

U.S. honors Newtown school shooting victims on 1st anniversary

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USPA News - U.S. President Barack Obama on Saturday honored the victims of last year's massacre at a Connecticut elementary school by lighting candles in the White House, while officials in the town at the center of the tragedy asked for privacy to quietly mark the first anniversary. The memorial at the White House began with the weekly radio address in which Obama mourned the victims of the shooting and called for an end to gun violence.

"One year ago today, a quiet, peaceful town was shattered by unspeakable violence. Six dedicated school workers and 20 beautiful children were taken from our lives forever," he said. The December 14, 2012, massacre happened at around 9:30 a.m. local time when 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, a town about 7 miles (11 kilometers) east of Danbury in Connecticut, before killing himself. His violence at the school lasted only about five minutes but claimed the lives of six adults and 20 children. "As parents, as Americans, the news filled us with grief," Obama said. "Newtown is a town like so many of our hometowns. The victims were educators and kids that could have been any of our own. And our hearts were broken for the families that lost a piece of their heart; for the communities changed forever; for the survivors, so young, whose innocence was torn away far too soon." The candle-lighting memorial at the White House began at 9:29 a.m. local time when Obama and his wife Michelle entered the building's Map Room. They both took a pre-lit candle and lit 26 candles which were arranged on a wooden table, one for each soul lost at Sandy Hook Elementary School. After they finished, the Obamas took a step back and faced the table with their heads bowed for a moment of silence. They stood in silent remembrance for about a minute until the president put his arm around his wife's waist, leading her down the hall and out of the room without making any remarks to reporters. In Connecticut, Governor Dannel Malloy asked citizens to perform an act of kindness and directed U.S. and Connecticut flags to fly at half-staff in honor of the victims at the school. Houses of worship and other organizations across the state also rang their bells 26 times at 9:30 a.m. as the names of the victims were read. "It's my belief that the best way to honor those we lost is to find again the spirit of compassion and togetherness that we felt in the days that followed the heartbreaking events at Sandy Hook Elementary School," Malloy said earlier this week. "Donate to a local charity, volunteer your time in service to your community or simply come together with friends and family and appreciate the time that we have together." But the memorial services in Newtown were mostly quiet as there were no formal events and officials urged journalists to stay away. In his weekly address, Obama said the nation has not yet done enough to make communities safer. "We have to do more to keep dangerous people from getting their hands on a gun so easily. We have to do more to heal troubled minds. We have to do everything we can to protect our children from harm and make them feel loved, and valued, and cared for," he said. The president added: "As a nation, we can't stop every act of violence. We can't heal every troubled mind. But if we want to live in a country where we can go to work, send our kids to school, and walk our streets free from fear, we have to keep trying. We have to keep caring. We have to treat every child like they're our child." The first anniversary comes just weeks after the results of a lengthy investigation were made public, revealing that Lanza was obsessed with the infamous Columbine High School massacre and other mass murders. It concluded that Lanza acted alone but that a motive will probably never be known. In the hours and days after the shooting, investigators found a large number of firearms and other weapons inside the Newtown residence where Lanza lived with his mother, who had legally purchased many of the weapons and was caring for her troubled son. On the morning of the school shooting, Lanza used a rifle to shoot and kill his mother as she slept in her bed. Additionally found inside the house were photos of a dead human wrapped in plastic and a New York Times article covering the February 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University that resulted in the deaths of six people. Also found were photocopied 1891 newspaper articles pertaining to the shooting of school children and a book relating to the mass shooting at an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania in October 2006. "While the vast majority of persons interviewed had no explanation for the shooter's actions, a review of electronic evidence or digital media that appeared to belong to the shooter, revealed that the shooter had a preoccupation with mass shootings, in particular the Columbine shootings, and a strong interest in firearms," the report said. "For example, there was a spreadsheet with mass murders over the years listing information about each shooting." The Columbine massacre happened in April 1999 when 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold went on a killing spree at Columbine High School in Colorado, killing 12 students and one teacher before committing suicide. It was the deadliest high school massacre in U.S. history, prompting changes in school security across the United States. The investigators also discovered additional, equally disturbing electronic evidence such as two videos showing suicide by gunshot, commercial movies depicting mass shootings, a computer game titled "School Shooting" in which the player enters a school and shoots at students, photos of Lanza holding a handgun and rifle to his head and photos of Lanza with a rifle, shotgun and numerous magazines in his pockets. Other electronic evidence included a 5-second video dramatization depicting children being shot, a document describing the prerequisites for a mass murder, a spreadsheet listing mass murders by name and information about the incident, and a large amount

of materials relating to the Columbine massacre as well as other mass murders. In addition, investigators also found materials regarding the topic of pedophilia and advocating for the rights of pedophiles. "No child pornography was seen on any of the digital media," the report stated, although it will never be known if child pornography may have been on a hard drive that appeared to have been intentionally destroyed to make the recovery of data impossible.

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