

What happened? People came over and savagely—savagely—murdered children, raped women, took hundreds of hostages, killed more Jews than at any time since the Holocaust.

What you just heard for the last 15 minutes could be summarized as the absolute propaganda of Hamas. Let me just be clear. This war was started by Hamas. It could end today by Hamas if they released every last hostage, including an American citizen.

We are sitting here in the U.S. Senate and not even saying a word of the fact that there is a U.S. citizen being held hostage by a terrorist group in the Middle East. That is outrageous. That should be at the top of the agenda. Why have civilians been killed in Gaza? Because they hide weapons in hospitals, in schools, in homes.

Hamas is the enemy, not our greatest ally, which is Israel. I was just there 2 weeks ago. Two weeks ago, I was there. There is almost no Israeli that hasn't seen a mom, a dad, a son, a grandson, granddaughter that hasn't been either injured or killed to protect their country. The fact that we are disparaging our greatest ally at this level is completely outrageous.

I had plans to go home, see my wife and kids, but I rose today because I cannot stay silent after listening to that kind of nonsense spewed here in the U.S. Senate. It is a disgrace, and we should not ever forget that Israel is just fighting the war that we would otherwise fight.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if the Senator had heard my remarks, I talked about the need to release the hostages and I talked about who started the war, which is the terrorist organization called Hamas, led by war criminals. There is no debate about that.

But what the Senator did not tell us is whether or not he thinks it is a good idea for U.S. taxpayers to be spending billions of billions of dollars on an extremist government in Israel whose stated policy is to starve children; whether or not he thinks it is a good idea to cut off all humanitarian aid getting into Gaza right now—no medicine, no clean water, no healthcare facilities open.

So the issue is not who started the war. Everyone knows who started the war. The issue is whether you commit war atrocities, criminal war acts by punishing an entire people for the acts of a terrorist organization.

Did Israel have the right to defend itself? Yes, nobody denies that.

Did it have a right to kill over 50,000 people—60 percent of whom are women, children, and the elderly? No.

Did it have a right to injure 112,000 people, to destroy almost every housing unit in Gaza, to bomb hundreds of schools at every university in Gaza? No.

Israel had a right to defend itself, but it does not have the right to engage in ethnic cleansing and to starve children.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

#### TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise in recognition of educators in Hawaii as well as across the Nation who are dedicating—have dedicated—their lives to the benefit of the children of our country.

This week is Teacher Appreciation Week. And as this administration attacks education and educators, it is more important than ever that we recognize our educators and thank them for all that they do on behalf of our children.

I have spoken before on the floor of this body on the fundamental importance of public education in my own life, having come here as an immigrant speaking no English from very humble beginnings.

I thank my teachers at Kaahumanu Elementary School, Koko Head Elementary School, and especially the librarian at Koko Head Elementary School who awakened my love of reading. They helped me to learn English and helped set me on a course that ultimately led to the U.S. Senate.

Today, teachers like Chayanee Brooks, an English teacher at Ka'u High School and Pahala Elementary on Hawaii Island, continue to educate and inspire Hawaii's youth. Chayanee, a Thai immigrant, is a nationally board-certified teacher. And, believe me, to become a nationally board-certified teacher, one must go through a lot of steps. But this certification indicates what an exceptional teacher she is.

She has been recognized as her complex area's Teacher of the Year, as Hawaii State teacher fellow, and as a Pulitzer Center teacher fellow. Just last month, she was recognized by the Hawaii State Teachers Association for her work to engage with and uplift the work of the voices of her students in her rural community.

Chayanee has said that her philosophy as an educator is simple:

Empower students to connect with their community and their own potential through storytelling.

Chayanee has created a welcoming space for her students to express themselves and share their stories through creative avenues like journalism and documentary storytelling, where they highlight topics such as family separation and mental health. You know that these are areas that the students not only care about but have experienced in their own lives.

In addition to supporting her own students, Chayanee helps train other teachers to use storytelling as a tool to engage students in their own classrooms.

