

The American people need confidence that the administration is not favoring or punishing the people it regulates based upon their support for the administration's pet causes.

When it comes to these disturbing allegations about Secretary Sebelius and all of the other recent scandals, the American people deserve to know what happened. Yesterday Secretary Sebelius had an opportunity to answer questions. She did not. Today, again Secretary Sebelius had an opportunity to answer questions. Again, according to press reports, she refused to do so.

The American people want answers. Members of the Congress want answers. There are many more questions to be asked.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

TRIBUTE TO SARAH NEIMEYER

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, once in a while you are lucky enough to meet someone who is down to Earth but uncompromising in their idealism. I met someone just like that in the year 2007, and I hired her for my staff. It was a great decision.

For the better part of 6 years, Sarah Neimeyer has been a senior member of my staff, and this week she left my office for a new adventure which she started today, working with the new Secretary at the Department of the Interior. I am sorry to lose her, but I wish her well.

Sarah comes by her idealism honestly. She grew up in a family of progressives in rural Minnesota. Her dad practiced law and her mom raised honey bees and grew her own vegetables.

From her parents Sarah inherited progressive ideals, practical Midwestern values and a deep love of the land.

During college, she spent her summers leading canoe trips through the Boundary Waters Wilderness in northern Minnesota and Ontario, Canada.

Her first boss in the Senate was a dear friend and one of my personal heroes, Paul Wellstone. Sarah worked for Paul for 10 years. After he passed away, she left Capitol Hill and worked as an advocate for land conservation and wilderness preservation.

Illinois has benefited from Sarah's passion, her practicality and her incredibly hard work.

Lake Michigan is one of Illinois' most beloved treasures. As a member of my staff, Sarah has fought many battles to protect the Lake from threats from toxic dumping to invasive Asian carp.

She has worked alongside energy companies in Illinois that are cleaning up the way energy is produced.

Whenever safe water, clean air and healthy lands are at stake, you can be

pretty sure Sarah Neimeyer is close by. She is committed and tenacious. And she usually wins.

There is one cause which is even dearer to Sarah and that is her family—her husband, Joe Warren, and their teenage sons, Will and Harry. As accomplished as Sarah is in her professional life, if you ask her what she is proudest of, she will tell you in an instant: it's her boys.

Paul Wellstone had a great definition for politics. He used to say:

"In the last analysis, politics is not predictions and politics is not observations. Politics is what we do. Politics is what we do, politics is what we create, by what we work for, by what we hope for and what we dare to imagine."

Paul Wellstone was right. That is politics at its finest. That is the kind of public service Sarah Neimeyer has performed for me and for the people of Illinois for the last nearly 6 years and I am grateful to her.

I want to thank Joe, Will and Harry, first of all, for sharing Sarah with us. And I want to thank Sarah for helping to protect and preserve some of my State and our Nation's greatest natural treasures.

I wish her continued joy and success as she gets back on the "green bus" to begin her next professional challenge.

CONTINUING GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. DURBIN. I rise to talk about the continuing toll of gun violence on America and my home State of Illinois. For several months now, New York Times columnist Joe Nocera has published what he calls "The Gun Report." It is a daily compilation of stories about shootings across America. This report, posted online on the New York Times Web site, is startling.

It is one thing when you hear the dry numbers about 87 Americans killed, 200 wounded every day by gun violence, but Joe Nocera's report goes beyond the numbers. It shares some of the details from the news reports of these shootings.

For example, Mr. Nocera's report for Monday describes shootings that took place over this last weekend. The tally of shootings in America goes on to fill 19 paragraphs. Let me read just some of the descriptions of the shootings that took place over this last weekend right here in our beloved country:

A 12-year-old boy was accidentally shot in the face by his 11-year-old friend Friday morning in Camden, NJ.

Two Minneapolis, Minn. police officers were shot and wounded at a traffic stop in the Uptown district Friday afternoon.

Avery Williams, 22, and Jamario Troutman, 24, died and a third man is in serious condition after a Friday afternoon shooting in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Tamara Logan, 44, teacher's aide was shot multiple times in the head area outside McKinley Elementary School in east Erie, Pa., Friday morning.

46-Year-old Bruce Byrd shot and killed his wife, 44-year-old Stephanie Byrd, and then turned the gun on himself in a Lawrenceville, Pa. home Friday.

