

Our brave law enforcement officers risk their lives every day to stop gun violence before it occurs, but they cannot do it alone. They need resources—not just funding and equipment although those are critically important—but also information and intelligence. That is why the ATF collects and compiles gun trace data—to provide crime gun information to law enforcement agencies, federally firearm licensees, FFL, the public, Congress, and State and local authorities so they may better understand and prevent gun violence.

It goes without saying that the more we understand a problem and its sources, the more proficient we will be in our ability to solve it. That is particularly true when talking about guns that are used to commit crimes. In fact, one study has shown that 1.2 percent of gun dealers sell 57 percent of guns later traced to criminal investigations.

My home State of New Jersey has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, yet hundreds, if not thousands, of off-limit customers, such as those under age or those with violent criminal records, wind up with such weapons each month. And the overwhelming majority of guns used to commit crimes in our State's cities were originally sold in compliance with the law in other States.

In fact, a large majority of the guns used to commit crimes in Jersey City, Newark, and Camden traveled up the east coast along I-95—the “Iron Pipeline”—and therefore don't fall under New Jersey's gun laws. This is truly a paradox that has not only frustrated law enforcement agents, but elected officials too.

According to ATF reports released in July 2002, 85 percent of the traced guns used to commit crimes in Jersey City and Newark, and 77 percent of those used in Camden, were originally purchased outside of New Jersey. And more than 67 percent of crime guns recovered in Jersey City were originally purchased more than 250 miles away, with 20 percent originating in South Carolina.

This is exactly the type of information that assists law enforcement officials in placing local crime guns in a regional and national strategic enforcement context and would allow Federal, State, and local elected officials to develop national, regional, and local strategic responses to gun crime.

Unfortunately, every year for the past few years some of my colleagues from the other side of the aisle have slipped a provision into law to prohibit the release of this information to anyone other than “a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency or a prosecutor solely in a criminal investigation or prosecution.” This amendment effectively prohibits information from reaching Congress, and State and local authorities, and the public. The practical impact of the Tiahrt amendment is that gun trace data is rarely

shared and an important law enforcement tool goes largely unused.

The Tiahrt amendment also limits how Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies can use crime gun trace data they are able to obtain. The Tiahrt provisions restrict use of the information to retroactively investigate crimes that have already been committed. Using the data to proactively prevent gun crimes from happening is not permitted.

This makes no sense. We should be using every tool we have to prevent the deaths and injuries that result from gun violence—not waiting until they happen and then figuring out the hows and whys.

Unfortunately, here in Washington, every year the Republican Congress and President Bush bow to the gun lobby in Washington and sacrifice the safety of our streets. They do this by including the Tiahrt provisions.

Denying police access to critical information about crime gun traces helps no one but the bad guys. Our families' safety should never take a backseat to the demands of radical interest groups seeking only to further their own narrow agenda. Congress needs to pass my legislation—instead we need to stand up to President Bush and the gun lobby, and stand up for our families.

Far too often in this country, innocent Americans, including children, are tragically caught in the crossfire of gun violence. Far too often these crimes may have been prevented with stricter gun control regulations. As a Senator, it is my solemn duty to do everything within my power to protect the American people from the ravages of gun violence. Addressing this grave issue should not be hampered by divisive, partisan bickering. We must undertake a bipartisan approach to reach an effective solution to this problem that is concerned solely with the welfare and safety of the public.

That is why I am introducing legislation to make this gun crime data public again. It will not only help law enforcement prosecute gun crimes, but will also increase public awareness about where these guns originated. I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation.

DEATH OF CHALDEAN ARCHBISHOP PAULOS FARAJ RAHHO

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, just this morning, the world learned of the death of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, who was kidnapped 2 weeks ago following the Way of the Cross ceremony at a church in Mosul. I extend my condolences to the Chaldean community in Iraq and in the United States on the tragic death of one of their church's spiritual leaders. The Chaldean community and those impacted by this tragic death are in the thoughts and prayers of people around the world from all religions.

The death of this spiritual leader demonstrates the fragility of the situ-

ation in Iraq and the vulnerability of the Chaldean community. I hope the Archbishop's life of integrity and testimony to his faith in God and in his country will serve as an inspiration to the Chaldean community as they move forward in these difficult times.

