

Elks Lodges from around our Nation for the tremendous work they do for our communities, especially our veterans. Or, better yet, take the opportunity to volunteer at an Elks Lodge or consider joining an Elks Lodge. They do so much great benevolent work for our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 days to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to thank the distinguished Congresswoman from New York for her comments about Francis Bellamy, the great Christian abolitionist and socialist who authored America's Pledge of Allegiance. He was a great patriot who wanted to unify the country in the wake of the Civil War during the Reconstruction Period. We, indeed, owe him a great debt of gratitude for everything he did for America.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a matter of pressing importance and urgency to the people of America today. It is the question of gun violence and what Congress is doing about the problem of gun violence.

I want to start by invoking something that all of the schoolchildren of America know about, which is the idea of a social contract.

You can go back and read John Locke or Thomas Hobbes, or Rousseau, but all of them began with the idea that, in the state of nature, we are all in a dangerous and perilous condition because there is no law. It is the rule of the jungle. Hobbes said that the state of nature was a condition that was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Because of that, people enter into civil society to create a government.

The first principle of government is that we have got to protect our people. As Cicero put it, the safety and good of the people must be the highest law. That is why we have a social contract.

But, Mr. Speaker, in America today, our social contract is bruised and battered and damaged and tenuous because of the gun violence which has come to our public schools, to our universities, to our churches, to our movie theaters, to the public square.

America's high school students have woken us up to the fact that this is not

a normal condition. America is an absolute outlier nation in terms of the levels of gun violence that we permit to take place in our own society. Our social contract is threatened by the gun violence that is a menace to every single American citizen.

Now, we have a social contract, we have got a social covenant, and it is the Constitution of the United States. We know that we have an amendment in there which deals specifically with the question of guns, the Second Amendment, which says: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

That is the Second Amendment.

□ 1700

Now, some people would have us believe that, because of the Second Amendment, there is nothing that we can do about the problem of gun violence. If you remember nothing else about what I am about to say, please remember this: this is demonstrably, absolutely, categorically false, and we know it is false because the Supreme Court has told us that it is false.

In its 2008 decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court adopted the individual rights view of the Second Amendment. There was a contest between those who said, no, you only have a right to bear arms in connection with militia service versus those who said that it is an individual right. The individual right won in a 5-4 decision.

But in the course of making that 5-4 decision, the majority on the Supreme Court agreed, readily, that the right to bear arms is one that can be conditioned on all kinds of regulation by the government. That is true of all of the rights in the Bill of Rights.

Think about the First Amendment, which guarantees all of us the right to speak. You have a right to go protest across the street from the White House, but do you have the right to go protest across the street from the White House at 2 in the morning with 20,000 people without getting a permit? Of course, you do not.

The Supreme Court has said that the exercise of First Amendment rights is conditioned by reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. And in the same sense, the Second Amendment right to keep and to bear arms is conditioned on reasonable time, place, manner, and use restrictions by the government. We know that to be the case. The Supreme Court told us that in *Heller*.

In *Heller*, the Court said everybody has a right to the possession of a handgun for purposes of self-defense; everybody's got a right to a rifle for purposes of hunting and recreation. But nobody's got a right to possess a machine gun, even though someone might describe it as an arm; nobody's got a right to possess a sawed-off shotgun, much less does anybody have a

right to access a weapon without going through a background check, without going through the government's policy for determining that you are not going to be a danger to yourself or to other people. The Supreme Court was very clear about that.

Those people who were out there saying, "We can't allow any gun safety regulation or we are going to lose the right to have guns, our guns are going to be taken away," are engaging in a knowing falsehood. There is no way that the guns of the people of America—the hundreds of millions of guns that are out there—could be confiscated. They can't be confiscated.

