violence affects mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, and whole communities on both sides.

Some people call Bint Jubail a Hezbollah stronghold—and I understand that. But 15,000 of my constituents act, I tell them to fly out because you know if you are going to die. But you have to happen to their families.

Tibebus. He talked about his experience. He mentioned his son. I know they are dying on both sides. Today I pray for them and grieve with their families.

The lucky ones were able to get out—such as Rania Horani from Dearborn who was vacationing with her family in Bint Jubail when the fighting broke out. Fortunately, Rania was evacuated, but she spoke to the Associated Press about this terrifying experience. She said:

You're waiting, you're scared, you don't know if you are going to die. But you have to get out because you are going to either starve, fear, stress, or a bomb. Thank God we're in [Cyprus].

We share that sentiment.

But the tragedy continues for hundreds of others stuck in Bint Jubail right now. The State Department must not stop the evacuations until every American and their families are safely out of Lebanon.

Last evening I spoke with one of the assistant Secretaries of State about American citizens and their families who are still there. And I appreciate the attention of the assistant Secretary and of the Embassy, but we can not stop the ships.

We can not stop the rescue missions until all Americans and their families can come home. Too many people are still stuck there.

On the Israeli side, there is also too much destruction and loss of life. I understand this must be a very difficult time for the thousands of Americans fear for their families. Thousands of people in Michigan, friends of mine, hundreds of Michigan teenagers were evacuated in the middle of a summer trip to Israel because they were close to Hezbollah rocket attacks. I know their families and the fear of their moms and dads about whether their children would come home safely from a summer trip.

Brandon Lebowitz, a student at West Bloomfield High School, was a few miles away from the bombings in Tiberius. He talked about his harrowing experience:

We saw the missiles hitting the city and the smoke and we heard them from across the street. They were pretty close to the missiles exploding.

I know how I would feel if that were my son.

Innocent Americans from both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border have fled to Michigan in panic. I have come back home to escape the violence, watch the news every day, waiting to see what will happen to their families.

Unfortunately, many civilians did not escape the violence. Over 400 Israelis and Lebanese have died in the fighting. This has got to stop. The U.S. Government must push hard to stop the hostilities and the violence against innocent citizens. Innocent civilians are being killed in Israel and in Lebanon. I believe it is our responsibility to stand up and do everything possible to bring that violence to an end. That is why I am pleased to be a co-sponsor of a resolution with Senator Dodd, my colleague, Senator Levin, and Senator Sununu that expresses support to attain a cessation in hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. We know this is not easy, but we know innocent people—families, Americans—are counting on us to show leadership.

Regrettably, over the last 5 years our Government has not played the leadership role so critical in the Middle East, the leadership role played by every other administration, whether Democrat or Republican. It is time to assert our leadership and put a stop to the violence as soon as possible. The innocent people of Lebanon and Israel have had enough of the violence and bloodshed. It is time for them to be able to live their lives in peace.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation in the Senate?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is in morning business with 19 minutes for Senators to speak therein.

THE AUGUST RECESS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished President Officer. I commend him for his duty in the chair on a Friday morning where the smell of jet fumes have proven an allure to many of our colleagues in both parties who have headed off. I might say to my friend, the distinguished President Officer, I do realize he cannot respond from the chair, but all of us look forward to that time. I am willing to spend the month of August in my own State of Vermont.

I said to somebody that we make sacrifices in these jobs, and they suggested the idea of being in Vermont for a month, which is one of the prettiest times of the year up there, was probably not the world’s greatest sacrifice. I invite the President Officer and anybody else who is in the District of Columbia after he signs the bill to at least spend a month in Vermont while I was there at the White House, that what really struck me the most was the President’s saying his administration would “vigorously enforce the provisions of this law and we will defend it if necessary."

I complimented him for the words he used in the ceremony when he signed the law. He sounded like a man fully on board and supportive of the findings, purposes and provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

I speak on this topic again today because of its immediate importance to the reauthorization and revitalization of the Voting Rights Act that we unanimously passed last week. The President signed it into law yesterday. It was 98 to 0 in the Senate. It was passed by an overwhelming bipartisan margin in the other body. I felt privileged to be there when the President signed the law. I talked with him shortly after the signing and again after he signed. I complimented him for the words he used in the ceremony when he signed the law. He sounded like a man fully on board and supportive of the findings, purposes and provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

I am delighted to go there. They would vote for the distinguished President Officer, too.
I am told that next week the President will issue a Presidential signing statement on the Voting Rights Act re-authorization. I am urging that this not be one of those infamous signing statements where he says something else, but what he means is the opposite. We don't just do for our generation, we do it for our children and our grandchildren in all parts of this country.

