other sensible gun safety measures can help limit children's access to firearms. It is clear that reducing our kids' access to guns can save lives.

PROTECTING AGAINST WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to once again state my strong support for legislation that increases access to post conviction DNA testing.

Our judicial system has numerous safeguards in place to help protect against wrongful convictions of innocent people. The presumption that a person is innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt is one of many protections our judicial system provides to protect against wrongful convictions. Rights to appeal criminal convictions are another example.

Despite these many protections, I recognize that wrongful convictions, unfortunately, do occur. In my view, we must continuously examine our judicial system to determine if new protections are available to ensure that individuals are not imprisoned for crimes they did not commit.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, we need look no further than the Earl Washington case to understand that individuals can be convicted of crimes they did not commit. Washington, a mentally retarded man, spent more than a decade on death row after being convicted for the 1982 rape and murder of 19-year-old Rebecca Williams.

In 1994, Governor Wilder commuted Washington's sentence to life in prison as a result of DNA test results. Since 1994, more sophisticated DNA tests became available, and these tests proved conclusively that Washington did not commit the rape and murder. As a result, last year, Governor Gilmore granted Washington a full pardon for this conviction. Subsequently, the Virginia General Assembly unanimously passed legislation signed into law by Governor Gilmore that allows for inmate access to post conviction DNA testing.

Certainly, Earl Washington's case is not unique to Virginia. Wrongful convictions occur in both Federal and State courts all across the country. The Washington case, however, makes clear to me that post conviction DNA testing must be made more available.

Over the last few years, DNA testing has proved to be a reliable means for identifying criminals when biological evidence exists. While DNA testing is standard in today's investigations, such technology was not available even a decade ago. DNA is more and more frequently used by prosecutors to prove guilt. In my view, it should also be made available to prove innocence. Access to post conviction DNA testing, in circumstances where DNA evidence can prove innocence, is of utmost importance to the administration of justice.

In addition to increasing access to DNA testing, we must look at other ways to improve the administration of justice in our system. The Justice Project, a national non-profit organization focusing on identifying and solving issues of fairness in our judicial system, reports that since 1973, 95 people have been exonerated and released from death row. Of those 95 wrongful convictions, only 10 were discovered as a result of DNA testing. Thus, while access to DNA evidence is one new, important component that we must pursue to protect against wrongful convictions, it cannot be the only avenue we pursue.

We have all read or heard about the horrific cases where individuals are convicted and sentenced to death after a trial where the defense attorney slept through portions of the case, was inexperienced in death penalty cases, or failed to even interview important witnesses. Such incompetency on the part of a defense attorney undoubtedly results in some wrongful convictions.

Certainly, convicted defendants may appeal their conviction to a higher court based on the assertion that they were denied a constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel. However, I believe that our system, particularly in the highly complex capital punishment cases, can do a better job at ensuring effective assistance of counsel prior the time a case gets the appellate level.

In this regard, I share the views of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who, in a recent speech, stated that perhaps it's time to look at the minimum standards for appointed counsel in death cases and adequate compensation for appointed counsel when they are used.

Increasing access to post conviction DNA testing, and undertaking a closer examination of the issue of national, minimum standards for appointed counsel in death penalty cases, are two steps in the right direction to improving our judicial system and further protecting against wrongful convictions.

My colleague, Senator LEAHY, has joined with Senator GORDON SMITH and Senator COLLINS in introducing legislation that improves access to post conviction DNA testing and provides for minimum standards for appointed counsel in death penalty cases. Today, I am pleased to join as a cosponsor of this important legislation, S. 486, the Innocence Protection Act.

While I do believe that some technical improvements can be made to the Innocence Protection Act, I support its overall goal of additional, reasonable, protections against wrongful convictions.

Specifically, the Innocence Protection Act contains provisions relating to habeas corpus reform. Under the bill, prisoners in States that do not adopt appointed counsel minimum competency standards will be subject to differing habeas corpus rules than prisoners in States which have adopted such standards. In my view, habeas corpus reform is outside the scope of this legislation, and the issue ought to be thoroughly examined by the Judiciary Committee and addressed in separate legislation.

In addition, the Innocence Protection Act directs the Attorney General to withhold a portion of the funds awarded under the prison grant programs from death penalty States that have not established or maintained a system for providing legal representation in capital cases that satisfy the standards called for by this bill. In my view, a more appropriate way to encourage States to adopt minimum competency standards would be through awarding new grant money for those States that adopt such standards.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, the goal of the Innocence Protection Act is an important one. I look forward to working with the sponsors of this legislation on these concerns, and look forward to working for passage of legislation that will further protect against wrongful convictions.

IN HONOR OF PURPLE HEART MEDAL RECIPIENTS

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize those veterans who have earned the Purple Heart Medal. My own State of Minnesota has recently decided to designate August 7, 2001 as a day to honor these veterans.

The Purple Heart Medal was created by General George Washington and first awarded to soldiers who were wounded as a result of actions by an enemy of the United States. General Washington established the award on August 7, 1782. The Purple Heart Medal is still awarded to members of our Nation's armed forces who are wounded while protecting our Nation and democracy.

Our Government issues several medals to soldiers for bravery, good conduct and efficiency. However, the Purple Heart Medal is unique in the fact that a soldier who is awarded this medal received a wound as a result of hostile actions by an enemy of our Nation. As a U.S. Senator and a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, I have had the opportunity to personally thank many of the Purple Heart Medal recipients in the State of Minnesota for the sacrifice they made for our Nation and democracy. I believe that every recipient of this distinguished award should also receive appropriate acknowledgment from the Senate.

I invite all members of the Senate to join me and urge all 50 States to hold appropriate ceremonies to honor their Purple Heart Medal recipients.

WE NEED A DRUG CZAR

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, in the last several days, I have received a copy of the most recent PRIDE survey of youth drug use in this country. The numbers are not encouraging. In fact, the numbers over the last several years