

Peace Corps' return is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of this vitally important branch of U.S. foreign affairs. COVID's continued presence around the world requires the Peace Corps to undertake a wide array of new public safety measures to keep volunteers, staff, and host communities healthy and safe.

And so this reauthorization comes at a most critical time for the Peace Corps. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enact long overdue reforms and to make sure the agency can effectively promote international peace, development, and people-to-people engagement. And it represents significant reforms and strong bipartisan congressional support for the Agency at an inflection point in its history.

This legislation will strengthen the Peace Corps, giving it the baseline budget it needs to build the program that Americans deserve. It sets a \$375 per month minimum for the Peace Corps volunteers' readjustment allowance. It suspends student loan interest during volunteer service. It extends healthcare coverage for returned Peace Corps volunteers. And it provides greater whistleblower protections so the Peace Corps will be transparent and accountable, honoring the standards and aspirations of its original vision, as outlined in 1961.

The Peace Corps is on track to redeploy volunteers to 30 countries by the end of this fiscal year. And it has set an aggressive goal of returning volunteers to almost all of the prepandemic countries by the end of fiscal year 2023. The programs and policy reforms authorized in this legislation are crucial to ensuring the safe and successful return of volunteers to the field.

I am especially proud of the bipartisan work that has gone into this bill and appreciate the collaboration of the ranking member of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator RISCH, for joining me on this important legislation. And I am pleased that we are joined by our colleagues, Senators CARDIN, YOUNG, SHAHEEN, PORTMAN, FEINSTEIN, and CORNYN, who should be commended for their support of the Peace Corps and to ensuring the Peace Corps can continue to support and enhance America's leading role in the world.

I also want to salute the tremendous input from the Peace Corps community. Their commitment to improving security, conditions, and opportunities for future Peace Corps volunteers is vital to the introduction of this bill and improves our national security as well.

So I urge my colleagues to support this bill and its swift passage. Passage of this bill will help bring about a revitalized, retooled Peace Corps. Making this bill law will help ensure the return of volunteers executing the important work of the Peace Corps, representing the United States of America overseas.

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE AURORA, COLORADO, SHOOTING

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, on July 20, 2012, Colorado suffered a horrific mass shooting at a movie theater in Aurora. A gunman took 12 innocent lives from us, each of them full of aspirations for a future that was tragically and senselessly cut short. They leave behind family, friends, and a community in Aurora that still carries the pain of their loss a decade later.

Colorado will never forget and forever honor the 12 victims of the Aurora shooting. Today, I ask to read their names into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

Jonathan Blunk was 26 years old. He was a father of two who moved to Colorado in 2009 after three tours in the Persian Gulf and North Arabian Sea for the U.S. Navy. He was a certified firefighter and EMT. Jon lost his life protecting his friend Jansen Young from the gunman's line of fire. Jon shielded her from gunfire by pushing her to the ground while shots were fired. He was supposed to fly that Saturday to Nevada to see his wife Chantel Blunk and his 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. Instead, his wife had to put up the dress her daughter had picked out to wear to the airport. She told her daughter that they would not see their dad anymore, but that he would still love them and look over them.

Alexander Jonathan Boik was 18 years old. His friends and family called him A.J. He had just graduated from Gateway High School. He enjoyed baseball, music, and making pottery. A.J. was supposed to start art classes at the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design that fall. He was described "as being the life of the party," who could bring a smile to anybody's face." He was a young man with a warm and loving heart.

Jesse Childress was 29 years old. He was an Air Force cyber systems operator based at Buckley Air Force Base. He loved to play flag football, softball, and bowl. He was a devoted fan of the Denver Broncos and held season tickets. His superior officer described him as an invaluable part of the 310th family who touched everyone with whom he worked.

Gordon Cowden was 51 years old. He was originally from Texas and lived in Aurora with his family. He was "a quick witted world traveler with a keen sense of humor, he will be remembered for his devotion to his children and for always trying to do the right thing, no matter the obstacle." Gordon took his two teenage children to the theater the night of the shooting. Both of them, thankfully, made it out unharmed.

