

so we can pass a stand-alone Zika funding bill that gives our country what it needs now, not this fall. We need to act before local transmission starts occurring in the continental United States. That is going to be soon. Late this fall will not do the trick. This fall is too late. It is time to act, not take a break. The Republican leader should not send the Senate out of session until we have done all we can to protect the American people from the threat of this horrible virus.

It doesn't take into consideration the other things we are just leaving: Flint, MI, opioids. There are so many things we are walking away from in this institution.

OBAMACARE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am so happy to have my friend talk about ObamaCare. I am happy to have him talk about that because he is making himself not look very good, and that is a gross understatement. Yesterday the Commonwealth Fund released its fourth survey of ObamaCare. Here is what they found: Since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act, 28 million people have gained coverage either through marketplaces or Medicaid. In the last 3 years, the number of uninsured Americans have been reduced by 13 million people. Those are 13 million more people who have insurance now than they had 3 years ago, and 82 percent of American adults enrolled in private plans or government coverage said they were satisfied with their plans.

Those numbers are further evidence the Affordable Care Act is helping the American people. It is getting people insured, many for the first time in their lives. Yesterday a woman came to me and said: Thank goodness. I—a diabetic—have been able to buy insurance because of ObamaCare.

It is giving families important subsidies so they can afford the plan they need, and it is providing options, allowing Americans to cater their health insurance plans to their needs. Much has been made recently about premiums. My friend has made a big deal about premiums, especially by Republicans looking for any opening to spread misinformation, falsehoods. They love to come and talk about ObamaCare, how horrible it is for the American people. Allow me to set the record straight again. At this point, we are all looking at proposed increases. This, of course, is preliminary information.

Let's consider Arkansas as an example. I picked Arkansas because one of the Senators from Arkansas is usually presiding, and I want him to hear this. Three out of the four companies that offer policies on Arkansas' health insurance marketplace proposed high premium increases for their enrollees. All of these increases were hikes of at least 10 percent. Fortunately, for the people of Arkansas, the Affordable Care Act helps. For starters, the vast major-

ity of enrollees in Arkansas are protected from premium increases. Why? Because ObamaCare tax credits actually cap health insurance premiums for 85 percent of consumers. In Arkansas, 87 percent of consumers receive tax credits that help make coverage affordable; 62 percent of Arkansas enrollees had the option to select plans as low as \$75 per month after tax credits. There are other ObamaCare provisions that safeguard against these rates that are out of line. Thanks to a provision within the law, State leaders have the resources to conduct a thorough review of the proposed rate increases. In Arkansas' case, the State received \$9.2 million to study proposed premium increases. Now it is up to Arkansas' Governor and insurance commissioner to do the job and examine their rate proposals. State leaders have until August 23 to approve final rates for the 2017 exchange plans.

The Arkansas insurance commissioner, Allen Kerr, already made it clear that he and the Governor are opposed to the hikes. Governor Hutchinson is a well known, fine man. I served with his brother and him in Congress. His brother was in the Senate.

Allen Kerr said:

Governor Hutchinson and I do not believe there is substantive justification for these rate increases. For that reason, we expect to take action to deny the requested rate increases until there is sufficient justification to properly consider any rate increase.

Before we passed the Affordable Care Act, Americans in the individual insurance market were hit with double-digit health premium increases every year without any exception. Back then, if the insurance company said you need to pay more, you either paid up or lost your insurance. Consumers had no recourse. And they were charged more because they had an illness the previous year. They were charged more for all kinds of reasons. And insurance companies could deny covering certain conditions all together—one is if you were a woman.

Now that Americans have ObamaCare in their corner, insurers can no longer charge more because you are sick or deny coverage to someone who has a certain illness. All conditions are covered, period. When insurance companies want premium increases, States have resources to fight back just like Arkansas, and when consumers decide that a plan is no longer working, they can—and should—shop around. In fact, everyone should do all they can to ensure that they are getting the best deal possible. That is what these marketplaces are for—to give the American people options.

The Republican leader should be embarrassed by what he said this morning. For all this misinformation said on the Senate floor almost every day, the truth can't be hidden: The Affordable Care Act is keeping Americans insured and providing them options to find health coverage that meets their needs.

I say to my friend the Republican leader, that is why today America has the lowest uninsured rate in the history of the country. The uninsured rate is at 9.1 percent. That is the lowest rate ever. The facts are undeniable. The Affordable Care Act is working.

Will the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 2943, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 469, S. 2943, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I am back here for the 44th edition of "Waste of the Week." I am starting to enjoy this, and I hope someone else is, but what we don't enjoy is the fact that the government is wasting taxpayer money. We have been documenting this for 44 weeks now, and we have come up with a significant total that is approaching \$200 billion of waste.

People get up every morning, go to work—put in a hard-day's work if they have a job—try to save money so they can get the mortgage paid each month, get the insurance covered, get the gas tank filled up in the car, and hopefully save a little money for their kids' education. But every time they get a paycheck at the end of the week, they look at it and see deductions for this, that, and everything, such as State taxes, Federal taxes, sales taxes, excise taxes, such as the tax at the pump, and on and on it goes. You can't go to a grocery store, clothing store, or any retail store without getting a tax slapped on everything you buy. That money comes to Washington as a Federal tax, and at the very least, the taxpayer is due

careful use of their hard-earned tax dollars to fund the Federal Government. There are essential functions that the Federal Government and only the Federal Government can deal with—States participate with the payment of interstate highways, along with some Federal support—and one of those functions is national defense.

The minority leader was just talking about delays, delays, delays, and how we are not getting anything done. My colleagues and I have been standing around here all week waiting to move on to one of the essential functions of government that has to be done every year, and that is funding for our national security and national defense. Through the use of parliamentary maneuvers, the minority leader, who was just talking about not getting anything done, is the reason we are not getting it done.

I can understand that there is an issue that the other side doesn't think should go forward and they want to use senatorial privileges and procedures to stop it from going forward. I mean, that happens on both sides of the aisle. But national defense is something for which we have bipartisan support. In the end, this bill will probably pass 98 to 2 or 100 to nothing.

What the minority leader didn't say is that every Democrat on the defense committee, after spending hundreds of hours putting this together, supported it.

The minority leader comes down here and says: We don't know what is in it. His own people wrote this legislation, along with Republicans, and in the end, the committee sanctioned it by voting for it. Every Democrat on the committee voted for this bill, and now the minority leader comes down to the floor and says: We don't know what is in it. Why don't you talk to your own people? Why not talk to the people you have assigned to this committee?

I can understand why he doesn't want to read every word of this bill—I don't think he reads every word of any bill—but I don't understand why he is using that tactic to keep us from going forward with something the Federal Government must provide for—our defense—at a time when threats are as high as we have ever seen. The world is on fire, and we need a strong national defense. Both Democrats and Republicans understand that, and yet we have wasted an entire week because the minority leader has used procedural motions to keep us from even talking about the bill. This isn't passage of the bill; this is not amending the bill; this is about the ability to come here and start talking about the bill.

I didn't come down here to discuss this particular issue; I came down here to talk about how money that is sent here by taxpayers is used and the waste and misuse of that money. But you can't sit here very long and listen to the minority leader without some response to his nonsensical approach on

this issue. The only good news is that very few people were watching, so what difference does it make? I am here to talk about the waste of the week. I hope the pages enjoy this one. You can't make up some of this stuff.

The Government Accountability Office has the accountability of what we do with taxpayer dollars, and they keep pouring stuff out of here through the inspectors general, whose job it is to make sure the taxpayer dollars are spent accordingly for what they need to be spent for, and they have a category called waste, fraud, and abuse.

I have just been scratching the surface of the waste, fraud, and abuse of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. Those dollars ought to go into the savings of our taxpayers and not sent here to Washington to be wasted. I have been down here 44 times talking about separate wastes of the week, and it is outrageous. If this body does anything, we should take the word of those in the government who have pointed at agencies that have incorporated waste, fraud, and abuse and deal with it.

Here we go with "Waste of the Week" 44. It is called the solar field of death. It sounds like a movie—solar field of death. This week we are looking at a solar powerplant that puts taxpayers on the hook for \$1.5 billion.

Here is the history. In 2011 the Department of Energy provided a \$1.5 billion loan guarantees for the development of a solar thermal field in California called Desert Sunlight. We all know there is a lot of sunlight in the desert. It is one of the largest solar fields in the world. But most of us understand—and we see these solar fields and solar panels on top of some houses and commercial buildings—that these solar panels absorb sunlight and turn it into energy, and that is an alternative energy to what we usually get from a powerplant burning coal, gas, or whatever.

Environmentalists like this because it doesn't use coal. There has been a war on Coal and a war on fossil fuels, but what really surprises me is the war on natural gas, which has just a fraction of the carbon emissions that come out of fossil fuel. Nevertheless, alternative energy is something the government has been pursuing, but we would like them to pursue that in a way that is economically feasible and doesn't put the taxpayer at such great risk.

Well, the Obama administration essentially, in its war on coal, has said: Look, go on out there, and we will put up loan guarantees. Do your thing. Experiment, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and if it fails, don't worry—the taxpayer will back it up because we have given a guarantee to some of these companies with ideas.

