successful tracking and arrest of key terrorist figures.

Just last week, we learned how, in 2002, a terror plan to hijack a commercial airliner and fly it into the Los Angeles Library Tower was thwarted. Authorities discovered that Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11, had recruited a suicide hijacking cell to bring down the 73-story skyscraper—the tallest building on the West Coast.

Authorities were able to hunt down and capture Khalid Sheik Mohammed, along with his accomplice, Hambali, the leader in al-Qaida, in Southeast Asia, the leader of the terrorist cell, and three of its terrorist members.

It was a tremendous victory in the war on terror, and it saved countless innocent lives. But it also reminded us that our enemies are ruthless. It reminded us that they are determined to kill scores of Americans, hundreds of Americans, right here on American soil. They are determined to exploit any weakness or slip through any potential loophole.

We cannot let our guard down. We must never, ever let our guard down. We have to stay on the offensive. On 9/11, the enemy was able to allude law enforcement, in part, because our agencies weren't able to share key intelligence information. That is why, within 6 weeks of the attacks on America, Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act with overwhelming bipartisan support. It was near unanimous. The vote was 98 Senators voting in favor.

The PATRIOT Act went to work immediately, tearing down the information wall between agencies, and it allowed the intelligence community and law enforcement to work more closely in pursuit of terrorists and their activities. Since then, it has been highly effective in tracking down terrorists and making America safer. Because of the PATRIOT Act, the United States has charged over 400 suspected terrorists. More than half of them have already been convicted. Law enforcement has broken up terrorist cells all across the country, from New York to California, Virginia, down to Florida.

In San Diego, officials were able to use the PATRIOT Act to investigate and prosecute several suspects in an al-Qaida drug-for-weapons plot. The investigation led to several guilty pleas. The PATRIOT Act also allowed prosecutors and investigators to crack the Virginia jihad case involving 11 men who had trained for jihad in Northern Virginia in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. We need to continue to provide these tools to track and foil terrorist plots before harm can be done to innocent Americans.

The PATRIOT Act has been debated thoroughly. It has been negotiated. It has been drafted, and it has been redrafted again. It is time to bring this process to a close. The bill before us is the result of sincere, good-faith efforts and builds on the work that was accomplished last year to renew the PATRIOT Act. It strengthens our civil liberties protections as well as the core antiterrorist safeguards that have been so critical in fighting the war on terror.

In 2006, the USA PATRIOT Act, as written, once passed, will help us to combat terrorist financing and money laundering, protect our mass transportation systems and railways from attacks such as the one on the London subway last summer, and to secure our seaports. It will help us fight methamphetamine drug abuse, America's No. 1 drug problem today, by restricting access to the ingredients used to make that poisonous drug, methamphetamines.

So the question before us now is pretty straightforward. It is simple. Why delay all of these provisions any longer? Why wait to move forward to make America safer? Why wait to give law enforcement the same tools they already use against white-collar criminals and drug offenders? It doesn't make sense to postpone, to delay, to wait.

Those who are delaying the bill claim they are taking a stand for stronger civil liberty protections. Yet they admit that the renewal of the PATRIOT Act is a vast improvement over current law. Again, why wait to enact the dozens of civil liberties protections in this bill that they have supported for so long. We have a duty and responsibility to protect our fellow Americans. Indeed, it is our highest duty as Senators.

I urge my colleagues to move forward to renew the PATRIOT Act. The time to act is now. It is the only, the best, and the right thing to do.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CHAFEE). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

HEART FOR WOMEN ACT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I wish to take a few moments to speak very briefly about heart disease. Many people might not know but February is American Heart Month, and heart disease, as we certainly know, is the Nation's leading cause of death.

Many women believe heart disease is a man's disease. Unfortunately, there are many women in this country who do not view this as a serious health threat. Yet every year since 1984, cardiovascular disease has claimed the lives of more women than men. In fact, cardiovascular disease death rates have declined in men since 1979, which is great news, but the death rate for women during that same period has actually increased. The numbers are disturbing.

