

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Ranking Member Jamie Raskin Committee on Oversight and Accountability Opening Statement

“Oversight of the U.S. Secret Service and the Attempted Assassination of President Donald J. Trump” July 22, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Comer.

Elijah Cummings taught us that the way to find *common ground* in a crisis is to search for the *higher ground* that elevates everyone affected.

Last week, Chairman Comer and I came together to reach for higher ground. We made a joint statement condemning the mass shooting and assassination attempt against former President Trump as “a grave assault on our democracy.” As we wrote, “we are united in condemning *all* political violence.”

I join the Chairman in expressing profound condolences to the family of Corey Comperatore and in sending healing wishes to the wounded victims of this atrocious act of violence.

Some people are calling it a miracle that the former President escaped this AR-15 attack, unlike so many thousands of our fellow citizens who have been killed in other shootings by disturbed loners or political extremists wielding weapons like the AR-15.

Whether this miracle is of divine provenance or of an adventitious and arbitrary nature will be up to each of us to ponder, but our job in Congress is not to marvel at miracles or good luck but to act as national public policy legislators to do whatever we can to prevent future political violence and mass shootings from affecting anyone in our society. We’re charged with protecting public safety, domestic tranquility, and the blessings of liberty, which depend on the right to life.

The Chairman and I are thus determined to get to the bottom of the stunning security failures that enabled this 20-year-old lone gunman, who borrowed his father’s AR-15, to perpetrate a mass shooting and assassination attempt at an event protected by the Secret Service, as well as state and local law enforcement.

We will ask hard questions of Director Cheatle today. We ask hard questions in order to identify the shocking security failures that occurred *and* to help transform the operations of the Secret Service to prevent anything like this from ever happening again.

But we also cannot let ourselves off the hook, dear Colleagues.

What happened in Butler, Pennsylvania, was a double failure—the failure by the Secret Service to properly protect Donald Trump and the failure of Congress to properly protect our people from criminal gun violence.

We must, therefore, also ask hard questions about whether our laws are making it too easy for potential assassins and criminals to obtain firearms generally and AR-15 assault weapons specifically.

Mr. Comperatore, former President Trump, and the other rally attendees wounded in Butler are now members of a club no one wants to belong to: the thousands of victims of mass shootings.

Last year in America, we had 655 mass shootings, typically defined as four or more people being shot or killed in a single incident, not including the shooter. 712 people died and nearly 2,700 people were wounded in these attacks.

Mass shootings are tragically commonplace in America. They happen at political rallies and constituent meetings; in our elementary schools, middle schools and high schools; in churches, synagogues and mosques; in movie theaters and at parades; in night clubs and grocery stores; in concerts and on street corners.

This list is a grim reminder of the horrific damage and death wrought by assault weapons—and AR-15s in particular—that have taken the lives of our children, parents, colleagues, and neighbors. Sadly, this is merely a partial list.

Mass shootings have now become so frequent that we don't even hear about most of them anymore. Since the mass shooting in Butler, there have already been at least 10 additional mass shootings in the United States—two of which took place the very same day that former President Trump was targeted.

One of the mass shootings on that violent Saturday happened at 11:00 PM at a nightclub in Birmingham, Alabama, where four people were shot dead and ten others were wounded. This means the Butler attack was not even the deadliest mass shooting to happen in America on that *day*.

A weapon that can be used to commit a mass shooting at an event under the full protection of the Secret Service, together with dozens of state and local law enforcement officers, is obviously an intolerable threat to the rest of us who do not receive such protection and does not belong in our communities.

It is time to pass universal background checks and build on the Biden-Harris Administration's work to ensure that we permanently close the loopholes in the Brady law for gun show purchases, on-line purchases, and private sales to prevent these weapons from getting into the hands of people whom we know to be a threat to themselves or others.

But what happened in Butler, Pennsylvania, shows why even closing these loopholes will not keep assault weapons out of the hands of potential assassins and mass murderers.

Under federal law, and in the vast majority of states, even young people who cannot legally buy a beer yet can legally purchase and own these weapons of war and even carry them in public.

The shooter in Butler used his father's AR-15.

We have to find the courage and resolve to pass a ban on the AR-15 and other assault weapons. A ban has broad support—even the *New York Post* loudly endorsed such a ban in 2019.

We have passed an assault weapons ban before. Republicans and Democrats together passed it three decades ago in 1994. Alas, in 2004, we allowed the ban to expire.

And we know this weapons ban worked. One study found that in the decade that followed the ban's lapse, mass shootings went back up 183 percent and deaths from mass shootings went up 239 percent.

But even as we change the Secret Service and act to ban weapons of war like the AR-15, we will still have fallen short of our duty to our constituents and the American public if we fail to denounce every instance of political and ideologically motivated violence in whatever form it takes.

Republicans and Democrats have come together to denounce this assassination attempt, just as we did the violent attempts on the lives of Representatives Steve Scalise and Gabby Giffords, and on Paul Pelosi, the husband of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was attacked and brutalized in his home.

And in the immediate aftermath of the January 6, 2021 mass violence waged against us and the Vice President and the constitutional transfer of power, Democrats and Republicans—including Senator McConnell, Chairman Comer, and other colleagues—all denounced this violent assault on our democracy that wounded approximately 140 officers from the U.S. Capitol Police and the Metropolitan Police Department.

Political scientists tell us that authoritarian attacks on democratic institutions begin with political parties refusing to disavow, or openly embracing, political violence as an instrument of obtaining state power. We have to reject that on a strong bipartisan basis—as Chairman Comer and I have done—even as we ensure our Secret Service is up to its vital task of protecting Presidents and candidates and as we work to ensure that America is free from the violence of weapons of war.

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