Some of the ideas have worked, some have been cost-effective, but many fewer than people thought. This one was supposed to be the ultimate. They said: Let's go out in the desert. The Sun shines all the time, and we will not put solar panels out there, but instead we will put out mirrors.

Here is a picture of it out in the desert. There are literally hundreds of thousands of mirrors out there all directed at this tower. This tower then reflects the heat bouncing off the mirrors all directed in here toward the tower, which then boils water and then it produces through a steam turbine that energy and send it out over the wires to light up homes, factories, and provide electricity for people in California.

That sounds pretty straightforward. Maybe it is a good idea. It probably would have been good if they tested it out before they put the mirrors out there. If they had done that, maybe they would have learned some things.

What was the first thing they learned? Nobody seemed to factor in that the Sun doesn't always shine in the desert because sometimes there are clouds. As it turns out, one-third of the power they thought they would get they don't get because it is cloudy. You would think somebody would have said before the government offered a \$1.5 billion guarantee: What about the cloudy days? They projected how much energy can be gotten to light up and provide electricity for California when the Sun is shining, but they are operating on the basis that the Sun is always going to be shining.

How about nighttime? How much light or heat are we going to get directed toward those mirrors from the Moon? Not very much, if anything. Clouds came to be a factor, and what we found out is that the plant is producing only about a quarter of the energy that was originally envisioned.

I am not a scientist, and I am not somebody who has a specialty in alternative energy, but I think I would have had the gumption to say: How about clouds? Are these projections that you have made regarding the kind of energy that is going to be produced going to be cost effective so that the taxpayer is not on the hook? Apparently, somebody didn't figure that out because we are only getting a quarter of what we thought we were going to get out of it.

What the company did is say: OK. We are not getting what we wanted, but we need an extension. We need extensions on payments to the Federal Government because the plant isn't generating the kind of energy needed and therefore not getting the kinds of profits from the users of electricity for us to pay back the loan. So the Obama administration said: Yes, we are for alternative energy. Go ahead. We will extend this. They did extend the payments. Earlier this year, the California Public Utilities Commission gave the plant a lifeline, giving it 1 more year to fix the problems.

Another problem was that while production improved, the average price for a megawatt hour of electricity from the plant was \$150. Compare that with the price for a megawatt, the same amount of energy, on natural gas, which is \$35. The customers said: Wait

a minute. I am paying a utility bill at the rate of \$150 per megawatt hour of electricity, and if we were using natural gas, we would only pay \$35. So what is the deal here? It turned out that alternative energy, while it is alternative, also is not cost effective.

The assumption is that we are saving on carbon emissions. OK. Well, that didn't work either. For starters, it takes the boilers that they have to heat up because, of course, it is nighttime and the mirrors aren't reflecting any Sun that reflects heat that causes the water to boil and then to be used to turn the turbines to produce electricity. It takes 4.5 hours every day to get up to speed. Guess how they do that? They have to use natural gas to get it to the point where then the Sun can add more to it. Maybe somebody didn't figure that out, either.

In 2014, the plant emitted 46,000 metric tons of carbon—nearly twice the amount of carbon that power plants can emit under California State law. So the State said: Here's the limit of what you can emit in carbon, but thank goodness we have this solar field because that doesn't issue any. Well, it issues twice as much as what they were getting out of natural gas. That apparently didn't get figured in.

People say: Well, there is an environmental advantage here. This environmental advantage means we don't have to put carbon in the air, and it is going to be a much cleaner source of energy, and there will not be any adverse effects on the environment. They have to also factor in that there are birds that fly in the air—a lot more birds than you might think. The heat has killed over 3,500 birds each year. They fry to death because there is so much heat reflected from those mirrors, and it is a huge field. The birds are probably attracted to the light, and by the time they get into this field, it is like going into a deep fat fryer.

In Indiana there is a saying that if you can fry it, you can eat it. I have seen pictures of these fried birds. Trust me, we don't want to eat them. But \$1.5 billion in taxpayers' money has been spent for a solar field of death that kills thousands of birds each year, doesn't produce much energy, and then, finally, sets itself on fire. I am not making this up. They had the mirrors redirected the wrong way, so it hit the cables that were providing the source for the energy to go down, and the cables caught on fire. I had a picture with the tower on fire, but we didn't bring it down here.

What a boondoggle. I mean, look, is this interesting? Yeah. Is this funny? Yeah, but this is taxpayer money. This is a waste of \$1.5 billion of taxpayer-guaranteed money. This is money that people send to Washington after a hard week's work. So, while it is interesting to talk about fried birds and mirrors redirecting the energy to the tower that catches on fire, the clouds coming over, and so on and so forth, the serious issue here is it is yet another waste of taxpayer money.

Think what this \$1.5 billion could be used for if it could be left in the hands of the taxpayer for whatever use—to pay the mortgage, send the kids to school—or if it could be used for common defense, protecting the American people from terrorist attacks or essential functions or repairing bridges or paving some roads.

It is like driving in a third world country here in Washington, DC. There are potholes one wouldn't believe—cracks in the roads. Bumping along, I see people's hubcaps flying off cars and people pulled over to the side because their tire is blown out. I blew out two tires a year ago for the same reason.

No environmental activist, fiscal conservative, or rational person should continue to support solar field of death. So I am labeling this as a waste of the week. The Obama administration continues to refuse to admit any of these half-baked—in this case fully fried—ideas that don't succeed. They are continuing to advocate for the solar field of death rather than put taxpayer money to better use.

So here we go, adding \$1.5 billion to a waste of taxpayer money, putting us to \$172 billion of accountable money spent through government agencies' waste, fraud, and abuse.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is postcloture on the motion to proceed.

Mr. HELLER. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 6 minutes.

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

MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, every day that I drive into Washington, DC, coming here to work, I pass by the Iwo Jima Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. It is a humbling reminder of the valiant men and women from across this Nation who have answered the call of duty in two world wars, the wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous other conflicts waged to keep America free. It constantly reminds me that the ongoing fight to care for our Nation's veterans is my duty and my responsibility as a Member of the U.S. Senate.

These fearless warriors had moms and dads of their own. They had sons, daughters, loved ones, neighbors, and friends, but they selflessly made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us.

They stood against tyranny, fought oppression and injustice, defended liberty with the highest measure of honor, valor, and courage. They demonstrated the greatest love a person can have by laying down their lives for our country.

The greatest honor we can bestow on our men and women in uniform and their families is to remember their im-

measurable sacrifice. While we carry on the tradition of Memorial Day, let us never forget that every day is a chance to thank and honor our patriots in uniform.

Last week I had the honor of attending the final sendoff for two of Nevada's very own at Arlington National Cemetery. I would like to speak about one of them. His name is Bob Wheeler.

Bob Wheeler was a patriot in every sense of the word. He joined the U.S. Air Force in November of 1962, serving in the pararescue career field. He was recognized as a true innovator in his leadership position, opening the door for free-fall parachuting and combat tactics. He led by example, working diligently and earnestly to help those around him and to protect our country.

Bob was credited with saving 28 lives throughout his career, including vulnerable aviators who had crashed and distressed seamen in the Vietnam war.

He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for Valor, the Airman's Medal, numerous commendation medals, 17 Air Medals and SEA Service ribbons. His 20 years of service and bravery will never be forgotten.

These are the types of men and women our armed services are made up of, and they live across this Nation in each and every State representing us in this body.

I had the pleasure of working with Bob Wheeler personally. He served on my Nevada Veterans Advisory Council. We worked as a team along with the rest of the council to help improve resources for Nevada's veterans community. His firsthand knowledge of combat and veterans' needs cannot be replicated. He was one of a kind, and I am thankful to have had him as an ally helping Nevada's veterans.

That is why I am disappointed to hear the head of the VA, Secretary Robert McDonald, comparing the wait times veterans experience at the VA for health care appointments to the wait times at Disney theme parks. It is totally inappropriate, and it is inexcusable. It shows there is still a culture and attitude inside the VA that needs to be changed. The mission of the VA should be serving the veterans, not finding ways to avoid accountability.

With the words "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan," President Lincoln affirmed the government's obligation to care for those injured in war and to provide for families who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Congress will do this by working diligently on behalf of those who served and survived, which is why one of the greatest privileges of serving Nevada in this body is the opportunity to sit on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Recently I joined my colleagues to introduce the Veterans First Act. It focuses on improving the delivery of care and benefits to our Nation's veterans and their families. Specifically, I championed causes that reform the VA disabilities claims process and create a

system that can withstand surges in disability claims without generating another claims backlog.

I also sought to implement a new, voluntary 5-year pilot program to help reduce the large backlog of appeals at the Veterans Benefits Administration. I want to establish a new channel whereby veterans can expedite their appeal instead of having to wait 2 to 4 years for a decision by the Board of Veterans Appeals.

Finally, I want to ensure that all those veterans and their families are cared for, which is why this bill includes provisions to reimburse VA-funded shelters for the care of children of homeless veterans.

