

to act, and we reported out legislation that would punish criminals who traffic in firearms and would close background check loopholes. This included my bipartisan legislation to prevent criminals from using straw purchasers who exploit weak background check laws in order to funnel firearms to criminals. Our efforts were strongly supported by the American public, but Senate Republicans blocked these commonsense reforms on the Senate floor.

It has been more than 3 months since Democratic members of the Judiciary Committee called for a hearing in the wake of the tragedy in Charleston, SC. I hope the majority will soon schedule this hearing so that we can have a constructive discussion on gun violence that has shaken too many communities and too many families. But if we truly want to make a difference, we must work together to build consensus around solutions to gun violence. I will work with anyone interested in preventing these tragedies, and I will soon reintroduce my legislation to strengthen our straw purchasing and firearm trafficking laws.

Like many Vermonters, I grew up with firearms, and I have enormous respect for the freedoms the Second Amendment protects. None of the concepts put forward by the Democratic caucus threaten the Second Amendment rights of lawful gun owners. But American lives are threatened when our laws do not protect them. This need not be a partisan issue, and we must work together.

Our country desperately needs meaningful reform now. The toll that gun violence takes on our communities is too great. It is past time for Congress to act. The American people should not have to wait until the next tragedy.

JUSTICE FOR WAR CRIMES IN SRI LANKA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, earlier this week the distinguished ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CARDIN, spoke about the opportunity for the United States and Sri Lanka to expand economic and security cooperation and the need for accountability for war crimes and reconciliation between ethnic and religious factions in that country. I want to join him in expressing support for the aspirations of the Sri Lankan people for reconciliation, justice, and equitable economic development.

Last week the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution which, if faithfully implemented, could be the basis for a meaningful and long overdue international role in Sri Lanka to hold accountable those involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity during that country's brutal civil war.

After so many false starts, so many investigations and reports that documented widespread atrocities by both sides in the conflict, including rape, arbitrary detention, torture, the use of

child soldiers, summary executions, shelling of civilians, and forced disappearances were ignored; and after recommendations to bring those responsible to justice were ignored, the U.N. resolution affirms that the Sri Lankan Government needs to put in place a judicial mechanism with international participation.

The resolution refers to the recent report by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which documented horrific abuses by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and LTTE rebels and the government's failure over decades to punish those responsible. Among the report's key recommendations is the establishment of a special court "integrating international judges, prosecutors, lawyers and investigators" with an independent Sri Lankan investigative and prosecuting body. No other mechanism would have the credibility and independence to deliver real justice.

Let me repeat that because it is so important: No other mechanism would have the credibility and independence to deliver real justice. The refusal of past Sri Lankan Governments to accept this premise and to recognize that no one, including the armed forces, is above the law, is why so far no one has been held accountable.

To its credit, President Maithrapala Sirisena's government cosponsored the resolution, which was presented initially to the U.N. Human Rights Council by the United States, United Kingdom, Montenegro, and Macedonia. The resolution, regarding a "credible judicial process," "affirms the importance of participation in a Sri Lankan judicial mechanism, including the Special Counsel's office, of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defense lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators." Having cosponsored the resolution, the government should establish without delay a special tribunal that brings together international investigators, prosecutors, and judges with Sri Lankan counterparts who are protected from outside pressure and intimidation, as well as a program to protect witnesses. The United States could provide assistance for such an effort.

The government will also need to ensure that violations of international law, including war crimes, disappearances, torture, and the concept of command responsibility, are incorporated into Sri Lankan law, so that charges brought reflect the severity of the crimes and target those most responsible.

I have spoken previously about President Sirisena's initial accomplishments, including the adoption of the 19th Amendment to the constitution, which curtails the extensive powers enjoyed by the Executive and vests more power in the parliament, limits the Presidential term to 5 years instead of 6, and allows the President to hold office only for two terms instead of an unlimited number of terms.

