

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
March 7, 2013**

Last week we all had the opportunity to talk about the legislation before the Committee regarding gun violence in America. This week I hope we can make significant progress.

Earlier this week I was joined by Senator Collins, Senator Durbin, Senator Gillibrand, and Senator Kirk in the introduction of revised legislation to combat the straw purchasing and trafficking of firearms. Others have since joined us on that bill, including Senator Klobuchar, Senator Blumenthal and Senator King. Today I plan to offer a substitute amendment to my pending bill to refine its provisions with the text of the Leahy-Collins bill.

I noted last week that I had reached out to others Senators and those discussions bore fruit. The substitute incorporates the pending bill's provisions and its creation of a specific crime for straw purchasing. It is designed to prevent criminals from using straw purchasers who can pass a background check and then hand those firearms to the criminals. Straw purchasers circumvent the purposes of the background check system. The practice of straw purchasing firearms is undertaken for one reason—to get a gun into the hands of someone who is prohibited from having one. We know that many guns used in criminal activities are acquired through straw purchases. We need a meaningful solution to this serious problem. In our substitute we also include suggestions from Senator Gillibrand to go after those who traffic in firearms by wrongfully obtaining two or more firearms. Our bill is intended to give law enforcement better and more effective tools.

The substitute also incorporates a number of changes that result from suggestions from Senator Grassley and his staff. Our staffs have been discussing these matters since January. I have tried to be responsive to the Ranking Member's concerns and suggestions. As I reached across the aisle to other Senators I have also been reaching out to Senator Grassley and I hope that he will join us in support of this legislation.

It was an ATF whistleblower who testified last Congress that the existing firearms laws are “toothless”. Law enforcement officials have consistently called for a firearms trafficking statute that can be effective to go after straw purchasers. What we need to do now is to create better law enforcement tools. I urge all Senators to join with us to close a dangerous loophole in the law that Mexican drug cartels, gangs and other criminals have exploited for too long.

We should all be mindful of the human costs of gun violence and move quickly on our bill, the Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act. This week USA Today ran a frontpage story about a study that estimates that gun violence costs Americans \$12 billion a year. Whether it is \$12 billion or \$10 billion or \$2 billion, we ought to be doing what we can as a Committee and a Congress to mitigate those unnecessary costs and stop the devastating loss of so many precious lives. As soon as we can get a quorum I intend to proceed quickly through the nominations that were held over from last week and then proceed to the Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act and the other items held over from last week.