

and kids can no longer be kids. They have all heard too many stories of toddlers in strollers killed by a stray bullet or parents murdered while picking up their own kids from school.

But these everyday gun deaths no longer garner the attention they demand. We have become desensitized, even as elementary schoolers' lives are being stolen and survivors' innocence are lost. Every gun death is a tragedy that can and should be prevented. This is a uniquely American disease, and it requires a national solution.

So I am here on the floor today to plead with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to help keep another toddler from having to cry out for his parents amidst gunshots and terror; to help stop another day of patriotism, another math class, another trip to the grocery store from turning into a living nightmare.

I plead with them to help prevent all that by passing the assault weapons ban, legislation that would block the further sale, transfer, manufacture, and importation of military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines for civilian use.

I spent 23 years in the Army. So I recognize a weapon of war when I see one. I know why you would need to use them, the power they wield, and what they can do to a human body.

I understand that the M4, the M16, and their civilian variants—known generically as AR-15 rifles—were designed for the battlefield. From their portability, rapid rates of fire, power and accuracy to their effective range, these weapons were designed to rip apart the human body so your enemy cannot get back up and fire back at you on the field of combat.

These are weapons of the battlefield and have no business being on our streets and in our schools. There is a reason why the parents in Uvalde had to submit DNA to identify their murdered children. These AR-15 style rifles fire small caliber ammunition at a velocity that can easily penetrate many kinds of body armor even at a distance. So when an unprotected child is shot with an AR-15 at close range, the results are horrific.

And as anyone who has ever carried an M4 into combat understands, the American people should not be misled into thinking that AR-15 rifles are safe for our communities or that a ban on fully automatic machine guns is sufficient to protect our children from the most dangerous weapons of war.

Mass shooters are hunting mothers in malls, fathers in theaters, and children in their schools. For that evil purpose, a semiautomatic rifle is the perfect weapon because it is lightweight, portable, and easy to load with high-capacity magazines.

It couples the speed of automatically chambering the next round after each shot with maximum accuracy—a combination designed to kill as many people as possible, as fast as possible, as efficiently as possible.

So the first thing I thought when I heard the audio of last week's tragedy was that it sounded like war because the last time I heard the sound of gunfire that rapid and that many rounds going off on the Fourth of July was when I was serving in Iraq. I never thought I would hear that on this holiday again, let alone here on U.S. soil.

And I live, like so many other moms, in daily fear that my own daughters will be forced to hear that nightmarish soundtrack of war in their own classrooms or their own local parade.

You know, a few weeks ago I went to talk to my daughters' class about Memorial Day. Both girls' teachers had asked me to come and explain the meaning of Memorial Day, to talk about the sacrifices of our troops, what we have done to safeguard our freedoms and rights as a nation, including, as the Constitution says, our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

As I was talking, I happened to look outside the window of my older girl's classroom, only to see my younger daughter walking in a line, following behind the other kids in her class in the middle of a shelter-in-place drill. And I watched as that little row of 3- and 4-year-olds crouched down as small as they could get, and my daughter, with her head against the wall, put her hands over her head, learning to protect herself should there be a mass shooting.

She is just 4 years old. And she was already being taught how to survive if someone with a weapon of war comes into the classroom where she is just beginning to learn her ABCs, believing that their right to fire assault rifles matters more than her right to make it to age 5.

What I felt was close to horror. And I know other parents have felt the same. I am far from the only mom who will hug their kids a little tighter while putting them to bed tonight, then spend hours looking up ballistic backpacks to protect my girls in case the worst-case scenario becomes reality. But the horrible truth is, even ballistic backpacks may not stop these rounds.

This week alone, hundreds of Illinoisans and survivors from other mass shootings were gathered at the Capitol. These people—mostly moms—are still recovering from major trauma. And they have jobs and childcare responsibilities and no experience lobbying Congress. Yet they made the trip to Washington, DC, because they know that their children's lives depend on it and because they are beyond furious at the lack of action to ban these weapons of war that have terrorized all of our communities.