Jessica Ghawi was 24 years old. She was an aspiring journalist, most recently interning with Mile High Sports Radio in Denver, and went by the nickname "Redfield." She was hard-working, ambitious, and had a generous spirit and kind heart. When several homes were destroyed by Colorado wildfires, Jessica collected hockey

equipment to donate to the kids affected because she wanted to help. That was who she was.

John Thomas Larimer was 27 years old. He was a cryptologic technician with the Navy based also at Buckley Air Force Base, a job that requires "exceptionally good character and skills." Originally from Chicago, John was the youngest of five siblings and had joined the service just over a year before the shooting. Like his father and grandfather, John chose to serve in the U.S. Navy. John's superior officer called him "an outstanding shipmate, a valued member of the Navy and an extremely dedicated sailor." Colleagues praised his calming demeanor and exceptional work ethic.

Matthew McQuinn was 27 years old. Matt died while protecting his girlfriend Samantha Yowler by jumping in front of her during the shooting. Matt and Samantha moved to Colorado from Ohio last fall and worked at Target. He and Samantha were in love and planning their future life together. Matt's bravery saved Samantha's life.

Micayla "Cayla" Medek was 23 years old. Cayla was a graduate of William C. Hinkley High School in Aurora and a resident of Westminster. She worked at Subway and was a huge Green Bay Packers fan. Cayla would plan weekend activities around watching the games with her brother and father. She is remembered as a loving and gentle young woman.

Veronica Moser-Sullivan was 6 years old. She had just learned to swim and attended Holly Ridge Elementary School in Denver. She was a good student who loved to play dress-up and read.

Alex Sullivan was 27 years old. He was at the movie celebrating his 27th birthday and first wedding anniversary. He loved comic books, the New York Mets, and movies. Alex was such a big movie fan that he took jobs at theaters just to see the movies. Alex stood 6 feet, 4 inches, and weighed about 280 pounds. He played football and wrestled before graduating high school in 2003 and later went to culinary school. Alex was known as a gentle giant and was loved by many.

Alexander C. Teves was 24 years old. Alex received an M.A. in counseling psychology from the University of Denver and was planning on becoming a psychiatrist. He also competed in the Tough Mudder, an intense endurance challenge, and helped students with special needs. Alex was at the theater on the night of the shooting with his girlfriend Amanda Lindgren. When the gunman opened fire, Alex immediately lunged to block Amanda from the gunfire, held her down, and covered her head.

Rebecca Wingo was 32 years old. Originally from Texas, Rebecca joined the Air Force after high school, where she became fluent in Mandarin Chinese and served as a translator. She was a single mother of two girls and worked as a customer relations representative

at a mobile medical imaging company. Rebecca was also enrolled at the Community College of Aurora and had been working toward an associate of arts degree. She was known to family and friends as a “gentle, sweet, beautiful soul.”

When I came to the floor a decade ago, I said that scripture tells us “not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” That is what the people of Aurora have done for the past 10 years. Today, we recommit to not remember July 20 for the evil act that day.

We choose to remember the beautiful lives lost and the loved ones they left behind.

We choose to remember the 70 wounded survivors, whose resilience in the years since is a testament to humanity’s resolve.

We choose to remember the heroic acts of everyday citizens, our first responders, and medical personnel who saved lives that otherwise surely would have been lost.

And we choose to remember the profound generosity of the Coloradans and Americans who donated blood in record numbers and raised funds to support the survivors.

A decade later, Colorado and the country continue to draw strength from the example set by the people of Aurora. And we recommit to ending the American scourge of gun violence—unique among industrialized nations—that has cut short too many innocent lives in our communities.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, following my submission yesterday, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the next part of an investigation directed by the U.S. Central Command concerning the Abbey Gate bombing in Afghanistan in August 2021.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

ACTS-SCK-DO

SUBJECT: Findings and Recommendation—
Attack Against U.S. Forces Conducting
NEO at Hamid Karzai International Air-
port on 26 August 2021.

