

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for the transaction of routine morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

 WHEN WILL THE CYCLE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE END?

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, the nightmare of violence in our nation's schools has grabbed our attention once more. This morning, a first-grade student was shot and killed by another first-grader at a Michigan elementary school. Our thoughts and prayers are with the young girl's family, with the young person who pulled the trigger, and with the twenty other students in the classroom. Tragically, once again, the notion of schools as a safe haven was shattered by the sound of gunfire, and we must now begin to face the formidable challenge of rebuilding that serene and tranquil school environment that each and every student and teacher deserves.

This tragedy begs some very basic questions of our society.

First, and perhaps most importantly, what is a first-grader doing with a loaded gun? A first-grader is six years old, maybe even seven. These are merely babes with sweet young faces who have barely begun their lives. They are still putting baby teeth under their pillows awaiting a visit from the tooth fairy. How did this child get the weapon? And what on Earth possessed the child to bring it to school?

What has gone so wrong in our nation that students feel the need to bring weapons to the public school classroom? Do they think they have to show off for their friends? Do they feel the need for power? Surely not a child in the first grade. Do they think that carrying a weapon to school gives them greater stature? I know that we, as a nation, have been struggling with these questions for many, many months, but it is time we started to reach some conclusions.

In the 315 days since the tragedy at Columbine High School, the violence has not stopped. We have seen the same tragic scene of students and teachers pouring out of schools in fear in Atlanta. In the District of Columbia, since this school year began in September, 15 public school students have been killed. According to police, eight of the fifteen slayings were precipitated by an argument in school and ended in gunfire on a neighborhood street. For some reason that we cannot seem to get our arms around, our children continue to injure and kill one another.

Why in the world are we not concentrating on this? Why is the Juvenile

Justice bill, which passed this Senate in May with common-sense weapons controls, still stalled? How many children have to die before this Congress sits up and takes notice? How many lives, so full of potential, have to be snuffed out: 15, 30, 50, 100?

We need to find out why these tragedies continue to occur, and we need to find ways to stop it.

There will be a supplemental bill coming before this Senate soon which is intended to provide close to a billion dollars in aid for Colombia. The White House calls this funding an emergency. I think we have more than enough emergencies here on our home soil that demand urgent attention. It is time to get our priorities straight.

I understand that this is not something that Congress can do on its own, nor is it something that a local school board can accomplish by itself. Putting an end to school violence will take a concerted effort—from lawmakers to parents to students to clergy to community leaders. No one can be given a pass. We all share a responsibility to come together, to look past any historical differences, and to work to find real solutions that will put an end to these tragedies.

I only pray that we can.

My heart goes out to the family who must be stunned at the loss of their little girl. I can only imagine their suffering. All the potential in one tiny, small, little innocent life has been stolen in the flash of a gun. I hope that this Congress, and I hope that the electronic media, the Hollywood movie stars, the movie industry, and the whole Nation, will finally commit to taking the difficult steps that are needed to make sure something positive can come from such an incredible tragedy.

I yield the floor.

 KEEP OUR PROMISE TO AMERICA'S MILITARY RETIREES

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in sponsoring, S. 2003, the Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act of 2000. I am sponsoring this legislation because I believe it is necessary if we are to fulfill our moral obligation to those who devoted their careers to safeguarding our nation's people, our homes, and our way of life.

The brave men and women of our armed forces literally put their lives on the line for this country. We owe them a debt we can never repay. But one thing we cannot do, in my opinion, is fail to live up to our explicit promise that those who made military life their career would receive, in return lifetime medical care. That is a promise we have made; and it is a promise we must keep.

There has already been a great deal of discussion on this topic in the Administration and the Congress. In the 1998 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress expressed its sense that many retired military personnel rea-

sonably believed that they had been promised lifetime health care in exchange for 20 or more years of service. Recruiters for the uniformed services, as agents of the United States government, had used recruiting tactics promising enrollees entering the Armed Forces prior to June 7, 1956, that they would be entitled to fully paid lifetime health care upon retirement.

