

the United States and around the world, how will we respond? My first concern, of course, is my home State of Illinois and the folks who are kind enough to let me serve them in the U.S. Senate.

I want to do everything I can to work with the Army Corps of Engineers, which is a critical part of flood protection for the Midwest. These earthen levees you will see along the shorelines of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers have been sorely taxed by these floodwaters. When they are drenched and soaked over long periods of time, they tend to weaken. We count on the Army Corps of Engineers and the good people locally to step forward and help us fortify these levees. We need to continue to do that, maybe even more so because of the frequency of the floods we are seeing in the Midwest.

But we have a responsibility here in Washington too. What are we doing about the climate change that is happening around the world? What are we doing to make sure our kids and grandkids will inherit an Earth that is habitable and that won't face these kinds of awful occurrences on a regular basis? Are we willing to make sacrifices and changes in the comfort of our own lives just a little bit so that our kids and grandkids have a world that they can live in, a world that is habitable, that they can pass on to the next generation? I don't think that is too much to ask.

There was an agreement reached a few years ago in Paris. Every nation in the world signed up to do something. Every single nation in the world signed up to do something to reach a common goal of stopping the warming of this planet and everything that has followed. Then what happened with the election of this President? President Trump stepped forward and said: Count us out. The United States is not in the Paris Agreement any longer. We are the only nation in the world to step away from that agreement. The rest of the world understands the gravity of this challenge. Today, it is the floods in the Midwest. Tomorrow, it will be that tornado in Oklahoma. The list goes on and on and on.

I stand ready to work with everyone I can locally to deal with this, but I also plead with this administration—open your eyes to the reality of climate change in the world and what it is doing to the extreme weather patterns we currently face.

Our Governor, J. B. Pritzker, has declared a disaster in 34 of Illinois's 102 counties—about a third of the State. Four hundred Illinois National Guard men and women members are working sometimes around the clock to do their part, and my hat is off to them and their families for their extraordinary sacrifice.

The levees, like the Nutwood Levee, which isn't far from Alton, IL, were breached by floodwaters, and over the past week, a small town was evacuated. State and local officials have urged ev-

eryone there to be careful and make certain that they do everything they can to protect themselves and their property.

When you take a look at this picture taken in Alton, IL, you don't see the real story. There are a few people, families who are looking at floodwaters, but the real story is the coordinated effort, which is heartwarming. It is not just the Federal agencies, like the Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard; it is not just the State agencies, like the Illinois Emergency Management Agency; it is the local units of government, like the city of Alton and so many other cities, that have come together to coordinate their efforts and to make the best of what they have.

It is also an effort by a lot of charitable organizations. As you might expect, the Red Cross was on the scene almost immediately, and we also know the Salvation Army has been involved as well. They are all doing their part to make sure we work together.

But the one group that should be recognized—they may not have a formal title—are the men and women, the families and community leaders who stepped up and rolled up their sleeves to fill the sandbags to help their neighbors. It is not just a midwestern thing, but it is a midwestern thing, as far as I am concerned. Our people and our families across my State time and again step up to lend a helping hand to one another. In this time of need with this kind of flooding damage in Alton and all across our State, it does my heart proud to see that these folks have once again responded to this call.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

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Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, I rise for the swift passage of bipartisan legislation I am leading with Senator KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND known as the Never Forget the Heroes: Permanent Authorization of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund Act.

I will never forget the images of the brave men and women running into danger to save lives during the September 11 terrorist attacks. I never had the privilege or honor of going to New York City prior to September 11, 2001, but I will never forget my first visit after September 11, 2001, going to Ground Zero, watching the firetrucks, with their flag, heading to Ground Zero to continue to work, and now that has become absolutely emblazoned in the minds of the people of this country.

The work they did wasn't just for those in Manhattan who suffered incredible loss but the work they carried

forth for our country—they became symbols of our security, symbols of our freedoms, symbols of our country's willingness, effort, and tenacity to fight back.

This legislation would ensure that all 9/11 first responders and survivors who have been injured by the toxins at Ground Zero would receive their full compensation through the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund now and into the future as more and more become ill with 9/11-related cancers.