What greater right do we have as Americans than the right to vote? We fought a revolution to have that right. We praise other nations when they toss off the shackles of dictatorship and can now vote. Yet in this country, for many decades, generations, large groups of people, because of the color of their skin, were not allowed to vote. Artificial obstructions were placed in the way so they could not vote. We came together, Republicans and Democrats, to say these people would be allowed the color of their skin in will not make a difference. Their ethnic background will not make a difference. They will be able to vote. That is what was signed yesterday on the lawn of the White House.

The Constitution places the law-making power, “All Legislative Powers,” in the Congress. That is an Article I power. I believe our Founders made Article I to, first and foremost, put the Congress first; the President came next.

We are at a pivotal moment in our Nation’s history, where Americans are faced with a President who makes sweeping claims for almost unchecked Executive power.

This administration is now routinely using signing statements to proclaim which parts of the law the President will follow, which parts he will ignore, and which he will reinterpret. This is what I have called “cherry picking.” It is wrong.

This President also used signing statements to challenge laws banning torture, laws on affirmative action, and laws that prohibit the censorship of scientific data. In fact, time and time again, this President has stood before the American people and signed laws enacted by their representatives in Congress, while all along crossing his fingers behind his back. I don’t want the Voting Rights Act to fall into this area.

Under our constitutional system of Government, when Congress passes a bill and the President signs it into law, that ends the matter. But at that moment, the President’s constitutional duty is to “take care that the Laws be faithfully executed.” In fact, that is his duty, which he acknowledged yesterday with respect to the Voting Rights Act. I commend him for that because his Article II power, Executive power, is to execute the laws. He doesn’t have a legislative power.

I remind the President and this administration of this—and I have been here with six Presidents, Democrats, and Republicans, and I have never seen anything like this in my 32 years in the Senate. I have never seen such a case where the President interprets the Constitution in such a way that it is a unitary executive. It is not a unitary executive. The legislative power is vested in the Congress. The judicial power is vested in the judiciary. The power to execute the laws is in the Constitution and the President’s oath of office say I shall faithfully execute.”

When the President uses signing statements to unilaterally rewrite the laws enacted by the people’s Representatives in Congress, he undermines the rule of law and our constitutional checks and balances designed to protect the rights of the American people.

These signing statements are a diabolic device. The Bush-Cheney administration has been willing to turn a blind eye and rubberstamp the questionable actions of this administration, regardless of the consequences to our Constitution and civil liberties.

Mr. President, I mentioned that this issue of signing statements is something that has concerned me since 2002. That was also the year that the Bush-Cheney administration was writing secret legal memoranda seeking to justify the lawlessness by postulating an unfounded and unconstitutional Commander in Chief over ride to our laws, and they did this to justify the use of torture.

When the President was exposed to the light of day, not by the rubberstamp Congress, but by the press, the administration had to withdraw it. But we read in a front-page story in the Washington Post today of another frightening lawlessness by postulating an unfounded and unconstitutional Commander in Chief override to our laws, and they did this to justify the use of torture.

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Mr. President, I say, for shame. To think that you can use a rubberstamp Congress to renege on this country’s proud commitment to human rights is another aspect of the lawlessness of this administration. But it will succeed if the Republican-led Congress continues to act as a wholly owned subsidiary of the White House; instead of fulfilling its responsibility as a separate and independent branch of Government intended by the Founders and established by the Constitution to serve as a check on the Executive, I helped write the war crimes law during the Bush-Cheney administration is trying to undermine. In 1996 and 1997, we acted with the support of the Department of Defense to include expressly in our laws culpability for violating human rights in the Geneva Conventions. The United States did that so we could serve as a world leader and as a moral leader.

