

heard before. I think the students speaking out have had a clear, articulate message that this carnage needs to stop. I am not sure I know any lawmaker or American who would disagree with the idea that our students need to be safe in their schools. It means that we need to act—really act this time.

Setting aside the outrageous idea of arming teachers, it has been heartening to see the President move in the direction of legislative solutions, such as expanding background checks and banning bump stocks. The devil is always in the details, and we will see how far the President is willing to stray from the NRA and whether the Republican leadership will back the President or remain on the sidelines of protecting the American people and especially our children.

On that Valentine's Day, February 14, when I heard about the shooting in Parkland, FL, my immediate reaction was horror, pain, and outrage. How could we allow this to happen yet again? Schools should be a safe harbor for our children, not a place of killing and terror. I was in my office thinking about how tragic this is, not only for those who were killed but for all the children who were there. I am as frustrated as the people across this country. I want to pass commonsense gun safety legislation. Why shouldn't we get these military-style weapons off the streets?

It is hard to know what will motivate the congressional leadership to bring up this issue, what will jar them to action. I want action. We may not solve the problem entirely, but we need to try. We need to do something.

A new CNN poll released just this Sunday finds that 70 percent of Americans now back tougher gun laws. This is a huge jump from 52 percent after the tragic, horrific October shootings in Las Vegas. This number includes 49 percent of Republicans, which I think is encouraging. Saving lives should not be a partisan issue. Commonsense gun safety legislation should not be a partisan issue.

Public opinion polls may not be perfect, but they are generally helpful to show trends. Americans are getting it. It is time that we do. This trend toward protecting the American people, and especially our children, is moving in the right direction. The American people are letting their voices be heard on this issue.

Thoughts and prayers might console the grieving for a moment, but action speaks louder and will have a lasting impact. From my hometown of Baltimore to the many towns across America that have had their names in the headlines because of gun-related tragedies or mass shootings, people are calling upon Congress to act.

I don't care what the reasons are for a change of heart, but let's get bills on the floor. What we are proposing are logical next steps to address the deadly problem that has been festering in this country for too long. Too many young

lives have been lost. Will this time be different?

Mr. President, in honor of the victims of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, I ask unanimous consent that their names be printed in the RECORD.

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

Alyssa Alhadeff, 14; Scott Beigel, 35; Martin Duque Anguiano, 14; Nicholas Dworet, 17; Aaron Feis, 37; Jaime Guttenberg, 14; Chris Hixon, 49; Luke Hoyer, 15; Cara Loughran, 14; Gina Montalto, 14; Joaquin Oliver, 17; Alaina Petty, 14; Meadow Pollack, 18; Helena Ramsay, 17; Alex Schachter, 14; Carmen Schentrup, 16; Peter Wang, 15.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, to all the victims of gun violence who have preceded them, let's make the answer a resounding yes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this morning, I would like to start off speaking about a very important day in the history of my State, a day that inspires pride in the hearts of all those who were born in Texas. I am here to commemorate Texas Independence Day, which will be celebrated tomorrow.

On March 2, 1836, Texas adopted its Declaration of Independence from Mexico. It is worth reading, and I would recommend it to anyone. This happened in the context of a struggle that is perhaps best remembered by the Battle of the Alamo, which laid some of the groundwork for Texans' eventual victory.

On February 24 of that year, with his position under siege, an important figure named William Barret Travis wrote a letter, which I would like to read. He was a lieutenant colonel in the Texas Army, and during the battle, his fellow soldiers were outnumbered nearly 10 to 1 by the forces of the Mexican dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Here in the Senate, both Republicans and Democrats have had the honor of reading the fabled Travis letter since 1961, when then-Texas Senator John Tower started that tradition. The letter was addressed "To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World." Travis wrote:

I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls—I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch—The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own

honor & that of his country—Victory or Death.

Signed, "William Barret Travis."

What a letter it is. It is a reminder for all of us that the 189 defenders of the Alamo lost their lives, but they did not die in vain. In fact, Texans wouldn't be around today if it weren't for them.

