Mr. Speaker, it is a national disgrace that our child support enforcement system continues to allow so many parents who can afford to pay for their children's support to shirk these obligations. The so-called ''enforcement gap''—the difference between how much child support could be collected and how much child support is collected—has been estimated at $34 billion!

Failure to pay court-ordered child support is not a ''victimless crime.'' The children going without these payments are the first victims. But the taxpayers are the ultimate victims, when the parents who have custody are forced onto the welfare rolls for the lack of support payments being withheld by deadbeats.

Mr. Speaker, let's make deadbeats pay up or face the consequences. Let's let them know that they can run, but they can't hide.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3811, which establish felon violations for parents who fail to pay child support. This legislation will help encourage noncustodial parents to pay their court ordered support payments in a timely fashion or face a substantial fine or up to $10,000 and/or a prison sentence of up to 2 years.

The purpose of this bill is to help local law enforcement officials collect outstanding court-ordered child support payments. This will be especially helpful in situations where the parent has moved to another State in the hopes of avoiding paying child support. There are far too many cases of this occurring in our Nation each year. The children are the ones who are being hurt the most. Those ''dead beat parents'' who refuse to take responsibility for their children and pay child support, as ordered by the court, should be ashamed of themselves. These support payments are supposed to be used for their children's basic needs such as, clothing and schooling, and in most cases, this additional money is desperately needed in order to provide a decent life to these children.

Just one example of how this failure to pay affects families is in the quality of child care received. Because the parents are divorced and the custodial parent must work, these support payments are used to help defray the cost of child care for their children. When a parent refuses to make their child support payments, the custodial parent has to make choices and if they have to choose between buying groceries and using the best day care center in town, a parent would have to choose the former. However, the child still needs to be in day care, and they may not be able to attend the best facility available. As a result, the children are unnecessarily put in harm's way, because their parent dodged his or her responsibilities and denied his child monetary assistance.

This bill will help the States identify these parents residing in different States than that in which the order was initially issued and hold them accountable for failing to pay child support, by making it a felony under Federal law with punishments of fines and jail sentences. Additionally, the parent will still be responsible for making restitutions of all unpaid child support which is still owned at the time they are sentenced.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to join in supporting this measure which will help our Nation's children and make parents assume their responsibility for their children.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3811.

The question was taken.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT ACT OF 1998

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2829) to establish a matching grant program to help state and local jurisdictions purchase armor vests for use by law enforcement departments, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2829

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1998''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS; PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) the number of law enforcement officers who are killed in the line of duty would significantly decrease if every law enforcement officer in the United States had the protection of an armor vest;

(2) according to studies, between 1985 and 1994, 709 law enforcement officers in the United States were feloniously killed in the line of duty;

(3) the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that the risk of fatality to law enforcement officers while not wearing an armor vest is 14 times higher than for officers wearing an armor vest;

(4) the Department of Justice estimates that approximately 150,000 State, local, and tribal law enforcement officers, nearly 25 percent, are not issued body armor;

(5) according to studies, between 1985 and 1994, bullet-resistant materials helped save the lives of more than 2,000 law enforcement officers in the United States; and

(6) the Executive Committee for Indian Country Law Enforcement Improvements reports that violent crime in Indian country has risen sharply, despite a decrease in the national crime rate, and has concluded that there is a ''public safety crisis in Indian country''.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to save lives of law enforcement officers by helping State, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies provide officers with armor vests.

SEC. 3. MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT ARMOR VESTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3711 et seq.) is amended—

(1) by redesignating part Y as part Z;

(2) by redesignating section 2501 as section 2601; and

(3) by inserting after part X the following new part:

''PART Y—MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT ARMOR VESTS

''SEC. 2501. PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.

''(a) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance is authorized to make grants to States, units of local government, and Indian tribes to purchase armor vests for use by State, local, and tribal law enforcement officers.

''(b) USES OF FUNDS.—Grants awarded under this section shall be—

''(1) distributed directly to the State, unit of local government, or Indian tribe; and

''(2) used for the purchase of armor vests for law enforcement officers in the jurisdiction of the grantee.

''(c) PREFERENTIAL CONSIDERATION.—In awarding grants under this part, the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance may give preferential consideration, if feasible, to an application from a jurisdiction that—

''(1) has the greatest need for armor vests based on the percentage of law enforcement officers in the department who do not have access to a vest;

''(2) has, or will institute, a mandatory wear policy that requires on-duty law enforcement officers to wear armor vests whenever feasible; and

''(3) has a violent crime rate at or above the national average as determined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation; or

''(4) has not received a block grant under the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant program described under the heading 'Violent Crime Reduction Programs, State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance' of the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998 (Public Law 105–119).

''(d) MINIMUM AMOUNT.—Unless all eligible applications submitted by any State or unit of local government within such State for a grant under this section have been funded, such State, together with grantees within the State (other than Indian tribes), shall be allocated in each fiscal year under this section not less than 0.50 percent of the total amount appropriated in the fiscal year for grants pursuant to this section, except that the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands shall be each be allocated 0.25 percent.

''(e) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—A qualifying State, unit of local government, or Indian tribe may not receive more than 5 percent of the total amount appropriated in each fiscal year for grants under this section, except that a State, together with the grantees within the State may not receive more than 20 percent of the total amount appropriated in each fiscal year for grants under this section.

''(f) MATCHING FUNDS.—The portion of the costs of a program provided by a grant under subsection (a) may not exceed 50 percent. Any funds appropriated by Congress for the activities of any agency of an Indian tribal government or the Bureau of Indian Affairs performing law enforcement functions on any Indian lands may be used to provide the non Federal share of a matching requirement funded under this subsection.

''(g) ALLOCATION OF FUNDS.—At least half of the funds available under this part shall be awarded to units of local government with fewer than 100,000 residents.

''SEC. 2502. APPLICATIONS.

''(a) IN GENERAL.—To request a grant under this part, the chief executive of a State, unit of local government, or Indian tribe shall submit an application to the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance in such form and containing such information as the Director may reasonably require.

''(b) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this part, the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance shall promulgate regulations to implement this section (including the information that must be included and the requirements that the States, units of local government, and Indian tribes must meet) in submitting the applications required under this section.

''(c) ELIGIBILITY.—A unit of local government that receives funding under the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant program (described under the heading 'Violent Crime Reduction Programs, State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance' of the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998 (Public Law 105–119)) during a fiscal year in which it submits an application under this part shall not be eligible for a grant under this part unless the chief executive officer of such unit of local government certifies and provides an explanation to the Director that the unit of local government considered or will consider using funding received under the block grant program for any or all of the costs relating to the purchase of armor vests, but did not, or does not expect to use such funds for such purpose.

