

law enforcement problem and not a public health problem.

I will join with any colleague on either side of the aisle to stop the scourge of fentanyl taking too many of our children, but, God, follow the evidence, and let's work together on what we see is actually lowering causes, lowering the rates of death.

So, yes, I object with a heart that is hurting with the same anger that my colleague has shown.

I will work with him. We have worked together before. Let's do something that is a comprehensive approach, that follows the data, that follows the report, that follows the National Institutes of Health and the DOJ's best recommendations.

I will join with him, and we will bring to the floor a comprehensive bill that does affect the fentanyl coming into our country, overwhelmingly being brought by Americans; that does affect law enforcement's capabilities and powers to detect those substances, as I found out on the border; that does impact the addicts that he so passionately and compassionately cares about. Let's do a comprehensive bill, not something that the data does not support will actually stop children from dying like they have died in the many seconds that I have talked.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I listened very carefully to my friend Senator BOOKER's remarks, and I appreciate them, and I thank him for his offer to work together. And I do want to work with him again, but I want to make a couple of things clear. My bill doesn't deal with addiction. My bill deals with dealers.

A pencil, the point of the pencil—enough heroin to fit on a point of a pencil will kill you dead. You are not walking around with 40 grams of fentanyl for your own personal use. You are going to deal it. You are going to cut other drugs with it. You are going to sell it to young people, probably not even tell them fentanyl is in it.

And you are not going to measure the fentanyl very carefully. If you get too much in it, somebody dies. There are others, because if you can get them to take your meth with fentanyl—laced with fentanyl—given that fentanyl is 50 times more powerful, more addictive than heroin, you can get them addicted.

I am not talking about addicts. I am talking about dealers—dealers in death, dealers that this body punishes less severely than a meth dealer or a crack cocaine dealer or a PCP dealer or an LSD dealer.

What you allow is what will continue. I don't know if my bill will stop all the fentanyl dealers in America. I can't make you that promise. But it will, sure as hell, stop the dealer caught dealing, and that will save lives.

I agree with my good friend Senator BOOKER. I believe in justice. The definition of justice for some is complicated. I believe in the definition that was put forth. I think it was Saint Augustine who said: Justice is when you get what you deserve. Justice is when you get what you deserve. And fentanyl dealers deserve, yes, a special place in hell, but they sure deserve to be punished more severely than dealers of less dangerous drugs.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 11 minutes, followed by Senator GRASSLEY for 10 minutes, and Senator MENENDEZ for 5 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Jersey.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I rise to speak about another public health crisis. I feel a little bit like I am in this horrific version of Ground Hog Day because I have come to the floor of the Senate to speak about this crisis time and time again.

This is a public health crisis that is happening only in America, a public health crisis that is impacting every community in this country, whether it is a rural town called Uvalde, a movie theater in Aurora, a school in Nashville—the uniquely American crisis of gun violence.

If you love this country, I will tell you, if America hasn't broken your heart, you don't love her enough. This is heart wrenching—a specifically, uniquely American epidemic.

And so I stand here on the Senate floor heartbroken, like so many Americans, and share the sense of obligation that we speak as a nation after a mass shooting, that we don't treat this like business as usual.

Decades ago, in this body, if eight people were shot and killed—I think we should share a sense of outrage with our heartbreak that in the face of almost daily reportings of gun violence victims, many of them innocent children, we have failed to respond to this crisis.

Instead, we choose the pathway of inaction or choosing a pathway where the action is in no way proportionate to the crisis. We have allowed carnage in our country to persist, and we have chosen to value the power of wealth and special interests to overcome the majority will of a nation.

It seems so common now to turn on the TV and see, yet again, Americans being slaughtered in our Nation. This past Saturday, that place was a shopping mall. It was in the suburbs of Dallas. It was in the suburbs of Dallas, where a shooter opened fire on shoppers with an AR-15-style rifle. We are still learning more about this event, but the early reports indicate that at least eight lives have been lost and numerous others wounded. Lives shattered, crippled by weapons that belong in a war zone, firing with bullets that

rip through bodies with gruesome reality; victims from their sixties to a child—to a child—that is 5 years old.

