

I want to conclude by thanking my friend from New Jersey, Senator LAUTENBERG, for his continued dedication to this issue. His hard work and perseverance have helped bring us to the point today where the Senate once again has passed legislation to strongly encourage states to enact this life-saving measure. I would also like to thank Senator RICHARD SHELBY, the Chairman of the Subcommittee, for his support of the .08 measure as the Transportation Appropriations bill was being crafting; and Senator JOHN WARNER for his continued dedication to reducing drunk driving.

Mr. President, .08 is definitely a legislative effort worth fighting for, and I hope we will succeed this time in retaining the provision in the conference report. I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

PROJECT EXILE: THE SAFE STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS ACT

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, there has been a lot of talk recently in this country about gun control. It is no secret that gun control measures are very controversial and are subject to a great deal of debate—as they should be. But, we have to remember that in the heat of this debate, we must not lose sight of the real issue at hand—and that's gun violence. There is nothing controversial about protecting our children, our families, our communities by keeping guns out of the wrong hands—keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and violent offenders—not law-abiding citizens, Mr. President, but criminals.

These criminals with guns are killing our children. They're killing our young adults. They're killing our friends and our neighbors. I am here on the floor today because I am very troubled by this, Mr. President, and I am troubled by the current Administration's handling of crimes committed with guns. Let me explain.

Right now, current law makes it a federal crime for a convicted felon to ever possess a firearm. So, once a person is convicted of a felony, that person can never again own a gun. It is against federal law to use a gun to commit any crime, regardless of if that crime is otherwise a state crime. And, under federal law, the sentences for these kinds of crimes are mandatory—no second chance, no parole.

In the late 1980's, President Bush made enforcement of these gun laws a priority. His Justice Department told local sheriffs, chiefs of police, and prosecutors that if they caught a felon with a gun—or if they caught someone committing a crime in which a gun was used—the federal government would take the case, and put that criminal behind bars for at least five years—no exceptions. During the last 18 months of the Bush Administration, more than 2,000 criminals with guns were put behind bars.

Consistent, effective enforcement ended once the current Administration took office. Between 1992 and 1998, for example, the number of gun cases filed for prosecution dropped from 7,048 to about 3,807—that's a 46 percent decrease. As a result, the number of federal criminal convictions for firearms offenses has fallen dramatically.

For six years, the Justice Department refused to prosecute those criminals who use a gun to commit state crimes—even though the use of a gun to commit those crimes could be charged as a federal crime. The only cases they would prosecute were those in which a federal crime was already being committed and a gun was used in the commission of that crime.

Even worse, to this very day, some federal gun laws are almost never enforced by this Administration. While Brady law background checks have stopped nearly 300,000 prohibited purchasers of firearms from buying guns, less than .1 percent have actually been prosecuted.

I have repeatedly questioned Attorney General Reno and her deputies about the decline in prosecutions, and their standard response is that the Department of Justice is focusing on so-called "high-level" offenders, instead of "low-level" offenders, who commit one crime with a gun. They say that they want to prosecute the few sharks at the top rather than the numerous guppies at the bottom of the criminal enterprise. With all due respect, that's nonsense.

Attorney General Reno recently said that she would aggressively prosecute armed criminals, but only if they commit a violent crime. Again, that type of law enforcement policy just doesn't make sense. Current law prohibits violent felons from possessing guns, and so we should aggressively prosecute these cases to take guns away from violent criminals—before they use those guns to injure and kill people. It's that simple.

Mr. President, we have often heard that six percent of the criminals commit 70 percent of the crimes—six percent of the criminals commit 70 percent of the crimes. Well, if you have a violent criminal who illegally possesses a gun, I can bet you that he is part of that six percent! He's one of the bad guys—and we should put him away before he has a chance to use that gun again.

Mr. President, we need to take all of these armed criminals off the streets. That is how we can reduce crime and save lives. Why wait for armed criminals to commit more and more heinous crimes before we prosecute them to the full extent of the law? Why wait, when we can do something before another Ohioan—or any American—becomes a victim of gun violence?

We shouldn't wait, Mr. President. That's why the House of Representatives recently passed legislation that would increase gun prosecutions. And that's why, along with a number of my

colleagues, including Senators ABRAHAM, SANTORUM, WARNER, SESSIONS, HELMS, ASHCROFT, and HUTCHINSON from Arkansas, we have introduced the companion to the House-passed bill—a bill that offers the kind of practical solution we need to thwart gun crimes.

Our bill—called "Project Exile: The Safe Streets and Neighbors Act of 2000"—would provide \$100 million in grants over five years to those states that agree to enact their own mandatory minimum five-year jail sentences for armed criminals who use or possess an illegal gun. As an alternative, a state can also qualify for the grants by turning armed criminals over for federal prosecution under existing firearms laws. Therefore, a state has the option of prosecuting armed felons in state or federal courts. Qualifying states can use their grants for any variety of purposes that would strengthen their criminal or juvenile justice systems' ability to deal with violent criminals.

This approach works, Mr. President. In Virginia, for example, the state instituted a program in 1997, also called "Project Exile." Their program is based on one simple principle: Any criminal caught with a gun will serve a minimum mandatory sentence of five years in prison. Period. End of story. As a result, gun-toting criminals are being prosecuted six times faster, and serving sentences up to four times longer than they otherwise would under state law. Moreover, the homicide rate in Richmond already has dropped 40 percent!

Every state should have the opportunity to implement Project Exile in their high-crime communities. The bill that we have introduced will make this proven, commonsense approach to reducing gun violence available to every state. It will take guns out of the hands of violent criminals. It will make our neighborhoods safer. It will save lives.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support and pass this legislation. It's time to protect our children, our families, and our country from armed and dangerous criminals. It's time to get guns out of the wrong hands. It's time we take back our neighborhoods and our communities from the criminals and take action to stop gun-toting criminals.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, July 11, 2000, the Federal debt stood at \$5,665,065,032,353.04 (Five trillion, six hundred sixty-five billion, sixty-five million, thirty-two thousand, three hundred fifty-three dollars and four cents).

Five years ago, July 11, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,925,464,000,000 (Four trillion, nine hundred twenty-five billion, four hundred sixty-four million).

Ten years ago, July 11, 1990, the Federal debt stood at \$3,149,532,000,000