People have a right to them for purposes of self-defense and for purposes of hunting and recreation, but it doesn't give you a right to an AR-15. It doesn't give you a right to carry weapons of war into public schools and into movie theaters and into public places, and it does not give you the right to access guns without a background check, yet that is precisely what the law is today. We have a huge gaping loophole where terrorists can go to a gun show and simply buy a gun without any background check at all.

Now, here is the good news that people want to keep from you. We have great news, America. Mr. Speaker, we know there is good news, and here is the good news.

We have a consensus about what to do in America, starting with a universal criminal and mental background check, supported by, no longer, 95 percent of the American people. In the wake of the Parkland massacre, it is 97 percent of the people who think that you should not be able to access a weapon without first passing a background check.

That is the vast majority of the people, maybe almost a unanimous verdict by the American people. Almost everybody believes that we need to close the gun show loophole, we need to close the internet gun sale loophole, we need to close the 7-Eleven parking lot loophole, and we need to close the loophole that would allow criminals and gangsters and terrorists to go to a gun show and purchase a gun. Ninety-seven percent of the American people agree with that.

Sixty-seven percent of the American people agree with the call of the young people who survived the massacre in Parkland, which took the lives of 17 students and teachers, the call for a ban on assault weapons. Sixty-seven percent of the American people, more than two-thirds of the American people, agree with a ban on the sale of military-style assault weapons.

And 75 percent of the American people say that Congress must be acting to reduce gun violence. So we have a consensus over what to do.

But what is happening now?

Well, I serve on the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Speaker, and we had a vote today that had nothing to do with guns. It was about collecting data on

bail policies, which is not to say that that is unimportant; but, seriously, millions of people in America are demanding action from Congress, and we can't even have a hearing on the problem of people accessing assault weapons and going to public schools and assassinating our school children at pointblank range.

Now, I had the good fortune of meeting some of the young people from Parkland who have awoken the conscience of the country. One of them was asked a question: Why, suddenly, is America waking up in the wake of the Parkland massacre, which took the lives of 17 people, but it didn't in the same way after the massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook, which took the lives of even more people, 26 people?

She had a fascinating answer. She said: Most of the people killed at Sandy Hook were first graders, and first graders can't start a revolution against the political power of the NRA; but high school students know how to do it because they understand how to contact people, and they know social media. They know Facebook and Twitter, and they have enough education so that they can speak with authority about the recklessness and the negligence of government not addressing the problem.

Congress now is the outlier. Congress will not act.

Are we a failed state such that when more than 95 percent of the American people agree that something needs to be done, Congress cannot act?

Are we abandoning our social contract?

Are we abandoning our primary commitment to defend the lives of our own people?

Well, it is a very serious moment. We are having our Special Order hour on the problem of gun violence, the failure of Congress to act, but the need for Congress to act.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my distinguished colleague from the State of Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL), with whom I serve on the House Judiciary Committee.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman RASKIN for his leadership on the Progressive Caucus and for his leadership on the Judiciary Committee. Nobody understands the Constitution better than a constitutional law professor.

I appreciate you bringing the reality of the situation to us. Nobody is talking about trying to take guns away from everybody. We are talking about making sure that we have safety with anybody who owns a gun and that we have the ability to check any of the dangerous contexts for which guns can be used. We have a responsibility, really, to protect our country, to protect our young people, and to do something for all of the families that have been affected by gun violence.

In addition to all of the things that he mentioned, we need to consider gun

violence as a public health crisis. That is what it is. And when we look around at the millions of people who are dying from gun violence, you think about this, and you think about the way in which we treated vehicle fatalities as a public health crisis and we instituted laws around seatbelts, and the way we thought about smoking as a public health crisis and we instituted laws around smoking. But, in order to do that, we had to first do research into those areas and figure out what were the best ways for us to move forward as a country in preventing those kinds of fatalities that are preventable.

Unfortunately, what happened in this country is that Congressman Dickey, some time ago, passed an amendment called the Dickey amendment. While it didn't explicitly prohibit research into gun violence, it all but did that.

