

to law enforcement. If we have the courage to stand up and do this, then never again will thoughts and prayers be needed in the aftermath of a mass shooting.

This country is at a crossroads. We need your leadership. We need your love, your compassion. We need your serious thought unmarred by lobbyists.

I implore you to think about the kids. Think about how you would feel if it were your son, your daughter, your granddaughter, or your grandson, because it could be.

Had we—had the Members of this body—learned the lessons of Columbine and of Sandy Hook, Joaquin would still be here. The lives of hundreds would not have been ripped to pieces. This was preventable.

Something you can do, and urge your colleagues to do right this moment, is support the recently introduced universal background checks bill.

It is now my mission in life to do whatever I can to ensure that no mother and no father have to endure the pain I have, that no shining beacon of light, hope, and love like my Joaquin is snuffed out too soon in a preventable mass shooting.

We know that he didn't have to die if our leaders had done enough. Other countries have solved this problem. The roadmap exists. Please follow it.

Sincerely, Patricia Oliver, Parkland, Florida.

Mr. Speaker, Patricia and Manuel, Joaquin's father, have not allowed Joaquin to remain a victim. He is an advocate.

Last month, the Olivers visited Capitol Hill with a statue of Joaquin to deliver this letter and to call for change. It is time to listen to them, Patricia, Manuel, and Joaquin. We shouldn't have to know the pain that Patricia and Manny know, that 16 other families in Parkland know, and that families in every corner of this country know, to do something about gun violence.

The time to act is now.

DISASTER RELIEF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remind you and my colleagues that Congress appropriated billions for disaster relief for Hurricanes Irma and Maria. In the latest effort, however, to find funding to build a wall, the White House and top budget officials continue to discuss shifting disaster funding to pay for a wall that a foreign nation was to pay for and now must be borne by people still recovering from disaster.

The 2017 hurricane season was one of the worst on record. Among the hardest places hit were Puerto Rico and my home, the Virgin Islands of the United States, which not only lost power across the islands, but many vital pieces of infrastructure were heavily damaged and destroyed, and, most tragically, lives were lost.

This disaster significantly impacted the Virgin Islands, destroying the island's infrastructure, with the loss of our only two hospitals, multiple

schools, thousands of homes, and it left residents without electricity for a period of 9 months.

The total damage to the Virgin Islands is estimated at \$10.8 billion—\$10.8 billion in a place that only has a \$1 billion budget—\$6.9 billion for infrastructure, \$2.3 billion for housing, and \$1.5 million for the economy.

Diverting disaster funds from this community would create a security risk and make them even more vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, shifting disaster relief funds appropriated by this body from my district and others impaired by the 2017–2018 natural disasters would create a catastrophic economic disaster.

□ 1030

Disaster funding from the Army Corps was critical to disaster recovery, including power restoration, studies, repairs, and construction projects in the Virgin Islands and other territories and States impacted by the national disasters.

The Army Corps of Engineers, however, has barged more than 25,000 cubic yards of construction and demolition debris from the territory. However, approximately more than 6,000, almost 7,000, cubic yards remain on the island, still to be removed.

There is still so much work left undone. Individuals are still without roofs. After extensive debate and discussion with FEMA, the roof repair program is just now, a year and a half later, repairing the thousands of roofs and homes destroyed.

The STEP roof program has been extended to March 1. The STEP program debris removal is still in progress throughout the territory.

The hurricanes left not one but two hospitals overwhelmed with debris and destroyed—our only two hospitals—and, now, worksheets still have not been approved by FEMA for the rebuilding of those hospitals. The modular hospital is still not in place.

Students have only recently, in this month, moved into the modular classrooms. Can you imagine?

School reconstruction has not begun. Our communities still have a long way to go to get in the disaster recovery and rebuilding process.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere else in this country would this be allowed. This would not be allowed in any of your colleagues' homes.

However, before and after the storm, Virgin Islanders put their heads down and did the work. They pitched in and helped one another because that is all we had at that time, and the benevolence of other people, until you, Congress, until you, colleagues, gave them the disaster funding that was needed to rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, unlike other places, the Virgin Islands doesn't have five or six Members of the House or millions of constituents living in your own districts. The Virgin Islands didn't have thousands of people on the news media

or chefs or playwrights bringing musicals to our island to draw attention to the devastation in our home.

The Virgin Islands had me, and I pray they have you—they have you, Mr. Speaker; they have you, colleagues—to continue the fight for them, for these Americans, to tell the White House that they should not shift disaster funding to build a wall away from Americans living in territories for something that a foreign country was to pay for in the beginning.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

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

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize February as National Children's Dental Health Month and to raise awareness around the critically important issue of access to quality dental care for our Nation's children.

The most prevalent chronic infectious disease among children in the United States is tooth decay. This disease is responsible for countless health problems in children and more than 51 million hours lost at school every year.

However, this disease is preventable with basic dental care. Sadly, even with improvements in recent years, too many children are not able to access the quality dental care they need to simply stay healthy.

I have a long history of advocating for increased access to dental care for all, particularly our Nation's young people. I have often said that our children are the living messengers we send to a future we will never see. That means that we must do everything in our power to ensure that they are healthy and given every opportunity to succeed.

Today, I also rise to share the story of a young Maryland boy named Deamonte Driver. He died because of a lack of access to basic dental care.

In February of 2007, 12-year-old Deamonte Driver came home from school with a simple headache, which had started as a toothache. His mother worked hard to make ends meet with all kinds of low-paying jobs. She searched for a dentist who would accept Medicaid for her children, but she found no dentist who would care for children's teeth.

Deamonte's mother took him to the emergency room, where he received medication for pain, a sinus infection, and a dental abscess. Unfortunately, that was not enough. The bacteria from Deamonte's cavity spread to his brain, and, at 12 years old, Deamonte Driver died—12 years old. Deamonte could be alive today if it were not for the lack of a simple procedure and the early removal of one tooth.

Deamonte's story is one we must never, ever forget. We must imprint it in the DNA of every cell of our brains.