

from that day, and we ask ourselves: Why? How could this happen in America? We grope for answers and I hope we will find them.

Today I join, first with every American, in expressing our deep and abiding grief as a Nation and our deepest, most heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. I am the father of two. As a father of two, this strikes painfully close to my heart, and painfully close to the heart of every parent. There is no greater sorrow, no deeper pain than the enormous grief these families are suffering for those 20 innocent children, 6 teachers, and school employees and their families; and no parent—no parent—should ever have to bear the unspeakable pain of losing a child, especially to this type of tragedy.

All too often I have come to this floor having to say those same words—one tragedy after another, time and time again, having to stand here and say that our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of another tragedy involving gun violence, semiautomatic weapons, high-capacity clips, and the families of those victims who have lost loved ones to senseless, sick gun violence.

But this time we are talking about children—elementary schoolchildren—the youngest, most innocent among us taken away. Enough is enough.

Matthew 18 says:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like the children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven . . .”

The children have entered the kingdom of heaven today. I hope we honor them and their memory in what we do now to end the violence. Let Newton finally be the turning point when we are all willing to come together and do what is right. As we pray for the victims, let us commit ourselves as a Nation to a long overdue debate about violence and guns and how we deal with those who suffer mental illnesses in our society, and let us finally pass commonsense gun laws. No more politics; no more excuses. We cannot allow this sort of senseless violence to continue. We need a national debate about the role of firearms in our society, we need to address mental health issues, and we need to act immediately.

This shooter had hundreds of rounds of ammunition—reportedly enough to kill everyone in the school—and had it not been for the brave first responders, there could have been even more tragic killings on Friday. These high-capacity clips must be outlawed. I don't believe there is any reason why a law-abiding citizen would need the capability to shoot multiple rounds like a street sweeper.

Words cannot express my sadness that another shooter used a weapon that has no legitimate purpose, from my perspective, in a civilized society,

using high-capacity 30-round clips that defy any reasonable use. And there are even greater capacity clips than this.

I don't understand why the same type of weapon used by the DC sniper is still readily available, and I don't understand how we can see the same high-capacity clips used over and over by maniacal murderers during these strategies and not act.

After Tucson, Aurora, and now Newtown, we need to finally do something about these dangerous clips. We need to make sure nobody with a criminal record or mental illness can purchase a firearm, and that means we need a comprehensive, mandatory background check system. It is no use that my State of New Jersey has some of the toughest laws but then over a third of the guns that come into our State and commit an act are from outside our State.

I have cosponsored legislation to outlaw high-capacity clips, improve our background checks, and I have supported and helped pass the original assault weapons ban, and I will support an assault weapons ban this next year as I have in the past.

This doesn't need to be a political debate. This is about keeping little children safe in their first-grade classroom. I am for reasonable use of guns, but first and foremost I am for protecting our children, our teachers, our families. That is our No. 1 responsibility. If we can't do that, shame on us.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. I thank the Senator from New Jersey for his comments.

The Presiding Officer and I and others have discussed how we felt this weekend. I can't think of anything that has more emotionally roiled the Nation. There have been few such events in my lifetime. All of us feel the senseless killings last Friday in Newtown, CT, made no sense—just hit everybody. If we feel so deeply, we can't begin to imagine how the families must feel—the families, the parents of the children, the siblings or spouses of the adults killed. We pick up the paper, turn on the radio, listen to the television, and there is one more wrenching story after another.

In my family, and I know in families from coast to coast, parents called their children. Brothers called sisters. Neighbors reached out to neighbors. We huddled with two of our three children, soon to be with a third one in Vermont, hugged our grandchildren. Over the weekend and again today, in discussions in churches, synagogues, houses of worship, on the sidewalk, in the grocery line, at the worksite and in our offices, we have all struggled for words to describe our feelings of shock and our feelings of immeasurable sadness.

I think we can all agree no matter what our political background, no matter what part of the country we come from, that last night President Obama

gave voice—our voice, 325 million Americans gave voice to let these stricken families know how deeply we wanted to help relieve their suffering as we share their grief. It was a time when the President can and should and did speak for the whole Nation.

But there are so many questions about this unspeakable tragedy that have yet to be answered. The President has pointed out it is unlikely any single step or package of steps or this move or that move can erase the chance of such a tragedy happening again. We know it could have even been worse if the brave first responders hadn't rushed into the school even though they knew they might be facing death themselves. We know that sometimes things are beyond our understanding. We know situations vary widely from State to State and community to community. But whether it is in the State of Connecticut or, God forbid, in the State of the Presiding Officer or my State, we all share the responsibility of searching for an answer not just for the people of Connecticut but for people throughout the United States, and some can honestly say the people throughout the world who look to the United States as a bastion of freedom, of democracy.

I think Congress can and should be part of this national discussion in the search for answers. We will come back into a new session in a few weeks. The Judiciary Committee will be holding a hearing very early in the next congressional session to help in the search for understanding and answers. I know all of us will take part in that no matter what our feelings might be.

There are other committees also that have different types of jurisdiction and will have to take part in this national discussion. It isn't a matter of just guns—which is a significant part of this, of course—it is the matter of mental illness; it is a matter of how we run our educational facilities. All of these things should be talked about. If there are practical and sensible and workable answers to prevent such unspeakable tragedy, we should make the effort to find them and then we should have the courage, each and every one of us, to vote for those steps.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1, which the clerk will now report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1) making appropriations for the Department of Defense and the other departments and agencies of the Government