

the three holds I have on ambassadorial nominations: Mr. Samuel Heins, who is nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to Norway, and Ms. Azita Raji, who is nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden. I believe both are qualified to represent our Nation abroad, and we have significant interests in Scandinavia. My hope is that both nominees receive a vote and are confirmed in the Senate sooner rather than later.

I will retain, however, the hold on President Obama's Ambassador to the Bahamas. This is because the Department of Justice has yet to initiate an investigation into the unauthorized access and dissemination of Congressman CHAFFETZ's personal records.

The DHS inspector general has testified to Congress that he believes criminal violations of the Privacy Act occurred. Secret Service Director Clancy, in his own testimony to Congress, agreed with the inspector general, acknowledging that the violations constituted, in his words, "a criminal offense." With such agreement between the Department of Homeland Security IG and the Secret Service Director, I retain the hope and fully expect that a criminal investigation of these offenses by the Department of Justice will be forthcoming.

That investigation and the discipline currently being meted out by the Department of Homeland Security are important to send the message that politically motivated crimes will not be tolerated. Consequences are needed to make clear that the separation of powers will be respected and that Members of Congress acting on behalf of the people will not be intimidated.

I also reserve the right to place new holds on future administration nominees. What we cannot have is impunity for criminal offenses. If the discipline for the Secret Service leadership is too weak or if a criminal investigation is not initiated, I may place additional holds in order to again remind the White House of the seriousness of this matter, but in the meantime I look forward to continuing to work with the administration to ensure that discipline is appropriate and a criminal investigation on this matter is initiated.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, having just finished the Thanksgiving holiday season, many of us had a chance

to be with our families and give thanks for all of the great goodness we have had showered on us as individuals and those lucky enough to live in this great Nation, but for many families this was a painful holiday weekend. It is sobering to realize how many American families have their lives impacted by gun violence in America every single day. Sadly, the past holiday weekend was no exception.

In my home State of Illinois, in the city of Chicago, gun violence has taken a devastating toll. There have been 436 homicides in Chicago this year—most of them by gunfire. In Chicago, the news this morning was that 8 people were killed and at least 20 others were wounded in shootings over the holiday weekend. Today the University of Chicago has closed its campus in Hyde Park because of a shooting threat that was made against the campus community. Classes and activities are canceled. Extra security has been provided. At a high school in Barrington, IL, in the suburbs of Chicago, students saw a lockdown after a student came to school with a gun and was arrested.

The fact is, there is too much gun violence in America. All across the country we have seen such terrible stories.

On Friday, in Biloxi, MS, a patron at a Waffle House restaurant shot and killed Julia Brightwell, a waitress, after she asked him not to smoke in the restaurant.

In Atlanta, on Saturday, 6-year-old Ja'Mecca Smith found a loaded handgun in the cushions of a sofa and fatally shot herself—6 years old.

In Rome, NY, a 7-month-old infant was shot and killed on Saturday when a nearby 18-year-old was cleaning and loading a shotgun that was discharged.

In Colorado Springs, CO, a gunman burst into a Planned Parenthood building and killed three people, including police officer Garrett Swasey, and wounded nine others. The Governor of Colorado called this domestic terrorism, and I agree.

An average of 297 Americans are shot every day, 89 of them fatally. They are shot in homicides, assaults, suicides, accidental shootings, mass shootings, and even domestic terrorism attacks like the one we just witnessed at the Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs. By one count, there have been at least 351 mass shootings in America so far this year—that is more than one every single day—and there have been more than 50 shootings in American schools so far this year. There are some people who think that the Founding Fathers, when they envisioned the future of America, envisioned an armed America with absolute, inviolate gun rights. I don't believe it. I don't believe for a minute they had any vision of this level of wanton violence which is taking place.

Several weeks ago, I joined with my Senate Democratic colleagues. We went to the steps of the Capitol and called on the Republican majority in the Senate to do something. We urged

Republicans to consider calling on the floor of the Senate—in light of all of this gun violence—commonsense reforms that would keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

Whether or not you own a gun, whether or not you hunt, whatever your view is of the Constitution, can't we all basically agree that people who have been convicted of a felony and those who are mentally unstable should not be allowed to buy a gun? That, to me, is just common sense. There are many people in my own family who are sportsmen and hunters and enjoy the firearms they bought as kids and went hunting with their dads and really appreciate it. It is part of the Midwestern culture. I have yet to meet a single person who owns a gun and uses it responsibly who doesn't agree with the statement that we should keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons and also out of the hands of those who are mentally unstable.

