

Statement of Heather Gooze

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, thank you for inviting me to speak here today. My name is Heather Gooze, and on October 1, 2017, I was in Las Vegas, Nevada. Also at event, were Christine Caria and Heather Sallan, from Las Vegas and Reno, who are here and sitting behind me today.

Before I tell my story, I feel that I need to disclose something to the Committee. I am not someone who is “anti-gun,” but I support Senator Feinstein’s bill to ban bump-fire stocks.

Those devices are not for hunting. They are not for target practice. They are for hurting people. And they have no place in our general society.

I hope that my story will help you understand why.

The three-day Route 91 Harvest Country Music Festival has been going for 4 years.

This year was my second year landing a highly coveted bartending job, and my first year at the House of Blues, one of the main bars right in the midst of the festival grounds. People come from all over the world for this event.

At around 10:00 p.m, the first round of gunshots peppered the festival grounds.

I remember hearing a loud noise and thinking that it was feedback from the speakers, or perhaps fireworks. People were still dancing. Then everyone started to rush in all directions, trampling the bar and pushing through the back doors.

At first I thought a group was trying to swarm the VIP area above the bar, until I heard screams: “shooter,” “gun,” “help me!” This was followed by a second round of gunshots. There were people covered with blood all over their bodies.

My own “night of terror” continued with me helping frightened concert goers get through the back doors, hoping they would be safe. As people tried to hoist others over the fence out back, I joined about twenty others to push the fence over so that they could run out.

I went up to VIP to check on the other bartenders and guests. That’s when another set of gunshots rang out, directly in front of the bar. My coworker Ryan was only spared by hiding behind an ATM, saving another bartender in the process by pulling her behind the machine. The woman standing right next to them, however, was hit by the bullets still raining down.

I then ran down the stairs and got pulled under the bathroom trailers, where I had a moment to call my mom and sister. I told them both in separate phone calls that they were going to hear scary things on the news, and that most of it was true, but that I was okay for now.

The fourth set of shots starting pinging off the metal around us and we all tried to stay as quiet as possible. Throughout the entire ordeal, I expected to look up and see a gun man standing in front of me, about to shoot.

After that round of gunfire, everyone scrambled for the gate. But for whatever reason . . . I ran back into the bar.

The first thing I saw back in the bar was a woman bleeding down her leg who said that it hurt. I asked if she fell, and she said no. I then looked down and saw my first bullet holes. I asked a man who was running through the bar to help carry her out back.

But just then someone else came in dragging a man by his fingers. He had been hit in the thigh, and then broken his leg falling. I grabbed an arm and helped pull him thru and behind the bar. At this point there were 6-8 injured behind the bar.

As bodies and wounded continued to grow, I ran to the medic's tent for help. Every two minutes somebody was running in. There was one group carrying a girl who had been shot in the back. I helped them adjust her on a Route 91 banner. I found out later, after looking at pictures, that the girl had not made it.

I ran back to the bar and told everyone help was on the way. We moved everyone to the back street. Strangers started pulling up in trucks and cars, volunteering to drive the injured to the hospital, while myself and others helped carry them to the makeshift ambulances.

At one point I got called over to hold a jean jacket against a victim's head to try and stop the bleeding. We shouted for him to wake up. He was breathing, but not conscious. As a car pulled up to load the injured, the jacket fell and I was left plugging the hole in the victim's head with my bare fingers. That man's name was Chris, and he died the next day. That's all I knew at the time. Now I know his name was Chris Hazencomb.

Then I met the Victim who became such a main part of my story. He had been laid on a maintenance ladder that was being used as a make shift stretcher. Three men called me over to grab the ladder's corner. I held it with one hand, and with the other reached over to hold the victim's hand. His fingers lightly touched mine.

When our group reached the sidewalk, an area "deemed safe" from whoever was shooting, we put the ladder down. The men asked if I was ok, as I was covered in Chris's blood. I said it was not my blood! They ran back into the festival grounds to continue helping. I kept holding Jordan's hand.

Then Jordan's fingers stopped holding mine.

I shook him, strangers checked his chest, but there was nothing. People asked how they could help, but I was without words. What could they do? He was now DOA. Someone draped a T-shirt over his face and then a table cloth. And for some strange reason, I felt compelled to stay and sit with the body. I felt attached.

I saw other bodies lying alone and didn't want this man to be left alone. I was still holding his hand... About an hour later, his phone rang, and I picked up.

The person on the other end of the line asked for his friend. I asked, who the caller was. Where were they calling from? Who were they trying to call? The voice on the other end said they were trying to reach Jordan McIldoon. British Columbia. Maple Ridge. I had I tell him Jordan had died. I told him to call Jordan's parents!

Pulling out Jordan's wallet, I took a picture of his ID and sent it to everyone on his Facebook friends list with his same last name.

I texted: "911 . . . do you know this man?"

Then came a call from Jordan's mom. And I soon found out about Jordan's girlfriend, Amber Bereza, who was also at the festival. I called her immediately.

Amber was in lockdown nearby, and I told her I was with Jordan. She asked whether he was okay, and I said, "No." She asked if he got shot. I said, "Yes." She said, "But he's breathing right?" I said, "Amber, he's not breathing. He's dead." She said, "Are you sure? He's the love of my life. Are you sure?" I said, "Yes. He's gone."

I made a promise that I would stay by Jordan no matter what, so that Amber would know where emergency personnel took him. I told her that I wouldn't leave his side, because at this point, there were only two of us there who knew who he was.

Jordan's mom called again. I realized we hadn't told her he had passed when she asked if he was okay, and I said that he wasn't. She asked if he was dead. And I said "yes." I said I had spoken to Amber and promised that I wasn't going to leave him. She had to be told by a complete stranger in another country her only child was murdered.

I then learned more about the young man I had just "met." I learned he was covered in tattoos, what a nice a boy he was, how much he loved his girlfriend. I learned that he was days away from his 24th birthday.

I kept my promise not to leave Jordan's side, staying with him for over four hours in the cold, dark night.

When police and emergency personnel finally arrived, I told them about Jordan. I said I had promised not to leave him until I knew they had his girlfriend and she knew where Jordan was being taken. It wasn't until around 3:30 a.m. that the police finally got a hold of Amber, who was still in lockdown.

Covered in blood, exhausted and crying, I made it home still not believing or understanding what had just happened.

When I asked myself in the days following why I had stayed with a stranger's body, I could only answer that I hoped someone would do the same for me. I didn't want Jordan to be a John Doe. His death mattered, and I wanted him to be remembered.

I don't know why I didn't run. I had more than one opportunity. I still don't know. I am not that strong. I am not that special. I am not that honorable.

But something wouldn't let me run that night, and something compelled me to help Chris, Jordan, and others whose names I still don't even know.

As I mentioned a moment ago, I may have stayed because I hoped someone would do the same for me. I did it because I wouldn't want to be forgotten.

But the truth is that none of us want to be forgotten, and I ask that this Committee not forget all of the lives that were lost that day.

Thank you.