(3) Gate Operations.

(a) Occupation of Abbey Gate. At approximately 0800 on 19 August, Golf Company, reinforced by Fox Company platoons, arrived at Abbey Gate and found U.K. and other foreign forces standing in the inner corridor (exhibits 77, 89). Golf Company attempted to open the gate to process evacuees and enable U.K. Forces to move to the Barron Hotel (exhibits 77, 89). This attempt failed because the large and desperate crowd in the outer corridor nearly breached the gate and forced Golf Company to stop in less than an hour (exhibits 77, 89). On 20 August during the period of darkness, Golf Company, reinforced by Fox Company platoons, moved the crowd approximately 150 meters south passed the entrance of the Barron Hotel (exhibits 77, 83, 89). 24th MEU engineers emplaced several shipping containers to form an obstacle, known as the Chevron, in the road (exhibits 77, 83, 86, 87, 89). The Taliban were employed to man the outside of the obstacle and con-

ducted initial screening and crowd control (exhibits 77, 83, 89). Later on 20 August, crowds in the canal breached the southern end of the fence separating the canal from the outer corridor (exhibits 83, 172). Marines identified the need to clear the nearside of the canal and keep crowds on the opposite side (exhibits 53, 76, 77, 83).

(b) Steady State Gate Operations.

(i) After the establishment of the Chevron and clearing the nearside of the canal, 2/1 established a steady state operation of screening evacuees and movement to the PAX Terminal (exhibits 53, 77, 83, 89). Steady state was between 21–25 August. Marines on the canal would search for persons with documents (passports, immigration forms) meeting the current eligibility requirements for evacuation (exhibits 77, 83). Marines at the Chevron would do a similar screening (exhibits 78, 79). After pulling them into the outer corridor perimeter, they would conduct a cursory search of the potential evacuees, and place them into the holding area (exhibits 77, 83). 2/1 Marines established the holding area in the outer corridor traffic lane, against the HKIA exterior wall (exhibits 57, 60, 61, 77, 83). When DoS Consular officers were available, Marines would escort evacuees from the holding area to the search area in the inner corridor (exhibits 57, 60, 61, 77, 83). After thoroughly searching the potential evacuees, Marines would escort them to an area further into the inner corridor to be screened by the Consular officer (exhibits 57, 60, 61, 77, 83). The Consular officer would determine if the evacuees met the eligibility criteria and approve moving the evacuees forward to the PAX Terminal, or reject them, and the Marines would return them to the canal (exhibits 56, 57, 60, 61, 77, 79, 80, 82). The FST would assist in the searches and the escort of rejected civilians back to the canal (exhibits 77, 83, 107). Corpsmen were staged a CCP in the inner corridor and treated casualties at the canal or Chevron (exhibits 77, 83, 98).

(ii) U.K. Forces conducted NEO from the Barron Hotel, but also provided personnel for security on the canal and the Chevron (exhibits 53, 56, 76, 77, 127). U.K. support to steady state gate operations reduced as the NEO progressed (exhibits 77). Other partner nations provided no assistance with security at Abbey Gate (exhibits 56, 57, 60–63, 77, 79–88). Partner forces utilized Abbey Gate to escort their own consular officers or to pull evacuees from the crowd (exhibits 77, 79–89). Partner nations often did not coordinate their activities with Marines at Abbey Gate, and did not adhere to the established processing or security procedures (exhibits 79–89).

(c) Increased Crowds and Attack.

