

SEVEN YEARS AFTER COLUMBINE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last Thursday marked the seventh anniversary of the tragic Columbine High School shooting. None of us will forget the sight of hundreds of terrified students running out of their high school while police and S.W.A.T. team members frantically searched for 2 young gunmen who, before taking their own lives, had murdered 12 innocent children, a teacher, and wounded 2 dozen other students.

In the aftermath of the Columbine tragedy, I said I would try to make a statement each week on the issue of commonsense gun safety to help draw attention to an issue that, unfortunately, continues to go unaddressed. Heidi Yewman, who graduated from Columbine High School 13 years before the shooting, wrote about her frustrations and the lack of congressional attention to this issue in a recent newspaper editorial. As she put it, "This summer I will attend my 20-year high school reunion, and Topic A will be as it has been for the past seven years: the massacre and what hasn't happened since." I will ask that the text of Ms. Yewman's editorial be printed in the RECORD.

One of the things mentioned by Ms. Yewman that hasn't happened since the Columbine High School shootings is a Federal requirement of a background check on the sale of all firearms, including those that are sold at gun shows. Under current law, when an individual buys a firearm from a licensed dealer, there are Federal requirements for a background check to insure that the purchaser is not prohibited by law from purchasing or possessing a gun. However, this is not the case for all gun purchases. For example, when an individual wants to buy a firearm from another private citizen who is not a licensed gun dealer, there is no Federal requirement that the seller ensure the purchaser is not in a prohibited category. This creates a loophole in the law, making it easy for criminals, terrorists, and other prohibited buyers to evade background checks and buy guns from private citizens. This loophole creates a gateway to the illegal market because criminals know they will not be subject to a background check when purchasing from another private citizen even at a gun show.

During the 108th Congress, I cosponsored an amendment that passed the Senate which would have required background checks on all firearms sold at gun shows. However, when the Senate passed the amendment, the National Rifle Association and its allies in the Senate then removed their support for the underlying bill and it was defeated. Unfortunately, the Senate has failed to address this important gun safety issue since.

In the years since the Columbine High School shootings, Congress has also failed to renew the 1994 assault weapons ban. On September 13, 2004,

this legislation was allowed to expire, allowing 19 previously banned assault weapons, including the TEC-9 handgun used by the Columbine shooters, and other firearms with military style features to be legally sold again.

I have cosponsored legislation to reauthorize and strengthen the assault weapons ban. Last Congress, the Senate adopted an amendment to reauthorize the assault weapons ban for 10 years. However, like the amendment to close the gun show loophole, the bill to which the amendment was attached was later defeated, and despite the fact that a bipartisan majority of Senators voted to support reauthorizing the ban on assault weapons, the Republican leadership has refused to schedule another vote on the issue.

Mr. President, the threat of gun violence in our schools and communities has not diminished. Last week alone, as families and friends remembered those who were lost in the Columbine shootings, law enforcement officials apparently thwarted planned Columbine-style school shootings in Kansas, Alaska, Mississippi, and Washington. According to published reports, students in at least two of these small towns had already acquired the guns and ammunition necessary to carry out such an attack.

Were it not for the courage of the students who stepped forward to report violent threats from their fellow students and the investigative work by law enforcement officials that followed, another community might well have had to face the horror that the residents of Littleton, CO, faced 7 years ago. Congress must take up and pass common sense gun safety legislation to help prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future.

I ask unanimous consent that the before-mentioned editorial be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Columbian, Apr. 16, 2006]

LOCAL VIEW: GUN ADVOCATES IGNORE LESSONS OF COLUMBINE

(By Heidi Yewman)

This summer I will attend my 20-year high school reunion, and Topic A will be as it has been for the past seven years—the massacre and what hasn't happened since.

Seven years ago, this Thursday (April 20), two teenage gunmen massacred 12 students and one teacher at my school, Columbine High in Colorado. That teacher, my high school basketball coach Dave Sanders, bled to death after being shot in the chest; 24 other people were injured.

It was a terrible, sad day that sparked massive debate regarding guns and gun laws in the United States. Much discussion also centered on the nature of high school cliques and bullying, violent movies and video games, but mostly on guns like the two shotguns, the assault rifle, and the TEC-9 assault pistol that the two troubled kids at Columbine used to shoot their victims before killing themselves.

So what exactly has changed as a result of all that despair, discussion and debate?

Virtually nothing.

