

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, 6 years have passed since 20 beautiful children and 6 wonderful educators were killed in a massacre that gripped the Nation's attention in Newtown, CT. That tragedy, for any of us who lived through it, remains as real and vivid and grief-stricken today as it was then. We have lived with the memories and with the families and with countless others who found their lives changed—literally, transformed—in ways they never imagined.

In the day or so after that shooting—it may have been the following day—I was at one of the numerous calling hours I attended, and I spoke with one of the moms of those children. I said to her: When you are ready, we should talk about what can be done about gun violence in America.

She looked at me, through her tears, and she said: I am ready now.

Many of the families of Sandy Hook were ready then. Our Nation was ready then. Yet the U.S. Congress proved disastrously and tragically unready—in fact, failing in its responsibility to react not only with prayers and thoughts, as it did, but also with action to honor those wonderful children and educators with action, to honor them before others would die in the same way, the result of massacres that are preventable.

The Senate came close to acting. More than 50 votes were there for a background check bill, which had bipartisan support, but not the 60 votes that were necessary. From this Gallery vividly came the shout: Shame on you. It was well justified.

Shame on the U.S. Senate for failing to act 6 years ago. Shame on the Congress for being complicit in the continuing massacres that have been added since Sandy Hook: Oak Creek, Blacksburg, Charleston, Chattanooga, Lafayette, Parkland, San Bernardino, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs. That is just a partial list, not to mention the 90 deaths every day, often occurring singularly or in twos or threes or by suicide or by accident, as claimed the life of Ethan Song in Guilford, CT, when he was playing with a friend and a gun killed him—a loss that Kristin and Michael Song have made positive by their advocacy of commonsense measures to require safe storage of weapons.

The voices and faces of Sandy Hook have continued to inspire and move us. As of Parkland and all of the other tragedies that have occurred, they have rallied and written, emailed and called, organized and mobilized, and they have created a movement. It is a movement that is turning around this country, and it already has the effect of breaking the vice-like grip of the NRA on Congress. It is moving us forward. It has spawned groups at the grassroots, like Newtown Action Alliance and Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action, CT Against Gun Violence, Brady, and many others, in-

cluding Sandy Hook Promise, whose dinner we will attend tonight, their annual gathering.

We have come to the floor of the Senate now to demand action that honors those victims and prevents more victims, more survivors, more grieving families. I am here with my colleague Senator CHRIS MURPHY, who has been an unstinting advocate, a champion, a partner in this effort. We are here to demand that this body act on a measure that was passed more than 100 days ago by the House, which would require a universal background check.

The fact that the House passed that measure is itself evidence of a change that is moving this country. The change in leadership in the House is the result of the election of new Members in the House of Representatives as a result of the gun violence prevention movement that politically is acquiring an undeniable and indisputable force. Gun violence prevention was on the ballot in the last election, and gun violence prevention won. It won in the new Members of Congress who have championed that universal background check measure and closing the Charleston loophole, and they have successfully passed it there. They are making a critical difference, and they are coming here. Their election is the result of that grassroots political movement that is changing the narrative, and for the first time, it puts us nearer—in fact, nearer than ever before, that I can remember—to commonsense measures that will stop gun violence.

I have been involved in this effort since my earliest days as attorney general in the early 1990s, when Connecticut passed a ban on assault weapons. I not only advocated for it but then defended it in court against many of the arguments that continue to be made today, even though they have been rejected by the courts and the American people.

States have moved forward, as Connecticut has done, to adopt these commonsense measures: universal background checks; a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines; most recently, a safe storage bill, Ethan's Law in Connecticut; a ban on bump stocks and 3D weapons; and, of course, measures that keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. But the laws of a State like Connecticut—those strong laws—are no stronger or more effective than the laws of the weakest States because guns come across our borders. We are at the mercy of States with little or no protection for their people. The solution is a national one. It must apply across the country to make our Nation safer and to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

As near as we are and as much as has been accomplished, the work to be done is right here in this body, on this floor, and it must be done now. That is why we are here. That is why I have advocated for other measures. I have introduced Ethan's Law to provide for safe

storage. It has been supported here. A number of you have met with Kristin and Michael Song, and they will be visiting again. I have introduced an emergency risk protection order bill that would enable courts and law enforcement to take guns out of the hands of dangerous people as a result of a warrant and due process; an incentive program at the national level that makes States more aware and more inclined to adopt them, which should be bipartisan; a law that repeals PLCAA, the protection of lawful commerce in arms. This was adopted with the promise that no one would be deprived of a right of action, no one would be barred from the courthouse, but in fact PLCAA has prevented victims from seeking justice. It has stopped their day in court, and it should be repealed.

