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Brady law in 1993, we have put a stop to some 400,000 illegal gun sales, without stopping one legitimate sports man or woman from buying a gun. And you cannot convince any reasonable person in law enforcement that those 400,000 stops didn't have something to do with the fact that we have a 25-year low in the crime rate and an even bigger plummet in many areas of gun-related violent crime.

Now, in the wake of the shootings after Littleton, I asked the Senate to pass a commonsense measure to help prevent youth violence by doing more in this vein to keep guns out the hands of criminals and children. For one thing, we should close the loophole that lets a criminal turned away from a gun dealer go to a gun show or a flea market in a city and buy a gun without a background check. The technology is there now for these background checks to be done without great burden to people who run gun shows and flea markets. But today they can buy a gun there, no questions asked.

Now, the same people who said in 1993 that no criminals buy their guns at gun stores, they buy them other places, say that we should not have background checks at the other places. I think we should. I think we should require that safety locks be sold with every handgun. We should ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips. We should say violent juveniles should not own guns when they become adults.

It took a pivotal vote by Vice President Gore to break a tie in the Senate so that the Senate did the right thing in closing the gun show loophole. Unfortunately, as most of you probably know, 2 weeks ago, the Republicans in the House of Representatives, with some Democrats but not many, shot down America's best hope for commonsense gun control—in the face of strong public demand, clear public need, and again I say, out in the country, no partisanship.

The House filled the proposal full of high-caliber loopholes. And now they say they want to watch it die. The majority even pushed measures to weaken current law, for example, letting criminals store their guns at pawnshops, even if the reason they need to store it is because they're taking a sabbatical in prison. [*Laughter*] They say if they come back to get the gun, there shouldn't be a background check. [*Laughter*] We've had a pawnshop background check for a good while now. They want to get rid of that, as if that is somehow terribly burdensome to people.

Well, I think we can do better than that. But I don't know how we can expect you to stand up to youth violence if the Congress won't stand up to the gun lobby. We have got to—[*applause*].

So again, I say, it's not too late. The House and the Senate will now appoint conferees on this bill, because they have passed two different bills. Those people can put the provisions the Senate passed into the bill, send it to the House and the Senate, pass it, and I'll sign it. It's important that we strengthen, not weaken, our laws that make it easier for criminals to get and keep guns.

Okay, so let's go back and review the bidding here. We have a raft of bipartisan bills: health care for the disabled; the minimum wage; campaign finance reform; the Patients' Bill of Rights. We have big issues on which there are disagreements but where honorable compromise is possible: long-term reform of Social Security and Medicare; paying down the debt. We have a clear case where Republicans and Democrats should join together to mobilize private capital to give new life to our poorest communities: legislation to hire more teachers and to raise educational standards; sensible but vital steps to protect our children from violence.

These are big things. These are things worthy of a great nation and its elected representatives. I will work day and night to achieve this agenda. I hope you will support it, again, without regard to party. And I hope you will believe that good citizenship and public service are worth your time and effort.

Many times when I have come here, and many times around the country, I have referred to a professor I had here, who I talked about in 1991, who taught Western Civilization. He said, our civilization was unique in the belief of what he called ''future preference.'' That is, the idea that the future can be better than the past, and that every individual has a duty to make it so.

Now, you obviously believe that or you wouldn't be here. I'm about to give you all your medal, and we're going to take pictures.