

are committed from deep down in their heart. They love these kids. They love the purpose they are serving, and they are thinking ahead. They are thinking outside the box. These are not institutions that are so cookie cutter that they are not willing to explore new opportunities for their students. They are seizing every one of those opportunities.

I have seen firsthand, though, increasing concern from our HBCU community. Given their significance, it is frustrating that some of these schools continue to struggle. Public and private HBCUs face extensive capital project needs but have few funding sources to rely on.

On top of that, the Government Accountability Office found that HBCUs' average endowment is half the size of a similar sized non-HBCU. We have to change that. We have to make sure we provide to these schools because the bottom line is, they have no safety net. They struggle. They work. They do the things. The bottom line is, they have no safety net. If they have no safety net, neither do the students they serve.

This time last year, I was talking about legislation I had introduced called the Strengthening Minority-Serving Institutions Act, which would have permanently extended and increased mandatory funding to all minority-serving institutions. That bill was supported by one-quarter of the Senate. Unfortunately, it was simply all Democrats. We could not get the bipartisan support that I hope we will get in the future. However, now we are here and only have 19 days left in the fiscal year, and these schools still have no certainty about whether these critical funds will continue to be available.

We hear a lot in this body about the need to make sure we continue to fund government, that we continue to fund our military, and about how devastating even a continuing resolution might be to the Defense Department because it doesn't allow the military to plan. I agree with that. I see it. This is \$255 million that all of a sudden is going to be cut off completely from schools that have relied on it, that have planned, that have done their budgets around it. We owe it to them. We owe it to them to make sure that we get this funding because they give so much back to us.

Ensuring equal access to quality education should not be a partisan issue, and I worked over the last year to find a solution that I think should receive and could receive broad bipartisan support. I believe we have that in the Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education Act. It is called the FUTURE Act, which I have introduced with my colleague Senator TIM SCOTT and Representatives ALMA ADAMS and MARK WALKER in the House.

The FUTURE Act reauthorizes funding for the next 2 fiscal years, maintaining just level funding of \$255 million a year. It is the least we could do.

Our bill checks all the boxes. It helps institutions in 43 States. It is bipartisan, it is bicameral, and it is paid for.

Let's not delay any longer. With this important bill, let's get this to the floor. Let's come up with something so we can show the American people how important these institutions are and just as important, we show the American people that, doggone it, we can get something done. That is the most frustrating part I heard about when I went back to Alabama over the recess: When are you going to get something done, Jones?

Well, it is difficult. You all know it. It is difficult, but this is a piece of legislation that ought to receive support in this body and across the aisle, across the Capitol in the House.

This week we have a lot of the HBCU presidents and administrators who are on Capitol Hill. They are coming up for their own benefit but also for the Congressional Black Caucus events that are later this week. They are here on the Hill. It would be the perfect time to get this to the floor. I don't see it on the schedule anywhere, but it would be the perfect time.

As people are looking here, as they are watching us and listening to us, they know we support their institutions. Let's show them we support their institutions.

I urge my colleagues to support the FUTURE Act. Get onboard with us. Sponsor this legislation and, in turn, support our Nation's minority-serving institutions of higher education. Their graduates deserve the same quality education as any other student, and they deserve a fair shot at a successful future. Let's get this done. Let's do our job and get this done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### BACKGROUND CHECKS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am going to be joined on the floor over the course of about an hour or so by Members of the Senate who are desperate for our colleagues to wake up and recognize that the time for action to quell the epidemic of gun violence in this country is now. It was also last week. It was also a month ago and a year ago and 6 years ago. It was also nearly 7 years ago, after the shooting in my State of Connecticut that felled 20 little 6- and 7-year-olds attending first grade at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

We tend to pay attention to the mass shootings—the ones in Odessa, El Paso, Dayton, and Newtown—but every single day in this country, 93 people die from gunshot wounds. Most of those are suicides, but many of them are homicides, and others are accidental shootings. When you total it up, we are losing about 33,000 people every year from gun violence and gunshot wounds.

Those numbers may not be that meaningful to you because it is a big country, but how does that compare to the rest of the world or at least the

rest of the high-income world? Well, that is about 10 times higher than other countries of similar income and of similar situation as the United States. Something different is happening here. It is not that we have more mental illness. It is not that we have less mental health treatment. It is not that we have less resources going into law enforcement. The difference is that we have guns spread out all over this Nation, many of them illegal and many of them of a caliber and capacity that were designed for the military in which this slaughter becomes predictable. We have a chance to do something about it right now in the U.S. Congress. We have a chance to try to find some way to come together over some commonsense measures.

I just got off the phone—a 40-minute conversation with the President of the United States. I was glad that he was willing to take that amount of time with me, Senator MANCHIN, and Senator TOOMEY to talk about whether we can figure out a way to get Republicans and Democrats on board with a proposal to expand background checks to more gun sales in this Nation. In particular, we were talking about expanding background checks to commercial gun sales. That is certainly not as far as I would like to go, but I understand that part of my job here is to argue for my beliefs and my convictions but then try to find a compromise.

There is no single legislative initiative that will solve all of these issues, but what we know is, if you want to take the biggest bite out of gun crime as quickly as possible, increasing the number of background checks done in this country is the way to go. All we are trying to do here is make sure that when you buy a gun, you prove that you aren't someone with a serious criminal history or that you aren't someone who has a serious history of mental illness.