On behalf of the State of Nevada, the U.S. Senate, and the United States of America, I express my sincere gratitude to the families of all Nevadans who have given their lives in the line of duty. I assure you that your loss will never be forgotten, and I thank and commend each of the brave Nevadans currently serving in our Armed Forces, as well as their families, for their sacrifice. But my gratitude extends across the Nation to all veterans and their families. We owe all of you a debt of thanks that can never be repaid.

May God bless our troops, and may He continue to bless this great country.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG CHEMICAL SAFETY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY BILL

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, we are working behind the scenes to allow a vote on H.R. 2576, the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act. My understanding of the status of this vote is that we are fine on the Democratic side, but there is an objection to moving to it on the Republican side. I am hopeful this can be resolved because this bill has been the most complicated, difficult, and emotional journey that I have ever had in the Senate.

The fact that we have reached agreement—the vast, vast majority of us—showed in the House vote, where I think there were only about 1 dozen “no” votes. I think it is ripe for a vote. When you talk about regulating chemicals—toxic chemicals—it is not just an academic discussion. It has real-life consequences. When you name a bill after Senator Frank Lautenberg, who fought for the environment all of his life, it better be a bill worthy of his name.

The cost of toxic chemicals to society is enormous. It is not only in terms of dollars but in terms of pain and suffering. They have extracted a very, very high cost on our people.

Let me give you a few examples, because sometimes we talk in technicalities. I want to talk in realities. Asbestos is one of the most harmful chemicals known to humankind. It takes 15,000 lives a year. It is linked to a

deadly form of lung cancer called mesothelioma. That is when microscopic asbestos fibers, which are invisible and stay suspended in the air, get deep into the lungs of so many people, including children. They breathe these fibers deep into the lungs, where those fibers cause serious damage.

Another example brought to me by my brave firefighters in San Francisco is flame retardants. That is another category of dangerous chemicals that has been linked to a wide array of serious health problems, including cancer, reduced IQ, developmental delays, obesity, and reproductive difficulties. These harmful chemicals have been added to dozens of everyday items such as furniture and baby products.

Now, we know there are flame retardants that are way safer. We know we can do better than we have done so far. Again, I want to say that the San Francisco firefighters who gave testimony in my EPW Committee when I was chairman about the cancer rates they are experiencing believe it is directly related to flame retardants.

So, again, reforming TSCA, which is the Toxic Substances Control Act, is not about a theory. It is about our families. It is about being a part of a cancer epidemic that we have to get under control.

Now, we know that the TSCA bill, as it was written so many years ago—in the 1970s—was very weak. It was impossible for the EPA really to regulate any chemical because the standard was so weak. They could not prove that it needed to be regulated.

Therefore, that bill has needed to be reformed for so many years. When the Federal Government, in essence, had no program or very little program, the States stepped in to fill the void. My State, thankfully, was one of the States that stepped in to fill the void. Several States did so. About a dozen States, roughly, had strong programs to regulate these chemicals.

So I knew that these States were doing a good job. I knew if we were to pass a Federal bill, we had to allow the States to continue their good work. But when the Lautenberg-Vitter TSCA bill was first introduced, shortly before Frank Lautenberg passed away in 2013, something was terribly wrong. There was total preemption of State action.

The standard for the Federal bill was so weak that we would just have nothing going on. We would have a bill in name only, a law in name only. Nothing would be able to be regulated. Now, I had worked previously with Frank Lautenberg on four TSCA bills dating back to 2005. Every one of those bills before that 2013 Lautenberg-Vitter bill was strong and took the side of the American people, not the chemical companies. It never preempted the States.

What it basically said is that we will set a floor, as we do in most environmental laws. If the States want to do more to protect their people—whether your State is California, North Dakota,

South Dakota, Washington, Massachusetts, or New York; it does not matter—the States would be free to do more if they felt a particular chemical was harming their population.

I always thought that States' rights were big around here. Well, when you read that bill, in 2013, I will tell you, it looked like it was written by the chemical companies. I could never support it. That bill was a travesty. It was a disaster. I fought it every step of the way. Again, there was sweeping preemption of my State's ability and every State's ability to protect citizens from harmful chemicals.

Again, it was a very weak standard for evaluating chemicals. The way it worked was really incredible. If a chemical was just being looked at by the EPA, States were out of the picture—out of the picture. So, S. 1009, in my opinion and in the opinion of many experts who helped me throughout all this—the nurses and doctors who cared, all kinds of wonderful environmental groups, and the Breast Cancer Fund; and I will list those later—they helped me. I realized again that that bill—that original bill—would have had no controls whatsoever and given the chemical companies the green light to do whatever they wanted regardless of its impact on the health of our people. Again, the States were left completely out of the picture the minute the EPA announced they were looking at a chemical. That situation, I could never have allowed to continue.

I stopped the bill from moving forward while I negotiated to get rid of its flaws. Now, this is the first time I have ever stood here and said I stopped a bill. I am known as a legislator. I want to find the sweet spot. But we didn't find the sweet spot until just recently, I am happy to say. But it was a very lonely battle at times—just a couple of people working with me here. One person even said I was the most unpopular person because I was not getting out of the way. But that is not why I am here. I can't get out of the way of a bad bill.

Now, when the Republicans took the gavel of EPW, the Environment and Public Works Committee, a new bill, S. 697, was introduced by Senators UDALL and VITTER. I looked at that bill. I swear, I said it looked like it was written by the chemical companies. Again, I was heartbroken. Sure enough, a story broke in the Hearst newspapers entitled: “Questions raised on authorship of chemicals bill.”

I ask unanimous consent to have that article printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Hearst Newspaper, Mar. 16, 2015]

QUESTIONS RAISED ON AUTHORSHIP OF CHEMICALS BILL

(By David McCumber)

WASHINGTON.—It's certainly well-known in Washington that when it comes to the making of the sausage, lobbyists frequently have their thumbs in the pork. But usually, they don't actually leave their electronic signatures on bills.

The elaborately titled Frank Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act makes its debut at a Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing Wednesday. It's a high-stakes bill: If it becomes law, it would be the first update in 39 years of federal regulation of toxic substances like asbestos, formaldehyde and hundreds of other chemicals.

In recent days, a draft of the bill—considered the product of more than two years of negotiation and collaboration between Sen. David Vitter, R-La., Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., and both chemical industry and environmental groups—was circulated by Udall's office ahead of the hearing. The draft bill, obtained by Hearst Newspapers, is in the form of a Microsoft Word document. Rudimentary digital forensics—going to “advanced properties” in Word—shows the “company” of origin to be the American Chemistry Council.

The ACC, as the council is known, is the leading trade organization and lobbyist for the chemical industry. And opponents of the Vitter-Udall bill have pounced on the document's digital fingerprints to make the point that they believe the bill favors industry far too much.

“We're apparently at the point in the minds of some people in the Congress that laws intended to regulate polluters are now written by the polluters themselves,” said Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, who will testify against the bill at Wednesday's hearing.

“Call me old-fashioned, but a bill to protect the public from harmful chemicals should not be written by chemical industry lobbyists. The voices of our families must not be drowned out by the very industry whose documented harmful impacts must be addressed, or the whole exercise is a sham,” Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said Monday.

Boxer, who chaired the committee when the Democrats held the majority, and Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., have introduced an alternative version of the bill with much more stringent regulatory provisions.

Udall's office was a little indignant and somewhat embarrassed Monday. “That document originated in our office,” said Udall's communications director, Jennifer Talhelm. “It was shared with a number of stakeholders including at least one other senator's office. One of those stakeholders was the ACC.

“We believe that somebody at the ACC saved the document, and sent it back to us,” Talhelm said, accounting for the digital trail. “Sen. Udall's office has been very, very engaged with bringing various stakeholders to the table as part of the process of writing the best possible bill,” Talhelm added. “This is just one example.”

Earlier this month, a New York Times story detailed Udall's alliance with the chemical industry on the bill. In that story, ACC President Cal Dooley, a former California Democratic congressman, said “the leadership (Udall) is providing is absolutely critical” to the industry.

On Monday, ACC spokeswoman and vice president Anne Kolter said, “It doesn't mean the original document was generated here. Anyone could have put that (digital signature) in there. You could change it.”

Asked if that meant she was denying ACC wrote the document, she said, “I have no idea. . . . There's no way for anyone to tell.”

“You're not the first reporter to ask about this,” she said. “We've been able to raise enough questions” that nobody else has written about it, she added.

Cook of the Environmental Working Group said the copy of the draft he received bore the same electronic signature, and a Boxer staffer on the committee confirmed that

their copy did as well. A Senate IT staffer told Boxer's office, “We can confidently say that the document was created by a user with American Chemistry Council. Their name is specified as Author and their Organization is specified as American Chemistry Council.”

The Vitter-Udall version of the bill is expected to gain enough bipartisan support to pass out of committee to the Senate floor.

The bill's fate from there is uncertain, and some of the Boxer-Markey provisions could possibly be included in the final bill.

In its current form, the bill is opposed by many environmental, health and labor organizations and several states, because it would gut state chemical regulations.

