

explain why it has not been using the gun laws already on the books to prosecute gun cases. We know that weapons-related convictions under the Obama administration are down more than 30 percent compared to a decade ago.

So, look, no one wants terrorists to be able to buy guns or explosives—no one. Instead of using this as an opportunity to push a partisan agenda or craft the next 30-second campaign ad, colleagues like Senator CORNYN and Senator GRASSLEY are pursuing real solutions that can help keep Americans safer from the threat of terrorism. They are approaching this serious topic in a serious and constitutional way. They also understand that ultimately the most important way to prevent more terrorist tragedies at home is by defeating terrorism overseas.

Serious solutions—that is what the American people now demand more than ever. That is where we should keep our focus.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have an epidemic of gun violence. It is here. I wish it weren't, but it is here, and it is getting worse every day.

Last week's attack at a popular night club in Orlando, FL, was the deadliest shooting in modern American history. It was an act of hate and an act of terror. Forty-nine people were killed, and dozens were wounded. Many of those wounded are going to suffer for the rest of their lives from paralysis, blindness, and other maladies caused by the evil of Mr. Mateen.

Sadly, mass shootings are occurring with sickening regularity in our country. Let's just talk about some of them in recent years.

Tucson, AZ, 2011: Six were killed, and a number were injured, one of whom was Gabby Giffords—a wonderful, wonderful human being. She was critically injured. Her good husband, a famous astronaut, is doing everything he can to make her life as normal as possible.

Carson City, NV, 2011: Four were killed in a popular restaurant in Carson City called Heidi's. Three of the dead were National Guardsmen getting ready to do their duty, having a break. In fact, they were having breakfast when they were gunned down by a madman.

Aurora, CO: People there watching a popular movie in 2012 were gunned down in a night of terror.

Newton, CT, 2012: Twenty little kids—20 babies—and six educators were killed.

The Navy Yard, Washington, DC, 2013: Twelve were killed.

Las Vegas, NV, 2014: A couple of people had just left the Bundy domestic

terror situation. I guess they didn't get enough opportunities to do terrible things up there. So they came to Las Vegas and went to a restaurant where two police officers were sitting there having breakfast—two men with families. This man and woman walked up, having left the Bundy enclave, and shot both of them in the head right in front of everybody. They walked out, went next door to Walmart, and killed another unsuspecting shopper.

Charleston, SC, 1 year ago: Nine were killed in a church—praying and singing. That is what you should do in a church, but a murderer was there, and he killed nine of them.

Roseburg, OR, 2015: Nine were killed at a community college.

Colorado Springs, CO: Some crazy person hell-bent on doing something in his own mind—stopping abortion—killed three innocent people. They had nothing to do with abortion. They were just innocent people.

San Bernardino, CA: In a government facility, people there for a holiday celebration were maimed and 14 killed by two domestic terrorists.

Kalamazoo, MI, 2016: An Uber driver picked up a fare, drove around town to kill another one and got six.

So if we add these up, it comes to 100, not counting the 49 who were killed a week or so ago. We add to that the 90 who are killed every day—90 every day—with guns in America. That is a pretty staggering number.

But after the murders I have outlined here—Tucson; Carson City; Aurora; Newton, CT; DC; Las Vegas; Charleston, SC; Roseburg, OR; San Bernardino, CA; Colorado Springs, CO; Kalamazoo, MI—the American people have looked to Congress to stop them. No more, they say. The American people don't feel safe. They want to feel safe. They want the violence to stop. They want it to end. But instead of getting help from their elected officials, our constituents see a disturbing pattern of inaction. It is always the same. After each tragedy, we Democrats try to pass sensible gun safety measures. Sadly, our efforts are blocked by the Republican Congress, which takes its marching orders from the National Rifle Association.

In April 2013, just months after the shootings in Aurora and Newtown, Democrats proposed legislation that would expand background checks and reinstate the assault weapons ban, limit the size of ammunition clips. The man who went into the nightclub a week ago had an assault rifle that would hold a magazine of 30 shells. He could fire that every time he pulled the trigger. It would take him about 3 or 4 seconds to empty the 30 shells. He could reload in 1 or 2 seconds. We don't know for sure, but he had at least two extra clips, so 90 bullets. Does anyone think there is anything you hunt in America that requires 90 bullets? Is there anyone who thinks that in America you need 30 bullets to go hunting—for what? Well, the man in Orlando, FL, went hunting for people.

