

race, women's equality, LGBTQ rights, and the rights of immigrants should be disqualifying. At the Department of Education, he helped to cook up an illegal scheme to use the Social Security data of students who had been swindled by for-profit colleges in order to deny them debt relief. A judge ruled this scheme violated Federal privacy laws.

At the very least, a candidate for a judgeship should show respect for the law. That is the lowest possible bar. A judge is supposed to revere the law, uphold it, and apply it with an even hand. How can anyone trust Mr. Menashi to come even close to doing that? Mr. Menashi is a textbook example of someone who does not deserve to sit on the Federal bench, particularly with a lifetime appointment.

My Republican colleagues, in my view, have rubberstamped too many of these extreme, unqualified nominees—nominees, in Mr. Menashi's case, who have been almost craven, but on few occasions, a small group has stood up and said: Enough. This is too far.

Well, my colleagues, if there were ever anyone who was too far, it is Menashi. There is no reason President Trump couldn't find a more suitable nominee for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. I urge my Republican colleagues to do the right thing today and reject the Menashi nomination.

TAX RETURNS

On tax returns, yesterday a Federal appeals court ruled that Congress can seek 8 years of the President's tax returns. No doubt, the President will appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court in an effort to keep hidden what the President has been hiding for as long as he has been in public life—his tax returns.

Why the President has engaged in such an astounding breach of transparency is still unknown.

President Trump, what are you hiding?

The DC Circuit's decision—an 8-to-3 ruling—was clearly the correct legal result. It should be upheld.

FARMERS AND VETERANS

Last but not least, on farmers and veterans, President Trump has long fashioned himself a champion of everyday Americans—workers, farmers, veterans. This week has been a grim reminder that despite the President's promises, almost every week his administration undermines the very people he claims to champion.

Take our veterans whose service we commemorated earlier this week on Veterans Day. The Department of Veterans Affairs decided in 2017 to help Vietnam-era veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange by expanding the list of diseases that were eligible for health benefits to include bladder cancer, hypertension, Parkinson's-like symptoms, and hypothyroidism.

There are tens of thousands of veterans whose lives would be changed by this decision. It was the right decision based on research done by the VA. Unfortunately, it was recently revealed

that OMB Director and Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney blocked funding for these new health benefits because of what it would cost. Think about that. Mick Mulvaney, who thought adding \$1.5 trillion to our deficit was an acceptable cost for tax cuts to the rich, believes the cost of health benefits for sick veterans is just too high. So wrong. So wrong. It is shameful that Mulvaney could actually be in the position he is.

The next time the President claims to be a champion for our Nation's veterans, the American people should remember what he is doing here—denying benefits to men and women who were in our Armed Forces, exposed to Agent Orange, and are now sick. It is too expensive to help them but not too expensive to give tax cuts to the wealthiest of Americans. Shame on the administration, shame on Mulvaney, and shame on President Trump.

What about our farmers? It is no secret that America's farmers have struggled as a result of President Trump's trade policies and retaliatory tariffs from other countries. The administration even created a new program through USDA to help offset the losses farmers were facing.

Well, now it turns out that the Trump administration has grossly mishandled that program. A report by the Democratic minority on the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, led by its ranking member, Senator STABENOW, revealed that the lion's share of Federal aid has gone to large agricultural conglomerates scattered across the South, not to small family farms in the Midwest who have suffered the most. Ninety-five percent of the largest per-acre payments have gone to Southern States, while the lowest payments have disproportionately gone to the farmers who are suffering in the Midwest. The administration lifted the limits on aid to row crops but kept the limits for other crops, meaning that more aid has gone into the pockets of the largest and wealthiest farms in America. The report even showed that tens of millions of dollars have gone to foreign-owned entities, including a beef factory in Brazil.

President Trump has claimed to look after our farmers, and he has claimed to look after our veterans, but he has instead turned his back on them. More and more Americans—farmers, veterans, others—are starting to notice.

I yield the floor.

