Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEWINE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE EPIDEMIC OF GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago it was a Michigan nursing home and Monday night it was a shootout at the National Zoo here in Washington, D.C. The epidemic of gun violence has become something that affects all Americans, not only those living in our inner cities.

Whenever we open our morning newspapers and read about these tragedies, we are left to wonder whether our loved ones might be the next victims and whether our own community, our own neighborhood, and our own home could be tomorrow's headlines.

The devastation that guns have brought to our families and to our communities has been well documented, but the statistics bear repeating. Only with an understanding of the dimensions of the problem will we ever bring real change.

In 1997 alone, more than 32,000 Americans were shot and killed, including 4,000 children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates by the year 2006 firearms will become the largest single killer of our own children in the United States.

The economic cost of every shooting death in society—if it is necessary to measure it in these cold terms—is $1 million per victim in medical care, police services, and lost productivity.

The American public has grown tired of hearing of these appalling statistics. And so have I. More importantly, they have grown tired of a Congress that does nothing about it, with no real efforts to stop this bloodshed.

Last April, it seemed that the senseless death of 12 students at Columbine High School had finally brought the Nation to a point of judgment. It even appeared to me that this Congress had finally had enough. The shocking and heartbreaking nature of the tragedy, which was really unlike anything in its dimensions that the Nation had faced before, appeared to convince the Congress that it could no longer ignore the problem.

Indeed, this Senate, in one of its finer moments since I became a Member of this institution, courageously passed a juvenile justice bill that included three basic gun safety measures: It banned the possession of assault weapons by minors; it closed the gun show loophole; and it mandated safety locks on all firearms.

Originally, we had sought a more comprehensive solution that would restrict gun sales to one per month, a reasonable proposal; reinstate the Brady waiting period, proven to be an effective proposal; and regulate guns as consumer products, certainly a worthwhile proposal.

But we limited ourselves to those other basic provisions in the interests of a consensus, with a belief that they were so sensible and so necessary that there could be no reasonable opposition. So before the debate even began, the proposals had been limited to what should have represented a consensus view, leaving the more ambitious but still reasonable proposals for another day.

But now, with the 1-year anniversary of the Columbine shootings having passed, it is clear that our confidence, perhaps even our strategy, was misguided. Today, the bill languishes in conference—an unfortunate reminder that no gun law is too important or too responsible that it cannot be opposed by the National Rifle Association.

In place of changes, the Republican leadership and the NRA have offered the American public flimsy rhetoric that blames gun violence on poor enforcement of existing gun laws. The NRA erroneously claims that prosecutions have plummeted under the Clinton administration when, in fact, these prosecutions rose by 25 percent last year.

This campaign provides nothing but further evidence that this agenda is not aimed at protecting our communities, but it is aimed at protecting the status quo—a status quo that most Americans a long time ago decided was unacceptable.

No one disputes the fact that enforcement is a critical element of any response to this problem. That is why, indeed, on this side of the aisle we have supported 1,000 new ATF agents and 1,000 new prosecutors to deal with gun violence.

But as much as we have done, we can always do more; while laws are being enforced, they can be enforced better. But no one can reasonably believe that enforcement alone constitutes a comprehensive or sufficient answer to this national epidemic.

Better enforcement of every gun law ever written will not prevent the 1,500 accidental shootings that are occurring every year. Enforcement of every gun law on the books would not prevent a 6-year-old boy from bringing his father's gun to school and killing a 6-year-old classmate. Nor does it address the fact that 43 percent of parents leave their guns unsecured, and 13 percent have unsecured guns loaded or with ammunition nearby. Enforcing gun laws, vigorous prosecutions, would answer none of those problems.

These realities point to the need for a broad approach to gun control. The provisions contained in the juvenile justice bill are the first steps, but they are important first steps.

The real answer—perhaps the challenge that should have come to this Congress last year—is to bring the entire issue to the Senate, and build upon what is already in the juvenile justice bill by also challenging the Senate to restrict the sale of firearms to one per month, a simple provision which would help eliminate the problem under which my State is suffering, where people go to other States and buy large numbers of firearms and transport them to the cities of New Jersey, selling them, often to children, out of the trunks of cars.

Second, reinstitute the Brady waiting period on handgun purchases to prevent individuals in fits of rage and passion from acting upon their emotions with a gun. Separate the rage of the individual from the purchase of the firearm, giving a cooling off period that can and would save lives. Most important, we must do on the Federal level what Massachusetts recently did on the State level: regulate firearms as consumer products. Firearms remain the only consumer product in America not regulated for safety, a strange, inexplicable, peculiar exception to the law because they are inherently the most dangerous consumer products of them all.

It is, indeed, an absurd, inexplicable contradiction that a toy gun remains regulated but a real gun is not. Consumer regulation would ensure that, as every other product in America, guns are safely designed, built, and distributed, not only for the benefit of the public but also for the people who purchase them. Indeed, who has a greater interest in gun safety by design and construction than the people who buy guns? If the materials are imperfect, if they do not work properly, it is the gun owner who is going to be hurt.

Together these three measures would make a real difference in ending gun violence. Would they end all gun violence? Would they end all crime? Indeed, not. No single provision, no amendment, no law, no single action could eliminate all gun violence or most gun violence. But if we await a perfect solution, we will act upon no solution. Ending the problems of violence and guns in America is not something that will be done by one Congress or one legislative proposal in any one year or probably in any one decade. It is successive ideas in succeeding Congresses where people of goodwill put the public interest first and look for real and serious answers to this epidemic of violence.

As long as the NRA is allowed to dominate the gun debate in place of common sense and compassion, the Columbines of the future are sadly, even tragically, inevitable. It is time for Congress to finally muster the courage to act responsibly on this issue out of concern for our children. Out of respect for the memories of those who have died, we can and should do nothing less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.