

God for the other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and others which have been of assistance to these people. They have been driving out some of the more extremist element. We are working with the Russians to remove the chemical weapons.

In Syria today, Bashar al-Assad, from helicopters, is dropping these crude cluster bombs which are just shrapnel that kill anybody within lethal range. Since dropping it on populated areas, Bashar al-Assad has slaughtered innocent men, women, and children.

So here we are working with the Russians. Today there was a U.N. resolution from the Security Council condemning Bashar al-Assad's barbaric behavior. Guess who vetoed that. Our friends, the Russians. This is the most Orwellian situation in Iraq anybody has ever seen throughout history. Russians are working with us to remove chemical weapons from Syria and at the same time aircraft from Russia are landing full of weapons to kill Syrian men, women, and children. I am not sure a Syrian mother can differentiate between her child dying from a chemical weapon or dying from one of these cluster bombs that Bashar al-Assad is unloading from his helicopters.

So we have this grandiose idea the Secretary of State and the administration have been pushing for months and months to have a Geneva II. The first Geneva failed. Does anyone on God's green Earth believe that Bashar al-Assad, who is winning, is going to preside over his own transition from power? Of course not.

I will never forget—I am sure the Senator from South Carolina will never forget—the testimony of our now still Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta before the Armed Services Committee: Bashar al-Assad inevitably will leave.

The President of the United States: Bashar al-Assad, it is not a matter of when, it is not a matter of whether he will leave but a matter of when.

Meanwhile, the weapons pour in from Iran; Hezbollah, 5,000 of them; 130,000 people slaughtered, and one-quarter of the population being slaughtered, while this administration not only sits by and does nothing but the President of the United States says nothing.

This will go down as one of the most shameful chapters in American history. If the policy of this administration is to only focus on counterterrorism, get out of the Middle East, and remove any involvement of the United States in the Middle East, I can assure my colleagues the Middle East will not allow the United States of America to not be involved.

Mr. GRAHAM. If I may just conclude, I have a quote from Speaker BOEHNER, who said he would support the Obama administration if it decides to leave troops in Iraq beyond 2011.

I remember Senator Obama and Senator Clinton not being particularly

helpful to the mistakes made in Iraq during the Bush administration. In fact, the entire election in 2008 and the primary was about Iraq. I remember the politics of Candidate Barack Obama, who basically used the Iraq war to win the nomination, for lack of a better word. I remember during the campaign he talked about Afghanistan being a good war. We will talk about Afghanistan later. It is not a happy story either, I am afraid.

But the bottom line is that there was bipartisan support for troop presence beyond 2011, a residual force. This administration chose to ignore the advice of the commanders, and they created the situation where the Iraqis could not say yes. Yet they want history to record this being a problem created by the Iraqis for not giving legal immunity to U.S. soldiers. History is going to be written about our times. How this ends, nobody knows. But I know this: It is not fair to say that the reason we have nobody left behind in Iraq is because of the Iraqis. It is fair to say that the administration got the result they wanted, and they should own that—good, bad, or indifferent. Don't create a straw person for the situation that you drove and you created.

As to Syria, please understand that this whole conflict started when people went to the streets peacefully to ask for more political freedom after the uprising in Egypt; that this war in Syria did not start with a Sunni uprising or Al Qaeda invading the country. The conflict in Syria started when the people of Syria, from all walks of life, started demanding more from their government, from this dictatorship, and the response they received from their government was to use lethal force.

It has broken down now to a regional conflict where the Iranians are backing Assad and you have Sunni Arab States backing parts of the opposition and you have Al Qaeda types coming from Iraq and other places filling in the vacuum created by this breakdown in Syria.

