

make it more likely that deadly violence will erupt in our public buildings, offices, and public spaces.

This bill will have dangerous consequences for residents and visitors alike. It removes criminal penalties for possession of unregistered firearms. It legalizes the sale of assault weapons in the District. It allows handguns and assault weapons to be kept legally in the city's homes and workplaces. It hobbles the authority of the Mayor and the City Council to deal with gun violence. Absurdly, this bill even prevents the City Council from enacting any laws that "discourage" gun ownership or require safe storage of firearms.

As Congresswoman ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON has emphasized, this bill sets no age limit for possession of guns, including military-style weapons. It permits a person who is voluntarily committed to a mental institution to own a gun the day after the person is released. It prevents gun registration, even for the purpose of letting police know who has guns and tracing guns used in crimes. It prevents the DC government from adopting any regulations on guns, leaving only a bare Federal statute that would leave DC with one of the most permissive gun laws in the Nation.

This bill is a frontal assault on the well-established principle of home rule. It is an insult to the 580,000 citizens of the District of Columbia. It tramples on the rights of its elected leaders and local residents to determine for themselves the policies that govern their homes, streets, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Congress wouldn't dare do this to any State, and it shouldn't do it to the District of Columbia.

Congress has consistently opposed giving the residents of the District the full voting representation in Congress they deserve. Many of our colleagues have frequently attempted to interfere with local policymaking and spending decisions. This bill is a blatant interference with DC law enforcement by denying the right of the City Council to regulate firearms and firearm ownership.

I commend Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator LAUTENBERG for their leadership in opposing this shameful legislation, and I urge my colleagues to oppose this reckless, special-interest bill that will endanger the safety of the District of Columbia's residents and visitors.

The solution to DC's gun crime problem lies in strengthening the Nation's lax gun laws, not weakening those in the District. The tragic and graphic stories of gun violence that capture front-page headlines in the District show that current gun-safety laws need to be strengthened, not abolished. I have long been committed to reasonable gun control laws, and I am concerned that the Supreme Court's decision on the DC gun ban opens a Pandora's box. Much of the progress we have made in making Americans safer by placing reasonable restrictions on

the possession of firearms is now in doubt. It is a bitter irony that this gross setback comes in the name of a right to self-defense, and I urge the Senate to oppose it.●

NATIONAL HIGHWAY BRIDGE RECONSTRUCTION AND INSPECTION ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I would like to explain why there are objections to bringing up H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act of 2008. As has been mentioned by several of my colleagues on the floor today, the Highway Bridge Program in its current form needs to be reformed to make it more useable for States. Unfortunately, H.R. 3999 hinders, rather than strengthens, States' abilities to address their greatest bridge priorities. It would force States to follow a risk-based system developed in Washington to prioritize the replacement or rehabilitation of bridges. There is great concern that this one-size-fits-all approach would not allow for important local factors, such as seismic retrofit. This legislation also forces States to spend scarce resources on new procedures that will provide little or no new information to State bridge engineers.

SAFETEA-LU will expire on September 30, 2009. Any major policy changes at this point in the process will distract from the overall goal of completing a comprehensive bill on time. For that reason, a policy change of this magnitude should be handled in the context of reauthorization. Furthermore, it is counterproductive to attempt to fix our crumbling infrastructure through piecemeal efforts. Comprehensive reform is necessary and should be addressed in a holistic approach in the reauthorization bill the Environment and Public Works Committee will work on in the coming months.

There has been a lot of press about the poor condition of the nation's bridges in the wake of the Minnesota tragedy. Our bridges are certainly in need of additional investment, but the roads on the National Highway System, NHS, are actually in greater need. According to the Federal Highway Administration, FHWA, the Nation's bridges receive an average of 15 percent less funding from all levels of government than the maximum amount that could be economically invested. In contrast, the roads on the NHS receive 78 percent less funding than the maximum economic level.

This is not to say that there are not enormous bridge needs. These are simply 20 year averages, and much more could be economically invested in the short term. According to the same study by the FHWA, \$62 billion could be invested immediately in a cost-beneficial basis. It is critical, however, to view investment in the Nation's highways and bridges in a comprehensive fashion.

