

9/26/2006 Recognizing October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month

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Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the month of October as national domestic violence awareness month. Though we have made great strides in bringing attention to the tragedy of domestic violence, more than 4 million Americans continue to find themselves victims of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Domestic violence crosses every line of ethnicity, geography, and income. Abuse occurs in every single community in our country -- every community -- and it must be fought in every community.

It wasn't very long ago that family violence was considered just that--a family matter. A battered woman was forced to suffer the cuts and bruises and the terror and tears in silence. In my parents' generation, many folks whispered and had suspicions about what was going on next door. Seeing bruised children or watching a wife cower when her husband spoke to her caused speculation on what was taking place in the home. Unfortunately, no one intervened because that was a family matter and none of their business.

Domestic violence rarely made the headlines then and rarely makes the headlines now, primarily because most of the abuse occurs behind closed doors. In most instances, the victim knows the attacker. More than 50 percent of victims are battered by a boyfriend or girlfriend. More than 30 percent are assaulted by spouses, while 15 percent are attacked by ex-spouses. Many victims are reluctant to report these incidents to anyone because they fear this will only makes things worse.

Society tends to misplace the blame for continued abuse, focusing on the victim and criticizing him or her for not leaving the abuser. In many cases victims simply do not have the physical or financial resources to get out of the relationship. They often stay until things hit rock bottom.

Every year, domestic violence results in approximately 100,000 days of hospitalization and more than 28,000 visits to emergency rooms. In these cases, major medical treatment is often required. Furthermore, the possibility of being murdered by an abuser increases to 75 percent if the woman attempts to leave on her own.

Today, domestic violence is still causing terror and tears. But the story and its ending isn't quite the same. Thankfully, many of the calls for help are now answered. I would like to commend those who work every day to help victims of domestic violence, especially those who work in the nine service areas of my 69 county district-- Dodge City, Emporia, Garden City, Great Bend, Hays, Hutchinson, Liberal, Salina, and Ulysses. They are the unsung heroes battling the culture of darkness that domestic violence victims are caught up in.

Proximity to a safe facility can mean the difference between life and death. Though progress has been made in accessing services, many victims in central and western Kansas and other rural areas remain hundreds of miles away from the closest shelter. Ensuring safe havens for victims who leave abusive environments must continue to be a priority.

Most domestic violence centers rely primarily on grants and local donations. Federal grants made under the Violence Against Women Act provided essential funds for shelter operations and support services. That program has been credited with substantially reducing the levels of violence committed against women and children. We must continue to ensure that our shelters and crisis centers receive adequate funding.

As National Domestic Violence Awareness Month begins, we are reminded that domestic violence is an issue that must be addressed all year long. Only through funding, education and support can America hope to end this terrible crime.