We have set standards for conduct that we demand others around the world follow. We cannot ask others to meet standards we are unwilling to meet ourselves. Why diminish the moral leadership of the United States by trying to quietly carve out an exception for us, telling the rest of the world to do this, then saying we won’t? We have insisted on human rights and the rights of Americans, civilian and military, throughout the world. Let’s not tell the rest of the world: It is do as we say, not as we do. More recently, we have seen Abu Ghraib reported detainee abuses, investigations into the deaths of detainees and civilians in war zones, and indictments of American service personnel and contractors. These have all combined to stain America’s reputation and role. We must not retreat from the fight for human rights. We must not “cut and run” from our responsibilities as the world leader and the world’s only superpower.

The American military men and women are the finest in the world. They have been trained to respect human rights, and they do so. They need not fear laws against brutality and inhumanity. We, the United States, helped develop and then endorsed the Geneva Conventions to set standards to protect our own troops. To walk away from these protections would be to “cut and run” and walk away from our men and women in uniform. Pulling a thread from this cloak of protection risks unraveling the entire fabric to the detriment of our troops and to the great shame of the United States.

It is disheartening to read that the highest law enforcement officer in the country is leading an effort to undermine the rule of law. Rather than enforce the law as he is sworn to do, he is reportedly seeking to undermine it. Instead of ignoring the laws we have long honored, our leaders should be obeying them, not obfuscating or creating loopholes for them. This way nobody, not even the President of the United States, is above the law. The Attorney General of the United States...
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endorsing them should be virtually automatic for a group of lawyers. Whether the White House or congressional leaders will act on the proposal is another story. For decades, the co-equality of the legislative branch, which represents the nation’s lawyers, to evaluate the credentials of judicial nominees, but the current President Bush put an end to that. His administration treats the bar association as just another interest group, to be humored or ignored as he pleases.

But the task force has a point. Bush has employed signing statements more often and more aggressively than any of his predecessors, as the Globe’s Charlie Savage documents in his articles this month. What laws in question touch on fundamental values, such as whether U.S. military interrogators should be allowed to torture detainees. The administration’s defenders say the president is merely objecting to unconstitutional provisions specifically, ones that infringe on the rightful powers of the executive within the constitutional framework. But even if the Bush administration were correct on that point, back-door vetoes only relieve Congress of its obligation to make laws that are constitutional. The task force notes that deciding constitutionality is up to the federal courts. “The Constitution is not what the President says it is,” the panel’s report declares.

Congress was right to prohibit the use of torture by American interrogators. If the president opposed that ban, he had the right to veto it. That, of course, would have looked bad, both at home and around the world. But while a veto-by-signing-statement approach threatens the co-equality of the legislative branch, the constitutional authority of the executive branch has been diminished. Particularly since the Carter and Reagan administrations, the use of signing statements has been on the upswing, and that’s generally a good thing. These statements give the public and Congress fair warning that the president intends to ignore or limit through interpretation. They thereby permit criticism and more vibrant debate. And they have no legal meaning. Bush did away with the president’s powers to instruct the executive branch as to how to interpret a law—which he could do privately in any case.

While Mr. Bush has been particularly aggressive about issuing signing statements, a great many break no new ground but merely articulate constitutional views that the executive branch has consistently ignored. The problem is not that Mr. Bush reserves the right to state his views; it is the dangerous substance of the views he sometimes states.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, may I inquire, are we in a period of morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is in morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes.

VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, I rise this morning first to commend the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, for her efforts to negotiate a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah and to engage other countries in helping to end the conflict. I salute her for her expressed willingness to return to that region as soon as it is practical to achieve her goals.

I am appalled, as all civilized people are, by the terrorists’ destruction and the maiming and loss of human life in Israel, in Lebanon, and in Gaza. That is why I found it so disturbing that the Lebanese Prime Minister, Fuad Siniora, and his Speaker rejected Secretary Rice’s proposals before she had even left their country and was on her way to Israel.

The Lebanese Government and the Lebanese people cannot have it both ways. They cannot want an immediate cease-fire on the one hand, yet continue to support Hezbollah as it kidnaps Israeli soldiers inside Israel to start this war and then rain destruction on Israel’s cities and civilians. As long as Hezbollah keeps those kidnapped Israeli soldiers and continues to fire its rockets into Israel, there can be no cease-fire and there can be no peace for Lebanon. As long as the Lebanese people and their Government house terrorists who have sworn the total destruction and the elimination of the