It is also hard to imagine why there is opposition to this issue. Did you know that even if you are on the government's terrorist watch list—a person who is suspected of terrorism—you can legally buy a gun in America? I am not talking about gun show loopholes, where there are no questions asked; I am talking about the law in America which allows suspected terrorists to buy firearms. In light of what happened in Paris, France, does it make sense that someone on the terrorist watch list can buy an assault weapon? God only knows where they would take it or what they would do with it and ultimately how many innocent people would be killed. We can't even have a conversation about that on the floor of the U.S. Senate. No way. The National Rifle Association would not approve. The gun lobby does not want us discussing these issues. We are talking about a Second Amendment absolute, inviolate right, in their eyes, and I think we are talking about something that is impossible to explain and defend, from my point of view.

I will stand up for Second Amendment rights—the rights of people to own and use guns responsibly and store them safely away from children. I will stand up for their rights, but we also have to come together and acknowledge that those who would misuse firearms because they have a criminal intent, with a criminal record, are mentally unstable, or are on a suspected terrorist watch list—for goodness' sake, we ought to be able to draw that line in the United States of America.

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was just a few weeks ago that—I guess 10 days ago, actually—the Republican Presidential candidates went to the Presiding Officer's State to meet with religious leaders, Christian leaders, and were seeking their support. Of course they all want the support of everyone living in Iowa because the Iowa

caucus is coming up pretty soon. I thought about that as they went to meet these Christian leaders in Iowa, just across the river from my home State of Illinois. I thought about how they had just left their discussions here in Washington, talking about Syrian refugees.

The most humbling humanitarian crisis in the world today is occurring in Syria. They have had a civil war which has gone on for years. Millions of people have been displaced and thousands have been killed. I met some of them just a few months ago when I went to Greece and saw these refugees streaming away from the camps in Syria trying to find a safe place. I can't imagine what it must be like for a husband to turn to his wife and say: We have to move. Pick up the kids. Whatever you can carry is all that we are taking. We are going to try to find a safe place to live.

I saw hundreds and thousands of them—families streaming out of this war-torn area. Very few of them have ever made it to the United States—about 2,000. Part of the reason is we have an elaborate, lengthy background check before anyone can be admitted as a refugee. In fact, it takes anywhere from 18 to 24 months of waiting to see if you might legally become a refugee in the United States of America.

Well, these Republican Presidential candidates and 25 Governors have said: We don't want any Syrian refugees. We are not going to allow them to come to the United States during a period of a "pause"—as some say. Others have taken more extreme positions. It is hard to imagine. If our goal is to keep Americans safe, why are these Republican candidates focusing on Syrian refugees? You see, since we have allowed about 2,000 refugees into the United States over the last 4 years, not one single Syrian refugee has been arrested and accused of terrorist activity—not one. After a lengthy background check, we believe we have done everything humanly possible to keep those away who would be any danger to our country.

I met some of those Syrian refugees who have made it here, in the city of Chicago. If you think they are terrorist threats to the United States, for goodness' sake, take a few minutes and sit down and talk to them and hear their stories of how their families went through extreme hardships—some of them with children who were being killed in Syria during the war—and as they fled with the clothes on their backs, they appealed to the United States to be allowed to come here as refugees and then waited up to 2 years to go through every one of the possible background checks before they finally made it.

What happens when they get here? Well, initially they need some help. Many of them don't speak English very well. Some of them are not financially ready to take care of themselves. But do you know what happens after a few

months? They find a place, go to work, and join a long parade of those who have come to the United States as refugees and called it home. That includes 400,000 Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States and are now a great part of our country. It includes 650,000 Cuban refugees who came to the United States, escaping Castro. Included in those 650,000 refugees were the fathers of two U.S. Senators, one of whom is running for President of the United States. They came to the United States and made an important contribution to the Senate and our Nation—refugees. I heard one of them say: Well, it was different then. We are dealing with terrorism today.

Really? What were we dealing with when we accepted Cuban refugees? We were dealing with a Communist regime in Cuba that was friendly with the Soviet Union, which had nuclear weapons pointed at the United States, and we were accepting refugees from that country. I am glad we did. We were living in a very dangerous time when they were accepted, and on balance we found that history has proven that those refugees from Cuba have become an important part of the United States.

We accepted over 200,000 Soviet Jews who were being persecuted in that country and wanted to come to the United States so that they could practice their religion freely. In my hometown of Springfield, IL, the synagogues opened their doors and said: We will sponsor these families as they come to our Midwestern community. We brought refugees from the Soviet Union in, and they became part of the United States.

The story is told over and over again. Yet Republican Presidential nominees and Governors describe refugees as just terrorists on the run. They say they are not carefully screened and are still allowed in the United States. That is the way they describe it. It is not true. We know it is not true.