Those measures should be moved forward, and I am hopeful they will with bipartisan support. There is no question today about the need for a universal background check bill that Senator MURPHY and I and others who will speak today have advocated and now offers an opportunity for bicameral approval.

This movement has indisputable force. It has a dynamism and drive that will only increase regardless of what happens today. We are not giving up; we are not going away; and history will judge harshly a majority leader and a majority that fails to give us a vote. It will judge harshly opponents of these commonsense measures, and the voters will judge harshly because gun violence prevention will be on the ballot again. We will make sure of it. The American people will have an opportunity to vote again for candidates who support commonsense, sensible measures to make America safer, to keep guns out of the hands of truly dangerous people. The grip of the NRA is breaking. The gun lobby is crumbling from within and losing its traction in the field.

We are on the right side of history, and I hope my colleagues will see it that way, too, and will give us a vote. Let us vote on universal background checks, the bill that has come to us from the House of Representatives. Let's do it today.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am on the floor to join my colleagues Senator BLUMENTHAL and those who will speak afterward.

It has been 113 days since the House of Representatives passed H.R. 8, the bipartisan background checks bill. We have a proposal before the Senate as well, and we are here to make a simple request: Bring this bill up for a debate. Let us do our work as the U.S. Senate on an issue that dominates headlines, dominates kitchen table conversation, and steals from this country 36,000 lives a year, 3,000 a month, and 100 a day. Those are the number of people who are killed by gunshot wounds.

Each one of their stories is different. These are mostly suicides; many of them are homicides; accidental shootings; some are mass shootings that make the headlines, but no one can escape this horror today.

In my son's school, he has to go through an active-shooter drill every year. Think about the trauma we put kids through preparing for a stranger to walk into their classroom with a weapon.

Just this past weekend, 32 people were shot and 6 were killed in 1 city alone, the city of Philadelphia, including 24-year-old Isiaka Meite, who died this weekend. He was at a cookout to celebrate a graduation and to also celebrate Father's Day, and he along with four teenagers were shot while out celebrating. That is the reality of what happened in just one single city.

So I get it that the bill that passed the House of Representatives may not be the bill that could get 60 votes in the Senate, but what is so offensive to many of us who have lived with this epidemic—it is personal to everyone here—because I don't think there is an individual in the Senate who hasn't had a one-on-one experience with a victim of gun violence or the mother or father of someone who was killed. What is so offensive is that we are not even trying. We are not even attempting to find common ground.

The Senate used to do this. The Senate used to take big important issues, put them on the floor, and spend at least a week's time trying to figure out whether you could get 50 or 60 votes. We are not doing that on anything in the U.S. Senate today. This place has become a complete, total legislative graveyard. There is really nothing more important to families out there than their ability to protect their loved ones from harm. The fact that we are not trying to find consensus on the issue of gun violence, that there is no interest to put H.R. 8 before this body so we can attempt to debate it, amend it, and come to some consensus in the Senate is unconscionable to many of us.

I want to narrow my remarks on how exceptional this issue is from a public opinion standpoint. I have been on the floor so many times before talking about the evidence that points us to why background checks are the most impactful intervention we can make.

In Missouri, where they got rid of their universal background checks requirement, and guns started to flow into the community through gun shows and internet sales without a background check, homicide rates went up by 40 percent and reports of Missouri-bought illegal guns found in other neighboring States skyrocketed.

It is the exact opposite effect in Connecticut. Years ago, Connecticut put in place a universal background check requirement tied to a local permit. Research showed that reduced our gun homicide rate by around 40 percent. So the evidence is there.

Let's just talk about public opinion on this matter because there is really nothing like background checks today in the public consciousness. Today polls will show that 97 percent of Americans believe that everybody should go through a background check before they purchase a weapon. There is nothing else in America today that gets 97 percent support. I mean, there is nothing else that gets 97 percent support. These are actual numbers. Apple pie is supported by 81 percent of Americans. Kittens only get 76 percent support from the American public today, and baseball, the American pastime, has the support of only two-thirds of Americans. Yet 97 percent of Americans believe someone should fill out a form proving they are not a criminal or seriously mentally ill before buying a gun. Universal background checks, while here in Congress seemingly a very controversial, politically charged issue, is more popular than apple pie, kittens, or baseball. These are actual numbers.

I don't mean to make light of this. I just need to drive home the point that no matter if you represent a Republican-leaning State or a Democratic-leaning State, a State that voted for Donald Trump or a State that voted for Hillary Clinton, your constituents want you to vote for universal background checks.