Those are just a few of the shootings that were reported on Friday. There are dozens more stories from Saturday and Sunday, including a fatal road rage shooting in Arkansas; a convicted felon who shot and killed his son in Missouri; four people found shot to death in a home in Waynesville, NC; and at least 19 people shot during a Mother's Day parade in New Orleans.

Sadly, there were multiple shootings from my home State of Illinois in Mr. Nocera's report, including a Saturday night shooting in Rockford and at least nine people shot over the weekend in the Chicago area, three of them fatally.

It is hard to read Mr. Nocera's report and not feel that something is terribly wrong with this level of gun violence. Have we heard it so often that we reach the point it has no impact? I think most Americans will look at this report and agree that we should take steps to reduce this massive toll of gun violence.

Several weeks ago, on April 17, on this floor of the Senate, we fell short of the 60 votes needed to break a Republican filibuster. It was a filibuster against commonsense gun reform and gun safety. We did not get 60 votes for commonsense steps such as closing gaps in the gun background check system and cracking down on straw purchasers who supply criminals and gangs with guns.

JOE MANCHIN is a Senator from West Virginia. He is a Democrat. He may be one of the most conservative Democrats on the floor of the Senate. PATRICK TOOMEY is a Republican from Pennsylvania, arguably the most conservative Republican on the floor of the Senate. JOE MANCHIN and PATRICK TOOMEY, a Democrat and Republican, sat down and said: Can we find some way to reduce gun violence in America in a bipartisan way? Two conservatives? Two gun owners? And they did.

They came up with a proposal that would call for universal background checks. Today up to 40 percent of the guns sold in America are sold to people not subject to a background check. How important is that? What if you got on an airplane and before it took off the flight attendant said: Welcome to this flight. We want you to know that 60 percent of you have gone through TSA screening to see if you are carrying a weapon or bomb; 40 percent we did not check. Would you get on the airplane? Would you want your family on that airplane?

That is the situation in America today when it comes to the sale of firearms. So JOE MANCHIN and PATRICK TOOMEY said let's close the problems we have, the gaps in the law, and make sure everyone, virtually everyone is subject to a background check, particularly those who buy guns through newspapers or over the Internet. Let's make sure those who go to gun shows to buy guns, that at least we check their background.

Why do we want to check? The law says you have a right under the Second

Amendment to legally own and responsibly use a firearm in America. I understand that, and I will fight to protect it. But the law also says if you are a convicted felon or someone so mentally unstable you should not own a firearm, you cannot buy one, not legally, in this country.

There are a lot of sportsmen and hunters in my home State of Illinois. I know many of them. They are in my family. I have met them, I have talked to them. They get it. They want their Second Amendment rights protected, but they do not want to believe for a minute that a firearm is going to be sold to someone who is going to use it in a crime or to someone who is so mentally unstable that they cannot handle it. That is what the Manchin-Toomey amendment was all about. We needed 60 votes, we got 55.

We lost four votes on this side of the aisle, the Democratic side. We picked up four votes on the other side of the aisle. Let me commend my colleague, my Republican colleague, MARK KIRK, who joined me in voting for this measure. It was truly a bipartisan effort from those Senators who crafted the bill and voted for it, but we fell five votes short of breaking a Republican filibuster.

The issue of gun violence is not going to go away. We are losing more Americans every day to this gun violence. Just this morning, the Chicago Tribune reported that 2 people were killed and 11 wounded in shootings last night in Chicago.

Chicago is a wonderful city; it is a great city. I am proud to represent it and proud to spend much of my time there. But I am saddened by the gun violence that takes place there and in all the major cities across America.

Since 26 schoolchildren and 6 teachers were killed in Newtown, CT, on December 14, America has been fixed on gun violence. Just the images of those beautiful little boys and girls from their first grade class, killed in their school by a man firing away repeatedly with a weapon—it is just heart-breaking. I met some of those parents. They have come by my office. They showed me the pictures of their kids. There was not a dry eye in the room—beautiful little boys and girls, gone.

We have to ask the question: Can we do anything about it? Should we do anything about it? Will we do anything about it?

The sad reality is, since that day, that horrible day in Newtown, CT, when that massacre occurred, more than 4,000 Americans have been killed by guns. Think about that. More than 4,000 Americans have been killed by guns. If you read Mr. Nocera's report in the New York Times, you can see the devastating loss our Nation suffers every single day.

