

Opening Statement
**JEC Hearing on “Gun Violence in America:
Understanding and Reducing the Cost of Firearm
Injuries and Deaths”**
September 18, 2019, 2:15pm
210 Cannon House Office Building

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us for this hearing of the Joint Economic Committee.

Over the past several weeks, Americans have watched in horror, again and again, as our fellow human beings— young and old—have been murdered in high-profile mass shootings on our soil. As lawmakers, it is not enough for us to grieve these losses.

It is our responsibility, first, to understand what is causing these horrific events, as well as the many other tragic deaths by gun violence that take place in our country every year. And then, it is our responsibility to find any policies that may help prevent tragedies like these in the future—so long as these policies are faithful to our

Constitution, and do not inadvertently harm the very citizens we are trying to protect.

Mass shootings attract our attention because they have such power to inspire fear. When innocent people are gunned down at random and in public, we wonder whether we could be next. And our media, obsessed with their click count and viewership, too often choose to fan these fears rather than portray the truth about the terrible problem of gun violence in this country. Studies have suggested that this irresponsible media coverage may actually increase the number of mass shootings by encouraging potential killers in their sick desire for attention.

The reality of gun violence in America is less sensational than what we see in the media, but no less horrible. Six in ten gun deaths are suicides. In 2017, for every victim of a mass shooting, there were 88 victims of gun suicide and another 52 victims of other forms of gun homicide. Mental illness, spiritual emptiness, and a breakdown in family and community life are the underlying causes of much of our gun violence epidemic—including even mass shootings.

Mass shooters seek to inflict on others the pain, fear, and inner torment that they are already suffering themselves. They often come from broken homes and distressed neighborhoods. The JEC's Social Capital Project has ranked American counties by the health of their family and community life, and has found that half of identified mass shooters come from the bottom quarter of counties. The evil committed by these murderers must be stopped, but we must also seek to uproot its causes.

Millions of law-abiding citizens use guns to protect themselves, their families, and their communities, just as our founders intended. The Constitution protects our right to bear arms because if that right were abridged, we would become more dependent for security on our police and our military. And it is no criticism of our police and military to say that this would ultimately leave us *less* secure, not more. Some Americans have suffered tragedy precisely when they were prevented from exercising their right to bear arms, as we will soon hear from the personal story of Dr. Suzanna Hupp. And when we do enact gun-control

laws, we know that criminals are all too happy to ignore them. One study found that 79% of guns recovered from crime scenes were possessed unlawfully.

This does not mean that we have no ways to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and, especially, the mentally ill. Our state governments have proposed several worthwhile innovations, including those that make it easier for local law enforcement to act swiftly on reports of the suspicious activities that can precede a mass shooting. There is room for reform in our federal statutes as well: for example, we could improve local agencies' reporting to our National Instant Criminal Background Check System for firearms purchases.

Many Americans, including some of our witnesses, have borne in their own lives the unspeakable costs of gun violence. It is important for Congress to listen to their voices. I hope that this committee can present to the rest of our country a model for respectful conversation about some very difficult topics, so that we can work together to reduce the number of lives lost to gun violence.