In 2017, about 170,000 people in this country went into a store, tried to buy a gun, and were denied that sale because they had an offense on their record or a period of time in an inpatient psychiatric unit, which prohibited them from buying a gun. Of those 170,000 sales that were denied, 39 percent of them were convicted felons who had tried to come in and buy a gun, many of them knowing they were likely prohibited from buying those guns.

The problem is, that isn't a barrier to buying a weapon—being denied a sale at a gun store. Why do we know that? It is because just a few weeks ago in Texas, a gunman who went in and shot up 7 people who died and 23 who were injured failed a background check because he had been diagnosed by a clinician as mentally ill and had triggered one of those prohibiting clauses, but then he went and bought the gun from a private seller, knowing that he wouldn't have to go through a background check if he bought the weapon from a place in Texas that didn't have

a background check attached to it. He then took that weapon and turned it on civilians.

This happens over and over again every single day. Estimates are that at least 20 percent of all gun sales in this country happen without a background check. These aren't gifts of guns to a relative or a loaner to somebody who is going to go and use it for hunting on a Saturday or Sunday; this is about legitimate commercial transactions, 20 percent of which, when they involve guns, happen without a background check.

We also have plenty of data from States that have decided to expand background checks to make them universal. States requiring universal background checks for all gun sales have homicide rates that are 15 percent lower than States that don't have those laws.

In Connecticut, we have research showing that when we extended background checks to all gun sales through a local permitting process, we had a 40-percent reduction in gun homicide rates. Compare that with the State of Missouri, which repealed its permitting law, which was their way of making sure that everybody who buys a gun has to get a background check. They saw a 23-percent increase in firearm homicides immediately after they started allowing people to buy guns without a background check.

There is your data. It is pretty incontrovertible. You can get pretty immediate and serious returns—safety returns—if you expand background checks to all gun purchases. But the benefit to a U.S. Senator who has to go back for reelection every 6 years is that not only are background checks as a legislative initiative impactful, they are also very politically popular. In fact, very few things are more popular than expanding background checks to more gun sales.

Ninety percent of Americans want universal background checks. Apple pie is not that popular. Baseball is not that popular. Background checks are. You are not going to get in trouble with your constituents if you vote to expand background checks to all commercial sales or all private sales in this country. You are going to get rewarded politically if you do that. I don't argue that that is the reason you vote for background checks, but I think you should accept the plaudits that will come to you from your constituents if you support this measure.

I don't think the President has made up his mind yet. After spending about 40 minutes on the phone with him this afternoon, I don't know that the President is convinced yet that he should support universal background checks.

I was with the President right after the Parkland shooting, and he said he would support universal background checks, and then he didn't support them after speaking to representatives of the gun lobby. I am sure the gun lobby will come in and talk to the

President this afternoon or tomorrow and try to explain to him why he should once again endorse the status quo.

The status quo is not acceptable to Americans in this country. People are sick and tired of feeling unsafe when they walk into a Walmart. Parents are heartbroken when their children come home and tell them about the latest active-shooter drill they participated in. I know that from direct experience, having listened to my then-kindergarten tell me about being stuffed into a tiny bathroom with 25 of his other colleagues and told by his teacher to remain as quiet as possible because they were practicing what would happen if a stranger came into their school. Some of the kids knew what it was really about and some of them didn't, but my 7-year-old—6 years old at the time—knew enough to say to me: "Daddy, I didn't like it." No child should have to fear for their safety when they walk to school.

I am not saying that universal background checks can solve all of our gun violence issues in this country. I will say that beyond the lives that it will save, it will also send a message to our children and to families in this country that we are not encased in concrete, that we are trying our best to reach out across the aisle and come to some conclusion to at least save some lives.

I will tell you that peace of mind, that moral signal of compassion and concern that we will send, will have a value, as well, next to and beside the actual lives we will save.

Leilah Hernandez was 15 years old. She was a high school student when she was shot by the gunman in Odessa, TX. Her grandmother Nora explained how Leilah would spend a lot of her time with family and would drop by after school to visit her grandmother. She described Leilah as a happy girl who adored her parents. She was described at her funeral as "a naturally shy girl who became a quiet leader on the basketball court."

Lois Oglesby was 27 when she was killed in the Dayton shooting. Her friend Derasha Merrett said: "She was a wonderful mother, a wonderful person." According to the children's father, Oglesby face-timed him after she was shot, saying "Babe, I just got shot in my head. I need to get to my kids." She died that day in Dayton.

Jordan and Andre Anchondo were 25 and 23 years old when they were amongst the 22 who were killed in El Paso. The couple had dropped their 5-year-old daughter at cheer practice, and then they went to Walmart to pick up some back-to-school supplies. Their 2-month-old son Paul was with them. He survived the shooting, probably because it looks like Jordan died shielding her baby, while Andre jumped in front of the two of them. The baby was found under Jordan's body and miraculously suffered only two broken fingers.

On August 31 in Buffalo, NY, Norzell Aldridge saw an altercation happening

from a distance. He went over to the altercation to try to defuse the situation. He was a youth league football coach. As he tried to deal with this altercation, he was shot and killed. One of his friends said: "The guy died a hero trying to save somebody else's life." One of the folks who work in football with him said: "His legacy will always be never give up, give it your all, and now his legacy is through his son."

You haven't heard of Norzell because he didn't die in a mass shooting. He is just one of the routine gun murders that happen every single day in this country. It matters just as much as those that occurred in El Paso and Dayton and Odessa, and we can do something about those right now.

