

like to ask unanimous consent that the New York Times article entitled “We Are No Strangers to Human Suffering, but We’ve Seen Nothing Like the Siege of Gaza” be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Dec. 11, 2023]

WE ARE NO STRANGERS TO HUMAN SUFFERING,
BUT WE’VE SEEN NOTHING LIKE THE SIEGE
OF GAZA

(By Michelle Nunn, Tjada D’Oyen McKenna,
Jan Egeland, Abby Maxman, Jeremy
Konyndyk and Janti Soeripto)

We are no strangers to human suffering—to conflict, to natural disasters, to some of the world’s largest and gravest catastrophes. We were there when fighting erupted in Khartoum, Sudan. As bombs rained down on Ukraine. When earthquakes leveled southern Turkey and northern Syria. As the Horn of Africa faced its worst drought in years. The list goes on.

But as the leaders of some of the world’s largest global humanitarian organizations, we have seen nothing like the siege of Gaza. In the more than two months since the horrifying attack on Israel that killed more than 1,200 people and resulted in some 240 abductions, about 18,000 Gazans—including more than 7,500 children—have been killed, according to the Gazan health ministry. More children have been reported killed in this conflict than in all major global conflicts combined last year.

The atrocities committed by Hamas on Oct. 7 were unconscionable and depraved, and the taking and holding of hostages is abhorrent. The calls for their release are urgent and justified. But the right to self-defense does not and cannot require unleashing this humanitarian nightmare on millions of civilians. It is not a path to accountability, healing or peace. In no other war we can think of in this century have civilians been so trapped, without any avenue or option to escape to save themselves and their children.

Most of our organizations have been operating in Gaza for decades. But we can do nothing remotely adequate to address the level of suffering there without an immediate and complete cease-fire and an end to the siege. The aerial bombardments have rendered our jobs impossible. The withholding of water, fuel, food and other basic goods has created an enormous scale of need that aid alone cannot offset.

Global leaders—and especially the United States government—must understand that we cannot save lives under these conditions. A significant change in approach from the U.S. government is needed today to pull Gaza back from this abyss.

For a start, the Biden administration must stop its diplomatic interference at the United Nations, blocking calls for a cease-fire.

Since the pause in fighting ended, we are again witnessing an exceptionally high level of bombardment, and at increasing ferocity. The few areas left in Gaza that are untouched by bombardment are shrinking by the hour, forcing more and more civilians to seek safety that does not exist. Over 80 percent of 2.3 million Gazans are now displaced. The newest Israeli offensive is now forcing them to cluster on a tiny sliver of land.

The bombardment is not the only thing brutally cutting lives short. The siege of—and blockades surrounding—Gaza have led to a critical food scarcity, cutoffs of medical supplies and electricity, and a lack of clean water. There is barely any medical care to be found in the enclave and few medications. Surgeons are working by the light of their

mobile phones, without anesthetics. They are using dishcloths as bandages. The risk of waves of waterborne and infectious disease will only grow in the increasingly overcrowded living conditions of the displaced.

One of our colleagues in Gaza recently described their struggle to feed an orphaned infant who had been rescued from the rubble of an airstrike. The baby had not eaten for days after her mother’s death. Colleagues could only scrounge up powdered milk—not formula, not breast milk, and not a nutritionally suitable infant food—to help stave off her starvation.

Before the war, hundreds of truckloads of aid were needed each day to support Gazans’ daily existence. Only a trickle of that required aid has made it into Gaza in the two months since the war began. But even if more were allowed in, our work in Gaza is dependent on ensuring our teams can move safely to set up warehouses, shelters, health clinics, schools, and water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure.

Today our staff members are not safe. They tell us they’re making the daily choice of staying with their families in one place so that they can die together or go out to seek water and food.

Among leaders in Washington, there is constant talk about preparing for the “day after.” But if this relentless bombardment and siege continue, there will be no “day after” for Gaza. It will be too late. Hundreds of thousands of lives hang in the balance today.

So far, American diplomacy in this war has not delivered on the goals President Biden has conveyed: protection of innocent civilians, adherence to humanitarian law, more aid delivery. To stop Gaza’s apocalyptic free fall, the Biden administration must take tangible measures, as it does in other conflicts, to up the ante with all parties to the conflict and bordering countries.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken once said of the war in Ukraine that the targeting of heat, water and electricity was a “brutalization of Ukraine’s people” and “barbaric.” The Biden administration should acknowledge that the same holds true in Gaza. While it has announced measures to deter violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, Mr. Blinken and his colleagues should apply similar pressure to stop violence against civilians in Gaza, too.