Let me just give the full panoply of public opinion on this. The number of people who support background checks is 97 percent today. That includes 90 percent of gun owners. I can back that up with plenty of anecdotal experience from my State. When I talk to gun owners, many who assume I have a hidden agenda and who believe I want to confiscate their guns—when I sit and talk to them about background checks, they say: Of course. It took me 5 minutes. I don't want people who are criminals to get their hands on guns. Everybody should go through a background check. Ninety percent of gun owners think this is a good idea.

This is not new data. Back in 2012, prior to the shooting in Sandy Hook, 74 percent of NRA members who were polled said they supported requiring criminal background checks. A year later, in April 2013, a Washington Post poll showed that 91 percent of Americans supported background checks.

In July of 2014, a Quinnipiac poll found that 92 percent of Americans supported background checks, including, in that poll, 86 percent of Republicans and 92 percent of Independents, 90 percent of men and 94 percent of women and 92 percent of gun-owning households. You don't get below 90 in any constituency.

In September 2015, another poll showed 93 percent of Americans supported it and 90 percent of Republicans.

A CBS poll from 2016 shows that 89 percent of Americans supported it, including 92 percent of Republicans.

In March of 2017, a Pew Research Center poll found that 77 percent of

gun owners and 87 percent of non-gun owners supported background checks.

Then the February Quinnipiac 2018 poll found 97 percent of Americans support background checks.

These are stunning numbers. They are stunning numbers. Again, they don't require everybody in this Chamber to support the bill that passed the House of Representatives, but it has been 113 days since H.R. 8 passed, which is broadly supported by 90 percent of Americans, and we still have not had that bill or any version of this measure brought up before this body for debate or an attempt to find consensus.

This is the running theme. We are talking a lot about the Senate becoming a graveyard for legislation because, in my lifetime, I have read stories about the Senate working through big issues, having serious debates—sometimes not coming to a completed product, sometimes ending up stymied but more than not figuring out a way where 50 or 60 votes could be achieved.

The House is passing legislation—healthcare legislation, anti-violence legislation, clean elections legislation—and all of it is coming here to die, not because we can't find consensus but because we don't even try to find consensus. In those 113 days, approximately, 11,000 people have been killed by guns. That is a number that finds no equal in any other high-income nation. I can talk to you about the variety of reasons for it. Some of them can be solved by us; some of them can't.

America is a unique nation with a unique history. We are, indeed, a melting pot of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. By virtue of that, we were likely going to be a more violent nation from the start. I admit that, but we have poured kerosene on this fire by having the loosest gun laws, a set of laws that are not supported by 90 percent of Americans who are asking us to do something different.

So we are on the floor today asking, begging, pleading with Senator McCONNELL and Republican leadership to at least bring H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act, or some version of it before the Senate so we can have a debate on the most important, most vital issue to Americans today—their physical safety.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Connecticut for leading this discussion today on gun violence. We want to focus on one bill in particular, one piece of legislation, but I want to step back for a moment and talk about this issue more broadly in terms of what it means for the American people.

We are talking about a problem, the problem of gun violence, which is a uniquely American problem. No other country has this problem. No other country has the amount of mass shootings. I don't know the exact number,

but we have had so many that we know them by the name of the community. When we say Newtown, CT, or Sandy Hook Elementary School, when we talk about places like Columbine, or Parkland, you know what happened at those places because they have become so common. So this is a uniquely American problem that Americans have to solve. Some of those Americans, obviously, have to be Members of Congress.

You would never know there was this problem based upon the inaction by Congress, by the Senate, and, until recently, the House over many years.

The one question I have to ask is, are we going to surrender to this uniquely American problem—because the inaction by Congress over many years now would indicate to me that the answer to that question is yes; that a lot of Members of Congress, House and Senate, have concluded that there is absolutely nothing we can do to reduce even the likelihood of another mass shooting or reduce the likelihood of more and more gun violence.

So here we are. The House has passed background check legislation that, as Senator MURPHY just outlined, is overwhelmingly popular with more than 90 percent of Americans who support it, and we are in day 113. It has been 113 days since the House passed it, and there is no action on the Senate floor. There hasn't even really been a debate of any kind here in the Senate on gun violence or what to do about it.

So consider that time frame and all the time that has gone by since. The one bill that dealt with this issue of gun violence that passed either House in probably 25 years is now 113 days from having any action in the Senate. So with no action on something as popular and as well-supported as that bill and on such an important issue as gun violence, I have to conclude that without any action here in the Senate, in this particular legislative graveyard, the Senate is surrendering to this problem. It is just letting this bill die in the Senate over time.

