

We come to the floor with respect, compassion and yes, love for those who have lost loved ones in Tucson last Saturday and for those who are recovering from the physical and psychological wounds. We also come to pay tribute and show love and send our best wishes to Representative Giffords and to Mark Kelly. I hope they feel our love. Our colleague is a beautiful person and everything one would want in a congressional representative--thoughtful, engaged, compassionate, optimistic and a genuinely good person. We also recognize those who responded, staff members quietly going about making democracy work, bystanders, medical responders and surgeons, ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

This hits us on more than a personal level, though. Each year, there are many thousands of Americans felled by gunfire. Each is a personal tragedy to the victim's loved ones. The Tucson shooting strikes a blow to our ability to govern ourselves, to maintain a peaceful society. The rights to assembly peaceably and to speak freely are preserved not just for their own sake, but, as the geniuses who established this country recognized, it is through those rights that we can create a society that protects and extends life, liberty and happiness.

There are lessons to be drawn from the events about our understanding of people with mental illness and their screening and treatment. There are lessons to be drawn about our gun crazy culture. There are lessons to be drawn about the ever-present inflammatory, dehumanizing rhetoric, but let us defer those discussions for the moment and recognize that we are a strong, prosperous and supportive country because of our representative democracy and our freedom to assemble and speak.

Let us in Congress not withdraw. Let us hold more outreach, more town halls, more sidewalk office hours. And let us, in the words of Representative Giffords delivered here on the floor of the House, let us agree to forgo some of our individual interests and intemperance to allow the space for open dialogue, debate and discussion.