

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

GUN SAFETY

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I hope we rise to the moment before us and get something done, over the course of the next week or two, to try to make this country safer. I am glad to be joining the President in a few hours to hear more about his thoughts on how we can put the safety of our kids ahead of any political considerations and try to figure out how to make sure that Parkland is the last.

As I have told some of the kids from Parkland who have come into my office, the ripples of grief will never, ever end. Newtown, CT, is a place that has been fundamentally changed. When you lose that many young lives in a short period of time, there is no true recovery. Unfortunately, Parkland will find that as Charleston did, as Orlando did, and as so many did before them.

We need to remember that while the country tends to pay attention to the epidemic of gun violence when there is a mass shooting, this is an epidemic that doesn't take a day off. Yesterday, it is likely that 80 to 90 people died from gunshot wounds. The majority of those were suicides. That is an epidemic in and of itself. A chunk of those were accidental shootings, another chunk of those were gun homicides; but the rate of gun deaths in this country just has no parallel anywhere else in the world. There is not another First World nation that has the rate of gun violence we do. In fact, it is not even close. The rate of gun violence in our country is 20 times higher than the average in the OECD.

We have to remember that when we try to craft a public policy response, it just cannot be about school shootings. One is much more likely to die from an accidental gunshot than in a school shooting. We have to be comprehensive in our approach, which is why the Fix NICS Act just isn't good enough.

I am proud Senator CORNYN and I and many others in this body came together to put forward a piece of legislation that will improve the background check system. It will make sure people who shouldn't buy guns aren't able to buy guns, but it is a modest change. In fact, it is really just about making sure people who are in law enforcement and inside the NICS system comply with existing law. It doesn't actually add any new background checks, it doesn't solve the gun show loophole, and it doesn't solve the internet loophole. So my hope is, we can bring this bill before the Senate, but then we can have a debate on other measures that might enjoy bipartisan support that will do 10 times more than fix NICS to keep this country safe.

Let's talk about expanding background checks to make sure everybody who is buying a gun in a commercial sale has to prove they are not a crimi-

nal and prove they are not seriously mentally ill. Let's talk about the experience that Connecticut and Indiana has had in allowing courts to use protective orders to take away guns from people who are showing evidence of doing harm to the people around them. Let's have a conversation about whether we think it is right for people to be able to walk into schools with a gun equipped with a 30-round or 100-round magazine.

I don't know if any of those measures will get 60 votes, but I think we owe it to the American people to not limit debate, to not shut down debate in the U.S. Senate Chamber.

I know it is probably a scary thing for some Republicans that votes are changing. Many of my Republican colleagues have acknowledged they might be thinking about supporting things today that they might not have supported before. Because minds are changing, it behooves us to make sure we have a full debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

I am supportive of the bill that Senator CORNYN and I have worked on. I hope it can become the foundation of a much more comprehensive set of measures that we take a look at in the coming days. I think we have to pay attention to where the American public is on this issue. I understand polls shouldn't dictate all of the decisions we make here. We pay attention to public opinion, we respond to it more often than not, but it doesn't guide every single decision we make because public opinion changes.

On this issue, it has been a slow and steady build, the number of Americans saying the U.S. Congress bears responsibility for the epidemic of mass slaughter in this country because we have not changed a single gun law, except to make them weaker, since Sandy Hook. Remember, the only thing this Congress has done since Sandy Hook is allow hundreds of thousands of seriously mentally ill people to get weapons. That law was passed last year by the President—nothing to restrict guns.

In fact, 97 percent of Americans want us to pass universal background checks. Apple pie isn't as popular as background checks are in this country today. No other public policy we are considering gets a 97-percent approval rating from the American public than universal background checks. Let's listen to that. Let's listen to them.

I encourage Senator MCCONNELL not to limit debate, not to constrain the Senate. Let's use this week and next week to have a set of measures we can debate and have up-or-down votes on, and let's hope, in the meantime, the President fleshes out what he is for and against.

The President tweeted that he is in support of comprehensive background checks. Maybe later today we will find out if that is really true. Comprehensive background checks tend to mean the closing of the loopholes that exist,

but hopefully the President can help lead us to a conclusion that is something much more than Fix NICS. As my colleague from Florida who has lived through the last several mass shootings in his State remarked, Fix NICS is simply not enough to meet this moment. I hope we build upon it in the coming days.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2464

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2464) to improve border security and to provide conditional provision residence to certain long-term residents who entered the United States as children.

Mr. CORNYN. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

FIX NICS BILL

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, my colleague from Connecticut is here in the room and mentioned the bill we have been working on together, the Fix NICS bill. I want to remind all of us what the motivation was, at least on my part, for introducing this legislation and express my gratitude to the Senator from Connecticut, as well as the Democratic leader Senator SCHUMER, and others who have cosponsored this legislation.

It was just a few short months ago when someone murdered 26 people worshipping in a small church just outside San Antonio in Sutherland Springs. He had purchased these firearms having lied on the background check when they asked him whether he was a convicted felon, whether he was honorably discharged from the military, and whether he had ever committed any domestic violence. He lied.

If he had told the truth, he would have been prohibited from buying those firearms and perhaps—maybe, perhaps—he would have been dissuaded, slowed down, or perhaps would not have committed that terrible atrocity that day when 26 people lost their lives, and 20 more were injured.

We have come to find out that the Air Force, which had convicted him of two of those offenses—domestic violence and the felony—failed to upload the information that was required in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. If they had, then he would not have gotten away

with lying because the FBI background check system would have revealed the truth.

I can state that I have the utmost confidence that if the Fix NICS law were in effect at the time he was attempting to purchase those firearms, in all likelihood, he would have been prohibited from purchasing those guns, and I would conclude from that, lives would have been saved, and the lives which were changed forever because of the terrible injuries that the other 20 received would not have been changed in such a terrible way.

