

time to act on climate change. We are not given a planet with unlimited resources. It is our job to protect our waters and the people that rely on them, and that begins with finding real solutions to our climate crisis.

STOP SPENDING BILLIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am on the floor again today with a prophetic political cartoon. In the cartoon, Uncle Sam is in a wheelchair, and he is at the edge of a cliff that is known as the fiscal cliff. Then, he has President Obama pushing him in the wheelchair; and then the donkey, representing the Democratic Party, is pushing Mr. Obama. And then the elephant, representing the Republican Party, is pushing the donkey and President Obama to push Uncle Sam off the cliff.

What is ironic is that Uncle Sam is yelling like he is excited: "I can see Greece from here." Well, we know what has happened to the economy of Greece. It is in total collapse.

Mr. Speaker, we are \$19.2 trillion in debt. I was here in the year 2000 when Bill Clinton left office. We were the majority in the House and the Senate. We were headed for a surplus. The debt in 2000 was \$5.6 trillion. Now we are here 16 years later and it is \$19.2 trillion.

The reason I bring this up is because we have an opportunity to stop spending billions and billions of dollars in Afghanistan. It is nothing but a waste. It is a waste of our young men and women in uniform. It is a waste of the taxpayers' money.

Recently, in an article in The Washington Post titled "Former Afghan Leader Karzai: Military Action Cannot Resolve Conflict in Afghanistan," the former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, told The Washington Post recently that he doesn't think a military effort will bring peace to Afghanistan. He said: "We did it for the last 14 years and it didn't bring us that, so how do we know . . . military action will bring us that now?"

We are going on 15 years of being in that country—and the waste, fraud, and abuse in Afghanistan is worse now than it has ever been.

I think about the needs of our veterans, I think about the needs of our children, I think about the needs of our senior citizens, and so many other needs. We passed a bill yesterday to help with the mental health issues of America, yet it is not funded. But, yes, we will find the money to fund Afghanistan so we can continue to waste and spend the taxpayers' money and get nothing for it. It is just absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, I voted against the Department of Defense bill last week simply because there is another \$43 billion

in there going to Afghanistan. This is OCO funds, it is slush funds, and it can't even be accounted for.

The taxpayers are frustrated with both parties and fed up because we are not doing our jobs. We are not doing what is necessary. We ought to be debating Afghanistan on the floor of the House and we ought to be saying, "Is it worth it or is it not worth it," and have an up-or-down vote. No, we just let it continue to go down this road with no end to it.

Mr. Speaker, I close this way, because to me this tells you more about Afghanistan than anything I could say today. Afghanistan is known as the graveyard of empires. Well, I know one empire that is headed for the graveyard, and it happens to be the United States of America. And if we continue to fund and waste the taxpayers' money in Afghanistan, then I hope that graveyard will have a headstone, and it will one day, that says "USA," because we will be in the graveyard of Afghanistan.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. PRICE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a vice chair of the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force and in solidarity with the majority of Americans who are demanding that Congress take meaningful action to prevent gun violence.

We all know the statistics. Whether it is through mass shootings that make the headlines or the unseen violence that happens daily on our streets, gun violence takes the lives of more than 30,000 of our Nation's citizens each year, a number that far exceeds other industrial countries.

Now, all these countries have their share of violent extremists and madmen, but only our country gives easy access to weapons of mass killing. And that makes all the difference for America.

Rather than seeking out commonsense solutions to address this crisis, the Republican majority continues to cower to the gun lobby and the firearms manufacturers. Now they plead the Second Amendment, but Constitutional Law 101 would tell us that all of our rights, including the precious freedoms of religion and speech, must be balanced to protect innocent third parties and to protect the safety of the wider community.

One commonsense measure we should all agree on is background checks to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, domestic abusers, and the dangerously mentally ill. You can't shout "fire" in a crowded theater because of your freedom of speech, and neither should you be able to buy a weapon if you have a history of violence and criminality.

