

amendment would have addressed what the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves characterized as an “appalling gap” in our domestic defenses. I was unsuccessful, but I will continue to press for enactment of this legislation. It is time that we get our priorities straight and put the defense of the American people first.

State and local authorities will always be the first to defend the American people in any disaster, whether manmade or natural. We need to ensure that we give them the resources they need to fulfill their responsibilities. That is why I have long supported adequate funding for homeland security and emergency management grants. I opposed the administration’s proposal to reduce funding for these grants this year and am pleased that 2009 Homeland Security appropriations bill, which we should vote on shortly, includes increased funding for these and other important State and local grant programs.

The security of our borders is another critical priority. While I had serious concerns about some provisions of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, the bill took some steps toward tightening border security that I strongly supported, such as requiring the Department of Homeland Security, DHS, to develop a national border security strategy and border surveillance plan. The bill also required DHS to develop a schedule for implementing the US-VISIT exit-entry program, created new criminal penalties for constructing border tunnels, provided grants to law enforcement agencies to address criminal activity along the border, and required the Government to work with countries south of the border to combat human smuggling and drug trafficking.

While that bill ultimately failed, I have supported other measures to enhance border security which have been signed into law, including funding to hire 23,000 new Border Patrol agents, put in place vehicle barriers along the border, install 105 radar and camera towers, remove and detain undocumented aliens, construct barriers, and purchase ground and aerial surveillance devices. Congress must take a practical approach to securing the borders and provide the resources necessary for our Government to carry out that important responsibility.

From our borders to the first responders in our communities, we face tremendous challenges. As we work to close those security gaps, we must also draw on America’s boundless capacity for innovation and creativity. We need those talents more than ever as we face unprecedented challenges in our energy sector and elsewhere. We remain hostage to foreign oil sources, yet we have not invested adequately in the necessary alternatives. We face huge challenges in our transportation systems, which consume the largest proportion of our petroleum resources. We are beginning to understand that fresh water

may be the next oil and that we have to use, conserve, and manage it as the scarce resource that it is. And where do these alternatives necessary to rebuild and sustain the economy of our future come from? Our history tells us they come from what President Eisenhower, in his farewell address to the Nation, called the “solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop”—the entrepreneurial small businessperson.

So we must invest in our skilled workers and our infrastructure. We must find ways to invigorate our creative and entrepreneurial small businesses so that we can not only drive innovation and employment but strengthen our own security in the process.

Two programs—the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs—are prime examples of how we can encourage innovation to improve our security. These highly successful programs not only need to be reauthorized, they need to be substantially increased and targeted at the key challenges of our time. Our domestic security, our innovative and entrepreneurial opportunities, our country’s longer term employment prospects, and our economic future are all directly benefited by these programs, which provide Federal money for small business innovation. And the National Research Council, after an exhaustive study of the SBIR Program, tells us that Congress could effectively increase funding of this effort. This is the kind of investment we need to be making in our national security and in our economic future.

As we make that investment, we should make security-related innovation a stated priority of SBIR, not simply a byproduct of some SBIR-supported research. There are few, if any, Government programs better positioned to develop technologies to protect the American people than SBIR. I have introduced legislation to make domestic security, water security and quality, transportation, and energy top SBIR priorities. By focusing SBIR innovation and research in all of these areas, but especially domestic security and water security and quality, we can do a great deal to address the security challenges we face.

Today there are many technologies addressing areas such as first responder emergency responses, detection of radioactive materials, cargo scanning and cybersecurity, that demand more research and innovation to meet our security needs in a post-9/11 world. Recent reports from the Government Accountability Office and the National Academy of Sciences, for instance, identify troubling gaps in first responders’ ability to deal with hazardous releases in urban areas or our ability to better track and detect radioactive materials. SBIR can fund the research that can close these security gaps, and that program—and most importantly the small business innovators them-

selves—deserve our full support in Congress.

Mr. President, as this administration comes to a close, we have an opportunity to revisit how best to address the gaps that have arisen in our national security both before and since 9/11. Our need to act is no less urgent now than it was 7 years ago, except that we have squandered time and great resources in the intervening period. I urge those of us who will return in the next Congress to work with the next administration to address these gaps with a renewed perspective on the sense of urgency they deserve.

FIREARMS AND SUICIDE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, a recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* examined the link between the presence of guns in the home and the chance of suicide. The article, written by Dr. Matthew Miller and Dr. David Hemenway, entitled “Guns and Suicide in the United States,” illustrates a direct correlation between having a loaded firearm in a home and the success rate of suicide attempts.

According to the article, in 2005, the most recent year mortality data are available, suicide was the second leading cause of death among Americans 40 years of age or younger. More than half of all suicides in the United States are carried out by a firearm. An average of 46 Americans per day committed suicide with a firearm in 2005, accounting for 53 percent of all completed suicides.

Many of the attempts made at suicide are both impulsive and fleeting. There is often a very short window between the time a person decides they are going to attempt suicide and the time they follow through with the attempt. These attempts are often made drastically, in reaction to a specific event. However, as the initial reaction to the event subsides, so often does the urge to attempt suicide. This is illustrated by the fact that more than 90 percent of the people who survive a suicide attempt, do not go on to die by suicide. Unfortunately, those attempt suicide using a firearm are rarely fortunate enough to survive and thus have an opportunity for reconsideration. Suicide attempts that involve drugs or cutting have a much lower mortality rate.

The article cites over a dozen studies that have found that there is between a two and ten times greater risk of suicide in a home with a firearm than without. These risks do not only increase for the gun owner but also for the gun owner’s spouse and children.

The simple fact is that guns increase the chance of suicide. Suicide prevention is a national problem that demands our attention and commitment. Congress must do its part by taking such steps as ensuring gun manufacturers supply trigger locks and closing the loopholes that allow young people easy access to guns.