

And so have I. More importantly, they have grown tired of a Congress that does nothing about it, with no real efforts to stop this bloodshed.

Last April, it seemed that the senseless death of 12 students at Columbine High School had finally brought the Nation to a point of judgment. It even appeared to me that this Congress had finally had enough. The shocking and heartbreaking nature of the tragedy, which was really unlike anything in its dimensions that the Nation had faced before, appeared to convince the Congress that it could no longer ignore the problem.

Indeed, this Senate, in one of its finer moments since I became a Member of this institution, courageously passed a juvenile justice bill that included three basic gun safety measures: It banned the possession of assault weapons by minors; it closed the gun show loophole; and it mandated safety locks on all firearms.

Originally, we had sought a more comprehensive solution that would restrict gun sales to one per month, a reasonable proposal; reinstate the Brady waiting period, proven to be an effective proposal; and regulate guns as consumer products, certainly a worthwhile proposal.

But we limited ourselves to those other basic provisions in the interests of a consensus, with a belief that they were so sensible and so necessary that there could be no reasonable opposition. So before the debate even began, the proposals had been limited to what should have represented a consensus view, leaving the more ambitious but still reasonable proposals for another day.

But now, with the 1-year anniversary of the Columbine shootings having passed, it is clear that our confidence, perhaps even our strategy, was misguided. Today, the bill languishes in conference—an unfortunate reminder that no gun law is too important or too responsible that it cannot be opposed by the National Rifle Association.

In place of changes, the Republican leadership and the NRA have offered the American public flimsy rhetoric that blames gun violence on poor enforcement of existing gun laws. The NRA erroneously claims that prosecutions have plummeted under the Clinton administration when, in fact, these prosecutions rose by 25 percent last year.

This campaign provides nothing but further evidence that this agenda is not aimed at protecting our communities, but it is aimed at protecting the status quo—a status quo that most Americans a long time ago decided was unacceptable.

No one disputes the fact that enforcement is a critical element of any response to this problem. That is why, indeed, on this side of the aisle we have supported 1,000 new ATF agents and

1,000 new prosecutors to deal with gun violence.

But as much as we have done, we can always do more; while laws are being enforced, they can be enforced better. But no one can reasonably believe that enforcement alone constitutes a comprehensive or sufficient answer to this national epidemic.

Better enforcement of every gun law ever written will not prevent the 1,500 accidental shootings that are occurring every year. Enforcement of every gun law on the books would not prevent a 6-year-old boy from bringing his father's gun to school and killing a 6-year-old classmate. Nor does it address the fact that 43 percent of parents leave their guns unsecured, and 13 percent have unsecured guns loaded or with ammunition nearby. Enforcing gun laws, vigorous prosecutions, would answer none of those problems.

These realities point to the need for a broad approach to gun control. The provisions contained in the juvenile justice bill are the first steps, but they are important first steps.

The real answer—perhaps the challenge that should have come to this Congress last year—is to bring the entire issue to the Senate, and build upon what is already in the juvenile justice bill by also challenging the Senate to restrict the sale of firearms to one per month, a simple provision which would help eliminate the problem under which my State is suffering, where people go to other States and buy large numbers of firearms and transport them to the cities of New Jersey, selling them, often to children, out of the trunks of cars.

Second, reinstitute the Brady waiting period on handgun purchases to prevent individuals in fits of rage and passion from acting upon their emotions with a gun. Separate the rage of the individual from the purchase of the firearm, giving a cooling off period that can and would save lives. Most important, we must do on the Federal level what Massachusetts recently did on the State level: regulate firearms as consumer products. Firearms remain the only consumer product in America not regulated for safety, a strange, inexplicable, peculiar exception to the law because they are inherently the most dangerous consumer products of them all.

It is, indeed, an absurd, inexplicable contradiction that a toy gun remains regulated but a real gun is not. Consumer regulation would ensure that, as every other product in America, guns are safely designed, built, and distributed, not only for the benefit of the public but also for the people who purchase them. Indeed, who has a greater interest in gun safety by design and construction than the people who buy guns? If the materials are imperfect, if they do not work properly, it is the gun owner who is going to be hurt.