The authors of H.R. 3999 tout one of the benefits of the bill is that it prohibit transfers from the current bridge program to other highway programs. I would like to take a few minutes to explain that while that sounds good, it will not accomplish what the authors of the bill want. Many States rely on the flexibility allowed under the Federal highway program to transfer money in between core highway programs as an important cash and program management tool. This flexibility in the bridge program is needed by States as bridges are enormous, "lumpy" investments and it often becomes necessary for States to wait a few years between major bridge replacements. If they did not do so, bridges would consume too much of their highway resources to address nonbridge needs. This bill would prohibit all transfers from the bridge program on the incorrect assumption that all transfers are bad.

Many States find the bridge program requirements too bureaucratic and prefer to replace or rehabilitate structurally deficient bridges using more flexible programs. These States transfer money out of the bridge program and then obligate those same dollars to structurally deficient bridges. Also, when bridges are being replaced or rehabilitated as a part of a larger project, States frequently transfer money into a single category of funding that can be used on the entire project. Because of the narrow eligibility of Highway Bridge Program funds, the flexibility to transfer funds is oftentimes necessary and does not necessarily detract from the goals of the Highway Bridge Program.

H.R. 3999 incorrectly assumes that all bridge construction and reconstruction is done through the bridge program. In fact, only about 55 percent of obligations on bridges are through the Highway Bridge Program. The remaining obligations of funds on bridges, about \$2.4 billion, are done using other categories of funding. By prohibiting transfers, H.R. 3999 would effectively punish States that are spending more on bridges than is provided in bridge funding, by denying them an important cash and program management tool.

In addition, H.R. 3999 requires States to follow a risk-based system developed in Washington to prioritize the replacement or rehabilitation of bridges. Many fear that this will produce a "worst first" approach to replacing and rehabilitating our bridges an approach that is widely criticized among economists as it costs far more money than a targeted approach. In many aspects of government this is a prudent method to make decisions, but the approach set forth in this bill lacks the cumulative factor analysis required to make the most cost-beneficial and safety-driven bridge investment decisions. Under H.R. 3999's risk-based system, a lower rated bridge that is rarely used and poses no public safety threat could be prioritized ahead of a slightly higher

rated bridge with more traffic, greater relative importance to the rest of the system, and overall more need for investment. This bill would create yet another level of bureaucracy to a bridge program over-burdened with red tape, as State risk-management plans will have to be approved by the Department of Transportation.

The requirements for the risk management system set forth in H.R. 3999 are vague and unspecific. However, there is a wide concern among State departments of transportation that they will be interpreted by FHWA to force one-size-fits-all Federal standards that ignore local considerations and variations in risk factors across the country, such as seismic retrofit.

States are already using a highly effective bridge management system to address risk when making State-wide bridge investment decisions; this bill will disrupt these efforts.

In closing I will reiterate that I fully agree that the current Highway Bridge Program needs work, but so does the entire Federal Highway Program and I believe we need a comprehensive solution. I look forward to working with my colleagues to that end.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, democracy and the rule of law have become firmly entrenched in many Central and Eastern European nations. We must be forthright and firm in our support for the continued independence and territorial integrity of the still fledgling CEE democracies.

The political and economic transformation of the region is nothing short of breathtaking. After years of untold suffering under Soviet rule, these countries have boldly embraced common transatlantic values of liberty and democracy with profound and positive consequences.

Internal reforms, including increased government accountability and efforts to eradicate corruption, have spurred economic transformations reaching deep within each country. Respect for human rights and democratic reforms have invigorated civil society. The progress and achievements in the region are inspirational, and I join with the 22 million Americans of Central and Eastern European heritage in taking great pride in the democratization of these former Soviet bloc countries.

But the great strides in freedom and democracy in the region are under threat. Russia's recent military incursion into the neighboring country of Georgia was a dramatic wake-up call. Some have suggested the incursion is a harbinger of Russian desires to limit the sovereignty and pro-Western orientation of vulnerable neighboring countries. I hope that is not the case.