I also hope this tragic death will motivate President Bush to focus more attention on assisting this highly vulnerable community in northern Iraq, particularly as al-qaida shifts much of its operations to the north in search of new victims.

FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER THE BRADY LAW WAS ENACTED

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, we recently marked the 14th anniversary of the enactment of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act. This legislation was a major step in our fight to curb gun violence. According to Centers for Disease Control statistics, since the Brady law went into effect, the number of gun deaths in the United States has dropped 26 percent, from 39,595 in 1993 to 29,569 in 2004. Even more dramatically, the number of gun homicides dropped by more than 38 percent from 17,024 in 1993 to 10,661 in 2004.

According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, the Brady law's requirement that gun purchasers undergo a criminal background check before purchasing a firearm has prevented approximately 1.4 million prohibited purchasers from buying guns from federally licensed gun dealers. By preventing these potentially dangerous individuals from obtaining guns, the law has helped prevent countless tragedies. On this 14-year anniversary, I urge my colleagues to capitalize on the successes of the Brady law by taking up and passing additional gun safety legislation, such as closing the gun show loophole and establishing an assault weapons ban.

In a New York Times Op-Ed written March 29, 1991, on the 10th anniversary of the assassination attempt on his life and that of his press secretary, James S. Brady, President Reagan described his incredible ordeal of surviving the shooting and then went on to talk about Jim Brady. President Reagan said:

I was lucky. The bullet that hit me bounced off a rib and lodged in my lung, an inch from my heart. It was a very close call. Twice they could not find my pulse. But the bullet's missing my heart, the skill of the doctors and nurses at George Washington University Hospital and the steadfast support of my wife, Nancy, saved my life.

Jim Brady, my press secretary, who was standing next to me, wasn't as lucky. A bullet entered the left side of his forehead, near his eye, and passed through the right side of his brain before it exited. The skills of the George Washington University medical team, plus his amazing determination and the grit and spirit of his wife, Sarah, pulled Jim through. His recovery has been remarkable, but he still lives with physical pain every day and must spend much of his time in a wheelchair.

Thomas Delahanty, a Washington police officer, took a bullet in his neck. It ricocheted off his spinal cord. Nerve damage to

his left arm forced his retirement in November 1981. Tim McCarthy, a Secret Service agent, was shot in the chest and suffered a lacerated liver. He recovered and returned to duty.

Still, four lives were changed forever, and all by a Saturday-night special, a cheaply made .22 caliber pistol, purchased in a Dallas pawnshop by a young man with a history of mental disturbance. This nightmare might never have happened if legislation that is before Congress now, the Brady bill, had been law back in 1981.

President Reagan was right. The record of prevention of gun sales to potentially dangerous buyers over the past 14 years and the lives saved dramatically demonstrate that and remind us of the wisdom embodied in the Brady law.

5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR IN IRAQ

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, next week marks the 5-year anniversary of the war in Iraq. Although Saddam Hussein's brutal authoritarian regime no longer exists, the war has been nothing less than a disaster for that country, for others in the region, and unquestionably for our own, as well.

Four million Iraqis are displaced from their homes and Iraq's profoundly weak central government cannot provide its citizens with sufficient basic services like food, water, and electricity or protect them from savage violence, disappearances, or kidnappings. Tensions continue to rise throughout the Middle East and, as the war triggers internal unrest in many countries, it has caused our own credibility to decrease significantly.

The war continues to undermine our top national security priority—the fight against al-Qaida, which has strengthened itself in Pakistan and reached out to new affiliates around the world. According to the Congressional Research Service, the war costs us over \$10 billion a month in direct costs. The war saps our military, which is stretched too thin to keep us safe here at home. In short, the war is making us weaker, not stronger, and that trend is not likely to change.

America continues to be mired in a conflict that has no end in sight. As of the beginning of this week a total of 3,974 American soldiers had been killed and 29,320 wounded. While the administration touts a recent decline in violence as an indication that the surge is "working," there is little political progress that might indicate the decrease in violence will result in genuine national reconciliation. As the region remains particularly fragile and our international credibility profoundly damaged, Americans ask each other just how many more billions of dollars will be spent and how many more of our brave troops will die or be injured while we wait for national reconciliation in Iraq—which is the only way to end the violence.