When I visited Ground Zero, I will never forget that smell—a burning, acrid odor. These men and women didn't just visit it once but time and again to carry out the cleanup of Ground Zero. Unfortunately, thousands of first responders and survivors, including many who reside in my home State of Colorado, now suffer from illnesses and diseases from the toxins they inhaled day after day during the recovery efforts at Ground Zero.

It is unacceptable for this Congress to fail these heroes and their families. It is unacceptable to fail the families and heroes of September 11. There is no time to waste as Congress debates this issue. More and more people are becoming ill, more and more people are suffering. Today people such as Lou Alvarez came to Washington, DC, postponing a chemotherapy treatment to advocate for his fellow heroes.

The fund expires at the end of this year if we do not act. These men and women have already been forced to reduce their compensation. We have seen a reduction of their compensation for 9/11 first responders due to the impending insolvency.

Jon Stewart, a longtime advocate for the 9/11 responders, testified today before the House Judiciary Committee, expressing the urgency of making sure these first responders receive the care they deserve. He testified before members of the committee in the House about the need to act now because time is of the essence. He said that these men and women "responded in 5 seconds. They did their jobs, with courage, grace, tenacity, humility . . . 18 years later" it is time for Congress to do its job.

That is what I hope my colleagues will do—our job. Pass this important bipartisan legislation, recognizing the service and the sacrifice of these great heroes of 9/11.

Tomorrow the House companion legislation will be marked up in the Judiciary Committee. Congress must do the right thing. The Senate must do our job, and it must act on this legislation. I urge my colleagues to join this legislation to cosponsor the bill, to support this effort, and to support the effort in the House and Senate to swiftly pass this legislation to ensure these heroes receive the care they need and deserve.

We didn't know what was going to happen on September 11, but for the thousands of people involved at Ground Zero, we know what will happen if Congress fails to act. It is unacceptable.

That is why I urge my colleagues to pass this important legislation, to do the right thing and stand up for their fellow heroes who served our country so well.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KAYNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY HALL SHOOTING

Mr. KAYNE. Mr. President, I rise to talk about a sad tragedy that occurred in Virginia on May 31—the shooting deaths of 12 individuals in Virginia Beach.

It was a Friday. I was in Virginia Beach that day having meetings in the community on the boardwalk at a hotel with the Old Dominion Bar Association. It was a meeting about sea level rise with interested constituents.

I had just left Virginia Beach to drive back to my home, and after I left, within a couple of hours, I got word about a shooting at the Virginia Beach City Hall.

This is a city hall I know well. I was the mayor of Richmond and used to work closely with the mayor of Virginia Beach at that time. I also tried cases in the courthouse right there near Virginia Beach City Hall when I served as a private attorney in private practice.

I rise to talk about these 12 victims but also talk about my hope that the Virginia Beach shooting will lead us to stop being bystanders and take meaningful action to reduce gun violence.

If I could say a few words about each of the 12 individuals who were killed at Virginia Beach: Laquita Brown was a 4-year employee of the department of public works. She was known for her love of travel, her friends, and her ability to light up a room with her presence.

Ryan Keith Cox was a 12-year employee of the city. He had worked with the department of public utilities, was known for his kindness and beautiful singing voice. He became known just in the hours after the shooting as somebody who ran into danger looking for more people to save after ensuring his workers were sheltered in a barricaded room. He saved many lives on that horrible day and was killed himself doing so.

Tara Gallagher was a 6-year employee at the city of Virginia Beach. She worked as an engineer to provide clean drinking water to people. She was murdered in the shooting.

Mary Louise Gayle had worked for 24 years for the city in public works. She was known as a cheerful coworker and devoted mother and grandmother.

Alexander Mikhail Gusev was a 9-year employee of the city, emigrated from Belarus to Virginia Beach to find

a better life. He was known as a generous and devoted coworker, friend, uncle, and brother. He was murdered that day.

Joshua Hardy worked for the city for 4 years in the department of public utilities. He was known for his kind-hearted nature, love for family and faith.