Together these three measures would make a real difference in ending gun violence. Would they end all gun violence? Would they end all crime? Indeed, not. No single provision, no amendment, no law, no single action could eliminate all gun violence or most gun violence. But if we await a perfect solution, we will act upon no solution. Ending the problems of violence and guns in America is not something that will be done by one Congress or one legislative proposal in any one year or probably in any one decade. It is successive ideas in succeeding Congresses where people of goodwill put the public interest first and look for real and serious answers to this epidemic of violence.

As long as the NRA is allowed to dominate the gun debate in place of common sense and compassion, the Columbines of the future are sadly, even tragically, inevitable. It is time for Congress to finally muster the courage to act responsibly on this issue out of concern for our children. Out of respect for the memories of those who have died, we can and should do nothing less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

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

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

THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from New Jersey for raising this important issue of gun safety.

One of the most important powers of the leadership on Capitol Hill is the power to schedule a hearing, the power to bring a bill to the floor, the power to tell a committee to bring a bill forward so it can be considered.

Currently, the Republicans are in control of the Senate as well as the House of Representatives, and they have this awesome congressional power and responsibility. Over the last several days, there have been calls from the leadership, the Speaker of the House as well as the majority leader of the Senate, that this Senate and House basically drop what they are doing and start gathering information and documentation for an emergency hearing on the question of what occurred in Miami, FL, last Saturday morning. That is to the exclusion of a lot of other things that could be considered by the Congress of the United States.

The Hill newspaper and others have talked about this Republican fervor over investigating Attorney General Janet Reno and others about the Elian Gonzalez controversy. This is an important issue. It has certainly captured the imagination of many Americans and the attention of the press and a lot

of politicians. I think it is worth looking into to consider the procedures that have been used and could be used. But would we step back and say, when we look at the state of America today, that this is the single most important thing that we should be doing right here on Capitol Hill? My guess is, in my home State of Illinois, the State of Ohio, as well as many other States, families might suggest: Before you get into that, could you take a look at education? Could you take a look at reducing violent crime in our country? Could you consider a Patients' Bill of Rights so if someone gets sick in my family, the doctor can make the medical decision instead of the insurance company? And while you are at it, my mother or grandmother is on Medicare and can't pay for her prescription drugs. Could you take a look at that incidentally? Is that something you could put on your priority list?

Quite honestly, those things will come out in polls across America as things about which people are concerned. They would like us to drop, perhaps, our focus on a 6-year-old boy from Cuba for just a few minutes and think about education, think about reducing gun violence in America, a Patients' Bill of Rights, a prescription drug benefit. Sadly, those items are not on the agenda. They don't capture the attention of the Republican leadership. Their attention is on this 6-year-old boy.

I hope we can focus the attention of Congress on some other issues. I hope we can earn our pay for a change and consider some bills and some laws that just might improve the quality of life of families across America. I kind of thought that was part of our job. We were elected from 50 different States to come here to show some leadership and respond to the people back home to make America a better place to live.

Senator TORRICELLI of New Jersey talked about gun safety. We are just a few days away from the first anniversary, the sad anniversary of the tragedy at Columbine High School. That focused America's attention. It shocked us to believe that a high school in the suburbs of Denver could end up having this tragedy visited upon it and 12 children who got up and went to school never came home.

We saw that the two students who started this rampage got their guns from gun shows. We decided in Congress we had to do something. So we brought a bill forward, a gun safety bill, that had three basic provisions in it. The bill said, if you buy a gun at a gun show, we want to know whether you are legally disqualified from owning a gun. Of course, if you buy it from a gun dealer, we already make that inquiry. We want to know if you have a criminal record. We want to know if you happen to be a fugitive, a stalker, a wife beater, someone who is ineli-

gible because they are too young, someone who has a history of violent mental illness. If we are going to preserve the second amendment right to own and bear arms, many of us believe we want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's 5 minutes have expired.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent for an additional 5 minutes.

