

caught, released, caught, released, stopped by law enforcement, let go, 2 days later murdered Jared Vargas.

How can we allow this to happen in the greatest country and the most powerful nation the world has ever known? How can we allow American citizens to die at the hands of illegal immigrants who are here who shouldn't be here, who have broken our laws previously? How can we allow American citizens to die at the hands of the terrorists who are moving drugs into and out of our country through cartels, die because of dangerous fentanyl and dangerous heroin that are coming across our borders at the ports of entry and, yes, between the ports of entry, which the data fully backs up?

It is not just coming through the ports of entry. It is, in fact, coming across on loads across the Rio Grande River, which is not policed.

We have a duty to defend our border.

One last point: Fencing, walls work. In the Rio Grande Valley sector, in the eastern section next to the Gulf of Mexico, there is 35 miles of fencing. In the western section, in McAllen, there is far less fencing and far fewer roads. Ninety-four percent of the traffic comes through the McAllen portion of the Rio Grande Valley sector.

We have a duty to defend our borders. American citizens like Jared Vargas, who lost his life, and the Vargas family, who is now without their family member, and the United States of America deserve better. The migrants who seek to come here deserve better.

□ 1800

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Speaker, this evening, we have heard from Members across the country about the devastating toll illegal immigration has had on American families and American workers. The Democrats' divisive and disconnected immigration agenda has real consequences and leads to real victims.

What makes this such a calamity is not only the cost to Americans that we have talked about tonight, but the fact that these tragedies are completely avoidable if Congress, as we heard earlier, would do its job and secure the border.

I want to tell you about Miss Sharon Gross from my district in North Carolina. Just over a year ago, Sharon had finished a 5-mile bike ride with her 18-year-old daughter in Creekside Park, where I have been, in Archdale, North Carolina. They began their trip home in "Roxie," the vehicle her daughter received for her 16th birthday.

As her daughter was driving home, she saw a white SUV heading the opposite direction and beginning to swerve from the outer lane. The vehicle hit them head-on. Sharon described the next moment: "The next thing I remember was the sound of the metal crashing and twisting in front of us. I vaguely remember everyone running to us and telling us to get out because the car was about to explode. I couldn't get out and could barely breathe."

Sharon thanks God that her daughter was largely unharmed, but Sharon suffered five broken bones in her back and a severely broken sternum, leaving a large hole in her chest. She now has chronic pain that impacts her daily life.

The driver of the white SUV was a man by the name of Mr. Rodriguez. He had a blood alcohol concentration of .20, 2½ times the legal limit in North Carolina.

Mr. Rodriguez is in our country illegally. He did not own the vehicle he was driving, nor did he even have a driver's license, and this was his third drunk driving charge. He then served only 11 months in prison and has now been released.

Mr. Rodriguez's time in prison may have come to an end, but the physical, mental, and emotional scars that Sharon has, well, they will never fade. Making matters worse, Mr. Rodriguez was uninsured, leaving thousands of dollars in medical bills, adding to the emotional and physical and now financial pain for Sharon and her family.

Sharon stated: "It is very difficult for me to have all this constant pain and then deal with all the emotions I am feeling about someone who comes into our country illegally and gets a little pat on the hand when he breaks all our laws." She said: "To say my life was shattered is an understatement."

You see, we can do better. We must do better for Sharon and for all Americans who have been impacted by illegal immigration. That means an all-of-the-above approach to border security, including construction of additional physical structures and barriers. Border security not only helps keep our families safe, but it also continues the American tradition of being a welcoming Nation.

Many of us are proud of our legal immigrant heritage. Though it goes underreported, America has the most generous legal system in the world. Think about it. We proudly welcome 1 million legal immigrants into our country every single year.

In fact, just last year, the first full year of the Trump administration in 2017, the number was 1,127,167 new citizens whom we welcomed. These are people from all over the world who have raised their right hand, promising to obey the laws of our land and contribute to our blessed Nation.

As President Trump said on this very floor just 2 days ago: "Legal immigrants enrich our Nation and strengthen our society in countless ways. I want people to come into our country . . . but they have to come in legally."

You see, in America, we can do both. We can continue to be the beacon of hope throughout the world, and we can do much better in protecting the American people. After all, it is the first oath we take.

But the clock is ticking. We face another impasse this week. Will our Democratic colleagues support commonsense policies to end this crisis, or

will they continue to disengage on solutions, suggesting ideas like abolishing ICE and stopping additional funding for the Department of Homeland Security?

