

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Kelly Craft, of Kentucky, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations during her tenure of service as Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IOWA TOWN MEETINGS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, during August, I continued my annual tradition of holding at least one Q&A in every one of Iowa's 99 counties. I go to Iowans where they work and live to hear what is on their minds so that I can better represent them in the Senate. No matter the setting, my citizens of Iowa set the agenda.

On August 27, with a town meeting in Spencer, IA, I completed the 39th consecutive year of my annual 99 county meetings. I look forward to continuing my dialogue with Iowans throughout the rest of this year, just to emphasize that I hold a lot more than just 99 meetings with my constituents every year.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO DAYTON POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise to honor six brave Ohioans—Sergeant William C. Knight, Officers Brian Rolfes, David Denlinger, Vincent Carter, Ryan Nabel, and Jeremy Campbell.

Last month, on Sunday, August 4, the people in my State woke up to devastating news: A shooter had opened fire overnight—at about 1 o'clock that Sunday morning—in Dayton. In 31 seconds, a shooter had fired 40 bullets. He had taken the lives of 9 Ohioans and had injured 27 more. This was another senseless tragedy caused by gun violence. As awful as it was, it could have been even worse had it not been for the bravery and skill of the officers I just mentioned.

While others ran from danger, these men ran toward it. They stopped the shooter within 31 or 32 seconds after the first shot was fired. They saved,

certainly, dozens of lives as the shooter was about to go into a very crowded nightclub. Had they not gotten to him in less than a minute, the shooter would have entered the doorway he was headed toward of the Dayton institution Ned Peppers, which was filled with Ohioans who were out on a Saturday night.

Dayton Police Chief Richard Biehl said: "Had this individual made it through the doorway of Ned Peppers with that level of weaponry, there would have been catastrophic injuries and loss of life." That didn't happen because these dedicated public servants did the job they signed up to do—to protect the people they serve.

Over the past month, as we have mourned those Ohioans we have lost, we have also seen the incredible strength and solidarity of the Dayton community. People from all over the city have come together to support the families of the victims and to support the law enforcement officers and officials who threw themselves in harm's way to protect their friends and neighbors.

Chief Biehl reported that the Dayton Police Department has received hundreds of emails, social media messages, and thank you cards—all from people thanking them for what they have done for this city.

Dayton has faced so many challenges this year. Each time, these officers and the entire department have risen to the occasion. They kept the public safe when a KKK group held a hate rally, and they helped residents after devastating tornados hit this summer. Now they are dealing with this awful gun violence and all kinds of tragedies that have fallen on this community.

I thank my friend Mayor Whaley, who is here in Washington today to help honor these officers and who has truly held this community together. I think she put it best when she said that Dayton has had, "as I like to term it, one hell of a summer, and you all have been on the front lines of it."

I met these officers at the Miami Valley Hospital 3 days after the shooting. The President of the United States was there to honor these officers and to see the victims and some of the injured Daytonians who were victims of the shooting and to see their families.

I said to the President that the best way he can honor these police officers is to bring the Senate back into session and pass universal background checks as 93 percent of the American public supports it and as Congress has already passed it overwhelmingly. We could do it in a day.

I thank Sergeant Knight, Officer Rolfes, Officer Denlinger, Officer Carter, Officer Nabel, Officer Campbell, and all of the Dayton law enforcement for responding far beyond the call of duty in saving the lives of so many people in the Miami Valley.

I thank their families, many of whom are here today. We know how families sacrifice alongside law enforcement

and servicemembers. Yet so often families don't get the recognition they deserve. To the officers and their families, we are forever grateful.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, today this Chamber, once referred to as the greatest deliberative body, must take action. We have people all over the country who want to see action, people who want to see change, people who are crying out for their leaders in Washington to do their jobs.

These days, the U.S. Senate has become a place where legislation goes to die and the important issues of the day go ignored, in addition to inaction—major, major issues, significant issues, like climate change and infrastructure and immigration reform.