Colorado and Oregon immediately passed initiatives requiring background checks at gun shows. Today 32 states still do not require background checks on gun purchases at gun shows including Washington.

The Federal Assault Weapons Ban expired in 1994 and was not renewed, putting guns like Tec-9s back on the streets.

In 2005 Congress passed and the president signed into law a measure that, astonishingly, provides immunity from prosecution for gun manufacturers and sellers.

The National Rifle Association is pushing hard to pass "take-your-guns-to-work" laws in all 50 states that would turn companies into criminals if they barred guns on their private property. So far the legislation has been introduced in 11 states.

Seven states have passed legislation that eliminates a citizen's duty to avoid a threat, and allow the use of deadly force before other options when a gun user simply feels threatened.

You've got to give the NRA credit. It is an effective lobbying organization that fights hard for its beliefs and has enjoyed remarkable success in the past seven years. But at what price? If only common sense had lobbyists.

A MASSACRE EVERY DAY

Since the Columbine tragedy, 210,000 people have died in America due to gun violence, and school shootings continue to occur without much notice. Can you even remember the names of the schools where kids were shot and killed in the past seven years? It's become routine news, sandwiched between the latest from Iraq and the weather.

Since 9/11, America has monitored library cards, listened in on cell phone calls, tracked fertilizer purchases, and made us take our shoes off before boarding an airplane, but it has done almost nothing to make it harder for either terrorists or criminals to buy guns. We continue to put the right to own a Tec-9 over common sense precautions to protect our nation and our kids. I find such inaction inexcusable.

Columbine did mobilize millions of moms across the nation, and a small, vocal minority is railing against this country's gun culture. In March, 32 states received grades of D's or F's in the Brady Campaign's 2005 annual report card. Washington state earned a D-plus and Oregon got a C-minus because they haven't passed common sense gun laws that protect our children and families. Do we perhaps think that, because our memories have faded, the threat is any less real? Don't we know that 10 of the 19 school shootings since Columbine happened in the spring? Didn't Benjamin Franklin say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results?

On April 20, 1999 I saw my high school turned into a morgue for innocent teenagers. I truly thought the carnage would prompt some meaningful change.

I was wrong.

I guess we're all just hoping that our child, our school isn't next. But wishing won't make it so. What we can do is call on our legislators to pass a law requiring background checks at gun shows in 2007, legislation that we have been trying to pass in Washington since Columbine.

I wonder if at my 30-year reunion the massacre at Columbine High School will still be "the worst school shooting in U.S. history."

Sadly, I doubt it.

WELCOMING HIS EXCELLENCY
ILHAM ALIYEV, THE PRESIDENT
OF AZERBAIJAN

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, the Senate recognizes Azerbaijan as a key

ally in a region of significant importance and a valued partner to the United States. Under President Ilham Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan has made important contributions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. He supports efforts to combat terrorism, speed integration of Azerbaijan into Western institutions, and is committed to working with the United States in developing democracy and civil institutions in Azerbaijan.

President Aliyev is in Washington this week to meet with President Bush, senior Administration officials, and key congressional leaders to discuss the promotion of democracy, regional cooperation, energy security and diversification, and our Nations' commitment to working closely together to advance freedom, security, and economic independence.

Specifically, the Senate welcomes the fact that Azerbaijan is rapidly developing its national economy, growing at a rate of about 26 percent annually since 2004, which contributes to the alleviation of poverty and reaching the millennium development goals; is completing the one mbpd Baku-Ceyhan, BTC, oil pipeline and Baku-Erzurum, SCP, natural gas pipeline, set to increase energy exports and availability for the United States and its allies; and welcomes encouragement by the United States to assist the people of Azerbaijan in establishing a fully free and open democratic system, a prosperous free market economy, and its rightful place in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, and World Trade Organization, WTO.

The Senate welcomes President Ilham Aliyev upon his first official visit to Washington and thanks him for coming.

NORTH KOREA FREEDOM DAY

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, this week the North Korean Freedom Coalition, a bipartisan coalition of NGOs and individuals, will be organizing a rally on Capitol Hill at noon on Friday, April 28, 2006, in recognition of North Korea Freedom Day.

Largely through the persistent efforts of the coalition and many others across the country, there has been an upsurge of interest in North Korea with Americans and particularly the faith communities. Members of Congress, North Korean defectors, NGO leaders from the USA, South Korea, and Japan have been holding rallies, testifying before Congress, and personally sharing their stories with others and the press to help support the plight of North Koreans and, in particular, the refugees in China and elsewhere. Thousands will gather to stand up for the freedom, human rights, and dignity of the North Korean people.

