

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

CELEBRATING THE GEORGIA SEA TURTLE CENTER'S RELEASE OF SIX TURTLES

HON. EARL L. "BUDDY" CARTER

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate an important moment for environmental conservation in Georgia, this year's first public release for the Georgia Sea Turtle Center.

On June 25, 2025, the Georgia Sea Turtle Center on Jekyll Island released six rehabilitated sea turtles back into the Atlantic ocean—five green sea turtles and one Kemp's ridley.

The Kemp's ridley is one of the most endangered sea turtle species in the world.

The release marks another success in their mission to protect coastal wildlife and stands as a testament to the incredible work of the Center's staff and volunteers.

Their tireless efforts not only save individual animals but also protect Georgia's coastal wildlife and educate thousands of visitors each year.

Today, we express our gratitude to the Georgia Sea Turtle Center for their impact on our state and beyond.

SUPPORTING THE RESOLUTION HONORING THE VICTIMS OF THE ANNUNCIATION CATHOLIC CHURCH SHOOTING

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise with a heavy heart in support of Representative OMAR's resolution honoring the victims of the devastating shooting that occurred August 27, at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis.

On what was supposed to be a joyous day, with the student body gathered for their first student Mass of the year, the children and parishioners of Annunciation Catholic Church experienced a horrific event that has become all too familiar to Americans and Minnesotans. An assailant armed with an assault rifle, shotgun, and pistol fired dozens of rounds at praying children, educators, support staff, and parishioners. Two students were murdered, 8-year-old Fletcher Merkel and 10-year-old Harper Moyski. Dozens were wounded, and many more are enduring emotional trauma that they will carry for life. It is heartbreaking that only two months after my friends Speaker Emerita Melissa Hoffman and her husband Mark were murdered, and Senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvette were shot, Minnesotans are once again grieving for victims of gun violence.

I am grateful for the immediate actions of the older students, adults, law enforcement,

EMTs, and medical personnel whose actions prevented a horrible situation from becoming even worse. Lives were saved thanks to the bravery of those who took swift action.

Mr. Speaker, we are decades late in taking meaningful action to prevent the mass shootings we are all too accustomed to. Under President Biden, Democrats and Republicans joined together to pass the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the first bill addressing the gun violence epidemic since Republicans allowed the assault weapons ban to expire in 2004. We have a duty to protect Americans from gun violence. Especially American children, for whom guns are the leading cause of death in America. It is time we turn our collective grief into collective action.

I would like to include in the RECORD a news article titled Richfield couple in their 80s among the 21 wounded during Annunciation Church shooting by the Minnesota Star Tribune. The article profiles a handful of the many victims of this shooting. I hope everyone will take the time to learn about who they are:

[From the Minnesota Star Tribune, Sept. 2, 2015]

RICHFIELD COUPLE IN THEIR 80s AMONG THE 21 WOUNDED DURING ANNUNCIATION CHURCH SHOOTING

(By Paul Walsh, Laura Yuen and Sharyn Jackson)

Families are sharing the extent of their children's injuries as well as stories of their courage and resilience while protecting their friends and "little buddies."

As the shock begins to wear off, some families of children wounded Wednesday at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis are revealing details of their kids' injuries on online fundraising sites. Others, including one girl grazed by a bullet, have spoken to reporters outside the church.

Stories of bravery and resilience are beginning to emerge as well. Some kids wounded during the shooting were protecting friends or their "little buddies" at school from a storm of bullets.

Fletcher Merkel, 8, and Harper Moyski, 10, were killed in the shooting. Of the 21 who were injured, 16 were children. Eight families have so far created GoFundMe pages. Here is what we know about the students who were caught in the gunfire, just days after returning to the classroom from summer break, and two of the three adults:

WESTON HALSNE

Weston quickly became the face and the voice of youngsters who were inside Annunciation Church last week when gunfire broke out. He told reporters about his friend Victor Greenawalt (see below) shielding him from the barrage of gunfire.

At first, Weston seemingly came away physically unscathed. However, it turns out Weston "will need surgery to remove a bullet fragment that is lodged in his neck, dangerously close to his carotid artery," his aunt, Allison Hawes, wrote on an online fundraising page she started for Weston's family.

"You've been amazed by his quick wit, awed by his persistence, and charmed by his earnestness," Hawes said. "If you've been watching the news, you've seen his grief stricken face and heard, despite his shock,

Weston's account of the horrific details during the mass at Annunciation Church. And in spite of everything, this 10-year-old boy was able to express appreciation for his friends and pray for their recovery.

VICTOR GREENAWALT

When fifth-grader Weston spoke to reporters after Wednesday's shooting, he recounted that his brave friend Victor "laid on top of me" to shield Weston from the bullets and ended up getting hit.