Today I will focus on three things that are right before us—three bills in the gun legislation area that right now are on the leader's desk—and two other areas, election protection and bringing down the cost of prescription drugs, where we could literally take action immediately.

I focus on these because they all involve bills that have passed the House, and the Senate could literally act today. I focus on these because, in all three cases, the timing is urgent.

I am talking about inaction in the wake of terrible tragedies in Dayton and El Paso and in Midland-Odessa, all in just the last month; inaction in protecting our elections and making it easier for people to vote; inaction in response to serious issues of healthcare costs, particularly prescription drug prices.

First, I will speak about gun safety. Think about the courage—the incredible courage—of the people who were in Dayton and in El Paso and in Midland-Odessa, of the mom who literally shielded her baby from death as she herself perished from gunshot wounds, but she kept that baby alive. Or how about the grandpa who died shielding his wife and granddaughter or the off-duty soldier who carried children away to safety? All of that happened in that store.

As we approach the anniversary of 9/11, I think also about the first responders in all of these mass shootings. Those in Dayton, OH, got there in 1 minute—1 minute—but, still, we lost nine people in 30 seconds. But they were there in 1 minute and saved so many lives. That is courage.

That is the courage of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, and I believe in this place of extraordinary power that their courage must be matched. The courage must be

matched to that mom, to that grandpa, to that soldier, to those first responders. These are ordinary citizens who stepped up and saved lives. It is the least we can do to match their courage.

The American people can't afford more inaction. But over the past few years, to me, it seems we have lost our resolve.

Today, I implore my colleagues, I implore the Republican leadership to find the resolve once again and act with courage just as those men and women did in El Paso, in Dayton, in Midland and Odessa and Gilroy and Parkland and Newtown and Charleston and Orlando.

How about all of those families who lose a loved one every single day to gun violence in homes, to gun violence on the streets? There are 1,300 children who die from gunshot wounds each year. That is a classroom of kids every single week.

Yes, we are back today. Congress is back. I believe we should have come back sooner. We were in recess for mere hours when the gunman in El Paso claimed the lives of 22 people and for only a few hours more when the gunman in Dayton claimed 9 lives.

I was among those who immediately called for the Senate to come back from recess so that we could vote on gun safety measures—gun safety measures that had passed the House of Representatives with some Republican support.

I said that we should come back for that vote back then on background checks. By the way, 9 out of 10 Americans support sensible background checks; the majority of hunters support sensible background checks; the majority of voters who voted for President Trump support sensible background checks.

I know the history here. As the lead sponsor of the bill to prevent perpetrators of domestic violence—perpetrators, people who have been convicted of serious domestic violence and stalking—from possessing a gun and as a longtime supporter of universal background checks, as well as the assault weapon ban and limits on magazines, I was invited to the White House right after Parkland, right after all of those kids died in that school, and I thought: Well, this is a moment when we can act.

I was seated across from the President of the United States, and I had a piece of paper that I saved, and I wrote down with hash marks how many times he said that we should pass the bill for universal background checks and stop that gun show loophole. Nine times he said it—nine times.

I was seated next to the Vice President and across from the President. I told the President that I come from a proud hunting State and that when I look at proposals like this, I say to myself: Do they hurt my Uncle Dick in the deer stand? Do they do anything to hurt our hunting tradition in our State?

They don't. That is why the vast majority of hunters support universal background checks and a lot of these other measures we talked about that day in that conference room in the White House. It was on TV, so people can see it. There is a video of it. There is evidence of it.

I thought it was a done deal. But then what happened? The President, the next day, met with the NRA, and he folded. He folded, despite the fact that on TV in front of the Nation, in front of those kids, those surviving kids from Parkland, in front of the families of the kids who had died, he made a promise that he didn't keep. That is the history I know and I have lived.

