Children's Safety Must Come First

GUEST OPINION BY
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All too often we hear heartbreaking stories about innocent, young children who have suffered at the hands of sex offenders. And as a concerned parent, I feel frustrated when I hear that nearly 100,000 convicted sex offenders have failed to register after moving into communities and neighborhoods throughout the country as is required under current law.

Today, these unregistered sex offenders are moving freely about the country, and the risk that they may strike again grows every day. We've all seen the news reports and read the stories about abductions perpetrated by repeat offenders across the country, including those right here in the Northwest. The fact that these men went unwatched as they committed their outrageous acts of violence and predation is unacceptable.

Such crimes are not confined to any one particular city or part of the country; recent abductions stretching from Idaho to Florida make it clear that this is a nationwide problem that merits a nationwide response. It is time the federal government address the issue with common sense reforms to help solve the increasingly dangerous and widespread problem of violence against children.

Yesterday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 3132, the Children's Safety Act of 2005, legislation I cosponsored that would provide a more comprehensive plan to increase the safety and security of our nation's children in their homes, yards, and neighborhoods.

Provisions in the Children's Safety Act are aimed at preventing violent and sexual crimes against children through a coordinated law enforcement approach. This approach includes broader definitions of what constitutes a violent or sexual crime and increases minimum penalties for those convicted of these crimes against minors.

Additionally, the new statues would increase reporting requirements for known offenders, require them to register prior to leaving prison and enhancing registration tracking, notification and verification of predators. These provisions would give residents and local officials as much information as possible about offenders who move into their communities in order to prevent future abductions, and will augment law enforcement's ability to find missing children before additional harm can come to them.

Other measures designated to protect America's youth, such as the Amber Alert system, have met with great success. The Children's Safety Act would only add to their success and the overall efficacy of our efforts to protect our kids.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of the Children's Safety Act and proud that my colleagues in the House have joined together in overwhelming and bipartisan support of the bill. It is imperative that we protect children throughout our district and our nation while giving mothers and fathers a greater sense of security when it comes to the safety and well-being of their children.

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