Mrs. BOXER. According to this story:

[T]he draft bill, obtained by Hearst Newspapers, is in the form of a Microsoft Word document. Rudimentary digital forensics . . . shows the “company” of origin to be the American Chemistry Council.

Imagine: The bill that was being circulated came right out of the computer of the American Chemistry Council. How could anyone believe it was a fair and just bill that protected the public? That document was not simply a set of comments by the chemical industry. It was circulated as the most current draft of the bill at the time. Everyone will see the story, and I commend the reporter for doing this deep investigation. But I never gave up on the bill. I continued to negotiate with my colleagues.

I commend Senators WHITEHOUSE, MERKLEY, and BOOKER. They went forward and negotiated some significant fixes to that disastrous bill as it moved through the EPW Committee. Their improvements were very important but still many serious flaws remained. My State of California and other States that had programs to regulate chemicals and all these public interests—probably 450 public organizations that protect the health of our children, of our families, of our elderly, of our disabled—were all strongly against it.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a list of letters from States and many organizations demonstrating the opposition to and concern with the bill.

You can see what the opposition was, and still colleagues said: No, no, no, Senator BOXER, you are unreasonable. Well, really, was I unreasonable when we had letters against the bill and letters expressing concern from the Massachusetts attorney general; letters from the attorneys general of New York, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Oregon, and Washington; a letter from the Office of the Attorney General of California; the California Environmental Protection Agency; the Washington State Department of Ecology; the Vermont attorney general; a letter from Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families; the American Association for Justice; the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization; a letter from the Breast Cancer Fund; the American Sustainable Business Council Action Fund; the Environmental Working Group, which opposed it; 25 law professors; health care organizations; the Union of Con-

cerned Scientists; the Environmental Health Strategy Center; Safer States; Earthjustice; Seventh Generation; a reproductive health letter; and a letter from the Center for Environmental Health? They are all in here.

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

LETTERS OF CONCERN ON S. 697

Letter from Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey

Letter from the Attorneys General of New York, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Oregon, and Washington

Letter from Brian E. Nelson, General Counsel, Office of California Attorney General

Letter from the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA)

Letter from Washington State Department of Ecology

Letter from Vermont Attorney General's office

Letter from Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families

Letter from American Association for Justice (AAJ)

Letter from Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization

Letter from the Breast Cancer Fund

Letter from the American Sustainable Business Council Action Fund

Letter from the Environmental Working Group

Letter from 25 Law Professors

Letter from Health Care Organizations on S. 697

Letter from the Union of Concerned Scientists

Letter from Environmental Health Strategy Center

Letter from Safer States

Letter from Earthjustice

Letter from Seventh Generation

Reproductive Health Letter

Letter from Center for Environmental Health.

Mrs. BOXER. The history of this bill must be made permanent in the record. It started out as a disaster, and it got to a point where it is better than current law. That makes me very happy. The negotiations on the bill continued. Again, several Members helped us, and we still had problems with the bill.

We tripled our efforts to improve it. I want to say that the 450 organizations that were part of the Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition worked with me. They were the wind at my back.

My staff, the EPW staff director and chief counsel, Bettina Poirier, and my senior policy adviser, Jason Albritton, were incredible.

I also thank the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization.

As I said before, asbestos is one of the most dangerous chemicals in existence today. It is the poster child for the failure of the old TSCA law that we are reforming.

These organizations and States stood strong despite enormous pressure. They took a lot of heat. I am so grateful to them for their persistence because—let's be clear—without their persistence, without just a few law-makers who had the courage to stand up to the special interests, we never would have been able to negotiate

improvements to this bill—so many improvements to this bill.

I want to be clear that a lot of these organizations still think the bill is too weak and still would like to see it stronger, and so would I.

If I could write this bill myself, I would use the usual formula we have for environmental laws. We set a standard. We set a floor. People have to abide by it. But if the States feel they can do more, they should be able to.

In this bill, although the States now have a tremendous amount of leeway, they don't have 100-percent leeway. That is why there is still opposition—not so much in the Senate but with some of the organizations. But I have to say to them that this is a bill that I believe is better than current law.

There was a 24/7 commitment from my staff. They worked Friday nights, Saturdays, Sundays—constantly. They constantly worked well with Senator INHOFE's staff to get the best bill we could.

My staff, as do all of us, have strong family obligations and responsibilities. So I just wish to take a minute to thank their families for sharing them with us, because they missed family time. They did it for the good of all of the children in the country, because when we control these toxic chemicals and we protect our children, it is going to help everybody.

I am for this bill because we made amazing improvements to it, and I am going to highlight these improvements.

No. 1, the first major area of improvement is in the preemption of States. I said before that if I had written the bill, I would have no preemption. I would set the floor and let the States make it even better. We were unable to get that. But here is what the facts are. The States are free to take whatever action they want on any chemical, and there are many—thousands, tens of thousands. The States are free to take whatever action they want on any chemical until the EPA has taken a series of steps to consider a particular chemical. That is the first thing. They are free on any chemical they want until the Federal Government announces that they are studying certain chemicals.

No. 2, when EPA announces the chemicals they are studying, the States are still not shut out. They have up to a year and a half to take action on these particular chemicals to avoid preemption until EPA takes final action. So if there is no chemical being studied, they can study any chemical in the States, and they can control any chemical. When EPA announces steps, they still have a year and a half to ban that chemical until we see the results of the Federal Government.

No. 3, even after EPA announces its regulation, the States can still have a waiver so they can still regulate the chemical. They will have to make the case. For example, if the EPA decides to do very little regulation of a chemical that is very present in one of our

States because of perhaps the oil industry or fracking or something and if the State has a reason to do more, it can go get a waiver. We made that waiver a lot easier for States than when it originally came to us.

The first 10 chemicals that EPA evaluates under the bill are also exempted from preemption until the final rule is issued. This is very important because the EPA is already studying about 10 chemicals. State or local restrictions on a chemical that were in place before April 22, 2016, will not be preempted. So if any one of your States took action on a chemical before April 22, 2016, they will not be preempted.

The second area of improvement concerns asbestos. I fought hard to ensure that dangerous substances like asbestos are prioritized to get the attention they deserve from regulators. I talked about asbestos as one of the most harmful substances known to humankind. I believe it should have been banned a long time ago. I support an immediate ban and will introduce a standalone bill to do just that. But the prioritization in this bill is a start.

The third area of improvement includes cancer clusters. We added a provision—which was based on my bill with Senator CRAPO, the Community Disease Cluster Assistance Act, or Trevor's Law—that provides localities that ask for it a coordinated response to cancer clusters in their communities.

I wish to say to Trevor, who may be listening: Thank you, Trevor. He came forward and he told his story.

Fourth, persistent chemicals that build up in the body are a priority in this legislation.

Fifth, the bill ensures that toxic chemicals that are stored near drinking water are prioritized. Remember that in 2014 West Virginia lost their drinking water supply because there were chemicals stored right near that drinking water supply, causing havoc and disruption.

I thank the two Senators from West Virginia for supporting me on that.

Sixth, the bill enables EPA to order independent testing if there are safety concerns about a chemical, and those tests will be paid for by the chemical manufacturer. The EPA, if they have concerns, regardless of their program, can go into a chemical company and say: We see that you have been using this chemical more, and we are worried about it. We order you to provide for us a very unbiased, independent analysis of whether it is safe.

I thank Members in the House for working hard with us on this important improvement, and that is Members on both sides of the aisle.

Finally, even the standard for evaluating whether a chemical is dangerous is better. The bill requires EPA to evaluate chemicals based on risk—not cost, risk—and considers the impact on vulnerable populations. This is very critical because the old law was useless. It was thrown out in court.

All of these fixes make the bill better than current law.

Looking forward, I think it is important to note that the new TSCA law—which I am so hopeful will pass today, if we can—will only be as good as the EPA is good. With a good EPA we can deliver a much safer environment for the American people, safer products, less exposure to harmful toxics, and better health for our people.

With a bad EPA that does not value these goals, not much will get done. But if there is no action—I want to underscore this—States will be free to act and that is a very important point. My message to the States is this: Do not dismantle what you have going. Rev it up because you still have the ability to be leaders on protecting your citizens from toxic chemicals.

Compared to where we started, the improvements in this bill provide a much better balance between the States and the Federal Government. But let me be clear again, in case I wasn't clear enough. If I had written this bill on my own, I would have modeled it after other environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, where the Federal Government sets a floor and the States are free to set a higher bar. The bills that I worked on with Frank Lautenberg did not put an unprecedented ceiling on how much we could protect the people. Having said all of that, there are so many chemicals out there that are not being looked at or studied.

I believe a good EPA, working with the States, can make a major improvement if this bill is carried out with a sense of purpose and commitment. The journey to this moment has been the most difficult journey I have ever had to take on any piece of legislation.

I see the majority leader on the floor. He and I worked hard on the transportation bill, and that was a long and winding road. This one was much more difficult.

But I can honestly say to you today that there were so many committed people in the Senate and House—Members of both parties. I really do have to give a shout out to Leader PELOSI, the Democratic leader, to STENY HOYER, to FRANK PALLONE, and to all of those on the House side who worked so hard, and to their counterparts in the Republican Party. In the Senate, there is Senator INHOFE, and there are Senators from my committee from both sides of the aisle without which we would not be here. To the staffs, to the public interest organizations, and to the States, we have scored a significant step forward for the American people.