But it doesn't end there. I go back in time. I go back to the saddest day in the U.S. Senate for me. That was the morning of the vote on background checks. That was years before. That was after the Sandy Hook shooting. Those families were there, and I had been working with some of the Senators who were leading that bill, and I had to tell those parents that morning who had lost their kids—their elementary school-age kids in that school—that we didn't have enough votes to pass that bill.

I remember one of the moms said to me: You know, I will never forget that day. I will never forget the last time I saw my son alive. He had severe autism, so he really couldn't speak. But every morning he would point at the picture of the school aide, whom he loved so much, who would never leave his side. He loved her, and he would point at her picture on our refrigerator.

That is what happened that last day she saw him alive. Then he went to school, and then, just a few hours later, she was waiting in that firehouse with all of those parents. One by one, those children came into that firehouse, and pretty soon, the parents who were left knew that they would never see their babies again.

As she was sobbing in that firehouse, she had this fleeting moment where she thought of that school aide, and she knew at that moment that the school aide would never leave the side of her little boy.

When they found them both, shot to death, that school aide had her arms around that little boy.

That mom was in my office that morning, and she had the courage to advocate for something she knew wouldn't have saved her kid because of the particular circumstances of how that guy got that gun. But what she knew about the background checks was that they would save more lives than a lot of these other measures. Why? Because the States that have them have reduced rates of domestic homicide. Yes, and they help with suicide as well.

It probably would have helped in Midland-Odessa. We don't know all of the facts, but what we do know is that one time that guy failed a background

check, and then somehow he was able to get a gun.

Those parents had the courage to do that. Then, a few hours later, this place didn't have the courage to pass that bill.

That is the history I have had with this issue, but it goes back even further. It goes back to when I was a prosecutor and we had cases all the time of everyday gun violence. We had officers killed; we had children killed; we had women killed in their homes.

But the case I most remember actually happened after I left that job, and I was in the Senate, and we had a shooting of a police officer in a small town. He was just doing his job. He showed up for a domestic violence call, which maybe sounds regular to a lot of people but not to officers because they know how dangerous those calls are.

It was a young woman, the victim of domestic violence, 17. The guy was in the house, and the officer went to the door, just doing his job. He opened the door, and the guy shot him in the head. He was wearing a bulletproof vest, but it didn't protect him.

The widow told me—because I was there for that funeral—the last time they had been in that church was for the Nativity play that the kids were in. After Christmas, the next time they were in that church, she was walking—a widow—down that aisle with her little children, with a little toddler in her arms in a blue dress covered with stars.

That is gun violence. It is not just about one family; it is not just about one victim; it is not even just about that police officer and that family who will never be the same. It is about our entire community. That is my history with this issue.

So when I come back here and I think of the courage of all of those people and all of those survivors and I think about those mass shootings and how, one by one, if we had passed these sensible bills, we could have prevented some of this from happening, I don't know what our excuse is anymore.

The leader on the Republican side said that “if the President took a position on a bill so that we knew we would actually be making a law and not just having serial votes, I would be happy to put it on the floor.”

Then the President said: “Congress is going to be reporting back to me with ideas.”

The time for ideas is done. The ideas passed in the House of Representatives—not all of the ideas that I would like put into law, but some really good things got passed that would prevent a lot of violence, including the background checks, including closing the Charleston loophole, when that White nationalist went into that church and gunned down those parishioners only because a background check hadn't been completed. It just gives a few more days—that is what that bill does—so police officers can do their job and complete the background checks.

How about my bill, which is a bill that is sitting on Leader MCCONNELL's

desk? It closes the boyfriend loophole. What is the status of the law right now? Well, if you get convicted of a serious offense of domestic violence against your husband or wife—most of the time it is wives—against someone who lives in your house, then you can't go out and get an AK-47. You can't go out and get a gun. That is the law right now.

But if you get convicted of the same crime against a boyfriend or a girlfriend—usually a girlfriend—you could go out and get that gun.

We have had hearing after hearing about this bill. We have had hearings because it is so sensible to close that loophole. Why? Because half of those domestic homicides involve girlfriends.

