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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Subcommittee on Government Operations

Joint Hearing on "Radicalization in the U.S. and the Rise of Terrorism"

September 14, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing to assess efforts to protect our communities and deter acts of violent extremism.

This hearing was originally called in the immediate aftermath of our nation's worst mass shooting. On June 12, 2016, America woke to a nightmare. A man driven by hate and armed with assault weapons killed 49 innocent people, and left more than 50 injured.

The Republican presidential candidate painted this as an issue of radical Islamic terror. At this point we do not know what motivated the shooter.

But mass violence occurs too often in our country. Some of it is caused by people who associate themselves with extremist Muslim groups. But so much of the bloodshed is a result of gun violence at the hands of those who claim no allegiance to Islam or ISIS.

Some of the violent extremists held racist, anti-LGBT, anti-abortion, anti-government views; others had no apparent ideology.

Less than one month after the shooting in Orlando, a heavily armed sniper gunned down five police officers in downtown Dallas. The shooter, who stated that he wanted to quote, "kill white people, especially white officers," was a supporter of the New Black Panther Party, an organization that has advocated for violence against whites.

In December, 14 people were killed in San Bernardino by extremists associating with ISIS. Last year, nine people were murdered by an avowed racist during bible study at one of our country's oldest black churches in South Carolina.

Twenty innocent children and six school faculty members were gunned down by a deranged person with no apparent ideology inside a school at Sandy Hook in 2012.

Thirty-three students and faculty were murdered at Virginia Tech in 2007, by a person with no apparent ideology and mental health issues. The dead included five bright, young, talented students from my community of Fairfax County.

Twelve people were murdered in an Aurora movie theater in 2012 by two people with no apparent radical ideas.

Six people were killed at a, "Congress at Your Corner," in Tucson in 2011, which also injured our former colleague Gabby Giffords.

Ten people were killed and three others injured in the 2002 sniper attacks across the D.C. region. It's time for an honest conversation about hate and guns in our country.

A recent Southern Poverty Law Center study showed that between 2009 and 2015, 51% of attacks were motivated by some form of hate, ranging from misogyny, radical Islam, and white supremacy.

The study found that in 2015 alone, 38% of the attacks were associated with white supremacy, 37% with domestic Islamic extremism, 19% with anti-government extremism, and 6% with anti-abortion extremism.

These numbers alone show violent extremism has not one, but many roots.

Add easy access to firearms that the NRA protects, and we have a recipe for mass shootings. The Southern Poverty Law Center also found that firearms were involved in 64% of domestic terror attack incidents, and 95% of deaths resulting from domestic terror attacks since 9/11 were inflicted by guns.

ISIS itself has recognized the ease with which Americans can purchase firearms, and for that reason has sought to use the internet to radicalize individuals within the U.S.

In an interview with the New York Times, a German man who is serving a prison sentence for having joined ISIS discussed the ISIS recruiting strategy, stating and I quote:

"For America and Canada, it's much easier for them to get them over the social network, because they say Americans are dumb – they have open gun policies. They say we can radicalize them easily, and if they have no prior record, they can buy guns, so we don't need to have no contact man who has to provide guns for them."

Al Qaeda has also reportedly advertised how easy it is to buy guns in the U.S. In a video entitled, "Do Not Rely on Others, Take the Task Upon Yourself," Adam Gadahn, an Al Qaeda spokesman, advises would-be jihadists to take advantage of the gaps in U.S. gun laws, saying quote, "America is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms," and asks "So what are you waiting for?" The video includes footage of a gun show here in America.

Our country must combat all forms of violent extremism and acknowledge the role that easy access to firearms has played in countless mass shootings. As I said last December, as we marked the three-year anniversary of Sandy Hook, if more politicians viewed the safety of the American people as more important than pleasing the NRA, reason would prevail and the club of

gun violence victims and their families would not continue its unrelenting growth. Instead, our ever-more-frequent moments of silence, followed by inaction on gun reform, speak volumes.

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