It is time to put productivity over personality and people over politics. Anything less would be immoral.

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

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2019, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PORTER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. CICILLINE), my friend and a member of the Judiciary Committee, a leader in responding to the American people who broadly support gun violence prevention.

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding, and I particularly thank the gentlewoman for her leadership on this issue and for organizing today's Special Order hour.

One of the great blessings of being in the majority is wonderful new colleagues who are bringing their incredible intellect and passion and commitment to the issues facing the American people, and the gentlewoman from California is obviously a magnificent example of that, so I thank her for the courtesy.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. On average, 100 Americans are murdered with firearms every day. Three hundred more are shot and wounded.

In 2017, the number of gun deaths in this country hit 40,000, the highest level in 20 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Globally, we have the highest rate of gun violence of any developed Nation on Earth.

We have a gun violence epidemic in this country.

The U.S. is now the world leader in child gun deaths, with death by gunshot being the second highest cause of death among children.

This is a public health crisis.

People are being killed at schools, at houses of worship, in restaurants, at homes, and everywhere in between. There is no place safe from the threat of gun violence in this country.

We have seen it at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School; at houses of worship in Charleston, Oak

Creek, Sutherland Springs, and Pittsburgh; at a nightclub in Orlando, a movie theater in Aurora, and a country music concert in Las Vegas.

But under GOP control for the last 8 years, Congress did nothing. We had moments of silence for 30 minutes. We stood. We said nothing and did nothing.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is about to change. Yesterday, the House Judiciary Committee held its first hearing on gun violence prevention in nearly a decade. The room was filled with parents who lost their children and young people who lost their friends to gun violence.

They are determined to make sure that no one else has to live through such senseless tragedies. Particularly the young people, whose passion and commitment and dedication to making sure that we do something to reduce gun violence in this country, have changed the conversation in America. It was a great pleasure to have the opportunity to thank these young people because their voices are making a difference.

I used my 5 minutes at the hearing in part to apologize to these young people, because we have failed them. The adults in this country and the adults in this Congress have failed them.

They are asking us to do our jobs at the very basic minimum: Keep them safe. Allow them to lead their lives and reach their full potential.

I am very proud that I am introducing a number of bills that will reduce gun violence in this country—a bill to ban assault weapons, a bill to ban dangerous bump stocks and 3D-printed guns.

I will also be introducing a bill to improve the background check system by requiring States to establish better reporting systems for mental health professionals to identify individuals who pose a risk to themselves or others if they have a gun.

I plan to introduce a bill that will require notification to law enforcement if a prohibited purchaser buys or attempts to buy a gun.

Mr. Speaker, there are dozens of commonsense proposals that will be introduced in this Congress. Sadly, almost all of them will be introduced by Democrats. I hope we can have some bipartisan support on this, because the American people want us to do something before another horrible tragedy occurs and before another deadly weapon ends up in the wrong hands.

There are many good ideas on how to do it. Our Republican colleagues, as I know the gentlewoman from California will agree, always say there isn't one bill that will stop every instance of gun violence, and so, they argue, we shouldn't do anything, because we can't stop it all. Of course, that is a ridiculous argument against taking action, because there is no question that we can take action on a number of bills that, taken together, will substantially reduce gun violence in this country.

We have the responsibility to do it. The American people are demanding

that we do it. We will take up a bill to close the background check loophole that allows nearly 22 percent of guns sold in this country to happen without a background check.

We are going to take up legislation to fix the background check system and make certain that all sales of guns undergo a background check, so we can make sure criminals don't have access to firearms.

That is just the beginning. That is the first thing we will do. We are going to move forward on a whole series of commonsense proposals that will help stop the carnage being caused by gun violence in this country.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will yield back to the gentlewoman and again thank her for her leadership and accommodation this evening. I thank her for organizing this very important Special Order hour to continue to raise this issue and demonstrate to the American people that we are committed to getting something done to reduce gun violence in this country to protect our constituents who sent us here to do just that.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. CICILLINE for his words and his passion and his leadership on this issue.

As he said, one of the most basic functions of our government doing our jobs is to keep American families safe and secure. For too long, Congress has put fealty to the special interest of the gun lobby ahead of our safety.

Mr. Speaker, the prevalence of gun violence in our country is horrifying. For 15- to 24-year-olds, the gun murder rate here in America is 49 times higher than our peer nations. Our children and my children go to school with the fear that their school, that their classroom, could be the next mass shooting site.

Guns are the second leading cause of death for our American children and teens. Nearly 1,700 children are killed by guns each year. Our country's gun violence epidemic is not normal. While we have about 5 percent of the world's population, we have about 15 percent of noncombat-related gun violence.

The fact is that no other country on this planet even remotely comes close to ours on the problem of gun violence.

It has been almost a year since the Parkland school shooting and more than 6 years since the Sandy Hook shooting. And until this Congress, there has not been any change coming out of Washington.

Yesterday, we took an important first step. As my colleague, Mr. CICILLINE, recognized, the House held its first hearing in 8 years on taking action to prevent gun violence in America. It is a shame, Mr. Speaker, that it took 8 years to hold that hearing.

Next week will be the markup of historic legislation, H.R. 8, the bipartisan background check bill. Now more than ever, we need to insist that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle stand up to the gun lobby and stand up to join in the fight to end gun violence.

Six of the deadliest mass shootings in our Nation's entire history happened in the last decade, a decade in which Congress did nothing to reduce preventable gun deaths.

We cannot continue, we should not continue, to ignore the demands of mothers, of grandmothers, of grandparents, of teachers, of nurses, of emergency room physicians who are concerned, like all of us, about violent gun deaths and about children being killed in their schools and in their communities.

We need to be leaders, not shills for the gun lobby, not cowards afraid of losing an A rating. Our children deserve courage. They deserve the courage of this Congress. Our children deserve leaders who will fight to ensure that families are safe at school, at movie theaters, at concerts.

I will not be bought, and I will not be silenced by the gun lobby or by the President.

□ 1815

The midterm elections made clear that voters want lawmakers to put the safety of our children and our families first. We must end the insidious buying off of politicians by the gun lobby.

Americans overwhelmingly support commonsense gun safety reforms like H.R. 8, which implements mandatory background checks on all gun sales and transfers. Ninety-seven percent of Americans want laws like this implemented.

Since the Brady Bill was passed 25 years ago, over 3 million attempts to purchase firearms have been blocked because of background checks. Yet, one out of five guns is still sold without a background check.

We also need commitment and action by Congress to reinstate CDC, Centers for Disease Control, funding to study how best to prevent gun violence. More than three-quarters of Americans support the CDC conducting research on gun violence as a public health issue.

Yet, for decades, Republicans in Congress have prevented us from studying the factors that contribute to accidental deaths, suicides, and homicide by firearms. And without that information, without that research, we cannot have a full understanding of how to exercise our duty to keep American families safe and to prevent unnecessary loss of life.

These are not radical ideas. They are commonsense American solutions that are being held hostage by the gun lobby.

My home, Orange County, has made its feelings heard time and again, that it wants to strengthen gun violence prevention laws. Keeping our families safe is at the heart of our values.

I am particularly inspired by the advocacy of those in our community who have experienced loss and suffering from gun violence and, yet, found the strength to dedicate their lives to making sure that others don't experience similar tragedies.

I would like to highlight the story of one such couple, Mary Leigh and Charlie Blek, from Orange County, California. These loving parents led the fight in my district and in California, for commonsense gun legislation.

Mary Leigh and Charlie's son, Matthew, was only 21 years old when he was shot and killed. He was a victim of an armed robbery by teens using a small handgun, also known as a "Saturday Night Special" or a "junk gun."

In memory of their son, the Bleks founded the Orange County Citizens for the Prevention of Gun Violence in 1995. For five long, hard-fought years, they advocated for safety regulations that would rid California of the type of gun that killed their son, and they succeeded.

California used to produce 80 percent of the junk guns for the Nation. California no longer produces these junk guns, and has enacted safety standards for handguns that are working to reduce gun violence deaths.

Still today, the Bleks are vigilant in preventing the gun lobby from finding new ways to sell dangerous handguns in California. They now lead the Orange County Chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and I am personally very grateful for their efforts, their leadership, and their courage.

No family should ever have to go through what the Bleks suffered, but too many in our own communities have. Since the beginning of 2014, in California, over 14,000 people, 14,000 people, including 120 law enforcement officers, have been injured or killed from gun violence. Forty-seven of those people hurt or killed were in my district, the 45th district. We have lost 34 members of our communities in just 4 years, all to gun violence.

This is a public safety problem, and, Mr. Speaker, doing nothing is unacceptable. This issue affects all of us, young and old alike.