I hope this bill will come before us today. If it does, I will vote yes. If it comes to us after recess, I will vote yes.

But I really wanted to make this statement because I think the history of this bill is clear to me. I think that history is being rewritten by some about this bill. And I wanted to make sure I put into the RECORD all the problems we had at the beginning and all

the improvements we obtained at the end.

I thank the Chair for his patience, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, recently we have had some very welcoming news out of the House of Representatives on the Toxic Substances Control Act. The House passed that in the last several days 403 to 12—a wonderful, large, bipartisan majority—and I am glad we are going to proceed to TSCA sometime soon and deal with the legislation on the Senate floor.

Mr. President, most Americans believe if they buy a product at the grocery store or a hardware store, the government has tested it and determined it is safe. Until now, that has not been true. We are exposed to hundreds of chemicals in our daily lives. In countless ways we can breathe, eat, and drink chemicals. They can be absorbed through our skin, even from common household items. Some are toxic, but almost none are regulated.

Let me cite now a couple of examples. There are flame retardants in your sofa and in other furniture that get up into the air when pressure is put on the furniture. There is formaldehyde in pressed-wood floors and carpets, glues and adhesives even in noniron shirts. There are the PFOA compounds from the nonstick coating on your frying pans and bakeware. Most water bottles are BPA-free now, but you still find BPA in your credit card receipts. Some laser printers give off ultrafine particles like volatile organic compounds that can cause serious health problems. I could go on and on and on with the list of chemicals out there in our society that citizens are exposed to every day.

As a result of that exposure, we carry these chemicals around in our bodies, even before we are born, but we don't know the full impact they are having on our health because in the last 40 years only a handful have ever been reviewed for safety. The EPA lacks the ability to evaluate and the authority to regulate, even though some have linked many of these chemicals to various kinds of diseases, such as cancer, infertility, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, and other diseases that are out there.

Infants, pregnant women, the elderly, and workers exposed to chemicals on the job are particularly at risk for chemical exposure. For example, we have seen an increase in cancer rates among firefighters who get exposed to chemicals from smoldering furniture in house fires.

That is why we must pass the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act. It will be a working chemical safety law for the whole country—for our families, for our children. We will, for the first time, have a cop on the beat when it comes to safety and protecting our children and our communities from dangerous chemicals. For the first time in 40 years, we are going to have that cop out there working hard to make sure our families are safe.

Getting here has taken years—years of negotiations and collaboration, working with stakeholders across the country. Now, Congress can send the President a strong, bipartisan environmental reform bill, and he will sign it into law. There is no doubt about that from the statement put out by the administration on this bill. In fact, I think they called it landmark reform by the Congress.

The EPA has commented on the bill. They stated:

[This bill] is a clear improvement over current law and is largely consistent with the administration's principles for TSCA reform. Critically, the bill would address the fundamental flaws that have hindered EPA's ability to protect human health and the environment from chemical risks.

The administration has also put out a statement of policy saying that it "strongly supports" this legislation.

Americans have been calling out for this reform for decades. They understand we need a national solution to our broken chemical safety law because they have seen the impacts firsthand, like Dominique Browning, who works with Moms Clean Air Force. She survived kidney cancer and now wants a safer place for her kids. When she asked her doctor what caused her illness, he said:

It's one of those environmental ones. Who knows. We are full of chemicals.

And Lisa Huguenin. Lisa is a Ph.D. scientist who has done work on chemical exposure at Princeton and Rutgers and at the State and Federal level, but it isn't what she saw at work that motivated her to work for reform. It was what she saw at home. Lisa's 13-year-old son Harrison was born with autism and other autoimmune deficiencies. Five years ago, Lisa testified before Senator Lautenberg's subcommittee on the need for reform. Since then, her husband Marc has undergone tests for a rare and newly discovered disease that wasn't even known to exist when she testified. So she is eager to see TSCA reform be signed into law.

Lisa recently wrote to me and said:

The concerns I expressed 5 years ago remain today. I have no way of knowing if the household products that I use or the toys my son plays with are really safe because the chemicals that make them up are not rigorously tested and there is little or no information regarding them. And if I, a person well educated in the field of human exposure to chemicals, cannot be confident that I am keeping my family safe, then neither can the average person.

My office has appreciated Lisa's emails and photographs of Harrison

dressed as a broccoli for Halloween and of Marc playing his favorite guitar. They have inspired us to keep going, to recognize that this legislation has a tremendous impact on real people. Thanks to Lisa and Dominique and the many others who care about a safe environment, healthy kids, the safety of the clothes we wear, the pots and pans we cook with, and the substances we breathe, we finally have an opportunity to pass a law that will keep our kids safe from dangerous chemicals.

TSCA was enacted in 1967 and was one of the major laws of the 1960s and 1970s. That was when Rachel Carson and environmental leaders who worked with her opened our eyes. They showed us how air pollution, water pollution, and chemicals in our environment were affecting our health and changing ecosystems right in our backyards. TSCA was supposed to protect American families, but it didn't.

Since 1976, thousands of chemicals a year have been manufactured and released onto the market without a safety evaluation and without meaningful regulation. In over four decades, the EPA has been able to restrict just five chemicals and has prevented only four chemicals out of tens of thousands from going to market. It took 40 years to fix this broken system. Now we have historic reform—decades in the making and decades overdue.

Here are some of the ways we are reforming this broken law and replacing it with a working safety program:

Under the old TSCA, reviewing chemicals was discretionary. This new law requires that EPA methodically review existing chemicals for safety, starting with the worst offenders.

The old TSCA required that the EPA consider the costs and benefits of regulation and then study the safety of chemicals. This new law requires that the EPA consider only the health and environmental impacts of a chemical, and, if they demonstrate a risk, the EPA must regulate it. This new law states that when it considers the safety of a chemical, the EPA must evaluate how it would impact the most vulnerable—pregnant women, infants, the elderly, and chemical workers.

The old TSCA put burdensome requirements on the EPA. To test a chemical, the EPA had to show it posed a potential risk, and then it had to go through a long rulemaking process. Our new law gives the EPA new authority to order testing without those hurdles.

The old TSCA allowed new chemicals to go to market without any real review. An average of about 750 new chemicals flowed onto the market a year. This new law would require the EPA to determine that all chemicals are safe before they go to the market.

The old TSCA allowed companies to hide information about their products, claiming it is confidential business information even in an emergency. This new law will ensure that companies can no longer hide. States, medical

professionals, and the public will have access to this information. It ensures that businesses must justify when they keep information confidential, and that will expire after 10 years.

The old TSCA underfunded the EPA, so it never had the resources to do the job. This new law creates a new, dedicated funding stream that requires industry to pay its share—\$25 million a year.

In addition, this new law ensures victims access to the courts if they are hurt, minimizes unnecessary testing on animals, and ensures States can continue to take strong action on dangerous chemicals.

We have spent a great deal of time on the right of States to act. My colleague, Senator BOXER, has said this is one of the hardest pieces of legislation she has ever worked on. I agree with her. Finding the right balance between State and Federal was not easy; there is no doubt about it. But we stayed at the table, we worked hard, and I believe we have a true compromise. It is a compromise that creates stronger Federal tools to test, review, and regulate chemicals, that ensures States can act when the EPA is not acting, that protects the work that States have already done, and that allows States to get a waiver when there is overlap with the EPA.

Some of our colleagues have said that, while they will support this bill, it isn't a bill they would have written. I agree. If it were up to me, I would have written a different bill. But, if it were up to me, it also wouldn't have taken 40 years for us to get to reform. And it isn't up to me. It isn't up to any one of us. Legislating, especially on complex and difficult issues—issues that affect all aspects of health, environment, and commerce—takes work, it takes patience, and it takes compromise. This bill took all the hard work, patience, and cooperation we had. The end result is a stronger regulatory program to test and assess chemicals, a stronger program to ensure that our most vulnerable children and loved ones are protected, and a stronger program that ensures the public has access to important health and safety information on chemicals.

Our colleagues in the House supported this bill, as I said earlier, 403 to 12. That is two more votes than the Clean Air Act amendment got in 1991, so it shows strong bipartisan support. This is the largest margin for a major environmental bill in decades. I believe the Senate very soon will follow suit.

This probably isn't the place to do it. I have a long list of people I would like to thank in terms of the staff effort. One of the things that is absolutely clear is our staff—all of our staff that were involved in this—worked very hard and helped us reach that perfect spot where we had a good compromise, so I will do some of those thank-yous at a later point.

But I want to say, it is very important that we realize why we named this

law after Frank Lautenberg. He started us on this path. It was Frank Lautenberg. I have a picture of him here with his grandchildren. The picture was taken by his wife Bonnie Lautenberg, who is a wonderful photographer.

Frank was always motivated. He was always motivated by his children and grandchildren. He used to sit in committee, and I will never forget him asking questions very specifically: How does this impact future generations—children, grandchildren? What impact is this going to have?