Victor Greenawalt's uncle, Mike Kelly, said his nephew's "selfless acts" helped spare the lives of his friends.

"But he and his sister were injured in the process," Kelly wrote on an online fundraising site. "Vic, along with his family, have started the long journey of recovery. A journey that involves unknown and ongoing future medical costs."

A sign seen Thursday at a memorial outside the church that someone drew said, simply, "Thank You Victor."

GENEVIEVE BISEK

Genevieve Bisek was shot in the neck, and the 11-year-old's "medical journey is uncertain," according to an online fundraising campaign begun on behalf of the family. A spokesperson at HCMC said Genevieve was in satisfactory condition as of midday Friday.

"This courageous child, her family, and the entire community are struggling to comprehend the unimaginable," the campaign's posting read. "Genevieve's older sister was also present during the tragedy, bravely helping her Mass buddy to safety. She now carries the emotional weight of that day, questioning if she will ever feel the same again."

SOPHIA FORCHAS

One of the children wounded was taken to the hospital where her mother was working as a nurse. Seventh-grader Sophia Forchas remained at HCMC on Friday in critical condition, a hospital spokeswoman said.

According to an online fundraising campaign started to help the family with medical and other expenses, Sophia's mother, Amy Forchas, is a pediatric critical care nurse who reported for work in response to the shooting.

Amy Forchas showed up at HCMC "before knowing it was her children's school that was attacked and that her daughter was critically injured," a posting on the campaign's webpage read.

Also at the scene at the time was Sophia's younger brother, Anthony, the posting disclosed. The fundraising campaign includes a photo of Sophia and Anthony, a fourth grader, together outside the school and wearing their uniforms and big smiles.

"Though he was physically unharmed," the posting continued, "the trauma of witnessing such a terrifying event—and knowing his sister was critically injured—is something no child should ever experience."

LYDIA KAISER

Twelve-year-old Lydia Kaiser was wounded while protecting her "little buddy" during Annunciation's first Mass of the school year, according to an online fundraising campaign started to help Lydia's family with medical and other expenses.

Her father, Harry Kaiser, is an Annunciation gym teacher and "was also in attendance and helped to secure the room, to keep

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

children safe, and stuck with them all until they were reunited with their families, even while his daughter was entering the emergency room.”

ENDRE GUNTER

Natalie Davis said her family’s world “was turned upside down” when her 13-year-old nephew was shot at the church Wednesday. In a posting on an online fundraising campaign on behalf of Endre Gunter’s family, Davis wrote that the eighth-grader was shot twice while attending Mass.

“It’s impossible to make sense of this act of violence against children, in a place that should have been a sanctuary of peace and safety,” Davis wrote.

“In the face of unimaginable fear and pain, Endre showed strength and faith beyond his years.”

Davis said that before Endre went into surgery, he asked the doctor, “‘Can you say a prayer with me?’”

VIVIAN ST. CLAIR

Despite being shot, 9-year-old Vivian St. Clair remained resilient through the most terrifying moments.

An online fundraising campaign started on behalf of Vivian’s family noted that despite being shot in her back and her arm, she “ran from the church to the school gym, where a police officer scooped her up and rushed her to an ambulance.”

Vivian was taken to HCMC, where her mother works, the posting continued. “Through it all, she continues to smile and radiate sweetness,” the campaign read.

“She’s been telling people how excited she is to swim at her grandma’s pool in Arizona [Thursday] evening with her dad, Joe—just showing how innocent and hopeful she remains.”

DAVID HAEG

A smiling boy with two missing front teeth wears a backpack and a green school uniform polo smiles on what appears to be his front stoop.

Six-year-old David Haeg has undergone surgery and has more days ahead being cared for in a hospital pediatric intensive care unit, according to an online fundraiser started on behalf of his family.

“His road to recovery will be long, but he is showing incredible strength and resilience,” the online posting read. “In the midst of this unimaginable time, the last thing David’s family should have to worry about is mounting medical expenses.”

ASTORIA SAFE

On Thursday while visiting a memorial at Annunciation, Astoria Safe, 10, placed a stuffed animal on a display for one of her friends, Harper Moyski, who was killed in the attack. A shot grazed Astoria on the forehead, and a bullet fragment was lodged there. Doctors deemed it too dangerous to remove but said it wouldn’t cause long-term problems.

Astoria told a reporter she’s feeling OK. She also described how she helped pull two other kids down next to her when the bullets started flying.

“I had two buddies side by side, and I just pushed their heads down to make sure they were safe,” she said. “I thought it was fireworks, it was just crazy. And the smell was terrible.”