The harrowing events unfolding before us are shaping a global narrative that, if unchanged, will reveal a legacy of indifference in the face of unspeakable suffering, bias in the application of the laws of conflict and impunity for actors that violate international humanitarian law.

The U.S. government must act now—and fight for humanity.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this article is authored by some remarkable people: Michelle Nunn, president and chief executive of CARE; Tjada McKenna, chief executive of Mercy Corps; Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council; Abby Maxman, president and chief executive of Oxfam; Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International; and Janti Soeripto, president and chief executive of Save the Children U.S.

I would like to take a minute to read two paragraphs from this essay, which I have just entered into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

It reads as follows:

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more than two months since the horrifying attack on Israel that killed more than 1,200 people and resulted in 240 abductions, about 18,000 Gazans—including more than 7,500 children—have been killed, according to the Gazan health ministry. More children have been reported killed in this conflict than in all major global conflicts combined last year.

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I think this essay is worthy of all my colleagues and for the public to read it. I hope they saw it initially in the New York Times and will read it now.

Now I ask consent to go to a separate, unrelated topic.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJAN). Without objection.

FIRST STEP ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 5 years ago, Congress came together to pass the First Step Act, the most important criminal justice reform legislation in a generation. I am happy to come to the floor today with my colleague and friend Senator BOOKER of New Jersey and celebrate this momentous anniversary.

The First Step Act passed the House and Senate by overwhelming bipartisan majorities and was supported by a broad coalition from across the political spectrum, including former President Donald Trump, who signed it into law. I was proud to champion this landmark legislation with the help of Senators BOOKER, GRASSLEY, and LEE. It took months of bipartisan negotiation and painful compromise, but the net result was a historic victory that significantly improved our system of justice.

I am thankful for the tireless efforts of many dedicated advocates who never gave up hope that this law could be passed. It was a dramatic change to finally acknowledge that just being tough on the so-called war on drugs was not enough.

I often think back to my early days in the House of Representatives, during the 1980s, when the crack epidemic was devastating America. I vividly remember, in 1986, when the Nation reeled from the news that a Maryland basketball player named Len Bias had died from a heart attack induced by cocaine. All of the evidence points to it having been powder cocaine. Somehow, his death, nevertheless, became a public symbol of the crack epidemic.

Members of Congress were desperate to do something to stop the despair caused by drugs in our communities and to punish the dealers who were trafficking this new, highly addictive product. So we passed legislation, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, that established mandatory minimum sentences for distribution of specific quantities of

drugs. We thought we would clearly deter people from selling drugs by imposing tougher—tougher—sentences for larger quantities.

The law imposed much tougher sentences for crack cocaine offenses than for powder cocaine offenses. An individual would receive a minimum—minimum—5-year Federal prison sentence for selling just 5 grams of crack, the same sentence provided for selling 500 grams of powder cocaine. At the time, we believed this 100-to-1 hit between sentences for crack and powder cocaine was the right thing to do. We were so frightened by the impact that crack was having in America.

But it became clear over the next 30 years that we were terribly, terribly wrong. Instead of the price of crack going up, after the law was passed because of reduced supply, the opposite occurred. The price went down. Even though we were locking up more people than ever for drug offenses, primarily African Americans, the amount of drugs on our streets and the number of addicts was increasing.

Years after the law passed, I met a young African American from Alton, IL, who told me the story of his sister Eugenia Jennings, also from Alton. As a child, she was abandoned and seriously abused. At the age of 15, she started using crack to dull the pain of her life. At the age of 23, Eugenia was convicted for trading a small amount of crack cocaine for clothing for her small children. She was sentenced to 22 years in a Federal prison—22 years.

She was a model prisoner while serving her sentence. While in prison, she developed leukemia. I went to visit her in Greenville, IL, at the Federal correctional center. I will never forget the moment when I walked into the room and she was seated at the table. Then, she had been in prison for over 10 years.

She talked about how nice it was that she was in Greenville, close enough to Alton, IL, and that her children could visit. But she was afraid because her cancer was taking her to a prison hospital in Texas, and she wouldn't be able to see her children.

