

from all over the country—not just New York—who were affected by 9/11 to look Members of Congress in the eye and ask them to renew this worthy program. They had meetings. They held press conferences. They even brought a celebrity spokesperson to draw attention to their cause.

Toward the end of the day, one gentleman said that he probably wouldn't be coming back to push Congress on this issue in the future. Now, I wish that none of them would have to come back because we would be able to tell them that we took action and permanently established this program.

But the reason he is not going to be coming back is because he has stage 4 cancer, stage 4 cancer as a result of his work on the pile, looking for his friends. He may not be coming back at all. That is what this is about. That is who we are talking about.

Every day first responders, cleanup workers, and volunteers are struggling with health conditions caused by the effects of the attack of 9/11. They have doctors' appointments, tests, treatments, chemotherapy.

And they can't do it alone. That is why we put this program in place in the first place, to help those who can't do it alone, to not just thank them for their service, but to give back to them what they have given to us.

These heroes should be thanked every day for what they have done. They deserve our thanks. They deserve to be honored and applauded and to have floor speech after floor speech given in their name.

But they deserve more than just words. They deserve action by this House, action that we must—not just should—but we must take to ensure that this program will continue to be there for those who need it.

Our heroes deserve better. We hear a lot about "never forget." I want to suggest that we never use the term "never forget" here on the floor, "never forget 9/11," until we pass a permanent extension of the James Zadroga Health Act.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, I am sick to my stomach this morning because we have just witnessed the 45th school shooting this year. There have been more than 294 mass shootings this year, and we have only had 272 days this year.

I am not going to stand for another moment of silence on this floor unless it is joined with meaningful action. It is a hollow gesture to act like we care for these families when the truth is we don't care enough to act.

Twenty-six times since Sandy Hook we have paused on this floor, we have paused to give our prayers and our sympathy to the families who have lost loved ones. But what are we doing for the next set of families that are going to lose loved ones?

We are going to do nothing, absolutely nothing. In fact, we create more credibility in the fictionalized "death panels" than we do about the actual deaths of innocent schoolchildren, college students, and moviegoers.

This is the truth: In America, more preschoolers are shot dead each year than police officers killed in the line of duty. Ninety-two Americans are shot to death each and every day. Ninety-two will be shot to death today. Do we care enough to do anything?

If there were that many people dying each day due to terrorism, disease, faulty consumer products, you bet we would do something, but not when it comes to guns. When it comes to guns, we can only muster enough to stand up on this floor and be silent. What a tragedy.

Our inaction means we are willing to let thousands of our fellow citizens die so we can prop up the myth that gun violence measures, which the Supreme Court has ruled ironclad under the Constitution, will somehow undermine the Second Amendment.

By refusing to adopt the mental health and background check measures supported by 90 percent of the population and 74 percent of NRA members, we are doing the bidding of the NRA lobbyists and the gun manufacturers. We are not standing side by side with the victims of Umpqua and Charleston and Sandy Hook. We are shrugging and saying, "Eh, stuff happens."

Stuff does not just happen. As you can see on this chart, gun violence is dramatically down in States that have passed strong gun violence prevention laws. You can see the trends in other industrialized countries that have reacted wisely to gun violence.

Australia had 13 mass shootings over 18 years. But then they put in strong laws to protect against gun violence, and they haven't had one mass shooting since then.

In Canada and Norway, also, they tightened their gun laws in the wake of mass shootings, and gun violence rates are a fraction today of what they were. These countries are our closest allies. They are not Fascist regimes. If they can do it, we can do it.

We need to make mental health reporting laws universal and enforce the ones already on the books. It is shameful that eight States have no mental health reporting laws and 13 States have submitted fewer than 100 mental health records each to the national background check system.

By the way, Senate Majority Whip JOHN CORNYN says that his measure is the solution. He has even introduced his own bill, but he and his Caucus have declined to advance it.

We have to make background checks universal by closing the gun show loophole and the loophole for online sales. These loopholes allow criminals, drug abusers, and mentally ill people who are already banned from having guns to get guns. Finally, we need to lift the ban on NIH and CDC research.

Mr. Speaker, I will not stand for another one of these hypocritical moments of silence, but I will stand up for any effort we make to pass sensible and genuine gun safety laws. Lipservice alone is a disservice to these families and the next families who don't want our prayers, but want the lives of their loved ones back.

CALIFORNIA DROUGHT CAUSING SUFFERING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. VALADAO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Speaker, today I had the opportunity and the honor to represent my district on the Senate side in a committee to talk about water, and it was to talk about the bill that we passed off this House floor just a few months ago back in June. Obviously, I was very excited to move that forward and excited to see the debate move forward. This is something that I think we need to talk about a little bit more here on the floor, not just in the Senate because I think people need to remember what we are talking about.

I had this picture taken just last week in my district. When people say a picture is worth a thousand words, you look at this picture, and you try to think of just a few different words that this brings to mind. You see houses here in the background, but you obviously see shacks here. You see a child's stroller, a child's toy, cans of food, a box from one of our local food banks.

These are people who are suffering today. This is in the United States of America. These are people who so many in this body claim to represent, so many in this body talk about, but when we see so many in this body sign letters, speak out in opposition to legislation that could help solve this problem, these people are suffering not because of a lack of the will to work but because we are facing a drought, and also because of legislation, because laws are in place that prevent us from delivering water to these communities.