In fact, almost 90 percent of Americans, including the majority of gun

owners, support universal background checks for all gun purchases. The problem is that our present background check system is rife with loopholes. Background checks are not required for private sales at gun shows. They are also not required for Internet sales.

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced by Representatives PETER KING and MIKE THOMPSON that would finally close this egregious loophole. It is an entirely sensible reform that would have a measurable impact on the safety of our schools, homes, and neighborhoods, without preventing law-abiding citizens from using guns for self-defense or recreational purposes.

Despite attracting 186 cosponsors, including several Republicans, the background check legislation has never been brought to the floor or even received a hearing in committee. It has been languishing for more than 15 months. Meanwhile, the shootings and the suicides and the massacres continue to accumulate.

My colleagues, we must do better. Our fellow citizens are totally fed up, both with the unspeakable killing and suffering and with a feckless Congress that hasn't lifted a finger to prevent it.

Now, this week, after intense public criticism and a historic protest by Democrats on the House floor, Republicans seemed for a while to be willing to hold a vote on legislation they claim would prevent suspected terrorists from purchasing firearms. After all, nearly 2,500 individuals on the terrorist watch list have successfully purchased weapons in this country.

But rather than embrace existing bipartisan legislation to actually fix the problem, Republicans put forth a woefully inadequate proposal that would require law enforcement and courts to grapple with unworkable processes, unreachable standards, to be completed in an unreasonably short period of time.

Their bill would allow suspected terrorists to receive firearms by default after only 3 days if the court is unable to work through a complicated process. That is the same flaw that allowed the White supremacist Charleston shooter to obtain the weapon that he used to murder nine people at Emanuel AME Church.

In other words, the bill is totally inadequate. Now, under pressure from their most extreme Members, Republican leaders refuse to even put this bill on the floor.

What should be on the floor is bipartisan legislation, H.R. 1076, that would permit the Attorney General to block gun sales to suspected terrorists. This legislation, based on a proposal from the Bush Justice Department, would still allow individuals to challenge the government in court to restore their gun ownership rights.

We don't have to choose between protecting our communities and respecting due process.

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And so, Mr. Speaker, we ask our colleagues how much longer must we

wait? How many more people have to die to move us to act? How many more American towns and cities must be added to the constantly growing list of places like Orlando and Columbine and Aurora and Charleston and Newtown?

Moments of silence aren't enough. Thoughts and prayers are not enough. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that such pieties give grave offense when they mask a refusal to do what we know is right. We need action. I call on my colleagues to bring these common-sense proposals to the floor for a vote.

ONGOING PEACE PROCESS IN COLOMBIA

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

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to applaud and encourage the ongoing peace process in Colombia.

Over the last 52 years, Colombia has witnessed an armed conflict between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. The conflict has taken a serious toll on the country: 220,000 people have been killed and more than 6.8 million people have been forced from their homes. The fighting has been especially difficult for the rural areas of the country.

But a new day is on the horizon for the people of Colombia. The country is on the verge of a historic peace agreement with the FARC. In fact, the government and the FARC signed a ceasefire agreement on June 23. This was seen as one of the few remaining roadblocks to a final peace agreement.

With all that is going on in the world today, it would be easy to miss the important progress taking place in Colombia. The peace process isn't garnering the media attention that some other foreign affairs are, but it is going to have just as important an impact on global affairs.

Last year, I had the opportunity to travel to Colombia with the Committee on Armed Services and my colleague from Arizona, Mr. GALLEGOS, whose mother is from Colombia. It didn't take long for me to realize that Colombia is a beautiful and fascinating country, and I was very impressed with the hospitality of the Colombian people. It also became clear during my trip that the majority of Colombian people want things to be better in their country, and they are committed to the peace process.

Mr. Speaker, Colombia is our closest and strongest ally in Latin America, so the peace process is very important not only to Colombia, but also to the United States. Their future opportunities are also ours.

Colombia has a growing economy with immense potential based on their abundant natural resources and a culture that values hard work. A more stable Colombia will allow the country to further expand their economy, which would be a benefit to us right here at home.