She said to me something I will never forget. She said:

"I don't know how much longer I am going to live, Senator. But I promise you this: If you can find some way to get me out of prison to be with my girls, I'll never do anything wrong again in my life."

So I wrote a personal note, handwritten, to President Barack Obama, asking him to commute Eugenia's sentence. He did, just in time for her to see her eldest daughter graduate from high school. It was the thrill of her life.

Sadly, Eugenia died less than 2 years later.

Her story was tragic in so many ways, but it inspired me to keep working to pass legislation to help other individuals who had been unjustly sentenced by our overly punitive laws. It became my personal mission to correct these errors and fix a policy that was doing far more harm than good.

We took a big step in that direction in 2010, when President Obama signed into law a bill I authored, the Fair Sentencing Act. We reduced the 100-to-1 crack-to-powder-cocaine disparity to 18 to 1, but the Fair Sentencing Act was not retroactive, meaning that people were still serving long, disparate sentences on crack cases after the law was passed.

The First Step Act finally brought them relief, allowing them to be resentenced under the 18-to-1 ratio. The First Step Act also created an entirely new system programming in Federal prisons, designed to prevent incarcerated people from reoffending, with a chance for them to earn extra time in community confinement or supervised release at the end of their sentence, a strong incentive for them to do the right thing while in prison.

Last week, Senator BOOKER and I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of individuals from an organization called Families Against Mandatory Minimums. It was a great meeting. Many of the folks we met had been incarcerated under the harsh 1980s drug law. I spoke with them, including some from my own home State of Illinois.

One lady looked me in the eye, and she said: I was sentenced to life without parole, and without your bill, I would still be there.

Several of them noted they would still be in prison today, and now they were back with their families. They are back in their communities. They are spending time and contributing to our society.

The reforms in the First Step Act have been tremendously successful. I want to put these numbers on the record because they are so important. Of the 29,944 incarcerated people released under the First Step Act reforms through January 2023, only 12.4 percent have been arrested for new crimes. By comparison, the overall recidivism rate in the Bureau of Prisons currently stands at nearly 43 percent—12 percent versus 43 percent. The success of the overwhelming majority of individuals released under the First Step Act demonstrates that reducing the population in our overcrowded prisons can be done safely and effectively, and it is the right thing to do.

It is however, as its name, just the first step. To keep making our justice system fairer and our communities safer, we must continue reforming our outdated sentencing laws and provide opportunities for those incarcerated to successfully return. I hope Congress will take many more steps in this direction toward more just criminal sentences.

There is a natural impulse—Mr. President, you know it; you have heard it; you have seen it—when we talk about narcotics and drug crime, to say: If we can just get tough, if we get the message out there that we are going to impose tough sentences, then they will stop using.

We tried it. It was a disastrous failure when it came to crack cocaine.

Let's not just get tough. Let's get smart when it comes to sentencing people. Let's realize an addiction is more than just a curse in the person's life. It is a medical situation that can be resolved many times, and we can do it if we work conscientiously to make America safer.

I hope that Congress takes steps in that direction for more just criminal sentences and wiser responses to the crisis of substance abuse in America.

And now I am going to turn the floor over to a man who has become a close friend and an ally in this effort.

When he first came to Congress, CORY BOOKER may have been new to the Federal level of this issue, but he certainly had ample experience when it came to State and local enforcement of drug laws because of the fact that he was the mayor of the city of Newark, NJ, of which he reminds us frequently—as he should.

He has led on this issue personally in his home and in his community. He has seen the devastation it can cause. He has the same hope that I do—that rather than just say no, these individuals are given a chance to find a new way in life to overcome their addiction and become contributing members across America.

I yield the floor to Senator BOOKER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I am pretty excited. In fact, let's just say this is the season of joy, and I feel such joy today.

The gentleman who just spoke, the Senator from Illinois, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, is a man of heroic action. What we are marking today, this anniversary, is so much due to his work and steadfast leadership on these issues years before I came here. We are celebrating this moment of joy and a moment of deep, profound gratitude, and I want to give Senator DURBIN my deep thanks.

I also want to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. I want to thank CHUCK GRASSLEY. I want to thank MIKE LEE. I want to thank all of their staffs who worked so hard for this moment. This was truly a bipartisan effort and one of the best experiences I have had as a U.S. Senator.