(i) On 25 August, Echo Company recognized an increase in the size and desperation of the crowd (exhibits 53, 56). The Echo Company [TEXT REDACTED] was concerned with the crowd pushing past the jersey barriers at the base of the sniper tower and not having space to operate (exhibit 56). In response, Echo Company cleared the crowd on the nearside of the canal (exhibits 56, 60–62). Echo Company positioned Marines approximately 150 meters down the canal, running northeast, to maintain control of the nearside (exhibit 56, 77). At approximately 1600, Golf Company relieved Echo company and assumed the same positions along the canal, the outer corridor, and inner corridor (exhibit 77) [TEXT REDACTED] received several updates concerning SVIED attacks at gates and determined the positions down the canal presented unacceptable risk to force and isolated Marines from support, to include CASEVAC (exhibit 77). Golf Company withdrew the Marines back down the nearside of the canal and crowds backfilled the space almost immediately (exhibits 77, 83). [TEXT REDACTED] stopped the flow of

evacuees and took the defensive posture previously mentioned (exhibits 77, 83).

(ii) The next day, crowds were even larger and more unruly (exhibits 53, 56, 77, 83). Golf Company was forced to push additional Marines to the canal to keep them from crossing the jersey barriers at the base of the sniper tower (exhibits 53, 76, 77). Echo Company assumed inner gate responsibilities so Golf Company could maintain the positions on the canal (exhibits 56, 57). The crowds grew so desperate, they began to crush people against the sniper tower walls and jersey barriers (exhibits 53, 75, 77, 105). Golf Company Marines consolidated at the base of the tower in response (exhibits 53, 76, 77, 83, Brit Video). At 1736, the single explosion occurred, and detonated directly across from the platoon gathered at the base of the tower (exhibits 5, 53, 76, 77, 83, 89). Shortly after, Abbey Gate closed, the 1/82nd IBCT took over security of the Gate, U.K. Forces passed through for the final time from the Barron Hotel, and gate operations ended (exhibits 53, 56, 77, 124, 127).

(4) Preventability of the Abbey Gate Attack. The attack was not preventable at the tactical level without degrading the mission to maximize the number of evacuees. Given the priority of effort, time, resources, partner nation requirements, and terrain restraints, the only mitigation possible would have jeopardized the flow of evacuees and potentially risk mission failure.

(a) The priority for the Marines at Abbey Gate was maximizing the flow of evacuees through the gate to the ECC (exhibits 11, 15, 18, 56, 77, 88). Any time spent emplacing obstacles was time not spent searching and screening civilian evacuees. Additionally, many force protection measures that could have been implemented, such as additional T-Walls or HESCO barriers, would have inherently reduced the flow of evacuees. Closing the gate was also not an option because of U.K. efforts to conclude evacuation operations at the nearby Barron Hotel (exhibits 18, 54, 121, 127). Closing the gates would have isolated U.K. Forces and jeopardized the JTE force flow and timeline, potentially initiating renewed armed conflict with the Taliban (exhibits 15, 18, 21, 23, 125).

(b) Leaders at Abbey Gate on 26 August made frequent decisions (multiple times daily) to increase the force protection posture. Electronic countermeasures were already emplaced to prevent enemy coordination and radio controlled device use (exhibit 65). Several times during the 18 hours prior to the attack, the company commander stopped the flow at the gate and had Marines take covered positions (exhibits 77, 83, 84). Medics were consolidated in the inner corridor to ensure their safety and quick reaction to any attack, and additional medical assets were surged forward (exhibits 66, 77, 98). An Afghan interpreter was recruited to pacify the crowd using PSYOP capabilities (exhibit 107). ISR was increased and the Taliban were tasked to screen for the specific threat (exhibits 18, 125). Leaders struck the balance of protecting the force and maximizing the flow of evacuees as best as possible under the circumstances.

D. READINESS

(1) Key Findings.

(a) Most units that deployed to HKIA in support of the Afghanistan NEO, with the exception of USFOR-A FWD and JTF-CR, had adequate manning levels for the assigned mission. USFOR-A FWD and JTF-CR staffs were task-saturated due to the nature of the NEO. The effects were further exacerbated by the fact that many of their personnel were forced to expend significant energy trying to find specific evacuees, or groups of evacuees, at the gates of HKIA, on behalf of