I told myself at the time that I cannot go to another church service—we went to the church that met in a tent just down the street from the place where the shooting took place a week after the shooting. The pastor and his wife who lost their teenage daughter were there. The wife was distraught, as you can imagine. The pastor summoned a power that is greater than human power to preach that day. It was emotional, it was inspirational, but it was a terrible tragedy. I told myself that day that I never wish to look another family in the face and say we failed to do everything that was in our power to prohibit or to stop something like that from happening again.

Fix NICS, as I think people who are familiar with it understand, basically takes the laws that currently exist and makes sure it is applied so people like this shooter in Sutherland Springs can't lie their way out of it and get access to firearms and ruin people's lives in the process.

I realize it may not be as comprehensive as some people would like. The problem is around here, if you ignore the things you can agree on and just look to fight about things you can't agree on, nothing ever happens—no problems ever get solved. I think a good place to start would be to pass this bipartisan Fix NICS piece of legislation.

I hope our colleagues would consider it. I understand they have a different view on some aspects of guns, but what we had here was a catastrophic failure. We had a systemic failure. The school system failed, the mental health authorities failed, the local law enforcement, the Federal law enforcement failed. Our society failed to provide the tools to identify people who cry out, in essence, on social media like this young man did when he posted on YouTube essentially the threat he actually carried out, which was going to go shoot up a school. When that was referred to the FBI, they didn't follow up on it and nothing ever happened.

Looking back on this particular young man, he was sending signals out on a regular basis that he was a ticking timebomb and people were going to get hurt and potentially die, as they did.

I hope that rather than leave here this week with nothing to show for our efforts, we would at least agree to pass what enjoys broad bipartisan support and to perhaps prevent another shoot-

ing like that which occurred at Sutherland Springs.

The President has made clear, thinking now about the Las Vegas shooting, that he believes bump stocks ought to be regulated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. I agree with that. So those are two things we could do, perhaps, that might save lives in the future, but to just say it is not enough, we ought to do more, and to fail to do what is within our grasp, which we can agree to, to me, seems like a bizarre way of doing business, and I think it is an abdication of our responsibility.

I don't want to see another family who has lost a loved one as a result of one of these mass shootings that might be prevented by some action we might take on Fix NICS or the bump stock issue, for example.

There may be other things we need to do. We have done some things, such as trying to address the mental health challenges that people like Adam Lanza's mother had. Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook shooter, was obviously mentally ill, but he wouldn't accept the treatment his doctor prescribed.

What we did last December—during the Obama administration—passed something called the 21st Century Cures Act, which included a bill I sponsored called the Mental Health and Safe Communities Act, which encouraged the use of assisted outpatient treatment. For example, if Adam Lanza's mother couldn't handle her son—he wouldn't take his medication or comply with doctor's orders—she could go to a civil court and essentially get a court order requiring him to comply with his doctor's orders and to take his medication.

Again, I am not suggesting that any one of these in isolation is a panacea, but there are things we can do step-by-step, bit-by-bit, to reduce the likelihood that these terrible mass shootings occur in the future.

TAX REFORM

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on another note, we heard some great news yesterday, in terms of our economy. Consumer confidence has jumped to a 17-year high. Optimism continues to surge as employers and payroll services across the country continue to implement the reforms to our Tax Code that we passed last December in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

What is more, the Treasury Department has now released the new withholding tables that went into effect earlier this month and reflect the changes passed as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

I got a call from someone close to me. I will leave it at that—I don't want to embarrass her—who said she opened her paycheck, and she had \$240 more in her paycheck than she had in the previous month as a result of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. She didn't regard this as crumbs; she thought it would make a positive difference in her life.

I think many Americans are having the same experience, seeing an increase in their take-home pay even in the month of February. As I said, for some, it is several hundred dollars extra each pay period, which is money that can be saved for a rainy day or invested for their retirement or future, or it could be used to pay for their child's education or to put new tires on their car. A married couple with two children, making about \$75,000 a year, will see an estimated tax cut of approximately \$2,000.

That is just on the individual side. What we are seeing across the country is greater than just what is happening to single families and households, though. It is good to see at the micro level or the personal level, so to speak, what the impact is, but we also have to see the bigger picture in terms of our economy, the jobs created, the investment opportunities, and the way to grow our economy, and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act has had a profound impact on that.

So far, at least 417 companies have announced new investments, pay raises, bonuses, and charitable contributions. They have added new employee training and increased contributions to pensions and 401(k) retirement accounts. According to the White House, more than 4.4 million workers have been positively affected. It is no wonder the tax law is becoming more and more popular as people have learned more about it. Even the New York Times has had to agree that the public is learning to love the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act because of the positive impact on hard-working American lives.

I see the wide-ranging effect of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in my State. Thanks to a competitive tax system, for example, Fort Worth-based companies like American Airlines paid large bonuses to their employees. AT&T, which is headquartered in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, paid \$1,000 to more than 200,000 men and women across the country who work for that company. Just as important, AT&T announced \$1 billion in capital investments, which could create as many as 7,000 jobs.

Texas also proves that the effects of tax reform are more than just a one-time-only impact. Waste Management, based in Houston, has already paid bonuses to drivers and landfill workers, but its CEO emphasized in an interview that the company will continue to spend money on its people beyond 2018. ExxonMobil, headquartered in Las Colinas in the Dallas area, will expand oil production in West Texas. Oncor, one of the largest investor-owned utilities in the State, will issue future refunds to customers on their utility bills. And Walmart, which is the largest employer in Texas, increased starting wages, expanded parental leave, and offered financial assistance to employees who choose to adopt.

It is not just the big players, though; small businesses are doing the same