In addition to that, we worked with the President's staff and his team to get to that bill and that moment. We had activists across the political spectrum, people like Mark Holden, who worked for Koch Industries, all the way to folks like Jessica Jackson and Dan Jones. We had not only activists but people who were directly impacted—advocating organizations, nonprofits—trying to bring justice to the justice system.

This bill was a product of compromise and shows what is possible in this institution when both sides come together on common ground. It was a recognition that had been growing that the criminal justice system needed reform and was devastating our Nation's

highest ideals and principles. We are a nation of liberty and justice for all.

Think about the backdrop to this. Think about all of the facts that were happening leading to this incredible accomplishment 5 years ago.

Our Federal prison system since 1980 had grown—exploded—by 800 percent. The United States of America, which professes freedom as its fundamental ideal, had more people incarcerated than any other nation on the planet Earth. One in four incarcerated people on our planet in the world was here in the United States of America. We had a system that was not based on justice or restorative justice but based on retribution and, in many ways, cruelty. We became captive of impulses of fear rather than the wisdom for healing and growth and security.

I was stunned when I first saw that data point that about a third of the adult Americans in our country—adults—had a criminal record. Think about the criminalization. Think about that. Over 5 million children in our country had a parent who was actually in jail or prison during their childhood.

This overreaction to the War on Drugs that did not—it was not a war on drugs but a war on people and disproportionately impacted certain people and not others. The African-American community is a great example. Because of this overincarceration, there were more Black folks in our country under criminal supervision—more Black men under criminal supervision than were enslaved in 1850. This is an affront to our ideals of liberty and justice.

We malign other countries for imprisoning journalists, for imprisoning politicians, imprisoning people who dare to protest the state, but in our country, whom do we imprison? The poor. The mentally ill. The addicted. Survivors of abuse and sexual assault. Black and Brown folks are way over-indexed in our prisons and jails. Any visit to an American jail will show in so many ways the failings of our system.

Instead of offering people help with substance abuse or mental illness, we were wasting billions of dollars, tearing families apart, destroying communities, and ultimately making communities less safe; investing billions of dollars in warehousing people—not in roads, not in bridges, but incarcerating human beings. In fact, between 1990 and 2005, a new prisoner jail opened in our country every 10 days. Think about that for a second. Our national treasure was being used not for education, not for research, not for roads, bridges, technology, but to warehouse human beings.

The perversity of the system was that it was making us less safe. People who were being released had recidivism rates that were so high because they weren't getting the help they needed. People incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses were coming out and facing over 40,000 collateral consequences

that stopped them from getting a job, from buying a home, from providing for their family.

Our system is supposed to be about justice, and what was happening in the early 2000s is that red States and blue States were starting to make an effort to reform their criminal justice systems. We saw States, from Georgia to New Jersey, lower their prison populations and lower crime at the same time, understanding that if you affirm people's dignity and give them pathways to health and well-being, you not only lower your prison population but you make communities safer and you make families more intact.

After decades of these failed policies, a group of bipartisan Senators, working with a Republican White House and House Members, crafted this legislation that has affected thousands of people's lives.

Senator DURBIN said it: The population that was liberated from unjust incarceration as a result of this bill has a lower recidivism rate than people who have served out full terms and come home, because the fullness of this bill wasn't just about liberating people from unjust incarceration but creating programs that could empower people in prison to pathways to better lives when they are coming out. It was logical, it was common sense, and that is why the rightwing think tanks and the leftwing tanks and all in between were supporting and advocating and pushing for this commonsense bill.

Five years after the passage of the First Step Act, we now have evidence that not only demonstrates its success but shatters the myth that criminal justice reform and public safety don't go hand in hand. As the Senator said, almost 30,000 individuals were released, and almost 9 in 10 have avoided re-arrest or reincarceration, compared to the 45-percent recidivism rate Senator DURBIN talked about.

Oh, but God, these are data. This is just statistics. What is powerful for me is meeting the human beings and their families, meeting the children who had their parents come home. Do you want to talk about joy? When this passed 5 years ago, I will never forget, right out those doors, as soon as it passed, as an impulse, I hugged CHUCK GRASSLEY because it was what I knew was going to happen. The holidays were really going to be about the American values, that the most sacrosanct thing we can have is liberty. The most severe thing the government can do is to take someone's liberty. We literally have slogans in our country—"Give me liberty or give me death."

