

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

MR. DURBIN. Madam President, the Senate Judiciary Committee has really been in business for a few weeks now, and I think we have begun this session addressing some of the relevant issues that I expect such a committee to address.

First, of course, was the appointment of Attorney General Merrick Garland. I thank Senator GRASSLEY for his cooperation on a bipartisan basis in bringing that nominee to the floor, where he received 70 Senate votes—bipartisan support for his leadership at the Department of Justice. We continue this week with two more of President Biden's appointments to the Department of Justice: Lisa Monaco and Vanita Gupta. They will be considered by the full Judiciary Committee on Thursday.

We will continue to fill vacancies in the administration as we are sent nominees and have that opportunity, but in addition to that, we have had hearings on several relevant topics and have another one starting tomorrow.

Christopher Wray, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was called before the committee for an oversight hearing. It is the first time in more than a calendar year that the head of the FBI was actually brought to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee, a committee that has the traditional oversight responsibility for his Agency. His testimony was important and timely. He talked about the Trump-inspired mob that attacked this Capitol and the rise of domestic terrorism in the United States. He identified it as one of the major threats to security in our country, and we are considering legislation to empower him and others in the administration to address this threat.

That does not take anything away from our efforts to staunch any inspired international terrorism, but we have learned, unfortunately, that in addition to looking across the ocean for threats of terrorism, in America today, we have to look across the street. Unfortunately, there are domestic terrorism groups. We saw them on parade January 6, and they are still at their work. They must be stopped to make sure that America is safe for everyone.

That was an important hearing. We followed it up last week with the first ever Senate hearing on the Equality Act. The Equality Act, which has been passed by the House of Representatives, has been sent to the Senate for consideration. Senator MERKLEY from Oregon is the lead sponsor.

Simply put, the bill is there to end discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. I thought it was a very powerful hearing. Most Americans are surprised to learn that although we now recognize marriage by people of the same gender, in many States, there is no protection against discrimination for those same people. It is a gross dis-

parity in justice in this country, and I thought our witnesses brought that point through very clearly. I hope that we can gather bipartisan support for that measure quickly and bring it to the floor. It is long overdue.

Tomorrow we are having a hearing which is, unfortunately, very timely. I announced last week that this hearing on commonsense steps to reduce gun violence in America would be held this week. On the same day I announced that hearing, a gunman murdered eight people in a string of shootings near Atlanta, GA—one man, seven women, and six of the victims were Asian Americans. He committed these murders with a gun he had bought the same day. That day, children lost their parents, husbands lost their wives, and fear of trauma reverberated across America in the Asian-American community.

I know that the Presiding Officer and I reached out to people in our home State of Illinois to assure them that we are aware of this and are going to do everything we can to stop this type of discrimination and this terrible violence that followed.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been 27 mass shootings in America this month—27 mass shootings this month—with a mass shooting defined as an incident where at least 4 victims are shot. Mass shootings, of course, make the biggest headlines, but day after day, week after week, the deadly toll of gun violence grows. Last weekend, 20 people were shot in our city of Chicago, 4 of them fatally. Across the Nation, every day, we lose on average 109 American lives to gunfire—suicide, domestic violence shootings, accidental shootings, and homicides—and another 200 Americans are injured by guns each day.

The numbers are sobering, and that is why tomorrow the Senate Judiciary Committee is going to address this issue. The subcommittee chairman, DICK BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut, will take over the full committee hearing after I make some opening remarks. I know he has a special feeling for this issue because of the tragedy in Newtown, CT, just a few years ago when a gunman went in and killed so many innocent children and their teachers at a grade school. It was one horrible event. It was an event that was so horrible, many of us said: That can make the difference. Politically, that is going to change America. It is going to result in things happening finally—commonsense, constitutional gun safety measures that will keep guns out of the hands of people who would misuse them.

