

straw-purchased gun. He was an extraordinary police officer. When he was shot, he had a gun on him. He shot back at the armed gunmen who were trying to rob him, and so did his father, who was standing nearby, also a retired police sergeant. But Officer Wortham was killed. He died in front of his parents' house on May 19, 2010. I attended his funeral.

Thomas Wortham's sister Sandra spoke at that hearing. It was powerful. This is what she said:

My brother carried a gun. My father carried a gun. But the fact that my brother and father were armed that night did not prevent my brother from being killed. We need to do more to keep guns out of the wrong hands in the first place. I don't think that makes us anti-gun; I think it makes us pro-decent, law abiding people.

Sandra Wortham is right. I hope my colleagues will hear her words.

Some say it is impossible to stop bad guys from getting guns; they are just going to get them. It is true that there are a lot of loopholes in the law to get them today, like the gun show loophole and the Internet loopholes in the background check system. I don't question the possibility that those loopholes are there. It is also true that the gun lobby is working hard every day to further weaken the laws on the books and to strike them down in court. But we can stop the gun lobby from gutting the laws on the books, and we can close those loopholes if lawmakers just have the courage and political will.

Our goal should be to keep guns out of the hands of bad guys, not to take them away from people who use them in a responsible and legal way. I grew up in downstate Illinois. Owning shotguns and rifles is just part of life. Taking your son or in some cases even your daughter out hunting is normal. It is what people do. I have been out duck hunting in Stuttgart, AR, with my former colleague, Mark Pryor. We had a good time. Everybody there knew that a gun was a dangerous weapon that had to be handled carefully. We filed the necessary permits and licenses to be out there hunting on that day and followed a long list of requirements that limited our right to go shooting ducks, migrating ducks in that area. We did it because it was the law and law-abiding people pay attention to the law.

But what are we going to do now to respect those law-abiding people but still get serious about stopping these guns that end up in the hands of felons and mentally unstable people? Are we going to shrug our shoulders? Are Members of Congress going to put out the standard press release after a mass shooting? Or are we going to rise to this challenge on this occasion and do something? What a breakthrough it would be if we could save these innocent lives.

I cannot imagine that classroom in that community college in Oregon where that crazy gunman, loaded and armed, went up to each of those stu-

dents and asked if they were Christians. If they said yes, he told them: You are on your way to Heaven, and then he shot them dead. I cannot imagine that moment. I certainly cannot imagine if in that classroom was someone I loved, someone I knew, someone I cared about, and they were the victim of that kind of mental instability.

So are we going to shrug our shoulders, remember the victims in our thoughts and prayers and do nothing? Is that what it has come to? We are better than that. We can easily pass laws to protect domestic violence victims by keeping the guns out of the hands of their abusers. All it takes is will. We could easily hold gun dealers accountable for guns that they purposefully misplace into the hands of criminals. All it takes is the will. We can easily adopt technology to stop criminals from stealing guns and stop kids from using them accidentally. All it takes is will. We can easily create a better background check system and pass better laws to stop straw purchasing and illegal gun trafficking. All it takes is will. We can stop the gun lobby from gutting the laws on the books, and we can close these loopholes if lawmakers just have the courage and the political will.

As President Obama said, our thoughts and prayers are not enough. Stopping this violence requires courage and political will. I hope the Congress can rise to this challenge. I am not giving up. I have seen too many lives cut short, too many families and communities devastated by this violence. I am going to do all I can to bring down the number of shootings in America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, imagine a successful and popular program that saves our special natural places, such as parks, recreation areas, wildlife refuges, and forests. Imagine further that this is accomplished not with tax dollars, but with royalties paid by companies that extract oil or minerals from our public lands. What is not to love

about a program like that? Now imagine that some in Congress want to kill or weaken that program. In fact, its charter just expired on October 1.