There have now been many, many calls to repeal the Dickey amendment. Interestingly, Congressman Dickey passed away last year, last April. Before he died, in 2012, he actually came out on the record and said that he wished he hadn't been so reactionary, that he wished he hadn't passed that amendment, because he realized that it did lead to a chilling effect on research into gun safety. The way that it did that is, when they passed the amendment, it essentially said that no Federal funds should be used for advocacy, but, at the same time, the amount of funds that were used for research were cut by exactly that amount.

So this is not about advocacy; this is about how do we protect our country, how do we treat this as what it is: a public health crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I am here to say that I am really proud of my home State of Washington. Just yesterday, we became the latest State to ban bump stocks. And we also had a senate committee pass a bill to mandate that people purchasing rifles go through the same background checks required for pistol purchases and that we increase the legal age to buy rifles to 21.

So, in less than a month, my home State has finally advanced meaningful proposals to prevent gun violence. I wish I could say that we were doing that here in Congress. I truly believe that there are Members on both sides of the aisle who would like to pass sensible gun safety regulations and legislation.

Unfortunately, I feel like we are being held hostage not by the reasons that we all came to Congress to get sensible things done that protect our constituencies, but by lobbying interests in the National Rifle Association; and every time there is a small movement towards progress, somehow they come in and, essentially, squash those efforts.

In October of last year, Congress stood by after 58 people were killed and over 500 injured at a music festival in Las Vegas. One of my constituent's, Zach Elmore, sister was shot. Luckily, she was one of the lucky ones who survived the shooting.

I read a letter on the floor that Zach had read to me—it was an incredibly moving letter—about his deep anger and frustration at Congress for not protecting his sister and millions like her, those who were not as lucky as she was.

In November, Congress failed to act, after 26 people were killed and 20 injured at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas; and then a few weeks ago, on Valentine's Day, as we all know, 14 students and 3 teachers were killed, and 15 injured, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida.

Already, in 2018 alone, there have been 2,581 deaths because of gun violence, including those precious lives that were lost at Parkland; 105 of those deaths were children ages 11 and under.

Let me just say that one more time: 105 of the 2,581 deaths, this year alone, were children ages 11 and under.

As Members of Congress, we need to make sure our kids are safe.

I am so grateful to the energy and the commitment and the passion and the smarts and the organizing strength of the Parkland students, because, as you say, they were not first graders who couldn't organize for themselves. They are students who are soon going to be voters. And they understand that they can't vote right now, but they also understand that they do have a voice, their parents' vote, and they can make sure that people across the country understand that we have a responsibility to them, to our children, to the people across the country who are afraid of sending their kids to school.

That should be our number one priority is keeping our kids safe. Our kids should be able to walk into schools knowing that they can fully focus on learning. Our parents shouldn't have to wonder whether their kids will come home from school.

My heart goes out to the families that lost someone in the Parkland shooting and all of the shootings across the country. I am proud to stand alongside incredible young people who wasted no time to demand action and justice for their friends and teachers. They are determined, they are brave, they are unafraid, and they are depending on us to pass meaningful legislation to end gun violence.

One of the interesting things that I heard them say when I met with them is: We are not looking for the whole package. We just want to see steps along the way that show us that it is possible for us, on a bipartisan basis, to make some progress on this critical issue, to make sure that no child, no parent, no community, ever again, has to experience the unspeakable tragedy of another school shooting.

I am tired of seeing men, women, and children die because the gun lobby puts profit over people. That is not, as Mr. RASKIN so eloquently said, what our Founders intended by the right to bear arms. Support for stricter measures to prevent gun violence is at an all-time

high, on a bipartisan basis. Eighty-seven percent of gun owners and 74 percent of NRA members support commonsense solutions like criminal background checks.

I have a plea for gun owners across the country. My husband used to be a hunter. We had guns at home. And I understand the need for people to have guns for recreational purposes, to ensure their own safety. But this is not about that. It is not about taking guns away from people, who legitimately exercise responsible behavior. It is about making sure that we have the protections in place so that no more children, no more people die.

