

While Republicans are putting their fingers in their ears and pretending that our country isn't in the grips of a gun violence epidemic, innocent people continue to die. What makes this inaction even harder to accept is the fact that, for over 3½ years, I have had bipartisan, pro-Second Amendment legislation that would help make these tragedies less common.

My bill would close a dangerous loophole in our background check system that allows criminals, domestic abusers, and the dangerously mentally ill to bypass a background check in 34 States when purchasing guns online, at a gun show, or through classified ads.

Background checks are our first line of defense when it comes to making sure that dangerous people don't purchase guns. We know that, when used, they work. Every day, background checks stop more than 170 felons, some 50 domestic abusers, and nearly 20 fugitives from buying a gun. But, sadly, this gaping hole allows those same felons, domestic abusers, and fugitives to easily bypass a background check when buying firearms.

H.R. 1217 has 187 bipartisan coauthors and 90 percent of the American people support strengthening and expanding our background check system.

Mr. Speaker, let us have a vote on this bill. Gun violence shouldn't be a partisan issue. When deranged gunmen open fire in a nightclub, movie theater, or school, they don't care if you are a Democrat or Republican. Together, we can build a country in which all Americans feel safe being who they are, having fun in a nightclub, going to school, seeing a movie, going to Bible study, an office party, or simply walking down the streets of their own neighborhood.

Mr. Speaker, let us do the work the American people sent us here to do. Let us vote on the legislation they want to see enacted. Let us vote to keep our fellow Americans safe.

Each day the Republican majority drags its feet and refuses to give us a vote on bipartisan, pro-Second Amendment bills to help keep guns out of dangerous hands, more innocent lives are lost.

Give us a vote. And give us a vote now, before you recess for another break.

CONSTITUTION WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. JENKINS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JENKINS of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, September 17–23 is Constitution Week, where we celebrate the document and principles that are the foundation of this great Nation. Constitution Day on the 17th marks the ratification of this great document.

The Constitution is the basis of our Nation. It is the reason we are here today. It lays out the fundamental principles and structures of our Nation

and our government. And the Bill of Rights makes clear the rights we enjoy as Americans and the fact that the Federal Government cannot infringe on these rights. Every decision I make as a Member of Congress is informed by the words written in the pages of this Constitution.

All over the world, our Constitution stands as a pillar of justice, freedom, and good governance. Other countries look to our Constitution for guidance as they write their own constitutions and establish their own democracies.

As we celebrate Constitution Week, I also want to recognize the great work of the Daughters of the American Revolution, including the chapters in my district, for their efforts to educate America about this document and its history.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our Founding Fathers in crafting this great document, a Constitution that has stood the test of time.

VA ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. JENKINS of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, during two townhall meetings recently, I had the opportunity to hear from our veterans about the care they are receiving from VA hospitals. They want, they need—no, they deserve—a VA healthcare system that works for them, one that gives them timely care, one that treats our veterans with respect and one that holds VA bureaucrats accountable.

I am proud to support H.R. 5620, a necessary step to getting the VA working again for our veterans. I will not stand for a system that rewards Washington bureaucrats for failing to do their job. There are a lot of good, caring people at the VA and their employees at our hospitals, and we need to make sure they have an environment and system where they can serve our veterans.

□ 1030

I stand with our veterans, and for the commonsense reforms to the problems that they are facing. I will continue to work to make sure the VA is held accountable; that veterans receive the best health care in the country—no, in the world—and that a broken system is fixed. Our veterans have sacrificed so much for us, and we must keep the promises we have made to them.

SILENCE EQUALS DEATH IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

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

Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to demand a vote on commonsense gun safety legislation. It has been 26 years since our country has passed any meaningful gun safety legislation.

I have only been in the House for a little over 2½ years, and we have had 10 moments of silence to recognize victims of mass shootings during that time.

After Fort Hood in April of 2014, when 19 people were shot in a deadly rampage, Republican leaders brought us together for a moment of silence, but there was no discussion about honoring those lives with our action.

In May of 2014, the country came together after a massacre in Santa Barbara, and families looked to our Nation's leaders to see what they could do. What did they hear? More silence.

In June of 2015, nine parishioners were murdered by a hate-filled radical—who was able to get his gun because of a loophole—while they were at a Bible study at the Emanuel Church in South Carolina. While those lost inspired our country, the Members of Congress bowed their heads in silence and did nothing else.

Then there was Chattanooga, Roseburg, Colorado Springs, and San Bernardino. Dozens were murdered in senseless killing sprees. And while the country demanded a vote to finally do something about gun violence, this Congress responded with silence.

Three months ago, after the worst gun massacre in modern history took place at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, some of us had finally had enough. If our friends in the LGBT community have taught us anything, it is that silence equals death. And this is no time to be silent.

Our frustration, and the frustration of the American people, resulted in a sit-in that gave voice to the American families who are fed up with a Congress that is cowed into silence by the rich and powerful gun lobby.

Here we are, 3 months later, and House Republicans have spent more time thinking about how they can punish us for that sit-in than doing anything to address the gun violence devastating Americans.

In July, rather than allow debates and votes on keeping American children and families safe, Republican leaders adjourned this House. Since then, an additional 2,015 Americans were killed by guns. In Chicago alone, 3,000 people have been killed or injured by guns just this year.

This is a public health crisis, and this Republican Congress has returned to its routine silence instead of working to keep Americans safe. I am here to tell you, the American people will not forget and will not continue to stand for this silence and inaction.

Every single day, victims and survivors of gun violence come and tell their heart-wrenching stories to Members of Congress.

I have stood with Felicia Sanders as she gathered the courage to stand in front of our Nation's Capitol and tell the story that no mother should have to tell. At Emanuel Church in North Carolina, Felicia's son, Tywanza, ran toward the gunman while trying to shield others in his Bible study group. Tywanza was only 26 when Felicia said her final goodbye.

I have had the honor of thanking Catherine Bodine for coming and telling her story to the American people.