The Battle of the Alamo bought precious time for the Texas revolutionaries, allowing General Sam Houston to maneuver his army into a position for the decisive victory at the Battle of San Jacinto. I would just note that I am honored to occupy the same Senate seat first occupied by Sam Houston when he became a U.S. Senator after Texas became annexed to the United States in 1845.

With that victory at the Battle of San Jacinto, Texas became a sovereign nation—the Republic of Texas—for 9 years. For 9 years, it thrived as a separate nation, and then in 1845 it was annexed to the United States as the 28th State.

Many Texas patriots who fought in the revolution went on to serve in the U.S. Congress—Sam Houston being one of them. Every single day, I am honored to have the opportunity to serve 28 million Texans—a chance I wouldn't have had without the sacrifices made by the brave men like William Barrett Travis 182 years ago.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, on another matter, we have come a long way since the days of the Texas revolution, but Texas remains a place of optimism, fortitude, and dedication to worthy causes. It is also a bustling State, full of entrepreneurs, investors, and risk-takers who have created jobs and opportunities for the people who live there. I would like to mention briefly two iconic companies that are showing their devotion to Texas in a much different but important manner.

In Tyler, they are spreading the good news of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the law we passed in December, which overhauled our Tax Code. For those not familiar with where Tyler is, it is out in East Texas. We sometimes refer to that as "behind the pine curtain." The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act effects have been far-reaching. They have positively affected communities all across the country for the past 2 months, and Tyler is no exception.

The first company I would like to mention is Greenberg Turkeys, a family-owned operation that sells the famous Thanksgiving bird to around 200,000 customers each holiday season. Four generations of the Greenberg family have worked in the company since the 1940s, and its turkeys have been featured on Oprah Winfrey's website as one of her favorite things—twice, in fact. As a result of the tax reforms we have passed, the company plans to refurbish its plant and give hourly employees a raise. Sam Greenberg, the president, said:

This is a really good deal for businesses. It pays to treat people right, and so we want to share this with our workers.

I couldn't have said it better myself.

The second Tyler company I want to mention briefly is Don's TV & Appliance. The staff there has more than 150 years of combined experience. It buys products direct from manufacturers at the lowest possible cost in order to provide customers with prices that are competitive with national chain stores. Recently, the owner, Don Thedford, and his son Donnie announced they would give their employees raises in 2018, which they were not able to do for the past several years, and they would not have been able to do it but for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Thanks to those reforms, Don has been able to help out his employees to provide them more take-home pay, and I am sure they appreciate the extra money in their paycheck each pay period. They can use these savings to invest, to pay for their children's education, prepare for their retirement, or whatever they find best.

So I just wanted to say to Don and other small employers who are making sure their employees see the benefit of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act reforms: Thank you for paying the savings forward. I can't wait to continue to hear more stories like these two in the months ahead.

FIX NICS BILL

Mr. President, on a final note, I would like to bring up one last topic we have been discussing a lot this last week; that is, ways we can prevent mass shootings from happening in the future. Of course, the most recent one occurred at Parkland, FL, at Stoneman Douglas High School.

Last fall, my State saw another in-sidious shooting at Sutherland Springs near San Antonio, TX. Twenty-six people lost their lives that day worshipping in a small Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, and 20 more were wounded, including a 6-year-old boy named Ryland Ward, who was shot five times. We are ecstatic Ryland survived and is now out of the hospital and has gone home.

What we all learned in the aftermath of that event is that sometimes these horrific crimes are perpetrated by individuals who never should have been able to purchase firearms in the first place. That is because, under current law, convicted felons, like the gunman at Sutherland Springs, are prohibited from legally purchasing firearms. The problem was that his convictions were not uploaded in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, what is commonly referred to as the NICS system operated by the FBI.