''SEC. 2503. DEFINITIONS.

''For purposes of this part—

''(1) the term 'armor vest' means body armor, no less than Type I, which has been tested through the voluntary compliance testing program operated by the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and found to meet or exceed the requirements of NIJ Standard 0101.03, or any subsequent revision of such standard;

''(2) the term 'body armor' means any product sold or offered for sale as personal protective body covering intended to protect against gunfire, stabbing, or other physical harm;

''(3) the term 'State' means each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands;

''(4) the term 'unit of local government' means a county, municipality, town, township, village, parish, borough, or other unit of general government below the State level;

''(5) the term 'Indian tribe' has the same meaning as in section 4(e) of the Indian Self–Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b(e)); and

''(6) the term 'law enforcement officer' means any officer, agent, or employee of a State, unit of local government, or Indian tribe authorized by law or by a government agency to engage in or supervise the prevention, detection, or investigation of any violation of criminal law, or authorized by law to supervise sentenced criminal offenders.

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 1001(a) of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3793(a)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(23) There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out part Y, $25,000,000 for each of fiscal years 1999 through 2001.''.

SEC. 4 SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.

In the case of any equipment or products that may be authorized to be purchased with financial assistance provided using funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act, it is the sense of the Congress that entities receiving the assistance should, in expending the assistance, purchase only American-made equipment and products.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WEXLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2829.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. This Friday afternoon, the families, friends and colleagues of police officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty this past year will gather on the West Front of the Capitol and remember the courage and sacrifice of their fallen loved ones at the 17th annual National Peace Officers' Memorial Service. This solemn ceremony is the climax of National Police Week here in Washington.

Later today, this House will pay tribute to these fallen men and women of law enforcement in a special resolution commending their heroism. It will be a privilege to join in this recognition. As we remember with great sadness the ultimate sacrifice of America's police officers, both today and on Friday, the legislation before us provides a measure of comfort.

It serves, Mr. Speaker, as an encouragement for us in two ways. First, H.R. 2829 introduced by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), reminds if it were not for the bulletproof vest already being worn by thousands of police officers throughout the country, we would certainly be mourning the loss of even more police officers this week.

Second, this bill, in establishing a matching grant program for states and localities to purchase armor vests, offers the real hope of fewer officers being killed in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, the men and women in blue on the front line fight against violent crimes, and they are always doing so as targets for violent criminals. H.R. 2829 represents a joint effort by the Federal, state and local governments to protect these officers. The bill creates a matching grant program through which the Federal Government, acting in concert with localities, will provide help for vests for every police officer who needs one.

Today I am bringing forward an amendment to this bill, which the House and Senate have crafted in a fair and bipartisan agreement, to ensure that the funding goes first to those police departments which need it most. The Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance is given discretion to give preferential consideration to smaller departments whose budgets are stretched thin. Also those jurisdictions which do not receive any funding under the local law enforcement block grant program will be given preference. Additionally, at least half of the funds available under this program shall be awarded to jurisdictions with fewer than 100,000 residents.

The agreement sunsets the program after three years so that Congress can reassess it at that time. In the interim, I fully expect the Department of Justice to review this program and report back to Congress on its progress.

Among the most important elements of this legislation is a requirement that local governments receiving the local law enforcement block grant must consider using their block grants to purchase body armor before becoming eligible for a bulletproof vest grant. The block grant program was established in the Contract with America and has provided $1.5 billion to localities over the last three years. This provision will ensure that this new vest grant program does not undermine the block grant's important goals of local control and flexibility.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. SCHUMER), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) and their staffs for their willingness to be flexible and their unyielding commitment to ensure the passage of this bill.

If every officer routinely wears a bullet resistant vest, we may be able to return to a time when we are all astonished, not just saddened, to learn that a police officer was wounded or killed by a criminal with a gun.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2829. The body armor should be standard equipment for police officers. When a new officer joins the force, he or she is issued a badge and a gun. A bulletproof vest should be part of that package. When a police officer walks out of the station house each morning, that officer is putting his or her life at risk in order to protect the rest of us. Thankfully, there is equipment available that will minimize the risk; not eliminate it, certainly, but minimize it.

You can walk into virtually any big city police precinct and find an officer whose life may have been saved by a bulletproof vest. Unfortunately, rural and suburban officers are increasingly at risk. An officer making a routine traffic stop on a highway has no idea whatsoever whether the driver is armed and how the driver will respond. We owe it to the men and women who undertake the responsibility of being police officers to make sure that they have the potentially lifesaving equipment that is available.

This bill would authorize $25 million a year in grants to state and local governments to purchase body armor for law enforcement officers. This is not a Federal giveaway. The grant recipient

must put up half of the funds. The real purpose is to use a Federal incentive to get local police departments to see vests as standard equipment.

I commend my colleagues, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) for their sponsorship of this bill. I understand the differences between the House and Senate versions of this bill have been resolved and that the bill offered by the gentleman from Florida (Chairman MCCOLLUM) incorporates the amendments necessary to harmonize the two versions so that we can get this bill on the president's desk by the end of this week. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), the coauthor of this legislation.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Mr. Speaker, it is with great appreciation and satisfaction that I am here today to speak on behalf of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. As our friends from the law enforcement community gather in Washington to recognize National Peace Officers' Memorial Week, the House's consideration of a program to help protect the lives of those officers seems a fitting and timely tribute.

To me the issue is rather simple: It is as equally ludicrous to put a police officer on the street without a firearm as it is to put that officer on the street without a vest. These men and women pledge to protect and defend our lives and property, and society's commitment back to their personal safety should and must be total.

This bill is on the floor today because of the dedication of my colleague, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY). Without his commitment to this issue and the diligent efforts of Jeff Gerhardt of his staff, this initiative would not have happened. I have enjoyed working with the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) on this, and I thank him very much for his hard work.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank Carlyle Thorsen from my staff, who has put countless hours in on moving this initiative forward as well.

The legislation makes sense, a Federal matching grant program to help states and local governments buy bullet resistant vests for law enforcement officers. As Republicans, we speak often of refraining from micromanaging how states and localities spend Federal resources. However, the fact that close to 150,000 state and local law enforcement officers across the country do not have access to vests makes a powerful case that this bill represents a unique exception to such philosophical resistance.

