

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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March 7, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden:

We write to urge you to hold hearings as soon as possible to address gun violence in this country.

On February 14, 17 members of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School community in Parkland, Florida lost their lives at the hands of a 19-year-old armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle. This tragedy is one of more than 230 school shootings that have occurred since 2012, when 20 first graders and teachers were murdered with an assault rifle at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.¹ Indeed, in just the past two years, this country has witnessed four of the ten worst gun massacres in modern American history.² Seven of the eleven most deadly mass shootings have taken place since 2007, when 32 students and teachers were killed at Virginia Tech.³

The day after the Parkland shooting, Speaker Ryan said that he was not willing to discuss gun control at this time.⁴ The Trump Administration said the same thing after a gunman killed

¹ *After Sandy Hook, More than 400 People Have Been Shot in Over 200 School Shootings*, New York Times (Feb. 15, 2018).

² *Deadliest Mass Shootings in Modern U.S. History Fast Facts*, CNN (Feb. 19, 2018).

³ *Florida school shooting now among the deadliest gun massacres in U.S. History*, ABC News (Feb. 15, 2018).

⁴ *Paul Ryan says not yet time for political battles on guns*, CNN (Feb. 15, 2018); *The mix of politicians saying it's either not the time to talk about gun control or it's past time*, ABC News (Feb. 16, 2018).

58 people in Las Vegas, Nevada last October, albeit while promising that “one day” such policy conversations would be appropriate.⁵ Identical promises were made after Sandy Hook.⁶

Americans deserve better than empty promises and delaying tactics. “One day” is now, and this debate has gone on long enough. The lives of our children and our constituents are at risk, and it is past time for us to take common-sense measures to protect them. The American people rightfully have questions about the ever-increasing capacity of guns to kill or seriously harm in large numbers and why these weapons are so easy to obtain in the marketplace. There are also legitimate questions this Committee must take up, including the ease of purchasing ammunition and gun accessories online and whether social media is contributing to the societal divisions on the topic of gun violence.

On February 16, we wrote a letter asking you to hold a hearing on the adequacy of federal investment in gun violence prevention research, as gun violence is a public health crisis that is claiming thousands of lives every year. To date, our Committee has yet to announce such a hearing, and we have not received a response to that request.

Today, we reiterate our push for Congress, and specifically our Committee, to do more to explore common-sense solutions to gun violence. In addition to the gun violence research hearing, we urge you to immediately schedule a series of hearings on this topic including:

1. Gun violence in America: Who does gun violence hurt?

This hearing would examine who is most likely to be killed or injured in a firearm related incident, what proportion of gun deaths are attributable to suicide, accidents, or mass shootings, and the barriers to predicting when and where a mass shooting is likely to take place. It should also address ways to reduce the death toll in situations such as domestic violence, where the presence of a gun increases the risk of death by five times,⁷ and suicide, where firearms accounted for over half of all self-inflicted deaths in 2016.⁸

2. The lethality of guns in America: Where do you draw the line between sport, self-defense, and public threat?

This hearing would scrutinize if mass shootings have become increasingly deadly in recent years and whether there is a rising death toll attributable to particular guns, ammunition,

⁵ *White House says now not the time for gun debate*, Politico (Oct. 2, 2017).

⁶ *Obama Vows Fast Action in New Push for Gun Control*, New York Times (Dec. 19, 2012).

⁷ Everytown for Gun Safety, *Guns and Domestic Violence* (www.everytownresearch.org/guns-domestic-violence/).

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury* (Mar. 17, 2017) (www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm).

or accessories. This hearing would also examine the types of guns frequently used for sport and self-defense, and the ease with which they can be purchased.

3. “Shoot Now, Pay Later”: Sales of guns, ammunition, and accessories over the Internet

One gun sales website advertises “Shoot Now, Pay Later,” and another promotes “Click Here to find out how easy it is to own a suppressor or Short-barreled Rifle.”⁹ Yet one more website advertises that “Local Sales are ALWAYS FREE.”¹⁰ This Committee should explore whether federal agencies have the tools they need to exercise effective oversight of the distribution of these products through e-commerce. Our hearing should explore the question of how easy it is to purchase a gun over the internet, and what both companies and the government can do to ensure that there are no loopholes that allow people to get a gun online that they could not purchase in a store.

4. What role does social media play in the divisions of the gun debate?

News reports indicate that after the Parkland shooting, bots and trolls began blasting social media with inflammatory pro-gun and anti-gun messages. This was reportedly done in an effort to “stir the pot” for the purpose of “creating public doubt in institutions like the police or media.”¹¹ In addition, messages posted through these media accused Parkland survivors of being “crisis actors,” while other sources report that survivors and their families received death threats after speaking out.¹² One analysis indicated that people on online forums worked aggressively to undermine news reports about the shooting, potentially leaving “long-lasting scars on students and their families.”¹³ This Committee should examine whether social media is increasing the hostility surrounding this debate, and if so, what steps can be taken to protect public discourse.

⁹ Warrior One, Shoot Now Pay Later Financing Page (www.warriorone.info/page.shoot-now-pay-later) (accessed Feb. 26, 2018); GrabAGun, Home Page (www.grabagun.com) (accessed Feb. 26, 2018).

¹⁰ Guns America, Home Page (www.gunsamerica.com) (accessed Feb. 23, 2018).

¹¹ *After Florida School Shooting, Russian ‘Bot’ Army Pounced*, New York Times (Feb. 19, 2018); *Russian Trolls Are Flooding Social Media With Messages Meant To Increase Tensions In U.S.*, National Public Radio (Feb. 21, 2018).

¹² *“I am not a crisis actor”*: Florida teens fire back at right-wing conspiracy theorists, The Washington Post (Feb. 21, 2018); *Parkland-Shooting Survivor Logs Off Facebook After Death Threats*, New York Magazine (Feb. 22, 2018).

¹³ *We studied thousands of anonymous posts about the Parkland attack – and found a conspiracy in the making*, The Washington Post (Feb. 27, 2018).

We urge you to hold hearings as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please contact Christina Calce, Julie Babayan, or Kevin McAloon of the Democratic Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.

The lives of our children depend on this Congress and our Committee taking action on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



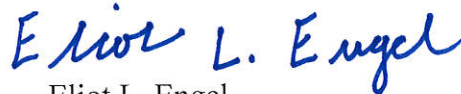
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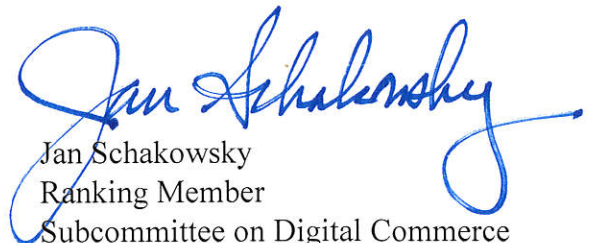
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