At a time when there are so many foreign policy challenges around the globe, Colombia is a rare success story. The country was literally on the verge of becoming a failed state, but now they are a leader in the region. The United States maintains significant bilateral relations and has provided important diplomatic assistance to the Colombian Government, but we have done so without becoming overly involved in their local affairs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize my strong support for the Colombian peace process, and I call on every Member of this House to also lend their support to that process. We need to encourage our neighbors in South America. I want to commend President Santos for his leadership and his commitment to a lasting peace.

I also want to highlight the important work of Ambassador Pinzón. I appreciate his friendship, and I applaud his work to strengthen the partnership between the United States and Colombia.

Ultimately, only the people of Colombia can reach the lasting peace agreement that restores justice and order to their country, but the United States can—and I believe we must—stand ready to assist the Colombian Government as they finalize this process and then as they move their country out of conflict and into a period of stability and lasting peace.

ANOTHER AMERICAN SHOT DOWN BY THE POLICE

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

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I had planned to talk about something else this morning, but the events of the last 12 hours changed my plans.

I watched this morning on TV and online—like a lot of Americans—another of our fellow Americans shot down by the police. This time it was in St. Paul, Minnesota. Earlier this week, it was in Baton Rouge. But we know it is everywhere—in Chicago, in Baltimore, in South Carolina.

It seems that every week or month another Black man is shot by the police, and we always have the same reaction: Oh, it is a tragedy; there should be an investigation. A lawsuit is filed, and another settlement. Oh, the Justice Department and the FBI need to oversee the investigation because we cannot trust the police to police themselves. And then we go back to business as usual, and nobody actually does anything.

State by State, city by city, and county by county, we might make this reform or that reform, but there is no national strategy to stop police from killing people, especially Black people, especially Black men.

I wept this morning as I watched the mother of Philando Castile describe her son. She said he had a job, he served children in the cafeteria, and

that he was a calm young man. She also said that he was not a thug.

Why does a Black woman in the 21st century in the United States of America, while a Black man sits in the Oval Office, almost 50 years after Martin Luther King, Jr., was gunned down, why does she have to start her description of her son with "He was not a thug"? She said: "We are being hunted."

Mr. Speaker, this is another sad chapter in American history.

I do not feel compelled to say in describing my grandson Luisito: Well, first and foremost, he is not a gang banger, he is not a thug. But for this Black mother and for a lot of African American mothers in this country, that is something they feel a necessity to say.

This mother did everything right. Her son was still shot dead by the police. This young man was riding in the passenger seat of a car with his fiancée and 4-year-old little daughter in the backseat.

He had a permit to carry a weapon, which he announced to the police. So he had gone through the background check, gone through the training, and had the concealed carry permit. But he was shot dead in front of his loved ones, his fiancée and daughter.

Why is it in 21st century America we have to have a conversation about how to avoid being shot by the police? Why do I have to instruct my grandson about deescalation if he comes in contact with the police, about strategies to prevent a sworn public servant, an officer of the court, a trained member of law enforcement, and I have to instruct my teenage grandson how to prevent that person from shooting him to death for no reason? Why, Mr. Speaker?

We have no national strategy, no national conversation. When Americans are literally crying out in the streets that, yes, Black lives matter, we have no response from the Congress, the people's House. None.

The head of the FBI announces he won't press charges against a candidate in the Democratic Party. Stop everything; we need to have hearings, congressional hearings. Benghazi, let's spend millions on hearings, political hearings. Planned Parenthood, let's form a special committee to do what the majority party feels is important from their political point of view.

But a young Black man is shot by police in his car in cold blood? Nothing. Young men are shot by police, videotapes are withheld from the public, and nothing happens.

Mr. Speaker, I think Black lives matter. I think the lives of young men in inner cities across this country matter. And I think this Congress should be the place where America comes together to decide what we are going to do about young Black men getting shot by the police. Not next week, when it is going to happen again. Not next month, when it is going to happen again. Not waiting safely until after the election,