Among the many examples we could talk about, I will give you two examples from both ends of our State of Pennsylvania. In the city of Pittsburgh, we witnessed the deadly act of violence against the Jewish community. The worst act of violence against a Jewish community in American history was at the Tree of Life synagogue back in October, when a shooter opened fire on three congregations worshipping during Shabbat services. Three different congregations were worshipping at the same place. This deadly mass shooting—a targeted, cowardly, hateful attack on the Jewish community—resulted in the deaths of 11 innocent Pennsylvanians and injured 6 more, including 4 members of law enforcement. Eleven people were gone in a matter of minutes, and in this case they range in age from the ages of low fifties, I guess, to the oldest being 97 years old, if memory serves me.

While this attack was horrific for so many reasons, it is just one example of

the ongoing and systemic problem of gun violence across our country. It is an epidemic. I will say it. It is a uniquely American problem, and we are acting as if there is no problem at all here in the Senate.

Just consider this. Through the month of April, nearly 400 individuals have been shot in the city of Philadelphia. In many cases, if that doesn't lead to death itself, it leads to grievous permanent injury.

Just this past weekend in Philadelphia, there were 19 shootings in one city—19 shootings in one weekend with 5 deaths and 28 others wounded. One of the shootings occurred in a public park during a graduation party. Six people were shot and one was killed. They were all under the age of 25.

Here is what the toll so far is this year. This year the gun-related death toll in Philadelphia is 152—in one city. Needless to say, the national statistics on this—the national numbers—are staggering, in addition to the numbers I cited from Philadelphia. Gun violence affects more than 100,000 people every year, impacting their lives year after year in numbers like that.

On February 27, as I mentioned, the House passed H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019—113 days ago—but the majority leader has refused to call this bipartisan bill to the floor of the Senate. Shouldn't we even debate it? Is that really where we are—that this uniquely American problem of gun violence is not even worthy of a debate? We are looking for a vote, obviously, but is it not even worthy of a debate and then a vote?

We know that there may not be the votes in the Senate to pass this, but we are not even going to debate something on such an important issue? This is a piece of legislation supported by more than 90 percent of the American people. If you don't want to be for it, just tell us in the debate and register your vote. At least we will have debated the one bill that passed the House in 25 years. We have this one opportunity on one bill, and it is not even worthy of a debate here in the Senate.

I am a proud original cosponsor of the Senate version of the bill, the Background Check Expansion Act, because it is a type of commonsense legislation that makes Americans safe from the horrors of gun violence. In fact, expanding background checks is supported by more than 90 percent of Americans because they know—we all know—that background checks make our community safer.

Since 1994, background checks have prevented more than 3.5 million gun sales to dangerous criminals and others prohibited from owning guns. Yet these background check bills haven't seen the light of day since H.R. 8 was passed in the House. I will say it again: 113 days ago. They were sent to this legislative graveyard. I have to ask my Republican colleagues: Why don't you ask the majority leader to schedule just one debate? It could be a limited de-

bate. Then, let's have a vote up or down. I hope there may be a vote on some other measures, but at least let's debate and vote on a background check bill that passed the House of Representatives.

The time for talk about this issue and the time for lamenting the problem has long passed. We have to do something about it. That means debating and voting. That is what we are supposed to do here—debate big issues and vote. Vote how you want, but at least debate and vote on this issue, which will reduce the likelihood that we will see more and more tragedies like we have seen.

We are told that 100 people are shot and killed every day in the United States of America. One hundred people are shot and killed every day. We go not just days but weeks and months and now years without a single bill getting the kind of debate and vote that it should get and without a single bill passing.

At least let's get a start with this piece of legislation. Let's debate it and vote on it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator CASEY for his passion on this issue, and I want to thank Senators BLUMENTHAL and MURPHY for bringing us here together.

The logic here is inescapable. I can't explain to my constituents, nor can Senator CASEY explain to his, why the universal background check has not been on the floor of the Senate for a vote.

Let us do our will. This is an issue that we have talked about for years. The majority leader has refused to bring this up for a vote so that the will of the majority can prevail. That is what we are simply asking for.

It was in February of this year that the House of Representatives passed a bipartisan bill to deal with universal background checks. It passed by a large majority, and we now understand the urgency of our considering legislation.

Inaction is not an option. We have to do what we can to deal with the crisis at hand. What is the crisis? One hundred people are killed every day in this country by gun violence; 310 are shot, by the way; 210 are injured; and 100 are killed every day of the week, 7 days a week.

Since the House has acted on this bill, about 11,000 Americans have been killed. This is urgent. Every day makes a difference. In my State of Maryland, over 180 people have been killed by gun violence since the House passed the bipartisan universal background check legislation in February of this year. It is the second leading cause of death among children and first among African-American children. Rarely does a month go by without our having another mass shooting take place here in the United States.

