

passing new gun laws, we should enforce those already on the books.

Here in Washington, for example, there are 2,400 violent crimes committed with firearms in 1998. Only two criminals were prosecuted in Federal court for these gun crimes. This is not uncommon. A study by Syracuse University found that Federal prosecution of gun crimes has dropped, has dropped by 44 percent since 1993.

However, only a 2-hour drive from here, where I am speaking, vigorous Federal action has helped to reduce gun homicides in Richmond, Virginia, by one half. Project Exile is an effective, anti-violence program promising Federal prosecution and an additional 5 years in jail for felons caught with a gun. In Richmond, more prosecutions under Federal gun laws took place than in California, New Jersey, New York, and Washington, D.C. combined.

The President and his supporters want to create a false sense of security by enacting more laws with little or no real impact on the problem. A stronger commitment to enforcing the laws already on the books will do far more to protect our communities and our school rooms from gun violence.

GUN VIOLENCE UNDERCUTTING AMERICAN VALUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MORELLA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague discussing the issue of gun violence, but I could not disagree with his assessment more.

A livable community is one where people are safe, healthy, and economically secure. Gun violence undercuts each of those elements. We are not safe today in the epidemic of gun violence, whether it is in Mount Morris Township, Michigan; Littleton, Colorado; or Springfield, Oregon. Gun violence is a leading cause of death and injury, 12 per day for children alone. And our families are not economically secure. Gun injuries, injuries, cost almost \$20,000 per incident to treat, and the cost of a gun-related death is approximately one-third of a million dollars.

In the face of overwhelming evidence about gun violence, the gun apologists continue to argue that guns somehow make us safer, and simple common sense gun legislation is unnecessary. By their logic, we could get rid of metal detectors in airports. Yes, a few guns might get through, but almost certainly well-armed passengers would gun down the terrorists.

A little article in today's Post notes that for the second time in a week, a passenger was arrested on a plane for assaulting a pilot. Would we be better off if that passenger had been armed so that there would have been a gun battle instead of a fist fight?

The NRA argues that the people who want to reduce gun violence have blood

on their hands, that they want a certain level of violence. I was with the President of the United States as he visited the victims and the families in my State in Springfield, Oregon; and I know that such an assertion is as untrue as it is sick and twisted.

Tragically, it is consistent with the NRA's approach and that of their apologists. They oppose even the most simple common sense approaches. If they had their way, the Brady Bill would not have passed and 400,000 felons and mentally ill people would have had guns outright, instead of eliminating that opportunity for them. Does anyone think that that would have made us safer?

We do not have to be stalemated by this argument. There are simple common sense approaches. We can require safe storage of guns. Maybe it would not have made a difference for that little 6-year-old boy and the girl he shot in terms of that home, but maybe the gun would not have been stolen in the first place if it had been in a lockbox.

We can lead by example by making sure that smart gun technology is available for law enforcement officials. One in six law enforcement officials who are killed with a gun are killed with their own service revolver or that of one of their partners. If the Federal Government and State governments would announce that next year we will not purchase guns that are not personalized, that cannot be wrestled away, we could move that technology forward by leaps and bounds.

We can make guns safer to reduce accidental death and injury. Why in the name of all that is holy do we sell guns in this country that do not tell you whether or not there is a bullet in the chamber, when we have mandated child-proof bottles for aspirin and cigarette lighters? Why do we have more consumer protections for toy guns than real guns? Sadly, it is the apologists for the gun lobby who have had their way.

We can also keep guns out of the hands of violent felons; not just violent felons, but violent misdemeanants as well. A study at the University of California-Davis has demonstrated that those who are convicted of misdemeanor crimes are 7.5 times more likely to be charged with new crimes than those with no criminal records. The vast majority of people who own guns, as well as normal citizens who do not, support prohibitions like this.