To see people come up to you and saying: All hope was gone. I was sitting in the depths of incarceration, like Joseph thrown into the well, thrown into prison—no hope—but yet I found deliverance because of Republicans and Democrats who worked together for common sense.

I visited with those families. I have seen the impact on children. I have

seen the stories of grades improving in school. I have seen the stories of people who have come out of prison as we met, Senator, who have gone to work making their communities safer, doing violence intervention, helping other people not go the same way.

This is what happens when we affirm human dignity. This is what happens when we understand how powerful and urgent families are in America. This is what happens when we live the values we swear an oath to with our hand over our heart—liberty and justice for all.

So yes, today, again, I wish Senator GRASSLEY were here. I might try to hug him one more time in honor of the anniversary. But this is a time when we should be celebrating this incredible step toward justice.

But I will tell Senator DURBIN, we called this the First Step Act. I remember the press conferences we had, Republicans and Democrats standing together and saying: This is the first step, but we still have work to do because we are still a nation where the majority of women incarcerated are survivors of sexual violence. We are still a nation where people struggling with addiction more easily find jail than treatment. We are still a nation where our prisons and jails are filled with people who are mentally ill and need medical care that they do not receive. We are still a nation where you get better justice if you are rich and guilty than if you are poor and innocent.

So let us celebrate progress. Let us celebrate success. But let us double down again on making our Nation real for everyone because if you want to judge a nation, don't just look at the size of their military, the height of their towers. Go to the dark places. Go to the shadows on this holiday season, celebrating a man who focused on the least of these, as it says in Matthew 25. Did you visit me in prison? If you go there, you see the unfinished business.

If you celebrate this season, remember those who are in solitary confinement, remember those who are suffering unjustly, and remember those most in need of our empathy, our grace, our love.

The First Step Act was the height of my experiences as a Senator, but the United States of America and this greatest deliberative body—we can go higher.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague. He is outstanding as a Senator and extraordinary as a public speaker. I thank him very much for really driving the message home.

I am sure he would join me in adding our congratulations and thanks to dutiful staff members who worked without any kind of reluctance for months and years to get this project done.

I want to name two of them, and there are others—Joe Zogby, who is my

chief of staff on the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Dan Swanson, who is no longer serving with me. Those two did an exceptional job on this issue and showed the kind of patience that was absolutely essential for success. So I want to add those to the list of those I have thanked.

Mr. BOOKER. Senator, I have four words: Joe Zogby for President.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. VANCE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak to a particular problem in America's higher education system, a problem borne of unfairness and of mass subsidy from the American taxpayer. It has now metastasized into one of the most corrupt and one of the most politically active and politically hostile organizations in the United States of America, and that is elite colleges.

A lot of us have watched not just since the October 7 attacks on Israel but for over a decade as America's colleges seem less and less interested in education and more and more interested in teaching things like racial hatred and various forms of far-left ideology.

A lot of us ask ourselves: How is this possible? How is it that universities that should be responsive to the public will, responsive to their donors and alumnae, and responsive to their students—how is it that they can go so far, so fast, without any pushback?

The answer, my fellow Americans, is university endowments, which have grown incredibly large on the backs of subsidies from the taxpayers, and they have made these universities completely independent of any political, financial, or other pressure. That is why the university system in this country has gone so insane.

At just three universities—Harvard, MIT, and Penn—the endowments are approaching \$100 billion. That is as large as some of the largest hedge funds in America. In fact, Harvard, Penn, Yale—many of our Ivy League institutions and others beyond that—are little more than hedge funds with universities attached to them as pretend.

This must stop. It must stop because it has enabled political insanity. It must stop because it has burdened an entire generation of Americans with over \$1 trillion of student debt—student debt relief that many of my friends on the other side would like plumbers in Ohio to pay for. But I think, if the universities have caused the problem, they ought to pay for it, and if they paid for it, if they didn't have these massive endowments subsidized by taxpayers, then maybe they would be a little bit more responsive to the public will in the process.

I have advanced legislation that would do something very simple: take the hundreds of billions of dollars in large university endowments—not even all university endowments, just the

largest university endowments—and apply a tax to them. Right now, they pay a tax that is less than 2 percent on their net income—far lower than many of the working-class members of my own family and far lower than most Americans pay in taxes.

