

problem, instead of just putting an expensive bandaid on that problem.

First, I am all for encouraging innovation, but let's be clear: The motto "move fast and break things" has a cost, and we don't want that cost to be imposed on our children.

We know that Big Tech will never hold themselves accountable to any acceptable safety standard. The creation of safety by design and the resulting accountability should be our goal.

Second, we want to make sure that these safety standards don't allow these companies to take their hands off the wheel once certain requirements are met. Verifying a user's age or obtaining parental consent for minors to use the platforms—that is important, but it will not stop children from getting bombarded with dangerous content once they are online.

And, finally, legislation must not simply shift the burden of controlling the spread of this dangerous content onto the parents. This is precisely what Big Tech companies have been doing for years, and it is not working. Parents want to be involved, but they cannot protect their children if the platforms keep moving the goalposts to protect their business models.

Unfortunately, when our children are on these platforms, our children are the product. These platforms data mine our children, and then they market that data.

We have seen proposal after proposal fail, but after years of talking to parents and tech companies and policy experts, we finally have the opportunity to support a bill that does get it right.

Last week, Senator BLUMENTHAL and I reintroduced the Kids Online Safety Act. As of today, this bill has 33 bipartisan cosponsors and the endorsement of hundreds of bipartisan organizations because it does exactly what moms like Joann Bogard and other advocates have been asking Congress to do.

First, it would force platforms to give families the ability to protect minors' information, disable addictive product features, and opt out of algorithmic recommendations.

Next, it would give parents the safeguards needed to protect their kids online, as well as a dedicated portal to report harmful behavior.

Predatory content and content that promotes self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders—all of this that causes problems for our kids would become a problem that the platforms have to deal with—no more denial, no more deflection.

We also included requirements for annual risk assessments and access to datasets we can use to assess safety threats to underage users.

This is a very straightforward bill. It won't hinder innovation. It won't allow platforms to take their hands off the wheel, and it won't put the burden on parents to try to figure out how in the world to control the access their children have to this harmful content.

Our children are exposed to things in the virtual space that we would never

allow them to be exposed to in the physical space. Over the past few years we have heard pundit after armchair pundit insist that it is time to treat our kids like grownups. But our children are not adults, and it is our responsibility to protect them so that, one day, they will have the opportunity to be grownups. Our children are being exposed to things that no reasonable parent would ever allow their child to know about these things.

If there is one thing we have learned during our hearings with the Consumer Protection Subcommittee, it is that simply encouraging more supervision is not enough. A high-tech permission slip just isn't going to cut it. If we want to keep kids safe online, we have to demand real accountability from these Big Tech social media platforms.

Last Congress, the Kids Online Safety Act passed out of the Commerce Committee 28 to 0. That is right—unanimous support. I would ask my colleagues on each side of the aisle to join me and Senator BLUMENTHAL in calling for a vote so that we can finally push this bill across the finish line and provide parents the toolbox they need to protect their children from the harm in the virtual media.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been a rough weekend in Texas. Last weekend, tragedy struck the city of Allen, TX, and a driver in Brownsville drove into a group of migrants, killing a number of them and injuring others. In both cases, the circumstances surrounding these incidents are still being investigated.

On a beautiful Saturday afternoon, people of all ages visited a popular outdoor mall in the suburbs north of Dallas. That is where Allen is. Shoppers filtered in and out of stores with their children and were enjoying what appeared to be a normal weekend, but, as we know now, the day took a tragic turn when a man drove up to the crowded shopping mall and got out of his car with a gun and began firing. Shoppers ducked behind cars and ran into stores. Customers crowded into tiny storage rooms. Parents used their own bodies to protect their children. The shooter murdered eight innocent people and wounded seven others before being killed himself by police. The victims were between the ages of 3 and 37.

A patch on the shooter's clothing and his social media posts suggest that he might have espoused White supremacist and other extremist views. As I said, law enforcement is still gathering

information about him and his motives, but what we know so far is that he was discharged from the army prematurely due to mental health reasons. But it is unclear if that discharge or any other factors would have legally disqualified him from purchasing a firearm.

