

health care equipment that they need. Furthermore, unqualified bids from firms that are unlicensed to service contracts create significant distortions of the bid prices in every bidding area nationwide.

I'm extremely concerned that mishandling of the bidding process is going to have a devastating impact on Medicare beneficiaries. This is a serious issue that warrants a full review of the process and a delay of round two until this fatally flawed program is fixed.

I encourage my colleague to join me and Congressman BRUCE BRALEY in co-signing a letter to the Medicare administrator requesting an administrative delay of the durable medical equipment competitive bidding program. This is absolutely necessary to ensure that older adults have access to the equipment that they require to live at home with independence and dignity. It also is about jobs as one of the unintended consequences, I believe, but it is still a devastating consequence regarding how the implementation of round two will continue to see the loss of small businesses all throughout this great Nation. And so I just encourage my colleagues to join Congressman BRALEY and I in signing this letter to the Medicare administrator.

HOW MANY MORE CHILDREN HAVE TO DIE?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, it has now been almost 6 months since the tragedy of Newtown. The American response to that tragedy was quick and overwhelming. And yet, we have done nothing to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

In fact, many of my colleagues here in this institution seem all too ready to forget Newtown and the gun violence epidemic that is devastating families and communities across our country every single day.

According to Slate's gun-death tracker, an estimated 4,620 people have died as a result of gun violence in America since Newtown—4,620 people.

In 12 U.S. States, gun deaths now outpace auto deaths.

A new analysis from the Violence Policy Center found that in 2010, there were 31,672 firearm deaths and 35,498 motor vehicle deaths, compared with 1999, when there were 28,000 firearm deaths and 42,000 motor vehicle deaths, which is startling considering more than 90 percent of the American households own a car while less than one-third of American households own a gun.

We require auto manufacturers to include safety features like seatbelts and airbags, and to pass crash safety tests, and lives are being saved as a result.

By 2015, gun deaths will outnumber auto deaths on a national scale. Think about that. More gun deaths than auto deaths, and we require all these pre-

cautions and restrictions on manufacturers to make sure our cars are safe and we do nothing—nothing—when it comes to gun manufacturers. Think about that. Mandatory safety measures, and auto manufacturers can be held liable for defects in their products. We expect cars to be built safely, but when it comes to guns, a product designed to kill, manufacturers have been given a free pass. They can't be held liable for the deaths and destruction their products may cause. We don't even require gun manufacturers to make guns child-safe.

How many more children have to die as a result of senseless gun violence and avoidable gun accidents? New York Times columnist Joe Nocera is producing a weekly "Gun Report" that compiles gun deaths and injuries from around the country. I'm going to read a few of the recent posts since Newtown that deal specifically with children.

A 2-year-old boy is dead after an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound. Trenton Mathis shot himself in the face with a 9-millimeter pistol in a house in Cherokee County, Texas, while at home with his great-grandmother.

A 6-year-old girl was shot in the leg by her father during a boisterous party in Federal Heights, Colorado.

Joshua Johnson, 4, was playing with a gun at a Memphis apartment complex when it went off. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

A Garland, Texas, toddler was fatally shot in his home in what police are calling a tragic accident. Three-year-old John O'Brien was shot in the head with a handgun in front of his mother, father, and two young sisters. He was taken to Children's Medical Center in Dallas, where he later died from his injuries.

The 4-year-old son of a Jackson County, Michigan, sheriff's deputy accidentally shot and killed himself. Authorities say it happened around 5 p.m. in the deputy's home.

Michael Easter, a 3-year-old boy in Liberty Township, Michigan, died after he accidentally shot himself in the head while alone in his parents' bedroom. Police are unsure how the boy gained access to the gun. Michael was home with his mother and two sisters at the time.

A 3-year-old toddler accidentally shot himself in the head with a relative's gun but was listed in stable condition at a Nashville, Tennessee, hospital.

A teen boy accidentally shot and killed his 12-year-old brother in Orlando, Florida. The shooting happened at home in the Lake Nona area. Investigators said they are working to determine what led to the shooting.

A dad accidentally shot his son dead as he cleaned his gun in the family's living room. Christopher Stanlane, 34, was wiping down a loaded weapon in his home in Fairmont, North Carolina, when it discharged. His 10-year-old son, Christopher Stanlane, Jr., was watch-

ing television, and was struck in the back of his head with a bullet. His 8-year-old daughter was also in the room. The boy was pronounced dead at the scene.

How many more children have to die before Congress acts?

□ 1040

MORE CAN BE DONE FOR VETERANS ACROSS THE NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. McNERNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about the veterans' disability backlog, but this time on a positive note.

First I want to thank Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Committee Chair JOHN CULBERSON and Ranking Member SANFORD BISHOP for their work on the fiscal year 2014 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill and for including report language that my California colleague, Representative PAUL COOK, and I recommended to address the backlog of claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our veterans are heroes, and they deserve the benefits they've earned. The VA has set a goal of processing all disability claims within 125 days by the year 2015. This is an ambitious goal that deserves our attention as the agency works to meet its self-imposed deadline.

Unfortunately, too many VA regional offices across the country are underperforming by failing to process benefits claims for veterans in a timely manner. Recent data indicates that it takes 552 days, on average, for a claim to be processed at the VA's Oakland regional office, which serves the veterans in my district. This is unacceptable. While I'm pleased that the VA has made a concerted effort to improve accuracy and timeliness at the Oakland RO, more can be done for veterans across the Nation.

The VA has made a genuine effort to help veterans suffering from Agent Orange, posttraumatic stress, and to recognize the special needs of women veterans, among others. In addition, the VA recently announced it would mandate overtime at its regional offices and place a priority on claims pending for more than 1 year.