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

H.R. 8

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senators MURPHY and BLUMENTHAL for their tremendous leadership that we are here on the floor today to speak about.

I come today not just as a Member of the Senate representing my home State of Washington but as a former educator, as a mother, and as a grand-

mother devastated by how the gun violence epidemic is tearing apart our families and ravaging our communities in every State.

I am furious at Republican leaders who continue to stand by and do nothing while more and more lives are lost, just as I was after Newtown, Parkland, Sutherland Springs, and Marysville in my home State of Washington. I could go on.

We don't have to continue this cycle of violence, heartbreak, and inaction, and we are here today to emphasize that there is action we can take right now because earlier this year, the House passed H.R. 8—meaningful, bipartisan gun safety legislation—to address this terrible crisis through universal background checks and other popular reforms. But in the 260 days since H.R. 8 passed the House, it has languished here in the Senate despite repeated calls from myself and my Democratic colleagues for a vote.

That is why 58 days ago, following the tragic events at El Paso, Dayton, and Midland, I joined my Senate Democratic colleagues here on the floor to try to break the cycle and demand that we address the scourge of gun violence in this country by taking a vote here in the Senate on H.R. 8, which would install universal background checks—a policy that, by the way, is supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans.

In the face of Republican apathy, people across the country raised their voices even louder, demanding action to end the endless wave of gun tragedy, so much so that after this summer's string of horrors, President Trump bowed to public pressure and made a commitment to finally act to address the gun violence epidemic.

After months and years of inaction and far, far too many lives lost, it was the first sliver of hope in a long while—that the President and Senate Republicans would finally put the safety of our families over their allegiance to the NRA and do something substantive about ending this Nation's gun violence epidemic, working with Democrats toward commonsense reforms to end gun violence and keep people safe.

Now, more than 2 months later, President Trump has betrayed his pledge to address this tragic epidemic as if the past summer never even happened. Once again, he has chosen to abdicate his responsibility to keep our families and our communities safe and has broken yet another promise he made to the American people, kowtowing to the NRA and its unpopular, hard-right agenda to stymie commonsense gun reform as soon as mass shootings were out of the headlines.

Well, I can assure you, Senate Democrats and I are going to keep fighting for commonsense gun safety reforms, like universal background checks, even when gun violence isn't making a headline that day, because while President Trump continues carrying water for the NRA and Senate Republicans continue hiding behind President Trump,

Democrats here understand that Congress has a duty to act to protect lives, and that the President's cowardice absolutely should not set Congress's agenda.

While President Trump's backtracking on this serious issue is disgraceful, I ask my Republican colleagues to remember that we are not beholden to the President or to the gun lobby and that we do not need President Trump's permission to vote on bills or to act to save lives.

In fact, in States across the country, we have been able to take on the gun lobby and make meaningful progress to address this crisis.

In my home State of Washington, we have closed background check loopholes, and we have enacted extreme risk protection orders. We were able to accomplish those things because of the advocacy of groups like Moms Demand Action across my State, the Washington State Alliance for Gun Responsibility, Everytown for Gun Safety, March for Our Lives, and so many more, as well as the dedicated volunteers and activists behind those organizations, the brave people who have been out making their voices heard and putting pressure on lawmakers to do their jobs to end this senseless epidemic, people like Jane Weiss, who lives in Mill Creek, WA. After she tragically lost her niece to gun violence, Jane joined the fight to pass lifesaving legislation in Washington State by putting pressure on her State lawmakers and won.

There are people like Jane all across the country who are speaking up and fighting back, even when it means reliving some of the hardest moments of their lives, in order to prevent others from suffering as much as they have. That is hard and brave work to do, but there is absolutely nothing hard or brave about simply having a vote on bipartisan, House-passed legislation to ensure universal background checks. To the contrary, it is the height of cowardice not to hold that vote while families across the country wonder which movie theater or shopping mall or synagogue or mosque or church or community space is next and while students spend their time in school on active shooter drills while they should be learning. Unfortunately, cowardice is what we are seeing from far too many Republicans here in the Senate and in the White House when it comes to protecting families from this scourge of gun violence.

