These tragic events have shattered the lives of too many families. The shooter was armed with 6 firearms and loads of ammunition, and when they came to his home they found at least 14 guns—and another gun. I thought it was only 14, but, no, they found another one. So add them up—15 plus 6, or 21 guns—21 guns.

We do not yet know why this young man murdered these innocent people in cold blood. But what does it say about our country that it is willing to stand by, idle, while these tragedies happen, happen, happen?

Smarter gun laws in this country are long overdue. The lives of these men, women, babies, and children are at stake. How many more innocent lives must be taken before we are willing to act? How many more communities and families' lives will be shattered? How many more sacred places of worship will be violently attacked? How many more colleges or schools will be terrorized and forever traumatized by gun violence? How many more Americans will we mourn? How many more solemn statements, speeches of condemnation, and frank discussions must take place? What will it take before we stand up as a nation and say: Enough, not another innocent American will fall victim to this ideological crusade of having more guns and more guns and more guns.

If we don't take action, we are equally responsible for innocent deaths as are the sick individuals who plot and carry out these horrific massacres. I have started reaching out to Senators and talking about what can be done to advance the cause of background checks while Republicans are in charge for the next year or so. But one thing is clear. To pass background checks, we need Republicans to stop acting as puppets for the NRA.

Madam President, would the Presiding Officer announce what the schedule is for the rest of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NOMINATION OBJECTION

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, our Founders designed a constitutional government powerful enough to defend against all threats, foreign and domestic, yet safe enough itself not to threaten our liberty. The separation of powers is a primary feature of our Constitution. Our Founders knew that encroachment by the executive onto the legislature, or vice versa, isn't only a political dispute but ultimately a threat to the freedom of all Americans. Thus they provided both branches with checks and balances to prevent such encroachment.

Late last week, we learned shocking news. Armed agents of the executive violated the law to intimidate a Congressman from doing his job. This is exactly the kind of encroachment against which our Founders warned. The executive hasn't yet acted with anything like the gravity this matter deserves. Until it does, I intend to use the powers of my office to demand action and to protect our constitutional order.

Let me say more about the shocking news. In an inspector general report issued last week, we learned that dozens of Secret Service employees illegally accessed the personnel file of Representative JASON CHAFFETZ. More than a decade ago, Congressman CHAFFETZ applied to the Secret Service; he was not hired. Now he is the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

In late March of this year, the committee held an important oversight hearing into a serious misconduct by Secret Service agents. Mere minutes into the hearing, an agent at the Secret Service's Washington office illegally searched the Service's database, which contains all manner of criminal, security, investigative, personnel, and other data. The agent discovered Congressman CHAFFETZ's old job application. This search was a blatant violation of the Privacy Act, about which the computer-based system explicitly warns on a prompt screen. The agent admitted conducting the search simply out of curiosity, presumably because Congressman CHAFFETZ was conducting an oversight hearing.

Far from an isolated incident, word quickly spread throughout the Secret Service, and 45 employees accessed Congressman CHAFFETZ's records over the next week on 60 different occasions. These employees were located around the world, from London to Sacramento, in multiple headquarter offices, even on Bill Clinton's protective detail. The inspector general could identify only four instances of potentially legitimate access. Moreover, the inspector general concludes that the information was shared with hundreds of people—each a violation of the Privacy Act.

Some employees realized their mistake and self-reported to their supervisor, according to the inspector general. While these employees indeed made a serious mistake, at least they owned up to it. Others remained defiant, saying they didn't read the warning banner or even claiming a right to satisfy personal curiosity because the personnel files are ''our database.''

Let me state for the record my admiration for the vast majority of Secret Service agents, officers, and other professionals. We saw their professionalism on display again last month during Pope Francis's visit and at the U.N. General Assembly. They are dedicated professionals who risk their lives to defend our Constitution and laws. Indeed, Secret Service whistleblowers aware of this situation helped to initiate the inspector general investigation. Like the soldiers with whom I served in the Army, the upstanding men and women of the Secret Service want to get rid of their bad apples more than anyone.

Unfortunately, the senior leaders at the Secret Service once again failed their people. The inspector general identified 18 supervisors who knew or should have known of the illegal searches and disclosures. With but one exception, the inspector general found no evidence that these senior managers reported the matter up the chain of command or took steps to stop or remedy it.

These leadership failures went all the way to the top. One example is Deputy Director Craig Magaw. When briefed by a subordinate, Mr. Magaw reportedly ''made a shooing hand motion and stated 'Yeah, yeah we know.' '' Despite the gravity of the allegations, Mr. Magaw apparently took no steps to learn more or stop the illegal activity, and he claims not to recall this exchange.

Another example is Chief of Staff Michael Biermann, whom the inspector general characterizes as the de facto gatekeeper for Director Joe Clancy and Deputy Director Magaw. Mr. Biermann admits to hearing rampant rumors about the Chaffetz matter within 24 hours of the hearing. Yet he also apparently didn't inquire any further to learn the truth or take action to stop illegal activity.

The most egregious example of leadership failure in the inspector general report is Assistant Director Ed Lowery, the head of training for the Secret Service. Mr. Lowery wrote in this email about Congressman CHAFFETZ, ''Some information that he might find embarrassing needs to get out. Just to be fair.''

Lo and behold, 2 days later, a news Web site ran an article—unsourced—about Congressman CHAFFETZ's decade-old job application to the Secret Service. I wonder who the source could have been. For that matter, I wonder if this kind of attitude from the head of training explains some of the Secret Service's recent struggles.

There is even more egregious behavior not in the inspector general report. Thanks to a Friday afternoon news dump, we now know that Director Joe Clancy himself both knew of the Chaffetz matter at the time and misrepresented the facts to the inspector