Obviously, a dishonorable discharge, a felony conviction—those sorts of things—would result in your being prohibited under existing law from purchasing a firearm, but we don't know whether there are other circumstances beyond his premature discharge from the army after only 3 months due to mental health reasons which rise to the level necessary to invoke one of those disqualifying actions.

So at this moment, there is still a lot we don't know. And, of course, at times like this, we are all trying to make sense of this unspeakable tragedy. Obviously, I am eager to learn more about the circumstances that led to this attack. But one thing is for sure, and that is local law enforcement officials leading this investigation and searching for answers have already done heroic work, thanks to an Allen Police Department officer who was at the mall for other reasons and who was able to respond quickly and neutralize the shooter. But for that police officer, many others would have been injured and died.

So I am grateful to the police officers, the emergency medical technicians, and healthcare workers who responded to this tragedy—as I said, especially the heroic officer who responded to gunfire and immediately ran toward the danger.

The shooter was carrying multiple weapons and had five additional guns in his car. If not for the quick action of that police officer, there is no question that even more families would be grieving today. I have spoken to local officials who are responding to this crisis, including Mayor Ken Fulk and Police Chief Brian Harvey. I offered my condolences and offered whatever help we might be able to provide, whatever assistance we can provide.

One of the things Chief Harvey told me that he particularly appreciated is the FBI had come forward with crime victim services, a number of FBI agents providing that assistance to the victims of this terrible shooting, which relieves a lot of the pressure on this local police department. And, of course, the FBI is now taking the lead in the investigation, supported by Texas Rangers, the Department of Public Safety, and, of course, the Allen Police Department.

So, today, I join all Texans in grieving this senseless tragedy. We mourn the eight lives that were stolen and lift up the survivors, who will never forget the horror they endured that day.

I know, Mr. President, because I have been part of negotiations over the last few years involving the so-called Fix NICS legislation—Senator CHRIS MURPHY of Connecticut and I took the lead

on that bill to try to fix gaps in the background check system. The one area of consensus between people who are avid supporters of the Second Amendment and those who believe that we ought to ban some types of weapons, even for law-abiding citizens—the one area we can agree on is that people with criminal records and people who are mentally ill should not be able to purchase firearms. And that is simply enforcing current law.

So we were able to do something in the Fix NICS bill a couple of years back—I think it was 2018 now—that I believed met my test for whether we should do legislation like that, and that is: Will it save lives? And I believe it has.

More recently, we passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which is so new that it is only now being implemented. This bill did, of course, a number of things. It provided for an enhanced background checks for gun purchasers between the age of 18 and 21. The reason why that age group is so important is because the profile of many of these disaffected young men—who are obviously suffering from severe mental illness, who are so tortured that they not only want to commit suicide, they want to take other people with them—that cohort, that group of young purchasers, I believed we needed to go back and look at some of the juvenile records for mental health adjudications, for criminal convictions.

These are the sorts of things that, if you had been an adult, would disqualify you, and you would not be able to purchase a firearm under existing law. But in Uvalde, TX, Salvador Ramos turned 18 years old, and even though everybody in the neighborhood knew he was a ticking time bomb—he had tortured animals; he had posted threats on social media; he shot his own grandmother who insisted he go back to school after a long absence due to COVID restrictions—he was able to purchase firearms without revealing anything about his juvenile record, without consulting with the local police, who knew him well.

That has all changed by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. And the most recent tally I saw from the FBI is that approximately 100 different purchases have been intercepted for individuals between the age of 18 and 21 who had disqualifying juvenile records that are now being queried as a result of that bill.

But the other parts of it that were so important are that we made the single largest investment in community-based mental health care in American history in that bill. We were able to find an offset so it didn't involve spending new money, but it was billions of dollars in investment so more communities can have locally based community health services. Because, frankly, there are too many people falling through that net. The net doesn't really even exist.

And we also made sure that our schools provided more comprehensive services. Part of the problem, though, is that, as there is more demand for mental health counseling and treatment, there are not enough people qualified to provide those sorts of services. So this is a huge problem.

