

founder of Youth Republicans of Brevard, and many members of our community who came together in a recent vigil honoring the late Charlie Kirk.

Their gathering reflects the values Charlie Kirk lived by: faith, patriotism, and a commitment to developing the next generation of American leaders. Over 500 community members from across many different towns gathered for this vigil.

Charles Kirk will always be remembered as someone who challenged young people to be engaged as citizens and never shy away from standing for their beliefs. The vigil in Brevard County was just one example of many across the globe, showing that his influence will continue to inspire.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Youth Republicans of Brevard, led by Chandler Braid and her amazing leadership. They show that our best days are still ahead. We will always remember Charlie's incredible legacy, patriotism, and love of our country.

ENSURING FUNDING FOR COMMUNITIES

(Ms. McCOLLUM of Minnesota was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, Republicans say they have a mandate. President Trump has told his party, don't even bother working with Democrats. Congressional Republicans wanted to go it alone when they passed President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

The American people are now finding out it is really a pretty big, ugly mess, especially when it comes to their healthcare and their everyday lives.

Republicans made devastating healthcare cuts to Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. They made \$990 billion worth of cuts. We are now just 2 weeks away from a government shutdown.

Speaker JOHNSON is, once again, refusing to work across the aisle with Democrats. Democrats want to prevent exploding health insurance premiums. They have already started to show up in some people's mail. That is because the Affordable Care Act subsidies are about to expire. Oh, that was part of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ensure that the funding Congress passes is actually delivered to the people in our communities, and I don't want it to be illegally cut or withheld by the Trump administration. We are seeing cuts in CDC, NIH, and the Department of Education. We all know what happened to the State Department and USAID. It was basically just stamped out from existence.

If House Republican leadership wants to go it alone on Federal funding to keep our government open, well, that is their prerogative. They shouldn't expect my vote.

CALLING FOR EMPATHY IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY

(Ms. ANSARI of Arizona was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. ANSARI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call for empathy in the wake of fear-driven hate. Fear has become the air we breathe in America.

Parents breathe it as they drop their kids at school, wondering if today will be the day they get a call that no parent should ever get. Teachers breathe it, walking into classrooms, rehearsing how they might shield their students.

Immigrant families breathe it in their own neighborhoods where ICE raids at schools and festivals turn everyday life into a source of terror. Transgender Americans breathe it just stepping outside, never knowing if they will be targeted for simply existing as themselves.

Journalists and everyday Americans breathe it for simply exercising their free speech rights. Elected leaders, including myself, breathe it after watching colleagues and public figures gunned down in front of their families.

This is the America we are living in right now, and this is not okay. We don't need to agree with someone's politics to say that their murder is a tragedy. The assassination of Charles Kirk, the murders of Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, and the countless children lost to school shootings, are not partisan issues. These are human tragedies.

Violence against any American is violence against us all. Yet what did we hear in the immediate aftermath? We didn't have space for grace or respect for families left behind. We heard Fox News hosts declare this is a war.

Mr. Speaker, that is not what America needs right now. That instinct to weaponize tragedy betrays our humanity because political disagreements, even vast ideological differences, never justify violence.

The assassination of Charlie Kirk is a reminder of the imminent threat that having so many guns in our society poses to all of us, not just to our immediate safety, but to our freedom and our democracy. Violence cannot heal division. History teaches us that it only deepens it.

Somewhere along the way we have lost our empathy. We started debating which families deserve protection, which communities deserve safety, and which children deserve dignity. That is not who we are supposed to be.

□ 1110

Empathy is not weakness. Empathy is strength, and empathy is action. It is action against the epidemic of loneliness that leaves millions disconnected and vulnerable, a crisis that fuels despair and radicalization.

We need to invest in connection in this country: in schools, in civic spaces, in mental health services, and in communities where people can see one another as human beings again.

Empathy is action against the viciousness of unchecked social media. Cruelty isn't an accident of these platforms. It is their business model.

When algorithms reward division and hate, that hate doesn't stay online. It shows up in our streets, in our schools, and in our politics.