Well, I would have lost that bet. Many others would have, too, because we failed to respond in a timely fashion. What stopped us from passing a bill in the U.S. Senate for background checks to make sure that convicted felons did not purchase guns legally in America and would be stopped because of roadblocks we put in their paths and

that people who were mentally unstable would not have access to guns which they could use to hurt innocent people, as we have seen over and over again—what stopped that from happening? A rule in the U.S. Senate. It is called the filibuster, and what it says is, it takes more than a majority for the overwhelming majority of the American people to see gun safety in America. It takes 60 votes in a Senate evenly divided 50-50.

Well, we are hoping—we are just hoping—that maybe there is a sentiment, a bipartisan sentiment, that could reach 60 votes on thoughtful, commonsense gun control that will really say to people: Yes, you have your Second Amendment right to own a gun legally, responsibly, and to store it safely. You can use it for sporting, target practice, and self-defense if you wish. But we want to make certain that we eliminate as much as possible those who would misuse those firearms.

It is interesting. The overwhelming majority of firearm owners across the Nation believe that same thing. They don't argue with the premise that they want guns to be in the hands of people who will use them responsibly. Yet, despite this overwhelming majority sentiment, we can't get the bill through the U.S. Senate for the very reason I mentioned, the filibuster.

So when Senator MCCONNELL comes to the floor each day to defend the filibuster, the basic question you have to ask him is, If the Senate can work with the filibuster, show us. Show us. Show us that if we bring 45 or 50 votes to the floor, there are 10 Republicans who will join us and work with us to pass important legislation. That wouldn't be the only thing. There would be many other things.

I have heard speeches on the floor by so many Republicans about the situation on our southern border with immigration, and it truly is a challenge. I work on it because it is the matter that I have paid a lot of attention to in my career but also because it is subject matter in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Why is it that we have not addressed immigration reform in the United States? The filibuster, that is the reason. The filibuster has stopped us from passing measures like the Dream Act.

I introduced the Dream Act 20 years ago to say, if you are brought here to the United States as a child, raised in this country, you ought to have a path to legalization and citizenship so you can stay in the country you call home—a simple premise overwhelmingly supported by the American people.

Five times I brought the Dream Act to the floor of the Senate for passage: Let's make this a law. Five times it failed. Why? The filibuster rule. Each time I had a majority but not the necessary 60 votes. That is another example of where the filibuster has stepped in and stopped a majority of the Senate from passing a measure which was

timely, I believe thoughtful, and which the American people overwhelmingly supported.

So I would say to the defenders of the filibuster: Show us it can work. We have had so little legislative activity that was subject to this filibuster rule over the last several years, and, obviously, some Senators are very content with that. I am not. There is work to be done, not just in the areas I have mentioned but in so many others. Infrastructure programs for Americans are a good example too.

Let's get to work in the Senate and do what we were elected to do: to deliberate, to legislate, to amend, to express different points of view but, ultimately, to enact laws that will make this a better nation.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Madam President, I want to salute a member of my staff before I make this statement. His name is Chris Homan. He has been with me a number of years. He has a special passion for people who are languishing in prisons around the world for so-called political crimes, and he has convinced me to make this my cause as well.

Time after time, we have been successful at seeing the release of these political prisoners simply by speaking on the floor and addressing the Embassies of the countries where they are imprisoned and trying to put some political pressure on the leaders of those countries to release those prisoners. You wouldn't believe that would work, would you, in an authoritarian regime, but it turns out it does, and over the years, we have been successful in helping many political prisoners be released. Today, I would like to address that topic again.

There are political prisoners languishing in jails around the world for nothing more than advocating for human rights and political freedom. These brave souls are often led to believe their efforts to push for freedoms are forgotten. I come to the floor today to tell them that is not the case.

Let me start with a particularly cruel and troubling set of cases: a Saudi writer, Raif Badawi, and his lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair. Badawi was arrested in 2012 for his peaceful writings, charged with apostasy, sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2012 and 1,000 lashes, at least 50 of which were carried out despite international uproar. Badawi suffers poor health, hypertension. His condition has worsened during 10 years in prison.

I had the honor of meeting his wife, Ensaf Haidar, here in Washington, DC, some years ago. She is living in exile in Canada with her young children after facing threats to her life in Saudi Arabia.

