

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

Democratic Roundtable: “The Real Facts of Life: The Long-Term Effects of Gun Violence on Young People, Schools and their Communities, Part II” September 23, 2024

Good afternoon and thank you for being here today for this important conversation about the gun violence epidemic. It’s the second roundtable on gun violence the Oversight Democrats have held this Congress, and I’d like to thank my colleagues from Florida, Congressman Frost and Congressman Moskowitz, for their involvement and fierce commitment to ending gun violence.

Two weeks ago, in the immediate wake of the horrific school shooting in Winder, Georgia, my Democratic colleagues and I urged Chairman Comer to immediately convene a hearing on the epidemic of gun violence ravaging America. Our pleas for action have been met with silence.

So far in 2024, there have been nearly 400 mass shootings across the country defined as shootings that kill or injure at least four people, not including the shooter themselves. Yet this Congress, the Majority has refused to hold a single hearing about any mass shooting—with one exception: when one of the intended victims was Donald Trump. The security of the former president and all presidential candidates is obviously critical, and our bipartisan hearing spurred the bipartisan investigation into the assassination attempt of a former president.

But what about the security of students and teachers in Winder, Georgia? Or the safety of children in Uvalde, Texas, or Nashville, Tennessee? What about the people shopping at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, or a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, or worshippers at a church in South Carolina or a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania?

Democrats say that the lives of our children and loved ones count just as much and cry out for serious Congressional investigation and action. Every person in America deserves to live a life free of AR-15 attacks and gun violence—not just presidential candidates

In the face of stony-face Republican refusal to do anything to improve public safety, Democrats have convened this roundtable to lift the voices of people in communities across America still *living* through America’s gun violence epidemic. We hope to force Republicans to acknowledge the staggering human, financial, medical, educational and social costs of their decision to tolerate out-of-control gun violence in our country without doing anything to stop it.

Since the beginning of this Congress, there have been more than 1,000 American mass shootings that have claimed more than 1,000 lives and injured more than 4,300 people—and zero hearings on the problem of gun violence. And these mass shootings represent just 1% of all firearm violence in America.

The gruesome reality is that firearms are the leading killer of children and teens in America, beating out car accidents, childhood diseases, and even cancer. In 2022, an average of *seven young people* died every single day from gun violence in the United States.

And while school shootings may account for only a small fraction of the total gun violence in America, the continued attacks on our elementary and middle and high schools spread terror throughout our communities and are fundamentally changing the character of childhood in America.

Schools should be havens of intellectual and emotional growth where our kids fall in love with learning and acquire the skills needed to become responsible adults and citizens. With rampant and random gun violence afflicting every state in the union, schools have become a locus of fear and anxiety for a “lockdown generation,” where active shooter drills, random bloodshed and community heartbreak have come to define the lives of hundreds of thousands of young Americans and their families.

But even beyond the terrifying violence and gore that are standard fare on TV, there is far more to the picture than meets the eye. In countless American communities, long after the TV cameras have left and the country’s attention has shifted to the next bloody spectacle, the nightmare has just begun for parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and other grieving family members, bereaved loved ones and classmates and teachers and friends left behind to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

In the months and years after a mass shooting, young people injured or wounded in the attack experience continuing fear, pain, trauma and disorientation, and struggle to hang on to what is left of their lives. Studies show they are less likely to graduate from high school, obtain a college degree, or even find their place in the labor market compared to young people who haven’t lived so directly through the horrors of gun violence. In the year after getting shot and enduring a firearm injury, kids will experience not only violent interruption of their academic, extracurricular, social and athletic lives but substantial increases in psychiatric disorders and higher rates of alcohol and substance abuse.

The parents, siblings and family of a wounded gun violence survivor also experience a marked increase in psychiatric disorders themselves and seek 75% more mental healthcare attention. That doesn’t account for the fear and trauma that these survivors experience every single day. The path to recovery is long and winding, and many—if not most—never fully recover.

There is also an economic cost to our uniquely American gun violence epidemic, one that is borne by the schools and surrounding communities that experience a school shooting or gun violence. Research shows that gun violence costs the United States more than \$550 billion every year, more than a half-trillion dollars a year that the gun dealers and firearm manufacturers don’t pay for; that’s the equivalent of about 2.6% of our nation’s GDP.

Without meaningful, commonsense gun reform, Americans are paying more every year in taxes to pay massive medical and hospital emergency room and long-term care costs, expensive school resources for security, building reinforcements and cleanup costs, huge criminal justice and first responder costs—to recover and respond to the relentless gun violence epidemic.

Our panelists today will share their stories about what it means to live with the staggering invisible consequences of gun violence and the heartbreaking obstacles they have encountered as they and their communities try to recover some semblance of normal life. They will share their experience with the overwhelming and enduring medical and psychiatric costs of a mass shooting and the psychological, emotional, educational and financial difficulties of trying to address so much trauma, grief and fear in the wake of gun violence.

In addition to our other panelists, we've invited here today three principals from public schools that have suffered an episode of gun violence. It is critical for Americans to hear their stories. They will tell us about the recovery process and what is needed to support the next school and community that suffers a shooting. Anyone who thinks a school community can suffer a mass AR-15 attack on Friday can dust themselves off over the weekend and be back in action on Monday is about to get an education into the real facts of life from American communities still reeling from gun violence years later.

We're told that gun violence is just a "fact of life" in America and are invited to believe nothing can be done about it, c'est la vie. Gun violence is a fact of *death* in America, the leading cause of death for children and teenagers, but as you're about to see, it's indeed a fact of *life* too for all the injured, wounded, traumatized, and broken-hearted people who struggle to hang on in the wake of such an immense disaster.

We Democrats refuse to accept gun violence as an inevitable fact of death or life in America, and we must build a better and more peaceful nation for our children and the lockdown generation.

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