□ 1715

So here is my plea for gun owners: urge the NRA to represent your views, show them that you mean business, maybe even consider terminating your NRA membership if the organization continues to advocate against these kinds of sensible gun reforms.

Here in Congress, I hope that we act now. I really truly believe—and I have talked to some of my Republican colleagues who also want to do something about this. They don't want to be hamstrung. They want to move legislation forward, but not by attaching legislation that actually loosens gun restrictions into legislation that helps us.

We need just one or two pieces of commonsense gun reform legislation so that we can show these young people that we are responding to their pleas: no more shootings in schools, no more shootings in places of worship, no more shootings in our streets, no more mass shootings, period.

Let's show these students and students at schools across the country that we are not afraid to protect them. Let's show them that we can choose our country over the gun lobby. Let's stand with our kids. Let's pass commonsense gun violence prevention legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I join Mr. RASKIN in hoping that in the Judiciary Committee, which is the committee of record for this issue, that we can at least have some hearings on this.

What is so problematic about having a hearing on public health research into gun violence? What is so problematic about having a hearing on multiple pieces of legislation that have bipartisan support? Isn't that what we are supposed to do? I know that is why I came here.

I am a first term Member, and I know our speaker is as well, and I believe that we have much more in common than we do that divides us.

We don't have to necessarily tackle every piece of this, but let's make some substantial progress forward together, and let's show our students that we will protect them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman again for his leadership.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, we are so grateful for Congresswoman PRAMILA JAYAPAL from Washington, for her

powerful leadership and her lucid discussion today of the gun violence problem.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for placing emphasis on the fact that we have had no hearings in our Congress since we arrived here more than a year ago on the problem of gun violence in the House Judiciary Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for placing emphasis on the Dickey amendment, which forbids the expenditure of any public money even to research the epidemiology of gun violence and gun violence epidemics in the way that certain outbreaks of gun violence and mass shootings will trigger others.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman also for placing emphasis on the fact that the Newtown families who come to lobby in Washington, the families from Parkland, just want to see us break the logjam; they just want to see us end the paralysis and do something. And why not start with the thing that is backed by more than 9 out of 10 Americans, a universal criminal and mental background check so that people who are carrying guns in America are the lawful gun owners who can do it responsibly? That is something that the overwhelming majority of American people believe in, yet this Congress seems to be completely stuck, totally hamstrung.

Mr. Speaker, please help us dislodge this legislation.

Now, Congresswoman JAYAPAL praised her home State of Washington, rightfully, for the actions they have taken recently to ban the bump stocks and to pass other commonsense gun safety reforms.

I would like to talk about what has happened in my home State, the great State of Maryland, which is touching Washington, D.C., where we all are right now.

In 2013, after the catastrophe took place in Newtown, Connecticut, at Sandy Hook, where an AR-15 was used to assassinate 26 people at pointblank range, we acted in Maryland. We passed a ban on the sale of military-style assault weapons. We passed a ban on high-capacity magazines.

We gave our State police the right to engage in frequent and unannounced inspections of the gun dealers so that bad apple gun dealers couldn't be dealing firearms directly into the underground.

Then we said if a firearm is lost or stolen, it has got to be reported within 48 hours, and if not, that is a misdemeanor, because what was happening was they were selling guns to criminals, they would surface in a homicide investigation 10 months later, we would trace it back to the gun dealers, and the dealers would say: Oh, yeah. That was stolen. We forgot to report it.

Or they would say: We lost that, but, yeah, we never filed a report.

So now, in our State, you have got to file a report—commonsense gun safety

supported by people across the spectrum—so we don't have a leaky system where guns are getting into the wrong hands.

