

to extend the law. Each and every time we offered to extend the law, an objection was heard from either Senator MCCONNELL or another person on the Republican side. It appears this is not about the security advantage of the United States in fighting terrorism but about some political advantage that if this law appears to lapse, they believe they can make some political gain, I guess. That is the only thing I can deduce is their reason; otherwise, they would have extended this important law, but the decision was made by the Republican leadership not to extend the law. I don't know why. We tried. We will continue to try, and we will continue to try to work out an agreement between the House and the Senate to make certain America is safe.

TRAGEDY AT NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, about 60 miles west of the city of Chicago is the city of DeKalb, IL. DeKalb is a town of great historic importance not only in our State but to our Nation. Many years ago in DeKalb, they invented barbed wire. It sounds like a small matter, but it turned out to be a major part of the settling of the Western part of the United States. The town of DeKalb grew up around the farms that provided not only produce but jobs, and eventually gave birth to a great university: Northern Illinois University. Last night I was at that university. I went into the convocation hall there, to a gathering that was called together to memorialize a terrible tragedy.

On February 14, as this Senate was leaving Washington, we heard word that a shooter had come on campus, gone into a lecture hall and opened fire, wounding a score of students and killing five. It is hard to imagine. It is hard to imagine that a tragedy would take place at that great university. Today, Senator OBAMA and I are introducing a resolution expressing our condolences and the condolences of the Senate to all those affected by this tragedy.

If my colleagues have ever been to that campus, they know that under normal circumstances, it is the picture-perfect American university campus. On any day, you are going to find thousands of students and faculty in their classrooms and research labs, on athletic fields and in the dorms, eating pizza, studying, stuck in front of their computers, going through the happiest moments of their lives. I look back, as many of us do, on my college days, and realize what a good time it was, meeting all those wonderful new people, being challenged, learning so many important things, and making friendships that last a lifetime.

Tragically, for many of those students on the campus of Northern Illinois University on February 14, that atmosphere and that environment changed. They were literally running for the exits of that lecture hall as this

man stood before them, repeatedly firing handguns and a shotgun, killing their fellow students. Within minutes, the campus police were there. No one has questioned the response to this tragedy, nor should they. There was a good plan in place to deal with it. They executed the plan, but when they arrived, it was too late. Students had already been shot and wounded. Five students died and seventeen were wounded. We mourn their loss.

It is interesting, because in a circumstance such as this, we come to know the victims and their families. Gayle Dubowski of Carol Stream, IL. She was a devout member of her church. She sang in the church choir. She worked as a camp counselor and volunteer in rural Kentucky. When her parents went to her dorm room after she had been killed, they found the Bible open on her bed. Her faith was very important to her life.

Catalina Garcia, of Cicero, a first-generation American. Her parents are from Mexico. She wanted to make them proud. She was her family's princess, her family said, and their inspiration. She wanted to be a teacher. She always had a smile on her face. If you saw the photograph they used in most of the newspapers, you saw her beautiful smile.

Julianna Gehant of Mendota, IL. What a great story. She spent 12 years of her life in the U.S. Army, serving overseas and serving her Nation. She was in the Army Reserves. She went on to Northern Illinois to become a teacher.

Ryanne Mace, of Carpentersville, a much-loved only child who was rarely without a smile, and her dream was to be a counselor, to help those in need.

Daniel Parmenter of Westchester, known as "Danny," a 6-foot-5-inch rugby player, known as the gentle giant by all of his friends. He was a man who was sitting in that lecture hall next to his new girlfriend. He was going to give her a silver necklace the day after this shooting. It never happened. He died trying to protect his girlfriend from the gunfire, and she was able to survive.

On February 14, five beautiful lives ended in Cole Hall, a lecture hall at Northern Illinois University. Last night at the gathering there were 10,000 people filling the university center. Senator OBAMA was there. We had four Members of our House delegation from Illinois. I was glad they came: Congressman DON MANZULLO, Congressman PETER ROSKAM, Congresswoman MELISSA BEAN, and Congressman RAHM EMANUEL. The Governor of our State was there and many other State officials.