Badawi's lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair, a leading human rights activist, also was arrested in 2014 and sentenced to 10 years in prison and a 15-year travel ban.

As these two men near the latter years of their sentences, I once again

appeal to the Government of the Saudis to free them. They have suffered enough.

I also call for the release of Filipina Senator Leila de Lima, who just spent her fourth year languishing in jail in the Philippines. This is a photo of her in her cell.

As a leading human rights advocate, she has criticized the actions of the President of her country, Rodrigo Duterte. From time to time, she writes from her cell. Let me share a short excerpt from this brave woman who, incredibly, after 4 years in confinement, still maintains her sense of humor. She wrote:

Warm greetings from my detention quarters at the Philippine National Police Custodial Center, Camp Crame! . . . I do not know how long I will remain behind bars but there is one thing that I am sure of—my will to fight for what is right continues to be undeterred.

She is not alone. Many of us have spoken about Duterte's political harassment of Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, who received her 9th arrest warrant in November and 10th in January.

I have met with many in the Filipino American community in Illinois. We have a great, great community of Filipinos in the Chicagoland area and across the State. I know that they and colleagues here, like Senators MARKEY and LEAHY, will continue to support efforts to see a more accountable and democratic Philippines.

Lastly, let me turn to the United Arab Emirates, where one of the Nation's top human rights defenders, Ahmed Mansoor, also just passed his fourth year in jail. You see, Mansoor was arrested under the guise that his social media post advocating for human rights threatened the social harmony of the UAE. He is considered to be one of the last human rights defenders in the Emirates, one who peacefully advocates for freedom of expression, fair trials, and the humane treatment of prisoners.

Since his troubling sentencing in 2017, he has endured solitary confinement and cruel separation from his family. Despite the dismal conditions of his incarceration, he remains steadfast in his commitment to human rights, even conducting multiple hunger strikes in protest of jail conditions—the same conditions he spoke against before his detention. It is long overdue that Emiratis let this man go.

America's strength around the world comes not only from its military and its economy but also from the power of its ideals. I can tell you from the many former prisoners who have come to visit me over the years that the support of this body and this Congress and the American people, which we may just take for granted as another speech on the floor of the Senate, can make a difference. They have come to learn that someone actually mentioned their name on the floor of the U.S. Senate in Washington, DC. It sustains them. It encourages them. It gives them hope,

and it puts pressure on the governments that jail them to justify and rationalize the cruel treatment that they are responsible for.

So let me remind Raif Badawi, Waleed Abulkhair, Senator Leila de Lima, Maria Ressa, and Ahmed Mansoor: You are not forgotten. We will continue to advocate for your freedom, and we hope that it comes someday soon.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. 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 OF MARTIN JOSEPH WALSH

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, this pandemic has made it clearer than ever: It is not corporations that drive our economy; it is American workers.

With Marty Walsh, for whom we will vote in a moment on confirmation for the Department of Labor, workers will finally have someone on their side, as the Department that is supposed to look out for them. The Department of Labor is supposed to be the voice for workers in our government. It is their job to make sure workers' rights are protected, that people are safe on the job, that everyone can organize a union and get the overtime pay they have earned.

For 4 years, we have had a Department of Labor full of corporate lawyers. In fact, the Secretary of Labor was a corporate lawyer who made millions of dollars in court attacking labor unions and getting very well paid for it. That Department was full of people who made their careers fighting for corporate boards and CEOs, trying to squeeze every last penny out of workers and skirting labor laws.

And we saw the results. The DOL stopped fighting to raise the overtime pay threshold. In my State, tens of thousands of workers and, nationally, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of workers failed to get a raise as a result.

A year into the pandemic, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA, still has not issued an emergency temporary standard to protect workers from coronavirus. When 1,300 workers last year got sick at a Smithfield meatpacking plant, they fined the company a pathetic \$10 per worker.

With Marty Walsh, that corporate infiltration of the Department of Labor ends now. Mayor Walsh will put the focus back where it should be: fighting for the people who make this country work.

We know that for far too many Americans, hard work doesn't pay off. They have seen corporate profits go up. They have seen executive compensation skyrocket. They have become