RONALD AND SUZAN WILSON

Ronald Wilson, 87, and Suzan Wilson, 82, of Richfield, were among three adults who were wounded in the Aug. 27 gunfire at Annunciation, their family confirmed Tuesday. An online medical update from over the weekend written by a daughter has been read more than 5,300 times as of midday Tuesday. It notes that Ronald Wilson came away with

a minor cut on his head. Suzan Wilson, however, suffered serious injuries to her head from shrapnel.

“As my parents . . . enter this later stage of life, my siblings and I have lovingly and constantly been reminding them to make safe choices like not getting on ladders or shoveling the walk,” Jenny Harding wrote. “Unfortunately, on Wednesday August 27th, being at mass at Annunciation Church turned out to be unsafe.”

Harding went on to share that “my mom walked to the ambulance herself while noticing all of the ‘big strong police officers’ giving comfort to children everywhere she looked. My dad comforted one of the injured children in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.”

A member of the Wilsons’ family said Tuesday they were not ready to share more about the couple.

Louis Krauss of the Minnesota Star Tribune contributed to this report.

I urge all my colleagues to support this resolution.

CORDELE WATERMELON

HON. EARL L. “BUDDY” CARTER

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a Georgia town that has earned itself an unusual title, Cordele, Georgia.

Georgia’s agricultural staples are widely known as peanuts, pecans, and peaches; but Cordele has become a major producer of another crop: Watermelon.

This central-Georgia town plays an impressive agricultural role within the state, with a population of just under 10,000, it boasts a massive contribution to the region’s agricultural production of cotton, peanuts, and oddly enough watermelon.

Southern Living magazine just named Cordele, Georgia as the Watermelon Capital of the World, yes you heard that correctly.

This town produces a plethora of summertime fruit, supplying much of the state and the Southeast region with a sweet, refreshing treat to beat the heat.

Cordele also hosts the Watermelon Days Festival which invites thousands of visitors each year.

Today, we congratulate the town of Cordele on being recognized for another agricultural contribution of the state of Georgia, and the title “Watermelon Capital of the World”.

TRIBUTE TO MASTER SERGEANT LESLIE DIANE KOGER

HON. JAMES E. CLYBURN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor Master Sergeant Leslie Diane Koger on her retirement after 29 years of distinguished service in the United States Air National Guard. MSgt Koger’s career is one defined by professionalism, leadership, and selfless service. From her beginnings in South Carolina to her final assignment at Joint Base Andrews, she has embodied the highest

traditions of military service that leaves a legacy on the Airmen she has led and mentored.

A proud native of Moncks Corner, South Carolina, MSgt Koger graduated from Macdonia High School before embarking on her military career in July 1996 when she enlisted in the South Carolina Air National Guard’s 169th Fighter Wing, 245th Air Traffic Control Squadron. After completing her technical training as an Information Manager at Keesler Air Force Base, she quickly distinguished herself as a talented leader and mentor. Over the years, she advanced through key roles at the squadron, group, and headquarters levels, serving with distinction at McEntire Joint National Guard Base, the Pentagon, and the Air National Guard Readiness Center at Joint Base Andrews.

Throughout her career, MSgt Koger deployed seven times in support of Operations Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, and Freedom Sentinel, as well as multiple Air Expeditionary Force deployments and exercises. Her leadership was instrumental in earning her unit the Meritorious Unit Award, and her administrative teams were consistently recognized for exceptional service in deployed environments. She also played a critical role in preparing the next generation of Airmen, mentoring countless service members who have gone on to leadership positions themselves.

MSgt Koger’s commitment to professional growth is reflected in her academic and military accomplishments. A graduate of Limestone College, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Information Systems Management, she also completed numerous levels of professional military education. Her exemplary service has been recognized with some of the Air Force’s highest honors, including the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Air and Space Commendation Medal, and the Air and Space Achievement Medal with three oak leaf clusters. She was named South Carolina Air National Guard Non-commissioned Officer of the Year in 2004, an early recognition of the leadership and excellence that would define her entire career.

Her most recent assignments—as Assistant Executive Assistant for Intelligence and Cyber Effects Operations at the Air National Guard Readiness Center and as Executive Assistant to the Air National Guard Command Chief at the Pentagon—underscore the trust placed in her judgment, discretion, and leadership at the highest levels of the Air National Guard. In these positions, she supported directorates and leaders responsible for the readiness of Air National Guard units across all 54 states and territories, directly impacting the mission success of more than 90 Air Guard wings nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, as MSgt Leslie Diane Koger concludes her service at the end of 2025, we honor her for nearly three decades of dedication to our Nation. She has been a leader, a mentor, and a role model whose example continues to inspire and will for years to come. On behalf of a grateful state and Nation, I thank her for her service and wish her Godspeed in her well-deserved retirement.