However, we must hold the VA accountable for its results. Additional oversight and accountability will not only benefit our Nation's veterans and their families, but it will allow Congress to ensure the VA has the resources it needs to properly support our heroes.

In addition to these efforts, I was joined by a bipartisan group of colleagues in requesting that the VA submit quarterly reports for each regional office where disability claims are pending for an average of 200 days or more.

These reports must outline any progress the RO has made as well as the steps it's taking to reduce the backlogs, such as hiring more claims processors or requiring additional training.

I am pleased that this language was included in the committee report accompanying H.R. 2216. This is a move in the right direction as Congress continues its oversight of the VA to improve the lives of our veterans.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF FOUR FALLEN HOUSTON FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise with a very sad duty and, as well, an appreciation to my colleagues from Texas who joined me yesterday with a 1-minute request of silence, commemoration of the four fallen firefighters in Houston, Texas.

First responders belong to all of us, no matter where they live. When a devastating incident occurs that causes them to lose their lives, we all feel the pain and sadness for them and the families that mourn them.

We in Texas recently lost a number of firefighters in West, Texas. Now, sadly, I come today to acknowledge the loss of four firefighters in the Houston Fire Department in the city of Houston: Matthew Renaud, Robert Bebee, Robert Garner, and Anne Sullivan. Unfortunately, these wonderful people lost their lives in a fire where they were fighting to save the lives of others.

The mission of firefighters is constantly with courage and commitment and compassion, and today I recount the history of the Houston firefighters and fire department.

March 14, 2012, was the last time the city of Houston lost a firefighter in the line of duty when Senior Captain Thomas Dillon died. 1929 marked the last time more than two firefighters lost their lives in the line of duty, when Edgar Grant and Harry Oxford and John Little were killed when their engine was struck by a train.

But on May 31, just a few days ago, 2013, a 5-alarm fire, just after noon, at the location of a motel and restaurant, is now the most deadly fire in the history of the 118 years of the Houston City Fire Department.

Sadly, Captain EMT Matthew Renaud of Station 51, Engineer Operator EMT Robert Bebee of Station 51, Firefighter EMT Robert Garner of Station 68, and Probationary Firefighter Anne Sullivan of Station 68 died in the line of duty.

All we can see as we look to the heavens is that we hope that they will rest in peace. But they were our brothers and our sisters.

Anne Sullivan of Station 68 was a gifted athlete who played soccer and was a cross-country runner, focused her life's ambition upon graduating

from high school to become a firefighter and began her quest by joining the Wharton County Junior College Fire Academy. After graduation, she became a student at the Houston Fire Department Academy, while also previously doing work in another jurisdiction.

Whereas, Firefighter EMT Robert Garner of Station 68 was proud to call himself a Houston firefighter who sought out this honor after leaving the United States Air Force, where he honorably served his country and completed two tours of duty in Iraq and his fire department career at the Val Jahnke Fire Academy.

Captain Matthew Renaud, who served the Houston Fire Department for 11½ years, joined the Houston Fire Department in October of 2001 and was assigned to Station 51 upon graduation from the academy and awarded the Unit Meritorious Medal for saving a female who had been trapped in an apartment.

And Engineer Operator EMT Robert Bebee of Station 51 graduated from Dobie High School in southwest Houston in 1990 and began his fire department career at the fire academy on August 6, 2001, but served the majority of his career at Station 51.

Over the last couple of days, I've visited the command station, logistics, and the firemen's union, and then went to Fire Station 51.

To Fire Stations 51 and 68, we offer our deepest sympathy in understanding that your brothers and sister have been lost. But today we also pay tribute, because the members of the Texas delegation will be introducing a resolution in honor of these heroes. And we're reminded of their words and the words in the Fireman's Creed, that their work is to save lives, the lives of men, the lives of women, but it is God's work.

Those fallen heroes were engaged in God's work, for they were looking for lost souls that might have been in that building, that horrific, horrible fire that has seen thousands of Houstonians go by to pay tribute; and thousands more to go by and pay tribute at Fire Stations 51 and 68 and also to acknowledge Local 341.

Tomorrow, Houston will grieve together and, as well, I want them to know that the Members of the United States Congress grieve with them as we introduce this resolution.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 49 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WOMACK) at noon.

PRAYER

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Kauai Aadheenam Hindu Monastery, Kapaa, Hawaii, offered the following prayer:

May today's session of the House of Representatives, to which Americans rightly turn for leadership, be abundantly blessed by the Lord Supreme.

Through personal introspection, a collaborative heart, and by God's all-pervasive grace, may the Members present here, despite differing views and staunchly held convictions, find the wisdom to craft mutually acceptable solutions to our Nation's challenges.

The tragic Boston Marathon bombings, still vivid in all our minds, implore us to advocate the humanity of a nonviolent approach in all of life's dimensions. Hindu scripture declares, without equivocation, that the highest of high ideals is to never knowingly harm anyone.

May we here in this Chamber, and all the people of our great Nation, endeavor to face even our greatest difficulties with an unwavering commitment to seek out and to find nonviolent solutions.

Peace, peace, peace to us, and peace to all beings.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. COTTON led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman TULSI GABBARD and I are proud to have the opportunity to welcome Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the spiritual leader and head of Kauai's Hindu monastery. He has come here today to give the opening prayer on the Hindu American Foundation's 10th Annual Capitol Hill Advocacy Day, and he is a true leader in the Hindu community.

Satguru has been head of the monastery since 2001, and works to spread