

Giffords: “America, You Have the Power to Change Our Congress”

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 28, 2018

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 28, 2018
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Giffords announces new #VoteCourage campaign with first wave of priority races focused on defeating gun lobby politicians, electing gun safety champions

Voters in suburban districts want to see action to address gun violence

Washington, DC — Today, Giffords, the gun safety organization founded by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and Captain Mark Kelly, announced their #VoteCourage campaign focused on defeating politicians who, for years, have refused to pass any gun violence prevention legislation. The campaign will work to bring leaders to Congress who have pledged to support bills that will address the country’s gun violence epidemic. As part of the new effort for 2018, Giffords will maintain a public priority list of elected officials to unseat.

Former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, co-founder of Giffords:

“America, you have the power to change our Congress. The gun lobby has used its cash and influence to stifle any attempts to pass laws in Washington DC to make our schools, parks, and communities more safe. But they forgot about the power of the American people to do big things, to solve seemingly impossible problems. This year, voters will demand that our leaders imagine and act to create a world where gun violence is not a daily problem.

“Politicians paid to defend the firearms industry can no longer get away with saying thoughts and prayers and then staying silent. They can no longer say that these acts of violence are acts of nature, beyond our control. They are not. The American people know it. They are tired of politicians failing to acknowledge this crisis and and voting against our safety.

“Across this country, we will spend every day until the polls close reminding Americans of the power they have – the power to vote. This year it will be used to reshape Washington DC by sweeping out gun lobby champions and bringing in gun safety champions with the courage to pass laws that protect our children and keep guns out of dangerous hands. The time has come to act.”

The initial step to this official launch began in the hours after the Parkland shooting, when Giffords used [#VoteCourage](#) to get people to pledge to support candidates in November who will stand up to the gun lobby and fight for safer communities. In less than a week more than 450,000 Americans took the [pledge](#).

Giffords has also released a new web video to coincide with the launch, encouraging people to join the [#VoteCourage](#) campaign.

In addition to the [#VoteCourage](#) pledge, Giffords will run a robust political program in a set of priority districts to shine light on the incumbent’s record of prioritizing the interests of the gun industry over public safety, and encourage voters to support candidates with the courage to stand up to the gun lobby. The program will include TV and digital advertising, on-the-ground organizing and events, and a voter registration push. Last week, [Giffords announced that it is partnering](#) with NextGen America and Everytown for Gun safety on the voter registration effort. An initial \$1 million has been committed to the effort. In 2017, Giffords launched its candidate training program to help educate candidates who want to run on a gun safety platform and plans to expand the program in 2018.

The first round of the Giffords public priority list of elected officials to unseat is:

- **Mike Coffman** – *US House, Colorado’s 6th Congressional District*. Despite high-profile shootings in Aurora, Littleton and nearby Columbine and [mounting pressure](#) from his constituents to take action, Mike Coffman has continuously stood by the gun lobby and opposed gun safety measures.

- **Vern Buchanan** – *US House, Florida's 16th Congressional District*. Even after the tragedy in Parkland, Florida and **calls** from his constituents to take action, Vern Buchanan has stood by the gun lobby's side and opposed gun safety measures.
- **Pete Sessions** – *US House, Texas' 32nd Congressional District*. Pete Sessions is one of the top recipients of gun lobby contributions in the House. Running in a district that Hillary Clinton won, a gun safety champion is in a prime position to defeat him.
- **Barbara Comstock** – *US House, Virginia's 10th Congressional District*. Precincts across Virginia's 10th District **delivered a win** to gun safety champion Ralph Northam on Election Day in 2017, a resounding defeat for the gun lobby in their own backyard. Gun safety was a **top issue** in the gubernatorial race, and Barbara Comstock can expect it to be a top issue in her race in 2018.
- **Paul Ryan** – *US House, Wisconsin's 1st Congressional District*. The US House has not voted on a bill that would strengthen our nation's gun laws since the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, and since 2015, it's thanks to Paul Ryan. Despite pressure to take up gun safety measures following the shootings in Orlando, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs and now Parkland, Paul Ryan has failed the American people and refused to allow even one vote.
- **Dean Heller** – *US Senate, Nevada*. The shooting in Las Vegas devastated Nevada communities, but Dean Heller has remained quiet and refused to demand meaningful action that would make communities safer from gun violence. In 2016, Nevada voters delivered victories to two gun safety champions, Hillary Clinton and Catherine Cortez Masto, and passed a ballot measure requiring background checks on all gun sales.



The mass shooting at Parkland, in Florida, crystallized the country's frustration with the lack of any action to pass gun safety laws. Gun death rates have climbed to

levels not seen in decades. Currently, the country is averaging nearly 34,000 deaths from guns every year, and [recent polling shows](#) that support for stronger gun laws is at an all-time high. The #VoteCourage campaign will focus on bringing these voters out to the polls and making sure they vote on the issue.

Last November saw [gun safety champions win](#) commandingly across the country – from statewide races in Virginia and New Jersey to a key state senate seat in Washington state. The elections sparked what has become known as the suburban rebellion in the districts that will matter to who will have control of Congress next year.

In 2016, Giffords flagship program was in the US Senate race in New Hampshire, where it invested \$2.6 million in a targeted campaign to defeat incumbent Senator Kelly Ayotte by reminding voters of her vote against universal background checks, making the race a referendum on gun violence prevention.

[Suburban voters overwhelmingly support safer gun laws](#), making most Republican incumbents in suburban districts out-of-step with their voters on the issue. Two bills to further regulate or ban the sale of bump stocks that were introduced in the aftermath of the Las Vegas shooting have a combined 15 Republican co-sponsors, all of whom represent politically vulnerable districts. This is a sign that House Republicans understand that opposing reasonable gun safety measures could be a political liability in 2018.