At the end of the day, what Senator McCANN had been talking about for 3 years is that once you say Assad has to go—no President should say that unless they are willing to make it happen. Assad was on the ropes. With just any effort on our part, a no-fly zone to boots on the ground, any assistance at all in the last couple of years and Assad would be gone, the transition would be well underway. It would have been bloody at first, but we would have behind us now a Syria moving toward stability because the good news is the average Syrian is not a radical Al Qaeda Islamist. Syrians have been living peacefully with each other—Christians, Sunnis, and Alawites—for hundreds of years. Now Syria has become the central battle for every radical Islamist in the region, and it is just sad and sorry to witness.

But what does it mean to us? It means that if this war continues—our

friend the King of Jordan is under siege. The Lebanese Ambassador testified a couple of weeks ago in our committee that the country is saturated. Almost 1 million refugees from Syria have gone to Lebanon. There are over 5 million in Lebanon today. They have added almost 1 million refugees from Syria. They didn't plan to get to 5 million people until 2050. The Kingdom of Jordan—the Jordanians have received over 600,000 refugees, with no end in sight.

Syria is not a civil war. Syria is a regional conflict where you have proxies backing each side in Syria that are taking the entire region into chaos. It is killing Iraq. It is destabilizing Lebanon and Jordan. It has to be addressed in an effective way.

If you want to be President of the United States, certain requirements come with the job: having a vision, making tough calls at the time when it would matter. On President Obama's watch, you had the Arab spring come about and you had a desire by this administration to leave the region at any and all costs. Now you have absolute chaos. The only way we are going to fix this is for America to get reengaged. We do not need boots on the ground, but we need leadership.

It just breaks my heart to see how close we were in 2010. The surge did work in spite of opposition from President Obama as Senator and Secretary Clinton as Senator. In spite of their vehement opposition, the surge did work, and on their watch we are about to lose everything we fought for. Al Qaeda is the biggest beneficiary of our withdrawal from Iraq. Al Qaeda is the biggest beneficiary of our indifference in Syria. Al Qaeda is thriving, and our allies and our friends are in retreat.

Mr. McCANN. Madam President, thank you for your patience.

We yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:35 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. HEITKAMP).

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate be in a period of morning business until 3 p.m. today, and that I be recognized at 3 p.m., with all other provisions of the previous order remaining in effect.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BAUCUS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. BAUCUS, Mr. HATCH, and Mr. PORTMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 1900 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

MR. PORTMAN. Madam President, I yield back my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

MR. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING JAVIER MARTINEZ

MR. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, many of us have come back from a couple of wonderful weeks in our home States, traveling and visiting with families, and had the privilege of spending time with loved ones and sharing our hopes and plans for the new year. Not everyone was so fortunate.

I rise today to honor the memory of yet another tragic victim of gun violence in Connecticut and our country.

On December 28, in New Haven, shortly before the beginning of this new year, one family's time together with their son was cut short when Javier Martinez was shot and killed.

I have his picture here in the Chamber. His memory is with us today, as I ask this body to honor him, along with other victims of gun violence who have died since Newtown, and those who have died before Newtown, and now I ask them to be remembered not only in words but also in action by this body, so that Javier shall not have died in vain.

He was only 18 years old. He was a senior at Common Ground High School in New Haven, one of the really extraordinary educational institutions in our State.

His teachers and classmates describe him as a kind, intelligent young man who was becoming a leader in the school and in his community.

He had a bright future. In fact, he had the whole world, his whole life ahead of him.

At Common Ground, a charter school that focuses on sustainability and connecting students with natural resources in their own communities, he was absolutely thriving.

I have heard that some of his classmates and teachers at Common Ground are perhaps watching right now or will watch at some point, and I want to thank them for joining in honoring his memory and continuing his work to make our planet, our world, our Nation, and the community of New Haven better, and keeping faith with his memory.

Javier cared about his community and the environment and the issues of

sustainability and clean air and clean water, and he took action to improve the world around him.

Last summer he participated in a highly competitive internship at the Nature Conservancy, where he worked to protect endangered species. A director of this program regarded Javier as one of the most outstanding participants that the program ever had.