These are people who want to make a difference. A lot of them might be immigrants. Some of them probably are people born in this country, but they are people that want to achieve the American Dream. A couple weeks ago when the Pope was here, he said so many things that both sides agreed with and some things that both sides disagreed with, but what he said was that every man has the right to work, to earn an honest day's wage. These people are being denied that opportunity.

Just beyond these shacks, you see homes. They look relatively new. You see a business here. You see trucks. Those are all people who have the ability to support themselves, but they are also people who right behind, in their own backyard, that don't have the ability to work that honest day's wage, to supply for their family, to buy new toys for their kids, to actually afford

food that was grown and produced by their own hands. Some of these food products might even be from other countries.

When we have that conversation here about helping the less fortunate, do we just throw money at a problem? Is that what Washington does? Is that what we expect to have here? Is that what builds a great society? Or is it people working hard, providing for their families, educating their next generation on what it is like to actually grow food, what it is actually like to put in a hard day's work, to inspire and actually show what it is to work hard and produce something for yourself?

□ 1045

The pride that comes with earning that paycheck and purchasing that house or purchasing those vehicles or purchasing food for your family is what we want to provide for Americans. That is something that I think every single person—immigrant or American citizen by birth or who has been here for 20 generations, whatever it may be—wants to have, the opportunity to provide for their families and for a better life.

When you look at this picture, it is insane that this is going on today. And when people sign and put their names on or trash legislation that can help solve this problem, I think it is an embarrassment for this House and for this country.

There was water flowing through the delta that we had the opportunity to pump earlier this year. Would it have solved all of our problems? No, because we are in a drought. But there was still some water there. We missed out on that opportunity because of laws that are in place today.

These people don't have to be in this position. These people don't have to live like this. Their children do not have to live in those shacks and play with their toys outside of their home. Think of what type of society allows this to happen, by allowing legislation or laws to take effect that have done nothing to actually protect the species they claim to protect, as that species continues to be in decline. We see what is going on here and how it does nothing for these people.

We talk about the environment. Is this an environment to raise a family? How are these children going to be successful in school? I have got three young children of my own. I have nieces and nephews. I would never, ever want to see this happen to them, and I would never want them to see this happen to their friends.

This is something that is happening today because of the laws that this building protects. And we have got to continue to fight and we have got to continue to work together so that we can deliver solutions that actually help these people have that American Dream, just like the rest of us want for our children.

Today, at the end of my speech to a Senate committee, I invited the Sen-

ators to come take some time and meet with some of these folks or see what it is like to actually live like this. I extend that invite to every Member of this House, especially those who speak out in opposition to legislation that can help prevent things like this from happening.

I want them to come, knock on these doors, and talk to these people and see what they want more than anything. Do they want a handout or do they want the ability to produce and to provide for their families and show their children what the next generation should do, which is work hard and help build that American Dream for all of us?

I want every single person who speaks out in opposition to take a good, hard look at this and see what we have created in the United States unless we speak up and do what is right: pass legislation that can help solve this problem so we can deliver water for these families, for these farmers, for our communities, and do what is right for our Nation and do what is right for the American people.

HONORING OUR WWII MERCHANT MARINERS ACT OF 2015

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, words cannot explain the singular honor it is to stand in the well of the House of Representatives in the Congress of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today on a mission of mercy. I believe a brief vignette can best explain what a mission of mercy is as I apply it to the circumstances for which I rise.

Mr. Speaker, prior to coming to Congress, I served for more than a quarter of a century as a judge of a small claims justice court. I can remember an occasion when a mother testified on behalf of her son. Her appeal to me was along these lines. She said: Judge, I am not asking you for justice. I know he was wrong. But he is my son. I know he was wrong. I am not asking for justice. I am asking you for mercy. You have within your power to do justice or you can grant mercy, and I beg that you grant mercy to my son.

That was her hue and cry.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I rise today, I rise in support of H.R. 563, sponsored by the Honorable JANICE HAHN. I rise in support of this legislation, which is the Honoring Our WWII Merchant Mariners Act of 2015.

This bill would establish the Merchant Marine Equity Compensation Fund. It would accord each person who served between certain dates—December 7, 1941, through December 31, 1946—a sum of \$25,000.

Why should they receive the \$25,000? Well, Mr. Speaker, when they served in World War II, they were not accorded the benefits other members of the various Armed Forces were. In fact, it

took litigation to bring them under the purview of benefits that the other members of the Armed Forces have received and are now receiving.

It was in 1988 that they finally, after litigation, received these benefits, but the benefits were not applied retroactively. As a result of them not being applied retroactively, some of them didn't receive GI Bill benefits. They didn't receive home loans. Many of them, still alive, can be compensated if we grant mercy.

I know that there are those who would say that they already received their just compensation as a result of the litigation and as a result of being brought within the purview of the laws that allow them to receive certain benefits, but they didn't get them retroactively.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, they served honorably. As a matter of fact, approximately 9,500 of them died in service. They served their country. They bled the same blood as others when they were attacked and assaulted and when they lost limbs and their lives.

They are Americans, Mr. Speaker. And I believe we should show some mercy to these Americans. We ought to accord them the opportunity to have these benefits because they were willing to risk their lives so that we could have the quality of life that we have today.

So I make this hue and cry and appeal. I base it upon mercy, not justice. The arguments can be made as to whether just compensation has been accorded; but I believe that, if we show mercy, we will do the right thing for people who have done the right thing for their country.

RECESS

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

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 52 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

During these contentious and unsettling days during which an important transition is taking place within the House, we ask Your presence in this assembly.

Imbue each Member with confidence that they are called not to be successful in any one pursuit but, rather, faithful to the pursuit of the welfare of