Now, our opponents on this, of course, marched and protested and said they were opposed to all of it. They said this was an attempt to confiscate everybody's guns, which, of course, it was not. And responsible law-abiding gun owners have all the guns that they had before, they have still got them, but it was challenged in court. They said it violated the Second Amendment.

I raise it because I want America to notice this. They sued in the United States District Court in Maryland, and they lost. And the court said, reading the District of Columbia v. Heller decision in 2008, that the Second Amendment permits reasonable gun safety regulation that does not infringe on the fundamental right to bear arms for self-defense or to have rifles for hunting or recreation, but there is no right for civilians to be carrying military-style hardware and weaponry in public.

They appealed it to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Fourth Circuit affirmed the ruling of the district court.

Then they brought it to the United States Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court let that ruling stand.

So there is a perfect example of how you can enact reasonable gun safety regulation and it doesn't infringe anybody's Second Amendment rights and it doesn't impinge on the right of reasonable, law-abiding gun owners to have guns for lawful purposes.

So why are we involved in this terrible, atrocious situation where we have rates of death and fatality and injury greater than six times higher than any other modern industrialized country on Earth?

In the U.K., it is less than 50 people a year who die by gun; in Japan, it is less than 50 or 60 people a year. We are losing tens of thousands of Americans every year.

Is it because we have mental illness and they don't? No. They have got mental illness, too. Is it because Americans are more violent than other people? I don't think so.

It is simply because of the ready access to firearms wherever you go, and anybody can get them almost anywhere. Okay? So we need to follow the rest of the world in terms of enacting reasonable gun safety legislation.

Now, we have got our Second Amendment, so nobody's handguns are going to get taken away. The Supreme Court said it in the Heller decision and reaffirmed that 2 years later, that it applies not just in the District of Columbia directly against Congress, but it applies in the States, in a case that came out of Chicago.

So we know that nobody's handguns are going to be taken away and nobody's rifles are going to be taken away.

All we are talking about is keeping our children and our grandchildren

safe; keeping people safe at concerts, like in Las Vegas; keeping people safe in church, like in South Carolina; keeping people safe in their public schools, like in Parkland, Florida; keeping college students safe, like at Virginia Tech. That is what we are talking about doing.

Now, we don't know why Congress won't act. Some people are starting to hypothesize that America has become a failed state, that we can't respond to an almost unanimous demand by our own people to legislate in the interests of public safety, which is the most elementary requirement of a civilized society under a social contract.

Some people say we have become a failed state, like failed states we see around the world. You know that authoritarianism is on the march all over the world, whether it is in Putin's Russia or Duterte's Philippines or Orban's Hungary or Erdogan's Turkey, where it is all about enriching the people in power—ignoring the needs of the people, ignoring the rights of the people, but instead, using government as a money-making operation for a tiny group of people.

Have we become a failed state? Is that what we are? I don't think we are a failed state.

We have had other periods in American history where Congress has refused to deal with pressing public policy problems. One of the most famous ones, beginning in the 1830s, was when a proslavery faction within Congress said it would refuse to have any hearings at all and would refuse to entertain any petitions against slavery from anywhere in the country. It was a direct assault on the right to petition Congress for redress of grievances, it was a direct assault on the freedom of speech, but they imposed this stranglehold on Congress so there could be no debate on the most pressing issue of the day.

Now, I am not likening slavery to gun violence. Okay? I want to be clear about that. But I am saying that there are other times in American history where Congress has acted as a chokehold against the ventilation of serious public concerns and grievances. There have been times when Congress has refused to engage in debate, discussion, and analysis of the most pressing problems of the day, and that is where we are right now on gun violence.

All we are saying, Mr. Speaker, to the majority in Congress, is let's have some hearings on this, let's have some hearings on a universal criminal and mental background check being demanded by nearly every American right now. Let's start with that. Is that one thing we can all agree on, that there should be a background check before people go out and obtain weapons of war that they then carry into the hallways and the schoolrooms of our country? Can we have a hearing on that?