It was 1 year ago, on June 28, in Annapolis, MD, at the Capital Gazette, that we saw the shooting that took the lives of reporters. At that time, I took the floor with others saying: What more does it take for us to debate gun safety in this country? Why can't we take up legislation and have a debate? Isn't that what our job is here in the Senate?

The Gun Control Act of 1968 established a framework for legally prohibiting certain categories of people from possessing firearms. The list of prohibited persons has grown over the years, but it includes felons, fugitives, domestic abusers, and those found by the court or other tribunal to be seriously mentally ill. I would hope that all of us agree that these individuals shouldn't have guns. How do you know that they are going to get a gun without a background check?

Since the Brady Law took effect, it has blocked more than 3 million prohibited gun sales and processed over 278 million purchase requests. The technology is there. We know how it works. We have the FBI run a background check. The National Instant Criminal Background Check System is there to see whether you have been a convicted felon or are a fugitive, a domestic abuser, or other prohibited purchasers. We have the technology. We know that background checks work at the State level as well.

According to the Brady Campaign, States that have expanded the scope of their background checks have seen impressive results, including that 53 percent fewer law enforcement officers are shot and killed in the line of duty, 47 percent fewer women are shot by intimate partners, and cities in States with expanded background checks have seen a 48-percent reduction in gun trafficking.

Does it solve the problem? No. Does it take a bite out of gun violence? Yes. It is a significant improvement in dealing with gun violence. It is part of the solution. Yet when the Brady Law was enacted, it was before the internet. America has changed, and our Nation's gun laws need to change with it.

Today about one out of every five gun sales is either made online, made privately, or made at a gun show and they are not subject to the background check which is the law. It is our responsibility to make sure that the laws are kept up-to-date and are effective. These sales are largely unregulated and unchecked. That is simply wrong. These sales can avoid the background check.

Passing legislation to expand background checks to nearly every gun sale, including those conducted online, at gun shows, and through private transfers should be a top priority in Congress for commonsense gun safety legislation to save lives.

I am not going to repeat the numbers that Senator MURPHY and Senator CASEY mentioned about the popular support. It is over 90 percent—97 per-

cent, the last poll showed—and by all categories, because it is common sense. In fact, I think the public has a hard time understanding why we haven't passed this long before now.

I agree that gun laws alone can't solve the problem, but it will make a difference. There is no single answer, but we should take steps that can help us deal with this crisis. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option when our children are being killed, sometimes by other children.

Surrendering to the false logic that the problem is too big to address falls well short of what the American people deserve and expect us to do. They sent us here to the Senate to make tough decisions. This isn't even a tough decision, but we have to make decisions.

From my hometown of Baltimore to many towns across America, there have been names in the headlines because of gun-related tragedies or mass shootings. People are calling on us to act. My message is simple: Let's bring the bill to the floor of the U.S. Senate. Let's follow the example of the House of Representatives. Let's not be the graveyard. Let's be the greatest deliberative body in the world. Let's take up the issue. Let's debate it. Let's vote on it, and let's do right for the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise to echo the comments of my colleagues on these bills that are pending here in the Senate.

I hold up the Calendar of Business for the Senate for Wednesday, June 19, 2019, which is today. On page 15 of the calendar, item 29 is H.R. 8, "An act to require a background check for every firearm sale." The status, which is listed in every Senate calendar, is "Mar. 4, 2019.—Read the second time and placed on the calendar." It is pending here before the Senate.

The next item, No. 30, is H.R. 1112, an act to amend chapter 44 of title 18, U.S. Code, to strengthen the background check procedures to be followed before a Federal firearms licensee may transfer a firearm. On March 5, 2019, it was read the second time and placed on the calendar.

In this body, we are not asking for something that isn't before us. No. The Senate calendar for today says these bills are before us. Yet one individual, the Senate majority leader, is keeping us from having a debate and a vote on these two matters. We could vote on it. Maybe we wouldn't have the votes, but we ought to be able to at least vote and be accountable to the American public for the positions on these issues.

I rise in the shadow of yet another tragedy in Virginia. Every Senator in this body has had tragedies like these. I know the Presiding Officer has suffered multiple tragedies in Orlando and Parkland. I was the mayor of Richmond when we had one of the highest homicide rates in the United States,

which had been driven by gun violence. I was the Governor of Virginia when the shooting happened at Virginia Tech. I was in the U.S. Senate when two Virginia journalists were murdered on live television by a disgruntled ex-colleague. Then, three Fridays ago, on May 31, in Virginia Beach, just as I had left the city after giving a talk there to a local bar organization, the news came about the shooting of 12 innocent people—11 city employees and 1 contractor who was at the city just to get a building permit—who had been gunned down, in this case, by an individual who had used weapons that had massive magazines—the 30-round magazines. They were the kind of magazines that were also at issue in the shooting in Parkland. This is why I take to the floor today.