Cardiovascular diseases claim the lives of more than 480,000 women per year. That is nearly a death a minute among females and nearly 12 times as many lives as claimed by breast cancer. One in four females has some form of cardiovascular disease. Again, these are statistics many of us would find alarming, certainly, but also find that it is new information, something we didn't know.

I am pleased to join with my colleague from Michigan, Senator STABENOW, to introduce important legislation we have entitled the HEART For Women Act, or Heart Disease Education, Analysis, and Research, and Treatment For Women Act. This important bill improves the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart disease and stroke in women.

In Alaska, we have some very troubling statistics as they relate to heart disease. In Alaska, cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death, totaling nearly 800 deaths per year. Women in Alaska have higher death rates from stroke than do women nationally. Mortality amongst Native Alaskan women is dramatically on the rise, whereas it is appearing to decline among Caucasian women in the lower 48. So these statistics, again, should cause us concern.

Despite being the No. 1 killer, many women and their health care providers do not know the biggest health care threat to women is heart disease. In fact, a recent survey found that 45 percent of women still do not know heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women.

Perhaps even more troubling is the lack of awareness amongst our health care providers. According to the American Heart Association figures, less than one in five physicians recognize more women suffer from heart disease than men. Only 8 percent of primary care physicians—and even more astounding—only 17 percent of cardiologists recognize that more women die of heart disease than men. Additionally, studies show women are less likely to receive aggressive treatment because heart disease often manifests itself differently in women than in men.

This is why this HEART Act is so important. Our bill takes a three-pronged approach to reducing heart disease death rates for women through education, research, and screening.

First, the bill would authorize the Department of Health and Human Services to educate health care professionals and older women about the unique aspects of care and prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of women with heart disease and stroke.

Second, the bill would require disclosure of gender-specific health information that is already being reported to the Federal Government. We already have many agencies that are collecting the information based on gender, but they don't disseminate or analyze the gender differences. This bill would release that information so it could be studied and important health trends in women could be detected.

Lastly, the bill would authorize the expansion of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's WISEWOMAN program. WISEWOMAN is the acronym for the Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation For Women Across the Nation program. The WISEWOMAN program provides free heart disease and stroke screening to low-income, uninsured women. But the program currently is limited to 14 States. In the State of Alaska, we are fortunate to have two WISEWOMAN program sites, and these programs screen for high blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose in Native Alaskan women, and they have been providing invaluable counseling on diet and exercise. One program in Alaska has successfully screened 1,437 Native Alaskan women and has provided them with culturally appropriate intervention programs that have truly produced lifesaving results.

Heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases cost Americans more than any other disease—an estimated $403 billion in 2006, including more than $250 billion in direct medical costs. We as a Nation can control these costs. Prevention through early detection is the most cost-effective way to combat the disease.

A few days ago we celebrated Valentine's Day, and we saw images of hearts then and we are still seeing them around now. We shouldn't forget that the heart is more than a symbol—it is a vital organ that can't be taken for granted. Coronary disease can be treated effectively, and sometimes even prevented. It does not have to be the No. 1 cause of death in women, and that is why I encourage my colleagues to support the HEART for Women Act.

COMMONSENSE GUN SAFETY LAWS SAVE LIVES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, an analysis by the Violence Policy Center, VPC, of the most recent data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, revealed that the national per capita death rate from guns was 10.36 people per 100,000 in 2003. In addition, 10 States had per capita gun death rates of more than 15 gun deaths per 100,000 people. Not coincidentally, the States with the highest per capita gun death rates also have some of the most lax gun safety laws in the country. This is further evidence that commonsense gun safety laws do save lives.

