had that smile first—to remembrance, that's when you know—that's when you know you're going to make it—you're going to know you're going to make it.

And my prayer for all of you is that day will come sooner than later, but I promise you it will come.

God bless you all. I admire you so damn much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:37 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club of West San Gabriel Valley. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis, in her capacity as the Los Angeles County Supervisor for the First District; WenJu Liang, husband, and Weiqi, Weishan, and Liheng Liang, children, of Xiujuan Yu, who was killed in the January 21 shooting at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio; Jeff Liu, husband of Hongying "Nancy" Jian, who was killed in the January 21 shooting at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio; and Min Yi, daughter of LiLan Li, who was killed in the January 21 shooting at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio. He also referred to Executive Order 14092.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Gun violence prevention efforts in Monterey Park, CA.

Locations: Monterey Park, CA.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Chu, Judy M.; Garland, Merrick B.; Harris, Kamala D.; Liang, Liheng; Liang, Maria; Liang, Weiqi; Liang, Weishan; Liang, WenJu; Liu, Jeff; Padilla, Alejandro; Solis, Hilda L.; Tsay, Brandon; Yi, Min.

Subjects: Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, Bureau of; Attorney General; California, President's visit; California, shooting in Monterey Park; California, shootings in Half Moon Bay; Criminal background check procedures, strengthening efforts; Gun control efforts; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Vice President.

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