

Democratic and Republican amendments. The distinguished Presiding Officer is a member of that committee. He knows the debate we had and the votes we held. What a filibuster would do now is obstruct the open process of the Senate consideration of gun violence prevention legislation, and it is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. It demeans the Senate, and it turns our backs on 325 million Americans who expect better.

I have worked with Senator COLLINS and others to provide a real-world and commonsense solution to the problem of gun trafficking and straw purchasing. That is the course I urge the Senate to take. Let's go forward and vote. Vote yes, vote no, but vote. Have the courage to vote. Don't turn our backs on the families who have suffered so much.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my full statement be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, four months after that horrific day in Newtown, where 20 children and 6 educators were senselessly murdered, the Senate is poised to make further progress toward the goal of reducing gun violence. It is a goal that all Americans, regardless of political party, should share.

I want to thank our ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, Senator GRASSLEY, for working with us and supporting two of the measures favorably reported by the Judiciary Committee last month. I commend Senator COLLINS, who has been my partner, as we have moved forward with legislation to combat illegal gun trafficking and straw purchasers who obtain firearms to provide them to criminals and gangs. We have been joined in that bipartisan effort by Senators DURBIN, GILLIBRAND, KIRK, KLOBUCHAR, FRANKEN, BLUMENTHAL, SHAHEEN, and KING.

Our bill is intended to give law enforcement better and more effective tools. A bipartisan majority of the Judiciary Committee voted for the Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act, S. 54, and its provisions are included in the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act, S. 649, that Majority Leader REID placed on the Senate calendar just before the last recess and on which he has now moved to proceed.

Straw purchasers circumvent the purposes of the background check system. Straw purchasing firearms is undertaken for one reason—to get a gun into the hands of someone who is legally prohibited from having one. We know that many guns used in criminal activities are acquired through straw purchases. It was a straw purchaser who enabled the brutal murders of two brave firefighters in Webster, NY this past Christmas Eve, and it was a straw purchaser who provided firearms to an individual who murdered a police officer in Plymouth Township, PA, last September.

We need a meaningful solution to this serious problem. We also include suggestions from Senator GILLIBRAND to go after those who traffic in firearms by wrongfully obtaining two or more firearms. We worked hard to develop effective, targeted legislation that will help combat a serious problem and that will do no harm to the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding Americans.

It was an ATF whistleblower who testified last Congress that the existing firearms laws are “toothless”. We can create better law enforcement tools and that is what we are doing with the Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act. I urge all Senators to join with us to close this dangerous loophole in the law that Mexican drug cartels, gangs, and other criminals have exploited for too long.

I especially want to recognize the dedication and leadership of Senator COLLINS to confront the issue of gun violence. Although not a member of the Judiciary Committee, she has been committed to finding commonsense solutions to the problem of gun violence. Senator COLLINS has been dedicated in working with me to address the concerns of other Senators. She and I share a deep respect for the Second Amendment, but we also agree that our laws can be improved to give law enforcement officials the tools they need to help curtail gun violence. She has been a steadfast partner.

Our bill protects Second Amendment rights of lawful gun owners, while cracking down on criminals and those who would assist them. The bill does not create a national firearms registry, nor does it place any additional burdens on law-abiding gun owners or purchasers. It sends a clear message that those who would buy a gun on behalf of a criminal, a member of a drug cartel, or a domestic abuser will be held accountable. That is why our bill is strongly supported by law enforcement.

Some have expressed frustration about the level of prosecutions under existing gun laws. And some have suggested that instead of making sensible changes to our public safety laws to prevent gun violence, Federal law enforcement officials should focus exclusively on existing laws. I share some of that frustration, but I do not agree it is a valid excuse for us to do nothing. Improvements in the enforcement of existing laws and efforts to give law enforcement officials better tools to do their jobs are not mutually exclusive, those efforts complement each other.

A recent article in The Washington Times documented that gun prosecutions were in decline beginning in the Bush administration, and suggests that having a Senate-confirmed director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives would significantly help law enforcement.

As I said in January, Americans are looking to us for solutions and for action, not sloganeering, demagoguery,

or partisanship. That is why it is particularly disappointing to hear that some Senators are pledging to prevent Senate consideration of these legislative proposals by filibustering. It is especially disappointing that some who claim to support regular order and a transparent legislative process accord that process no deference. The Judiciary Committee held three public hearings and four public markups on this legislation. It gave them full and fair consideration. We debated and considered amendments. What a filibuster would do now is obstruct the open process of Senate consideration of gun violence prevention legislation. That is wrong.

