The House met at 9 a.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes, and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate be continued beyond 9:50 a.m.

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHABOT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. HASTERT. On behalf of the elected entire Republican leadership, I rise today to talk about the efforts of the House to respond to the national crisis surrounding violence in our schools.

Last week's shooting in Conyers, Georgia, only reinforced the fears of many parents about the safety of the schools which their children attend. Studies show that our Nation's schools on average are safer than ever, but average means nothing to the mothers and fathers who send their children to school every day. They want more from us, and we will provide more.

Last week the other body passed legislation that responded in part to the Memorial Day district work of Mr. HYDE to be prepared to mark up legislation the first week we get back from the Memorial Day District work period so it could be ready for the floor the next week. Again, this was much faster than originally proposed. He has agreed to do so.

Later today he and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. McCOLLUM) will announce an outline of our youth violence legislation.

This legislation will focus on making our schools and our streets safer by prosecuting those who break the current gun laws. It will keep lawbreakers in jail longer. It will enact a zero tolerance policy for children who bring guns to school, and it will make sure that dangerous juveniles will not be able to buy guns lawfully when they become adults, and that we have open and complete juvenile records to help us keep guns out of their hands.

When we consider this legislation, the House will be able to work its will regarding certain provisions from the Senate package, just as I had assured the minority leader last week.

The House will vote on trigger locks, background checks at gun shows, and closing the gun purchasing loophole.

We will expedite this legislation, but we will not force it through the system without the proper consideration of the Committee on the Judiciary.

Some of my colleagues, sensing an advantage, may try to go outside of the rules of the House and attach ill-considered riders to legislation not relevant to the juvenile justice issue. That would be a mistake. I know emotions are running high, but let us be honest about this. Even if we did pass legislation this week, it would still be the middle of June at the earliest before we could send a bill to the White House.

 Pretending otherwise, and promising the victims of these terrible tragedies something else, does a tremendous disservice not only to us and to our institution, but to the very people we are trying to protect.

Our Nation's schoolchildren deserve to attend the safest, most secure schools that we can provide, and the parents of our children should rest secure in the knowledge that everything is being done within our powers, both as citizens and legislators, to create precisely that environment.

This is not the time to play on the fears of our most vulnerable. This is the time for aggressive yet responsible leadership, one in which we can think carefully and examine all of the issues before we go off half-informed, searching for the snappiest sound bite rather than working together to develop the best legislation that we can.

This is one of those rare times when the national consensus demands that we act, but it does not require us to rush to judgment, to risk compounding the situation by stampeding toward what sounds like the best way to score points against each other. We can do better than that, and I am determined to see that we will.

By cooperating, we can get a bill to the White House promptly, while making sure that the policies are ready to be enforced when schools reopen in September. The Nation's eyes have turned towards us, looking for responsible leadership. We must resist the temptation to score political points at the expense of the lives and families of our Nation's children.

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1:407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.