Sadly, America just about leads the world when it comes to gun violence and gun death. It does not have to be that way. This past weekend the Chicago Tribune published an article look-

ing at the problem of straw purchasing. That is one of the main ways that convicted felons and gang members get their guns in Chicago.

The article said many straw purchasers see the opportunity as easy money and a victimless paperwork crime. In fact, straw purchases lead to serious crimes and killings. They are the primary factor behind gun violence in the city of Chicago.

What is a straw purchase? That is when a person who can legally purchase a gun buys one to either give it or sell it to a person who is going to use it in the commission of a crime. It happens a lot. Almost 10 percent of all the firearms confiscated in the commission of a crime in Chicago over the last 10 years—almost 10 percent of those guns came from the State of Mississippi. Mississippi. Why? It is because you can show a driver's license in Mississippi and buy a gun. In fact, you can buy a trunk full of guns and you can head out on the interstate, headed for some alleyway or crackhouse in or near Chicago, make your sale that night, and come away with a lot of money. That is what straw purchasing is all about.

One of the provisions in the law which I cosponsored, which was a bipartisan provision, along with Senator PATRICK LEAHY, Democrat of Vermont; Senator SUSAN COLLINS, Republican of Maine; Senator GILLIBRAND of New York, and myself, as well as my colleague, Senator MARK KIRK, Republican colleague—we made this a bipartisan effort to say if you are going to buy a gun to give it or sell it to someone who is going to commit a crime, you are going to commit a Federal crime yourself if you do it, with up to 15 years in prison, real hard time for a real crime. It was defeated. The gun lobby opposed it. Why? Was it to sell more guns? This doesn't help a sportsman or a hunter, for someone to buy a gun so someone else can commit a crime with it, and yet they defeated it. That is the reality of what we are up against, but it is a reality that can change.

Senator KIRK named this provision in the bill after a recent gun victim in Chicago, 15-year-old Hadiya Pendleton. She was a beautiful little girl who came out for the time of her life to be at President Obama's inauguration in January. She went back to Chicago, and a couple of weeks later she was gunned down while standing at a bus stop outside of her school.

I cannot believe people voted against the measure to stop straw purchasing and to make these people who buy these guns and put them into the flow of deadly crime across America accountable.

Well, people are speaking out now in a way they never have before. Mothers, doctors, mayors, law enforcement, and family members of victims are no longer going to sit down and be quiet; they are going to speak up. This coalition has been turning up the heat on

Members of Congress, and I know it has received a lot of publicity.

In a democracy, elections count. We have to make sure the people who are elected want to have gun safety in this Nation. We need real reform when it comes to gun violence and gun safety. We cannot just walk away from the daily toll of shootings across America. Instead, we need five more votes on the floor of the Senate.

People say: Well, the House of Representatives will never consider this measure.

Well, maybe they won't, and maybe the people who believe this is important for the future of their families and our country will remember that in the next election. That is what democracy is all about.

Some Senators have claimed they voted for an alternative—the so-called Grassley alternative—and therefore they are really for gun safety. Make no mistake about it—that Grassley amendment would have actually removed tens of thousands of mental illness records from background check databases, and it would have made it nearly impossible to convict straw purchasers. Only the gun lobby would call that an improvement to the current system.

There is no piece of legislation, no bill or law that can end every act of violence. We are duty and morally bound to do everything in our power to keep America safe. When we think of the tragedy in Newtown and the tragedy that affected 4,000 gun victims since Newtown, we have no choice but to move forward as a nation in a sensible way. We need to protect Second Amendment rights, but we also need to keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons and mentally unstable people.

I want to close by extending my sympathies to the victims and family members in Illinois and across the Nation who suffered from gun violence. I am sorry this continues. It is time for Congress to act and act quickly.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, about an hour ago I was on the telephone with Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel. It was a somber conversation. We were talking about the most recent disclosure yesterday of sexual assault in the military. The Secretary said he was beside himself with the knowledge that this continues and that he was going to do something about it. I trust that he will.

Last night we learned of the latest and most reprehensible incident. The Army is investigating a sexual assault prevention and response coordinator at Fort Hood, TX, for being engaged in abusive sexual contact and other abusive crimes.

Secretary Hagel has directed re-screening and retraining of all sexual assault prevention coordinators and military recruiters. I know he is upset