Unlike the previous government, which persecuted its critics and locked up after sham trials journalists who exposed corruption, President Sirisena has taken steps to reaffirm freedom of the press. Under the previous government, Sri Lanka's judicial system was politicized and corrupted. The new government is taking steps to reestablish the independence of the judiciary, which is fundamental to any democracy. And, as has been reported, the Government of Sri Lanka has accepted many recommendations to improve the human rights situation, including a repeal of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act and reforms to the Witness and Victim Protection Law, both long called for by victims' rights groups. The government has agreed to accelerate the return of lands confiscated by the security forces; to end the military's involvement in civilian activities in the country's north and east; to investigate allegations of attacks on civil society, the media, and religious minorities; and to work toward devolution of authority from Colombo, consistent with the 13th amendment to the constitution.

President Sirisena has sought to erase the worst excesses and abuses of his predecessor and put his country on a path to reconciliation and prosperity. For this he deserves our support. The sooner the government makes good on these commitments, the better, as the Sri Lankan people have waited a very long time for a government that is serious about reconciliation, which means addressing the ethnic, religious, social, economic, and political divisions and inequalities that were at the root of the conflict.

The U.N. resolution is far from perfect. It has been pointed out that it lacks adequate provisions for international oversight of implementation of its terms. The resolution only calls for an oral update from the High Commissioner in June 2016 and a written implementation report in March 2017. The United States should not wait until next June to report to Congress on the government's progress in complying with the terms of the resolution. Despite its shortcomings, the U.N. resolution points the way forward. A great deal of work lies ahead. More than 6 years have passed since the war ended. Physical evidence has been lost or destroyed, people's memories fade, and witnesses die. But the Sri Lankan people, and particularly those who suffered grievous losses in the war, should take solace from the fact that the international community has not forgotten them and that their own government may be ready to take the necessary steps to restore accountability and the rule of law to Sri Lanka.

PALESTINIAN TERRORISM

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, my thoughts and prayers are with the Israeli people who are enduring a new escalation of Palestinian terrorism.

Last Thursday evening, a mother and father were murdered in front of their four children ages 9, 7, 4, and 4 months when Hamas terrorists opened fire on their car. A few days later, another Jewish family was walking in the Old City of Jerusalem after praying at the Western Wall when a Palestinian terrorist went on a stabbing attack. He murdered the father, along with another courageous man who rushed to the scene to the family's aid. Both men leave behind their wives and nine children. In addition to the four murdered, many more Israelis have been seriously wounded from car-ramming, rock-throwing, and brutal knife and screwdriver stabbing attacks in what appears to be a fresh horror—an epidemic of low-tech, brutal attacks by militants who are acting on their own initiative.

These attacks have been incubated by the continued incitement and glorification of violence by the Palestinian leadership, most recently by President Mahmoud Abbas during his address at the United Nations General Assembly. He still has yet to categorically condemn these attacks. It is long past time for the United States and the international community to hold the Palestinians accountable for their incitement and support for terrorism, including through the financial payment to Palestinian terrorists who are jailed in Israel for committing acts of terrorism.

In yet another stark reminder of how closely our nations are connected in this fight, the father murdered last Thursday, Eitam Henkin, was a dual Israeli-American citizen. The terrorist who killed him did not care, as his sole intent was to kill Jews, not to engage in a political process. There is no moral equivalence between Palestinian terrorism and the obligation of Israel to act in defense of its people. To the Israeli people, especially those who are victims of terrorism and their families: I proudly stand in solidarity with you during this challenging time.

OBSERVING HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month, a time to honor the many traditions and contributions of America's vibrant Hispanic community. This special time is celebrated from September 15 to October 15 and honors the many Americans whose ancestors originate from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. I am proud to recognize this month in honor of the many Hispanic Americans who contribute so much to communities across our state and country.