For 50 years, a bipartisan commitment has promoted the preservation of our national parks, forests, and refuges and the vistas that are so iconic in our national identity. But today we find ourselves yet again in the midst of a made-in-Washington crisis that devalues this history of shared commitment, replacing it with the misplaced ire of those who do not understand its profound, community-driven impact on the land and on our economy.

On September 30, the authorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, LWCF, America's most successful conservation and recreation program, was allowed to expire. Founded on the principle of balancing the depletion of certain natural resources by conserving other resources, the fund uses revenues from royalties of offshore oil and gas extraction to support the conservation of our land and water, a symmetry that conservation advocates have praised. More to the point, the fund is supported at no cost to taxpayers. Similarly, congressional inaction allowed the Historic Preservation Fund—also a budget-neutral program with longstanding bipartisan support—to lapse. Together, these twin programs represent key commitments to protecting our Nation's historic resources and lands for future generations.

For 50 years, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has supported the creation of parks and refuges, but it has also filled in plots of land at risk of loss through development in our national parks to create a seamless park system that is easier and more cost-effective to manage. It has provided resources to local communities to achieve otherwise cost-prohibitive conservation projects in small towns. It supports community playgrounds and maintains trails, while fostering and protecting our innate appreciation of the world around us, and it accomplishes all of this while being a boon to local economies.

In Vermont more than \$123 million in LWCF grants have supported hundreds projects over the last five decades, and the benefits can be seen across every county in the Green Mountain State. These grants back an economy of outdoor recreation supporting 35,000 jobs, generating \$187 million in state tax revenue and \$2.5 billion in retail sales in Vermont alone, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. On top of this, an estimated 545,000 people hunt, fish, and enjoy the wildlife of the Green Mountain State every year—a stunning number that nearly matches our State's entire population.

In addition to local recreation projects, the LWCF in Vermont has supported the creation of our State's only national park, the Marsh Billings Rockefeller National Historical Park. It has helped to add 100,000 acres to the

Green Mountain National Forest, to establish the Conte National Wildlife Refuge, and to forever preserve large swaths of the Appalachian and Long Trails. These are treasures today, preserved for future generations.

Across the country, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been valued as America's premier conservation program—an outgrowth of what has been called “America's Best Idea,” the creation of our National Park System. It has drawn strong bipartisan support for half a century, even as the political atmosphere has become more divisive. I recently led a bipartisan coalition of 53 Senators representing every corner of the Nation in asking for a short-term extension of the LWCF and a commitment to work to permanently authorize and fund the program. We sent a similar letter calling on Majority Leader MCCONNELL and Minority Leader REID to support permanent funding for the program, which was followed by a similar bipartisan letter from members of the House to Speaker BOEHNER.

But despite this strong bipartisan and bicameral support, there are those who seek to throw this longstanding, commonsense program out the window, shutting down one of the few reliable sources that fund conservation work across the country, a truly devastating bid that threatens our land and water and our local economies. It makes no sense.

Several times last week, opponents of the widely popular LWCF objected to extending its authorization, claiming that the fund was used to purchase privately held land from landowners. But that is precisely what the fund is intended to support: the purchase of land from willing sellers interested in seeing land protected rather than developed. Often these land deals include land exchanges, thus ensuring that the Nation's most sensitive lands are not developed, while ensuring that other working lands remain privately owned.

Too often we see these deals evaporate because the funding is not there. This is why we need to ensure the fund is permanently authorized and fully funded. These projects should not slip away, as we have seen in Vermont and other parts of the country, because of a fundamental misunderstanding of how the fund operates and how it is supported.

We have watched conservation funding wither across the country while developments encroach our precious national parks and while the real threat of climate change draws closer and closer. Now is not the time to break a commitment to conserve our natural resources, our heritage, and the legacy we will hand to our children and grandchildren. We must value and protect our heritage by renewing the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

CONFIRMATION OF DALE DROZD

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the confirma-

tion of Dale Drozd to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California.

Judge Drozd earned his bachelor's degree magna cum laude from San Diego State University in 1977 and his law degree from UCLA in 1980, where he was inducted into the Order of the Coif.

