

Grays Harbor to Neah Bay and all the way up the Columbia River, our Washington State Coast Guard works tirelessly to protect the Northwest and our environment.

In our State, there are more than 2,000 Active-Duty coasties, 440 reservists, 192 civilian employees, and an impressive 869 volunteer auxiliary members in the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard plays an important role in the safety and oversight of our fisheries. Thousands of Pacific Northwest fishermen call Washington State home, and over 35,000 Washington State jobs are supported by the Alaska fisheries.

While we usually talk about big assets here on the floor, like icebreakers and national security cutters, Washington State is also home to heavy surf stations that serve in some of the most extreme conditions that people have to operate under.

This bipartisan Coast Guard legislation has many provisions that I would like to talk about this afternoon. I want to again thank my colleagues for their great bipartisan work on this legislation.

This legislation has many different solutions for many of the challenges our agencies face. I want to again thank Senator THUNE for working across the aisle on the various Coast Guard provisions that are included in this bill, and I want to thank Senator SULLIVAN for helping to cosponsor the authorization of the recapitalization of the Coast Guard heavy polar icebreaker, the *Polar Star*. The *Polar Star* is home-ported in Seattle and is our only operational heavy icebreaker, crucial for Arctic operations.

The language that we just passed improves the oversight of ships that pose an oil spill risk in Puget Sound. This is so important for us moving forward to have these types of assets in these critical waters.

This bill also includes language to strengthen the Coast Guard's family leave policies, as they moved forward to meet other branches in adding paid family leave. The legislation included language that helps to improve the flexibility of that paid family leave for various parts of our State that are most hard to serve.

The Coast Guard families should not be forced to choose between serving their country and supporting their families, and I so appreciate the incorporation of this language into this legislation.

This bipartisan deal also helps to protect good shipbuilding jobs at Dakota Creek Shipyard. I am a very strong supporter of the Jones Act, and I believe it is important that we continue to have the Jones Act in the future. I am proud that we were able to work together to find a solution to save good jobs at the Dakota Creek Shipyard, and I appreciate my colleagues working on the incorporation of that language.

This legislation also included a critical compromise to address the threat

of invasive species and the threat they pose to our waterways in many different parts of the United States. We worked hard on this solution, consulting with the State of Washington, and believe that this version, which does create regulatory certainty for maritime operators but does so while still protecting our environment, is critical.

The bill allows the State of Washington, which has a strong history of protecting our waters from invasive species, to modify the west coast ballast water management practices, which is very important for us to protect our waterways for the future. It requires that the most rigorous scientific standards are used—including the Clean Water Act's best available technology standard so important to us in the Northwest. The bill also creates tools for emergency response to invasive species so they can be stopped before they take a stronghold in our environment. Lastly, it includes a permanent fishing vessel exemption for incidental discharges which do not pose a threat to our environment.

All of these things were part of a very comprehensive Coast Guard bill that tried to give us the best tools possible to continue to operate in our coastal areas of the United States, to have the right resources, to have the right oversight, to have the right assets, and the right protection of our environment.

Again, I thank our colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working so diligently to finally get this legislation over the threshold and on to the President's desk.

The Coast Guard represents such an important maritime piece of our economy. I hope our colleagues will realize we need to give the Coast Guard the resources and assets to do their jobs, not just now in this legislation but moving forward as well.

I also want to thank our Coast Guard fellow, Lieutenant Commander Michelle Rosenberg, for her time working on this comprehensive legislation for the last several years.

I, again, thank my colleagues.

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.

Mr. TOOMEY. 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.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, winter has arrived in Pittsburgh. Today, 11 3-foot-tall wooden Stars of David make up a sidewalk memorial in the city's Squirrel Hill neighborhood, and they will be brought inside the Tree of Life Synagogue to protect this display of the city's grief from the snowstorm.

Pittsburgh, the Jewish community and our entire country were shaken by

a horrific anti-Semitic attack that occurred on October 27, during Shabbat morning services. Members of three Jewish congregations were present: the Tree of Life, Dor Hadash, and New Light congregations. Eleven innocent people were senselessly slaughtered in the attack, and six others were wounded, including four police officers who responded to the attack.

Even within this act of evil, there were displays of amazing courage and humanity: the first responders, who rushed into danger to apprehend the shooter and protect others; the Jewish doctors and nurses who cared for not just the victims but the shooter as well. Like Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, president of Allegheny County Hospital—who is actually a member of the Tree of Life Synagogue—displayed an amazing, remarkable courage and humanity in visiting the shooter to ask him about his care and to try to make some sense of the attack.

After such an inexplicable event, all of us looked for the motivation of the perpetrator and asked why.

Well, let's be clear about what this shooting was about. It was a cowardly act of brutal violence, fueled by anti-Semitism, a corrupt and repulsive ideology that really betrays our most fundamental values and distorts history.

John Adams had an interesting quote. John Adams said:

If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations. They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their Empire were but a Bauble in comparison to the Jews. They have given religion to three quarters of the Globe and have influenced the affairs of Mankind more, and more happily, than any other Nation ancient or modern.

Despite Judaism's incredible contributions to mankind and to our own country and our country's founding, anti-Semitism is still far too prevalent. We can't ignore it. We must condemn it. We must challenge it.

I think there is a lesson here from Dr. Cohen, whom I mentioned earlier. When asked how he could visit a patient with so much hatred, Dr. Cohen replied:

I thought it was important to at least talk to him and meet him. You can't on one hand say we should talk to each other, and then I don't talk to him.

I think Dr. Cohen's wisdom and insights in humanity could be useful for this body as well. I have spent a lot of time working with colleagues and others to try to find some commonsense solutions to address some element of the gun violence that plagues this country. Too often, it seems to me, we talk past each other rather than speaking with each other.