If you don't want to vote for it, you can stand up with the 1 or 2 percent of

the people who are against it, but allow those of us who want to represent the 97 or 98 percent of the people who are for it to have a vote, because we don't think that terrorists and criminals should be able to go to a gun show and purchase firearms, including AR-15s, without a criminal background check. We don't think that.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have got a consensus in America on this. Let's not stifle the consensus. Let's not choke off the ability of the American people and their representatives to govern. That is why we were sent here, to legislate.

The essence of legislation is hearings. We have to hear the American people, we have to hear the experts, we have to collect the evidence. We have got to overturn the ban on the collection of statistics about gun violence that was imposed a few decades ago on the CDC. We have got to collect the information, and we have to act.

The time for just prayers and meditation about the problem is long gone, as the young people from Parkland, Florida, have told us.

They were told in the wake of the massacre: It is too early to start debating gun policy.

They turned around, and they said: No. It is too late to be debating gun policy. This should have been done after Las Vegas. It should have been done after San Bernardino County. It should have been done after the Sandy Hook massacre. It should have been done after Virginia Tech.

How many more massacres do we have to await before this Congress decides something really must be done? How many more massacres? That is what America is asking us, Mr. Speaker.

Please, let's do our job. We have sworn an oath to the American people. Let's go and represent the public will, let's make it consistent with the Second Amendment, because it is very easy to do so. We proved it in the State of Maryland, and the Supreme Court has told us we can pass reasonable commonsense gun safety measures without violating anyone's rights.

We have got a consensus in America. In Congress, we have got to do our job and let that consensus become the law.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

WE MUST PROTECT THE SOVEREIGNTY OF OUR NATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. PERLMUTTER) for 30 minutes.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chair for the opportunity to address the House and people across the country.

I am joined today by two of my friends, JARED HUFFMAN, Congressman from northern California; and DAN KILDEE, Congressman from Flint, Michigan.

We are here on another very important topic. We just heard our friend, JAMIE RASKIN from Maryland, talking about gun violence and the need to try to limit that and bring it under control, but today we have another very important topic, a very troubling topic, and it has to do with the sovereignty of our Nation.

□ 1730

It has to do with our freedom, and it is really as pretty simple as that.

This country separated from England so that we could be a sovereign nation, so that we could rule ourselves, and right now that is a real big question as to whether or not that is happening, because it is clear that the Russians interfered with our elections last year.

The investigation into that interference now has resulted in at least 13 indictments of Russians, coupled with indictments of 5 or 6 people, 5 of whom have pled guilty to some crime or another based upon the investigation conducted by Robert Mueller. There seems to be something going on between the Trump administration and Russia, and we want to know what it is. The investigation is directed at that.

Mr. Speaker, it starts with something that we asked for last year. We asked to see the President's tax returns. We asked for it on a number of occasions. But unlike anybody else who has run for President or who has been President, our President has refused to turn over his tax returns.

So the question we ask is: Why? What is in there that would stop him from producing his tax returns? Is it a relationship that shows some kind of financial connection to Russia or the like? What is in there? Is he hiding something? What is it?

As time has gone on, starting with that question, we have some more questions. There has been this effort, beginning last summer, to question the integrity of the FBI and to question Mr. Mueller and this investigation to the point there was word that Mr. Mueller was going to be fired from his job last summer, and that question seems to percolate to the surface every so often.

And the question is: Why? What are they afraid of that he might find? What connections are they worried about that Mr. Mueller may uncover that really are hurting our Nation? So what is it that they are hiding? What are they afraid of?

These are very simple questions that need to be answered. This is important because this goes back to the heart of why our Nation was founded and the heart of all of us as Americans. It is our sovereignty, and it is our freedom. And if, in fact, we are being directed, our government is being directed by a foreign entity, by Vladimir Putin or Russia, generally, then this country has been undermined to a degree none of us could have ever seen coming.

Now, hopefully, that is not the case, but let's get this investigation going.