

“He yanked open a door that allowed dozens of classmates, teachers and staffers to escape,” officials said.

His middle school basketball coach said that he was just a “joyful person.” His sacrifice, according to his coach, “just made perfect sense” because he was that selfless.

Peter was posthumously accepted to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point for his heroic actions on that day.

Alex Schachter was a freshman who played the trombone and baritone in the marching band, and he loved to play basketball. He loved music so much that in middle school, he took two band classes so that he could get ready to join the marching band in high school, which was his dream. His Eagle Regiment Marching Band actually won the State championship in Tampa.

His dad said that he was just a sweet-heart of a kid. He said that he just wanted to do well to make his parents’ happy.

His dream was to attend the University of Connecticut. He told everybody. He was only a freshman, but he knew where he was going to college. He wanted to go to my State, to Connecticut. He wore a UConn sweatshirt almost every single day to school. His favorite song was an old one by Chicago, “25 or 6 to 4,” which is kind of an odd choice for a 14-year-old. Yet UConn’s band actually chose to play that song at halftime at one of UConn’s football games, and UConn admitted Alex posthumously because his dream was to be a UConn Husky.

Helena Ramsay was full of laughter and had this infectious smile. She was 17 when she was shot that day. She loved all kinds of music, although she was mostly into K-pop. She had all sorts of other interests too. She was interested in human rights and the environment. She joined the school’s United Nations Club and the Christian faith-based First Priority Group. She was always looking out for her friends.

One of her friends said: “When I was stressed out from my chemistry lab that I thought I was going to fail, she calmed me down and told me that it was going to be OK.”

One of her best friends said that she was “one of the kindest people I’ve ever met.”

When the gunman walked into her classroom, she turned to her friend to make sure that her friend was safe and told her to shield herself with books. People described it as a “moment of bravery in the face of horror.”

Another hero that day was Aaron Feis. He was an assistant football coach, and he was a security guard. He threw himself in front of his kids. That is how he died that day.

The football program’s spokesperson said:

[Aaron] died the same way he lived—he put himself second. . . . He was a very kind soul, a very nice man. He died a hero.

One of his football players who had been going through leukemia treat-

ments remembered that Aaron had guided him through those treatments.

He would send me prayers. He would send me Bible scripts and just stuff to cheer up my day.

Aaron died while protecting the kids at that school.

These 4 stories are amongst those of the 17 people who died at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Yet 93 people die every day from gun violence. Most of those are suicides. A bunch of them are homicides. Others are accidental shootings, but they are all preventable.

As we remember today the mass shooting at Parkland, it is important that even on those days on which nobody puts up on cable news a mass shooting, there are still somewhere around 90 people who die every day, and I will tell you about one of them.

Corey Dodd was 25 years old when he died last month in Baltimore, MD. That morning, he told Marissa, his wife, to stay home and rest with their 3-year-old and their 3-week-old while he took the 5-year-old twins to school. After he dropped the twins off at school and pulled up outside their home, he was shot to death. The 3-year-old was inside. Marissa had to tell her kids that Daddy wasn’t coming home.

She said:

I’ve told the kids that Daddy is done. He’s not coming back.

Their family was planning to move because Corey was looking for work, and they were going to move to wherever he found work. He had recently finished a program to earn his commercial driver’s license. Things were looking up for Corey and Marissa and their four kids.

I didn’t know Corey, but I know something about his death because I happened to be in Baltimore on that day. I happened to be at Corey’s kids’ school at the moment he was shot. I was inside that school when an announcement came over the loud speaker that there was a code green. I didn’t know what a code green meant. A few minutes later, I found out that it is what happens inside schools in Baltimore when there is a shooting in the neighborhood. They locked down the school and our classroom and pulled down the shades, and we turned off the lights. A few minutes later, the police notified us that the scene was clear, that the school was safe, and that the day could go on. Yet, unbeknownst to me, just down the hall from me inside that school were two twins whose father had been shot blocks away from that school. Their lives will never be the same.