Congress cannot keep looking away while Big Tech profits from tearing our communities apart. Empathy is action against gun violence, the fear that stalks every one of us. It stalks every school, every community, and every public gathering.

Enough with the excuses. Enough is enough.

Children's lives are worth more than the profits of gun manufacturers. We need commonsense gun safety laws, and we need funding for mental health care.

We cannot weaponize tragedy to silence dissent. When hate and fear are unleashed, then nobody is safe. Today it may be immigrants; tomorrow, transgender Americans; last week, a conservative political leader. Hate corrodes the bonds of belonging for all of us.

I am asking my colleagues: Resist the temptation to harden your hearts. Choose empathy instead. Choose courage over cruelty. Choose action over indifference.

That is because our strength as a nation will never be measured by how viciously we fight one another, but how deeply we care for one another. Let this moment of grief be a call to empathy, to decency, and to action.

A LETTER FROM SURVIVORS OF JEFFREY EPSTEIN AND GHISLAINE MAXWELL

(Ms. MORRISON of Minnesota was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. MORRISON. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to read a letter from more than 20 survivors of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. I implore my colleagues and all Americans to listen to their words.

Dear Members of the Republican Women's Caucus:

We write to you today with urgency, respect, and hope. Strong American women are serving in the House of Representatives, and survivors of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell's abuse need you to stand with them.

It is difficult to articulate the appreciation that we have for each member of the Democratic Women's Caucus who took the time to meet with us on September 3, 2025. Because of the intrepid leadership of Chairwoman TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ and the Congresswomen who gathered together to support us, we left the Capitol with dignity and resolve. We are likewise eternally grateful to Congresswomen MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE, LAUREN BOEBERT, and NANCY MACE, as well as to Congressman THOMAS MASSIE and RO KHANNA, for taking bold steps to help us in our quest for justice. While we are at a loss for how supporting survivors or transparency could ever be seen as a "hostile act," what you are doing is not only right, it is necessary. This is not a partisan issue. It is a human issue.

Jeffrey Epstein abused hundreds of women. The United States Government itself held evidence that he had sexually abused 40 children. Some of us are those children. Any other American man would have been imprisoned for life, yet Epstein was not. Instead, he was shielded by a nonprosecution agreement that blatantly violated the rights of children, and he was set free to continue abusing women in this country for another 9 years before his death.

Our government conspired with him and, in doing so, failed to protect hundreds of girls who would never have been harmed had our government simply done its job.

Those children are now grown women. We stand together in pain and resilience, and we are asking for your help. We have a right to feel safe in this country. We have a right to know why a serial sexual predator was treated with more humanity than we have ever experienced from our own government.

You now have the chance to be on the right side of history. Unlike past administrations, you are uniquely positioned to tell us that our voices matter and that we have finally been heard. Some of us live in your districts. We look to you to represent us. We deserve for you to represent us.

We implore you to stop protecting those who enabled Epstein's crimes and instead stand firm in protecting the women and children he harmed. Stand up against abuse of power. Take action to end the silence and speculation surrounding this criminal. There should be equal protection under the laws in the United States of America. This is one country, not two. The rich and powerful should answer for their crimes the same way that everyone else does. And when they don't, we deserve to know why.

Ghislaina Maxwell was tried by a jury of her peers for the crimes that she committed, and she was convicted. That is how the American justice system works. The idea of a pardon is beyond the comprehension of the victims who mustered the courage to testify against her and should be beyond the comprehension of the American people. No one should live above the law. Ghislaina Maxwell is certainly no exception.

You may be wondering how you can help us in this fight. At least we hope that you are. As American women, please hear our voices, for yourselves, for your daughters, for women, and for the future of our country.

First, we ask that you vote in favor of the Epstein transparency act and that you help us ensure with its passing that the identities of survivors are protected and the identities of the perpetrators or enablers are not. Remind us that America is the country that we thought it was when we were little girls, before we were let down repeatedly by our own government.

Second, start with H.R. 9444 and rewrite the Crime Victims' Rights Act, as codified in 18 United States Code section 3771 to protect future generations of Americans.