He began his legal career as a law clerk for a district judge in the same judicial district where he now serves.

Following his clerkship, Judge Drozd worked as a criminal and civil litigator in Federal and State courts at the trial and appellate levels for 14 years.

Then, in 1997, Judge Drozd was appointed to serve as a magistrate judge in the Eastern District of California.

In 2011, he became the chief magistrate judge in that court.

Over his 18-year career as a magistrate judge, he has presided over thousands of cases.

He is well regarded in the legal community and among those who appear before him on a daily basis. The ABA has rated Judge Drozd “well qualified,” its highest rating.

Five different U.S. attorneys who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations over more than 20 years have endorsed his nomination.

Those former U.S. attorneys include David F. Levi, who later served on the district court and is now dean of Duke law school, as well as George O'Connell, Charles Stevens, Paul Seave, and McGregor Scott.

Their letter states: “[w]e have all known Judge Drozd for many years and are also aware of his judicial reputation in the community. He is an effective, productive, fair, and balanced jurist who is widely respected in this district.”

Their letter further recognized Judge Drozd as “an outstanding magistrate judge,” and went on to state that “he will be equally effective as a district judge.”

The president of the Sacramento chapter of the Federal Bar Association wrote to the Judiciary Committee in support of this nomination.

That letter notes that, although it is not typical for the Federal Bar Association “to endorse a particular candidate or nomination,” Judge Drozd's nomination is “uniquely easy to support.”

The letter further stated that Judge Drozd “is widely respected in our district and commands a high level of respect from attorneys who appear before him.”

I would also add a point from the U.S. attorneys' letter about the crushing caseload in this district.

Their letter states: “[o]ur district has an extremely heavy case load and has been operating with a vacant judgeship for two and a half years. It is vitally important to the fair administration of justice that the long-vacant judicial vacancy in our Fresno district be promptly filled.”

This is a point that bears repeating: the caseload in the Eastern District of

California is extraordinarily large, and has been for many years.

This district covers Sacramento and California's Central Valley, including Fresno and Bakersfield—it covers 55 percent of California's land area.

The district has only six judgeships for a population of nearly 8 million people, and it has almost two times as many people per judgeship as the average U.S. district court.

Over the last 6 years, the court has had nearly three times as many pending cases per judgeship—more than 1400—than the national average, 569.

These numbers translate into lengthy times for cases to be resolved. Over the last several years, it has taken between 38 and 51 months for civil cases to get to trial—well above the national average of 26 months.

Criminal cases now take over 20 months to be resolved currently, almost three times the national average of 7.4 months.

The point is this: the Eastern District of California is in serious need of additional judges. I have worked for many years to create those positions, and I believe very strongly that they are needed.

I am pleased that the Senate took the step of voting on this nomination.

Thank you.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

IDAHO HOMETOWN HERO MEDAL

• Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I wish to honor the 2015 Idaho Hometown Hero Medalists in the fifth year of the presentation of this recognition.

The Idaho Hometown Hero Medal celebrates those working for the betterment of our communities. Drs. Fahim and Naeem Rahim established the recognition to honor individuals who embody the spirit of philanthropy while showing remarkable commitment in both their personal and professional lives. I congratulate the 2015 award recipients and commend the Rahim brothers, the award's committee members, the cosponsors, volunteers, and other organizations supporting this honor for partnering to highlight good works.

Ten exceptional Idahoans from communities across our great State are 2015 Hometown Hero Medal recipients. Marianna Budnikova, of Boise, started two nonprofits to help girls take part in technology and pursue careers in computer sciences. Carrie French, of Caldwell, is being awarded posthumously for her dedicated, courageous service to our Nation. She enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 19 and died serving bravely in the Iraq war. Tiara Lusk, an ex-policewoman from Sugar City, started two initiatives to help women who are victims of domestic abuse and started a training program to help women enlist in the police force.