Part of the reason we care so much about this epidemic is that it is not just the victims; it is also about the people who are left behind. Imagine going to an elementary school in which you fear for your life when you walk to and from school and where parents of your friends are shot at 10:30 in the morning. It changes their brains, the trauma these kids go through in a

school like that. It makes their little, tiny, developing brains unable to learn. There is a biological process that actually happens to these kids. That trauma is what Parkland has been going through for the last year, and that trauma is what kids in Baltimore, New Haven, Hartford, Chicago, and New Orleans go through every single day. We are ruining millions of children all across this country because of an epidemic that we could choose to solve, that we could choose to do something about.

This week, the House of Representatives had a hearing and a meeting to move forward with a universal background checks bill that is supported by 97 percent of Americans. It will pass the House of Representatives, with Republican and Democratic support, with flying colors. Do you know what that tells us? It tells us that the most important thing we could do to save lives, to cut down on the 93 people who are killed every day, is to pass that universal background checks bill. In States that have universal background checks, there is about 30 percent less gun crime and fewer gun homicides than in States that don’t have those universal background checks.

As we remember 1 year since the massacre at Parkland and as we strive to understand that this is an epidemic that takes 90 people every day, know that it is within our power to do something about it. We can’t eliminate every single gun death. We can’t stop every suicide or every homicide, but with commonsense legislation that is supported by 97 percent of Americans, we can make a big difference, and we can send a signal to would-be shooters who are contemplating violence that they should not interpret our silence as a quiet endorsement. It is up to us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

REMEMBERING WALTER JONES

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I come to the floor with a heavy heart today. A colleague in the House passed away, and right at this very moment, down in Greenville, NC, we have a number of Congressmen and friends and family members congregated to celebrate the life and mourn the death of Congressman Jones.

Congressman Jones served in Congress for over 24 years. His dad served before that. Between the two of them, the Jones family has represented the eastern portion of North Carolina for 50 out of the last 53 years.

Now, Congressman Jones was somebody who was a bit of a maverick and a bit of an independent spirit on the House side, and we didn’t agree on certain measures. But I never doubted his sincerity and his heart and his commitment to North Carolina and to this great Nation.

He is survived by his wife Joe Anne of over 50 years. In fact, they were married in 1966.

He has a number of people in the statehouse who served with him, in a chamber where I was speaker of the house. They are mourning his death today. I couldn't be there in person because we have to be here for the votes that we are taking up this afternoon, but I wanted the Jones family to know, and all the people in Eastern North Carolina, how much I cared for and loved Walter Jones.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, one of the reasons why I continue to be here in Washington rather than visiting with family and friends of Congressman Jones is that we have a very important vote that we expect the Senate to take up here sometime this afternoon.

It is a vote that is borne out of compromise. To quote Winston Churchill—I think it was—it is the worst possible option except for all the other options considered up to this point.

It is not perfect, but it is important that we get the votes and that we encourage the President to sign this bill into law.

Now, I walked through the hallway this morning, and I had the press come up to me. Some in the press probably want to report honestly, but others want to create a narrative.

So the latest narrative is this: Senator, how do you feel about a bill that just got published last night—1,200 pages—and you are going to be asked to vote on it today?

I told them, specifically, because I have been following this measure since the last Congress. I said: Are you referring to the almost-1,200-page bill, of which all but 41 pages were matters that were taken up in the Appropriations Committee, voted out of committee unanimously in all but one case and with 26 votes in the other case? Are you referring to that bill?

If the Senators are doing their job and the Congressmen are doing their job, they read that months ago when they were passed out of the Appropriations Committee. Most of this is not new information. About 41 pages of it relates to the compromise that ultimately—because we couldn't get a compromise back in December—resulted in the government shutdown.

It absolutely funds some of the President's priorities for border security. There are people that get caught up on either end of the spectrum. It reminds me of how my kids used to fight in the back of the minivan when we used to take them on vacations. It is a childish argument: It is a wall.

No, it is not.

It is a wall.

No, it is not.

Look, it is steps taken forward in a positive way for border security. It is a structure that makes sense. It is technology. It is personnel. It is what we need to ultimately secure the border.