I am not surprised that our aggressive cosponsorship drive was so successful. Over 100 of our colleagues cosponsored it within the first week of introduction, and a total of 306 members signed on within just a few months. Getting that many cosponsors so early helped us make a convincing case for the bill, and I thank them for validating what the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) and I knew was a good idea and for being part of our effort.

First among equals on that list of coequals was the gentleman from Illinois (Chairman HYDE), and he played no small part in the success of this measure.

□ 1600

My thanks go out to the majority leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY) for his support as well.

Let me also recognize the guidance and assistance of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM), chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary. The gentleman worked with us from day 1, offering suggestions of how we could improve the bill and holding a hearing for its consideration.

Also of great assistance in shepherding this measure through the process was the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCNULTY) and Nicole Nason of the Subcommittee on Crime staff, and I thank them for their competence and accessibility. I am looking forward to working with the chairman of the subcommittee and his excellent staff in the future.

Again, for me, this is about saving lives of our law enforcement officers on the street or in the prison yard. We in government are not the only ones who recognize and address this need. My efforts on a national level to provide officers with body armor are rooted in the great example set by private organizations in my own home district like Vest-A-Cop and Shield The Blue in southern New Jersey.

States and localities should not have to choose between having enough officers on the street, funding necessary training programs for those officers, or purchasing bullet- or stab-resistant vests. The local law enforcement block grant program goes a long ways towards funding their priorities, and many localities are too small to receive funding. So I was surprised to learn that of 46 townships in my district that operate municipal police forces, only 12 received block grants.

It is reassuring that this legislation will provide an additional option for small towns in both southern New Jersey and across America. I ask my colleagues to support the legislation.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY), the leading sponsor of the bill.

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

At the outset of my remarks, I too would like to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM), the chairman of the subcommittee, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) the ranking member, for their tireless work on behalf of this legislation.

I would be remiss also at the outset of my remarks if I did not express my heartfelt gratification and thanks to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), the lead cosponsor of this legislation. Without his tireless efforts on behalf of securing most of those 306 cosponsors, we would not be here this afternoon, and I deeply appreciate his help.

I also want to recognize the tireless efforts of Jeff Gerhardt, a member of my staff, who worked tirelessly on behalf of passage of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am in support of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Act, which I sponsored. I initially identified the need for such a bill when I found out that many gang members and drug dealers in northwest Indiana had the protection of bulletproof vests, while many of the police officers that patrol the streets in my district did not. I was stunned.

I believe that sworn police officers who are issued a badge should also be issued a bulletproof vest. I believe that if we are going to ask men and women to risk their lives to make our streets safe, then we owe them every bit of protection possible. Unfortunately, we often fall short.

Studies show that between 1985 and 1994, 709 police officers were killed while on duty, and over 92 percent of those deaths were caused by firearms. It is a nondisputed fact that bulletproof vests are extremely effective in protecting officers from death and injury. Between 1985 and 1994, no police officer who was wearing a vest was killed by a firearm penetrating the vest. Unfortunately, before today ends, 2 police officers in the United States of America will be shot.

Despite these statistics, close to 25 percent of the Nation's 600,000 State and local law enforcement officers do not have access to a vest. That means that there are approximately 150,000 officers that are placed in harm's way without the most effective protection we can give them.

I was even more troubled to learn the reason why so many officers do not have vests. During a visit I made to the local chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police in Dyer, Indiana, officers explained to me that bulletproof vests are prohibitively expensive. A good vest can cost upwards of $500. Many small departments, as well as some larger ones, simply cannot afford to purchase vests for all of their officers, a fact which sometimes forces officers to purchase their own.

The problem is particularly pronounced for small, rural police departments. Statistics show that officers in smaller departments are much less likely to have vests than their counterparts in large metropolitan staffs.

H.R. 2829 would meet the goal of saving officers' lives by authorizing up to $25 million per year for a new grant

program within the Justice Department providing 50–50 matching grants to State and local law enforcement agencies. These grants would be targeted to jurisdictions where most officers do not currently have access to vests, and they are designed to be free of the red tape that often characterizes other grant programs. In order to make sure that no community is left out of the program, half of the funds are reserved for jurisdictions with fewer than 100,000 residents.

In closing, our legislation is intended to create a partnership with State and local law enforcement agencies in order to make sure that every police officer who needs a bulletproof vest gets one.

Mr. Speaker, this Friday the Nation will come together to mourn the loss of its slain officers on National Police Memorial Day. We pass this bill with the hope that next year, when our Nation's police officers meet in Washington, D.C. to mourn the loss of their fallen colleagues, there will be fewer names added to the wall. There will be more children who still have a mother or father because of what we do today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to stand up in support of police officers everywhere and vote for passage of H.R. 2829.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER), a member of the committee.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I want to commend my colleagues, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) for seeing the need of our law enforcement communities and addressing it. I also am a cosponsor of this measure and I appreciate the gentleman's work. We also share Lake County, Indiana, so I thoroughly understand the need in the northern part of the county.

This bill will provide local communities with the means to provide its law enforcement officers with bulletproof vests. It also addresses those who are on the lines everyday. The bulletproof vests, as was stated by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WEXLER), and I agree with him, the vests should be as much a part of the equipment when officers are issued their badge, when they get their night stick, when they get their sidearm, when they are issued an automobile and they get a shotgun. Why they also do not get a bulletproof vest is beyond me. I think it is completely unfortunate.

Let me share one other thing. Even though I am a cosponsor of this bill, what I do not want to do is to build a constituency for that which communities should be doing in the first place. I agree with the 50–50 match, and I kind of look at this in my own mind as an opportunity to send a really good message out across the country, and that is to ensure that the county councils, the city councils are doing the job, providing the funding and the standard operating equipment, and we believe here in Congress that a vest is part of that standard operating equipment.

So I am interested, I want to move forward; and I want Congress to pass this bill and provide the money. But in the long run, I am not interested in growing the Federal Government, in growing a constituency. I want to ensure that jurisdictions across the country do their job.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the passage of this bill.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON).

Mr. JOHNSON of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) on this legislation, H.R. 2829, and to lend my support to protect police officers.

Earlier this year I traveled around the 13 counties in my district, met with sheriffs, chiefs of police, law enforcement officers, all across northeast Wisconsin to discuss the need for better access to bulletproof vests. These are the men and women who protect us literally with their lives. They get up every morning with the sole purpose and incredible responsibility of keeping our families and neighborhoods safe. They are our everyday heroes.

