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Floor Statement Regarding H.R. 5471

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America is still absorbing the devastation that was inflicted on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, over the weekend. This attack is the deadliest mass shooting in American history - 49 innocent, mostly young, people were killed and 53 others were maimed. We do not know, with any certainty, what exactly drove the perpetrator to carry out this hateful attack.

But there is one thing we do know beyond the shadow of a doubt - divisive rhetoric that pits Americans against each other and empty gestures will do nothing to heal Orlando's deep wounds or prevent the next attack. Unfortunately, railing against the American Muslim community is all that some, including the presumptive Republican nominee, are offering.

Meanwhile, empty gestures, like yet-another "moment of silence" and expedited House consideration of repackaged measures that are already pending in the Senate is as far as the House Republican Leadership is willing to go.

Although there is little to object to in H.R. 5471, particularly since it largely codifies what the Department of Homeland Security is already doing, it is important to state-- on the record-- that it offers nothing new to respond to the Orlando attack.

Sadly, when it comes to preventing mass shootings in houses of worship, schools, workplaces, and other public spaces, the American public has come to expect very little from this Congress.

The legislation before us today will not change that. It authorizes: a counterterrorism coordination body that already exists within the DHS, training on how to do community awareness briefings that DHS already does, the utilization of public testimonials to counter violent extremism, which the Department has repeatedly told Congress it already has authority to do, and an assessment of how DHS partners with local communities to counter violent extremism.

The House has spoken on provisions of H.R. 5471, and DHS is already carrying out the activities it authorizes. As such, there is nothing objectionable on the four corners of these pages. What I do object to is the House not acting on measures that could help prevent the next mass shooting.

For instance, there is H.R. 1076, the so-called "No Fly, No Buy" Act, a bipartisan measure, introduced by my Republican colleague from the Committee on Homeland Security, Peter King,

to allow the FBI to prohibit a person on the terrorist watchlist from purchasing a firearm. Closing this homeland security gap in our law has the support of 83 percent of Americans, including some gun owners.

Moreover, more than 180 Members of this chamber have signaled their support by signing a discharge petition to demand the bill's immediate consideration.

Analysis issued this week by the Government Accountability Office underscores the need for action. It found that 90% of the people on the terrorist watchlist who attempted to legally purchase firearms were successful.

Tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the terrorist attack on Mother Emmanuel in Charleston, South Carolina. That deadly attack, carried out in furtherance of a violent ideology, claimed the lives of nine people gathered in prayer and fellowship.

It was carried out by a domestic terrorist who, like the perpetrators of attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando, was radicalized by Internet propaganda. Nothing in the legislation we are considering today would have stopped that ideologically-motivated mass shooting.

I would take this opportunity to, again, highlight that those with a single-minded focus on one foreign terrorist organization—namely ISIL—as is the case with H.R. 5471, are turning a blind eye to a gathering storm.

In just the past year, the number of anti-government groups espousing violence has increased three-fold. Since 2008, when the Southern Poverty Law Center numbered anti-government groups at 149, there has been a 670% increase. Yes, today there are 998 anti-government groups.

Yesterday, I co-hosted with the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Grijalva, a forum to take expert testimony on the homeland security threat posed by armed militia and anti-government groups.

We were forced to hold a forum because the Chairmen of our respective Committees—Homeland Security and Natural Resources—have rebuffed our repeated requests for a hearing to examine domestic terrorism. The House Republican Leadership's refusal to acknowledge the threat of domestic terrorism echoes its unwillingness to take action to prevent future mass shootings.

As I said before, while I generally do not object to H.R. 5471, it cannot be the sum-total of what this Congress is willing to do in response to the mass shootings in Orlando, San Bernardino, Charleston and the concerns of Americans across the nation. Our constituents deserve better.