When I consider those Republican Presidential nominees going to Iowa to pose for holy pictures with religious leaders after they said we would exclude these poor people who are simply trying to find a safe place for their families, it is hard to imagine.

This morning's New York Times tells a totally different story. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that this article in the New York Times be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Nov. 17, 2015]

A MANHATTAN HARDWARE STORE WELCOMES REFUGEES AS GOVERNORS VOW TO SHUT THEM OUT

(By Jim Dwyer)

Chris Christie of New Jersey and at least 25 other governors have said they do not want Syrian refugees to come to their states.

Then again, there is Wankel's, a family-owned hardware store that opened on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in the 19th century. For decades, it has hired people who

came to the United States fleeing violence and persecution.

"People coming from really bad situations, trying to make a better life in America," said Sean Wankel, 32, vice president of Wankel's. "Or a life."

The refugees come to Wankel's through resettlement agencies like Catholic Charities or the International Rescue Committee and stay for a few months or years as they get their bearings in a new world. On a wall map, colored pins mark the three dozen countries from which the Wankel workers have come.

Felix Royce, 39, started in the store two months ago. Like many before him, he is new to retail work; in Nigeria, he had been a pastor and an author. He said the picture on his book jacket made him a target of the Boko Haram, a murderous sect of anti-Western Islamists who rose in a swamp of official corruption and violence. Among Boko Haram's infamous atrocities was the kidnapping of scores of schoolgirls in 2014.

"They organize mock street fights and send little kids with suicide bombs," Mr. Royce said. "ISIS is more sensible than Boko Haram. You would have insiders, police officers and politicians who collaborate with the Boko Haram. You didn't know who to trust."

In fear of his life, he said, he made his way to Houston and applied for asylum, appearing without a lawyer three times in front of immigration judges before being formally admitted to the United States. He, his wife and their two children now live in the Bronx, aided by the International Rescue Committee.

"I am sitting here," he said, "trying to put my life together. We are just trying to find our feet."

Mr. Royce said he had been closely following the news of the attacks in Paris on Friday evening by bombers and gunmen connected to the Islamic State, also called ISIS or ISIL.

A tiny fraction of the refugees leaving Syria have been permitted into the United States—fewer than nine a week between Oct. 1, 2011, and Sept. 30 of this year, a total of 1,854—as an estimated four million people fled the deteriorating nation. President Obama said the United States would accept 10,000 refugees from Syria in the coming fiscal year. Republicans in Congress and in statehouses are objecting, saying that terrorists like those involved in the Paris attacks could camouflage themselves in the stream of legitimate refugees.

Representative Paul D. Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin, the newly inaugurated House speaker, called for a "pause" in the refugee resettlement program. Mr. Christie, seeking the Republican presidential nomination, released a letter he sent to the president.

"I write to inform you that I will not accept any refugees from Syria in the wake of the deadly terrorist attack in Paris," he wrote, saying federal screening procedures were inadequate. "Neither you nor any federal official can guarantee that Syrian refugees will not be part of any terrorist activity."

New Yorkers might imagine police barricades being set up around the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, to prevent people from fleeing the collapsing towers because no one could guarantee they would not be part of any future terroristic activity.

It is not clear whether Mr. Christie or any other governor can refuse to "accept" refugees. As a practical matter, New Jersey does not have border controls, and probably could not set up traffic lanes for citizenship papers at places like the Lincoln Tunnel.

Other Republican candidates, including Ted Cruz and Jeb Bush, said they would permit Christian refugees from Syria, but not Muslims.

At the hardware store where he has found work, in a city where he and his family have taken refuge, Mr. Royce was polite in assessing the proposed restrictions.

"Some people are saying, let them be, let them stay there," he said. "I wouldn't subscribe to that. There are innocent ones out there. This would mean there is no hope for them. If you screen, there are good ones among the bad. Everyone from Syria is not from ISIS. If you leave everybody, ISIS will take advantage of them."

Mr. Wankel was asked if his business had room for Syrian refugees.

"Certainly," he said. "If they are coming through the International Rescue Committee or Catholic Charities, I'd do it. They have a tough life. If I was in Syria, I'd want to get the heck out."

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it is a story about a man named Sean Wankel. His family has owned a hardware store on the Upper East Side of Manhattan since the 19th century. For decades, the Wankel family has been hiring people who came to the United States to escape violence and persecution—asylees and refugees. The owner of the store, Sean Wankel, said: "People coming from really bad situations, trying to make a better life in America." Wankel, of course, takes these refugees in to work in their store. They are referred to him by Catholic charities and the International Rescue Committee. They stay for a few months or years as they get their bearings in the new world. He has a wall map in the hardware store with colored pens marking three dozen countries from which these workers have come.