He became very frustrated with the gridlock, with the problems that we were having in terms of the Environmental and Public Works Committee. So he teamed up with Senator VITTER, and almost immediately 12 Democrats and 12 Republicans joined in on that bill. I was one of the 12 Democrats.

Shortly thereafter, we lost Frank, so I decided this is something that should be picked up and continued. Frank had set such a great example, and we had some good bipartisan momentum. So Senator VITTER and I had dinner, and we decided we were going to see this through.

One of our greatest partners—and, really, our inspiration in helping us see this through—was Bonnie Lautenberg. She took her pain and agony and wanted to get something done; she plowed it into something positive. She has been absolutely terrific in terms of working with all of us in the House and in the Senate. I know Representative SHIMKUS in the House has said some very flattering things about her, all of which are true.

One of the things she did is help hold together Frank Lautenberg's staff, who had worked on the legislation for close to 15 years. They had various drafts over the years of chemical legislation. They knew the facts, they knew the evidence, and they knew what was out there and the dangers to the children and the grandchildren. So she worked with them, and she helped keep us on track.

It is wonderful to have her with us today in Washington, being able to see this happen hopefully today, maybe a little bit later in the day. I want to thank her so much and have her know that she really inspired us, kept us focused, and kept us on track.

I am hopeful that we are going to act very soon. I urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation. I urge the President to sign it. If we do that, we are going to be in a much better place as a country and as a society.

Mr. President, I see that my good friend Senator INHOFE, chairman of the committee, is here. They always say around here—and I know my good friend, PATTY MURRAY, told me this: You don't get a bill through this Congress without having a strong chairman, and there couldn't have been a stronger chairman than Chairman INHOFE.

Mr. INHOFE. Will the Senator yield? Before he leaves the floor, I want to get

in on this because the Senator said a lot of really great things.

I don't recall at any time someone from the private sector like the Lautenbergs coming in and participating the way that she has. I really do appreciate it. I know she is around here somewhere.

But let me say this to the Senator: You came in when we lost Frank and where we all were at that time. I have to say publicly that you are the guy who jumped in there and filled the vacuum that was created by his loss. We could not have done it.

When I stop and think about all the people who are supporting this, in the years I have been here—I am talking about 22 years here in the Senate—I have never seen this happen before, where we have so much unanimity, not even on the highway bills or things we have done together. I want to make sure everyone knows that you are very much the reason where we are today. I hope we can finish this up today and make everyone happy.

I was talking to a group yesterday. In talking about this, we haven't really used the issue of jobs as we should have. They were talking about how many—I will not name the companies—that are right now employing in places such as China, India, and other places because of the uncertainty of the definitions that we have in this country. This completely solves that. I don't think anyone has ever put pencil to how many jobs can be immediately recreated in this country, along with other things, that will be coming in the future. This could end up being the greatest jobs bill, not of the year, but of the decade.

Does the Senator agree with that?

Mr. UDALL. I very much agree with that. When it comes to innovation, when it comes to moving in the direction of creating products that are going to be sustainable over time, I don't have any doubt that this bill is going to have a huge impact. I think the thing that the Senator, as chairman, helped us do is—we always kept everybody at the table. Industry was at the table, environmental groups, public health groups. The EPA was giving us technical advice. We had the States and others. We stayed at the table and worked through the problems and created a piece of legislation that I think, when it becomes law, will end up helping to create jobs, make a safer environment, and protect our families and our children.

I will never forget when Senator VITTER and I came to you when you became the chairman at the beginning of this Congress. We told you of the bipartisan support we had, and you said right then: We are going to get on this. We are going to do this.

You have been true to your word. You have worked very hard on this. It has been an inspiration for me to work in a bipartisan way and have a strong chairman. We ran into bumpy times with the House for a while, but having

a strong chairman really made a difference on this. So I thank the Senator so much.

Mr. INHOFE. I appreciate that—and personalities also. We had the far left and the far right. Everybody realized that this is something we all can agree on.

Do I understand from the Senator that Bonnie Lautenberg is here today?

Mr. UDALL. Bonnie Lautenberg is here with the Congress. We don't want to violate any of the rules. I think she is in the room with us here today. She came down today. As the Senator knows, we have a First Lady's Luncheon, and all the spouses attend that luncheon. Then in the night, all the Senators get together for the annual dinner. Bonnie Lautenberg has been here ever since then. She has been down here numerous times, as the Senator knows.

I don't know if the Senator was here earlier. I was remarking on what a great photograph this is of Frank Lautenberg. Look at the grandchildren. They all have wonderful smiles. As the Senator knows, he always talked in committee about his grandchildren. She is a pretty incredible photographer. She took this picture.

Mr. INHOFE. Frank and I used to talk about that. I have 20 kids and grandkids. We used to compete with each other in exchanging pictures, one of the many things that we had in common.

I look forward to visiting. I look forward to making this a major accomplishment. It is so important to do it today because we have a recess coming up, the House has a recess coming up, and there are a lot of people and companies out there who are making decisions now as to what they are going to do, all predicated on their certainty that this bill is going to pass. So we will join together and just do the best we can to make that happen for the sake of a lot of jobs around the country.

Mr. UDALL. We sure will.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

ZIKA VIRUS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, it has now been months since President Obama first put forward a strong emergency funding proposal to respond to the Zika virus. We now know that more than 1,400 cases of Zika have been reported in the United States and territories. Just today, the Washington Post reported that according to a new study, the odds of having a child with microcephaly as a result of a Zika infection could be higher than even previously thought—as high as 13 percent for women who are infected early in their pregnancies.

The researchers who conducted the study urged health care systems to

“prepare for an increased burden of adverse pregnancy outcomes in the coming years.” The CDC is already monitoring almost 300 expecting mothers for possible Zika infections. Those numbers are unfortunately only expected to grow. This is a public health emergency, and it demands action.

While it shouldn't have taken so long, Democrats and Republicans have been able to agree on a bipartisan downpayment on the President's proposal, which would get emergency funding into the hands of first responders and researchers right away. We passed that agreement last week and, unfortunately, it hasn't gone anywhere.

Senate Democrats have urged our Republican colleagues to work with us on sending our bipartisan agreement to the House for a vote, but they have said they will only agree to do that if we agree to Affordable Care Act cuts. This is no time for quid pro quo politics or hostages. This is a time to protect our families. I am going to ask again that our Senate Republicans reconsider and join us to get this bill to the House. There, I hope that House Republicans will drop their partisan, underfunded billing and give our bipartisan agreement a vote. Then, I hope the President can sign it and we can get a serious response to this emergency underway.

Families and communities are expecting us to act. Parents are wondering whether their babies will be born safe and healthy. In Congress, we should be doing everything we can to tackle this virus without any further delay.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, sometimes I feel like our Democratic colleagues will not take yes for an answer. As the distinguished Senator from Washington knows, we have passed a \$1.1 billion appropriation to combat the Zika virus. It is something we all agree on, on a bipartisan basis.

What the Senator from Washington objects to is the fact that it happens to be attached to another appropriations bill, but the process is that now gets reconciled with the bill passed by the House and then sent to the President. The good news is, there is already \$580 million in unexpended Ebola funds that can be used as a downpayment to deal with the Zika virus.

The Presiding Officer and I have come from States where the mosquito which carries the Zika virus is present. We all appreciate the seriousness of this, and we are determined to act on a bipartisan basis. The Senator from Washington knows that, but that doesn't stop her and her colleagues from coming to the floor and making demands that we do this instantaneously.

Mr. President, to give you a sense of what is going on, we have been trying to get our Democratic colleagues to

allow us to pass the Defense authorization bill all week. What we have been told is, no, they need more time to review it. Every Democrat in the Armed Services Committee voted for the Defense authorization bill. It has been posted online for some time now. Anybody who cares about what is in the bill has had plenty of time to read it. Even though the Senate voted unanimously yesterday to proceed to the legislation—which is not a word you hear often around here, “unanimous”—the bill has been stopped in its tracks by our Democratic colleagues. It is shameful because this is our primary vehicle to make sure our men and women in the military get the resources and equipment they need in order to defend the country. That is why Congress has been able to pass a defense authorization bill every year for 50 years-plus. Taking care of our national defense is our No. 1 job in the Federal Government, but the Democratic leader and his colleagues, apparently with their complicity, have been doing everything they can to slow down this legislation. They know we are coming up on a weeklong Memorial Day recess, so they have delayed it another week before we can take it up when we return.

This also gives our men and women in uniform a pay raise, but apparently they are being used once again as a political pawn or football. It is shameful, and it is unnecessary. Somebody said: Well, it is just politics. It is one of the reasons the American people look with such disdain at what happens in Washington these days because these sorts of things—politics, partisanship—get put ahead of our duty to protect those who defend the Nation.

We will have a vote later on today to get on the bill. I know Senator MCCAIN, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, is eager to get on this bill, to deal with the amendments. The majority leader has said the week we come back, we will not leave until we complete our work on the Defense authorization bill.

