

He was able to purchase two handguns, and used them to brutally murder thirty two individuals. We saw this trend continue last week with shootings in Nebraska and Colorado.

Individuals who shouldn't have access to guns are getting them with ease are our killing innocent people.

The NICS system is supposed to prevent this from happening, but a database is only as good as the information put in it and many states don't have the resources to keep the NICS database up to date.

The National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS, is deeply flawed.

Millions of criminal records are not accessible by ICS and millions others are missing critical data, such as arrest dispositions, due to data backlogs. The primary cause of delay in NICS background checks is the lack of updates due to funding and technology issues in the states.

Many states have not automated the records concerning mental illness, restraining orders, or misdemeanor convictions for domestic violence. Simply, put, the NICS system must be updated on both the state and federal level.

According to a Third Way report, over ninety one percent of those adjudicated for mental illness cannot be stopped by a background check due to flaws in the system. But this issue allows other barred individuals to purchase firearms. Twenty five percent of felony convictions do not make it into the NICS system.

That is why I introduced the NICS Improvement Act.

My bill would require all states to provide the NICS system with the relevant records needed to conduct effective background checks. It is the state's responsibility to ensure this information is current and accurate. They must update the records to ensure violent criminals do not have access to firearms.

However, I recognize, many state budgets are already overburdened.

This legislation would provide grants to states to update their records into the NICS system. States would get the funds they need to make sure records relevant to NICS are up to date.

While the NICS system does have major flaws, it is responsible for preventing thousands of barred individuals from purchasing firearms.

Approximately nine-hundred and sixteen thousand individuals were prohibited from purchasing a firearm for failing a background check between November 30, 1998, when the NICS system began operating, and December 31, 2004.

During this same period, nearly forty nine million Brady background checks were processed through NICS. By improving upon the NICS system, we can stop criminals from falling through the cracks. Today, we are one step closer to bringing the records of millions of barred individuals into the NICS system.

No system will be perfect, but that does not mean we should not work to make improvements. This is good policy that will save lives and should be passed by the House. My legislation imposes no new restrictions on gun owners and does not infringe on the 2nd Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens. In fact, similar legislation passed the House in 2002.

Today, Congress will stand up for the victims and pass common-sense legislation. This is the best Christmas present Congress could give those whose lives have been changed by gun violence.

This legislation will help ensure that people who are legally ineligible to purchase a gun will not be able to purchase them.

This bill poses no new burden on law-abiding gun owners or gun sellers. It simply enforces current law. This legislation has the widest range of support imaginable. The National Rifle Association and the Brady Campaign have endorsed this legislation.

We have worked across both partisan and ideological aisles to make this bill law. The cooperation from members of both parties and from people on both sides of the gun issue should serve as a model for this Congress.

We can work together to find common sense solutions to our problems. These problems shouldn't divide us, but bring us together to make our country a safer and better place.

Personally, this is a very important moment for me. I have been fighting for common sense gun laws for 14 years since my own life was changed forever by gun violence.

Tonight, I'm one step closer to the goal of making sure other families never have to experience what mine did 14 years ago.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue that is so important to me and other Americans whose lives have been affected by gun violence.

PATRIOT WEEK IN TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOLT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to call the attention of my colleagues to Patriot Week in Trenton, New Jersey. On December 26, 1776, Colonial soldiers under the command of General George Washington crossed the Delaware River and engaged in the first Battle of Trenton. As Thomas Paine wrote, this happened during "times that try men's souls; the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

On this historic day more than two centuries ago, over 2,400 patriots proved that they were not summer soldiers, battling their way through a winter sleet storm, strong winds and the ice-strewn Delaware River. Against all odds, Washington and his soldiers completed the crossing, marched silently to Trenton on Christmas night with cannon, and arrived taking the Hessian garrison by surprise. This engagement, followed by the pivotal Battle of Princeton, has been called "the beginning of the winning."

The crossing of the Delaware is a story that must be told again and again so all generations will know this

feat and the new life it gave the American Revolution. On December 26 through 31 of this year, again this year, the Trenton Downtown Association will celebrate the 131st anniversary of this history-changing event through Patriot Week, the largest Revolutionary War festival in America.