I remember the one we had a few years ago. We heard from the sheriff from Racine County in Wisconsin. He described himself as a conservative. He said this:

Dangerous boyfriends can be just as scary as dangerous husbands. They hit just as hard and they fire their guns with the same deadly force.

That bill is in the Violence Against Women Act right now and is sitting on Leader MCCONNELL's desk. That bill passed with 33 Republican votes in the House of Representatives. There is absolutely no reason we should stop a vote on the entire Violence Against Women Act simply because it includes this commonsense provision.

Those are the three bills right now, soon to be joined by a bill on limits on magazines. Why that bill? Because in 30 seconds, nine innocent people were killed in Dayton, OH. The cops did everything they possibly could. They were there in 1 minute, and still nine people died.

Those are the bills—background checks and closing the loopholes—so the cops have time to simply finish their vetting. Why would you want to cut off their days at 3? Third, closing the boyfriend loophole to help in cases of stalking and domestic violence, and fourth, magazines. These are commonsense bills. Would I like to do more with the assault weapon ban? Yes, I would. But right now, we could get these done.

What do we hear instead? We hear this: The President took a position on a bill, so then we can wait to see if we can have serial votes, and then we put it on the floor.

The President is saying: Congress is going to report back to me with ideas.

This is a dangerous game of whack-a-mole that has to stop. People are dying while leaders are pointing fingers. We could point our fingers and vote yes or no, and we could do that today. We ask that those bills be called up immediately.

But it doesn't end there. There are other very important bills we should be voting on right now.

Election security. We know a foreign country invaded our election. We know that because we heard it from President Trump's top intelligence officials.

In fact, Dan Coats, the Director of Intelligence back then, said that they were getting bolder. We know that. We know what happened. We know they did it in multiple ways. They did it by trying to hack into elections and election equipment in all 50 States. We found that out. In Illinois, they got as close as the voter files.

We also know they tried to do it with social media, and there, they were more successful. They ran a bunch of ads—paid for them in rubles—to try to suppress the vote. I will never forget the one shown at our Judiciary hearing, paid for in rubles. It was a Facebook ad that went on African-Americans' Facebook pages in swing districts. It was a picture of a woman—an innocent woman; they had just taken the face of someone from Chicago—and it said: Why wait in line to vote for Hillary? You can text your vote. And they gave a number, something like 86513. That is illegal. That is a crime. If we had known about that ad and found the perpetrators, they would have gone to jail. But that kind of activity by a foreign country was allowed to run rampant, and when the President was asked about it at the G20, standing with Vladimir Putin, he made a joke about it, looked at Vladimir Putin, and they laughed.

Do you know what I thought? I thought to myself, hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost their lives on the battlefield fighting for democracy in our own country and around the world. I thought of the four little innocent girls in a church in Birmingham who lost their lives in the fight for civil rights, in the fight for democracy, in the fight to vote. And he made a joke about it. This isn't a joke.

We have an opportunity. We have several bills on this that I am leading, to push for backup paper ballots in the remaining States that don't have them and to push for funding for audits and funding to get the right election equipment.

This isn't a joke. It doesn't matter if you are a Republican or a Democrat or an Independent; this is about protecting our democracy from the invasion of a foreign country. That is why our Founding Fathers started this country—because they wanted to be independent and didn't want to have foreign influence. It is what we fought for in war after war—protecting freedom and democracy.

This is the new ground for invasions. They didn't do it with missiles. They didn't do it with tanks. They are doing it with computers, and it is called cyber warfare. We have to be as sophisticated in our country as they are when they try to invade it.

When we tried to call up one of these bills—and Senator BLUNT had nicely called that hearing in the Rules Committee, of which I am ranking member—we got gut-punched—Senator LANKFORD and I and the other authors of the bill, Senator BURR, head of the Intelligence Committee, Senator WAR-

NER, Senator HARRIS, Senator GRAM—because that got stopped by the White House—calls were made—and by the leader. It is time to bring back this bill or pass one of the many versions that are out there.

