these experiments in defiance of their conscience, the law, and the more fundamental principles of human dignity.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND TEEN VIOLENCE

HON. BERNARD SANDERS
OF VERMONT
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 29, 1999

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I submit for printing in the Record this statement by high school students from my home State of Vermont, who were speaking at my recent town meeting on issues facing young people today. I believe that the views of these young people will benefit my colleagues.

RESPECTING SCHOOL VIOLENCE
(On behalf of Sarah Mayer, Jessica Normand, and Colleen McCormick)

Jessica Normand: Set aside the accusations, the anger and the 20-20 hindsight about the massacre of twelve students and one teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20th. The fact remains that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold’s disturbed states of mind are the result of problems that our society has a responsibility to acknowledge and change.

This event has broken the already damaged national spirit, but it has brought to our attention the moral decline in American society. The lack of spiritual guidance among the nation’s youth that was once thought to be politically correct has only made life easier for young Americans to feel lost. Why did Eric Harris believe so strongly that life held no value, and why did Dylan Klebold feel so alone that he followed the demonic beliefs of his friends? These are the questions America must ask itself. Parents, teachers, administrators, friends, relatives, religious leaders, and especially our government must take an active role in the lives of young Americans if future tragedies like the one at Columbine High are to be avoided.

Sarah Mayer: Why is it that prayer is forbidden in schools, yet at the moment of service for those who died in Littleton, the theme of every speech was that the only way to heal such a wound was through faith in God and prayers of the spiritual community?

My fellow classmates and I at Rice Memorial High School are privileged to have prayer in our everyday lives. We feel that teaching kids about their spirituality gives them a stronger moral base to make better decisions throughout their lifetime. An anonymous student from a Catholic high school once said, “We do not kill together because we pray together.”

Colleen McCormick: Kids need to be able to differentiate between fantasy and reality. But can they do this when video games like Doom, which teaches children how to kill people, are readily available? In order to curb the availability of those games, greater restrictions need to be placed on the Internet and sale of home games. Although the Internet has a lot faster communication and is an effective learning tool, it has also made unhealthy things such as pornography and deadly games to be at the fingertips of the young.

The media is another aspect of our society that needs to be more careful about what images they present to children in this country. While freedom of the press is a trade-mark right of Americans, perhaps that right needs to be restricted in terms of violence and sex.

Our proposal is that legislation be passed to more strictly enforce the age limits at movie theaters, and all television channels be required to rate their shows according to government rating system.

Jessica Normand: Besides the media and schools, the most important influence every child has are their parents. As a society, we need to implore all parents to be involved in their children’s lives, and to keep track of the outside influences, such as the Internet, and the harmful media we mentioned earlier.

Sarah Mayer: Kids need to understand that this isn’t a video game, it’s life, and there is no reset button. Thank you.

RESEARCHING TEEN VIOLENCE
(On behalf of Alicia Prince)

ALICIA PRINCE: I am Alicia Prince, here to speak on reducing teen violence.

I think we all have been affected by what happened in Littleton. It has definitely given me the passion to come up here to say it.

I am originally from East Los Angeles, California, and I understand the type of violence that happens throughout our neighborhoods, communities, and in our schools. I think that firearms are a really big part of that, and I think that that should be discussed. I’m not anti-gun; I understand peoples’ rights to carry firearms, private collectors, and household as well. But when they’re in the wrong hands, there is trouble. There is a problem there. And a child’s hands are the wrong hands, and there is no reason why they shouldn’t be.