She is just one of the many teachers in our country who go above and beyond for their students and their communities. Teachers like Chayanee do more than educate students. They are role models and mentors, providing a

safe, nurturing space for our children to learn and to grow. That is why it is so important that we support teachers and the vital—often underappreciated work—that they do.

We all remember during the COVID times that suddenly all our kids were at home. Believe me, there were a lot of people appreciating teachers particularly during that time. But it shouldn't just be at a time such as COVID. It should be all the time that we appreciate the exceptional work and commitment that so many of our teachers have to our students' education.

But Trump and his administration are hell-bent on doing everything they can to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and undermine public education in our country. He and his Republican buddies want to take away Federal support for local schools, hundreds of millions of dollars—in fact, billions of dollars—money that provides services for students and parents, supports students with disabilities, and helps keep our children fed.

Trump is also threatening to cut funding from schools that won't comply with his draconian Executive orders—his obsession to stamp out diversity, equity, and inclusion in our public schools; Executive orders that direct our schools to stop teaching entire chapters of our Nation's history like the Civil War, African-American history, and the history of immigrants in our country.

That is just a part of the obsession that this administration has to stamp out diversity, equity, and inclusion in every arena.

We heard from teachers, parents, and students in Hawaii and across the country about the consequences of Trump's actions—the firing of people, what they are trying to get our schools to not teach—and they have told us in two words: "It's chaos." Much like everything else Trump touches and does, chaos follows.

Just this week, Homeland Security agents terrorized a group of teachers from the Philippines living and working on Maui. They were invited to come to Maui to teach in our schools for a period of time. And despite these teachers being here legally in our country, the teachers were detained by Homeland Security and targeted before being allowed to go about their business. That is called terrorizing people, plain and simple. So instead of supporting teachers, Trump is making it even harder for them to do their jobs, and our children will be the ones stuck paying the price.

A strong education system is fundamental to building a strong democracy, a strong economy, and a strong middle class. At the heart of our education system is, of course, our educators. That is why I and my Democratic colleagues are committed to supporting our educators, strengthening our schools, and ensuring every child—every child—has the opportunity to

learn and grow regardless of where they come from, their income, their disability—whatever their background. Every child should have that opportunity to grow and, you know, really seek their dreams.

Teachers can make a lasting impression in the lives of their students. In fact, I just had lunch with some of my interns in my office, and one of them said that she will never forget the encouragement from one of her college professors when she expressed some doubts about her success at her school, which happened to be Berkeley. This teacher said: You have a lot of years ahead of you. You know, believe in yourself. You can take risks, but go forward. She had a lot of years ahead of her to determine what she wanted to do with her life. So this intern in my office found this to be very encouraging.

That is what I mean about teachers having a profound impact on the life choices that their students make and how they think about themselves in this world. So I extend my gratitude to every teacher in Hawaii and across the country who continues to provide the kind of teaching experience that enables our students to have faith in themselves, to learn, and to understand that, you know, life has a lot in store for them.

I hope that a lot of these students will become teachers themselves, will become educators, and will be the kinds of teachers who will provide the kind of support that every student needs and deserves.

So “mahalo” to all of our educators across our country for all that you do both in and out of your classrooms and for the commitment that you have to our Nation’s children, our families, and our communities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I want to come to the floor today to talk about a success story but, potentially, a success story interrupted.

Back in 2022, we all were shocked to watch news playing out during an afternoon that we were here, working in the Senate, of another mass shooting—this one of just unthinkable size and scope—in Uvalde, TX. I was actually sitting in the Presiding Officer’s chair when I saw word of the shooting scroll across my smartphone screen.

Gratefully, in the wake of that shooting, a group of us—Republicans and Democrats—were able to come together and set aside the differences that we had and still have on the issue of gun violence in this country. We decided not to argue about an assault weapons ban, for instance. Instead, we decided to work on finding the least common denominator, as we called it, and tried to find a set of commonsense changes to our gun laws and common-

sense investments in our communities that would, hopefully, together, try to put a downward pressure on what, up until then, had been annual spiking rates of homicides and mass shootings.