Third, extend the same opportunity that the Democratic Women's Caucus did and invite us to meet with you so that we can try to convince you that we matter. We will come back to Washington. We will tell you why we matter. We will tell you why this matters.

We are not a "hoax." We are mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, and wives. We are America. We have sought justice for decades to no avail. We have been denied the basic rights that should be afforded to every American citizen time and time again. The fact that it took this long for anyone to care about us is a true American tragedy. Please stand with us, help us uncover the truth, and give us the respect and justice that we deserve. We deserve to put this chapter behind us. Americans deserve to move forward

knowing that they have rights in this country that will be enforced even in the face of power; in fact, especially in the face of power.

With hope and resolve.

Signed by more than 20 survivors of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaina Maxwell.

CHARLIE KIRK

(Ms. PETERSEN of Colorado was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. PETERSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today following the horrific events of last week in my community and the rise of political violence nationally.

Last week I was sitting in my office in a meeting when the phone lit up. Charlie Kirk had been shot at an event in Utah. Seconds later, my phone lit up again. There was an active shooter at Evergreen High School, which is not far away from my house.

Our schools are supposed to be our safest places, and, unfortunately, that is far from a reality in the United States. What happened in Evergreen High School is every parent's worst nightmare. I felt shocked and horrified as I waited minute by minute not knowing how many lives might be taken.

I couldn't help but think: What if that had been my kids' school?

My heart breaks for the two students who continue to fight for their lives in the hospital, the parents who are at their bedside not knowing if they will ever come home again, and for the kids and the educators who will carry this trauma forever.

Throughout the day, as I went back and forth thinking about the two tragedies, the one in Evergreen and the assassination of Charlie Kirk, I couldn't stop thinking about his two kids who will have to grow up not having their dad and his wife, Erika, who lost her husband and partner.

Charlie Kirk was exercising one of the most foundational pieces of our democracy: engaging in free speech and debating his political views in a public space without being threatened or silenced, and he was targeted because of this.

Before this assassination, in April, Governor Josh Shapiro's house was set on fire, endangering his entire family. Just 2 months after that, two Democratic lawmakers, Melissa Hortman and John Hoffman, were gunned down in their homes. Tragically, Melissa died alongside her husband, Mark.

Nobody should be killed for their views. This is not how we settle our differences. I can't help but feel that we have lost our way as a country.

The radicalization and easy access to firearms has been a lethal combination that doesn't just impact one party, one State, or one community. This impacts all of us, and any one of us and our families or someone we love could be affected.

□ 1120

Donald Trump doesn't take this moment to unite us as a country. Instead,

he has chosen to fan the flames. He refuses to bring us together to unequivocally denounce all of the political violence that we have faced. Instead, he has weaponized this moment and this tragedy to go after people who disagree with him.

Right now, so many of us are questioning who we are as a country and wondering how we got here. I know that we are so much better than this, and I have to have hope that our country can find its way again. We must build the future that our kids deserve, where we are safe at school, the movie theater, the grocery store, where we can go to a political rally without worrying about getting shot, and where we can disagree with the President and the political party in charge without being targeted.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues, if they continue to reel from the death of Charlie Kirk, the shooting in Evergreen, and the killing of Melissa Hortman and her husband, are you going to stand by while someone's father, someone's son, and someone simply exercising their right as an American continue to get gunned down while our kids get shot in classrooms?

We face a choice at this moment, and I personally ask you to join me in actually doing something about it. Let's choose a future where we keep guns out of the hands of people who are a danger to themselves or others, working together on bipartisan solutions that are overwhelmingly supported by both parties and by our voters in our districts.

Let's choose a future where our kids come home safe from school and where we don't continue to lose countless innocent lives.

When is it enough?

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STUTZMAN). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 21 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MESSMER) at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Margaret Grun Kibben, offered the following prayer:

As we draw near to You, O God, may we do so with sincere hearts, with minds free of distractions, and with souls willing to receive Your guidance.

And when, in our personal inventory of our worthiness to stand here before You, we discover our consciences are tainted by guilt, cleanse us of all unrighteousness. When our character has