

very sad situation that could have been prevented. But now that it has happened, it needs to be addressed in a bipartisan way. He would see what I saw, which is children separated from their parents with no certainty about the future, children who have endured unspeakable hardships and cruelty at the hands of some of the most vile thugs on the planet, the cartels, who view them as a commodity as they do drugs and weapons. They view these children as a commodity, something to make money off of.

The Border Patrol in South Texas and along the border is doing a very professional job under very difficult circumstances, but they are simply overwhelmed. Repeatedly, we will hear of the Border Patrol—law enforcement officers—basically having to divert their attention from doing those law enforcement responsibilities and duties to basically taking care of children, making sure they are fed, their medical condition is being attended to, and they have a safe place to stay while going through the procedures there at the border.

I commend the Border Patrol and all of our Federal law enforcement agencies for making their resources and time stretch as far as possible for these children while the Commander in Chief has decided to do something else.

I realize how controversial and polarizing this issue can be, but at least in some respects it should take precedence over partisan politics and fundraisers.

What I don't understand is how the President can send a bill for \$2 billion—which he reportedly is going to do tomorrow, apparently asking us for some changes in the existing law—and then to simply be missing in action when it comes to learning for himself the very facts that are necessary for him to be able to make the case not only to Congress but to the American people for why both of those were necessary.

President Obama evidently needs a wakeup call, and visiting the border and learning firsthand about the severity and causes of this ongoing crisis will be that wakeup call.

Again, I urge the President to visit the border this week during his fundraising trip to Texas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. COATS. Madam President, the Supreme Court issued a ruling last week that I wish to discuss for a few moments today. This decision marks a very important development in the ongoing debate our country is engaged in on the subject of religious freedom.

In a 5-to-4 decision, the Supreme Court reported that the contraceptive coverage mandate imposed by the Affordable Care Act on family-owned companies such as Hobby Lobby stores

and Conestoga Wood Specialties violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

These two companies are owned by individuals who have faith-based objections to providing access to contraceptives that can terminate a pregnancy.

While it is true some faith-based institutions object to the mandate on religious grounds, their insurance companies which are covering them and their employees in that business are mandated to provide support for contraception. It is also true, but not really distinguished and noticed in the media, that there are a number of institutions which are saying: You can't couch this under the umbrella of contraception, you have to understand that what we are opposed to here is not all forms of birth control.

Hobby Lobby has been clear to state that they fall under this category, although they oppose the morning-after pill and other contraceptives that induce abortions.

The Supreme Court's ruling means employers such as Hobby Lobby or Grote Industries in my home State of Indiana—a family-run auto lighting company—will not be forced to take actions contrary to their religious beliefs. I applaud this ruling issued by the Court because freedom of religion is a core American principle guaranteed by our First Amendment, and through this decision the Court has affirmed that the administration simply can't pick and choose when and how or whether to adhere to the Constitution.

While this ruling is a welcome positive step, it is important to note that religious freedom is still under attack across this country. It is under attack because the Court's ruling applies only to a very narrow rule, family-owned for-profit companies such as Hobby Lobby, when many faith-based organizations, charities, hospitals, educational institutions are still required to facilitate insurance coverage that includes contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs despite their religious beliefs and despite their moral objections. Requiring these faith-based institutions and businesses to betray the fundamental tenets of their beliefs is, I believe, unconstitutional, and the administration's so-called accommodation is far from adequate in this fundamental breach of our First Amendment rights under our Constitution. Those impacted by this mandate are a large and diverse group that includes Indiana-based institutions such as Grace College in Winona Lake, IN, the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, and many other schools based on a religious foundation that find a moral and religious objection.

Despite conscious objections and the University of Notre Dame's clearly outlined standards and values, Notre Dame was told by a Federal appeals court late last year that it must comply with the ObamaCare mandate, which they are appealing.

My alma mater, one of those institutions, Wheaton College, was told by the

Supreme Court only last week that it doesn't have to abide by the contraceptive coverage mandate until the judicial system determines whether the administration's requirement is valid over religious institutions and other nonprofits.

Just an aside, it was surprising to read this morning in the Wall Street Journal that—in fact, it was disappointing and highly unusual—despite the Court explicitly stating its decision to grant Wheaton College a temporary injunction “should not be construed as an expression of the Court's views on the merits” of Wheaton's case, having explicitly stated that, one Justice wrote a dissenting opinion in which she essentially decided on the merits of the Wheaton case herself. That is the first time, in my recollection. I don't follow every decision of the Supreme Court, but I follow many of them—but it is surprising that a Justice would allow their ideological passion on a particular issue to so mischaracterize the ruling of the Court that simply provided for an injunction to give the time for the court system to make a ruling.

Nevertheless, that is not why I came to the floor this evening. I thought in terms of thinking through this issue and what I might say that it appears to be ideological bias on the Court that raised its ugly head here, and hopefully that will be retracted.

But whether it is Wheaton College, whether it is Notre Dame or Grace College or numerous other institutions, it is important to understand that in many of these institutions a thread of faith, a stream of water, runs through everything they do in those organizations, and particularly in those schools of higher learning and those entities that provide social services through the food banks, through dealing with the homeless. The element of faith is important to their success, it is important to their results, and it is important to their beliefs.

Whether it is faith in learning as the central part of institutions such as Notre Dame, Wheaton College, or others, or whether it is a homeless shelter in South Bend, IN—that is the combination of churches, university, city, county, some Federal funding, some local funding, and some volunteer funding—it is essential, as they have told me on one of my visits, that this ribbon of faith is essential to the success of their program and to the rehabilitation of those who walk through the front door, often homeless, and leave months and years later with the capabilities of full employment, gainful employment, and become homeowners instead of homeless.

