

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STEARNS). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

#### EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE CONGRESS WITH RESPECT TO THE TRAGIC SHOOTING AT COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL IN LITTLETON, COLORADO

Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H.Con.Res. 92) expressing the sense of Congress with respect to the tragic shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

The Clerk read as follows:

#### H. CON. RES. 92

Whereas on April 20, 1999, two armed gunmen opened fire at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, killing 12 students and 1 teacher and wounding more than 20 others; and

Whereas local, State, and Federal law enforcement personnel performed their duties admirably and risked their lives for the safety of the students, faculty, and staff at Columbine High School: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—*

(1) condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the heinous atrocities which occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado;

(2) offers its condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones of those who were killed at Columbine High School and expresses its hope for the rapid and complete recovery of those wounded in the shooting;

(3) applauds the hard work and dedication exhibited by the hundreds of local, State, and Federal law enforcement officials and the others who offered their support and assistance; and

(4) encourages the American people to engage in a national dialogue on preventing school violence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO).

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

Mr. Speaker, the veneer that separates civilization from barbarism, that separates good from evil, is very thin, and it appears everywhere to be wearing thinner. Last week it wore through in my hometown, and the evil seeped out and stole the lives of 12 innocent children and one valiant teacher at Columbine High School. Mr. Speaker, yesterday my son Ray gave me something he had written in response to this tragedy. I believe it is not just fatherly pride that compels me to read parts of

it here today. I believe he eloquently captures the nature of the cultural abrasives that ever so relentlessly eat away at our national soul, and I would like to cite just a part of it:

“Do you believe in God?” “Yes, I believe in God.”

“Seventeen year old Cassie Bernal’s life ended with that answer. Our answers to the Columbine High School murders begin with the same question, and our answer must be the same as Cassie Bernal or the nihilistic fury unleashed by those two young murderers will surely prevail.”

People search for meaning in these brutal senseless acts. People question the norms of a society in which monstrous violence can be countenanced. People question the righteousness, even the existence of a God who can allow such pain and violence into the world. These are valid, but unanswerable questions.

We can speculate and hypothesize, we can blame and vent, but in the end we know we cannot fathom the meaning of this event or presume to comprehend this evil. Nevertheless, our choice is stark: Do we believe in God or not? An answer to that question is the whole of what we take away from the Columbine massacre, for the answer means everything.

We either coast in the cultural currents of a facile nihilism, or we embrace God on our knees and pray for His grace and forgiveness. Nihilism or God, that is the choice. The comfortable in-between is now gone.

In reporting on Adolph Eichmann’s 1960 trial in Jerusalem, philosopher Hannah Arendt noted the banality of evil; that is, how small, petty and unoriginal evil appears. She was speaking of Eichmann, a trivial bureaucrat who efficiently and systematically undertook the murdering of the Jewish people in Europe. Likewise here, evil’s banality is made plain to us. Two disaffected punks have changed life in my hometown forever.

In the end my conclusions are unsatisfying and incomplete: sin is real, evil is real. The inscrutable evil of these men made perfect sense from within their world. If I do not believe, if we do not believe, then their nihilism is right, and even if we ourselves do not embrace it, we have no means to stop others from doing so.

Pray the Lord’s mercy on us.

Stopping it is one thing, but where and how did it start? The comfortable, prosperous suburbs of Denver, Colorado should not foster such dark realities. Moreover, high schools have always had this same group of disaffected bright kids, who flirted with the darker regions of the culture. What changed for the diabolical fantasies of murder to be made real? No doubt a confluence of factors coalesced to make these young men’s revenge fantasies turn into reality. I offer some comments on three factors in particular: the culture, technology and institutions.

#### THE CULTURE

Ours is a culture wrapped in cotton candy nihilism. Poses and attitudes of nihilism are

struck and celebrated. The academy has its au courant ideologies. Feminism, postmodernism, structuralism, scientific materialism all presuppose a purposeless universe without any transcendent order where society is predicted on power and violence. Entertainment has its explicit nihilistic messages—the goth rock of Marilyn Manson and KMFDM—its ironically hip ones—the accomplished, but immoral, films of Quentin Tarrantino—and its implicit nihilism—Jerry Springer, or the titillation cum therapy of MTV’s Loveline. Indeed, nihilism in a soft and weak form is everywhere.

Meanwhile, “adult society” complacently indulges the destruction of cultural traditions. Legal norms are in shambles—murderers and perjurers escape punishment, and civil justice has become an elaborate shakedown scheme. Rampant materialism fuels a vicious cycle of decadent consumption and unending labor. Finally, cynicism and lassitude are the “adult” responses to the widespread cultural decay.

Our culture not only whispers, but veritably screams, that anything goes. While this is the cultural undertow, the current at the surface holds up ideals that are betrayed almost immediately—democracy is in disrepair; big business alternately rentseeks of foists cultural rot onto a complacent public; and education is mind-numbingly dumbered-down and awash in psychological fads.

An idealistic (yes, idealistic) young man regarding this spectacle can easily be drawn into the depths of the undertow. It is a wrong, but facile, conclusion that all is power, and that the ideals of this country are fraudulent. Reinforce this with bombs, guns and music—and someone just might, indeed, did, snap.

#### TECHNOLOGY

The internet is praised for its promise and ability to connect people in ways hereto before unthinkable. The commercial and intellectual potential of the internet is a marvel. But there is a dark side to all this. An absolute majority of internet traffic is pornography. Subcultures that used to be isolated, can now connect and reinforce one another.

As I said before, the type of student that Harris and Klebold represent has always roamed the halls of American high schools. Such students endure cruelties and indignities in the remorseless culture of high school, but they do not end up killing their classmates and trying to blow up the school.

With the internet, however, instead of hanging out with a few like-minded outcasts in their parents’ basement, these youths can log-on and interact with a whole underground world. These internet “communities” promote the ultimate in social atomization—a whole new self-created virtual identity. Wann-be Supermen could formerly only hear one-way communication through records and, for the semi-literate, books. Now, that communication is two way—bomb recipes can be exchanged, home pages can advertise and promote the rage, chat rooms can stiffen the resolve of would-be mad bombers.

#### INSTITUTIONAL

Columbine high school houses nearly 2000 students. The principal of the school has said that he didn’t even know these two students; nor had he heard of the “trench coat mafia,” the disaffected coterie of students to whom these men belonged.

It was easy for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to get lost at Columbine. They apparently did get lost, to all of our detriment.