To a person, these local sheriffs, deputies and officers applauded our effort to help State and local law enforcement departments purchase bulletproof vests and body armor. They told me they need them, they use them, they want them, and even, yes, in rural areas they are shot at; yet, it is one of the most expensive items on their law enforcement budget.

Our police officers put their safety at risk, their lives on the line every day to protect us and keep our communities safe. If they need new resources to purchase bulletproof vests and it would make their jobs just a little easier and a little safer, it is a worthy investment. It is the reason I signed my name as an original cosponsor of this bill. It is why I will vote today in favor of its passage.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. LATHAM).

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the bill H.R. 2029, to help safeguard the men and women in law enforcement who protect us and our families every day.

This $25 million a year matching grant program will provide bulletproof vests for our Nation's 150,000 law enforcement officers that are currently not protected. In fact, to make sure that no community is left out of the program, the matching requirement could be waived for jurisdictions that demonstrate financial hardship in meeting their half of the match. That is what makes this bill so important to rural areas across the Nation like my district in Iowa where small towns have such small budgets that they cannot afford to hire more than a few law enforcement officers, let alone bulletproof vests.

However, because of the growing methamphetamine problem in Iowa and throughout the Midwest, even rural, small town police are encountering well-armed narcotics dealers. Our rural officers need this protection in order to effectively confront this wave of violent crime sweeping across the heartland.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation to protect our men and women in law enforcement.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I too support H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Grant Partnership Act. Our law enforcement officers deserve every protection available. Mr. Speaker, 62 percent of the officers killed in the last 10 years were not wearing bulletproof vests. This program helps police in every jurisdiction, large and small, to purchase body armor.

In the face of the epidemic of gun violence in this country, there are, in fact, things we can do, and I sincerely hope that this legislation sparks other congressional action to make our law enforcement officers and the communities they serve safer.

One area that I hear from law enforcement officials in my community is the access of crooks to getting body armor themselves. Another area deals with the safe storage of guns. Guns are kept in nearly half the homes in America, and a large percentage of these gun owners keep their guns loaded and ready for use. A million and a half children have access to guns when they get home from school every day.

We can do more to ensure that children learn the lesson early that guns are dangerous and should be stored safely in lockboxes. The children accused of killing their classmates in Jonesboro, AR, tried to open a lockbox with a blow torch and failed, only to find other guns that were unlocked. If all of the guns had been locked away, these children may have gotten discouraged and their classmates and teacher might still be alive.

If more guns were stored safely, think of all of the children who might still be alive today, some of whom might grow up to be police officers themselves. Think of the officers whose body armor might not be put to the test.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. MCINNIS).

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time and the courtesy of the gentleman from Florida. Unfortunately, I think the previous speaker kind of sidelined this issue into a second amendment issue. That is not what this is about.

I used to be a cop. I was a police officer, and I can tell my colleagues my first day on the job actually was not on the job; I had to go to the police academy. The first day I was at the academy, they came up to me and said, as they were explaining the benefits of a police officer, what you signed up for, they said, by the way, the cheapest life insurance you can buy in this country is a bulletproof vest. The cheapest life insurance you can buy. Go out and buy it. And I went out and bought it. It makes a difference, and it is an important issue. It is an issue that obviously is bipartisan.

Take a look at that clock up there. Twenty-four hours from now when that clock is right where it is today, 2 more police officers in this country will have been shot. If we pass this bill, if we pass this bill, we will save 1 police officer's death, 1 police officer a week from dying if we pass this bill and those officers wear these vests.

□ 1615

I can tell you from experience that some of the officers I worked with, good, close friends of mine, did get into that habit of, well, it won't happen to me, or it is uncomfortable in the heat of the summer.

So we have to take this a step further. We can supply this for them, but we have to urge those officers to wear the darned things. They do not do you any good if you do not wear them. It does not guarantee us that we are going to save that officer a week, but if these officers wear these vests that we are going, together, jointly with the local communities, going together to supply, if they wear them, that clock will run 1 extra week before another officer dies. We can save the life of a police officer once a week.

I think it is a terrific bill. I think it does exactly what we should do, and that is sharing with the community, cost-sharing. It gives them an incentive to go out and buy their officers vests. I could never figure out why it was not standard issue to give out a bulletproof vest.

Those who say these things are expensive, they are outrageously inexpensive. A good vest you can buy for under 700 bucks. That seems like a lot of money, until you figure out your life is on the line. As they told me that first day in the Police Academy, it is the cheapest life insurance you can buy.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. KLINK).

Mr. KLINK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

Mr. Speaker, let me take us back in our mind's eye to a tiny town called Saxonburg, Pennsylvania. Settled by hardworking German immigrants, it is the kind of picturesque farm town, an affluent community, a safe community, that all of us would like to live in and all of us would like to raise our children in.

Back in 1980, the chief of police in that town was a young man named Greg Adams. Greg Adams had patrolled the streets of Washington, D.C., and had taken his two young sons and his wife back home to Saxonburg. As he was patrolling the town on December 4th of 1980, Greg Adams pulled a car over for a traffic violation into the parking lot of an Agway store. He did not know at that time that the man behind the wheel was a career criminal who had found his way to Saxonburg, Pennsylvania, who was wanted on interstate flight to avoid prosecution. No one knows exactly what happened, but when it was over, Greg Adams was shot. As he was bleeding and losing life, he was beaten to death.

I arrived at the scene, as a television reporter, within minutes of the time he was assaulted, and within minutes of the time that he finally breathed his last gasp of breath. His last words were ''Pray for me,'' as he died.

Those who investigated that shooting incident will tell you that if Greg Adams had had a bulletproof vest, his wife would not have become a widow, his young children would not have lost their father in this safe, picturesque farm town where you would not expect danger to prowl the streets.

This is a good bill. It is a good bill not only for those officers who are on the streets today, but for those who will patrol the streets and protect us in small towns, in rural communities, and in cities across this Nation, and in communities like Saxonburg, Pennsylvania.

I ask my colleagues to support H.R. 2829. In a day and age when gangsters and gang members have bulletproof vests, it only makes sense that police officers like Greg Adams would be able to have that kind of protection when they are on the streets.

Mr. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FOX).

Mr. FOX of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in support of this forward-thinking legislation. I commend the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) for their superb leadership on this issue.

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act will provide local police organizations with the much-needed resources that will make sure all officers have the protection of body armor they should have. We need to do everything we can to provide these heroes with the tools they need to protect their lives as they work each day to protect our lives.