Just last month, the leaders of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine stood together with Georgian

President Mikheil Saakashvili to demonstrate solidarity in the face of Russia's incursion. The United States pledged its support for the democratically elected Government of Georgia and for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. European leaders helped broker a cease-fire agreement. The United States, Europe, and the CEE nations must continue to stand together in the face of Russian aggression and interference in the region.

Nevertheless, as disturbing as Russia's behavior has been, we must we must find a way to step back from the path of confrontation with Russia. It makes better sense to find common ground than to engage in confrontation. This does not mean indulgence of Russia's recent actions. On the contrary, we must find a way to work with Russia without ceding freedom and democracy in the region.

Let me be clear. I am deeply committed to the continued freedom, democracy, and independence of the Central and Eastern European nations. At the same time, I fully support the democratization of Russia. Ultimately, we need to find a way to improve relations with Russia, but the effort cannot be one-sided.

It is in Russia's own economic interest to step up to the plate and be a positive member of the international community. Our relationship with Russia may be complicated, but we can find common ground in working together to strengthen global security, economic stability, and democracy. Moreover, the United States needs Russia as a partner in building a peaceful and prosperous Europe.

The United States does not have to choose between the Central and Eastern European countries and Russia. We should be able to form real partnerships with both.

DOMESTIC INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS POST 9/11

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, it has been more than 7 years since al-Qaida attacked us at home. There are many lessons those attacks should have taught us, many things we should have been doing as a nation since that date which we have yet to do. These post-9/11 gaps in our efforts and strategies need as much if not more attention today as they did on September 12, 2001. The largest gap we face is a strategic gap between what we should have done and what this administration elected to do in response to the tragic events of 9/11. The administration chose to attack Iraq rather than complete the mission in Afghanistan—where the 9/11 attacks were hatched—and address al-Qaida's expanding influence in northern Africa, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Those threats are real and have the continuing potential to manifest themselves again in disastrous ways here at home and around the world.

There are other gaps—failures by this administration to address the real

challenges of our post-9/11 world. We have created a gap in the readiness of our military. Our National Guard, an integral part of any large disaster response, has been severely strained. We continue to have insufficient intelligence and information resources posted abroad. We have insufficient diplomatic personnel, with insufficient language and other cultural experience, to cover the many places in the world where our national security interests require that we know more—and interact with those who know us least. And while I applaud the efforts of this administration to encourage more of our citizens to engage in international volunteer programs, there is room for much more to be done to strengthen our image and our impact abroad through citizen outreach and private diplomacy. In a post-9/11 world, these continuing gaps pose real threats to our security at home, and we cannot ignore them at the expense of a strategically misguided and perilously expensive ongoing military presence in Iraq.

Closer to home, we are now beginning to suffer serious challenges to our economic stability and longer term economic outlook. We are squandering our wealth and failing to invest in our economic future and our domestic security. Osama bin Laden's stated goal was to bankrupt America. Well, the cost of our presence in Iraq may ultimately exceed the massive cost proposed to bail out our failed financial systems. And what do we have to show for the hundreds of billions spent in Iraq? What do Americans have as a return on their investment? A more perilous world in which al-Qaida has a safe haven in Pakistan, our power and influence are diminished and our military might is badly overextended.

So where do we go from here? We go where Americans have always gone in times of challenge. We will take up the challenge we face head-on and work to close the gaps we face in the fabric of our domestic security.

Here at home, we continue to have critical gaps in our domestic security, in our infrastructure, in our first responder systems. We still have not deployed an effective system to prevent the smuggling of radiological materials through our ports. We have not done everything we can to secure chemical facilities that could be the source of materials for domestic car bombs like the ones we have seen cause so much damage in Baghdad. We have not fully implemented the command system needed to ensure that first responders know how to work together across federal, state and local government.

We have also failed to establish the military forces needed to conduct medical triage, search and rescue, and decontamination in the wake of a WMD incident at home. I tried to offer an amendment to the 2009 Defense authorization bill that would have mandated that these forces be established by the end of 2009 and that they be maintained at the highest levels of readiness. This