Hispanic Americans make up the largest ethnic minority throughout our Nation, as well as in Nevada. This community is an integral part of our State, helping shape our economy, trade, culture, and intrinsic Nevada footprint. I am thankful for the hard work and

dedication of the many Hispanic Americans whose perseverance has greatly impacted the success of the Silver State. That is why I recently cosponsored a resolution recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month and the fundamental role Hispanic Americans have in the accomplishments of the United States. I am proud to support legislative efforts that distinguish the immense efforts brought forth by this community.

Hispanic Americans play a critical role in our Nation's identity, especially in 2015. As of August 2015, Latino workers represented nearly 17 percent of the workforce and exhibited the largest percentage of labor force participation of any ethnic group with nearly 63 percent. This community is made up of hard-working physicians, surgeons, chief business executives, lawyers, educators, and many other professionals crucial to the success of our country. Latinos represent one in four public school students and 19 percent of college students between the ages of 18 and 24. Hispanic Americans have served the United States in every war, helping bring freedom and democracy to our country. As of July 2015, 164,000 Active-Duty servicemembers from the Hispanic community served and continue to serve our country, maintaining these principal values. The vast influence this community has had on our great Nation warrants only the greatest gratitude.

I ask that today and throughout the rest of this time set aside for Hispanic Heritage Month, we recognize the many contributions that the Hispanic community brings. I join citizens across the Silver State in thanking the many Hispanic Americans who have brought greater strength to our State and our Nation.

OBSERVING THE 104TH NATIONAL DAY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA, TAIWAN

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize the 104th National Day of the Republic of China, Taiwan, to take place on October 10, 2015.

As a longstanding supporter of Taiwan, I believe the occasion of its National Day is an appropriate time for us to consider our special relationship with Taiwan and the Taiwanese people.

The United States and Taiwan have fostered a mutually beneficial relationship over the years based on shared democratic values and common strategic interests. Taiwan is a fine example of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region and is a trusted friend and trading partner to the United States. Our relationship has realized far-reaching economic and cultural benefits, and I hope that our bonds continue to grow in the years to come.

It is a sincere privilege to offer my compliments to the people of Taiwan on this very special occasion.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I would like to take time to recognize that October 10, 2015, will be the 104th National Day of the Republic of China, Taiwan.

Over the years, the United States and Taiwan have maintained a strong relationship based on common values and global interests. I hope to see Taiwan remain a strong ally and trade partner for many years to come as we look towards a mutually prosperous future.

It is a great pleasure to extend my best wishes to the people of Taiwan on this special day.

OBSERVING INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, Sunday, October 11, 2015, is the International Day of the Girl. Started 4 years ago, this day is an effort to raise awareness of issues of gender inequality around the world. This year the theme is "The Power of the Adolescent Girl." As the father of three daughters and two granddaughters, I am keenly aware of the power of our girls, as well as the challenges that they face.

For these reasons, I was proud to welcome a delegation of young women from Arkansas to my office in July. These ladies were attending a leadership summit here in Washington, D.C., and came to my office to advocate on issues related to human trafficking, gender-based violence, childhood education, and more. I am very proud of them and their efforts to fight the problems girls face around the world.

Across the globe, girls and young women face incredible odds and challenges. Over the last 15 years, work by the United States and our partners has resulted in real change. Girls are now more likely than ever to enroll in primary school and receive important vaccinations and are much less likely to suffer health and nutritional problems than ever before. It is important that we continue these efforts, along with our partners, to solidify the gains that we have made and reach for even greater successes.

I thank the young women from Arkansas and across the country who are making the crucial effort to advocate for those who do not have a voice. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that our children inherit a world of increased possibilities.

TRIBUTE TO DETECTIVE WILLIAM J. ZIMMERMAN

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating an extraordinary public servant, Detective William "Bill" Zimmerman, as he retires from the United States Capitol Police force, USCP.

For 32 years, Detective Zimmerman has served the USCP with great distinction, including 28 years with the threat assessment section, the division responsible for investigating threats made against Members of Congress and their families.

To every challenge, Detective Zimmerman brought unparalleled skill and dedication, ultimately helping to establish programs for threat assessment