I am begging the President to come to the table and agree to a common-sense background checks expansion bill that will save lives. I am begging my colleagues here to do the same—figure out a way to get to yes. There is no political liability in it for you. There are thousands and thousands of lives to be saved.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Connecticut.

**MR. BLUMENTHAL.** Mr. President, I am honored to follow my colleague from Connecticut after his powerful and eloquent description of the lives that have been lost, the stakes of this decision, and the clear path we have—an opportunity and an obligation to save lives.

Let me begin where he ended. The President of the United States has an obligation here to lead. If he does, we will have legislation that will literally save thousands of lives. He has an obligation, as we do, to find a way to save these lives.

All of us have seen all too often the needless, senseless, and unspeakable tragedy done by gun violence. We focus on the mass killings, but those 90 deaths a day consist of the drive-by, one-by-one shootings in Hartford and New Haven and Bridgeport and cities and towns and communities around the country. No one is immune. No family is untouched, through friends and relatives and workplaces and through suicides, which are a major part of those 90 deaths every day in this country. Domestic violence is made five times more deadly when there is a gun in the home.

The President must not only come to the table but lead. And if he will not lead, get out of the way because we have an obligation to move forward now and take advantage of this historic opportunity and obligation.

Just weeks ago, in one 24-hour period, massacres in El Paso and Dayton left 31 people dead. Eleven days ago, a shooter in Odessa, TX, killed another seven. Communities are forever changed by these events, and so is our Nation. The trauma and the stress done in schools to our children by the drills they conduct, by the anticipation that

is raised, by the fear that is engendered—the sights and sounds of gun violence echo and reverberate across our land.

I remember the sights and sounds of the parents at the firehouse in Sandy Hook on that horrible day in 2012 when 20 beautiful children and sixth grade educators died. The firehouse is where parents went to find out whether their children were OK. The way they found out was either their children appeared or they did not.

For them, in the cries and sobbing they experienced, the expressions of anguish, the look on those faces, it was only the beginning of their nightmare. It transformed Connecticut. What we did in Connecticut was adopt commonsense measures and comprehensive steps to stop gun violence.

The lesson of Connecticut is not only that those steps have reduced gun violence, including homicide, but also that States with the strongest laws are still at the mercy of the ones with the weakest because guns have no respect for State boundaries. They cross State lines, and they do damage and death in States like Connecticut with strong gun laws. Through the Iron Pipeline, it comes from other States to our south.

Since that day at Sandy Hook, there have been 2,218 mass shootings in the United States, and over 2,000 times, parents have sat, as did those parents at Sandy Hook, and waited to know whether their children were OK—children who left in the morning with no inkling about the violence that was to unfold.

There is no reason people have to live this way in the United States of America. America has no greater proportion of mental health issues than any other country. We have a higher rate of gun violence. We can prevent it through commonsense steps and comprehensive steps that will save as many lives as possible as quickly as possible by keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous people. That is the principle of the two main proposals likely to come before this body.

To keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people, do it through background checks, which have to apply universally to all States for them to be effective. Experts estimate that 80 percent of firearms acquired for criminal purposes are obtained from unlicensed sellers, and a recent study found that States that have universal background check laws experienced 52 percent fewer mass shootings. Background checks prevent people who are dangerous to themselves or others from buying firearms, and, likewise, emergency risk protection orders take guns away from people who are dangerous to themselves or others. These two concepts have a common goal, the same end. They achieve it by complementary means.

The vast majority of perpetrators of mass violence exhibit clear signs that they are about to carry out an attack. The shooter in Parkland, as my col-

league Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM has said, all but took out an ad in the newspaper saying that he was going to kill people at that school in Parkland. The police were repeatedly alerted to his violent behavior, including a call from a family member who begged the police to recover his weapon.

Today, in Florida, she could ask for an extreme risk protection order under a Florida law signed by my colleague Senator SCOTT when he was Governor. In the 17 jurisdictions that have passed emergency risk protection order laws, enforcers can petition courts to temporarily restrict access to firearms with due process.

At a hearing this morning in the Judiciary Committee, we learned from one of the judges in Broward County who enforce these laws that they have worked to prevent shootings, including many suicides, and they enable mental health help to be available as well. These laws prevent suicide. The majority of those gun deaths in the United States, in fact, are suicide, which is accounting for 60 percent of those 90 people killed every day.

Emergency risk protection orders are effective, but they are resource intensive, and that is why Senator GRAHAM and I have worked hard and we are close to finalizing a measure that will provide grants and incentives to other States that are considering or may consider these kinds of laws. Together with Senator GRAHAM, I have been working hard on this legislation, and we are close—after extensive discussion, not only between us but with the White House and with our colleagues—to a bill that can muster bipartisan support and pass this body.

The Charleston loophole must be closed. I have been leading that fight in the Senate to fix this problem for years. The House passed bipartisan legislation on background checks, H.R. 8, and on the Charleston loophole that would fix the problem of would-be murderers having access to guns simply because information is unavailable within the time limit that is set.

Guns should not be sold simply because a deadline for a background check is not met. Most are done literally within seconds or a minute, but some require more extensive work. There is no reason to wait to pass these measures.

