

The legislative assistant called the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HANDGUNS IN AMERICA

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, last week the sense of security that Americans had in their own communities, our sense of the strength of our culture, our ability to protect our families and our homes, was once again shattered.

The challenge did not come from Kosovo, and it was not from a computer problem with the new millennium. It was from the most basic form of human violence, striking us where we are most vulnerable, and taking the life of a child.

James Agee once wrote that in every child who is born, no matter what circumstances or without regard to their parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again. It may be because of the sense we possess that our own renewal is in the life of our children that the death of a child shakes us so dramatically. Rarely have we seen an America more traumatized by individual acts of violence than as a result of the murders in Littleton, CO.

All of us recognize that there is no one answer, no one explanation for this tragedy. The answer lies in the strengths of our families, the responsibility of parents, the roles of school administrators and parents and local police. Almost every critic has a point; virtually none has a complete answer.

The increasing level of violence in the entertainment industry, the new use of technologies which have sanitized the very concepts of death and murder, the failure of role models, the growing isolation of children from parents and siblings and extended families—all critics are right; no criticism is complete.

But in this constellation of problems there is the persistent issue of access to guns in American society. Only a few years ago, when a similar tragedy rocked the United Kingdom, the British Parliament responded in days. A gunman killed 16 students in Dunblane, Scotland. The Parliament was outraged. The British people responded. And the private ownership of high-caliber handguns was not regulated or controlled; it was banned.

This Congress can rightfully cite a variety of challenges to the American people to ensure that Littleton never occurs again, though, indeed, we failed to do so after Jonesboro, Paducah, Springfield, and a variety of other cities and schools that had similar tragedies.

Now the question is, Do we visit upon this tragedy the same silence as after those other school shootings, or do we have the same courage the British Parliament exhibited 3 years ago in dealing with this problem?

The amount of death that this Congress is prepared to witness before we deal realistically with the problems of guns in America defies comprehension. Last year, 34,000 Americans were victims of gun violence. But the year before and the year before that, for a whole generation, the carnage has been similar. Every year, 1,500 people die from accidental shootings. Every 6 hours, another child in America commits suicide with a gun. No gun control can eliminate all of this violence. I do not believe any gun control can eliminate a majority of this violence. But no one can credibly argue that some reasonable gun control cannot stop some of this violence.

I am heartened that the majority leader has promised the Senate that within a matter of weeks there will be a debate on this floor and an opportunity to present some reasonable forms of additional gun control. At a minimum, this should include the question of parental responsibility for children who get access to guns. Where parents have knowledge or facilitate that purchase, they must bear some responsibility for the likely, in some cases inevitable, consequences of minors having those weapons.

Second, there is the question of whether or not minors should be able to purchase certain weapons at all. It is arguable that a minor should not be able to purchase a handgun. It is irrefutable, in my judgment, that a minor should not be able to purchase a semi-automatic weapon.

Third, the question of whether, through the new technologies of the Internet, it is appropriate that guns be sold or purchased in any form; if it is not an invitation to violate and avoid existing State and Federal laws; if a person does not have to present themselves in a retail establishment with credentials to purchase a weapon. Remote sales, in my judgment, should not be allowed.

Then there is the larger question of the regulation of all weapons through the Federal Government—whether, when we live in a society where everything from an automobile to a child's teddy bear has regulations on their designs and materials to ensure safety, that same regulatory scheme should not be used for weapons; whether a weapon is designed properly to assure its safety; whether its materials are the best possible; whether technology is being used to ensure that the gun is used properly.

One can envision that the Treasury Department or another Federal agency would require gun manufacturers to have safety locks so that children could not misuse them. Future technology may allow a thumbprint to ensure that only the owner of the gun is using the gun. More basic technologies might require better materials or that a gun does not misfire when it is dropped. Proper regulations might ensure how these guns are sold, to ensure that they are sold properly, that State

gun laws are not being evaded by oversupplying stores on State borders with permissive laws so that they are sold into States with restrictive laws. Inevitably this must be part of the debate: the proper Federal role in ensuring the proper design and distribution and sale of these weapons.

I am grateful, Mr. President, that the majority leader has invited the Senate to participate in this debate; proud, if the Senate responds to the challenge.

There were so many prayers throughout this country for the victims of the shooting in Littleton, sincere prayers on the floor of the Senate. The victims and their families and traumatized Americans need our prayers, but they need more than our prayers. They need the courage that comes from a people who recognize that change is both possible and required to avoid these tragedies from repeating themselves.

The victims of Littleton will be grateful for our prayers, but they will curse our inaction if political intimidation, the fear of change, results in the Senate offering nothing but prayers. This Senate has a responsibility to respond. We know what needs to get done. The President of the United States has challenged us. Americans are waiting and watching.

Every Senator must use these next few weeks to think about how they will vote, searching their own consciences on how they will answer their constituents, their families, and themselves, if Littleton becomes one more town in a litany of forgotten schools, forgotten children, and a rising spiral of carnage.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, what is the business before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business.

The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

(The remarks of Mr. GRAMS pertaining to the introduction of S. 896 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent, notwithstanding the previous order, I be allowed to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

Y2K

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, there has been some discussion about Y2K and the Y2K liability bill. It seems every