Michelle “Missy” Langer worked for the city for 12 years and was known for her beaming smile and passion for the Pittsburgh Steelers. We have a lot of Steelers fans in Virginia. She had plans to retire soon. She was murdered that day.

Rick Nettleton was a 28-year employee of the city. He was a selfless leader in regional utility system planning and a veteran of the 130th Engineer Brigade of the Army.

Kate Nixon was a 10-year employee of the city who was known for her intellect. She was a loving wife and mother of three.

Chris Kelly Rapp had just been there 11 months as a city employee. He was known for his kindness and passion for playing the bagpipes. I met a couple at the memorial whose wedding he had graced with his bagpipe playing. He was devoted to his wife.

Bert Snelling was one of the 12 who was not a city employee. He was a contractor. He had come to the municipal center to get a permit that day, like so many people who walk into the building permits office to get a permit. I learned a lot about Bert because he was a contractor who had done the carpentry renovations on the mayor’s home. The mayor talked about befriending this wonderful contractor in the community.

Then, finally, there was Bobby Williams. Bobby had worked for the city for 41 years in the department of public utilities. During the course of his time with Virginia Beach, he was awarded with eight service awards in recognition of his devoted work for the city, and he was planning on retiring later this year.

These were 12 beautiful people—12 lives lost—who had track records of accomplishment and more to give. They were new employees, 41-year employees, single, married with children, grandchildren. All just wanted to serve their colleagues. That is why they were there. They wanted to serve their fellow citizens of Virginia Beach.

I want to commend the response of city employees. Some of them alerted coworkers and pulled them into the shelter, saving unknowable numbers of lives.

I want to commend Virginia Beach officers. They responded within minutes of the first shootings. They heroically risked their lives, all four of them. Although they had all trained, including a training session the day before, most had not trained together. Imagine that you get this call and the four of you are going into a building where there is a shooting underway. You haven’t trained together, but you

are trying to put your training to use. They did remarkable work.

One of the officers was shot while confronting the gunman. He survived because he was wearing a bulletproof vest that was likely funded by a bulletproof vest program through which the Senate and the House have, for years, enabled local jurisdictions to have bulletproof vests.

The gunman, who was killed in the firefight, was carrying high-caliber handguns with high-capacity ammunition magazines. By some reports, the magazines allowed the gun to fire up to 30 rounds in automatic succession. And he was carrying suppressors that suppressed the noise of these weapons, which made it more difficult for the responding officers to determine where the shooting was happening.

I want to commend the emergency personnel for treating the wounded and also those who have responded to the mental health needs of the families of the wounded and killed, of other city employees, of friends of the city employees, and of the entire community that was brutalized by this. These deaths have robbed Virginia Beach of some wonderful neighbors who served their communities in many ways.

I went to a memorial service a week after the shooting, last Thursday, June 6. I went to the memorial and saw the mountains of flowers that had been left by crosses with each of the names of the 12 on them. While I was there, I visited with everyday people who were coming by to pay respects. They wanted to tell me how proud they were of their city, the city employees, the bravery and heroism, and people pulling together. I met a couple for whom one of the guys had played bagpipes at their wedding. I met the mother of one of the victims and family members of others.

When they saw elected officials there, they wanted to talk about their pride in their city, but they also wanted to share with us as elected officials that we need to do something. It was a reminder that no place is safe and no place is immune to the epidemic of gun violence. Again and again, what people said to me is “I couldn’t have imagined that this would have happened here.” But we have said that about schools; we have said that about night clubs; we have said that about concerts; we have said that about colleges; we have said that about communities all over this country—churches, synagogues, Sikh temples: “I couldn’t have imagined that this would happen here.”

We can’t forget that sometimes instances like this, in which there is mass violence, get headlines. We had a 9-year-old girl in Richmond who was killed at a neighborhood park by a gunshot a couple of weeks back. We had a shooting in Chesapeake, VA, near in time to the massacre of these 12, where many were injured—a mass shooting that affected a backyard barbecue. Many of those people were injured and were taken to the hospital.