Neither should we wait to pass a safe storage bill that we believe would have prevented deaths like Ethan Song's perishing in Guilford. This past January, Ethan Song would have celebrated his 16th birthday, but a year earlier, he was accidentally killed by a gun stored in his friend's closet, accessible to him and a friend. Like Kristen and Mike Song, thousands of other families across America lose children in gun violence every year. It is a parent's worst nightmare, and, in many cases, safe storage, including possibly Sandy Hook, would have prevented a mountain of heartache and a river of tears.

The Songs have been so strong and courageous, as have been the survivors

of the victims' families in Sandy Hook. They have been the powerful faces and voices of this effort and the most effective advocates.

The groups that have been formed in these past years, raising awareness and mobilizing every town—Guilford, Brady, Newtown Action Alliance, Sandy Hook Promise, Connecticut Against Gun Violence, Moms Demand Action, and Students Demand Action are only some of them. They are mounting a political movement, and we need to hear them.

History will judge us harshly if we fail to heed that call for commonsense reform. The voters will judge harshly, as well, the colleagues who fail to heed that call.

We need to keep in mind that gun violence is not one problem. There is no one solution. There is no panacea. We need to aim at all of these measures, including a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. The House, just this week, approved a ban on high-capacity magazines, as well as an emergency risk protection order statute.

Gun violence is many problems—not one. It is the loopholes in the background check system; it is the failure to safely store firearms; it is an arbitrary deadline for completing a background check; and it is the lack of emergency risk protection orders that take guns away from people who are dangerous to themselves or others with due process.

I have worked on this issue for more than two decades—almost three decades since I was attorney general first elected in the State of Connecticut. There has been progress. The progress has achieved results. Now it is this body's obligation to take that next step, and I implore the President of the United States to state his support, which my colleagues across the aisle have said is necessary for them to do what they think is responsible. I say to them: If the President fails to lead, you must do so.

We must continue to fight and never give up and never go away for the sake of the survivors and families who said from this Gallery when we failed to act in the wake of Sandy Hook: Shame.

Shame on us, in fact, if we fail to act. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I join with many of my colleagues to make a pretty simple request, and that is, the issue of gun violence in this country requires us to take action.

The Senate needs to do what it has historically been in place to do. The Presiding Officer is in his first term, and I am in my third term. The U.S. Senate is the place in which we debate and vote on issues, the greatest deliberative body in the world—at least that is what I thought I was running for.

It is time for Leader MCCONNELL to bring up gun safety legislation—well

past time to bring up gun safety legislation—and for us to act and do something about gun violence in this country.

Yes, we hope the President will lead, will provide that leadership that we hear about after every one of these mass shootings—that the President is engaged. We need his leadership to bring us together on sensible gun safety legislation, but if not, we still have the responsibility here in this body to act. We call upon Leader MCCONNELL to bring forward sensible gun safety legislation.

The United States is an outlier on gun violence. When you compare the amount of gun violence in the United States to that in the other developed countries of the world, in every category, multiply it times 10, 20, or 30—more likely for gun violence episodes here in the United States than other developed countries of the world.

We have far more private ownership of guns in this country than other industrial nations of the world. We have far more mass killings. We have far more gun-related suicides, and the list goes on and on and on.

So we need to take action. This is one area where we don't want to be the outlier. We want safe communities, and inaction is not an answer.

Yes, there are many things we could do. Look, the people of Maryland and the people throughout this country have been victims of this gun violence. In my own State of Maryland, we had a mass shooting in June of last year at the Capital Gazette—outrageous. People trying to do their jobs were killed. We have had, of course, school shootings. It is time for this Congress to take steps to reduce this risk. Inaction is not an option.

What should we do? As my previous colleague said, there are a lot of things we should be doing. We should take a look at whether it is reasonable for there to be private ownership of military-style weapons. I think there shouldn't be. That is certainly a bill we can bring up.

We have seen these assault weapons used in a lot of mass attacks, where you have multiple casualties in a matter of seconds, where there is no possibility for law enforcement to respond to keep people safe during that short period of time.

We should get rid of the high-capacity magazines. I know the House is working on that. That is something that, again, is not necessary for the purposes of recreation.

We should identify extreme-risk individuals and be able to put a flag on their ability to purchase a weapon. We need to invest in mental health. All of that is important.

The bill we can pass today is a universal background check. The House has passed it. It has been here since February of this year. For 7 months, that bill has been here—universal background checks. It was passed with a strong bipartisan vote in the House

of Representatives and is consistent with the Second Amendment. The Supreme Court has said the right is not absolute, that certain individuals are not entitled to have firearms because of what they have done.

Since 1968, we have provided forms to determine whether individuals are entitled to own a firearm or not. Of course, in 1993, we passed the presale process for licensed dealers because that is where guns were being purchased back in 1993. So if you buy a gun from a licensed firearms dealer, you have to go through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. As my colleague has said, it takes a matter of seconds. You can get cleared or not cleared, and it works. Three million guns have been denied a transfer as a result of this check, but there are loopholes in it because of the way commerce is handled today. It doesn't cover private sales. Internet sales weren't even available back when we passed these laws. We have to close those loopholes, and it will save lives. States that have closed these loopholes have a lower amount of gun violence than those States that have not.

We need a national answer to this. A person from Maryland can go into Virginia or West Virginia where the laws are different. We need one Federal law to deal with closing this loophole.

Today and every day in this country 100 people are killed through gun violence—every single day. We can't wait. We have to act. That is what this body is best at.