The bill provided grants and incentives to educational institutions so more people would train in those areas and so there would be more resources available for people suffering from psychological stress or even mental illness so that they can hopefully get better and become productive members of society.

So I know, at times like this, people say: Well, we need to do something. Twice in recent history the U.S. Congress has come together on a bipartisan basis to do something that meets that test I mentioned a moment ago: Will it save lives? And I believe, in both instances, the legislation we passed that was signed by the President will save lives.

But, of course, then we see what happened in Allen, and we wonder: What else is there? I mentioned the fact that these mass shooters, not only are they taking the lives of innocent people, they are, essentially, committing suicide themselves. They know they are not going to make it out of here alive. And there is this phenomenon that I learned from law enforcement called “suicide by cop” where actually mentally ill individuals who are unwilling to take their own life will encounter the police in a violent encounter which results in their loss of life, which, essentially, is a way of their committing suicide.

I believe these mass shootings are also a form of suicide because these shooters know they are not going to make their way out of it. But, tragically, not only do they take their own life; they take the lives of innocent others.

So we grieve with all the families and the entire community in and around Allen, TX, as we do each time one of these incidents occurs, and we will continue to look for ways we can find solutions to this sort of violence. But eventually or ultimately, I believe, what we are talking about are crimes; that while we can investigate crimes, we can prosecute crimes, we can punish crime, and we can even deter crime, but we haven't yet figured a way to stop crime.

But, hopefully, there is more we can do.

#### DEBT CEILING

Mr. President, on another matter, the President of the United States convened his first meeting of the four top congressional leaders to discuss the looming debt crisis. A potential default has been on the horizon for months now, and from the beginning, both sides—Republicans and Democrats—have said: We believe the debt ceiling needs to be addressed.

Republicans, for their part, have said: We need to do what we have done

before, and that is to couple a debt ceiling increase with spending reforms because you just can't keep maxing out your credit card and go back and ask that the credit card limits be increased without coming up with some plan to actually pay down the debt you incur. That has happened time and time again. I believe President Biden, when he was in the Senate, voted for that sort of coupling of spending reforms and debt ceiling increase. I think it was four times, if memory serves me correctly.

But never before has the national debt been the size it is now. Of course, you can point to COVID-19. This was, to my mind, sort of the equivalent of a domestic “World War III”; although, it was a healthcare battle and war, and we had to do whatever we could to deal with it, and we did. But that spending continued when President Biden was in office with a Democratic House and Senate; and, without any additional votes from Republicans, after we had done that together—as we should do things in a bipartisan way if we can—Democrats, including the President, added another \$2.7 trillion to the national debt.

And now the President takes the incredibly irresponsible position that: I am not going to negotiate. We just want to raise the debt ceiling. We don't want to talk about how we pay down that debt or any spending reforms.

Now, we all know the fact that, at \$31.5 trillion, \$31.7 trillion, we are on an unsustainable path. Everybody knows that. And the debt ceiling is important because it forces us to do something we should do anyway, and that is have a serious conversation about our Nation's spending habits, about Congress's spending habits.

Well, President Biden announced this debt ceiling crisis that was looming and subject only to how much money was coming in the door in terms of tax revenue as to when the “X” date would hit. Now we hear from the Secretary of the Treasury it is probably sometime in June. But instead of engaging back when the announcement was made, the President stuck his fingers in his ears and refused to even discuss any sort of negotiated outcome. Again, this is the party that spent more than \$2.6 trillion by themselves, and now they are refusing to entertain any ideas or any suggestion that, yes, America has a spending problem. But we know it does. We know we do, and we know Congress and the President are the only ones who can deal with it.

Well, to make matters worse, Democrats in Congress, including the President, have even attacked Republicans for trying to act responsibly to deal with this debt ceiling and have the temerity to suggest that, yes, there are some spending reforms that need to be coupled along with it.

Earlier this year, the Senate majority leader criticized House Republicans' approach to the debt ceiling as hostage-taking. He described it as