Patriot Week in the Trenton area will include over 50 events, including the reenactment of Washington's crossing of the Delaware, puppet shows and other children's activities, tours by bus and on foot, and lectures and panel discussions. These events will help pass down this great and important story to our children and to adults, the story of the War for Independence. I am sure these events will be both informative and entertaining, as they have been in previous years, and I look forward to attending some of these events myself.

I am proud that in my central New Jersey district we honor the sacrifices that were made to found this great Nation through events like Patriot Week and through the Crossroads of the American Revolution which commemorates 14 counties in New Jersey where the War for Independence took place.

However, our battles against Britain for a free and democratic nation took place in over 19 States and over two wars, and each of these States has its own unique story about its role in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Many States, however, have not taken sufficient steps to preserve the sites of those battles. Out of the 825 significant battlefields and associated sites of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, more than 100 of these battlefields have been lost, about 250 are in fragmented or poor condition, and another 220 are in danger of being destroyed within the next few years. Therefore, some of us have sponsored here in the House of Representatives the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 Battlefield Protection Act, H.R. 160, and the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Commemorative Coin Act, H.R. 158. H.R. 160 would create a national program for the preservation of historic battlefields. It would allow officials of the American Battlefield Protection Program to collaborate with State and local governments and non-profit organizations to preserve and protect the most endangered historical sites and to provide up to 50 percent of the cost of purchasing battlefield land threatened by sprawl and commercial development. H.R. 158 would provide the necessary funding for these purchases by authorizing the creation and issuance of commemorative coins for these two wars.

History is best understood by those who have had the opportunity to touch it, experience it and live it. On December 26 through 31, over 4,000 people will be reliving the history of the Battle of Trenton during Patriot Week. It is my hope that Congress will pass H.R. 160 and H.R. 158 to allow other States the privilege of preserving their historic battlefields where their citizens, and

all citizens, can experience the history of the founding of our great Nation.

IN MEMORY OF REUBEN
WHEATLEY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Again, Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to be speaking to my colleagues as you preside over this Chamber, and we thank you for your leadership.

I am privileged this evening to be able to stand on the floor of the House and salute a very dear friend, a friend who will commemorate and celebrate for his homegoing ceremony on this coming Friday, December 21, 2007. We will lay this battle-worn warrior, this friendly and wonderful public servant, Reuben Wheatley, to rest. I stand here as a longstanding friend, as a grateful member of his community, for all that he did to promote equality and justice and freedom.

Yes, Reuben Wheatley, born September 15, 1921 was, in fact, a member of the movement both in terms of creating opportunities for those of African American heritage and others and as well in fighting for the working men and women of America.

He was the proud son of Fifth Ward. Yes, that is in Houston, Texas, but everybody knows there is something called proudly Fifth Ward, Texas. Educated in the Houston Independent School District, and certainly whenever you would see Reuben, he would talk about his beloved Wheatley High School, Phyllis Wheatley High School, and he was an all-star member of the track team, the football team and the basketball team. And he was quick, regal, tall and quick. They called him "Rabbit." He joined the church at the Sloan Memorial United Methodist Church, a church still standing proudly in Fifth Ward.

But yet as this young man grew, he loved this Nation. And in 1941 he heeded the call of this Nation, the need of this Nation and went to war, World War II. He participated in the European Theater of Operations and was honorably discharged by the United States Army as master sergeant. He had the good sense, if you will, when he returned to marry Helen McCree his high school sweetheart, on November 18, 1945.

How grateful we are that he was one of the returning heroes, that as he battled in World War II, he lived to be able to enjoy the partnership, friendship and love of Helen McCree, now his wife, Helen Wheatley.

His father was a longshoreman, and in those days, the union and working for the union and working for the longshoremen, that was a job for African Americans that was a legacy, an opportunity, a step up. And so when he came back from the war, he joined in the footsteps of his father and became a

member of the International Longshoremen's Association, Local Number 872.

And boy, did he become a member, and did he not serve. Reuben Wheatley had his hands on the pulse of the community. He understood the importance and the necessity of empowerment of minorities. He was one of the champions of the election of the Honorable Barbara Jordan. Almost every elected person that could come out of Fifth Ward, Reuben Wheatley was there. He was there for Mickey Leland. And I am so grateful that he stretched his arms to be there for SHEILA JACKSON-LEE. As I ran for judge and city council, he saw in me something worth investing in.