So I encourage President Trump to lead on this issue. I know he had some meetings this week. I encourage our leader to allow this body to take up the universal background check bill that passed the House of Representatives by a strong bipartisan vote. Let us get that done. Let us tell the people of this country that we will not be silent and we will not be inactive in regard to the amount of gun violence in this country.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues in discussing our country's horrific gun violence epidemic. I have risen to speak of this problem many times over the years, and to be honest it is exasperating to have to do it over and over again.

El Paso, Dayton, Gilroy, Odessa, Midland, Brownsville in New York—the list goes on and on—city after city, community after community, devastated by gun violence. We witness these tragedies. We watch heart-breaking and nightmarish footage on our televisions. We offer our thoughts and prayers. We have heavy hearts, deep disappointment and horror, and still nothing. The Senate has still not passed any meaningful legislation to address the problem.

So here we are once again in this Chamber. Democrats are speaking out on behalf of the American people, on

behalf of the citizens who are protesting and demanding action, and on behalf of our constituents who call and write and tweet to us every single day for commonsense legislation to help end this gun violence that plagues our communities.

We aren't just speaking out on behalf of Democrats because gun violence doesn't ask what political party you support. It touches the lives of everyone in this country. The majority of the American people—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—all want action. They want their schools to be safe. They want a place to go and worship and be safe. They want to go and buy their back-to-school supplies and be safe.

Let's be really clear about the root of this inaction. It is greed. It is corruption. It is the rot at the heart of Washington. The NRA is no different. The NRA cares more about gun sales than they do about the people of this country. They care more about the gun manufacturers than they do our communities. Too many of my colleagues just don't have the guts to stand up to the NRA.

There are three effective solutions sitting right in front of us, all of which are bipartisan, all of which have been voted on before, getting lots of bipartisan support. I reject the false argument that because these commonsense proposals may not stop every single instance of gun violence that it is not worth doing them. We should do these. It makes no sense to stop doing the commonsense things just because it doesn't stop every gun crime because the truth is, it is time to do something.

We can and should ban assault weapons and large magazines. No civilian needs access to weapons of war. Those weapons are designed solely to kill large numbers of people very quickly, in minutes and seconds, and our military train heavily to be able to use those weapons well.

We can and should pass my legislation to criminalize gun trafficking. It will help slow the tide of illegal guns into cities like New York and Chicago and across the country where guns that are illegal are sold directly out of the back of a truck to a gang member or a criminal. It is one of the things that law enforcement keeps asking us to do and have been asking for a decade.

We can and should pass the red flag laws that are designed to make sure people with violent tendencies cannot have access to guns, but the first and most obvious solution should be a cakewalk for this Chamber, and that is universal background checks. This solution is supported by the vast majority of Americans. A great bipartisan bill has already passed our House, but it is not even being considered right now for a vote in the Senate.

So it is really on Senator MCCONNELL right now. It is on him. It is his decision whether to protect our communities or not—to just protect our kids.

As a mom, when there was a shooting less than a mile from Theo and Henry's

school, all I could think about was getting there as fast as I possibly could just to make sure my child was safe. That is the fear every parent in America has today. We shouldn't accept living in an America where we have to worry that our kids aren't safe in school, where they are actually doing shelter-in-place drills instead of mathematical drills. We shouldn't accept that world. We shouldn't accept a world where you can't be at Bible study with your friends. We shouldn't accept a world where you can't go to a concert or go to a movie and know that you are safe, but that is the world we are living in.

The truth about all of this is, right now at this moment, we have Americans who are fueled by hate hunting down other people with weapons of war. That has to change.

We do have the will to do this. Congress can show courage. Congress can do the right thing, so why not do it now, when the American people are begging us to just have an ounce of strength in our spines, just an ounce of courage to stand up to special interests, to greed and corruption and lies that distort this debate.

We are bigger than this. We are stronger than this. We are better than this. Let's protect our kids.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the same issue my colleague from New York just spoke to, and I know others have preceded her on the floor. I am grateful to be a part of this discussion today.

What I could do—but I know I don't have to because it is so well known now—is go through the three or four most recent mass shootings which are the ones that get most attention, but I don't have to do that because we know so well now what happened just in the last number of weeks.

One way to remember them, of course, is by the names of the communities: El Paso, Dayton, Midland, Odessa—names like that where everyone in the country knows exactly what we are talking about because of what happened there. What we don't talk about enough, of course, are the places where there is daily gun violence and horror and tragedy and death and grievous injury because it doesn't get the same attention.

Tragically, another way to go through a list of tragedies that are connected to this awful epidemic of gun violence—this uniquely American problem of gun violence—is to use numbers. These numbers are now emblazoned on the communities that were so tragically destroyed, in large measure, by these events. In El Paso it was 22, in Dayton it was 9, and in Midland and Odessa it was 7. So doing the math, that is 38. That is the number of people killed in just three places. Of course, there are a lot of other deaths between those tragic events which aren't get-

ting the same attention. That is another way to measure—38 killed between August 3 and August 31. Another number is the number of injured. I think the number now is just about 76, just in those three tragedies. So there were 38 killed and 76 injured in three American communities.

One of the most disturbing realities after the fact is what happened in Dayton in just such a short timeframe. I know that timeframe. We could probably cite the other tragedies as well, but we know that in about 32 seconds in Dayton, 9 people were killed and 27 were injured. Law enforcement, the folks we often call the good guys—good guys not just with guns but good guys with a lot of training and a heroic willingness and heroic commitment to get to a place of danger to try to apprehend a criminal and to try to save people. In Dayton, law enforcement officials got there faster than Superman could get there, and it wasn't fast enough because in 32 seconds 9 were gone and 27 were injured.