He spent last spring planting trees—planting trees—with the New Haven Urban Resources Initiative. He planted trees that he will never sit under, but the world will be better for all that he did—one small act, one small part of what Javier did to make New Haven and the world better.

This past fall he joined a crew of West River Stewards, identifying and documenting sources of pollution along the West River in the New Haven area.

Not only did he have a bright future ahead of him, but he knew what he wanted. He was pursuing the American dream. He was seeking and working to make America a better place for him and for his fellow students at Common Ground.

By all accounts he was not only dedicated and hard working, but he had a good heart. He had a great sense of himself. He stayed out of trouble. He had no criminal record whatsoever, it goes without saying. He worked hard at his studies.

He was loved in New Haven by his classmates, by his teachers, and by all who knew him. He had a growing dedication to protecting that world. Unfortunately, our society failed to protect him, failed to protect him during the simple act of walking home, failed to protect him from gun violence, failed to protect him in a neighborhood where he thought he would be safe as he walked.

On that early morning of December 28, shortly before 1 a.m., he was found shot to death on the streets of New Haven. In fact, he was walking from his house to a friend's house. He did not have a car, so his only choice was to walk. He sustained multiple gunshot wounds and was pronounced dead at the scene.

The police are continuing to investigate. Have no doubt that they are working hard. The New Haven Police have been extraordinarily responsive and responsible in combating gun violence, so I know they are going to get answers. Whether they will ever get enough answers to prosecute someone remains to be seen. But I know they are dedicated to finding out what happened on that night.

The death of Javier Martinez is a tragedy, heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking, as are many of the random deaths in America resulting from gun violence. This young man is a testament to our continuing responsibility, our obligation, and our opportunity to combat and prevent gun violence on the streets and in the neighborhoods across our country.

Just a few weeks ago I spoke on this floor, in this very place, about another

promising young person from Connecticut who was killed by a person with a gun whose name was Erika Robinson. The victim of that crime, Erika Robinson, just like Javier, was killed because she was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

We ought to remember some of the other victims. We should keep in mind all of the now tens of thousands, just since Newtown, who maybe survived but who are changed and challenged in ways they never could have envisioned. Their lives have been changed forever.

Amber Smith, who worked as a manager in a New Haven Burger King restaurant, was shot on September 15, 2013, when two robbers entered that Burger King.

The robbers demanded that she open a safe in the business, and one of them shot her in the upper hip and through her leg. She was just 19 years old at the time on September 15, 2013.

She remembers thinking that she was going to die and wondering who would take care of her two small children. She almost bled to death but was saved, fortunately, by receiving surgery in the emergency room. So she survived the shooting, but she lives with the psychological and the physical trauma of that shooting every day.

These random acts of violence may not always make the national news, they may not always take a life, but they change lives, and they take lives one or two at a time.

Those shooting deaths of Javier Martinez and Erika Robinson have become all too often the mundane evil of our time. The banality of evil is found in gun violence, and we seem to accept it all too often with indifference as another news item. Yet it should be as repugnant and abhorrent and unacceptable as the deaths of 20 innocent children in Newtown and 6 great educators because every act of gun violence diminishes us as a nation and as a community.

Our country has come to the point that gun violence can happen anywhere. If your life has not been touched by it, there is a near certainty that it will be at some point—tragically, unfortunately—because far too often communities suffer in silence. We need to end that silence. We need to end the inaction and the acceptance of this mundane and banal evil that lives among us.

While we have failed to act in this Chamber, even though we had a majority of 55 Senators ready to approve very simple, commonsense measures to stop gun violence, the President has done what he can through executive action, most recently on mental health. I commend him for those actions. He has done what he can to strengthen Federal background checks for firearms purchases. I thank him for that action.

These changes are incremental, but they are steps in the right direction.

States have taken the leadership on this issue as well, maybe even more so than the Federal Government. My own