

Madam Speaker, I rise to call attention to one of the world's oldest and most preventable health tragedies and to recognize the efforts under way to address it.

I am speaking of the needless and preventable death of women in pregnancy and childbirth.

Motherhood is of course at the heart of much of what we value and cherish in our civilization. Yet even today, in this age of scientific achievement, becoming a mother still carries great risk.

During the next 10 years, an estimated three million women may die attempting to bring new life into the world – this is approximately 1,000 mothers per day.

When a mother dies, we lose so much. Her baby is at greater risk, and so are her other children. Families are torn apart and some are thrust into poverty or deeper into poverty.

Maternal mortality is a problem in the developing world. It is also a problem, Madam Speaker, in the United States of America. As I understand the figures, mothers dying around the time of childbirth doubled in this country between 1990 and 2008. Unfortunately, women in the United States have a higher risk of dying from pregnancy-related complications than women in 38 other countries.

Yet in acknowledging this tragedy, I also rise to recognize and applaud efforts that bring real hope. In my district in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, the healthcare company Merck has just announced a new program: “Merck for Mothers.” Merck has pledged a half-billion dollars over the next decade to help alleviate this situation – complications of pregnancy and childbirth. The people of Merck will dedicate their expertise to help make proven solutions more widely available, to develop new technologies and to improve public awareness to save lives.

Making progress against this complex challenge will not be easy. It’s not purely a medical problem. And there are no magic bullets.

I applaud Merck and other organizations and individuals who are dedicating their time, their resources and their expertise to creating an environment where no woman has to die in order to bring a child into the world.