We know that in Midland and Odessa, TX, the authorities reported that the gunman was prohibited from purchasing a firearm at one point, but he was able to avoid a background check because he purchased his assault-style weapon through a private sale. This is further evidence of why we need a background check bill that is rigorous—not just a background check bill that makes a nice headline but is rigorous enough to stop the guy in Texas who brought such horror to that community, including, as one of the wounded, a 17-month-old child.

We also know that through the month of August, in that same time period I mentioned, the 3rd to the 31st—but if you include every day of that month, the United States has experienced 38 mass shootings. So there were 38 times when four or more people were involved, which is the definition of a mass shooting.

When I think about it in terms of the scale of it—and I don't think there is anyone who would disagree with this—this is a public health epidemic, and it is plaguing our cities and our communities every single day. What we are talking about, in terms of the perpetrators of this violence, they are not just criminals, they are domestic terrorists, and we should call them that. That is what they are. We shouldn't try to remember their names or, frankly, even speak their names, but we should remember what they are: domestic terrorists who are, frankly, in terms of the whole scale of the problem, causing more problems in America than any other terrorists are causing. These domestic terrorists are using high-powered, military-style assault weapons to kill our children and to kill our families.

We know that last October, the most deadly active violence against the Jewish community in American history occurred at the Tree of Life synagogue in the city of Pittsburgh. Eleven were

killed there and six were injured, including four of the six being law enforcement officers who, again, got there very quickly—maybe not in seconds but in minutes. Of course, getting there that fast, with all of their training, all of their courage, and all of their commitment, was not fast enough because even though they got there in just minutes, that wasn't fast enough because of the nature of the weapon and because of the assailant.

How about Philadelphia? The two biggest cities in my home State are Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Philadelphia being the largest. Days before the horrible weekend of El Paso and Dayton, a mass shooting occurred in Southwest Philadelphia that left a 21-year-old dead and five others injured. Because only one person was killed, it is not ranked as a mass shooting. That happened in that same timeframe.

On August 14, an individual in North Philadelphia barricaded himself in a house and shot six police officers with an assault-style weapon. The shootout lasted nearly 8 hours and prompted a local childcare center to shelter in place for hours. I was at that childcare center just a few days later. Watching it on the news, I had envisioned a geographic distance of a lot more than it was. When I walked just to the side of the building where the childcare center was and looked across the street, it was closer than the width of this room we are in today. When you go out the back door of the childcare center, it was within feet across a very narrow street from where the shooter was barricaded. In this instance, you have one shooter in a house with a high-powered weapon who is able to hold off a number of law enforcement officials for hours at a time. That is just one example of the power of the weapon.

The issue of gun violence is a uniquely American problem. No country has the same problem on this scale. America has never had a problem like this in its history. It is uniquely American and unique in American history itself.

Some in Congress want to surrender to this problem. The argument is that there is nothing we can do except better enforcement of existing law. I don't think most Americans believe that—nor should they—because there is certainly more we can do. To have a position that I would say is a surrender to the problem, you would have to argue that the most powerful Nation in the history of the world can do absolutely nothing—except maybe tighten up a law by way of enforcement—that we can do absolutely nothing to confront this problem.

No one is arguing that if we passed a background check bill here or an extreme risk protection order bill that somehow the problem would magically begin to decline. No one is arguing that. But there is certainly something we can do to reduce the likelihood and we would hope substantially reduce the likelihood of more mass shootings. If we passed two bills in the Senate that

became law and 25 years from now, one mass shooting was prevented, it would be worth every minute of that effort and every degree of energy expended in furtherance of passing that legislation.

We have been talking about this for a long time just in the recent past. We now know that it is more than 195 days since the House passed H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019.

As I referred to earlier, in the Odessa-Midland shooting, we know that our Nation now needs a national background checks bill in order to make all Americans safer from the horrors of gun violence.

Reports indicate that in 2018 alone, 1.2 million firearm classified ads were posted on armslist.com that did not require a background check before purchase. This is a big loophole that helps feed an illegal underground gun market in cities and communities across our country. If implemented, the universal background checks bill known as H.R. 8 would close this loophole, requiring background checks for all firearm sales between private parties. We also know that since 1994, background checks have prevented 3.5 million gun sales to dangerous criminals and others prohibited from owning a gun.

I have to ask again, are we to surrender to this problem? I don't think so. I think most Americans don't want to surrender to it. What they want is for us to take action. They are a little bit tired of just speeches and debate. They may want a little more debate, but they want votes. They want us to be debating and voting several times at least, if not more so.

This is a grave, difficult challenge to confront, but the commitment to confronting it is a mission that I think is worthy of a great country. I ask Majority Leader MCCONNELL to give the Senate the opportunity to debate and vote on first the universal background checks bill, H.R. 8. And I am sure there will be other versions of that in the debate, and that is fine. We should debate on all of them and vote on all of them and debate and vote on an extreme risk protection bill.

