

play video games. He wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time. He hadn't made a bad decision. He was exactly where any other kid would be. Your kid. My kids. And then, gunmen started firing. And Zaevion—who was in high school, hadn't even gotten started in life—dove on top of three girls to shield them from the bullets. And he was shot in the head. And the girls were spared. And he gave his life to save theirs, an act of heroism a lot bigger than anything we should ever expect from a 15-year-old. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

We are not asked to do what Zaevion Dobson did. We're not asked to have shoulders that big, a heart that strong, reactions that quick. I'm not asking people to have that same level of courage or sacrifice or love. But if we love our kids and care about their prospects, and if we love this country and care about its future, then we can find the courage to vote. We can find the courage to get mobilized and organized. We can find the courage to cut through all the noise and do what a sensible country would do.

That's what we're doing today. And tomorrow, we should do more. And we should do more the day after that. And if we do, we'll

leave behind a nation that's stronger than the one we inherited and worthy of the sacrifice of a young man like Zaevion.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:43 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mark Barden, founder and managing director, Sandy Hook Promise, and father of Daniel Barden, who was killed in the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, on December 14, 2012; Mark E. Kelly, husband, and Gloria F. Giffords, mother, of former Rep. Gabrielle D. Giffords; Cmdr. Scott J. Kelly, crewmember, International Space Station; Min Yingjun, who was arrested for stabbing 22 children outside their school in the village of Chengping in Henan Province, China, on December 14, 2012; Mayor Madeline Rogero of Knoxville, TN; Brandon Perry and Christopher D. Bassett, suspected gunmen in the shooting in Knoxville on December 17, 2015; and Faith Gordon and Kiara Rucker, Fulton High School students who were shielded by Zaevion Dobson in the Knoxville shooting.

## Statement on Representative Steven J. Israel's Decision Not To Seek Reelection

*January 5, 2016*

Steve Israel has spent more than two decades serving the people of Long Island and fighting for working families. During his eight terms in Congress, he has fought to expand economic opportunity, deliver on America's promise of equality, honor our commitments to our veterans, and protect our communities from gun violence. As a leader of the Demo-

cratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Steve fought to advance our shared values and to build a future where every American who works hard can get ahead. I'm grateful for Steve's service, and I look forward to working with him throughout the remainder of his term. Michelle and I wish Steve and his family well as they begin their newest chapter.

## Statement on the Observance of Orthodox Christmas

*January 7, 2016*

Michelle and I wish a blessed Christmas to Orthodox Christians in the United States and around the world. During this holy season, we

celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and pray for peace on Earth. This day gives us a special opportunity to commemorate the contributions

of American Orthodox leaders to our progress. It also gives us a chance to reaffirm our commitment to protect religious minorities, including Christian minorities, who too often face violence and persecution throughout the world. Today and every day, we stand with all those who suffer attacks and discrimination, because

we believe that the freedom to practice your religion as you choose is a birthright of every person and part of the bedrock of a just society. So we join with our Orthodox brothers and sisters in celebration and in hopeful prayer for peace and justice the world over.

## Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at CNN's "Guns in America" Town Hall Meeting in Fairfax, Virginia *January 7, 2016*

*CNN Anchor Anderson Cooper.* And good evening from George Mason University here in Fairfax, Virginia. We are here tonight to talk about one of the most divisive issues in America today: guns. Their protection is enshrined in the Constitution in the Second Amendment, and gun ownership is an integral part of American history and culture.

There are some 30,000 gun deaths in America each year. Two-thirds of them are suicides; one-third of them are homicides. So the question we want to confront tonight is, how you find a balance between protecting the rights of American citizens who want to own guns, but preventing guns from getting into the hands of people who shouldn't have them?

We brought together people here tonight who represent really all sides of the issue: gun owners, gun sellers, people who have survived shootings or lost loved ones. Some here believe that having more guns makes us all safer and believe the right to bear arms defines us, preserves us from tyranny, and cannot be compromised in any way. Others here tonight believe just as passionately that more needs to be done to limit the sale of firearms. And we respect all of their views, and we want to hear from as many as we can tonight in the hour ahead.

One voice you will not hear from tonight is the National Rifle Association. They're the Nation's largest, most influential and powerful gun rights group. We invited them to be here; they are—I think their office is just a couple miles away. They declined to take part. Some of their members are here tonight though. We're very thankful for that. And so are repre-

sentatives from the National Firearms Retailers Association.

This town hall is not something the White House dreamed up or that the White House organized. CNN approached the White House shortly after the San Bernardino terror attacks with this idea. And we're pleased that they agreed to participate and pleased to welcome tonight the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

*The President.* Hey. Please take your seat.

*Mr. Cooper.* Thank you, Mr. President. Welcome.

*The President.* Thank you, everybody.

*Mr. Cooper.* Thanks for being here. I appreciate it.

*The President.* Great to be here. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Great to see you.

### *The President's Experience With Guns*

*Mr. Cooper.* Good to see you. Let me start. Have you ever owned a gun?

*The President.* I have never owned a gun. Now, up at Camp David, we've got some skeet shooting, so on a fairly regular basis, we get a 12-gauge and—I'm not making any claims about my marksmanship. [*Laughter*] But—

*Mr. Cooper.* Before you were President, did you ever feel a desire to get a gun, feel the need to get a gun?

*The President.* I grew up mostly in Hawaii, and other than hunting for wild pig, which they do once in a while, there's not the popularity of hunting and sportsmanship with guns as much as there are in other parts of the country.