Only in America. Only in America.

Only in this country is something like this routine. Eight people killed, and we continue with a growing savage normalcy that just accepts this carnage. Eight more souls—eight more.

Every time one of these shootings happens, we go through the same motions, almost beginning to seem like autopilot. I see the same tweets. I see the same moans. I see similar statements. And then we seem to get to a point where it leaves the headlines, just to be replaced by another slaughter, by another shooting, by another mass murder, by another child dying, by another kid without his parents. We seem to have resigned ourselves to this cycle of carnage, and the responses are “thoughts and prayers.”

As the death toll climbs, thoughts and prayers. As more people die, thoughts and prayers. As more people are put into the ground, thoughts and prayers. As more families and communities and places of worship and places of commerce are forever remembered as the place where family members, friends, and loved ones died. Only in America. Only in America. Only in America.

Yesterday, May 8, was the 128th day of the year. In those 128 days, there have been 201—201 mass shootings. In those 128 days, more than 14,000 Americans have been killed by gun violence. In 128 days, there have been 12,000 Americans who have been injured, many of them crippled, many of them with forever scars on their bodies and trauma to their souls.

This staggering toll includes people who weren't shot in mass shootings. We just had a 14-year-old girl shot because she was playing hide-and-seek—shot in the back of the head because she went on someone else's property.

What about the young Black boy who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, mistakenly ringing the wrong doorbell, only to be shot and traumatized for the rest of his life.

What about the toddler, a toddler shot in the head after a gun fell off a shelf.

As of 2018, we have seen an explosion of gun purchases in the United States. We now have 390 million guns in circulation, which means there are more guns in this Nation right now than there are people.

In my lifetime alone, just a short 50-plus years of my life, more Americans have been killed by gun violence in the United States than all of our wars, from the Revolutionary War to the World Wars, to the Vietnam war, to the Korean war, to the War on Terror. Than all of our wars combined, we have had more people in our country killed by gun violence in the last 50 years. And every single day that this body does nothing, another 120 people die. Only in America. Only in America.

We have gun death rates that are 8 times higher than our northern neighbor Canada; 22 times higher than the

European Union; 23 times higher than Australia. Only in America. Only in America.

Fifty-eight percent of us now—more than half of Americans now—more than half of American adults have someone they care for who has experienced gun violence.

This creeping reality is eating into everyone in America. It is now the leading cause of premature death in the United States and the leading cause of death for our children. The No. 1 killer of American children is gun violence. Only in America. Only in America is the No. 1 cause of death for children gun violence. Nearly 19 percent of childhood deaths in 2021 were caused by firearms. Only in America. In no other comparable country are firearms even in the top four causes of mortality with our children.

Our kids are being forced to do active shooter drills more so now than fire drills, being forced to hold hands, to be taught to escape, to be taught to hide, to be implicitly told by adults that we can't protect you from the No. 1 cause of death.

What is this doing to our society? More than the deaths even is the trauma that is creeping like a cancer into all parts of our society. What is it doing to our collective hearts?

What is it doing to our one Nation under God that this cancer of trauma is entering neighborhoods and communities and towns and cities? What does it mean?

Well, research on trauma shows that the level of collective trauma constitutes a cataclysmic event that affects not just victims of violence but the society as a whole. It is a cancer. It undermines our fundamental sense of security.

If you look at other countries that have suffered these same tragedies that decided to act, that their collective response was to do something—Canada took steps to ban military-style assault weapons. New Zealand placed restrictions on AR-15s and other semi-automatic weapons. In Australia, they implemented a gun buyback program and other actions. In country after country that took action, they affirmed their collective agency to protect their nations. They responded to tragedy with action, to trauma with healing. And yet, only in America, while other nations make progress, we choose to normalize trauma.

People make comments like more guns, more guns will make us safer.