I think one of the reasons our friends across the aisle are dragging their feet on this legislation is because they are getting a little worried at the contrast between the productiveness of the 114th Congress compared to the 113th Congress when they were in charge. We know what happened then, after a disastrous election, which many incumbent Democrats lost the election because they didn't have anything to point to as a record of accomplishment because of the failed strategy of the then-majority leader from Nevada. Even Senators in the majority party didn't have records of success they could point to, to commend them to the voters for their own reelection. It was a devastating loss. The majority became the minority, and new management was put in charge.

Senator MCCONNELL, the majority leader, said he thinks it is important for the Senate to return to its regular

role, considering and building consensus to pass bipartisan legislation, and that is exactly what we have done. Ironically, many of our Democratic friends, who are now in the minority, have had a greater opportunity to participate in passing legislation as Members of the minority more so than they did when they were in the majority, essentially when Senator REID shut down the U.S. Senate.

We have seen a productive Senate this year and last, notwithstanding the efforts to shut down the Defense authorization bill. For example, last week the Senate passed three bills. It passed an appropriations bill, it passed the POLICE Act—to make sure our law enforcement officials get the training they need to, to deal with active shooter training—and we passed a bill called the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act. They all had strong bipartisan support. That last bill is making sure families who lost loved ones in 9/11 get justice—the justice they deserve, wherever the facts may lead.

The bottom line is, we are doing our dead-level best, despite the dead weight of the other side, on occasion—such as the Defense authorization bill—to stop us from making progress. I think it is pretty clear what is going on, so I will not dwell on that any longer, but my response to them is to simply stop playing politics with our men and women in uniform and drop the stall tactics. It is blatant, it is obvious to everyone with eyes in their head, and it is absolutely shameful.

COAST ACT

Mr. President, in less than a week, hurricane season will be upon us. The Presiding Officer knows that well, coming from Florida. Residents along the gulf coast will be preparing for all that a major storm might bring, including flooding, storm surges, and high winds. The hundreds of miles of Texas coast and the State's location along the Gulf of Mexico make it particularly vulnerable to hurricanes and storms. That would be Texas. Because the area is so densely populated—Houston, TX, for example, right there in the middle of the Texas gulf coast—and includes one of our Nation's busiest ports and energy hubs, the potential for major damage along the Texas coast could have significant ramifications, not just for the region but for the rest of the country as well.

When Hurricane Ike made landfall in 2008, we got a glimpse of how bad it could be. The storm caused a tremendous amount of damage as it made its way through the Caribbean, from Haiti to the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Storm surges in parts of Texas were estimated to be as high as 20 feet. Ike was the second costliest U.S. hurricane on record, causing billions of dollars' worth of damage. Sadly, it took the lives of dozens across the Caribbean and the United States.

As the hurricane season gets underway, I know many Texans have been reminded of that terrible storm and

many worry about the potential damage another big storm coming through our coastline would bring. It is not a question of if, it is a matter of when that is going to happen. We need to make sure we are doing what we can to protect those on the coast and to protect our economy from the next Hurricane Ike.

I have been encouraged to see many efforts underway at the State and local level in Texas on how to develop the best plan to approach the problem. Several groups in the State are currently studying the coastline and determining where Texas is most defenseless against a major storm.

In Congress, I have joined with other members of the Texas delegation to authorize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assess the vulnerabilities and to propose how we can best mitigate future damage, but there is room to do more because we know this process is simply too slow. It is not as fast as it needs to be, which is why I introduced something I call the COAST Act, which stands for the Corps' Obligation to Assist in Safeguarding Texas. It is pretty straightforward.

This legislation would require the Corps of Engineers to use the data in other studies that are sound science and already completed for their planning at the State and local level. In that way, the Corps of Engineers is not just duplicating efforts and burning the clock when we can't afford to do that. So we can speed up the process so the Texas coast can get the protection it needs sooner. It would also let the final recommendations of the Corps proceed without going through numerous and unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. In other words, once the Corps determines the best course of action to keep Texans on the coast safe, they will not have to wait for another congressional approval to authorize it. The COAST Act is a lesson in streamlining the Federal Government—something we could use more of—so that folks who may be in harm's way can get what they need faster. I want to particularly express my appreciation to Congressman RANDY WEBER on the other side of the Capitol, who has introduced a similar bill as well. I hope that as we prepare for the upcoming hurricane season, we can get this legislation passed.

CALLING FOR APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL COUNSEL

Mr. President, on one final matter, yesterday the inspector general's office at the State Department released a 70-plus-page report telling us what many people suspected all along. That report criticized then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's use of a private, unsecured email server while she was our Nation's top diplomat and having access to and processing highly classified information—some of our Nation's most confidential and classified secrets. Some people have wondered why recent poll numbers have not been kind to Mrs. Clinton when it comes to her trustworthiness. A Washington Post-

ABC News national poll found that just 37 percent of the people who responded to that poll believe Hillary Clinton is honest and trustworthy, while 57 percent said they don't think she is. This is a serious problem, not just for Mrs. Clinton but for the country.

There are those who wonder why people are so upset with Washington. What they see is a culture of corruption that doesn't address some of these fundamental issues. Well, time and again we have heard Secretary Clinton and her allies say that her use of a private email server was wholly consistent with State Department policy. But, of course, the report that was just released by the inspector general yesterday says otherwise and revealed a host of other inconsistencies.

First, the report indicates that Clinton's email use was not in accordance with State Department standards, and, more than that, the former Secretary of State neglected to get the formal approval she needed in order to use her private server.

Second, Secretary Clinton and her supporters, including the President, have maintained that her server was not a security risk, while others, such as former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates, said they were confident that our Nation's adversaries—China and Russia, well known for their cyber attacks—were taking full advantage of an unsecured server and using and gaining access to classified information which was now—in the words of Representative POMPEO, who serves on the Intelligence Committee in the House—like putting intelligence on Twitter. In effect, that is what Mrs. Clinton did. But, of course, the report from the inspector general calls all of this into question and asserts that when some of Clinton's staffers raised concerns about a potential breach to the system, the relevant security officials at the State Department were not alerted. They just weren't alerted in accordance with State Department policy. Even though Secretary Clinton has maintained that she has been fully complying with every request related to an investigation of her use of the private server, the inspector general report makes clear that the Secretary and her staff refused to be interviewed. That is not cooperating with the authorities. She can't refuse to talk to the FBI, and a number of her staffers have been, and she said she will make herself available. I bet she will because she really doesn't have any choice. But to say she is cooperating with an investigation by the inspector general at the State Department and then refusing to be interviewed is just—well, let's call it what it is—a lie.

Similarly, the report reveals that Secretary Clinton didn't turn over all of her work-related emails upon leaving office, like she said she did. She only did so almost 2 years after leaving, and the State Department basically had to demand it, even then we know she deleted—she told us this—

thousands of emails before turning over those she deemed work related. I suspect the forensics experts at the FBI have been able to recover a lot of the emails that she deleted. We all know if you delete emails, they remain on the server in a digital format. The truth will come out sooner or later, but I just have to say the conduct of the former Secretary demonstrates why people just don't trust her. Of course, the recent contradictions are just outrageous and indicate that rather than cooperation, her intention has been to obstruct the public's right to know.

This report underscores why I believe we need an independent investigation into this matter. I called for the appointment of a special counsel because it is clear that the Attorney General, who serves at the pleasure of President Obama, is going to have very little incentive or intention to pursue the appropriate investigation. So I have asked Attorney General Lynch to appoint a special counsel to provide some modest level of independence so the public can know that we have gotten to the bottom of this despite Secretary Clinton's denials and obfuscation and statements of untruth. We need to get to the bottom of it. It is absolutely critical that we do so.

I hope Attorney General Lynch reconsiders my call for a special counsel. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, we have come to a crisis point in our country. In 2014, 18,893 people died due to a prescription opioid overdose. On average, 51 people die every day. What we are talking about is legal prescription drugs that are basically produced by pharmaceuticals, which are great companies. They are approved by the Food and Drug Administration, which is supposed to look out for the well-being and welfare of all the citizens of this great country. They are prescribed to us by our doctors, the most trusted persons outside of our family. Now it has become an epidemic. It is doing more harm to people than anything I know of right now.

When I talk about an epidemic, we have lost over 200,000 people since 1999, and not to raise this to the level that we should so we can fix this is ridiculous, and the trend is still going in the wrong direction. Some 16 percent more people died in 2014 than died in 2013. We have lost almost 200,000 Americans to prescription opioid abuse since 1999, as I said, and we must take action to stop the epidemic. Unfortunately, a major barrier that those who are suffering from opioid addiction face is inefficient access to substance abuse treatment.

There is not one of us in the Senate or in our States, who doesn't have somebody in their immediate or extended family or a close friend that has not been affected either by legal drug abuse or illicit drugs. If you talk to those without any means, you know

they have nothing. They have nowhere to go. There are no treatment centers, and we haven't stepped up to the plate.

