

local, State, regional and national statistics for 2006. According to the report, 14,990 people were murdered in the United States last year alone. This is an increase over 14,965 murders in 2005, and 14,210 in 2004. Of the 14,990 murdered in 2006, 10,177 people were killed by a firearm. In Michigan alone, there were 711 murders last year, 498 involved a firearm. These numbers are simply staggering.

Gun violence is preventable. However it requires action. In order to reduce the level of gun violence in our homes and communities, Congress must pass common sense legislation to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals.

Without action, guns will be found increasingly in our high schools, universities, religious institutions, and our homes. Some of us in Congress have heard voices cry of families, educators, and police officials around this country and continue to work to pass sensible gun legislation, which would limit access to guns by prohibited persons, close the gun show loophole, reauthorize the assault weapons ban and aid law enforcement agencies in tracking gun traffickers. Congress needs to address these needs and do everything possible to reduce the levels of gun violence in America.

RISING GAS PRICES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, oil prices closed at another record high yesterday over \$93.50 a barrel. That is nearly triple the average price just 4 years ago, and we have reason to fear that oil may be on its way to over \$100 a barrel and possibly to \$120 a barrel. Gas prices are reportedly 65 cents a gallon higher than they were just a year ago. This is an unacceptable burden to hundreds of thousands of families across the country, and it harms American consumers as well as the American economy. This winter, the price of home heating oil will be a serious burden on thousands of Vermonters.

The relentless rise in oil prices should be another clear signal that we need to redouble efforts toward energy independence. As we develop alternative energy sources, we must keep focus on the artificial manipulation of oil and gas prices today. Demand for oil is rising, but members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, continue to collude to prevent the supply from matching that demand. As the Centre for Global Energy summarized it: "Without more oil from OPEC, prices will continue to rise over the winter." In a properly functioning market, OPEC members would compete to serve the demand, but OPEC acts outside the basic principles of competition.

As the weather cools, rising prices for heating oil are an even greater cause for concern. Thousands of hard working Vermont families, seniors and disabled persons will experience considerable strain in coming months as they

try to balance the cost of such necessities as home heating oil, prescription drugs and food on their tables. The Energy Information Administration forecasts that the average U.S. household will see a winter increase of 22 percent in heating-oil expenditures from last year. In fiscal year 2006, Congress appropriated over \$3 billion for the critical Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP. Yet in his fiscal year 2008 budget, President Bush has requested only half that amount, or \$1.5 billion. While LIHEAP grants are decreasing, the number of applications is rising.

The American consumer is being harmed for the benefit of oil producing cartels. This is just wrong. When the President took office, Americans could fill their cars, heat their homes, and run their businesses on gasoline that cost \$1.45 a gallon. Today, fuel prices have skyrocketed to an average \$2.87 a gallon. Prices will, at times, fall, but because fuel prices are not properly subject to competition oversight and enforcement, the American consumer will only benefit from lower prices when it serves some other purpose of the cartel and foreign governments.

The administration must stop OPEC from artificially affecting prices in the United States. I joined Senator KOHL as an original cosponsor of his bipartisan NOPEC legislation that would hold accountable certain oil producing nations for their collusive behavior that has artificially reduced the supply and inflated the price of fuel.

When entities engage in anticompetitive conduct that harms American consumers, it is the responsibility of the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute. It is wrong to let members of OPEC off the hook just because their anticompetitive practices come with the seal of approval of national governments.

It is time for the administration to take the side of American consumers, not the side of oil cartels. We cannot claim to be energy independent while we permit foreign governments to manipulate oil prices in an anticompetitive manner. Vermont families, and families across the country, need our help to make essential home heating more affordable this winter.

PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS FOR SEPTEMBER 11 VICTIMS ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in the days following the terrorist attacks of September 11, Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle came together to pass comprehensive legislation entitled "The Air Transportation Safety and System Stabilization Act." This measure provided victims the option of filing a claim with a national compensation program or seeking limited damages in one Federal district court—the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. Unfortunately, the legislation we passed failed to grant that trial court with the

power to serve and enforce subpoenas outside of the traditional 100-mile radius of the Southern District of New York, even in the very cities where the hijacked flights originated and where two of them crashed on the morning of September 11.

We were able to pass a legislative fix to this problem recently in the Senate. I understand that the House of Representatives is poised to pass the Senate bill today. I praise my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both Chambers for acting to provide nationwide service of subpoenas for the September 11 victims. Although no amount of compensation can replace a lost loved one, the Procedural Fairness for September 11 Victims Act offers a technical fix that is crucial to allowing victims and their families to have their claims fairly and thoroughly heard in court. I urge the President to sign this legislation into law without delay.

REPATRIATION OF REMAINS OF VIETNAM VETERANS

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the return of the remains of LTJG Donald F. Wolfe, whose body has finally been returned to American soil.

Lieutenant Wolfe—along with four of his fellow Navy aviators and sailors—was killed on October 8, 1967, when the E-1B aircraft they were flying on crashed near Da Nang in heavy weather. The bodies of these brave Navy servicemen could not be recovered at the time due to weather, terrain and hostile activity.

But today, almost exactly 40 years after this terrible incident, the remains of Lieutenant Wolfe and his colleagues are back home, bringing peace of mind and closure to his family at long last.

One of the great stains on the history of this Nation is the way that many of our Vietnam War veterans were treated when they returned home from war.

We should be honest with ourselves and with our veterans: The way that many of these veterans were treated during this time was wrong, and that kind of treatment hurt our country psychologically, and it hurt our country militarily.

Fortunately, our Nation has learned from that sorry episode. I take comfort in the fact that despite our vigorous disagreements about the Iraq war, all of us in this Senate and in our hometowns and States honor those who serve there.

And today we have an opportunity to make sure that these five men get the welcome home that all our troops deserved. We should stop to honor their memory and their service. It is not too late to say to these men and their families: Thank you.

I intend to observe a moment of silence this afternoon in memory of these men and in memory of all those who are still classified as missing in action. I encourage my colleagues and all Americans to do the same.