These vests can literally mean the difference between life and death. Since 1980, Mr. Speaker, there have been 1,182 felonious deaths of police officers due to firearms. Of that number, 389 were due to shots to the torso area which could have been mitigated by body armor. The risk of fatality increases 14 times when an officer is not vested.

We should do all we can to keep our police as safe as possible. Since 1980 we could have possibly prevented 42 percent of these deaths. I see no reason why we can not turn that 42 percent loss into 42 percent saved with the adoption of this important legislation.

The district attorney in my district of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Michael Morino, like most DAs across the United States, have endorsed this legislation, saying that there is no higher priority in government than to support and protect our law enforcement professionals.

Nowhere is that more clear than the story of Ed Setzer of my district. On September 30, 1988, Lower Merion Township Officer Setzer responded to an emergency without the protection of a bulletproof vest. He was shot and killed, leaving his children without a father, and his wife Julie to raise them alone. He was an outstanding police officer, husband, and father whom we will miss forever.

For me, the Officer Ed Setzer is the inspiration for the Bulletproof Vest Grant Act, which is designed to assist State and local law enforcement agencies, and provide officers with the protection of bulletproof vests by authorizing up to $25 million per year for a new Justice Department program that would help local law enforcement agencies defray the costs of bulletproof vests, and require State and local governments to split the costs of these vests 50–50 with the Federal Government, and further, to give preference in awarding grants to jurisdictions where officers do not currently have vests.

I take great pride in cosponsoring this bill and in supporting it, and hope that all my colleagues in the House will join the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) in making sure this bill becomes law as soon as possible.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Florida, Mr. ROTHMAN.

Mr. ROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes a joke. I am proud to be from New Jersey.

Today, with the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act, Congress is taking a major step forward in protecting the safety of our law enforcement officers. Bulletproof vests should become standard issue for every police officer in America. By paying half the cost of the vests for our police and corrections officers, the Federal Government will help save the lives of the people we ask to protect us.

What do we ask from them? We ask from them a lot. Whether it is pulling over a speeding car, responding to a domestic violence call or walking a beat, our officers can be confronted by an armed assailant at any time. They can be just as soon shot in the head as being said hello to on the highway. If

we are asking them to protect us, then we must give them the best protection available.

As has been said many times before, our law enforcement officers represent the thin blue line separating civilized society and the good and decent, law-abiding citizens from anarchy and the law of the jungle.

I want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) for their leadership on this issue. I have been delighted to work on this issue as a member of the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2829.

Mr. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS).

(Mr. GIBBONS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time. I also want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their collective and outspoken support on this issue.

As we all know, this legislation serves one very important purpose, saving lives. We have all heard the stories about these vests saving peace officers from armed criminals, but I think it is also very important and very useful to understand, and I want to take this opportunity to point out, that providing protective vests to our law enforcement personnel has saved lives over the years in many nonshooting instances as well.

For example, in 1978, Deputy Gary Bale of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department was struck by a drunk driver while responding to a call for assistance from another officer. After sorting through the wreckage, it was determined that Deputy Bale's vest saved his life by absorbing the impact of the horrific accident.

Again, in 1987, Deputy Douglas Brady was directing traffic when he was struck by a vehicle. He was thrown off the road and over a guardrail, yet survived, because, it was again determined, his protective vest absorbed the potential lethal impact.

In another example, Deputy Earl Walling was working as a guard in the Washoe County Jail when an inmate attacked him with a sharpened object. Had Deputy Walling not been wearing his vest, he would have suffered life-threatening injuries.

Mr. Speaker, we need to realize that our law enforcement personnel are not just dodging bullets. It is my hope that by bringing each of these potentially fatal occurrences to mind, we can further stress the importance of providing vests to these officers.

Passage of this bill will allow the families of our law enforcement officers to each year look forward to celebrating another Mother's Day or another Father's Day together with their family. I urge a yes vote on H.R. 2829.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES).

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2829. As a former law enforcement officer for 26 years, I know firsthand how our men and women that are peace officers put their lives on the line every day. They courageously defend our borders, our States, our cities, and our neighborhoods. The well-being of our Nation's peace officers should therefore be the highest priority for all of us.

As a Border Patrol chief, my officers confronted numerous criminals who were armed and often dangerous. Bulletproof vests provided my officers with additional protection from firearms and reduced injuries and saved lives. Nonetheless, today many of our Nation's police and sheriff's departments are without this vital piece of equipment. The Justice Department estimates that 150,000 officers nationwide do not have access to these vests. Some communities simply cannot afford them.

This, in my mind, is simply unacceptable. In my opinion, every officer should be provided with a vest. This bill will address this goal. I am personally grateful for this legislation that will authorize $25 million in grant money to help pay for the purchase of bulletproof vests.

As we celebrate this week, National Police Week, let us remember those officers who died in the line of duty by honoring their memory and unanimously passing this legislation. Let us give our officers this important protection. Therefore, I strongly support this bill, and ask this Congress to unanimously support its passage.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY).

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana for sponsoring this legislation and for all the hard work on behalf of our country's law enforcement officers. I also want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey, as well as the ranking member and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime, for their leadership in bringing this important legislation before us.

As everyone knows, this week we are celebrating Police Week all across America. It is time to say thank you to all of the law enforcement officers who keep our streets safe. It is also a time to remember and honor those officers who have given their lives for our safety.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to let our policemen and women know that we stand with them, and that we are committed to making their jobs as safe as possible. That is what this bill is all about. The FBI reported that 64 law enforcement officers were murdered in the line of duty nationwide in 1997. That is an increase over 1996, when 56 officers were murdered. Clearly, it is a dangerous time for those who help to protect our families. However, the Department of Justice estimates that 150,000 of American law enforcement officers do not have bulletproof vests.

We can do a better job protecting our law enforcement officers. H.R. 2829 will establish a grant program through the Department of Justice to help local police departments purchase bulletproof vests. The bill requires local law enforcement agencies to match the Federal funds. This is legislation that will help pay for as many as 100,000 bulletproof vests.

I know that bulletproof vests do not guarantee the safety of our policemen and women. I personally believe we need to do more to get weapons off the street and make sure our law enforcement officers are not outgunned.

We can and should do a better job of keeping guns out of the hands of criminals, and improve our efforts to tracking and tracing firearms used in crime. However, that is a debate for another day. Today, in honor of our police and in honor of those officers killed in the line of duty, I urge my colleagues to vote for H.R. 2829. It is the least that we can do for the dedicated law enforcement officers of America.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK).