I have introduced a bill that has already passed the House that would address this problem and, I believe, would save lives in the future. It is a bipartisan piece of legislation cosponsored by the junior Senator from Connecticut. Senator MURPHY, along with his colleague Senator BLUMENTHAL,

come from the State that saw the horrific killings at Sandy Hook. We added 10 new cosponsors just this week, bringing the total number to 50 cosponsors for this legislation. In my experience, it is rare to see a piece of legislation enjoy such broad, bipartisan support—50 cosponsors.

I have been saying all week that we need to pass this bill now. We should not wait, we should not go home emptyhanded, and we should not have to face the grieving families who lost a child or a loved one as a result of a future shooting that might have been averted had we acted. America is tired of the government's response to these catastrophes which rip families apart, take lives, and pit people against each other. The response of their government has been largely either silence or bickering with no outcome, no result.

There are other proposals we can consider as we continue to grapple with the questions posed in Parkland—questions about failures of local law enforcement, social media platforms, and the FBI. Yesterday, the President hosted an amazing meeting of 17 Members of Congress on a bipartisan basis and brainstormed about other things we might be able to do, but right now—right now—fix NICS is our best and only option to act in response. It is supported by the President, the majority and minority leaders are cosponsors, and it is supported by gun groups like the NRA and Everytown for Gun Safety, which are at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum when it comes to the Second Amendment. As I said, this bill has 50 cosponsors in the Senate and is ready for action, having already passed the House of Representatives.

I pledged to myself, after my wife and I visited Sutherland Springs a week after the terrible shooting there and attended a church service led by the pastor who lost his 14-year-old daughter in that shooting just 1 week before—it was a gut-wrenching, emotional service, but it was inspiring in its own way. I pledged then that I would never face another grieving family with empty hands, saying we could have done something that might have saved your child's life or your loved one's life by fixing the broken background check system. I pledged I would never face them again, saying we didn't try our best to save lives in the future by passing commonsense, bipartisan legislation like the Fix NICS bill.

As I said, there are other things we might do, but, as we all know, the threshold for actually passing legislation is 60 votes. What I don't want us to do is to end up like we did on the DACA debate, where we started with a neutral bill—a shell which really did nothing—and all of the various proposals failed to get 60 votes, so we ended up emptyhanded on the DACA issue. I don't want that to happen again, and I am not going to go home and tell my constituents in Texas I didn't do my very best to make sure we

did something and something meaningful that would save lives in the future. Fix NICS is the best way to do that and do that now.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the tragedy in Parkland and the responsibilities of the Senate to try to make our communities safer. I am going to talk very personally about my own experience in confronting gun violence as a mayor of an urban area, Richmond, VA, and as the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I will start by saying, I am a gun owner. I am a Second Amendment supporter. When I was an attorney in private practice, I was the lawyer who worked with an effort to amend the Virginia constitution to guarantee Virginians the right to hunt and fish. The Second Amendment and private gun ownership is an important part of our framework. I support it, but I obviously believe that we can do things consistent with the Constitution that will make our Nation safer, and I ask my colleagues to join in that effort.

When I was elected to the Richmond City Council in 1994, Richmond, at that time, was only on one top 10 list that I am aware of. It is not the one you want to be on. We had the second highest homicide rate in the United States. We were not a high-crime area generally, if you looked at all crime, but in homicides and aggravated assaults—assaults committed with weapons—we were unusually high. The weapons of choice in these homicides and aggravated assaults were guns.

I remember very early in my time at the city council getting called to a neighborhood, Gilpin Court, which is a public housing community in my city council district. There had been a gun crime that killed an entire family of five—adults and little children.

Over the course of my 8 years of working in local government, I went to too many crime scenes and funerals and wakes. In some ways, the things that were the most memorable were the meetings in church basements of the families of homicide victims. We embarked upon a set of strategies to make our communities safer. Amidst all the bloodshed and the tears, we actually found strategies—some dealing with reductions in guns, some dealing with law enforcement strategies, some dealing with police and community relations. We found strategies that, over the course of about 8 years, reduced the