What struck me as touching was that as soon as we entered this hall, it was to silence; 10,000 people sitting in silence at this memorial tribute. Prayers were offered, as they should be, for the families of those who died and for the families of those who were wounded and are still recovering. They should

not be forgotten. We wish them a speedy recovery. But we also commended the emergency responders, the law enforcement officers, the health care providers. They were there on February 14, and they did what they promised they would do: Everything they could to save lives and heal the wounded. They were trained, they were prepared, and they responded with courage. The toll from this shooting could have been worse if it wasn't for their efforts.

I wish to also acknowledge President John Peters of Northern Illinois University and the entire administration. The program last night was a beautiful program which they organized, but even more important was the work they have done since February 14 to bring that campus back together.

Today, classes resumed at Northern Illinois University. Lessons were being taught. But last night, we gathered at the memorial service to reflect on the lessons of life we have learned from February 14. First, we thanked all those across America who have joined us in expressing sympathy for our loss and solidarity of purpose for our future. From the moment that news spread about this tragedy in DeKalb, IL, America has been standing with the Northern Illinois University community.

This tragedy is a terrible reminder that we in Congress have work to do to make our campuses and our country safer. We need to do all that we can to make schools a safe place. When we grew up, we always thought school was the safest place one could be. Now look what we face.

Last April, Senator OBAMA and I introduced campus safety legislation in response to the Virginia Tech shootings. The Presiding Officer certainly knows the pain and sorrow and the grief that were associated with that tragedy. Key parts of that legislation will reach the President's desk soon as part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization. I hope these new measures Senator OBAMA and I are supporting will allow campuses and universities to think of ways to make those environments safer for students and everyone who visits in the future.

But we also need to take a look at two controversial issues. We need to take a look at gun violence. There is an epidemic of gun violence in our Nation. We have reached the point in Congress where we don't talk about it, or if we do, it is in hushed tones. There is almost a feeling of inevitability that because there are 300 million guns in America, there is nothing we can do about it. We get tied up in political knots, every time we discuss it, about whether we are going too far, infringing on constitutional rights, or whether we are going far enough to spare innocent victims such as these five college students.

In America, every day, we lose 81 people who die from gun violence. 30,000 Americans die every year from

gun violence, which is more than twice as many as die from HIV/AIDS. That doesn't count the 176 people who are wounded every day in this country by gunfire. It is of epidemic proportions. No matter where you are, where you live, or how safe you think you are, any of us could be among the dozens of victims each day who end up on the wrong side of a gun.

Just a few months ago, I was invited to speak at a memorial service for a little girl who was killed near Logan Square in Chicago. She was playing on a playground and got caught in the crossfire of gang violence. The gangs started shooting at one another, and this little girl was killed. Her mother could hardly stand, as she was sobbing uncontrollably, even days after it occurred. As I went up to say a few words, the minister said to me, "Don't bring up the gun control issue, it's too controversial." I reflected on that for a long time, and I abided by his wishes and the wishes of the family not to bring it up. But that is an indication of the fact that we cannot even talk about it. We cannot talk about reasonable ways so that guns don't get in the hands of people who will misuse them.

The vast majority of people who own guns in America obtain them legally and use them legally and responsibly. We should do everything we can to protect their rights under our laws to continue to use guns in a safe and legal manner, for sporting purposes or self-defense. But we know—even gun owners know—there are people buying guns at this very minute who have an intent in mind of killing innocent people. This great Nation has to do a better job of keeping those guns out of the hands of those who would misuse them.

The second issue is equally challenging; it is the issue of mental illness. It is ironic that 30 years ago a young boy whom I knew in my hometown of East St. Louis, IL—and I had known him since he was a 2-year old—grew up, graduated high school, and went away to Northern Illinois University. He was gone 5 weeks, and he was sent home. We started asking, "Why did Gary come back? What happened?" We never got the full story until a few months later. When Gary went up to Northern Illinois University, for the first time in his life, he exhibited problems with mental illness, serious mental illness. They decided it was in his best interest for him to go home. And he did. He had a serious problem. Unfortunately, it troubled him for his entire life before he died. It first exhibited itself on that college campus. That is not unusual. Many people who leave their homes for the first time—leave the shelter and comfort of the home environment and head out to a new place, like a new campus or university, move into a dorm room—have a problem that exhibits itself for the first time. When we talk to those who are leaders of universities, they say they offer counseling and try to find the students who need help.