(Mr. STUPAK asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to compliment both sides on the issue being brought up here today, and the scope of the debate that is going on here. It is great to see so many people supporting law enforcement on this issue.

I would like to go back, when I was in law enforcement back in 1973, in 1974, when vests started to get really sort of popular. We have heard some comments here that the first thing you should buy is a vest, because it is a good life insurance policy. We often wonder why our departments, why don't they just go ahead and provide the vests?

□ 1630

Back in 1974, when we were just getting going with the bulletproof vests, they were quite expensive, and being a young police officer, and I was, you live from paycheck to paycheck. You are trying to support your family and get things going. The gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY), the main sponsor here, mentioned about rural areas.

While I was in the Michigan State Police then, we were up in Alpena, Michigan, an area that I represent now, we were tracking some safe crackers and it was December of 1974, and I guess I will probably never forget this. While were sitting there working and

trying to work these guys and trying to catch them, unfortunately when the squad car stopped them, the individual State trooper that stopped them was gunned down as he stepped from his car. The sad part about the story is that he actually had a bulletproof vest; it was at home. It was a Christmas present from his wife.

It still took us another 10 years to get our department to provide bulletproof vests for members of the Michigan State Police. Actually that came about not because management wanted it, but it was because we finally got collective bargaining rights and we then made it part of our negotiations and our contract that we would give up pay and other incentives to have bulletproof vests issued to each and every member.

So when we talk about the need for this, there are about 600,000 law enforcement officers right now who do not have access to bulletproof vests for whatever reason. So if we certainly could get these vests, not only would we save a lot of lives but I think we would save a lot of heartache and a lot of other problems throughout this Nation.

Since we are here and it is Police Officers Memorial Week and we will be doing a number of things and today, actually, we have three bills on the floor supporting law enforcement, I hope we just do not stop here today and do this one shot. Being the founder and cochairman of the Law Enforcement Caucus for several years, we have been working on several pieces of legislation to benefit law enforcement. I hope with everybody here that they listen well and that we actually take up H.R. 959, the body armor bill, which would prevent mail orders of body armor to unknown individuals so we do not have the criminals armed as well as the police officers are protected.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. Since bulletproof materials became available to law enforcement, the lives of more than 2,000 police officers have been saved, and this bill will help make bulletproof vests available to more officers.

This bill creates a new Department of Justice grant program which will assist state and local law enforcement agencies in providing their officers with the protection of bulletproof vests. The bill would authorize up to $25 million for this new program, and would require the federal government to split the costs of these vests with state and local governments.

As a former law enforcement officer, I know first hand the necessity of bullet proof vests for the men and women who put their lives on the line every day. Unfortunately, 25 percent of the nation's 600,000 state and local law enforcement officers do not have access to bulletproof vests.

The Department of Justice has reported that between 1985 and 1994, 709 police officers were killed while on duty, 92 percent of them killed by a firearm. Studies by the ATF show that no officer killed during that time period died because a bullet penetrated a bulletproof vest. It is clear that bulletproof vests play an important role in the safety of law enforcement officers, and saves lives.

As founder and the Co-Chairman of the Law Enforcement Caucus, I have worked for several years to inform my colleagues about the value of bulletproof vests and the dangers of body armor when it gets in the hands of armed criminals. This bill will go a long way to help protect the men and women who protect us. With the passage of this bill, police departments will be able to provide vests to more officers, and we will be able to reduce the number of officers that are killed each year. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2829, and support our law enforcement officers.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

Mr. HOYER. I thank the gentleman from Florida for yielding the time to me and I rise to commend the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY) as the principal sponsor of this legislation; also the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) and others on the committee who have worked on this legislation. This is truly bipartisan legislation which is aimed at trying to make our law enforcement officers safer.

We ask some Americans to do an extraordinary thing; that is, to put on a badge, put on a uniform or in plain clothes to protect us every day, to face the most dangerous people in our society who would undermine our safety, would take our property, and place at risk our families and our neighbors. This bill is a bill that will, I think, enjoy overwhelming support. It is appropriate that we tell local subdivisions, both State and local, municipal, that we will participate with them in trying to ensure further the safety of those we ask to defend what is vital in any democracy, and that is peace and good order.

Obviously, democracy cannot flourish in a society if law and order is not also present in that society. So the very essence of a police officer's duty is to preserve and protect the Constitution and the democratic way of life. So this is a very, very important piece of legislation.

It is appropriate that we pass it this week when we make note of the contributions and the sacrifices and the courage shown by so many in law enforcement throughout this country. I am pleased to be a supporter of this legislation.

Mr. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I do not believe that I will consume all of it. I just want to comment about this at the end of the debate and say once again how important this bill is. We have had a number of Members speak on both sides. It is, as the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) said, a truly bipartisan piece of legislation.

But this is an exceedingly important piece of legislation because it does present us an opportunity to save lives and save the lives of the people out there protecting our kids and our families every day by putting their lives on the line. It is not very often we get a chance to do that. Usually we are up here after the cow is out of the barn or the horse is gone or whatever and trying to do some remedial correction to help law enforcement.

Today we have a chance to do something in advance to help people who are on the street every day to provide a new grant program, a grant program carefully tailored only to those communities in this country that are not able or have not used their local community block grant monies to provide these vests or those very small communities that do not qualify otherwise, but nonetheless tailored to assure that every community can provide and is providing vests, bulletproof vests for their police officers.

I urge passage of the bill. Again, I commend its authors, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. VISCLOSKY). I think it is tremendous that they brought it forward. I have been proud to bring this out of the Subcommittee on Crime and urge its adoption.

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bill that will help save the lives of men and women who serve and protect our communities—our law enforcement officers.

Under this legislation, the Justice Department will administer grants to assist state and local authorities in purchasing bulletproof vests for their officers. The grant would provide up to 50% of the cost of the vest with local and state governments matching the remaining costs.

Right now, in my home state of Wisconsin, many officers are either wearing secondhand vests not fitted properly to protect them, paying for their own vests, or wearing vests that have passed the 5-year expiration date. In Milwaukee, even though each officer receives a vest at no cost to them, many of them are past the 5-year expiration date, putting the officers' lives in danger. In addition, the vests' integrity is often compromised when they get wet, rendering them useless.

We should not be sending our police out on the streets with bulletproof vests that only work some of the time. The average cost of a bulletproof vest is about $500. Aren't our law enforcement officers' lives worth that?