I would argue we should do more than that. We should have a series of commonsense gun measures to be debated and voted on, even if we are likely to know the outcome, because the American people expect that this uniquely American problem and the scale of it are worthy of that debate and worthy of those votes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINES. Mr. President, I also rise to talk about gun violence. I express my appreciation for our Republican colleagues. Those of us on this side of the aisle feel very strongly about this issue. I understand we have gone a little bit past the time. I will try to be quick. I feel very strongly about it too.

Let me just talk about two Virginia tragedies, and let me tell the story of a

hero whose name we should all know. It has been interesting. I sat on the Senate floor and listened to a number of my colleagues' speeches. As they talked about gun violence and mass shooting in the United States, very few have mentioned that 12 people were killed in Virginia Beach in a mass shooting on May 31. They mentioned Odessa, they mentioned El Paso, and they mentioned Dayton. Why not Virginia Beach? Because there have been so many tragedies since May 31.

The Virginia Beach shooting of 11 governmental employees and a contractor who was just there to get some permits for a building permit he was seeking happened barely 3 months ago, but it has already receded into the memory of virtually anybody outside of Virginia because the gun tragedies since have been the ones that have crowded into our minds.

The fact that that has been allowed to happen—that we are so used to it now that the killing of 12 people in a mass shooting barely 3 months ago escaped people's memories—tells us we have become used to a situation we should never have been able to tolerate.

In the Virginia Beach shooting, one of the reasons 12 people were killed quickly was the shooter used high-capacity magazines that would contain dozens and dozens of munition, which made the rescue operation conducted by brave first responders extremely difficult.

We say we care about our first responders. When I talk to our first responders, they say: If you care about us, do something to restrict high-capacity magazines. Don't you want us to be able to stop a shooting in progress? Don't you want us to stop a murder and keep the homicides and carnage down? It is hard to do it when we are up against somebody with such a massive amount of firepower. If you care about first responders, if you want us to stop crimes in process, then enable us to put meaningful restrictions on high-capacity magazines.

I think that was a powerful lesson from the Virginia Beach shooting, that had the magazines been smaller, they could have stopped the carnage earlier. There may have been those injured or killed, but it would have been less of a toll.

I want to point this out before moving to the next issue. As a society, we tolerate high-capacity magazines. Many in this Chamber are hunters. Many in this Chamber are familiar with hunting laws. In Virginia, as in most States, there are rules that have been on the books for years. If you hunt a deer in Virginia, we limit the amount of rounds you can have in a rifle or shotgun. We put a limit, and that limit has been accepted for decades. Why do we limit the size of magazines in hunting animals? Because it wouldn't be fair. It wouldn't be sportsmanlike. It wouldn't be humane to allow an animal to be hunted with a

magazine of near-unlimited capacity. If it is not humane to hunt an animal with a massive magazine, then why allow near-unlimited magazines to be used to hunt human beings? This is a rule we accept, and we should accept it for weapons designed to hurt humans as well.

The second tragedy in Virginia occurred when I was Governor a number of years ago—the tragic shooting at Virginia Tech. I won't go into it because I will segue when I talk about a hero, but the shooting at Virginia Tech happened because of a weakness in the background check system. The individual, the young man, Seung-Hui Cho, who killed 32 people was prohibited from having a weapon because he had been adjudicated mentally ill and dangerous, but weaknesses in the background checks system enabled him to get a weapon anyway. We learned a powerful and painful lesson that day, which is that if your background check system has loopholes and gaps, disasters will result.

So I join with my colleagues who say H.R. 8—that has come from the House and is a comprehensive background check system bill that keeps weapons out of the hands of people who are dangers to themselves and others—is something we should absolutely pass.

Last, let me tell the story about an American hero. I have told this story on the floor before but not for a number of years. I want to tell this story because I think everybody should know this individual's name. The name of the hero I want to describe is a man named Liviu Librescu.

Liviu Librescu was one of the 32 people who were killed at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007. Let me tell you about him. He was born in Romania—and he was Jewish—during the Holocaust. When Germany occupied Romania and began to take over the country, Jews were persecuted. Liviu Librescu was then a young child. His family was sent to concentration camps, and many of them perished just because they were Jewish. Liviu, as a young child, was hidden by relatives and friends and miraculously managed to survive the Nazi campaign of anti-Semitism against Jews. Many Jews left Romania because they felt their neighbors and friends didn't protect them. Liviu Librescu decided to stay. "I am a Romanian and am going to stay in Romania and make my country a peaceful place where Jews can live in peace with their fellow men and women."

He ran into a second problem. He went to the university. He was a talented scientist and engineer. But then the Soviet Union moved in and essentially occupied Romania. They punished him because he was Jewish and because he wouldn't join the Communist Party. He was a world-renowned engineer published in journals around the world. First, they prohibited his ability to travel to academic conferences and then prohibited his right to publish. Over the years, the

Soviet-dominated Government of Romania took away virtually every right he had.

He started to try to figure out a way to immigrate to Israel. In the early 1970s, at a time when some Eastern European Jews were allowed to immigrate to Israel, Liviu Librescu finally escaped Soviet-dominated communism after having survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel. It was his dream.

Liviu Librescu was teaching at the Technion in Israel, one of the premier scientific engineering institutions in the world. He got an offer after a few years to come be a visiting professor in Blacksburg, VA, at Virginia Tech for 1 year. He came in 1958. This Romanian Jew, professor at an Israeli technical university, came to Blacksburg, VA, in the mountains of Appalachia, for 1 year, and he fell in love with Blacksburg. He stayed in Blacksburg, at Virginia Tech, for the rest of his career.