In thinking about these tragedies in Virginia and the repetitive nature of them, when the shooting happened at Virginia Tech when I was Governor, I had always hoped that it would have been the worst shooting in the history of the United States. It is a weird thing to say about your own State. What a bizarre thing to say about your own State—that this tragedy had happened on April 16, 2007, and that I had hoped it would have been the worst shooting in history whereby there had been 32 people killed. Yet, at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, 49 people were killed. In Las Vegas—and my colleague from Nevada is here—over 50 people were killed, and hundreds were injured.

There is an escalating nature to these. Our teachers now have to do live shooting drills because of school shootings. They didn't have to do that when they were going through ed schools 10 or 15 years ago. They have to hold practices with little elementary school students. A teacher was telling me the other day about what it is like at the beginning of the year to take a group of second graders into a restroom, which is their designated spot near their classroom. The teacher is then instructed to stand in front of the door so that if a shooter starts to shoot through the door, it will be the teacher who will be killed rather than the students.

The fact that we have normalized this and that we have practiced it is evidence of a sickness. Yet there are cures for sicknesses. These bills are cures for a sickness. We don't have complete cures, but they would make us safer.

As was indicated, the Federal background requirement has prevented 3 million people since 1994 from getting weapons that they shouldn't have had. Some of those individuals, no doubt, may have found weapons in other ways, but the moment people are turned away from getting weapons they can't have, society is safer on those days. Sometimes they are turned away, and they never get the weapons—3 million times. Yet, because of glitches and weaknesses in the background check system, too many people who have

been prohibited for decades from having weapons are still able to get them.

The New York Times recently did a study of 19 mass shootings in which the firearms that had been used had been bought legally after there having been Federal background checks—19 instances in which the firearms had been legally purchased after there having been background checks. It discovered, though, in looking at those 19 cases that at least 9 of the instances had been those in which the background check systems had had glitches and flaws so that the people were able to get the weapons even though they shouldn't have been able to. Let me give you just three powerful examples.

The young man who murdered 32 people at Virginia Tech was a student by the name of Seung-Hui Cho. He went to high school in Fairfax, which is not far from here. He had a serious mental illness. His counselors and teachers at his high school knew this young man. They knew his capacity and strengths, and they knew he had problems. They were able to wrap services around him so that he not only graduated but was a successful student.

Then he went on to a college campus that was 200 miles away, and all of that knowledge was locked up in his high school and didn't transfer to the college campus. He was then with a new group of 35,000 people. The folks didn't know him, and they didn't know of the challenges he had. They didn't know what it took for him to be successful, because he would have been able to have been successful if the right things had been done.

Over the course of his college career, he experienced increasing instances of mental illness and, at one point, was adjudicated by a local behavioral services board as being mentally ill and dangerous. That is one of the nine categories under Federal law. It is not just one's being mentally ill, because mentally ill people are, more often, the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators of violence. You have to be adjudicated mentally ill and likely be a danger to others. He was adjudicated in that way, and that prohibited him from getting a weapon.

The local court system failed to introduce the record into the national criminal background check system. So, a few months later, when he went to a federally licensed gun dealer in Roanoke to purchase the weapons that led to the mass atrocity, even though he was prohibited, the weakness in the background check system allowed him to get the weapons and carry out the murders.

I was able to fix some of this glitch by executive order when I was the Governor when what I really needed at the time from my legislature in Virginia was a commitment to universal background checks. The better the system, the safer we are. I could not get that from my legislature, but that was an instance in which, clearly, glitches in the background check system had led to this massive atrocity.

In Charleston, this deranged young man who had sat in on a Bible study, had worshiped with people who had prayed for him and who had later forgiven him, and had then used his weapon to murder nine people had acquired a weapon despite his having been prohibited. He had been prohibited under Federal law from having a weapon.

There is a part of the Federal law that is the subject of one of the two bills that is pending now before the Senate that says, if you are buying at a licensed gun dealer's and if the background check can't be completed within 72 hours, the dealer has to put the weapon in your hand even though you are prohibited from having the weapon.

In the case of Dylann Roof, they could not complete the background check within 3 days. The weapon was put in his hand, and he murdered these people as they were at a Bible study in the middle of the week. Again, there was a weakness in the background check system.

How sad they are, these shootings. They are sad however and wherever they occur—at a nightclub, at a school, at a corner in Richmond. We had the murder of a 9-year-old and the injury of an 11-year-old 2 weeks ago in a neighborhood park because of a driveby. Wherever it happens, it is horrible—but at synagogues and churches in Charleston?