The last area I am going to bring up—and there are many other things. I mentioned climate change and immigration reform, but the reason I am focusing on these things—gun safety for the obvious reason, as well as election security and prescription drugs—is because these are bills that have passed the House of Representatives. They are something we could do right now.

What about prescription drugs? It feels like years ago now, but it was actually just last January when I went to the State of the Union with my guest Nicole Smith-Holt. Nicole's son Alec was 26 years old, a restaurant manager in the suburbs of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and he had aged off his parents' insurance. Three days short of his payday, this hard-working kid—a pretty severe diabetic—wasn't able to afford his insulin, so he did what so many diabetics are doing right now because of the incredible cost of insulin: He started rationing it. He saved it. He took less than he was supposed to take.

I have talked to seniors who literally keep the injectors with those precious drops of insulin so they can use them the next day. When Alec tried it, tragically, it didn't work. He died. This should never happen in the United States of America, not with as simple a drug as insulin, which has been around for nearly a century.

I brought his mom with me to the State of the Union. She was sitting right up there looking down at the President while he claimed—of course many times—that he is going to do something about the prices of pharmaceuticals.

I think those who are blocking and slow-walking bipartisan legislation to reduce the cost of prescription drugs should give Nicole a call. She is smart, she is pretty straightforward, and she is a nice person. Listen to her story.

Healthcare is one-sixth of our economy, and total drug spending accounts for over 15 percent of our Nation's healthcare costs, from consumers to hospitals and nursing homes.

Between 2012 and 2016, the price of brand-name prescription drugs increased 110 percent. If we don't act now, that number will keep increasing as the profit margins for Big Pharma increase hand over fist. They have two lobbyists for every Member. For every desk in the Senate, pharma has two lobbyists. That is what Nicole looked down on when she saw the State of the Union. That number also applies to the House of Representatives, where we were that night.

There are solutions on the table. I think what would make the biggest difference, because it involves so many people, would be to pass my bill that I have led for years that would harness the negotiating power of 43 million seniors and allow Medicare to negotiate to

bring drug prices down. The VA does it. Medicaid does it. They have much less expensive drug prices because negotiation is allowed. I figure, with the power of 43 million seniors, we could get pretty good deals—43 million seniors—done through Medicare. But right now, it is locked in.

Why would it help people who are not at the age to be on Medicare? It helps you because it is the biggest block of drug prices, and once it starts going down for Medicare, it will start going down for everyone.

We can also pass my bill that I worked on for years with Senator GRASSLEY to stop big, brand-name companies from paying off other drug manufacturers to keep less expensive products off the market.

Let's think of what that means. What that means is pharma has a drug. A lot of times, they have a monopoly. Then someone comes along with another version of it that is less expensive. That would be great for us, especially when there are three or four competitive drugs. You always see those prices go down. Do you know what they do? They actually pay the generics to keep the product off the market. The big companies then have a monopoly. The new companies bringing the drug in, the generic, are fine; they get the money from Big Pharma. The only ones who get the short end of the stick are us, the consumers of this country. That is why Senator GRASSLEY and I have worked across the aisle, and it is time to get that bill passed.

The third one I would suggest is a bill I first introduced with Senator McCain—whom we all miss very much—that would allow Americans to bring in less expensive drugs from Canada and other countries as well. We know drug prices in Canada are so much less expensive than they are in the United States. Some States, like Maine, have tried to do this on their own, but they said: No; you have to have a Federal law to make this really work. Individuals have tried to do it. Bus tours of seniors go up there. We had bipartisan support for this in Minnesota—former Governor Pawlenty supported changing this bill—but we couldn't do it as a State. It really has to be done at the Federal level.

I am also pleased that Senator GRASSLEY has now stepped into Senator McCain's shoes and is carrying this bill for me. He is the chair of the Senate Finance Committee. There is no reason we shouldn't be able to call this bill up for a vote.