We tried to limit the size of ammunition clips, to prevent firearms trafficking, but the NRA didn't accept any of our proposals, and so the Senate Republicans didn't accept them and they filibustered and blocked every one of them.

It happened again last December. Following the shooting in San Bernardino, Senator FEINSTEIN proposed legislation to close the so-called terror loophole. Senator FEINSTEIN's bill would have prevented suspected terrorists from legally purchasing firearms and explosives. Keeping terrorists from buying guns should be something upon which every Member of the Senate agrees. Again, the NRA said no, the Republicans said no, and they blocked Senator FEINSTEIN's legislation. That is a pattern we see. We see it repeatedly. It doesn't matter how sensible the legislation or how terrible the tragedy, the Republicans are beholden to the National Rifle Association, the NRA, and not the people who elect them to come here and represent them.

Today I am afraid it will be more of the same. About 2 hours from now, the U.S. Senate will have an opportunity to stop the rampant gun violence that has plagued our Nation. Stop it all? No, but it certainly will do something. So, at 5:30, Senators will vote on four gun-related amendments, two from Democrats, two from Republicans. Two of these amendments—the Murphy and Feinstein amendments—are serious proposals to protect Americans from gun violence. The Murphy-Booker-Schumer amendment would close loopholes in our background check system and ensure that firearms and explosives are kept out of the hands of terrorists and criminals and those who suffer from mental illness.

Senator FEINSTEIN's amendment would close the terror loophole, which allows suspected terrorists to legally purchase weapons and explosives. Both of these proposals are in keeping with what America wants and what America needs. About 90 percent of Americans favor expanded background checks, and more than 80 percent of Americans want to close the terror loophole. These are Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. I might say, as to the National Rifle Association, all NRA Members don't feel the way the leaders of the NRA do. Even though 90 percent of Americans favor expanded background checks and more than 80 percent want to close the terror loophole, Republicans will again, I am confident, reject the voice of the American people. Instead, Republicans are proposing legislation that will actually make it easier for someone who has a mental illness to get a gun. Instead, Republicans are proposing legislation that will actually make it more difficult for law enforcement to keep guns out of the hands of the dangerous.

The first Republican amendment proposed by the senior Senator from Iowa would make it easier for a person with severe mental illness to buy a gun.

That is what it says. The Republicans would make it easier for one who just gets out of a psychiatric facility to walk out of a psychiatric facility and go buy whatever he wants in the way of firearms.

The second Republican amendment, the Senator from Texas proposed legislation that would allow the sale of firearms to terrorists after a brief 72-hour waiting period, which would compromise ongoing counterterrorism investigations. The Grassley and Cornyn amendments are political stunts that are meaningless in doing something to stop gun violence. These are amendments to divert attention from real legislation. Why? So Republicans can say: Hey, look, we tried. And all the time they are cheerleaders to the bosses at the NRA who are cheering them.

My Republican colleagues are again stuck in the same rut, the same warp, giving in to the demands of the NRA. The Republican leaders always find an excuse to say no. Democrats look at any reasonable proposal when it comes to gun safety. Right now there are Democrats like Senator HEINRICH who are working with Republicans to find a solution. We are open to any of their ideas, provided the legislation really does keep guns and explosives away from suspected terrorists, criminals, and people with mental illness—but we know the NRA will never support any of these proposals. That is why we need the Senate Republicans to take a stand against gun violence and against the NRA.

As I stand here, the NRA is sending a lot of direct mail. They are even getting better now and putting stuff on the Internet, saying: We need more money. They are trying to take your guns away from you. It is a fundraising operation. What we need is the Senate Republicans to take a stand against gun violence and against the NRA for a change. If they don't—if the Senate Republicans continue down this path and reject the Feinstein and Murphy amendments, it will be the third time recently they walked away from sensible gun legislation. It will be the third time recently Republicans have walked away from sensible gun legislation and will be the third time Republicans will have voted to give suspected terrorists, criminals, and the mentally ill access to firearms. It will be the third time recently that the Senate Republicans have protected the gun lobby, even as their own constituents have been gunned down in cold blood.

The Senate Republicans should be embarrassed, but they are not because the NRA is happy. The Republicans need to put the lives of innocent Americans ahead of the NRA.

I yield the floor and ask the Chair to announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2578, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2578) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Shelby/Mikulski amendment No. 4685, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Feinstein) amendment No. 4720 (to amendment No. 4685), to authorize the Attorney General to deny requests to transfer a firearm to known or suspected terrorists.

McConnell (for Cornyn) amendment No. 4749 (to amendment No. 4720), to Secure our Homeland from radical Islamists by Enhancing Law enforcement Detection ("SHIELD").

McConnell motion to commit the bill to the Committee on the Judiciary, with instructions, (McConnell for Murphy) amendment No. 4750), to ensure that all individuals who should be prohibited from buying a firearm are listed in the national instant criminal background check system and require a background check for every firearm sale.

McConnell (for Grassley) amendment No. 4751 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 4750), to address gun violence and improve the availability of records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

McConnell amendment No. 4752 (to amendment No. 4751), to change the enactment date.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, a few days after the mass shooting in Orlando, I received a very powerful letter from Ella Staats, a young Vermonter who, like Americans across our land, was sickened and horrified by this senseless act of hatred that we saw in Orlando.

What was pointed out to me in this letter, this eloquent, passionate heartfelt letter, is that Ella is 15 years old. In her letter addressed to me, under the auspices of the Young Writers Project, she explained that even at her age, she has "already seen so many mass shootings that it is becoming harder and harder to faze [her]." Ella calls on Congress to act, writing: "It is time that the gun laws in our country were completely reformed" so these violent and hateful acts will be prevented.

After I read and reread her eloquent letter, I was moved. I sat down in my home in Vermont, and I started to draft a response, going through all the votes I had taken over the years. I started looking up all the hearings I had convened on gun violence, all the bills I authored and cosponsored, those I moved through the Judiciary Committee and even on the Senate floor, but then I stopped—this was just a catalogue.

I decided the nature and the quality and the moving aspect of Ella's letter deserved a response on the Senate floor

because Ella has given voice to something urgent that many people in Vermont and across the country are feeling right now.

Here is my reply to Ella:

Dear Ella, thank you for your thoughtful letter. I have read it several times and I want you to know how powerful it is to speak up about issues as important as this one. Some worry that many of your generation have disengaged from involvement in the big issues of our day, but your letter gave me hope. You are right. It is long past time for Congress to reform the laws that allow mass gun violence to flourish in our country.

You deserve to feel safe. You should not have to fear that guns designed for the battlefield will end up in the hands of terrorists or violent criminals. A large majority of our fellow Americans feel just as we do and support sensible answers. But your government has let you down. Time and time and time again, commonsense remedies are thwarted by obstruction and inertia and powerful lobbies, and only if more people like you stand up will we be able to change this.

Ella, I want you to know that I have been working for years to find practical solutions that will stop the gun violence that continues to touch every corner of our country. But I bet that the last thing you want is a list of all the bills I have written or voted for but have not passed. You want to know how we are going to overcome the well-funded opposition to passage of laws that will reduce gun violence.

First, we must remember the amazing men, women and children who die from gun violence every day. Sadly these tragedies are not limited to mass shootings. It is essential that we pay attention to the loss that thousands of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters feel each day because of a shooting that could have been prevented.

Second, we need new voices like yours. We need you to hold us accountable. We need more people to demand reform so that we can finally overcome the well-funded opposition to commonsense laws that would keep guns out of the hands of criminals and terrorists.

Ella, I share your frustrations and I beg you not to become numb to this hatred and violence. I urge you to speak out in your community, on social media and to demand accountability. It often takes time—too long a time—but speaking out, sharing your ideas and views, and contacting your elected representatives makes a difference. I hope the votes that I cast on your behalf tonight demonstrate that I hear you and I agree that we must act to prevent the next Orlando. Ella, thank you for doing that—for speaking out and for holding us accountable.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Ella Staats's full letter be printed in the RECORD.

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