You will remember the instance in Sutherland Springs, TX, in November 2017 when someone went into a church and killed 26 people. Again, there was a weakness in the background check system. The gunman had been in the Air Force. While in the Air Force, he had been convicted and sentenced to 12 months confinement and had had his rank reduced because he had assaulted his wife and had broken the skull of his infant child. He had had a bad conduct discharge from the Air Force.

With that adjudicated offense and with that discharge, he should have been prohibited from getting a weapon. Yet, in 2016 and 2017, he had purchased two firearms and had passed the Federal background check because the military adjudications had not been introduced into the system.

The two bills I mentioned that are on the floor would do two things. They would make the background check system universal. However a weapon is transferred—in a Federal gun licensing, in a gun show, or between relatives and whether for payment or as a gift—you must determine before the gun is placed in the hand of an individual whether that individual is allowed to have a weapon or is prohibited. That is the first bill.

The second one I mentioned would fix the Charleston loophole. It would establish that you don't just get the gun put in your hand if there is a glitch and it slows down the processing of your request. You have to be approved. There has to be a green light that says you are an allowed person before you get the weapon. To the extent that it

might take longer than 3 days, it is in the interest of public safety to make sure that the person who is getting the weapon isn't prohibited.

These measures are effective. The States that have gone to universal background checks can compare data pre and post, and they can compare their data with that of their next-door neighbors. The States that have moved to universal background checks have seen a reduction in gun violence. It is not the complete elimination. We are not able to do that. We didn't completely eliminate auto deaths when we required that there be air bags, but we have made people a lot safer, and that should be the standard here too. These laws are effective, and they are popular. Overwhelmingly, Americans support background checks.

Finally, this is not even, really, a new law. The NRA used to take the position that it didn't want new laws but that it wanted to enforce existing laws. The background check bill isn't even a new law; it is just the enforcement of existing laws. If you have a group of people who are prohibited from having weapons but the only way to enforce that is through a comprehensive background check system, then the way to look at these two bills is that these are bills that are necessary to enforcing existing laws that have been on the books since 1968 and with a bipartisan consensus.

We deserve a vote. These matters shouldn't just sit here on the Senate calendar day after day, week after week, and month after month without there being the opportunity to have a vote.

As I conclude, there was a time in the Congress when there was something called the gag rule—for decades in the 1820s and 1830s. I think my timing is right. There was, essentially, something called the gag rule. Petitions with respect to the abolition of slavery were not able to be debated, and I fear that this is what we have come to in this body with respect to these issues. We haven't had a meaningful debate and vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate about the scourge of gun violence since the debate and vote in April of 2013, which was in the aftermath of the shooting in Sandy Hook. It has been more than 6 years, and I think it is time to do it. The bills are pending on the calendar. We should have that debate and have that vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Virginia for his eloquence and passion on this issue.

I have never talked to him about this, but there is one thing we had in common across the country when I was the attorney general for the State of Nevada and when he was the Governor of Virginia. It was the Virginia Tech shooting.

As the attorney general, after that horrific, horrific shooting, I wanted to

make sure that we were passing commonsense laws so that nothing like that could ever happen again. So, in the State of Nevada, when I was the attorney general, I introduced legislation to ensure that when our courts would adjudicate an individual who was mentally ill, the information would get to our law enforcement by way of a background check. We passed that legislation. Yet I am here to tell you that more needs to be done.

I agree with my colleague in that I would have hoped that the Virginia Tech shooting would have been the last that we would have ever seen in this country, but it was not. Almost 2 years ago, hundreds of people were wounded, and 58 were killed in my hometown of Las Vegas at the Route 91 Harvest music festival. It remains the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. It is not something for which we would have ever imagined citing a statistic in the State of Nevada nor could anyone ever want that.

Two weeks after that shooting, I delivered my first official address on this Senate floor. My maiden speech, I called it. I called for action to prevent the next mass shooting. Among other things, I asked for universal background checks on firearms.

Americans support these virtually unanimously, and you have heard the statistics from my colleagues on the floor today—that 97 percent of them want sellers to look closely at who exactly is trying to buy a gun. Yet the Background Check Expansion Act, which is supposed to close loopholes on background checks, hasn't received a vote in this Chamber. Not only has it not received a vote, but we can't even debate it. We can't even come to the floor and debate the issues about which we know Americans across the country want us to do something. Not only have we not had a vote on the Background Check Expansion Act, but neither have we had a vote on dozens of other vital pieces of legislation that would make us safer.

