

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

President's actions in the last month—no one can, no matter what your politics.

I say to President Trump: There are real issues facing real Americans, and it is our job as their elected representatives—whether we be in the executive branch or the legislative branch, whether we be Democrats, Independents, or Republicans—to do something to help them, but this President seems uninterested or maybe simply incapable.

As we return to work in Washington, let us aim for progress on the issues President Trump ignored during his strange, lost summer: gun safety, election security, healthcare, infrastructure, making progress on funding the government in order to avoid another government shutdown that the President caused and had to back off from last time.

That is the people's business. Even if the President isn't interested in it, it is our job to be. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work, and sometimes we have to ignore the President's shenanigans.

One issue of particular importance looms on this upcoming Senate work period, and that is gun safety. In the month of August, more than 50 Americans were killed in mass shootings, the latest barrage in the litany of mass shootings that have become all too routine in our country, to say nothing of the American lives lost in everyday gun violence in our communities.

It is on the minds of the American people. I was at the airport, and someone I didn't know grabbed my arm and said: Senator, do something about gun violence. I lost my nephew to gun violence last year.

It is on so many people's minds. That is why our first order of business in the Senate should be to take action on H.R. 8, the House-passed Bipartisan Background Checks Act. We must grapple with the stark reality that gun violence is becoming an all-too-routine occurrence and that we in Congress have both the ability and responsibility to do something about it.

H.R. 8 is the most commonsense way for the Senate to save American lives. It is bipartisan. It has already passed the House. As a matter of policy, it is absolutely necessary to close the loopholes in our background check system in order to make other gun laws effective. We can and should pass a very strong red flag law, but what good would a red flag law do if someone were adjudicated, unable to have a gun, and he could go online and get that gun with no check at all? If you don't have background checks, bad people will get guns—felons, spousal abusers, those mentally ill, and people who get red flags. So it is critical that we pass a universal background check law and close the loopholes and that we do everything we can to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands in the first place. Background checks must be the base, the foundation we start from,

when we talk about gun safety legislation.

Just look at the case of the shooter in Odessa, TX, who reportedly failed a background check in 2014 but was able to purchase a firearm through a private sale with no background check. This is one of the loopholes that the Bipartisan Background Checks Act would close.

These loopholes were never intended—I was the author of the Brady bill back in 1994, when I was a House Member and the chair of the Crime Subcommittee. I am proud of it. It saved tens of thousands of lives. Back then, there was no internet. When some of the gun advocates here said "Well, exempt gun show loopholes," gun shows were simply a place to show antique-type guns, like your 1938 Derringer. Now, of course, they have become the huge loopholes that felons and other people who shouldn't have guns seek to use to get guns. We have to close these loopholes. It is not doing anything more to take away the rights of legitimate American citizens who want to bear arms—something I believe in—than it was when it passed. It is just closing loopholes as time has evolved.

There are two people in Washington who would make this legislation pass, which would greatly reduce gun violence: Leader MCCONNELL and President Trump. Leader MCCONNELL has the power to make sure this legislation passes this body or to make sure that it doesn't pass. It is in their hands.

The Republican leader determines the Senate's business. After the shootings in El Paso and Dayton, we demanded that the leader call the Senate back into session so that we could respond to the crisis. He refused. Maybe he hoped the scenes of violence would fade from the minds of the public, and the issue would fizzle out. That certainly has not happened, and the Democrats will not let it happen. Unfortunately, the increased frequency in mass shootings will not let it happen either.

As Democrats return to Washington, we carry with us the frustration of Americans who demand action but have seen far too little. These are demands of Democrats and Republicans, people northeast, south, and west, men and women, and people from urban areas, suburban areas, and rural areas. With their importuning in mind, we will make sure the issue of gun safety remains front and center for these next 3 weeks and beyond, until meaningful change is achieved.

By contrast, Leader MCCONNELL did not even mention gun violence in his opening remarks today, after promising that we would have a debate in the Senate when we returned. We await word from the leader when that debate might take place. One thing we do know is that Leader MCCONNELL has said that the question of background checks will come down to President Trump. "If the president took a posi-

tion on a bill," Leader MCCONNELL said, "I'd be happy to put it on the floor." That is what he said. Those are his words.

If that is the case, the President has a historic opportunity to save lives by signaling his support for the House-passed background checks bill. So far, he has been all over the lot.

The President told me he is going to get his "strongest possible bill" but has not committed to what he might support and then, in future days, seemed to have backed off that statement. That is why Speaker PELOSI and I sent President Trump a letter today, urging him to support H.R. 8, the universal background checks bill, to make his position public.

President Trump can lead his party to do something that the NRA has long prevented Republicans from doing by providing these Republicans the cover of a Republican President's support.

President Trump, please read our letter. Support the bipartisan universal background checks bill. It is common sense. It is enormously popular with the public—93 percent—even popular with Republicans and gun owners, and above all, would save American lives.

Maybe that man at the airport—I don't know his name or where he was from—would not have to come up to me and tell me his nephew died of gun violence if we had passed some of these laws. The time to act is now, before more lives are lost. The pressure is on President Trump and Leader MCCONNELL to act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

AUGUST RECAP

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I came to the floor, and I heard the Democratic leader talking, obviously, about some terrible incidents that occurred in El Paso, Dayton, and in Odessa.

Since we were last in session, we have had two shootings in Texas, one in El Paso and one in Odessa. I confess that these are terrible tragedies that cause us to first ask the question "Why" and then cause us to ask the question "What": What can and what should we do to try to stop incidents like these in the future?

I will remind the Democratic leader that we actually have a great template for bipartisan support for gun safety legislation, which is the bill we sent to the President last year called Fix NICS—NICS being the National Instant Criminal Background Check System that the FBI operates.

For example, if you were convicted of a felony or dishonorably discharged from the military or you were subject to a protective order or you had been committed as a result of a mental health crisis, under existing law, all of these prohibit you from purchasing or possessing a firearm. But if the background check system doesn't work, it doesn't really count for much.

I am proud of the fact that we came together on a bipartisan basis and