Some people can call it a wall because you could argue that in total it

is. Other people could say it is not a wall. I don't care as long as you ultimately recognize that voting for this measure and sending the signal to the President that we have his back, that we understand his priorities, and that we will continue to work on other measures on a bipartisan basis makes sense.

So I intend to support it today. It is not a vote that I am going to enjoy, but sometimes we have to do things here to make progress, to compromise, and to move on. We owe it to the American people to keep the government open. We owe it to border security to listen to their recommendations to fund people, technology, and infrastructure. This is a step in the right direction.

VALENTINE'S DAY

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, it was a year ago today that I was presiding and something occurred to me. One is that in the 12 years that I have been in public service, I have virtually spent none of those Valentine's Days at home. Last year, I was thinking about how I messed up. I didn't even order flowers or do the things that I would normally do, although, I usually get flowers on Valentine's Day.

But then I started contemplating the Senate rules, and I know that there are a number of, well, things you just can't do on the floor.

I determined, for example, that you can't do an ad hoc prop and say something because it would be a violation of the rules. So although I thought about putting this heart up and presenting this and saying, "I love my wife Susan Tillis of 32 years," I am not going to do that because I think it would be a violation of the rules.

But in the event that someday we do change the rules and we are able to come to the floor and express our love for our spouses and people who sacrifice as much as we do, I hope someday to be able to give that speech on the Senate floor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about an experience I had this weekend that was extremely memorable to me.

I used to live in Texas. I used to be involved in businesses in the Valley, as they call it there—from Brownsville to Weslaco, to Edinburg, to McCowan. This past weekend, a good colleague of mine, Senator STEVE DAINES from Montana, and I traveled to the southern border to visit the Customs and Border Patrol people, to visit with ICE people, and to see firsthand what goes on in a typical night. We were there overnight on Sunday night. We had a remarkable evening, and we saw firsthand what these people are up against.

Before I make my comments, I want to say that from Deputy Chief Ortiz all the way down in the organization in that sector—the McCowan sector that we were in—the best of America is in uniform right now, every day and night, protecting our rights and privileges here in the United States. I was proud to meet these people and to be a part of this trip.

What we saw this weekend is disturbing on many levels. We spoke directly to Border Patrol agents. We went to the retention center. We saw firsthand that we have not just illegal immigration there, but we have a national security crisis. We saw it firsthand.

This is a situation that the border agents face every day, and it is a grim situation. It is shameful that we here in Congress have not given Border Patrol agents adequate resources to do their jobs.

First, the real tragedy at the border is the dramatic increase in illegal drug trafficking. Even though the conversation in this room deals mainly with illegal immigration across that border, in this sector, the drug traffic increases are remarkable.

This year alone, fiscal year 2018—this is from October 1 to today—we had a 22-percent increase of heroin seized at the southern border, a 38-percent increase of methamphetamine and a 73-percent increase in fentanyl.

The amount of fentanyl seized by ICE so far this year is enough to kill every American citizen by overdose. Let me say that again. The tonnage of fentanyl seized is up 73 percent this year across the entire southern border, and that is not 100 percent of what is crossing that border. That is a 73-percent increase over the last year. The tonnage that has been seized this year is enough to kill every American citizen by overdose.

What is so remarkable is the estimate that only 7 to 10 percent of the drugs that they are attempting to bring across the border are actually interdicted—less than 10 percent. That is consistent with what our SOUTHCOM combatant commander tells us repeatedly year after year. By the end of fiscal year 2019, CPB—Customs and Border Patrol—will have seized 1.7 million pounds of narcotics at the border.

The Border Patrol agents we spoke to estimate that they are only able to stop, again, about 10 percent, and that is because they don't have the resources.

The movement of drugs from Mexico to the United States at the southern border is the greatest drug threat to our country. These drugs pouring across the border are destroying communities across the Nation. Congress has to act to give these Border Patrol agents and our ICE agents the infrastructure they need to address this dramatic spike in illegal drug trafficking.

I know that the illegal immigration topic is a hot topic. I don't disagree