I want to be clear. I hope my Republican colleagues allow this legislation to pass today, but if they don't, for Jane and so many others, Senate Democrats are going to keep shining a spotlight on the inaction on gun violence here in the Senate and the broken promises coming out of the White House. We are going to keep making the case, building support, and we will not give up until this is done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 8

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, as Senator MURRAY noted, 100 people die from gunshot wounds every single day. We can't go 24 hours without news of another mass shooting somewhere in America. My kids and millions of others hide in corners of their classrooms or in their bathrooms preparing for a mass shooting at their school, and this body does nothing about it.

The good news is, we have a piece of legislation that enjoys 95 percent support in the American public and will undoubtedly make an enormous impact on gun violence rates in this country.

I will give more extensive remarks after I make this unanimous consent request, but my request will be that the Senate immediately take up H.R. 8, the universal background checks bill which was passed in a bipartisan way in the House of Representatives and which has received no action, no debate here in the U.S. Senate since that time.

As in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 29, H.R. 8; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Mississippi.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, legislation that would affect the rights of American citizens under the Second Amendment should not be fast-tracked by the Senate. Efforts to criminalize otherwise lawful conduct with firearms by law-abiding gun owners should not be exempt from consideration by the appropriate committee of jurisdiction. It should not be exempt from debate on the Senate floor.

If this so-called commonsense, bipartisan legislation was indeed crafted with strong bipartisan input, it shouldn't have any problems advancing by regular order.

Many questions about this legislation need to be answered before it is forced upon law-abiding gun owners. If I wanted to give my best friend's son or grandson my hunting rifle, would we first have to appear before a licensed gun dealer and go through a lengthy and potentially expensive background check? This is my understanding. We have many questions like this.

My constituents would like to have an opportunity to weigh in on measures like these, which is why we can't fast-track legislation that affects America's Second Amendment rights.

I object to this unanimous consent.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I appreciate the good-faith objection from my friend from Mississippi, but the good

news that I can convey to her is that my Republican Senate friends who want to have some impact into the consideration of the future of American gun laws have ample opportunity to do that because they are in the majority.

Senate Republicans control the Judiciary Committee. Senator MCCONNELL can decide to bring any measure to the floor. If the concern is that there hasn't been enough Republican input into the question of whether criminals or terrorists or people who are seriously mentally ill get guns, then, convene a discussion on this, bring a debate to the floor, have a process in the Judiciary Committee. Don't just stay silent. It doesn't pass the straight-face test to come down here and say: Well, we can't take up H.R. 8, despite the fact it has 90 percent public approval because we haven't had input on it. You are in the majority. You have the ability to pass legislation that you support and that Democrats can support as well.

The idea that we are just going to sit here and twiddle our thumbs week after week as 100 people are killed by guns through suicides and homicides and accidental shootings is an abdication of our basic responsibility as U.S. Senators. There is nothing that matters more to our constituents than their physical safety.

There are kids who are walking to school in cities in every single State in this Nation who fear for their lives, whose brain chemistry is changed by the trauma they go through because of that fear for their safety, and they can't learn, they can't cope, and they can't build strong relationships.

My kids go through active shooter drills at school because they, in fact, expect that someday someone will walk through their doors and start firing a military-style assault weapon in one of their classrooms.

I get it that there is a difference of opinion on exactly how we should expand background checks. I understand that maybe my Republican colleagues don't want to support H.R. 8. But you are in the majority. You have the ability to lead a conversation that can find that common ground on expanding background checks.

I am not going to accept this argument that we can't bring H.R. 8 to the floor because we have some concerns about it. I can't get a piece of legislation to the floor any other way than to offer this motion.

The American public is not going to accept silence from this body week after week, month after month, in the face of this epidemic carnage that is happening across this country. Parents know their kids aren't safe, and they expect us to act.

The President's Attorney General said the other day that we made some progress on the issue of background checks over the summer, but now we have the impeachment proceedings, and so that stops all of this discussion.