This bill has been endorsed by numerous groups, including the Fraternal Order of Police and the Wisconsin Professional Police Association. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this lifesaving bill.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. According to the Justice Department about 150,000 law enforcement officers nationwide do not have access to bulletproof vests. That is one out of four of the nation's 600,000 state and local law enforcement officers. Even though a bulletproof vest is a terrible thing to need, the reality of life is that our officers of the law often have to stare death in the eye in order to protect all of us from danger. Our law enforcement officers need every advantage, protection and privilege related to the performance

of their duties that we can give them. To this regard, the matching grant program in H.R. 2829 is a fabulous way to achieve this objective.

Under the provisions of the bill, local law enforcement agencies need only supply half of the costs of the equipment that they need. At present, a vest costs about $500, so this $25 million allocation of funds could provide up to 100,000 vests to those who do not currently have them. Furthermore, the priority for the distribution of the funds provided for under the bill has two conditions. First of all, local police agencies with high numbers of unprotected officers in heavy crime areas are given first priority, as well as those agencies that do not have a local law enforcement grant program to assist them.

The need for this legislation is unquestionable; nearly 1900 officers have been saved from death or serious injury because of wearing body armor. But this legislation, we can prevent a repeat of the 600+ police officers that were killed in the line of duty with a firearm between 1985 and 1994. These numbers equate to two officers being shot in the United States every twenty-four hours; frankly, a chilling statistic. But the pace has not slowed; in 1997, 160 more law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty, most of which with a firearm. With this kind of rampant crime and lawlessness abounding, we need to protect those who dedicate their lives to protecting us. I sincerely hope that by passing H.R. 2829, we will not need to use resolutions like H. Res. 422 very often. So I urge all of my colleagues to join with me, and support the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act, H.R. 2829.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this vitally important legislation, and I urge my colleagues to join with me in voting to pass it.

As we in North Carolina know all too well, violent crime can strike anywhere. All too frequently, that violence is aimed at our men and women in uniform as they patrol our communities. Last year alone, five officers in and around the Second Congressional District of North Carolina were gunned down in the line of duty.

I believe Congress has a duty to help protect our officers. Last November, I joined a bipartisan group of my colleagues in introducing H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. This legislation will provide $25 million in matching grants through the Department of Justice to help local law enforcement agencies purchase vests for their officers. This bill has been endorsed by the National Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriffs Association, the International Union of Police Associations, the National Association of Police Organizations and other law enforcement groups. H.R. 2829 enjoys the support of more than 300 cosponsoring Members of this House, and the Senate recently passed a companion bill.

On March 23, I participated in a live-fire demonstration of the life-saving usefulness of bulletproof vests to bring attention to the need for this equipment. This event demonstrated in dramatic terms the effectiveness bulletproof vests can have in protecting our officers.

The national statistics are compelling. Since the introduction of modern bulletproof material, the lives of more than 2,000 police officers have been saved because they were wearing bulletproof vests or some other form of body armor, according to the Department of Justice. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reports that between 1985 and 1994, no police officer who was wearing a bulletproof vest was killed by a gunshot wound penetrating the officer's vest. The FBI tells us the risk of fatality from a firearm while not wearing body armor is fourteen times higher than for officers wearing body armor. Since 1980, 924 officers were killed while not wearing a vest. Of those 924 officers, 389 (42 percent) were shot in the torso area and could have been saved by a bulletproof vest. Approximately 150,000 of the nation's 600,000 state and local law enforcement officers (25 percent) do not currently have access to a vest. On March 25, I testified in front of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime in support of this important legislation.

In my Congressional District, I have been surveying local jurisdictions to assess law enforcement needs. Although there is universal recognition of the importance of bulletproof vests, small towns and rural counties in North Carolina are having a difficult time providing them to their officers. Of the 1,619 officers in law enforcement agencies in my District, 299 officers—almost one in five—either have no vest or only have an expired vest which cannot guarantee protection. The need is particularly acute in smaller communities. In law enforcement agencies with forces of less than ten officers, more than one in three officers do not have a vest or only have an expired vest.

Despite the difficulty of equipping officers with bulletproof vests, their utility has been vividly on display in recent days. In March, Kenly Police Officer Todd Smith was shot at point-blank range by a suspect he had pulled over for missing tags. According to the physician who attended to Smith, without his vest, he would have died on the spot. One police chief wrote in response to my survey, ''I can't think of a better use of our tax dollars, and our officers deserve no less.''

Mr. Speaker, I believe Congress has an obligation to help protect the men and women who put their lives on the line each and every day to keep our streets and communities safe and free of crime and violence. H.R. 2829 will make a big difference in my District and across America. I urge the House to pass this bill.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. This legislation will authorize the Bureau of Justice assistance to establish grants to local and State governments to purchase bulletproof vests.

The Department of Justice released statistics which stated that approximately 25 percent of State and local law enforcement officers do not have access to bulletproof vests. That is unacceptable. With the extent of violent crime that occurs in our Nation each year, we need to do something to help protect the men and women who put their lives on the line for our citizens each and every day.

This bill authorizes up to $25 million per year for this new grant program which the Department of Justice will oversee. The program will consist of matching grants to help State and local law enforcement groups purchase bulletproof vests and body armor to be used by their officers. This bill also provides for the matching provision to be waived in certain instances of jurisdictions which cannot pay their half of the costs of the vests.

Additionally, this measure would prohibit any group which participates in this program from purchasing equipment and products which were made by prison labor. It also urges these State and local agencies which receive assistance through this program, to purchase American-made enforcement products.

It has been demonstrated that bulletproof vests do help save lives. Since 1980, 1,182 police officers have been killed by a firearm in the line of duty. The FBI has stated that, had those officers been wearing vests, 42 percent of them would have survived. More than 2000 law enforcement officials have been saved by wearing a bulletproof vest while on duty. This legislation will help protect and save more lives of our dedicated police officers who protect us all.

I applaud Mr. VISCLOSKY for bringing this important piece of legislation before the House, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2829. Passage of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act illustrates a deep commitment to protecting the lives of our Nation's dedicated law enforcement officers.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of HR 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1997. I believe this legislation takes an important step towards providing badly needed funds to law enforcement officers in communities facing violent crime. According to the Uniform Crime Reports, between 1987 and 1996, nearly 700 officers were killed in the line of duty. Of those officers, 63 were feloniously killed by firearms.