It is just true that, in this country, you are 10 times more likely to be shot in your school, in your neighborhood, at a movie theater than you are in any other high-income, developed nation. That is a choice. That is not bad luck. That is not happenstance. That is because, in America, we decide to have a ton of weapons in the hands of very dangerous people. We also don’t spend enough time trying to unwind some of the reasons young people, in particular, get into lives of really risky and potentially violent behavior.

So we came together in 2022, and we passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. It was a big bipartisan vote. It wasn’t close. The final tally was 65 to 33, with nearly two-thirds of the Senate voting in favor of this commonsense gun safety measure. It wasn’t anything close to what I see as being necessary in order to tackle this epidemic in this country, but it was significant. It was five changes in gun laws: supporting State red flag laws; stopping domestic abusers from getting their hands on guns; putting in a short but meaningful waiting period when young people are hastily buying an assault weapon; making it easier for law enforcement to go after drug trafficking rings. It was five meaningful changes, but it was also a big investment, a big investment in the kind of services that can help interrupt violence.

A lot of my Republican friends said: You know, we don’t believe it is the guns. We think it is mental illness.

Well, I don’t agree, but this is how you put together a compromise. So we passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which included a landmark \$14 billion investment, most of it in mental health, most of it directed toward kids’ school-based mental health, but there were also significant investments in school safety—just hardening schools to make it harder for a shooter to get inside and community anti-gun violence initiatives, which is the work that local community groups are doing in North Carolina and Connecticut and all across the country to just try to wrap services around people who might be at risk of gun violence or to stop that cycle of violence once the first shooting happens.

So we passed this legislation, and we crossed our fingers. We said: Let’s hope that we are right and that these changes in gun laws and these investments we are making in our communities will make a difference.

Well, what happened after we passed that law was absolutely stunning: the biggest 2-year decline in gun violence in the history of recorded statistics in the United States of America. That is extraordinary. That is extraordinary. I am not going to sit here and claim that the entire reason was the Bipartisan

Safer Communities Act, but it was a big part of the reason because we did make it harder for bad people to get their hands on guns. We did deliver the kinds of services that are necessary. You are seeing this downward trajectory, but let me just put the numbers on it.

In 2023, there were 659 mass shootings in America. In 2024, there were 500. That is a 24-percent, 1-year decline in mass shootings. That means that there were 160 mass shootings that didn’t happen and 160 communities that were not terrorized in 2024. And this bill had a lot to do with it. Overall gun deaths went down from 2023 to 2024 from 19,000 to 16,700. That was a 12-percent reduction. We have never in this country’s history seen 1-year declines in gun homicides in the neighborhood of 12 percent. Certain cities saw astronomical declines. In Hartford, we saw a 39-percent drop in homicides from 2023 to 2024. This year—this year, 2025—Hartford is on track to have the lowest recorded instances of gun violence—those are homicides and nonfatal shootings—since 2006. New Haven saw a 39-percent drop in homicides. As I think I said, overall, in Connecticut, we had 167 homicides in 2023. In 2024, we had 63. It is wild.

This happened in Baltimore, and this happened in Chicago. In most of the major cities in this country and in rural areas as well, we saw this dramatic, dramatic decline. So it is just something to celebrate because it is not easy to get that kind of consensus. It is not easy to get that kind of consensus, and we should celebrate the fact that there are literally thousands of people—largely young men—who are alive today because of the bill that we passed.

But this progress is in threat of being interrupted, and the reason is that the Trump administration has reversed course. I want to talk specifically about how they are undoing the progress of this bill, but their attempt to try to reverse the broader progress that we have made on reducing gun violence is pretty comprehensive. Let me just give you a handful of the ways in which the Trump administration is trying to make our communities less safe.

First, they closed the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. This was something the Biden administration set up to try to better implement the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. This wasn’t a terribly political office. It was just trying to coordinate all the work being done across Agencies to reduce violence in our communities. Trump would have taken this office in a different direction, but he didn’t. He just shuttered it. There is no Office of Gun Violence Prevention anymore in the Federal Government.

On March 20, the administration announced that they are going to start a process of restoring firearms rights to individuals who have had them taken away because they had serious criminal records. This is likely illegal.