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

Mr. DURBIN. The sportsmen and hunters in the State of Illinois and those I speak to around the country tend to agree. They want to use their guns legally and safely. They want to keep them away from criminals and children.

We put in the provision of this law a background check at gun shows. How frequent are gun shows? Come to downstate Illinois; they are pretty frequent. They have them at civic centers, all sorts of different places. We are not the leading State for gun shows. The leading State for gun shows is Texas. I will return to that in a moment.

Secondly, we said, let's have trigger locks sold with guns. As Senator TORRICELLI said earlier, 43 percent of guns are sitting around residences within easy access of children. How many times do you pick up the paper and read about a kid playing with a gun, shooting himself or a playmate? How many parents say, we don't have guns in our house because we think it is dangerous. But do you know whether your playmate's family has guns lying around. Who is so naive to believe that children never find Christmas gifts or guns? They go looking and they find them. Sometimes tragedy results.

We want trigger locks so the guns are secure, so a child who picks up that gun can't harm himself or others. Is this a radical idea? I think it is as sensible an idea as putting brakes on a car.

Finally, Senator FEINSTEIN added an amendment which said we don't want to import high-capacity ammo clips from overseas that can only be used for the semiautomatic and automatic weapons to sweep bullets in every direction. I have said that if you need a semiautomatic weapon or an assault weapon to shoot a deer, you ought to stick to fishing. Far too many people in this country think this is an invasion of second amendment rights. Too many people argue that we shouldn't even have these reasonable regulations in gun ownership.

We passed this bill that I am talking about on the floor of the Senate by one vote. Vice President GORE, as is his right under the Constitution, came to this Chair and voted. We passed the bill and sent it to the House. That was over 10 months ago. The bill, of course, was then subject to the National Rifle As-

sociation and all of the gun lobby beating up on it. They passed a terrible alternative to it. It has now been sitting in a conference committee month after weary month. We cannot summon the political will or courage to bring a gun safety bill out here to try to make the streets, the schools, and, yes, the zoos of America safe for families and children. No. We want to have an emergency hearing on a 6-year-old boy from Cuba. We want to drop everything. We want to subpoena all of the documents. This summons is more important. I think they are wrong.

When it comes to education, we have tried to focus on smaller class sizes so teachers can spend more time with kids who need help. We have tried to focus on afterschool programs so during that period of time when the school let's out before mom and dad get home kids have a chance to stay in a supervised situation at school so they can be tutored; if they are falling behind, enrichment classes if they are kids who are doing well; play a little sports but do something under supervision; summer school for the same reason—so that education starts reflecting the reality of family life.

We think we can focus as well on a Patients' Bill of Rights so we can say that doctors will make medical decisions and not insurance company clerks. Every medical group in America, nurses and doctors—all of them—support us. We would like to see the decisions on the future of each family's health made by health care professionals and not by people looking at the bottom line of an insurance company. We believe a prescription drug benefit is a high priority.

I had hearings across Illinois, and I have seen it across the Nation. There are people who are literally deciding between food and medicine. Elderly and disabled people can't afford the medicine their doctors prescribe. So they do not fill the prescriptions. They cut the pills in half. They do things they shouldn't do, and they get sick. When they get sick, what happens? They end up in a hospital. If they end up in a hospital, guess what. Medicare will pay the bills now. We wouldn't pay for the pills to keep them out of the hospital but we will pay for the pills when they get sick and go to a hospital.

We think a prescription drug benefit makes sense. We think that is what we should be debating on the floor of the Senate. But we do not. Another week passes by. We consider a lot of other things, and families across America return to ask us: Where are your priorities? What are you thinking about?

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

Mr. DURBIN. I will conclude. I thank you, Mr. President, for the time you have given me this morning and hope that the leadership on Capitol Hill will