What these moms want isn't impossible. It wouldn't even be that difficult if more folks would grow a conscience. These parents want us to do better for them, for their kids, for all those in Highland Park last week, and for every person who has so needlessly lost their

life to gun violence, whether in a mass shooting or in a tragedy involving a single bullet.

The folks at that parade last Monday were there to celebrate life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Seven of them will never be able to do so again.

We have to stop this. We have to end this cycle. And we can take a step towards doing so right now by getting these weapons of war off our streets and passing this bill immediately.

To anyone who says no, to anyone who objects to passing this bill, I want to know how you can show off taking pride in our country on a holiday, then turn your back on its citizens 1 week later. I want you to say all the names of the ever-growing list of victims of these preventable tragedies.

I want you to remember Aiden's pleas for his mom and dad, to think of the sounds of the gunshots that those children in Uvalde heard, to try to fathom the anguish of the parents whose teenagers are gunned down in senseless, everyday violence on our streets. I want you to explain to them why the dollars that you get from the NRA are worth their pain, their tears, their tragedy.

Please, I am asking, explain how that campaign contribution is worth this endless cycle of blood and death. Explain how your gun-lobbying, fattened campaign funds are worth another parent having to bury their first grader in their favorite pair of Converse sneakers.

Or, if you don't believe those checks are worth it, if you don't actually value your political self-interests more than those Americans' lives, then please join me in passing this bill. It is that simple.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

GENERAL MARK A. MILLEY

MR. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am here today in the Senate to sound the alarm about one of America's guiding principles—everybody knows about this—the constitutional principle of civilian control of our military, very much a cornerstone of our Republic.

This fundamental principle of self-government may have been in jeopardy during the final days of the Trump administration, but before I get to that, I will provide a historical context.

That principle became part of the American fabric on June 14, 1775, when the Congress of the Continental Congress appointed George Washington commander of the Continental Army. His commission ordered him to report to civilian authorities.

It specified:

You—

Meaning the new General Washington—

are punctually to observe such orders and directions, from time to time, as you shall receive from this, or a future Congress of these United Colonies.

Well, he followed that. At the war's end, General Washington gave this

principle lasting purpose, and he did it with power and grace.

On December 23, 1783, in a solemn ceremony at the statehouse in Annapolis, George Washington voluntarily surrendered his commission, as well as his military power, to civilian authority, the President of the Continental Congress. The scene is memorialized in a dramatic John Trumbull painting that is displayed in the Rotunda not far from here. All of my colleagues go through that part of this Capitol every day and probably don't pay a lot of attention to it, but it is an important description of our basic constitutional principles.

We know there are other ways of doing these things in other countries. We know that dictators rule their nations with an iron fist because they control the sword. Washington selflessly laid down that sword to ensure America's destiny for generations to come. He chose to disband the Army and return to private life at Mount Vernon.

One scholar explained it this way:

The Virginian . . . went home to plow.

By this noble act, Washington cemented a crown jewel of self-rule: civilian control of the military. Five years later, as Washington was elected President, this bedrock principle was enshrined in our Constitution.

While this governing rule is essential to the preservation of democracy, it has been challenged with grave consequences. The Truman-MacArthur dispute over conducting the Korean war is a case in point. President Truman wanted to limit the war. General MacArthur disagreed. General MacArthur defied orders, and General MacArthur criticized his Commander in Chief's—Truman's—decision, and he did that publicly, so Truman fired him for insubordination.

Now I want to get to the main purpose of coming to the floor. Recently, several books, including a book entitled "Peril" by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, suggest that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, may have trampled on this principle. The book "Peril" provides an alarming account of his words and deeds.

Milley told the authors he "was certain" that the Commander in Chief was "in serious mental decline . . . and could go rogue and order military action or the use of nuclear weapons. Milley felt no absolute certainty the military could control or trust the President."

So Milley, in his words, "took any and all necessary precautions."

"His job," he said, was "to think the unthinkable" and, in his words, "pull a Schlesinger." To "contain Trump," he had to "inject a second opinion." His opinion was then injected into the command structure.

In doing so, he may have stepped out of his lane as the President's principal military adviser and into the statutory chain of command where law doesn't

allow him to go because, by law, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has no command authority.