The article goes on to tell the story of Felix Royce, who came to the United States a few months ago, from persecution by terrorists in Nigeria, and got a job in this hardware store.

It is interesting that for decades this man and his family have intentionally brought in these refugees and asylees and made them part of their business and life, while nearby, the Governor of New Jersey is quaking in his boots at the thought of a refugee coming into the State of New Jersey. What a contrast.

The gentleman at the hardware store said that it is not clear if the Republican Governor of New Jersey even understands who these people are.

I will quote Mr. Royce from Nigeria again:

Some people are saying, let them be, let them stay there. I wouldn't subscribe to that. There are innocent ones out there. This would mean there is no hope for them. If you screen, there are good ones among the bad. Everyone from Syria is not from ISIS. If you leave everybody, ISIS will take advantage of them.

It is hard for me to imagine some of the things that have been said recently by some of the Presidential candidates on the other side. It isn't just a matter of turning away Syrian refugees even with the clearance practices we have, but some have gone to even more extreme statements, saying that we should never allow people of the Muslim religion to come to the United States or that they should somehow be

identified in this country. If you are a student of history, you will know that kind of paranoia and that kind of prejudice has exhibited itself many times in our history. We look back on it now not with pride but with sadness to think that we reached the point where we treated people that way.

In May of 1939, when a shipload of Jews were trying to escape the Nazis in Germany—900 of them on the SS *St. Louis*—and came to Miami, they were turned away. They went back to Europe. Two-hundred of those Jews perished in the Holocaust because they were turned away from the United States of America. And when Senator Robert Wagner of New York suggested that we allow 10,000 Jewish children to come to the United States to escape the Nazis, that was defeated in this Congress. There were Japanese internment camps and other situations just like that—sad, fearful things that were done that we look back on now and say: We can't repeat those mistakes. But the language that is coming out of many today is an echo of the past decisions—decisions we look back on now and say never again. Sadly, they are being suggested even today.

Our first obligation is to keep America safe, and if we are going to do that, let's look to things that truly do keep us safe. Let's say that if you are on the terrorist watch list in the United States of America, you cannot legally purchase guns or explosives. That is not a radical idea; that is something we need to do to change the law. Instead of focusing on 70,000 refugees who go through 2 years of background checks before they come here, let's focus on the 20 million who visit the United States without visas each year from Europe and 38 countries around the world and make sure they have been carefully checked before they come to the United States.

There are things we can do to keep America safe, but denying access to refugees who are suffering now with their children in the hopes of finding a safe place is not American. It is not who we are. It is not who we should be. I yield the floor.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO MACKENZIE BAKER

• Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today I recognize Mackenzie Baker, an intern in my Washington, DC, office for all of the hard work she has done for me, my staff, and the State of South Dakota.

Mackenzie is a graduate of Augusta Preparatory Day School in Augusta, GA. Currently, Mackenzie is attending American University, where she is a business and entertainment major. Mackenzie is a dedicated worker who has been committed to getting the most out of her experience.

I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mackenzie Baker for all of the fine work she has done and wish

her continued success in the years to come.●

TRIBUTE TO CAROLINE CRINION

• Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today I recognize Caroline Crinion, an intern in my Washington, DC, office for all of the hard work she has done for me, my staff, and the State of South Dakota.

Caroline is a graduate of Brookings High School in Brookings, SD. Currently, Caroline is attending Georgetown University, where she is majoring in international political economy. Caroline is a dedicated worker who has been committed to getting the most out of her experience.

I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Caroline Crinion for all of the fine work she has done and wish her continued success in the years to come.●

TRIBUTE TO SETH GERBERDING

• Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today I recognize Seth Gerberding, an intern in my Washington, DC, office for all of the hard work he has done for me, my staff, and the State of South Dakota.

Seth is a graduate of Sturgis Brown High School in Sturgis, SD. Seth is planning on attending college next fall and majoring in math or political science. Seth is a dedicated worker who has been committed to getting the most out of his experience.

I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Seth Gerberding for all of the fine work he has done and wish him continued success in the years to come.●

TRIBUTE TO MARY WRIGHT

• Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today I recognize Mary Wright, an intern in my Washington, DC, office for all of the hard work she has done for me, my staff, and the State of South Dakota.

Mary is a graduate of Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD. Currently, Mary is attending the University of Maryland, where she is majoring in communications. Mary is a dedicated worker who has been committed to getting the most out of her experience.

I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mary Wright for all of the fine work she has done and wish her continued success in the years to come.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United