

the right thing to do and because it puts the United States back where we belong: as leaders of the international community and defending, protecting, and promoting the quality of rights of all people in our world, regardless of their situation. From equality and nondiscrimination to equal recognition before the law, to access to justice, this convention touches on all these issues that Americans have long held near and dear to our hearts.

Ratifying this convention would reaffirm our leadership, leadership that was established under the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act legislation that this Congress passed in 1990. This was the first of its kind, domestic legislation that addressed the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. It sent a message to the world that we would support the principles of equal treatment and nondiscrimination with respect to those with disabilities.

I want to recognize Senator TOM HARKIN for his leadership in getting that legislation passed, and it had strong bipartisan support when it was passed back in 1990. That legislation still stands as a model for those who want to replicate our commitments and defend the rights of the disabled in their countries.

I have had a personal opportunity to see what a difference the Americans with Disabilities Act could make in the lives of people, to see the impact this convention could have around the world, because I grew up before ADA was passed and my grandmother was disabled. She couldn't speak or hear. I remember in those days, when she would come to visit us—which wasn't very often because she lived a long way away—we didn't have any technology to allow her to watch television or to answer the phone, the kind of technology that now is available as the result of passing the ADA, technology that I would hope, along with the human rights that come with passing this convention, will soon be available to people in all parts of the world.

We in the United States are already the gold standard when it comes to defending the rights of the disabled. So why would we not want to demonstrate to the world our intention to continue to fight for those less fortunate?

This treaty is not only about ending discrimination against people with disabilities around the world, it is also about protecting the millions of U.S. citizens who travel or live abroad. Ratification will provide the United States with a platform from which we can encourage other countries to adopt and implement the convention standards and to work to end discrimination against people with disabilities.

Let me just respond to some of the concerns we have heard, and some of these have been addressed already. I want to talk about what the treaty does not do.

It in no way, shape, or form infringes on America's sovereignty as a nation. It does absolutely nothing to change

American law. The treaty doesn't impose any legal obligations on the United States, and these facts were confirmed by the U.S. Department of Justice during our consideration of the measure.

The convention has overwhelming support from across the political spectrum. Over 165 disability organizations support the treaty, as do 21 major veterans and military service organizations, including the VFW, the American Legion, and the Wounded Warrior Project. I can't imagine why, at a time when more of our warriors are returning home with injuries and disabilities, we would not want to stand in support of ensuring their rights and protections at home and around the globe.

In closing, I want to quote from John Lancaster, who is a disabled veteran and the former executive director of the National Council on Independent Living, which is one of the oldest disability grassroots organizations run by and for people with disabilities. Mr. Lancaster testified at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of the treaty. I think his message was one of the most powerful, and it is one that I hope all of our colleagues will heed in thinking about consideration of this treaty.

At the hearing he said:

I'm appalled with some of the conversation that has been going on here today.

He was referring to some of the testimony at that hearing. He said:

As a veteran and as someone who volunteered, laid my life on the line for freedom, rights, dignity, and now, to have this whole debate that we're not willing . . . to walk the talk in international circles? To step up in a forum where they advocate these things and to say "We're not afraid to sign this thing?"

We aspire to what's in this convention. This is what we are about as a nation—including people, giving them freedom, giving them rights, giving them the opportunity to work, to learn, to participate. Isn't that what we're about? Isn't that what we want the rest of the world to be about? Well, if we aren't willing to say this is a good thing and to say it formally, what are we about, really?

I think Mr. Lancaster put it very powerfully, and I couldn't agree more with his assessment. This is exactly what we are about as a nation. We should ratify this treaty. We should remind the world why defending the rights of the disabled is a principle that should be at the heart of every civil society.

Mr. President, I hope when we get to the vote on this convention we will see the required votes to ratify this treaty and send to the entire world Mr. Lancaster's message.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### PREVENTING GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, as the 112th Congress returns after the election, we should consider this important question: Have we done our share to help prevent gun violence? Statistics from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence give a clear answer—no. Almost 100,000 people die as the result of gun violence in America every single year. This statistic includes 12,000 people who are murdered, 18,000 who commit suicide, and 20,000 under the age of 20. On average, 270 people are shot in the United States every single day.

Our society faces an epidemic of gun violence. Consider stories that have gone largely unreported in recent months: Near Chicago, a 16-year-old was shot twice in the head while riding in a car on her way home. A staff member on a prominent university's medical campus accidentally discharged his handgun at work and injured two people. And on election day, a parolee in California walked into the plant where he worked, methodically murdered two of his coworkers, and wounded another two before shooting himself.

Stories like these flash across newspapers for a few days or weeks, and then the national spotlight moves on. But we cannot forget that while reporters may leave, the tragic effects of gun violence linger. They forever alter the lives of good, talented young people, like Ashley Moser, who lost her 6-year-old daughter in the horrific movie theater attack in Aurora, CO. She is partially paralyzed now and faces significant health problems and medical bills. But even after this nightmare, Congress did nothing to prevent guns from falling into the hands of would-be killers.

Congress has the power to act to prevent more of these tragedies. We can take up and pass legislation like S.32, which would prohibit the purchase of the same types of high-capacity magazines that allowed the shooter in Aurora to hurt so many people, so quickly. We could enact S.35, the Gun Show Loophole Act of 2011, which would close the "gun show loophole" by requiring