Whether it is food banks or homeless shelters or other important organizations, so many of these are meeting needs of people across this Nation. But these institutions are seeing this ribbon of faith and the free exercise of religion constrained and restricted by this administration's mandate under the Obama health care law.

What is at stake here is of extreme significance. Established in the founding of our Nation and sustained for over 200 years, religious freedom is at the very core of our system of government, and protection of religious liberty means all people of all faiths have the right to exercise their faith within the bounds of our justice system even if their belief seems to some as misguided or flawed or flatout wrong. But what is unique about America and what is guaranteed in our Constitution is that we do not have the right to dictate to those people how to express their faith so long as they are within the bounds of justice, how to express their faith, live their faith, and employ their faith.

Taking that right away from faith-based institutions is flatout wrong and I believe a violation of the most precious amendment to the Constitution. Faith-based institutions should not have to facilitate insurance coverage for products that are counter to their religious or moral beliefs. To require them to betray the fundamental tenets of their beliefs and accept this violation of their First Amendment rights guaranteed by the Constitution is simply wrong.

In a joint statement released shortly after announcement of the Hobby Lobby decision, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the U.S. Bishops Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, said:

Now is the time to redouble our effort to build a culture that fully respects religious freedom.

That is really what we are asking for. We are asking this administration to respect those institutions' and those individuals' religious freedom as guaranteed under our Constitution. Whether we agree with their tenets, whether we ideologically take a position in favor or not in favor, it is their right and it is guaranteed.

I hope in the coming days the Supreme Court will strike down the administration's mandate for all faith-based institutions and rescind this unprecedented attack on religious freedom. While we await further action from the Court, now is the time for this body—the Senate—and all Americans of faith to stand for our country's longstanding right to the freedom of religion. It was the father of our country, after all, George Washington, who once said:

I have often expressed my sentiment, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.

We today know that reference to "every man" also includes every woman and every human being, the right to be accountable to God alone for their religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of their own

conscience—not the dictates of a Federal Government that says "We know better," nor the dictates of those who simply say "We will interpret that liberty to our satisfaction to accomplish our purposes." As in Washington's times, we must defend these rights of conscience and preserve religious liberty for all Americans regardless of their choice of belief and expression of their faith.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, last week Target stores announced that they were going to initiate a new policy in their stores across the country. They were going to politely ask all of their consumers to refrain from bringing guns inside their stores.

This is a picture of one of their customers bringing what appears to be a semiautomatic rifle into a store in order to buy Oreos. Their statement read like this:

As you have likely seen in the media, there has been debate about whether guests in communities that permit "open carry" should be allowed to bring firearms into Target stores. Our approach has always been to follow local laws, and of course we will continue to do so, but starting today we will also respectfully request that guests not bring firearms to Target—even in communities where it is permitted by law.

We've listened carefully to the nuances of this debate and respect the protected rights of everyone involved. . . . This is a complicated issue, but it boils down to a simple belief: Bringing firearms to Target creates an environment that is at odds with the family-friendly shopping and work experience we strive to create.

I am thankful that Target has taken this position. I am hopeful that other retail stores across the country will follow suit. My only point of disagreement is that there is any nuance to this debate. My only point of contention is that there is anything complicated about whether this is appropriate for workers across retail stores and restaurants in the United States or the little kids who come in and shop there on a regular basis.

Here is what the NRA had to say about this. The NRA released a statement that said:

Let's not mince words, not only is it rare, it is downright weird and certainly not a practical way to normally go about your business while being prepared to defend yourself—talking about bringing firearms into stores—to those who are not acquainted with the dubious practice of using public displays of firearms as a means to draw attention to one's self or one's cause, it can be down right scary. Using guns really to draw

attention to yourself in public not only defies common sense, it shows a lack of consideration and manners.

That was the NRA's position for a couple of days, until a handful of NRA members got upset and started tearing up their membership cards, and then the NRA's top lobbyist apologized for that statement and effectively withdrew it. Luckily, Target some weeks later changed their policies.

That is weird. That is scary. That is inappropriate. It is this policy which we have perpetuated by our inaction in this place that allows for the continued diffusion of weapons, many of which are military grade such as the one displayed here that is leading to the spiraling rates of mass gun violence across this country.

We went for a stretch in January or February where there was a school shooting almost every other day that school was open. We expect now to pick up the newspaper and read about another mass slaughter somewhere in this country, and we wonder why it is happening. There are guys buying Oreos with an assault rifle strapped onto their shoulder, and that debate is nuanced and complicated about whether we should allow it.

The gun lobby's position speaks to this mythology—that is charitable, a lie to the cynics—that the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. That is not what actually any of the data tells us. The data tells us if you have a gun in your home, you are much more likely to be the victim of a gunshot from that gun than you are to ever use that on an assailant. If you are a woman, for instance, you are five times more likely to die as a result of domestic violence with a gun if it is in your home rather than if you are in a home without a gun. Health Affairs came out with a study of 50 States. A longitudinal study of experience related to rates of gun violence and rates of gun ownership found that for every percentage increase of gun ownership in a community, there is a percentage increase in gun violence.

There have been 79 shootings in Walmarts in the last year—79 shootings in Walmarts, of all places, in the last year. I am glad Target made the decision to take guns out of the workplace.

Senator BLUMENTHAL will speak after me. Senator BLUMENTHAL and I sent a letter to Target asking them to make this change in policy, and I am glad they did.

It appears we will have debate this week on a piece of legislation that will allow for individuals to bring more firearms onto public property throughout this country. It is not a debate about bringing firearms into Target stores; it is a debate about bringing firearms onto public lands.

There is a perfectly legitimate debate to be had about bringing more legal guns onto public property, but there is a more important debate than that about taking illegal guns off of