In times gone by, in worst-case scenarios, many students took their lives. The suicide rate on college campuses is higher than people talk about.

Now there is a new element. I spoke to the president of a major university in Illinois about mental illness among the college population. He said that, in years gone by, a student would take his life and it was a tragedy for the school and their family. But now this is a new era, where that student buys a firearm and wants to take others with him. This university president said, "I don't understand. I don't know if it is the video games or the movies or whatever it is; but this idea that you will shoot innocent people before you kill yourself, as this gunman did at Northern Illinois University—this is a challenge for all of us."

We have to first understand that mental illness is an illness and not a curse. It can be treated successfully in the vast majority of cases. We need to enact the Mental Health Parity Act so that more people have mental health protection as part of their health plans. We have to offer counseling for students and people who need a helping hand in this circumstance. We have to understand that the college campus can be an especially important place to focus our resources. We have to encourage students to move into those resources and get help. We cannot penalize or stigmatize them for fear that they won't seek help. But we also have to be protective of the innocent people around them and to understand that at some point you have to draw a line and say this person is now in an unstable or dangerous situation, should never be allowed a firearm, and needs to be at least monitored carefully, if not some other action taken.

This is a difficult issue because for many years we didn't talk honestly and responsibly about mental health. We should. The shooter of these innocent students at Northern Illinois University obviously was suffering from some form of mental illness. I don't know if it could have been traced ahead of time and acted upon, but we have to think about the future and what we can do.

After the shootings at NIU, a group of parents whose children died at Virginia Tech wrote to the newly bereaved parents at NIU to offer their support. Those parents are now joined together by a bond that no parent ever wants to share. The letter from the Virginia Tech parents is posted on the Web site of Northern Illinois University. The question facing us now is, how much larger will we allow the circle of grief to become? How many more support groups will be formed by those who lose someone they love in school and on a campus?

We know guns and mental illness are controversial issues, but we also know that five of the finest young men and women you could ever ask for were taken from us on February 14. If there is any way we could have prevented their loss, we need to find it.

In the days and weeks to come, the victims of the shooting will be in our thoughts and prayers. We stand in solidarity with the Huskies of Northern Illinois University, the students, faculty, the staff, and the members of the families as they mourn their losses and recover from this tragic incident.

EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE TO THOSE AFFECTED BY THE DEVASTATING SHOOTING INCIDENT OF FEBRUARY 14, 2008, AT NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY IN DEKALB, ILLINOIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 458, which was submitted earlier today by myself and Senator OBAMA.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will state the resolution by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 458) expressing the condolences of the Senate to those affected by the devastating shooting incident of February 14, 2008, at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements related to the resolution be printed in the RECORD at the appropriate place as if read.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 458) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 458

Whereas, on Thursday, February 14, 2008, a gunman entered a lecture hall on the campus of Northern Illinois University and opened fire on the students assembled there;

Whereas the gunman took the lives of 5 students and wounded 17 more;

Whereas the 5 students who lost their lives that day were—

(1) Gayle Dubowski, age 20, of Carol Stream, Illinois, a devout member of her church who sang in the church choir and worked as a camp counselor and volunteer in rural Kentucky;

(2) Catalina "Cati" Garcia, age 20, of Cicero, Illinois, a first-generation American who had hoped to be a teacher, was her family's "princess" and inspiration, and was rarely seen without a beaming smile;

(3) Julianna Gehant, age 32, of Mendota, Illinois, who dreamed of becoming a teacher, and who had spent more than 12 years in the United States Army and Army Reserve serving our Nation and saving money for college;

(4) Ryanne Mace, age 19, of Carpentersville, Illinois, a much-loved only child who was rarely without a warm smile and hoped to be a counselor so she could help others; and

(5) Daniel Parmenter, age 20, of Westchester, Illinois, "Danny" to his friends, a 6-