In conclusion, I started this speech by questioning whether this Chamber is even capable of action on big things anymore. I will end by asking a question that should be simple: Will the Senate respond to the needs of the American people?

When Americans are shot in cold blood, their bodies littered on the floor of a Walmart, will we respond to their needs? Will we respond to their families? When their votes are threatened

by attacks from a foreign country, will we respond to the citizens of this country? Will we respond when we know drug prices have gone completely out of control and we uniquely could do something about it?

Today, what this Chamber needs are leaders. Leaders don't hesitate. They don't drag their feet or put politics over country. They don't block or obstruct progress. If my colleagues don't want to find common ground, at least we could show some common sense.

It is time to live up to the promise of this esteemed body. Inaction won't do. The American people can't afford inaction in the wake of unprecedented attacks on our elections and our democracy. They can't afford inaction when people are actually dying because they can't afford common prescription drugs. They can't afford inaction when we have people being slaughtered on our streets, going to a festival in California, out on a weekend night with friends, going to a movie theater, or going shopping for school supplies.

Historically, this Chamber has done great things. It is one of the reasons all of us who got elected to this office decided to do it. Our predecessors fought for and passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the U.S. Senate. This place expanded voting rights the following year. This place helped provide a safety net for families, seniors, and kids across the country by passing Medicare and Medicaid. Guess what. When those things were passed, they weren't totally popular at the time, but now they are because they did the right thing. They were leaders. They didn't wait. They didn't hesitate. They led. We can and should come together and do great things now. That is the America we love. That is the America we know. That is the America we can be again.

I ask that these commonsense measures come up for a vote.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, let me first welcome my colleagues back from the August State work period. As usual, it was an opportunity to travel in our States and meet with constituents and to hear from them about the issues that matter most in their lives.

These are some of the things I heard: Middle-class families are struggling with costs that keep going up while wages barely budge. Recent college graduates are saddled with crippling college debt and are worried about their future and their ability to buy a

home and do the things they want for their children. Families and seniors are worried about rising healthcare costs, particularly prescription drugs. And voters asked if we are doing enough to keep our elections safe from foreign interference.

I spent time talking with educators in Upstate New York about teacher shortages, with farmers about the future of agriculture production, with homeowners about improving flood insurance policies, and with middle-class families about keeping more of their earnings in their pockets after the Republicans repealed the State and local tax deduction. I heard from New Yorkers in every corner of my State, and the overwhelming consensus was that Washington has work to do and has to do more to shore up the middle class and those struggling to get there.

Typically, with Congress out of session, the President can spend the month of August highlighting issues and building support for laws, initiatives, and programs to help working Americans—but not this President, not President Trump. As we all could have predicted, he spent the month of August sowing discord and division at home, comforting our adversaries and alienating our allies abroad, and spreading recrimination and self-aggrandizement on Twitter.

Twenty years ago, if you read what the President had done this August, you would say that is fiction. Unfortunately, it is true. Although we have become a bit inured to the President's volatility, it is hard to recall a President having a more destructive or bizarre summer.

On the world stage, President Trump canceled a planned trip to Denmark because they refused to consider selling us Greenland. He released a reportedly classified satellite image on Twitter and suggested inviting Putin to return to the G7, hoping, of course, that he could host the next one at, of all places, his own private resort in Florida.

Here at home, the President called the Chairman of the Federal Reserve an enemy, continued to attack the FBI, again falsely claimed he won the popular vote, and called Jews who voted for Democrats disloyal.

On the issue of policy, the President began the month vacillating wildly on support for gun safety measures, despite three mass shootings, and ended the summer by diverting funds intended for our Nation's defense and for our soldiers and their families and taking that money away from them for the construction of a border wall that we all know he promised Mexico would pay for.

Of course, we have now spent the past week and a half watching the President desperately trying to justify—sometimes with a Sharpie—his warning that the State of Alabama lay in Hurricane Dorian's destructive path—what a circus.

This is America. We are so proud of this country. We can't be proud of the