Thank you, Reuben, and thank you to your wonderful family, your daughters, who you love so dearly, one in particular was named the name that I have, Sheila. And she, of course, along with her siblings were stars, and they were that because of Reuben and his wife Helen.

And so I am here today to thank you, Reuben, for now you fly where the angels fly. Thank you, Reuben, for being regal and tall. Thank you for smiling. Thank you for loving. Thank you for being that star at Wheatley so that your classmates can enjoy talking about your exploits on the football field, the basketball court, and the track, and yes, to remember that friendly name, "Rabbit."

Thank you for your faith and your commitment to your country. Thank you for your commitment, again, to family. Houston, Texas, the State of Texas and certainly our Nation is better because you yet lived. On Friday, it will be a celebration. Although tears will fall, we will be so grateful to continue to see you even as I speak, walking lightly in front of us.

Madam Speaker, it is certainly great to be able to say tonight, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." And that is what we say to Reuben Wheatley as he is laid to rest. We celebrate him and congratulate his life. God bless the family, and God bless him as he rests.

CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION IN MEMORY OF
REUBEN WHEATLEY

Whereas, on September 15, 1921, God blessed Emory McMillan, Sr and Creola Boyd Wheatley with the birth of their son, Reuben; and

Whereas, as a proud son of the Fifth Ward, Texas Wheatley clan, Reuben was educated in the Houston Independent School District. At his beloved Phyllis Wheatley High School, he excelled in football, basketball, and track and field earning the nickname "Rabbit"; and

Whereas, Reuben was presented to Christ by his parents at Sloan Memorial United Methodist Church. He later joined his bride at Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church and subsequently, both as faithful servants of the Lord, joined Brentwood Baptist Church; and

Whereas, in 1941, Reuben honored the call to serve his country during World War II. He participated in the European Theater of Operations and was honorably discharged from the United States Army as Master Sergeant.

Upon his return from the service in 1945, Reuben married Helen McCree, his high school sweetheart, on November 18th; and

Whereas, in 1946, Reuben began his career along the shore working on the Houston docks where his father had worked since 1921. He was a member of International Longshoremen's Association, Local #872; and

Whereas, he served his home local as Trustee, Recording Secretary and Business Agent before being elected President in 1971. In 1975, he became Executive Vice President of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District of the ILA; and

Whereas, he served as an active board member of Family Services of Greater Houston and an avid financial supporter of the United Negro College Fund; and

Whereas, Reuben was deeply committed to his community and his civic involvement reflected his concerns; and

Whereas, the memory of Reuben Wheatley will forever be in our hearts and minds as we go forth to celebrate his life today; and now, therefore, be it

Resolved. That on behalf of the constituents of the Eighteenth Congressional District of Texas, Reuben Wheatley will be remembered for his devotion to his family, his community service, and his passion for music. His life will serve as an example to all of us to continue his legacy to serve others. His death is a great loss to us, but we know that his work on Earth is finished, and we believe the Master will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter . . ."

A NEW DEBATE REGARDING LIBERTY, SOVEREIGNTY AND PROSPERITY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. McCOTTER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. McCOTTER. Madam Speaker, I know that it is getting close to closing time, and I am in the unenviable position of being between so many good people and the door, so I will try to make sure that I give a truncated version of my simple desultory philippic to my constituents.

We in Congress are charged with the sacred duty of heeding and serving our constituents' aspirations and addressing their tribulations. We also have the responsibility of offering them a national vision and purpose and, most importantly, of putting them first in policymaking, which is why I have risen today to again lay before my constituents what I believe to be the four great generational challenges facing the United States of America.

Like the Greatest Generation, we face four challenges. The Greatest Generation, due to the rise of industrialization, faced social, economic and political turmoil. They faced a world war for freedom against an abjectly evil enemy. They faced the rise of the Soviet superstate as a rival model of governance and strategic threat, and they faced the moral question of whether the constitutional rights of all Americans applied equally regardless of race.

This generation of Americans in the age of globalization faces social, political and economic turmoil. We face a