Just last week, I received 60 letters, 60 letters from constituents living at Heritage Point, a senior community, each letter asking me to take action to prevent so many senseless deaths. These letters said: "Most of us have families, children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren. We have much anguish due to the recent and terrible shootings taking place almost in our own backyard."

Gun violence destroys families and communities. We must work together to keep dangerous weapons out of the hands of dangerous people.

We cannot allow the frequent news of gun violence to desensitize us into believing it is the norm. It is not the norm, and it is not unavoidable. There is something we can do to prevent gun violence.

If Congress puts people first, people ahead of the gun lobby, we can save hundreds of lives each year. Our role, as elected Representatives, is to prioritize and fight for the well-being of our constituents and our commu-

nities, not the score we are assigned by the gun lobby.

Standing up to powerful special interests is a radical transformation of how Congress operates, but that change is long overdue.

We need commitment and action by Congress to pass commonsense gun laws like H.R. 8, to expand background checks. We need to fund CDC research on firearms and the impacts of gun violence.

Without Congress' action, if we simply offer thoughts and prayers, but do nothing, our children, our families, our communities, will increasingly suffer from preventable injuries, preventable suicides, and preventable homicides, preventable shooting massacres, and the fear and trauma associated with gun violence.

Gun violence is an epidemic, and we can no longer afford to point fingers or to place blame. We must act. On both sides of the aisle, we must have the courage to fight gun violence for the common good of the American people.

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

BORDER SECURITY AND COMPROMISE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2019, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GROTHMAN) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the current committee meeting on our immigration problems and problems connected to the wall. I would like to spend a few moments updating the American people on the key issues and the status of the key issues that we ought to remember as that committee does its work.

I have spent some time talking with constituents in the Sixth Congressional District and, one more time, want to address their concerns, or maybe address some misconceptions that are out there regarding this issue.

The first thing I will address is the need to compromise. And it is true that, in this body, again and again, we must compromise. But I want to point out that prior to this committee, President Trump, has elected to—more than any other issue—deal with the immigration crisis, has compromised considerably.

First of all, on the issue of whether we need a wall—and we will talk about that wall. At various different times, various different people have suggested different amounts on the wall. Initially, people talked about 20 to \$25 billion. The most recent or accurate estimate it would take—not to build an entire wall, but just to build parts of a wall in areas in which one could cross the border; in other words, areas in which the terrain does not form a natural border, would cost about \$8 billion.

And I hope the negotiators who are Republicans will remember that \$8 bil-

lion figure. I got it from the gentleman who was the head of the Border Patrol under the Obama administration.

President Trump, in an effort to reach some sort of compromise, has already gone down from \$8 billion to \$5.7 billion. I find that unfortunate, in that I toured the border about 3 weeks ago and, at the time—I know some of the wall that we so desperately need near Sasabe, Arizona, areas in which MS-13 has gone across the land, trampled across the land—and I have talked to the ranchers there, they will have to be told, sorry, we are building part of the wall, but not enough of a wall for you.

So already, that \$5.7 billion figure is a big compromise.

I also want to point out with regard to time. People wonder why we are shutting down the government right now. Actually, we could shut down the government whenever people disagree on what should be in, what we call, an appropriations bill, but I think what people back home would call a budget. And every budget up here is a compromise. It contains hundreds of provisions. Every provision gone over, and maybe the Democrats want more of this; the Republicans want more of that.

In his first 2 years here, President Trump got budgets that contained very, very little for anything like a wall. This is unfortunate. President Trump, in particular, in a budget passed about a year ago, what we call an omnibus bill, complained what a bad bill it was. It was a horrible bill, but he signed it because he didn't want to shut down the government, which happens when both sides disagree.

So President Trump agreed to cave in to people that wanted to spend a lot more money on other things, in the interest of keeping the government open. But President Trump only gets a 4-year term.

For the first 2 years he signed appropriations bills without adequate money for the wall. Finally, in the third time around he said, look, I would be happy to sign a third year of appropriations, but this time, I would like money for a wall. He has compromised for over 2 years.

We had a government shutdown just 3 weeks ago because some headstrong Democrats, despite being happy to spend billions of dollars on other things, refused to give a little bit of money for the wall.

President Trump also extended the DACA program for another 2 years. And I will point out, that as well is something the Border Patrol was not thrilled about, because whenever you talk about extending the DACA program, it is kind of a magnet for people south of the border, because they believe we are not going to enforce our immigration laws anymore.

But, in an effort to compromise, President Trump agreed to extend the DACA extension for two more years. So there have been plenty of compromises already.