I have sat here for the last 2 years and watched as the Republican leadership has been perfectly happy to have stopped the Senate from voting on these laws. In fact, I have heard, unfortunately, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL jokingly call himself the Grim Reaper, whose job it is to bury legislation. That is why we have this legislative graveyard. I will tell you that the American people don't think that it is funny. The mothers and fathers of children who have died as a result of gun violence aren't laughing, and neither is my hometown of Las Vegas—a community that is still healing from the pain of that night. It does not have to be this way.

In the State of Nevada, we have closed the loophole that lets private sellers skip background checks before they hand over a gun. I am so proud of my State. Voters in Nevada approved this commonsense reform in 2016 for universal background checks. Thanks

to our newly elected Governor Sisolak, Attorney General Aaron Ford, and other fierce leaders in the Nevada State Legislature, as well as the incredible people in the State of Nevada, we have finally made it law. This is just basic common sense. It is supported by Americans throughout the political spectrum and households with and without guns.

Listen, I support the Second Amendment. We own guns in my family. My husband is former Federal law enforcement. I come from a family of sportsmen. Throughout Nevada, we have friends who are sportsmen. But I will tell you, those Nevadans who are gun owners and almost every American agree we need to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists, violent criminals, domestic abusers, and others who may pose a threat to themselves or their communities. Nevada, with a strong western history of self-reliance and a culture of safe, responsible gun ownership, has done this.

It is long past time for the Senate to do what the House has done and what the American people demand and pass commonsense gun reform. The Senate majority leader must stop putting a roadblock in the way and let us act. At the very least, let us have a debate and move this issue forward—a debate the American people want us to address and an issue they want us to find a solution for.

Listen, we can't take back what happened that day in Las Vegas or Orlando or Sandy Hook or Charleston or so many cities and towns all across this Nation that are scarred by mass shootings and daily gun violence. We can't heal the pain of those whose friends and family members were killed. We can't erase the trauma so many survivors continue to endure. But we can save lives in the future, and isn't one life saved worth it? Isn't one life saved worth it?

So I ask all of my colleagues, let's stop the delays and denials and excuses, and let's pass this bill. Let's bring back to the floor of the Senate the time for debate on important policy issues that address the problems we see in this country. At the very least, let's save a life.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

SYRIA

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am here today with my colleague Senator GRAHAM to express my profound concern about the humanitarian tragedy that is currently unfolding in Idlib and northern Hama in Syria.

It is hard to imagine that after 8 years of war, the greatest humanitarian disaster in Syria might still be before us, because clearly what we have seen in the past 8 years is a horrible humanitarian tragedy, a civil war that has involved, really, international players and that has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and to the displacement of millions

more. But with the escalated attacks that have occurred since late April, the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies are threatening a population of approximately 3 million there in Idlib. Of those 3 million, 1 million are children. This is a region that is strained by hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people who have already fled from Assad's forces in other parts of Syria and neighboring countries. Just last Thursday alone, observers counted over 50 airstrikes in this region from early morning to early afternoon, and that was on top of artillery-shelling that was going on.

Last December, Senator GRAHAM and I came to the floor to warn about the dangers of President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from northeast Syria. I felt very strongly about that because last summer I had a chance to travel with Senator GRAHAM to Syria, and we saw the important work that the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve and its Syrian partner forces were doing there. We saw communities like Manbij city that had recovered after 3 years of occupation by ISIS. We saw that Syrians were returning to that northeast region of Syria where it was peaceful, and they were growing crops again. We visited the market. We walked around without any fear that terrorists were going to bomb us.

Local multiethnic residents saw the positive presence of U.S. troops and the value of U.S. global leadership. In fact, as we drove down the road and went by children, they flashed a "V" sign for "victory" when they saw it was the U.S. military.

Together with our partners, the Syrian Democratic Forces, we made significant gains against ISIS, but that progress, sadly, is not guaranteed. Unfortunately, what we are seeing now in Idlib is the result of a confused U.S. strategy in Syria.

When I spoke on the floor here in December, I warned that a hasty and ill-informed withdrawal could embolden ISIS and threaten the gains that U.S. partners have made. We discussed the fact that it would also cede the accomplishments of U.S. forces and our allies to Assad, Russia, and Iran.

What we are seeing now in Idlib and northern Hama is Assad's and his foreign supporters' military solution. We are seeing indiscriminate bombing and shelling that destroys schools and hospitals and that sets fire to farmers' fields. The latest surge in violence has killed dozens of people. It has destroyed thousands of acres of crops. It has forced another 300,000 people to flee their homes.

I would urge President Trump to listen to his military and diplomatic advisers and to recognize that an absence of U.S. leadership in Syria would give a free hand to Assad and to his Russian and Iranian allies, because clearly they are not our allies.

The people of Syria face danger at the hands of ISIS and of their own government. Unfortunately, they have