Since the Stalinist country disclosed several years ago that it had renewed efforts to develop nuclear weapons, not

a single day goes by without Pyongyang carrying out more reckless deeds to escalate the crisis or exchanging hostile threats with Washington, DC. With the six-party talks dissolving without any progress, the current nuclear standoff seems poised to continue, if not deteriorate. Many people point out, and correctly so, the need for more scholarship on the nuclear threat that North Korea poses not only to East Asia but also to the world.

The sad truth, however, is that amid the discussion of regional security and nuclear nonproliferation for South Korea, Japan, and China, as well as the war against terrorism for the United States, a central part of this issue has been neglected: the human rights of North Koreans.

It is hard to imagine a country whose citizens endure a worse or more pervasive abuse of every human right. The Government prohibits freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, movement, and more. The draconian penal code stipulates capital punishment and confiscation of assets for a wide variety of "crimes against revolution," including defection, attempted defection, slander of the policies of the state, listening to foreign broadcasts, and possessing "reactionary" printed matter.

Those who escaped political concentration camps tell stories of horror beyond imagination. Prison guards kill newborn babies in front of their mothers. A female prisoner dies after being beaten by prison guards like a soccer ball, with her wounds filled with maggots. Molten metal is poured on Christians who refuse to disavow their faith. The open goal of these camps, detaining political dissidents whose loyalty to the party is "beyond recovery," is to eradicate three generations of their inmates. An estimated 1.5 million prisoners have been killed in the camps. Approximately 200,000 are currently imprisoned.

Those who risk their lives and succeed in escaping to China to find food and freedom are not better off. The Chinese Government continues to violate refugees' rights and repatriates them to North Korea, where they will most likely face persecution; North Korean refugees are exploited by those around them who threaten to report them to the authorities. The sexual slavery of North Korean refugee women in China is an urgent human rights issue that has yet to attract the attention of the international community.

In 2004, Congress passed and the President signed into law the North Korean Human Rights Act. Since passage, much has been done and various provisions of the bill have been implemented. However, much more remains to be done, especially in fully funding the authorization contained in the bill. I ask that reports from State Department required by the Act be submitted to Congress. More importantly, it is absolutely critical that we allow North Korean refugees seeking refuge in the

United States to be allowed to do so as per the provisions of the act and appropriate vetting processes. Nothing we do—not even funding—will produce more tangible results of improving the human rights of North Koreans than this gesture that is a long and hallowed part of our history and tradition. We are a nation that welcomes those facing persecution because we not only believe but practice the principal that "to whom much is given, much is required."

As the security concerns dominate headlines of all United States and international news media, the sufferings of 22 million North Koreans are missing from public awareness. It is in recognizing this desperate need for more awareness of the North Korean human rights that the coalition is organizing this timely and important event this week.

North Korean Human Rights Week will provide an opportunity for us to learn more about this tragedy that is occurring right this minute. I commend the organizers of the week, especially the members of the North Korean Freedom Coalition and its many volunteers who have given so much of their time in preparing for this important event.

It is time to shake ourselves off of shocked disbelief. And it is time to break out of apathy and ignorance and stand up for human rights in North Korea.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, as we celebrate National Volunteer Week, I would like to take a moment to recognize four individuals for their extraordinary service to the Everybody Wins! program in Iowa.

As many of my colleagues know, Everybody Wins! is a literacy and mentoring program for elementary school students. The program gives adults the opportunity to spend one lunch hour a week reading with a child in a public school. It is the ultimate power lunch.

Eight years ago, Senator JIM JEFFORDS recruited me to join him as a volunteer for the Everybody Wins! program in Washington, DC. The time I spend at Brent Elementary is the most important and rewarding hour of my workweek. My experience also convinced me of the need to expand this program to Iowa.

In 2002, Everybody Wins! Iowa was launched. The program began as a small pilot program in 3 public schools with 15 volunteers. From this modest beginning, the program has grown, and now serves more than 260 students in 11 central Iowa schools.

The success of the Iowa program is due to the dedicated services of many individuals. Today, I would like to recognize the service of four people who served as founding members of the board of directors and who have played a critical role in the development of Everybody Wins! Iowa.