

no partisan agenda. They came as Americans who wished to spare their fellow parents and family members the mourning, fear and terror they felt 6 months ago. Their message is clear: honor the memories of the little children of these educators by helping to ensure that no other family is forced to endure such an unimaginable tragedy.

It had been unimaginable. Now we have seen it. Now our task is plain. We must restore confidence in the safety of our communities by taking clear, effective steps to prevent gun violence in our schools, homes, and neighborhoods.

I just read the names and showed the pictures of a few of the people whose lives were lost that day. For them and for others and for the lives we want to save, again I mention the bipartisan Thompson-King, King-Thompson legislation, which means to use this anniversary, certainly, to memorialize the victims of Newtown, but also to answer the call of their families to give gun violence prevention legislation a vote in the Congress of the United States.

Six months ago in Newtown, a lone gunman took the lives of 26 Americans. We all know that. It's emblazoned in our minds and in our souls. Since then, nearly 5,000 more Americans have fallen victim to gun violence. Now in Congress we must summon the courage to act. We must take inspiration from the courage of the Newtown families, from the courage it has taken to turn their grief into action. We must heed the moving words of the Sandy Hook promise: our hearts are broken; our spirit is not. As we mark this anniversary, we must uphold our most basic responsibility: the oath we take—the oath of office—to protect and defend the Constitution and to protect and defend the people of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague Congresswoman ESTY and our colleague Congressman MIKE THOMPSON for their leadership in bringing us together this morning so that we cannot only remember but so that we can have the courage to act.

NEWTOWN ANNIVERSARY AND GUN CONTROL

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

Mr. HOYER. I rise to join the leader. I rise to join Congresswoman ESTY and Congressman THOMPSON in recognizing this sad anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, it is with sadness that we mark the 6-month anniversary tomorrow of the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown.

On that day, as has been repeated and must be remembered, Americans were united in shock and grief at the senseless murder by a crazed gunman of 26 innocent people—of 20 innocent first graders and six courageous school staff members—who tried to protect them and helped save the lives of others. Since that day, approximately 4,500—the leader mentioned 5,000, but it's a

figure in excess of 4,500—Americans have died as a result of gun violence, according to the Newtown Action Alliance.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a tragedy; it is an epidemic, one that Congress has a moral responsibility to address. When nine out of 10 Americans support stricter background checks to keep dangerous guns out of the hands of criminals and those with mental illness, there is no reason why Congress shouldn't be able to take swift and decisive action to enact tougher protections. I was deeply disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that the Senate failed to move forward with legislation to protect Americans from gun violence by enacting effective background checks that safeguard the constitutional rights of responsible gun owners and safeguard Americans.

The American people are demanding action, and the House now has a chance to succeed where the Senate failed. Demonstrating that commonsense proposals to reduce gun violence can, indeed, command bipartisan support, Democratic Representative MIKE THOMPSON of California, who chairs the House Democratic Task Force on Gun Violence, and my friend Republican Representative PETER KING of New York have joined together to introduce legislation in this Chamber similar to that which was blocked in the Senate. There is not a single provision in their bill that should be worrisome to those concerned about our longstanding tradition of protecting Second Amendment rights—not a single provision.

It will help us keep firearms out of the hands of dangerous and mentally unstable individuals likely to do harm to others or themselves. Will it keep all of us safe all the time? It will not. We know that. That is the tragic fact of life. But will it help? It will. If we can help, should we? The answer is an emphatic "yes."

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This proposal contains commonsense proposals that I strongly support and that most Americans have supported, as well.

Congress has the opportunity to get this right by considering the Thompson-King legislation in the House and sending it to the Senate for consideration.

I congratulate Congresswoman ESTY in particular, as well as Congressman THOMPSON, for their leadership and efforts in this regard. After the backlash many Senators received for opposing expanded background checks, I suspect that a number may be ready to reconsider.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to come together, as Representative THOMPSON and Representative KING have done, to advance this bipartisan solution to this pressing challenge facing our Nation—not just the Congress, but every American.

It should not take and it must not take another tragedy such as Newtown

for us to act. We have a responsibility to keep our neighborhoods and our schools safe. I urge Speaker BOEHNER and Majority Leader CANTOR to allow this bill to come to the floor for a vote.

The Speaker often says that he wants to allow the House to work its will. That's why the people of Newtown sent Congresswoman ESTY to Congress. That's why the people of my district and every district represented in this House, people sent them here to vote on policies, policies to make their country better, policies to make their country more safe.

The memories of those children, the memories of those teachers, the memories of those 26, and, yes, the memories of those 4,500-plus who, since the Newtown tragedy, have lost their lives to violence, their memory, Mr. Speaker, demands and deserves action by their representatives.

GUN REFORM

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

Ms. ESTY. Mr. Speaker, 6 months ago tomorrow, Newtown experienced unimaginable tragedy and unparalleled loss.

That loss, the painful loss of sons and daughters, spouses, siblings, and friends, is still very raw and will always run very deep for the people of Newtown. Yet, in the face of that unimaginable tragedy on that day and on the days since, this small community that has been through so much has inspired our Nation with tremendous courage and resilience.

Americans have been inspired by the sixth grade educators who gave their very lives to defend and protect their students.

Americans have been inspired by the brave first responders who arrived on the scene to save others and live with the trauma of what they saw that day.

Americans have been inspired by the Sandy Hook families who, despite living with the pain that one can only begin to imagine, have responded to loss not with anger or hate, but with unbelievable love, strength, and courage.

They've taken their call to action to Hartford, where a comprehensive set of commonsense gun laws passed with bipartisan support. They've taken the call to action to State capitols around this country. And they've taken that call to action here in Washington, but here they've faced inexplicable political cowardice.

Mr. Speaker, in the 6 months since that terrible day, since we lost 26 precious lives in Newtown, nearly 4,800 Americans have also lost their lives to gun violence. But during that same time, this House has not held a single vote on commonsense gun reform to reduce and prevent gun violence, not even enhanced criminal background checks.

Forty-six Senators blocked an up-or-down vote on enhanced background