Each year the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence produces a ''Gun Violence Report Card'' in which it assigns individual States a grade on their gun safety laws of A through F. In its analysis, the Brady campaign evaluates State gun safety laws on factors such as: whether it is illegal for a child to possess a gun without supervision; whether it is illegal to sell a gun to a child; whether gun owners are held responsible for leaving loaded guns easily accessible to children; whether guns are required to have child-safety locks, loaded-chamber indicators and other childproof designs; whether cities and counties have authority to enact local gun safety laws; whether background checks are required at gun shows and between private parties; and, whether it is legal to carry concealed handguns in public.

When the analysis of the CDC gun death data for 2003 is compared with the Brady campaign's report card for the same year, we find that the States with the lowest rates of gun deaths also received the highest grades from the Brady campaign. In fact, four of the five States with the lowest gun death rates received an ''A-,'' the highest grade awarded by the Brady campaign that year, and the fifth received a ''B-.'' These five States had an average rate of 3.81 gun deaths per 100,000 people, less than half of the national average. Conversely, four of the five States with the highest rates of gun deaths received an ''F,'' while the fifth received a ''D-.'' These five States had an average rate of 17.9 gun deaths per 100,000 people.

According to the Brady campaign, none of the top 15 States with the highest rates of gun deaths have laws requiring background checks on guns purchased at gun shows or from private sellers. Under current Federal law, when an individual buys a firearm from a licensed dealer, there are requirements for a background check to ensure that the purchaser is not prohibited by law from purchasing or possessing a firearm. However, this is not the case for all gun purchases. For example, when an individual wants to buy a firearm from a private citizen who is not a licensed gun dealer, there is no Federal requirement that the seller ensure that the purchaser is not in a prohibited category. This creates a loophole in the Federal law, providing prohibited purchasers, including convicted criminals, with potential easy access to dangerous firearms. Fortunately, some States, including the five with the lowest rates of gun deaths, have enacted laws to help close this loophole.

Congress should work to enact national gun safety standards, including mandatory background checks on all gun sales, to help reduce the high rate of gun deaths across the country. The States who have already enacted commonsense gun safety legislation have shown that their laws make a difference and we should follow their lead.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, Thomas Jefferson called religious freedom the ''first freedom.'' As founder and leader over the last 3 years of the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom, I wanted to take this opportunity to pay tribute to this pivotal liberty. Last month, President Bush also recognized this important freedom by declaring ''Religious Freedom Day,'' observed on January 16.

Americans are among the most religious peoples on Earth and are of many faith traditions. Nearly 80 percent of Americans state they pray regularly. Within a few blocks of this Capitol, there are churches, meeting houses, synagogues, mosques, temples, and house of worship of every variety.

The free exercise of religion is a hallmark of our Nation. It is the reason many of our ancestors came here. It is the reason we are able to live peacefully together as a religiously diverse people. Cherished by the American people as the most precious of those rights given by God, religious freedom has been given the pride of place in our Constitution, in the first clause of the first amendment of the Bill of Rights.

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief, as Jefferson and the American Founders recognized, is the prerequisite for the exercise of other basic human rights. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly depend on a free conscience. No basic freedom can be secure where religious freedom is denied.

But these rights do not just belong to Americans. They are universal; they belong to every person in this world. No one, from the worst dictator to the most powerful government, can take away the right for a person to believe as he or she wishes. However, the expression of this belief is too often repressed through the imposition of persecution and death.

Since the Nazi Holocaust against the Jewish people, the principle of religious freedom has gained recognition in foreign policy. The right to religious freedom found worldwide acceptance in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which many nations have agreed. ''Everyone,'' the declaration asserts, ''has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.'' As the declaration makes explicit, ''this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.''

The declaration's article 18 thus provides for the acceptance of religious pluralism; the freedom to convert to another faith; the right to express unorthodox beliefs in one's individual capacity; the right, not only to worship in private or behind the walls of a building but to express one's faith in society. These are powerful concepts that challenge many societies, including at times our own.

For example, I have introduced the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, a