Why is it that we allow these massive hedge funds pretending to be universities to enjoy lower tax rates than most of our citizens—people who are struggling to put food on the table and buy Christmas presents this season? Yet they enjoy a far higher tax rate than these university endowments. It is insane, it is unfair, and I think we ought to fix it in this Chamber.

My friends on the other side will often talk about how the wealthy don't pay their fair share in taxes. If the wealthy don't pay their fair share in taxes, there is no institution in this country that is a bigger offender than these massive endowments that pay almost nothing.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3514, which is at the desk. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, we hear often about this matter of taxing college endowments, that somehow this is going to address college affordability and make the Tax Code, you know, more fair.

I am the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and I gather that my colleague has just introduced this legislation—maybe as recently as today. I think it is appropriate that before we start making tax policy on the floor of the U.S. Senate, we have a chance to actually have the Senate look at some of the details.

For example, if we are going to talk about tax fairness, I will just say to the Senator from Ohio that I welcome that. I am the author of the bill to say that billionaires, who now, under the current Tax Code, can go for years and years paying little or no taxes—I am the author of the proposal that would change it. All you have to do is change three words: buy, borrow, and die. That is how they do it—buy, borrow, die, and pay little or nothing for years on end.

So what we ought to do is take the Senator's ideas and anybody else's, you know, ideas and bring them to the Senate Finance Committee. I will tell you I have not seen any evidence in the past about how, somehow, the kind of tax my colleague wants to levy is going to somehow make things better for students, which is what I want to do.

This tax legislation has not been considered by the Senate Finance Committee. That is the correct place to hold a robust discussion about fairness

and affordability. For that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

11TH ANNIVERSARY OF SANDY HOOK MASS SHOOTING

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, a few days ago, I was with one of the parents from Sandy Hook Elementary School who lost her son 11 years ago today. She talked about this being the time of the year where she starts to spiral.

Today is a day when we are thinking about all of those parents, about all of those brothers and sisters who, this morning, had to relive the morning that they went through 11 years ago, December 14, 2012, when 20 sets of parents kissed their first graders goodbye as they dropped them off for school and never ever saw them again.

It is a fate that none of us would ever wish on another human being. For those of us who have never experienced the death of a child, there is no way for us to understand what those parents and what those families are going through.

One mother of a child who was lost in Sandy Hook had a tactic that she would use in those early days. She would pretend that her son was just at a friend's house on a playdate to convince herself, as best she could, that he wasn't dead, that he was just visiting a friend around the corner. It was the only way that she could clean up the house, get through her daily work. But then, all of a sudden, it would come flooding back to her that he wasn't at a friend's house; he wasn't around the corner; he was never, ever coming home. The things you have to do on a daily basis to try to process the loss of a child, they are unfathomable to most of us.

I have kind of run out of things to say about these amazing kids and these amazing adults—the adults who protected them that day, the children who would be turning 18 this year.

In Connecticut, we wear our hearts really heavy, but we also get to celebrate all of the things that have happened because so many of these families took their grief and they turned it into action and they turned it into change. So many of these families have started not-for-profit organizations and started charities to try to change other people's lives. Many of these families have been deeply engaged in the work of trying to make sure that mass shootings never happen again.

There has been a lot of joy and many miracles that have resulted from this awful tragedy. It does not square the moral order of the universe, but it is important to pay tribute to the way in which so many members of the Sandy Hook and Newtown community, as well as so many families who are directly affected by this shooting, have been able to manage through the grief and perform miracles at the same time.

We just need to make a decision as a country as to whether we want to live

in a world in which this carnage continues.

This isn't an accident. It isn't bad luck. It is just a choice. It is just a choice we have made to put our kids in jeopardy every single day that they go to school—for kids who live in my neighborhood, in the south end of Hartford, put them in jeopardy every day when they walk to and from school. It is a choice that we make, and we could make a different choice.

So today is a day for me that I think about all of my friends in Sandy Hook, that I think back on that day, being there at the firehouse that was serving as the emergency response hub, being outside the room as parents were told that their children were lying dead on the floor of their elementary school.

But it is also a day in which I remember that we are not helpless. This is also a day in which I recommit myself to the notion that I, as a Member of the U.S. Senate, have something to contribute to the work necessary to make sure that kids never ever, ever face this fate again.

Today, on the 11th anniversary, I have a little bit more hope than I had on the 10th or the 9th or the 8th or the 7th or the 6th or the 5th or the 4th or the 2nd or the 1st anniversary.