Unfortunately, prior to 1956, a statutory health care plan did not exist for our military personnel. Since the establishment of CHAMPUS, and its successor, Tricare, we have seen the erosion of space-available health care at military treatment facilities for military retirees. Additionally, military health care has become increasingly difficult to obtain for military retirees as the Department of Defense reduces its health care infrastructure. As a result, military retiree's health care situation is woefully inadequate compared to health care afforded to other federal employees. Today, military retirees remain the only Federal Government personnel who have been prevented from using their employer-provided health care at or after 65 years of age. Military retirees deserve to have a health care program that is at least comparable with that of retirees from civilian employment in the Federal Government.

In statements before this Congress, our distinguished Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs have reiterated the importance of seeing to military retirees' health needs. According to Secretary Cohen, the loudest complaints he hears while traveling concern the military health care system.

I believe General Hugh Shelton expressed the correct response to these complaints when he stated, "I think that the first thing we need to do is make sure that we acknowledge our commitment to the retirees for their years of service and for what we basically committed to at the time they were recruited into the armed forces." It is morally imperative, that we keep our promise to the brave men and women who devoted their careers to protecting our country.

But we should also keep in mind that health care is not only a top issue for retirees; it is also a major source of dissatisfaction for active duty personnel. As such it affects readiness, recruiting and retention. The availability of quality, lifetime health care is a critical recruiting incentive for the all volunteer Armed Forces.

That incentive has been undermined by the declining services provided to military retirees. In its self-proclaimed "Year of Health Care," the Department of Defense had a major opportunity to take the lead in keeping commitments to service members and start erasing the skepticism and distrust that years of broken health care promises have engendered among the retired population. Putting these initiatives in the

President's budget would have made them much easier to enact. But, once again, the Administration has chosen to pass its moral responsibilities to the Congress.

For too long, this Administration has ignored the needs of the brave men and women who have defended our interests and our shores. This is unfair. What is more, in my view it is unwise to ignore the well-being of military retirees.

Well-trained, properly motivated troops have been and continue to be the single most important factor in protecting our national security. Without them we will not be able to achieve and maintain military readiness. We will not be able, as a nation, to fight and win. Under current conditions we cannot expect to maintain the levels of re-enlistment, expertise and morale we need to maintain an effective military force.

Last year this Congress took it upon itself to address the critical issue of unconscionably low military pay. I hope and believe that this year we will address the no-less critical issue of unconscionably inadequate health care services for military retirees.

This Congress and the President must take action to address the problems associated with the availability of health care for military retirees. Keeping this nation's promise and providing adequate health care for military retirees is an issue whose time has come. Every day, in hundreds of locations all over the world, our soldiers, sailors and airmen willingly serve in defense of our national interest, promoting peace and prosperity around the globe.

We have asked for the greatest sacrifice from our military retirees and today's men and women in uniform—to give one's life in defense of their nation. When people put themselves in harm's way for their country, they should not have to worry about their families' access to proper health care.

We must act upon the sense of this Congress that the United States has incurred a moral obligation to provide health care to former members of the Armed Forces who are entitled to retired or retainer pay (or its equivalent); and it is, therefore, necessary to provide quality, affordable health to such retirees.

For these reasons I am happy to join with Senators COVERDELL, JOHNSON, and 13 fellow Senators in co-sponsoring the bipartisan Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act (S. 2003). This legislation is key to re-establishing the morale, confidence and trust of our military retirees.

I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, during the Civil Rights movement, Dr. Carter G. Woodson's idea of a Negro History Week honoring the achievements of African Americans was extended to the entire month of February.

I rise today as a Senator from the state with the largest population of African Americans in the United States to speak on behalf of this year's Black History Month theme "Heritage and Horizons." Harlem, New York was the center of a 1930's Renaissance period. It attracted aspiring individuals from across the country and the world. It is also the birthplace of renowned African Americans who have excelled in the areas of politics and business, arts and entertainment, athletics and activism.

Since the expansion of the Negro History Week to Black History Month, countless African Americans continue to amass accomplishments and shatter barriers worthy of multiple months of tribute. Many of us know of the great strides made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglas, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, and Rosa Parks. Many of the Members in this chamber have worked alongside Shirley Chisholm, Thurgood Marshall Sr., Charles Rangel, Clifford Alexander, Jr., and Colin Powell.

African Americans from New York have been pioneers in many different fields. In 1981, Pam McAllister Johnson was named publisher of Gannett's Ithaca (NY) Journal, making her the first African American woman to head a general circulation newspaper in the United States. In June 1995, Dr. Lonnie Bristow, a Harlem native, became the first African American appointed as president of the American Medical Association. American Express announced in February 1997 that Kenneth Chenault was named president and heir apparent to the position of CEO, making the Long Island native the highest-ranking African American executive in corporate America.

Art Hardwick, husband of Shirley Chisholm, won the 1962 State Assembly race becoming the first African American to represent Western New York. In 1971, Carmel C. Marr became the first woman of any race to serve as Commissioner of the New York State Public Service Commission. Harry Belafonte, a Harlem native, was recently honored at the Grammy's for his lifetime contributions as an actor and entertainer. Denzel Washington, born and raised in Mount Vernon, recently won a Golden Globe for his role in the movie Hurricane. The critically acclaimed author of *The Women of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor, hails from Queens, New York.

In 1957, New York City native Althea Gibson was the first African American woman to compete and win at the Wimbledon and Forest Hills. The following year, she repeated as the Wimbledon and U.S. National Tennis Champion. Former NBA coach and Brooklyn native, Lenny Wilkins, was voted into the Basketball Hall of Fame for holding the NBA record for the most regular season victories by a coach.

Almost 70 years after the Renaissance began, New York continues to be the place where African American

innovators and pioneers distinguish themselves, thereby continuing the Renaissance and enhancing our country.

NOMINATION OF GEORGE DANIELS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am extremely pleased to rise today to speak about George Daniels, who has just been confirmed as a Federal Judge in the Southern District of New York.

George Daniels is uniquely qualified to serve in this position. His work experience is as diverse and impressive as it gets: He has been a Legal Aid Defense Attorney and a prosecutor; he has worked at a top New York Law firm and served as a Law Professor; he worked in politics as Counsel to the Mayor of New York, and, of course, he has been a Judge—first on the Criminal Court of the City of New York and then as a Justice on the Supreme Court of the State of New York. I know he has the respect and the admiration from individuals on both sides of the aisle.

I am extremely pleased to see him confirmed as a Federal Judge. I know he will be an extraordinary addition to the Southern District of New York bench.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, February 28, 2000, the Federal debt stood at \$5,747,333,809,275.61 (Five trillion, seven hundred forty-seven billion, three hundred thirty-three million, eight hundred nine thousand, two hundred seventy-five dollars and sixty-one cents).

Five years ago, February 28, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,854,298,000,000 (Four trillion, eight hundred fifty-four billion, two hundred ninety-eight million).

Ten years ago, February 28, 1990, the Federal debt stood at \$2,994,354,000,000 (Two trillion, nine hundred ninety-four billion, three hundred fifty-four million).

Fifteen years ago, February 28, 1985, the Federal debt stood at \$1,698,358,000,000 (One trillion, six hundred ninety-eight billion, three hundred fifty-eight million).

Twenty-five years ago, February 28, 1975, the Federal debt stood at \$499,711,000,000 (Four hundred ninety-nine billion, seven hundred eleven million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$5 trillion—\$5,247,622,809,275.61 (Five trillion, two hundred forty-seven billion, six hundred twenty-two million, eight hundred nine thousand, two hundred seventy-five dollars and sixty-one cents) during the past 25 years.

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 2:47 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives delivered by