When President Nixon faced a crisis over impeachment and resignation, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger feared that he might order an unprovoked nuclear strike. So he, Schlesinger, reportedly took extra legal steps to prevent it. That is the same Schlesinger that Milley referred to as he was being interviewed for this book.

It happens that "pulling a Milley" as opposed to a "Schlesinger" is a very different kettle of fish. A four-star general can't "pull a Schlesinger." Schlesinger was at the top of the chain of command, just below the President. He kept the President's constitutional command authority firmly in civilian hands as the Constitution requires. Milley allegedly placed military hands—his hands—on controls that belong exclusively to the President.

According to "Peril," the book I am referring to, he summoned senior operations officers in the Military Command Center to his office. He had them take "an oath" not to "act" on the President's orders without checking with him first.

These brazen words and actions, if accurate, strike at the heart of our democracy: civilian control of the military. They turn this guiding rule upside down and show utter contempt for the Commander in Chief. Coming from the Nation's top general, they are dangerous and contrary to military code 10 U.S.C. 888.

After describing Milley's actions, the book's authors rightly ask this question: "Was he subverting the President?" Had he "overstepped his authority and taken extraordinary power for himself?"

Milley assured this Senator in a letter to this Senator that his actions were on the up and up. The book, however, seems to imply a different story. I had a hearing where the general was. Senator BLACKBURN asked him about the mismatch. He replied: "I haven't read any of the books, so I don't know."

She said to him: "Read them and report back to us."

He said: "Absolutely," he agreed. "Happy to do that."

Nine months later, he is still dodging the question with the same lame excuse.

To crank up the pressure, I joined Senators Paul and Blackburn a few months ago in a letter pushing for a straight answer. When none came, I began sending handwritten notes to the general. I soon received a 10-page letter from General Milley that ignored the question. My second note sparked an email. It claimed that our letter did not raise "a direct question" and asserted "General Milley answered the specific questions."

I think I can legitimately ask: Is that Pentagon baloney or what is it?

After my third note, General Milley responded with the same old smoke-

and-mirrors routine: "I have never read the books."

Years of oversight have taught me this lesson: Evasive answers usually offer revealing clues about the truth. I think General Milley knows better. He knows the score. If those books and all attendant press coverage of those books contained gross misrepresentations, we would have heard about it a long time ago. He would have hammered the authors and corrected the record. However, to date, not a peep from the general. His silence speaks volumes.

Something doesn't smell right. As the Pentagon watchdog, when I get a whiff of wrongdoing, I sink in my teeth and don't let go.

So Congressman JIM BANKS, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, and I upped the ante on April 11. With 12 pointed questions, we gave General Milley a second bite of the apple to clear the air. Now, 2½ months later, we still have no response.

General Milley, you said you were going to answer Senator BLACKBURN's question. Honor your word. Answer the question. Come clean with the American people. We are all ears.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

FREEDOM TO TRAVEL FOR HEALTH CARE ACT

Mr. Kaine. Mr. President, I rise to offer my own thoughts on the Dobbs decision that the Supreme Court rendered a couple of weeks back right after we went into a July Fourth recess.

My colleagues were on the floor earlier advocating for a bill that would go after the pernicious practice of States in trying to penalize women from traveling to seek reproductive healthcare. I am a strong supporter of that legislation. I understand it will be proposed for floor action later today.

I wanted to focus on two particular elements of the Dobbs decision that, as a former civil rights lawyer, struck me very, very deeply. Never in my life—I am 64 years old—has the Supreme Court taken away constitutional rights that had been counted on by generations of Americans. The Court has narrowed rights, redefined rights, articulated new standards for judging rights, but they have not taken rights away.

In this instance, the Supreme Court took away rights that had been established in both *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. They took away those rights for women to make reproductive healthcare decisions and ruled that the 14th Amendment to the Constitution—which protects citizens' ability to enjoy privileges and immunities of other States and persons' abilities to be treated equally under the law and not have life, liberty, or property—be taken from them without due process.

The Court ruled that the 14th Amendment, the Constitution, had nothing to do with women's reproductive rights. In my view, that is a horrible