Finally, we can take a step here in Congress today. We can end the gridlock. The Republican leadership should, must, let us move forward. The conferees on the juvenile violence bill have not met since August, hung up over these gun violence provisions. They ought to meet. They ought to meet today and allow us to vote on these simple, common sense provisions.

Finally, people at home today have an opportunity and responsibility themselves to reduce gun violence. Parents should not only demand that

Congress act, but they should make sure that if they have a gun in a home, that it is stored safely, and if a child of theirs is going to go next door to play at a neighbor's house, they ought to find out if there is a gun in that house and demand that it be stored safely before their child plays there.

There is no excuse for continuing to tolerate the highest rate of gun violence in the developed world in our country.

INS MANAGEMENT NEEDS TO DO ITS JOB

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Madam Speaker, I do not have to remind this House about the fine work of our Border Patrol agents. They put their lives at risk every day to slow the flow of illegal drugs into this country and to keep our borders safe from dangerous aliens. Their work in helping to arrest a suspected terrorist near Port Angeles, Washington, in December was exemplary. We all appreciate their efforts. Due to the current inept management of the INS, however, the job of these officers is made much, much more difficult.

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Over the past two fiscal years, Congress has appropriated funds for the INS to hire 2,000 new Border Patrol agents. The agency has failed to hire anywhere near that number, and every new agent they have hired has been assigned to the southern border, even though our northern border also has problems.

In fact, until recently, the INS had been detailing agents from our already shorthanded northwestern border to shore up its Border Patrol officers in Arizona. At one point, nearly 10 percent of the field agents in Washington State were assigned to the southern border. The INS has indefinitely postponed the details, but refuses to call a permanent halt to transfers to the southern border.

This is not what Congress wanted. There were supposed to be more agents in Washington State, not less. I agree that there are serious problems on the southern border. That is why the INS was given so much money for the Border Patrol last year. The INS management needs to do its job and hire more agents instead of robbing from one shorthanded border to fill out another. There is no reason why northern border staffing should not be increased.

Last week, with my colleagues, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS), I sent a letter to the INS Commissioner, Doris Meissner, demanding a permanent end to transfers of the northwestern Border

Patrol agents and urging higher staffing levels on the northern border.

Madam Speaker, how many more illegal drugs and weapons will flood across our northern border before the INS finally cleans up its act.

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG COVERAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MORELLA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, should the Medicare program offer prescription drug coverage? What good is insurance if it covers the diagnosis, but not the cure. Of course, Medicare should cover prescription drugs.

Why can we not target coverage to just the lowest income seniors? I can think of several reasons why that is a bad idea. First, Medicare endures in this country because every American contributes to it and every American at the age of 65 will benefit from it. A third of all seniors, over 10 million seniors, lack drug coverage; millions more are barely insured; employers are dropping their retiree coverage and private health insurers are cutting back their prescription drug benefits.

This is not an isolated or a status problem that can be solved in a piecemeal fashion. It is broad based and it is getting worse. Whether or not Medicare should cover prescription drugs should not even be a real question. If one believes this Nation benefits from helping seniors live in good health and above poverty, then Medicare should cover prescription drugs. But it is expensive to cover prescription drugs.

Can our government afford it? We are the wealthiest Nation in the world. Our retirees are collectively responsible for our current prosperity. Their security and their well-being resonate across families, communities, and the Nation. We can afford to, and it is in our interests, to provide seniors health coverage that makes sense, and that means providing prescription drug coverage. But we cannot afford to waste tax dollars that otherwise would be used to bolster Medicare's long term solvency. We need to pay fair prices for prescription drugs.

So are the current prices fair? For the sake of argument let us define "fair" in this case as necessary to continue a brisk pace of research and development. Maybe prices are fair, maybe drug companies have no choice but to charge such high prices. But I doubt it. Knowing how much drug companies are investing in marketing, knowing what their profit margins are, knowing what their CEOs and top executives are paid, knowing that any reduction in prices can be largely offset by increases in sales volume, I doubt prescription drug prices need to be that high.

