

livestock producers. Southwest North Dakota is terribly dry and has been for nearly two years. They have received almost no rain, making haying and grazing land very hard to come by, and causing feed expenses to soar.

These family farmers and ranchers ought not have to bear this burden alone. I am very pleased to join Senator CONRAD in introducing disaster legislation to help ease the financial burden of producers in their time of need. We need quick action on this legislation because producers need help, and they need it now.

The legislation being introduced today is very straightforward and almost identical to disaster legislation enacted in previous years, including last year.

Farmers experiencing crop loss of higher than 35 percent would be eligible for disaster assistance. Folks who bought crop insurance would be eligible for payments equal to 50 percent of the crop price, and those who did not purchase insurance would be eligible for payments equal to 40 percent of the crop price. Under this legislation, the uninsured producers will be required to purchase crop insurance for the following two years in order to receive any disaster assistance.

Also, ranchers suffering grazing losses will be eligible for assistance to help pay for the cost of feed. To be eligible, they must have suffered 40 percent loss during three consecutive months.

The weather conditions, beyond human control, have placed the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers at risk and I urge Congress to act quickly.

20 LEGISLATIVE DAYS AND COUNTING DOWN

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, as of today there are 20 legislative days left before the assault weapons ban expires. And as we get closer and closer to September 13, there are reports that gun manufacturers across the country are gearing up to flood the market with previously banned assault weapons. These weapons, according to the law enforcement community, were the weapons of choice for criminals before the ban and they have no place on our streets. The assault weapons ban is straightforward, commonsense public safety legislation that needs to be extended.

In addition to banning 19 specific weapons, the ban makes it illegal to "manufacture, transfer, or possess a semiautomatic" firearm that can accept a detachable magazine and has more than one of several specific military features, such as folding/telescoping stocks, protruding pistol grips, bayonet mounts, threaded muzzles or flash suppressors, barrel shrouds, or grenade launchers. These weapons are dangerous and they should not be on America's streets.

In response to Congress' inaction, some State legislatures have begun

taking action of their own. In Massachusetts, State legislators voted Wednesday to bar the sale of the same 19 specific weapons mentioned in the Federal ban. According to the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Massachusetts is now one of six States with its own ban. Seven other States are considering enacting their own bans.

The National Rifle Association has said that the ban is ineffective and unnecessary. The association asserts that guns labeled as assault weapons are rarely used in violent crimes, and that many people use them for hunting and target shooting. But this assertion is not supported by the facts. According to statistics reported by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, from 1990 to 1994, assault weapons named in the ban constituted 4.82 percent of guns traced in criminal investigations. However, since the ban's enactment, these assault weapons have made up only 1.61 percent of the crime-related guns traced.

Unfortunately, despite Senate passage of a bipartisan amendment that would have extended the ban, it appears that this important gun safety law will be allowed to expire. The House Republican leadership opposes reauthorizing the law and President Bush, though he has said he supports it, has done little to help keep the law alive.

I am hopeful that the Congress will act in the 20 days it has remaining.

THE DECISION TO GO TO WAR

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last month Americans across this Nation celebrated Memorial Day. It was a day that had special significance for millions of World War II veterans, tens of thousands of whom came to Washington to see the long awaited memorial on the Mall to honor them and the more than 10 million American veterans of that war who are no longer living.

This Memorial Day was also an opportunity to reflect for those of us too young to remember that war, but old enough to have parents or friends who fought, died, or in so many other ways sacrificed and labored together to defeat enemies that threatened the survival of the free world.

For me, it was a day of mixed emotions. It was uplifting for Marcelle and me to be on the Mall and to see so many World War Two veterans and their families together, many of them reuniting with members of their divisions or regiments for the first time in over half a century. It was extraordinarily moving to hear their stories of the war, told as if it were yesterday—stories of bone chilling fear, incredible suffering, and awe inspiring bravery.

It was also a somber occasion. I think each of us was reminded of how much we, and so many millions of people in countries around the world, owe to that generation of Americans.

There was much talk of D-Day, and the thousands of Americans who died

on the beaches that first day of the invasion of Normandy. Having returned from Normandy for the 60th anniversary of D-Day, I can say that the feeling is similar to what one experiences when visiting Gettysburg or any of the great battlefields of the Civil War. It is difficult to fathom that so many men so young could face death with such undaunted courage.

It was my second visit to Normandy. I was last there for the 50th anniversary, and the sight of those rows, and rows, and rows of white crosses was every bit as moving this time as it was the last.

Three weeks ago I also attended the funeral of one of two young Vermonters who were killed in action in Iraq on May 25. Sgt. Kevin Sheehan and Spec. Alan Bean died when their base on the outskirts of Baghdad was attacked. Six other Vermonters were injured, three seriously. Sgt. Sheehan and Spec. Bean were the ninth and tenth Vermonters to die in Iraq.

Then on June 7, another Vermonter, Sgt. Jamie Gray, was killed and two members of his Battalion were injured when their vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was the eleventh Vermonter to die in Iraq. At his funeral, I thought how the past few weeks have been very sad ones in my State; but, of course, the same could be said for many other states.

As of today, 844 Americans have died in Iraq since the start of the war, and there are thousands more who we rarely hear of who have been wounded. They have lost legs, arms, their eyesight, or suffered other grievous injuries that will plague them for the rest of their lives.

And there are the tens of thousands of Iraqis, including many thousands of civilians caught in the crossfire, who have been killed or injured. Their numbers are not even reported.

When I am in Vermont, and I am there most weekends, there is one question that I am asked over and over. "What are you doing to bring our troops home?" It is a question that I found myself asking this Memorial Day weekend, and in Vermont during those funerals, and then again at Normandy. It arises from a fundamental disagreement with President Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq, and his rationale for continuing to keep tens of thousands of our troops there in harm's way indefinitely.

The attacks of 9/11 were unlike anything our Nation had experienced since that infamous day at Pearl Harbor over a half century ago. I supported the President's decision to use military force against al-Qaida and the Taliban who had shielded them in Afghanistan. It was the right response and the whole world was behind us.

But as so many people warned, the decision to launch a unilateral, preemptive war against Iraq, even though Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11 and had no plan or ability to attack us, was a fateful diversion from the real terrorist threat.