

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: