

problems of gun violence in their own communities. Unfortunately, legislation introduced earlier this year would undermine both of these objectives.

Among other things, the misnamed District of Columbia Personal Protection Act would repeal local laws in Washington, DC that ban the sale and possession of unregistered firearms, require firearm registration, impose common sense safe storage requirements, and ban semiautomatic weapons.

Elected officials and community leaders throughout Washington, DC, have made clear their opposition to this bill and any other attempt to roll back Washington's local gun safety laws. In recent months, many groups around the country working to end gun violence have also expressed strong opposition to the proposed repeal of local gun safety laws in Washington, DC. In July, 44 national, state, and local organizations issued an open letter to Congress opposing the so called District of Columbia Personal Protection Act. Among the groups who signed the letter were the United States Conference of Mayors, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Black Police Association, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. Their letter said:

The citizens of the District of Columbia should have the power to decide by democratic means whether and how firearms are regulated in the city where they live. DC's current gun laws were passed almost 30 years ago by an elected city council, and these laws continue to enjoy broad support among business executives, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, civic organizations, and ordinary citizens. When legislation to repeal DC's gun laws was introduced last year, it generated widespread opposition—and attracted virtually no support—among DC residents.

While this bill has not yet been considered in the Senate, the citizens of Washington, DC, continue to face attempts to roll back their local gun safety laws. During consideration of the fiscal year 2006 District of Columbia appropriations bill, the House of Representatives adopted an amendment strongly supported by the National Rifle Association which would prohibit funds in the bill from being used to enforce a local requirement that District residents keep their firearms unloaded and disassembled or bound by a trigger lock in their homes. Fortunately, the current Senate version of the bill does not include a similar provision and I am hopeful the House-passed language will not become law.

The Senate should respect the will of the people of Washington, DC, with regard to local gun safety laws. I hope the Senate will focus its efforts on legislation that will help make communities across our Nation safer, not on steps which would make our Nation's Capital less safe.

I ask unanimous consent that the above-mentioned letter be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

JULY 15, 2005.

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR: We are writing to express our strong opposition to S. 1082, a bill that would strip the District of Columbia's voters and elected officials of the power to pass gun laws.

The citizens of the District of Columbia should have the power to decide by democratic means whether and how firearms are regulated in the city where they live. DC's current gun laws were passed almost 30 years ago by an elected city council, and these laws continue to enjoy broad support among business executives, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, civic organizations, and ordinary citizens. When legislation to repeal DC's gun laws was introduced last year, it generated widespread opposition—and attracted virtually no support—among DC residents.

DC has made great strides in recent years, both in reducing violent crime and in encouraging people to establish businesses, buy homes, and build their lives in the city. The city's finances are in order (it has an "A" rating from bond analysts), the homicide rate is down (by 55 percent over the past ten years), and commercial as well as residential real estate markets are booming.

The city has many challenges ahead, but its citizens and political leaders are working to build consensus and solve problems like any other municipality in the country through vigorous debate, hard work, and participation in democratic political institutions. While some members of Congress might have different ideas about what's good for the city, we believe the choices made by DC citizens and their elected representatives in local government should be entitled to respect.

The debate over S. 1082 is about democracy, not the Second Amendment. By denying the citizens of DC—who have no representation in Congress—the right to decide how best to protect public safety and reduce violent crime, this bill would violate basic American values, and we urge you to reject it.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Justice, Americans for Democratic Action, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Break the Cycle Washington, DC, CeaseFire Maryland, Ceasefire NJ, Ceasefire PA, and Children's Defense Fund;

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Common Cause, Consumer Federation of America, DC Action for Children, DC Democracy Fund, DC Vote, The Episcopal Church, USA, Episcopal Diocese of Washington, Florida Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, and Florida Consumer Action Network;

Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence, Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence, Jewish Women International, The League of Women Voters of the United States, Legal Community Against Violence, and Maine Citizens Against Handgun Violence;

Michigan Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Black Police Association, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, and North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund;

Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence, Oregon Consumer League, Physicians for So-

cial Responsibility, Saferworld, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, and United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries;

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, United States Conference of Mayors, Virginians Against Handgun Violence, Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort, and Women Against Gun Violence (California).

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to inform my colleagues as to why I missed voting on the motion to table Senator COBURN's amendment No. 2005 to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2006. At the time the vote occurred, I was attending the funeral of a longtime employee and friend, Shawn Bentley.

Should I have been present, I would have voted in favor of tabling the amendment, which would not have changed the outcome of the vote.

GI EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, the original G.I. bill in 1944 made a sacred bargain: honor our troops for their sacrifice, and keep faith with our veterans by helping them readjust to civilian life. Historically, G.I. bill educational benefits have risen and fallen—at times covering over 100 percent of the cost of tuition, books, supplies and other educational costs. And we know how valuable its benefits have become in recruiting the world's finest military.

But each year, the G.I. bill covers a little bit less of the cost of education in this country. It's a cruel mathematical calculation—the cost of a university education is growing faster than the benefits provided by the G.I. bill. Our troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world fight just as hard and sacrifice just as much as any in American history. Yet the G.I. bill—this great act of gratitude that transformed America 60 years ago—has not kept pace. Today, our troops return home to a G.I. bill that covers only 63 percent of the average price of a 4-year public secondary education. The result is veterans struggling to afford the education they were promised and have earned.

The U.S. Congress should never break promises to our veterans—like 28-year-old Jeff Memmer. As a member of the U.S. Navy, Jeff served two deployments in the Persian Gulf between 1996 and 2002. When he came home, he had to take out tens of thousands of dollars in emergency loans and work part time as a bartender to get through school because costs kept outpacing benefits. He said, "When I started putting a plan together in 1999, the benefit would have covered two-thirds of my tuition and costs. By the time I got to college, the tuition had increased so much it only covered half, and by the time I graduated it was only covering a third of my expenses." We are not proposing that veterans live in luxury while they earn their degrees. But clearly, it shouldn't be this hard.