Why? Because last year, Republicans and Democrats came together in this Senate in the wake of another mass school shooting, tragically reminiscent of Sandy Hook—the shooting in Uvalde, TX—and we acted. We put aside our political differences. We passed the first serious gun safety measure in 30 years. Even though forces outside of this building opposed it, we decided to come together because we thought we had an obligation to make this country safer, to try to make it a little bit less likely that a parent has to wake up on a morning of the anniversary of their child's death and try to figure out how to survive it. And why, this year, I feel more hopeful and more confident is because we now have data, we now have results in the wake of the passage of last year's legislation.

Right now, as we speak, we are tracking for there to be a 12-percent reduction in gun murders in this country from 2022 to 2023. That would be the biggest ever one-year reduction in gun murders in our lifetime.

What does that mean? It means that 8 or 10 fewer people are dying every day from gun violence. What does that mean? It means that 110, rather than 120, people are dying of gun violence. That is not an acceptable result, but it is proof of concept that when we change the laws to honor the death of so many innocents, we prevent the death of innocents in the future.

So today is a day when I relive that moment 11 years ago today. It is a day when I reach out to my friends in Sandy Hook to tell them how much of my heart is with them. But this year, on the 11th anniversary, it is a day in which I have confidence that if we con-

tinue to do the hard work of changing our gun laws to make it harder for dangerous people to have weapons and harder for anybody to have the most dangerous weapons—the kind of weapons that were used to kill these kids and teachers—that we can save lives.

In 1 year, we have seen the biggest drop in gun murders in our lifetime. It is a result of legislation that we passed, and it is a signal to us of what we can achieve in the future.

I thank my colleagues for what we did last year. I thank my colleagues for making it possible to show the families in Newtown and the victims of gun violence all across this country what is possible. And on the 11-year mark of that tragedy in Sandy Hook, I compel my friends in the Senate to do more.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that we begin the noon scheduled vote immediately.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 304, Jerry Edwards, Jr., of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana.

Richard J. Durbin, Peter Welch, Sheldon Whitehouse, Alex Padilla, Christopher A. Coons, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tina Smith, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard Blumenthal, Mazie Hirono, Chris Van Hollen, Michael F. Bennet, John W. Hickenlooper, Mark Kelly, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tim Kaine, Patty Murray.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Jerry Edwards, Jr., of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 66, nays 31, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 344 Ex.]

YEAS—66

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Reed
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Brown	Hirono	Rounds
Butler	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Cantwell	Kaine	Sanders
Capito	Kelly	Schatz
Cardin	Kennedy	Schumer
Carper	King	Shaheen
Casey	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cassidy	Luján	Smith
Collins	Manchin	Stabenow
Coons	Markey	Tester
Cornyn	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Moran	Warnock
Durbin	Murkowski	Warren
Ernst	Murphy	Welch
Fetterman	Murray	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Wicker
Graham	Padilla	Wyden
Grassley	Peters	Young

NAYS—31

Barrasso	Fischer	Ricketts
Blackburn	Hawley	Risch
Boozman	Hoeben	Schmitt
Braun	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Britt	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Budd	Lee	Sullivan
Cotton	Lummis	Thune
Cramer	Marshall	Tuberville
Crapo	Menendez	Vance
Cruz	Mullin	
Daines	Paul	

NOT VOTING—3

Blumenthal	Hagerty	Tillis
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The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). On this vote, the yeas are 66, the nays are 31.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PETERS). The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE

CALENDAR

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today to ask the Senate to confirm Ron Keohane to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

In this role, Mr. Keohane will be the principal adviser to the Secretary of Defense on all matters relating to the civilian and military personnel policies. He is extremely well-qualified for this role, previously serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy.

We need someone with Mr. Keohane's sense of experience to oversee and develop policies to support our servicemembers and their families, as well as to oversee our DOD schools. Strong leadership is also essential to address our military recruiting crisis.

I recently held a hearing in my subcommittee, which the Senator from North Carolina attended, that identified a long list of areas where our military services can continue to step up to inspire more young people to serve. They need someone like Mr. Keohane to make sure that the services actually follow through.

No one is disputing Mr. Keohane's qualifications. The Senate Armed Services Committee voted unanimously to advance his nomination. The only reason that Mr. Keohane's nomination has not already been approved is because