But even if drug makers could justify their revenue requirements, how could

they justify placing such a disproportionate burden on Americans? How can they justify charging Americans two and three and four times what they charge individuals in other industrialized nations. How and why are prescription drugs more expensive here? Because other countries will not tolerate these outrageous prices and because we in this Congress have tolerated them.

We do not negotiate prices; we do not demand that drug manufacturers reduce their prices to reflect the federally funded portion of research and development. We do not make use of the collective purchasing power of 38 million seniors to demand fairly-priced drugs. Instead, we nod our heads knowingly when drug manufacturers warn us that any action we take could stifle research and development. Drug prices can come down in the U.S. without stifling that research and development.

Take the case of medical devices. The Medicare program is the largest purchaser of medical devices in the U.S. Medicare pays discounted prices for medical devices and yet new devices are developed every day. The government funds 40 percent of the R&D in the United States. Sources other than drug companies fund another 10 percent of drug research and development. Drug companies receive huge tax breaks, drug makers pay an effective rate 10 percentage points lower than the average for all major industries. Drug profits are 5 percent higher than any other industry.

In 1998, the CEO of Bristol-Meyers-Squibb was paid \$146 million in salary and benefits. Obviously, a fast way to make money is to charge inflated prices for prescription drugs. It works beautifully for the drug companies, but it does not make it right.

So what do we do about high drug prices? The drug industry says the best way is to make prescription drugs affordable for seniors by enrolling all 38 million in private health insurance plans. That clearly has not worked as we have seen the price of health insurance go up and up and up.

We have other options. I have introduced legislation that would give drug manufacturers a choice. They could either disclose their true costs and work with us to bring the prices down, or they could license their patents to generic drug companies and let the free market, using good old-fashioned competition, bring prices to a more reasonable level.

The gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) has introduced legislation that would permit seniors to purchase drugs at discounted prices. The gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. BERRY) have introduced legislation that would permit us to import drugs when they are priced less expensively in other countries.

So I ask again, should Medicare provide prescription drug coverage for seniors? The answer is yes. Will it be ex-

pensive? The answer is yes. Is there some way we can make it less expensive? The answer is a resounding yes.

Now, will this Congress add a drug benefit to Medicare this year? I do not know the answer to that. We may not get a chance to vote, or the majority of the Republican leadership may go with yet another stopgap measure rather than taking a logical step in updating the Medicare benefits package.

LEGISLATION TO ALLOW FDA AUTHORITY TO REGULATE TOBACCO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WAXMAN. Madam Speaker, today the Supreme Court recognized that tobacco use is perhaps the most single significant threat to public health in the United States. Unfortunately, the Court also ruled that Congress had not given the Food and Drug Administration explicit authority to regulate tobacco.

We can change that today.

The Republican leadership blocked legislation in the past to give FDA this authority. This afternoon, I will reintroduce a bill that gives FDA explicit authority to regulate tobacco.

The Republican leadership has sole power to bring this bill to the floor this week or next week or next month. But the day has passed to ignore tobacco's deadly toll and the thousands of children who start smoking every day. We cannot look to FDA. We cannot look to the courts. We have the responsibility, and we must act.

Two years ago, I reached a comprehensive agreement with the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BLILEY), the chairman of the Committee on Commerce, to reduce smoking by children. The Republican leadership must let the House consider tobacco legislation. It is long overdue.

We had hoped the Supreme Court would have allowed the FDA to regulate tobacco on its own. Their decision today by 5 to 4 has sent the issue back to the Congress. It is now our responsibility. We can ignore that responsibility no longer.

With the bill that I will introduce today, it will be very clear that FDA will be able to regulate tobacco as they have chosen to do to stop them from targeting our kids. I call on the Republican leadership to work on a bipartisan basis to give the FDA this authority. We must stop tobacco companies from going after our children at the ages of 12, 13, and 14 to get them to start smoking a product that they know will hook many of them and keep them smoking into adulthood.