On April 16, 2007, Liviu Librescu—now 22 years in Blacksburg—was teaching an engineering class in one of the two buildings that were the subject of the attack by the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho. On the morning of April 16, 2007, he had undergraduates and graduates in the class. When he heard shooting start in the classroom, he instinctively knew he should protect his students. Liviu Librescu was now over 70 years old, this Holocaust survivor.

He stood in front of the classroom door on the second floor of this building and told the students: You have to jump out the window. I am going to do everything I can to protect your life. Jump out the window.

He stood there in front of the classroom door and absorbed bullet after bullet. Every student of Liviu Librescu's was able to escape from that building, save one. There was one student who couldn't get out in time and who had let others go first. Liviu Librescu was killed, and one student in his class was killed, but he saved the lives of all of these other young people.

April 16, 2007, was a day that was a very special day in Liviu Librescu's life. Most in the classroom wouldn't have known it. That day was Yom HaShoah, which is a day that occurs every year on the Hebrew calendar and is a day that is celebrated and commemorated in Israel. It is a day to commemorate, remember, and never forget the Holocaust. That is what Yom HaShoah was. Liviu Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, knew what that day was. He knew what it meant. He made a choice.

The commemoration of the Holocaust is not just about remembering the violent perpetrators and is not just about remembering the victims; it is also about remembering that there wouldn't have been millions of victims had there not been so many bystanders. That is what Yom HaShoah is about. It is about victims, perpetrators, and also about bystanders in that the Holocaust would never have hap-

pened had there not been so many bystanders. What Liviu Librescu decided to do that day was not to be a bystander. As violence was occurring around him, he decided: I will not be a bystander. I will try to take an action to save someone's life.

Think about it. He survived the Holocaust. Think about it. He survived the Soviet takeover of his country. Then he came to this Nation and loved it, but he could not survive the carnage of American gun violence. He did, at least, decide he wouldn't be a bystander.

That is what we are called to do in the Senate of the United States—not to be bystanders. We do not have to demonstrate the courage of a Liviu Librescu and place our bodies in front of a classroom door and absorb bullet after bullet to save somebody else's life. I don't think I would have the courage to do that. I don't know how many of us would have. We are not called to make a sacrifice of that magnitude, but I do think we are called to make some sacrifices, and I do think we are called not to be bystanders. If we are going to be true to that calling, we have to be willing to take up and debate and to vote on commonsense measures to keep Americans safe from gun violence.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11TH

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, I rise to honor those who lost their lives tragically 18 years ago and to make sure that we never forget what happened then.

I vividly remember that morning. I was in my own office in Jasper, IN. I didn't have a TV. Somebody there brought it up on the internet. The second plane flew into the building. I will never forget that image because we didn't know what had happened with the first one. We knew what had happened with the second.

Over the summer break, Senator RICK SCOTT and I took a trip to Israel and saw all of that which goes into its preparedness against the evil that lurks around the world. I saw it again up close, and it always makes me wonder: How can they live like that? How can they be prepared when they know there are always individuals and countries out there just like in 1941 and just like in 2001? Imagine living in a country in which your entire border is surrounded by a fence or a wall in order to keep people out—where, in the tough places, there is another barrier and where, in the really tough places, there is a dirt berm.

That drove home again how important it is to be prepared and to always be strong when it comes to defending this country and the liberty and freedoms we all enjoy every day. I never thought it could happen in 1941, and I didn't think it could happen in 2001. It can happen again because that is the world we live in.

When I came here as a U.S. Senator, I always knew the most important thing this body should do was foster the defense and the security of this country. When you see it has slipped so precariously over the last few years—and thank goodness that we have built it back up to a level that makes sense—it is because we always need to be prepared. If we are going to truly honor all of the lives that were lost in 1941 and 2001 and will be inevitably lost down the road, we need to be strong; we need to be prepared. We always need to be aware of the fact that we are blessed just as the State of Israel is blessed—despite all of that—with a thriving economy. They live with that danger every day, and they find a way to get through it. Let us never let our guard down or drop our defenses here. Our freedom and our liberty depend upon it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, as my friend from Indiana and others have pointed out today, this is a day that Americans remember as a day of unique tragedy. Earlier today, on the Senate floor, we had a moment of silence in the middle of a series of votes. The Senate floor was full of Members who paused to think about what had happened on that day.

I think almost every American alive knows where he was that morning. Just like this morning, it was beautiful and clear. If you were too young to remember where you were that morning—and there is a real likelihood that your parents told you where you were—it was a seminal moment. It changed how we look at so many things in our country. We reflect today where we were and the changes that occurred after that.

I was working on the other side of the building as a Member of the House 18 years ago, and I shared with the Capitol Police today my appreciation for what they do every day. On this day every year, I remember being one of the last people to leave this building. The Capitol Police were working hard to get people out as there was a sense that a plane was coming here and was going to either hit the White House or the Capitol. I remember walking out the door—I really was among the last to leave the building that day—and I remember looking into the eyes of a Capitol Police Officer who was still at the door and thinking and realizing that I was going to be out. If the building were a target, I was quickly going to be somewhere else, and she was still going to be here until those who work to protect us every day were sure that everybody who could possibly be found and gotten out of the building was already gone.

We clearly understand the world is a dangerous place. We just had a foreign policy discussion this week about the country that had served as really the haven for al-Qaeda and what would happen if we were to totally leave that