Just 2 weeks ago, many of my Republican colleagues stood on the Senate

floor to sing their praises of the surge, but now we may be witnessing a re-emergence of the brutal violence that was said to have dissipated. Early last week, two car bombs exploded, killing 24 people and wounding 56, while later in the week two bombs exploded in downtown Baghdad, killing nearly 70 people and wounding over 120. Yesterday a suicide bomber approached five American soldiers in Baghdad and detonated a bomb—killing all five soldiers and injuring three more. This attack has been labeled the worst attack on U.S. forces in months and it comes only days after a female suicide bomber blew herself up in the home of a Sunni leader who was reported to have been working in collaboration with U.S. forces.

Similarly, another political impasse in Parliament may result in little tangible results from recently passed and supposedly key legislation. Yes, a de-baathification law has passed but it may usher in renewed sectarian tensions as former officials from Hussein's regime try to reclaim their old jobs. A provincial powers election law was sent back to the Parliament by the President's Council—requiring another round of drafting before it is able to move forward. As we well know, working on a law and even passing it is one thing—seeing it successfully implemented is another.

National reconciliation still looks far off. The passage of what the administration is calling "benchmark" laws does not ensure society-wide sectarian reconciliation; in fact, there are significant concerns about how the local efforts we have supported to bring about this decline in violence will be integrated into the national framework. The Sunni Awakening has taken tens of thousands of former-insurgent Sunni militia fighters and it is unclear to what extent we can rely on their loyalties. It is not hard to see, however, that this policy risks increasing distrust between the local Sunnis and national government, which is led predominately by Shi'ites.

Without a legitimate political settlement at the national level, any decline in violence in Iraq is likely to be tenuous. Recent news from Iraq seems to indicate that any gains in security are already slipping and without a strategy for safe redeployment, it is inevitably our brave men and women who will pay the price.

The war in Iraq drags on while al-Qaida has reconstituted and strengthened itself. The Director of National Intelligence, DNI, recently testified before Congress that al-Qaida's central leadership based in the border area of Pakistan is its most dangerous component. And just a few months ago, the DNI again repeated the Intelligence Community's assessment that, over the last 2 years, "[al] Qaida's central leadership has been able to regenerate the core operational capabilities needed to conduct attacks in the Homeland."

Let me remind my colleagues, that it was from Afghanistan, not Iraq, that

the 9/11 attacks were planned and it was under the Taliban regime—which is once again gaining ground—that al-Qaida was able to flourish so freely. With a recent report warning that we are not winning in Afghanistan, we need to rethink our current Iraq-based strategy so we can counter the threat posed by al Qaida around the world.

As we approach the 5th anniversary of the US-led invasion in Iraq, it is clear that continuing the current open-ended military policy doesn't make sense. The American people certainly know that this war doesn't make sense and they expect us to do everything in our power to end it. We in Congress cannot in good conscience put Iraq on the backburner, and we cannot turn a blind eye or feign helplessness as the administration keeps pursuing its misguided policies.

This Congress has no greater priority than making right the mistake it made over five years ago when it authorized the war in Iraq. I do not want the American people to lose faith in their elected leaders for pursuing a war that they rightly oppose. I do not want to watch a failed strategy perpetuate regional turmoil any longer and I do not want any more American troops to die or get injured for a war that is not in our national security interest.

KC-X TANKER DECISION

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, on February 29, 2008, the Secretary of the Air Force, Michael W. Wynne, announced that the Air Force had made a selection in the KC-X competition for development and procurement of up to 179 tanker aircraft, which are urgently needed to support our armed forces.

This was a critical step forward in the recapitalization of an aging fleet of aircraft that are essential for force projection, intelligence, surveillance, and global strike capabilities. A modern tanker force is at the heart of our national security.

I understand that it was a carefully constructed and transparent process that the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force structured and faithfully implemented to reach this decision. As Secretary Wynne said, the announcement "is the culmination of years of tireless work and attention to detail by our acquisition professionals and source selection team, who have been committed to maintaining integrity, providing transparency and promoting a fair competition for this critical aircraft program."

The Boeing Company has filed a protest, as is their right under law, with the Government Accountability Office concerning the Air Force's award of this contract to Northrop Grumman. Further, as provided by law, the GAO will issue their decision within the next 100 days.

I now would like to provide some context and historical background to the ongoing discussion by reviewing the oversight process employed by Senate oversight committees beginning