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## **The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 28, 2013

# Remarks by the President on Gun Safety

East Room

11:58 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you, everybody. Thank you, Katerina, for sharing your story. Reema was lucky to have you as a teacher, and all of us are fortunate to have you here today. And I'm glad we had a chance to remember her.

Katerina, as you just heard, lost one of her most promising students in Virginia Tech, the shootings there that took place six years ago. And she and dozens of other moms and dads, all victims of gun violence, have come here today from across the country -- united not only in grief and loss, but also in resolve, and in courage, and in a deep determination to do whatever they can, as parents and as citizens to protect other kids and spare other families from the awful pain that they have endured.

As any of the families and friends who are here today can tell you, the grief doesn't ever go away. That loss, that pain sticks with you. It lingers on in places like Blacksburg and Tucson and Aurora. That anguish is still fresh in Newtown. It's been barely 100 days since 20 innocent children and six brave educators were taken from us by gun violence -- including Grace McDonnell and Lauren Rousseau and Jesse Lewis, whose families are here today.

That agony burns deep in the families of thousands -- thousands of Americans who have been stolen from our lives by a bullet from a gun over these last 100 days -- including Hadiya Pendleton, who was killed on her way to school less than two months ago, and whose mom is also here today. Everything they lived for and hoped for, taken away in an instant. We have moms on this stage whose children were killed as recently as 35 days ago.

I don't think any of us who are parents can hear their stories and not think about our own daughters and our own sons and our own grandchildren. We all feel that it is our first impulse, as parents, to do everything we can to protect our children from harm; to make any sacrifice to keep them safe; to do what we have to do to give them a future where they can grow up and learn and explore, and become the amazing people they're destined to be.

That's why, in January, Joe Biden, leading a task force, came up with, and I put forward, a series of common-sense proposals to reduce the epidemic of gun violence and keep our kids safe. In my State of the Union address, I called on Congress to give these proposals a vote. And in just a couple of weeks, they will.

Earlier this month, the Senate advanced some of the most important reforms designed to reduce gun violence. All of them are consistent with the Second Amendment. None of them will infringe on the rights of responsible gun owners. What they will do is keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people who put others at risk. And this is our best chance in more than a decade to take common-sense steps that will save lives.

As I said when I visited Newtown just over three months ago, if there is a step we can take that will save just one child, just one parent, just another town from experiencing the same grief that some of the moms and dads who are here have endured, then we should be doing it. We have an obligation to try.

Now, in the coming weeks, members of Congress will vote on whether we should require universal background checks for anyone who wants to buy a gun so that criminals or people with severe mental illnesses can't get their hands on one. They'll vote on tough new penalties for anyone who buys guns only to turn around and sell them to criminals. They'll vote on a measure that would keep weapons of war and high-capacity ammunition magazines that facilitate these mass killings off our streets. They'll get to vote on legislation that would help schools become safer and help people struggling with mental health problems to get the treatment that they need.

None of these ideas should be controversial. Why wouldn't we want to make it more difficult for a dangerous person to get his or her hand on a gun? Why wouldn't we want to close the loophole that allows as many as 40 percent of all gun purchases to take place without a background check? Why wouldn't we do that?

And if you ask most Americans outside of Washington -- including many gun owners -- some of these ideas, they don't consider them controversial. Right now, 90 percent of Americans -- 90 percent -- support background checks that will keep criminals and people who have been found to be a danger to themselves or others from buying a gun. More than 80 percent of Republicans agree. More than 80 percent of gun owners agree. Think about that. How often do 90 percent of Americans agree on anything? (Laughter.) It never happens.

Many other reforms are supported by clear majorities of Americans. And I ask every American to find out where your member of Congress stands on these ideas. If they're not part of that 90 percent who agree that we should make it harder for a criminal or somebody with a severe mental illness to buy a gun, then you should ask them, why not? Why are you part of the 10 percent?