People make comments like, oh, well, it is mental health issues, when other nations have mental health crises.

Some argue—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. BOOKER. I ask unanimous consent for 3 more minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOOKER. We cannot profess to be a nation of freedom if we cannot free

our society from fear, if we can't free our society from violence. We cannot profess to live up to our values if the very Nation founded for—one of the reasons being common defense, but we can't defend our children.

Last week, I introduced with Senator WARREN the Firearms Safety Act, which would implement Federal safety regulations for firearms because right now guns—the most lethal of all consumer products—are the only products that aren't even subject to consumer safety regulations.

Look, I want to end with the truth. A police officer who arrived at the shooting in Allentown recounted discovering a young boy beneath his mother's lifeless body who died protecting this child. He shared with anguish the haunting encounter of finding a young girl also crouched in a prayer-like position. As he searched for signs of life, he turned her head to the side only to find the horror of her face missing. In her final moments on Earth, the position of that girl was in prayer—was to pray. And we in this country—only in America—our response is only thoughts and prayers?

We need to be the prayer answerers. We need to be the ones who respond when people call out for help.

How will we respond to this national nightmare?

What will we do to this uniquely American problem?

Will we show American might? Will we show American strength? Will we show American healing? Will we show American community? Will we show American love for our children or will we repeat this national nightmare over and over again?

When the shots ring out, people run, people hide, people pray. It is time that we in America answer those prayers with action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, in 1988, President Ronald Reagan first recognized May as National Foster Care Month. Every year since then, the month of May has been recognized as a time to bring awareness to the needs of America's young people who are placed in foster care. It is also important to recognize organizations in Iowa and around the country tirelessly serving kids and families in our foster care system.

I salute these organizations and individuals for their year-round efforts to support the kids, kids who are most in need.

In 2021, there were nearly 400,000 kids in foster care. More than 4,000 of those 400,000 are in my home State of Iowa.

Older youth in foster care and adults who experienced foster care as a child can speak to what worked for them and what didn't work. They should have a seat at the table and a voice in making policy about foster care.

When I founded the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth in 2009, the very special

focus of the caucus was to hear directly from young people in foster care. We also wanted to hear from those who had been aged out of the system without having a permanent place to call home.

Over and over again, I have heard an urgent point of view from these young people and also the teenagers who are in foster care. What I heard was that they would like some permanence. They would say it like they would like to have a mom and dad. They would like to have a family. They would want a place to call home, instead of being shuffled around—maybe two or three different schools in 1 year, which means two or three different foster homes in that year.

All children, no matter of their circumstances then, deserve a permanent, loving home. They need consistent, caring adults in their lives. This year during foster care month, I want to give special recognition to families who answer the call to help vulnerable children and the teens in their communities.

My resolution recognizing National Foster Care Month also marks May 31 as a very particular day to celebrate and show appreciation to foster parents.

Throughout my years in the U.S. Senate, I have worked to keep families together. For example, I have expanded access to prevention services to help parents safely keep custody of their children during substance abuse treatment. The family, as we all know, is the bedrock of our society, so we must work to strengthen the family in the hopes of keeping vulnerable children out of foster care in the first place.

At the same time, it is important that we support the very people who are taking care of these kids—the ones we call foster parents. They answer the call to take into their homes children and teens who have experienced trauma in their very young lives. Foster parents—all of them—deserve recognition and support.

In Iowa, almost every county has a shortage of foster parents who are able to provide temporary homes for these young people. Without volunteer foster parents, kids who cannot remain safely at home often end up sleeping in hotels or in offices of social workers.

I have introduced a bipartisan bill called the Recruiting Families Using Data Act. This legislation would improve how States recruit foster parents and help ensure that they are supported and actually heard. It would help States conduct targeted recruitment for specific areas of need and help kids get matched with the best families for their individual circumstances.

We know that having at least one loving adult in the lives of these young people can meaningfully improve the academic, the social, and the emotional well-being of these kids. That positive experience lasts long into adulthood.

When family reunification is not an option—and that ought to be the first