I have worked with Senator COLLINS and others to provide a real world, common sense solution to the problem of gun trafficking and straw purchasing. That is the course I urge the Senate to take. We need to proceed to the bill and do what is best for the American people.

TRIBUTE TO COLONEL STEVE STROBRIDGE

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to Colonel Steve Strobbridge, USAF, Retired, in recognition of his distinguished service to his country.

For nearly 44 years, first for 24 years in the Air Force, and concluding with 19 years with the Military Officers Association of America, Colonel Strobbridge has worked tirelessly for the men and women of the military, their families, veterans and their survivors.

Raised in Vergennes, VT, Colonel Strobbridge entered the United States Air Force in 1969 as a second lieutenant following graduation from ROTC at Syracuse University.

After several assignments as a personnel officer and commander in Texas, Thailand, and North Carolina, he was assigned to the Pentagon from 1977 to 1981 as a compensation and legislation analyst at Headquarters USAF. Following assignments as Chief, Officer Assignments and Assistant for Senior Officer Management at HQ, U.S. Air Forces in Europe, he was selected to attend the National War College at Fort McNair in 1985.

Colonel Strobbridge served as Deputy Director and then as Director, Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 1986–1989. In this position, he was responsible for establishing Department of Defense policy on military personnel promotions, utilization, retention, separation, and retirement. In June 1989, he returned to Headquarters USAF as Chief of the Entitlements Division, assuming responsibility for Air Force policy on all matters involving pay and entitlements, including military retirement system and survivor benefits, and all legislative matters affecting active and retired military members and their families.

Following his retirement from the Air Force in January 1994, Colonel Strobbridge joined the Retired Officers Association of America and served as Deputy Director and since 2001 he has served as Director of Government Relations for the Military Officers Association of America, MOAA.

Under Colonel Strobbridge's professional stewardship, MOAA has played a vital role as a principal advocate of legislative initiatives to improve readiness and the quality of life for all members of the uniformed service community—active, reserve, and retired, as well as their families.

Defense News noted recently that “no major [military] personnel-related legislation has been enacted since 1994 without Colonel Strobbridge's imprint.”

Colonel Strobbridge has worked closely with, and has been a valuable resource for, the U.S. Senate and the Senate Armed Services Committee in particular as we enacted a wide range of benefit improvements for our military personnel. He provided input or support for legislative proposals on a wide range of issues, including TRICARE for Life; the elimination of VA disability pay offsets to military retired pay for many retirees; restoration of full cost of living adjustments to retired pay; elimination of the offset to survivor annuities by Social Security payments; TRICARE benefits for reserve families; and many other initiatives that have been invaluable in improving the long-term retention in our Armed Forces.

Colonel Strobbridge's long and distinguished career of leadership and personal dedication to fostering readiness by protecting every servicemember's welfare is an inspiration and a continuing lesson to all who care about the men and women of our military. My best wishes go with him and his family.

Colonel Strobbridge, on the occasion of your retirement as Director of Government Relations for the Military Officers Association of America, I salute you on behalf of all the men and women, past and present, who wear the uniform.

THANKING STAFF

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, on Saturday, March 23, 2013, the Senate passed the budget, S. Con. Res. 8. In my statement, I thanked a few members of my staff and I would like to acknowledge the rest of my dedicated staff who worked tirelessly to pass the Senate budget:

Jeannie Biniek, Sarah Bolton, Michael Branson, Alex Brosseau, Dave Brown, Paula Burg, Josh Caplan, Stephanie Cherkezian, Ally Coll, Brendon Dorgan, Amy Edwards, Robert Etter, Jennifer Hanson, Helen Hare, Robyn Hiestand, Mike Jones, Amaia Kirtland, Tyler Kruzich, Zach Moller, Michael Oleyar, Farouk Ophaso, Jason Park, Miles Patrie, Ryan Pettit, John Righter, Josh Ryan, Evan Schatz, Brian Scholl, Emily Sharp, Eli Zupnick.

Steven Bergsbaken, Shawn Bills, Scott Cheney, Beth Chrusciel, Sean Coit, Jake

Cornett, Carole Cory, Katherine Dapper, Ariel Evans, John Fogarty, Megan Foster, Emma Fulkerson, Adam Goodwin, Dabney Hegg, Alex Keenan, Zach Mallove, Matt McAlvanah, Megahan McCarthy, Ben Merkel, Rachel Milberg, Silke Mounts, James O'Brien, Molly O'Rourke, Lauren Overman, David Prestwood, Stacy Rich, Kathryn Robertson, Meghan Roh, Alexa Seidl, Mike Spahn, Anna Sperling, Michael Waske.

POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT IN UKRAINE

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President. I would like to address the current situation in Ukraine, an important country in the heart of Europe, a bellweather for democratic development in the region, and the current Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE.

Let me first welcome the release from prison Sunday of former Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs and leading opposition figure Yuri Lutsenko. Mr. Lutsenko had been convicted on politically motivated charges and incarcerated since December 2010. President Yanukovich's pardon of Mr. Lutsenko is an encouraging step in the right direction. I also welcome the pardon of former Environment Minister Heorhiy Filipchuk, who also served as a member of Ms. Tymoshenko's Cabinet and had been released last year after his sentence was suspended. By pardoning Mr. Lutsenko and Mr. Filipchuk, President Yanukovich is indicating not only a willingness to resolve what has been a major irritant in Ukraine's relations with the United States and the EU, but also a stain on Ukraine's democratic credentials.

At the same time, I remain deeply concerned about the politically motivated imprisonment of Ukrainian opposition figure and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who has been incarcerated since August 2011.

Mrs. Tymoshenko's case stands out as a significant illustration of Ukraine's backsliding with respect to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law since she was defeated by President Yanukovich in February 2010. The United States, EU, and Canada have repeatedly expressed concerns about the application of selective justice against political opponents, their flawed trials, conditions of detention, and the denial of their ability to participate in last October's parliamentary elections.

As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, which has long been committed to Ukraine's independence and democratic development, I am especially mindful of Ukraine's 2013 OSCE chairmanship. Like any Chair-in-Office, Ukraine faces formidable tasks in leading a multilateral organization that operates on the basis of consensus, which includes 57 countries ranging from mature democracies to oppressive dictatorships. The United States wants Ukraine to succeed, but the reality is that the politically motivated imprisonment of Ms. Tymoshenko casts a cloud over its chairmanship. A Chair-

in-Office must itself have strong democratic credentials if it is to succeed in encouraging reform in other countries.

Furthermore, democratic regression in Ukraine has harmed U.S.-Ukrainian bilateral relations, preventing a traditionally strong partnership from realizing its full potential. It has also slowed down the process of Ukraine's drawing closer to the EU, which is that country's stated foreign policy priority, manifested in the still-delayed signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. More than half a year has gone by since the unanimous adoption of S. Res. 466, calling for the release of Yulia Tymoshenko.

The Ukrainian authorities now need to follow up on the important step they have taken in freeing Yuri Lutsenko. They need to free Ms. Tymoshenko and restore her civil and political rights. By demonstrating commitment to the rule of law and human rights principles embodied by the OSCE, Ukraine will strengthen the credibility of its chairmanship and show it is serious about being a full-fledged member of the democratic community of nations.

I strongly urge the Ukrainian government to resolve the case of Ms. Tymoshenko.

HONOR FLIGHT 2013

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, in April, the participants in the 2013 Honor Flight will be traveling to Washington, DC, to visit memorials of World War II, Vietnam war and the Korean war, as well as the Lincoln Memorial on The National Mall.

I would like to record the names of the World War II veterans selected for this trip: Ms. Hallie Odessa Dixon from Anchorage, who served in the Navy as a telegrapher 2nd Class and also worked as a cryptographic aide. Mr. Chelton S. Feeny from Anchorage, who served in the Army as a private first class, participated in the Army Specialized Training Program at Princeton University, and also worked as a medic on hospital trains. Mr. Dietrich L. Strohmaier from Fairbanks, who served in the Army as a private first class, 25th Division, 35th Regiment and also served briefly in Hollandia, New Guinea, and the Philippines as part of a seven-man recon squad, and later in Japan as part of the Occupation Forces. Mr. Dale Joseph Trombley from Soldotna, who served in the Army Air Corps as a major and B-17 pilot in the 452nd Bomb Group, 730th Air Mobility Squadron, and Mr. John Walker from Soldotna who served in the Army as a sergeant, 2nd Division and 1st Army at Omaha Beach, Belgium and in Germany.

I would also like to make special mention of a Korean war veteran, Mr. William Ladd McBride, from Fairbanks, who has been selected for the trip as well. His vision is failing and it is his fervent wish to see 'his' memorial while he still can with his own eyes. Mr. McBride joined the Army in