I know there are strongly held views on the Second Amendment, and I am one of the Senators who has strongly held views on the Second Amendment. I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, but I am also convinced

there is common ground among people who have different views on the Second Amendment.

In this session of Congress that we are wrapping, we overwhelmingly enacted legislation to improve NICS, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which is used to prevent the sale of firearms to people who should not have firearms. Now think about that. We all agree firearms should not be sold to criminals and the dangerously mentally ill. I have never heard any colleague in this body suggest that firearms should be sold to violent criminals or dangerously mentally ill people. No. We all agree, as does our entire society, that these are people who shouldn't have firearms. So we have a NICS system that is designed, when it works well, to identify people who should not be able to have firearms because they are convicted criminals or dangerously mentally ill, or both, and we in this body recently passed legislation to improve the effectiveness of that NICS system.

Since we all accept the premise of the NICS system, and we have in fact enacted legislation to improve the effectiveness of the NICS system, shouldn't we also agree to close the remaining loopholes in the background check in this NICS system?

One measure that I think ought to be a consensus measure, and I know has bipartisan support, is that using the NICS system, we should cover all commercial sales of firearms with a background check. This is just a common-sense measure that is entirely consistent and compatible with the Second Amendment.

The Constitution guarantees the rights of law-abiding people to own firearms, but there is no such right for violent criminals and those who are dangerously mentally ill. I am not the only one who believes that. None other than the very pro-Second Amendment Justice Antonin Scalia wrote that it is completely compatible with the Second Amendment to have regulations like a background check.

Senator JOE MANCHIN and I have introduced bipartisan legislation that would address this loophole, that would expand background checks. It is pretty simple. It simply says that all commercial sales of firearms, including those sales at gun shows and over the internet, need to be subject to criminal and mental background checks. If you pass the background check, you get to buy your gun, but if you fail the background check, then you are exactly the kind of person we have all agreed shouldn't be able to get a gun. This is just common sense. By the way, he and I built into this legislation a number of provisions to allow law-abiding gun owners to more fully exercise their Second Amendment rights.

So I hope my colleagues will join me in working to advance this common-sense, bipartisan measure to keep our communities a little bit safer. I have never suggested that this would end

mass shootings in America—that would be absurd—but it might make it a little more difficult for someone who doesn't belong owning a firearm to obtain one.

I know in our country many people feel a deep sense of division. We saw it after the shooting at the Tree of Life. We see it sometimes in the debates here, including over gun safety, but this isn't the first time or even the worst time we have been divided.

Interestingly, Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue was founded in 1864 during the Civil War. When I was in Pittsburgh following the tragedy, the day after the attack, I attended a beautiful memorial service just a few miles from the Tree of Life Synagogue. The service was at the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall. At that ceremony, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, people from every walk of life were represented. People from the Greater Pittsburgh area united to support their Jewish neighbors.

It was fitting to gather at the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial. This memorial was founded by veterans of the Civil War in Allegheny County to honor the sacrifice and valor of those who were willing to die to save our country during that war. The very first soldier from Allegheny County to die in the Civil War was a married salesman in his early thirties from Pittsburgh. He died at the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5, 1862. His name was Jacob Brunn. He was Jewish. That didn't matter to Pittsburgh. The entire city turned out for his funeral, the entire city. As one historian put it, "the city put religious and political differences aside to honor the man who was first to fall."

I hope the Senate can also put aside some of our political differences and do something sensible. It is our duty, and it would be a fitting act of remembrance for victims of mass shootings—at the Tree of Life, Thousand Oaks, Sandy Hook, and all the others whose deaths from gun violence have scarred our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2644

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 393, S. 2644. I further ask that the committee-reported substitute amendment be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

SPECIAL COUNSEL INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY ACT

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise to speak in defense of Special Counsel

Robert Mueller and to defend the vital role he has played since May of last year in yet another act of service to his country in what has been a lifetime of distinguished service.

For his trouble, Mr. Mueller has been accused repeatedly and without basis in fact of conducting a "witch hunt" in the course of his current investigation by none other than the President of the United States. So I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about what Special Counsel Mueller and his team have been investigating and why, as the point of this vital investigation seems to have been purposely confused and maligned by the White House in a rather alarming way.

My colleague from Delaware, Senator COONS, and I have made the unanimous consent request to bring this to the floor, but it has been objected to already.

This bill is designed to do one thing: protect the integrity of the special counsel's investigation and spare it of any influence or interference from the executive branch, including from those who may themselves be subjects of the investigation.

The findings of Mr. Mueller's investigation are of utmost importance to the security of this country and to the well-being of our democratic institutions as well. In America, as we all know, no one is above the law. Our doctrine of separation of powers and the independence of the judicial system is what sets us apart from lawless countries, and Presidents do not get to determine who gets investigated and who and what does not.

For the record and for history, this special counsel was appointed to thoroughly investigate the attacks on our electoral system by elements of the Russian Government during the lead up to our 2016 general election. How such an investigation can be a cause of controversy is beyond me. Surely, we all recognize it is essential to understand this new form of foreign aggression so that we might better defend America against such attacks in the future; right?

One would think there would be unanimous national resolve to get to the bottom of such aggression from an enemy or foreign power, especially a foreign power with whom we spent much of the second half of the 20th century locked in a global ideological struggle, especially when in their renewed aggression toward us, they have targeted the institution we have and they don't—free and fair elections.

Vladimir Putin knows he could not defeat us on the battlefield, and he knows the ideas at the center of his former empire were soulless and bankrupt. He wants to rob us of what makes the United States superior to his autocracy. His goal is to turn us against ourselves and, in doing so, to try to destroy our democracy.

This is a matter of grave national importance. This is not a moment for our national leadership to be weak or