There's absolutely no reason why we can't get this done. But the reason we're talking about here today is because it's not done until it's done. And there are some powerful voices on the other side that are interested in running out the clock or changing the subject or drowning out the majority of the American people to prevent any of these reforms from happening at all. They're doing everything they can to make all our progress collapse under the weight of fear and frustration, or their assumption is that people will just forget about it.

I read an article in the news just the other day wondering is Washington -- has Washington missed its opportunity, because as time goes on after Newtown, somehow people start moving on and forgetting. Let me tell you, the people here, they don't forget. Grace's dad is not forgetting. Hadiya's

mom hasn't forgotten. The notion that two months or three months after something as horrific as what happened in Newtown happens and we've moved on to other things, that's not who we are. That's not who we are.

And I want to make sure every American is listening today. Less than 100 days ago that happened, and the entire country was shocked. And the entire country pledged we would do something about it and that this time would be different. Shame on us if we've forgotten. I haven't forgotten those kids. Shame on us if we've forgotten.

If there's one thing I've said consistently since I first ran for this office: Nothing is more powerful than millions of voices calling for change. And that's why it's so important that all these moms and dads are here today. But that's also why it's important that we've got grassroots groups out there that got started and are out there mobilizing and organizing and keeping up the fight. That's what it's going to take to make this country safer. It's going to take moms and dads, and hunters and sportsmen, and clergy and local officials like the mayors who are here today standing up and saying, this time really is different -- that we're not just going to sit back and wait until the next Newtown or the next Blacksburg or the next innocent, beautiful child who is gunned down in a playground in Chicago or Philadelphia or Los Angeles before we summon the will to act.

Right now, members of Congress are back home in their districts, and many of them are holding events where they can hear from their constituents. So I want everybody who is listening to make yourself heard right now.

If you think that checking someone's criminal record before he can check out a gun show is common sense, you've got to make yourself heard. If you're a responsible, law-abiding gun owner who wants to keep irresponsible, law-breaking individuals from abusing the right to bear arms by inflicting harm on a massive scale, speak up. We need your voices in this debate. If you're a mom like Katerina who wants to make this country safer, a stronger place for our children to learn and grow up, get together with other moms like the ones here today and raise your voices and make yourselves unmistakably heard.

We need everybody to remember how we felt 100 days ago and make sure that what we said at that time wasn't just a bunch of platitudes -- that we meant it.

The desire to make a difference is what brought Corey Thornblad here today. Corey grew up in Oklahoma, where her dad sold firearms at gun shows. And today, she's a mom and a teacher. And Corey said that after Newtown, she cried for days -- for the students who could have been her students; for the parents she could have known; for the teachers like her who go to work every single day and love their kids and want them to succeed. And Corey says, "My heart was broken. And I decided now was the time to act, to march, the time to petition, the time to make phone calls,

because tears were no longer enough." And that's my attitude.

Tears aren't enough. Expressions of sympathy aren't enough. Speeches aren't enough. We've cried enough. We've known enough heartbreak. What we're proposing is not radical, it's not taking away anybody's gun rights. It's something that if we are serious, we will do.

Now is the time to turn that heartbreak into something real. It won't solve every problem. There will still be gun deaths. There will still be tragedies. There will still be violence. There will still be evil. But we can make a difference if not just the activists here on this stage but the general public -- including responsible gun owners -- say, you know what, we can do better than this. We can do better to make sure that fewer parents have to endure the pain of losing a child to an act of violence.

That's what this is about. And if enough people like Katerina and Corey and the rest of the parents who are here today get involved, and if enough members of Congress take a stand for cooperation and common sense, and lead, and don't get squishy because time has passed and maybe it's not on the news every single day -- if that's who we are, if that's our character that we're willing to follow through on commitments that we say are important -- commitments to each other and to our kids -- then I'm confident we can make this country a safer place for all of them.

So thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America. (Applause.)

END

12:13 P.M. EDT



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