We cannot bring back those brave officers who gave their lives to protect us. But we can take action today for those police officers who continue to risk their lives in the line of duty. We should pass this legislation to offer needed protection from gunfire. Bulletproof vests will not prevent all deaths; but they will prevent many and provide a means of mitigating the danger that our officers face on a daily basis.

This bill will make grants to units of local government to purchase bulletproof vests for use by law enforcement officers, while giving preferential consideration to communities with the greatest need, a mandatory wear policy, and a violent crime rate at or above the national average. I believe this is a fair and sensible approach to protecting our officers to better help them protect and serve.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. This legislation is essential to the survival of our police officers who risk their lives daily. Mr. Speaker, this is a measure that I believe all law abiding citizens should strongly believe in and support.

H.R. 2829 addresses the issue of improving officer safety. Between 1985 and 1994, 709 police officers were killed while on duty. Ninety-two percent of those murders were committed with a firearm. Since the introduction of modern bulletproof material, the lives of more than 2,000 police officers have been saved because they were wearing bulletproof vests. From these invaluable statistics, we can obviously see the impact that bulletproof vests have on saving the lives of our police officers.

Thus, the need to provide every police officer with a bulletproof vest is obvious and necessary. The Bulletproof Vest Parthnership

Grant Act is a legislative measure that will assist police departments in providing their officers with such protection. This bill would authorize up to $25 million per year for a new matching grant program to help state and local law enforcement authorities purchase bulletproof vests and body armor. Furthermore, the bill makes preferences in granting awards toward jurisdictions where officers do not currently have vests, and reserves half of the money for jurisdictions with fewer than 100,000 residents. This legislation is very important in light of the fact that on the average, two officers are shot every twenty-four hours. This is disturbing news simply because these figures indicate that approximately 150,000 of the nation's 600,000 state and local law enforcement officers do not currently have access to bulletproof vests.

In consideration of the dangers that today's officers face, I strongly support the passage of H.R. 2829, the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act. This legislation is needed by the men and women who risk their lives daily for our protection. For their commitment and service, we owe every police officer our support on this issue. As the Representative of the Thirty-Seventh Congressional District of California, I am in strong support of this important legislation. This legislation has been endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriff's Association, the International Union of Police Associations, the Police Executive Research Forum, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, and National Association of Police Organizations, the Long Beach Police Officer's Association and the Compton Police Officer's Association.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HEFLEY). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2829, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5 of rule I and the chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

QUESTION OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise to a question of personal privilege.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman will state his question of privilege.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, the question of privilege deals with statements made in three editorials published in newspapers within the last week. The editorials contain statements which reflect directly on my reputation and integrity and specifically allege deceptive actions on my part and impugn my character and motive.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the press accounts which serve as the basis of the gentleman from Indiana's question of personal privilege and is satisfied that the gentleman states a proper question of personal privilege.

Therefore, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleagues that I regret having to take this time out of our very busy schedule. I will not take the whole hour, but I think it is extremely important that the issues I am going to talk about be made available to my colleagues and to anyone else who is interested.

I rise today to take a point of personal privilege and to discuss the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight's investigation into illegal campaign contributions and other crimes. My conduct as chairman has been criticized by many of my Democratic colleagues. Those criticisms have been echoed in the press so I am taking this point of personal privilege to lay out for the American people the facts about this investigation.

The fact is that this committee has been subjected to a level of stonewalling and obstruction that has never been seen by a congressional investigation in the history of this country. This investigation has been stonewalled by the White House. This investigation has been stonewalled by the Democratic National Committee. This committee has seen over 90 witnesses, 90, either take the fifth amendment or flee the country to avoid testifying, more than 90.

The fact that all of these people have invoked their fifth amendment right to avoid self-incrimination is a pretty strong indication that a lot of crimes have been committed. Tomorrow the committee will vote on immunity for four witnesses, all of whom have previously invoked their right against self-incrimination. The Democrats on the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight have voted once to block immunity and keep these witnesses from testifying. I hope that tomorrow they will reconsider and vote to allow this investigation to move forward as it should.

This investigation has seen enough obstruction and enough stonewalling for a lifetime. Before tomorrow's vote, I want to lay out for the American people and my colleagues what has happened in this investigation over the last year, the stalling and the delaying tactics that have been used against us and what has brought us to this point. I want to give a comprehensive summary of events so I am not going to yield to my colleagues during this speech.

I became chairman of the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight in January of 1997. The President said he would give his full cooperation to all congressional investigations of illegal foreign fund-raising, including ours. So why are we conducting this investigation? Because there is very strong evidence that crimes were committed.

Let us take a look at some of the allegations that compelled us to begin this investigation: that the DNC had accepted millions of dollars in illegal foreign campaign contributions; that $3 million of the $4.5 million in contributions attributed to John Huang had to be returned because of suspicions about their origins; that the Chinese Government had developed and implemented a plan to influence the elections in the United States of America; that Charlie Trie, a friend of the President's from Arkansas, had funneled close to $700,000 in contributions associated with a Taiwanese cult to the President's legal defense fund; that Charlie Trie's Macao-based benefactor had wired him in excess of $1 million from overseas banks; that Charlie Trie was behind roughly $600,000 in suspicious contributions to the Democratic National Committee; that Pauline Kanchanalak and her family funneled a half a million dollars to the Democratic National Party from Thailand; that Chinese gun merchants, Cuban drug smugglers and Russian mob figures were being invited to intimate White House events with the President in exchange for campaign contributions; that the former associate Attorney General received $700,000 from friends and associates of the President, including $100,000 from the Riady family at a time when he was supposed to be cooperating with a criminal investigation.

These are serious allegations about serious crimes. The Justice Department recently brought indictments against three of these individuals and a fourth, Johnny Chung has pled guilty.

In January 1997, I sent letters to the White House requesting copies of all documents relating to this investigation. I asked for documents regarding John Huang, Charlie Trie, White House fund-raisers, et cetera. I gave the White House a chance to cooperate. Chairman Clinger, who preceded me, had written to the White House in October of 1996, and requested all documents regarding John Huang. Press reports had indicated that the White House had already assembled these documents and had them in boxes at the White House before the end of 1996.

The entire month of February passed and we received only a trickle of documents from the White House. In March it was clear that the White House was not going to comply voluntarily. The President had offered his cooperation at the beginning of the year, but the White House refused to turn over documents to the committee. The White House campaign of stalling had begun. So I issued a subpoena for the documents. I held a meeting with the President's new White House counsel, Mr. Charles Ruff. Mr. Ruff assured me that the President would not assert executive privilege over any of the documents. The White House continued to resist turning over documents despite