All of the States' budgets are taxed, if you will. Every time we do something with the Federal Government's budget, we have to have a pay-for. We have been looking for ways to do something to make sure that every State has a sufficient amount of treatment centers to help those who need it. In fact, between 2009 and 2013, only 22 percent of Americans suffering from opioid addiction participated in any form of addiction treatment. We talked about addiction treatment. For so many years, we all looked at any type of drug use as being the crime, and we put them away. We put them in jail. We spent \$450 billion in the last 20 years for incarceration. Not one time did we look at this issue and say: This might be an illness, and an illness needs treatment, and a treatment can actually cure somebody. We haven't thought along those lines, and it needs to change.

In 2014, in my State of West Virginia, 42,000 West Virginians, including 4,000 children, sought treatment for legal drug abuse but failed to receive it. They needed treatment. They said: Please help us. Think about this. A family who has done everything, including exhausting all of their resources, has to have their child arrested and convicted with a felony so that child can go to drug court and get the treatment he or she needs. Isn't that a sad scenario? The largest long-term facility in West Virginia with more than 100 beds is Recovery Point, in Huntington. It has a waiting list that is 4 to 6 months long. This is the most successful treatment center, and it is run by former addicts. These are people who hit rock-bottom. They know what it takes. They have all come back and have been keeping themselves clean and mentoring other people. They have more of a success rate than anyone I know of in my State.

In 2014, about 15,000 West Virginians received some form of drug or alcohol abuse treatment, but nearly 60,000 West Virginians were identified as in need of substance abuse treatment and couldn't find help.

Based on conversations with West Virginia State Police, 8 out of 10 of all of their calls are drug related. Imagine if the Presiding Officer, who is from the beautiful State of Florida, should ask his law enforcement how many calls they get that are drug related. It is unbelievable. The costs are prohibitive as far as what we are spending now and how much is being taken out of our economy. These are people who have recognized they needed help and were turned away because there were not enough facility beds or health care providers in their community or they couldn't afford the pricey high-end facilities out there.

That is why I joined my colleagues this week to introduce the Budgeting

for Opioid Addiction Treatment Act. This Life BOAT Act would establish a steady, sustainable funding stream to provide access to substance abuse treatment. This is a difficult thing for a lot of my colleagues and friends on the other side of the aisle. Somehow, we have to step up to the plate and not worry about this being a tax. There are those who have said that we can't take out another tax and have pledged: I won't go for a new tax.

How about voting for treatment? How about voting to help people? How about voting to put people back in the economic mainstream to be a part of this great country of ours? How about taking them out of the prisons and not incarcerating people who don't have violent or sexual crimes and can basically be rehabilitated? We have a tax on cigarettes because we know it is harmful to you. We have a tax on alcohol because we know it is harmful for you. We have nothing on opioids. I have a piece of legislation—and we are looking for more and more sponsors all the time—that would tax 1 penny for every milligram of opioid that is prescribed. We know opioids are addictive. We were led to believe that they weren't addictive.

When opioids first came out in 1980, the pharmaceutical companies said this is a wonder drug with 24-hour relief from severe pain, and it is non-addictive. Guess what. The genie is out of the bottle, and we lost 200,000 citizens. But we have doctors prescribing them.

We prescribe more opioids than anyone in the world. We consume more painkillers than anybody in the world. I am talking about the entire world. There are only 330 million in our country. When we look at the population of the world, which consists of 7 billion people, and we consume over 80 percent of all opioids produced in the world. We only have 5 percent of the world's population. Something is dead wrong. That 1 penny will generate—if you can believe this—\$1.5 to \$2 billion a year. This is what we call the penny of gold. We can help people. We can go back to every community and every State in this great country of ours and help people get their lives back. We can help people get clear and clean and working again.

Every week I come to the floor and read a letter. I read letters from all over the country. I read letters of those from my State who have been affected. The legal drug abuse of opioids has been a silent killer. We haven't talked about it enough. We have had someone in our family—whether it is your child, mother, father, aunt, uncle, or cousin—and we were ashamed. Guess what. We continue to lose more and more people. Now they are coming forward.

I want to read another letter. These letters have a common theme. They mention how hard it is to get themselves or their loved ones into treatment. Sometimes it takes months, and sometimes it never happens. This problem stems from our lack of systems to

help those who are looking for help. We need permanent treatment facilities to help people get clean and stay clean.

I say to all of my colleagues: This is not a Democratic or Republican problem. This is an American epidemic, and I don't believe one person—whether Democrat or Republican—can argue against voting for 1 penny to try to help cure people who have been affected by this epidemic. It won't cost anybody one vote—not one vote. I hope they will consider that.

Today I am reading an anonymous letter from a veteran in West Virginia about his struggle to get his sons into one of the treatment facilities they desperately need.

He says:

I'm sure many have heard my story before. I have a 34-year-old son that first got addicted to Oxycontin while residing in Wyoming County. He had been in trouble with the law for stealing everything from ATVs or whatever he could get his hands on.

Most addicts, as you know, basically commit a felony. First, they steal from their families or friends of their family. When they run out of people who won't turn them in, they steal from anyone's home they can break into—anything they can do to get the money that gives them the fix they need for their addiction. Then they end up with a felony, and the system basically spirals down.

This young man stole everything he could get his hands on. They went to a methadone clinic. They have methadone and Suboxone. These are wonder drugs that are supposed to help an addict wean off drugs, but they never do. Methadone and Suboxone still have the heroin effect in them. And people get on those and they can't get off of them either.

Well then a Methadone Clinic was opened in Beaver, WV. He went to this clinic. I'm not sure what dosage he started at but I know till here recently he was on 120 milligrams a day.

And 120 milligrams a day is a lot.

He had lost his take homes—

Which is what they give him to self-medicate.

—so he had to drive from Mercer County to Beaver, WV, everyday. He had trouble holding down jobs, so if he didn't have the money he couldn't go or get dosed. The clinic there only takes cash or credit card.

I helped my son finance his home, cars, and lots of time I wasn't getting paid, I would pay these to protect my credit but I might not get my money back.

This is the father's and mother's credit.

So here recently I started to stop paying things.

Cut him off cold turkey.

Now he has pawned most of what he had in his house for cocaine, he says it's to help him with methadone withdrawals, I'm not sure. But his wife is getting ready to leave him, their son has been living with me since November of 2015.

My wife and I called and tried to find him a detox and inpatient treatment, but since he hasn't weaned down at the clinic they say he don't meet their criteria. My son hasn't

had methadone to the best of my knowledge since May 8th, 2016.

I have told him he can't live in his house if he can't pay the bills. He says he will accept treatment at a detox, the only place I found that may take him is a behavioral health at Appalachian Regional in Beckley for his depression and bipolar and they will help him to be safe while going through withdrawals.

We don't have the money to afford private care, he is on WV Medicaid. Most places he can go is out of state and WV won't pay for it. I'm so afraid that I'm going to lose my 34 year old son to this dilemma. I hope there is someone out there that can hopefully get him free of his addictions, so he can live and prosper.

He said that is only one son.

That's one son, my other son, is 30 and he too has some addictions and mental health issues. I paid his rent for 2 months to remove him from my home because he was so disruptive and searching for alternatives, such as he has been going to southern highlands for over 4 years for [his] bipolar [treatment].

He has been seeing the same physician. He has checked himself into the Pavilion in Mercer County several times but checks himself out he says its [be]cause they won't give him his medications that he wants.

This is another problem we have. A lot of people who go to the hospitals or clinics, if they don't get what they want, they give a bad report to the doctor or medical facility, and it hurts them on their reimbursement for Medicare and Medicaid. We have a piece of legislation to change that also.

He has been prescribed clonopins and Neurontin's. He prefers to either take them all at once per day or more than prescribed, since I moved him out of his apartment, I hear he diverts them for other drugs. He hasn't had a job in years.

I don't know what to do to help my two sons. I know the system hasn't seemed to benefit them at all but they still get their medications and etc.

It kind of keeps their addiction going on.

If they don't get the prescribed ones they search for street drugs and they will sell their own soles and [even] mine to get them. What is a parent to do?

For mothers it's hard to see your child in pain and maybe more willing to give them money and so forth but I have learned that is only enabling them. But there is so many ones out there it's too easy for them to get the drugs or divert them.

I feel we need to do a few things. One, we must either put strict controls on methadone clinics—

And I can assure that methadone clinics do not work and shouldn't be prescribed to everyone, and there should be professionals who prescribe methadone and it should be closely regulated—

and not let them keep our families hostage for their life.

What they mean by that is that once they go to these clinics, they never let them go. They are with them for life.

Two, counselors and physicians need to try and understand what is a success in treatment or failure. If our children can't function in normal society, hold down a job, take medications as directed, that plan of treatment isn't working, let's do something else . . . don't keep doing the same thing to get them out of the office.

Why keep them in the same type of program to give them the fix they are looking for when they are never going to be cured? Don't keep going to the same thing and expect a different result. Let's get them out of this type of situation.

It's not working, what is next?

People are asking and begging for help. They truly are, in West Virginia, in the Presiding Officer's beautiful State, and every State. It is atrocious what is going on.

We have legislation, and I think we can put our politics aside. This is not Democratic or Republican. I have said it over and over. This doesn't have a home. This is a killer. It is epidemic—200,000 have died. In my State of West Virginia last year, 630 West Virginians died of legal prescription overdoses—legal. This is not counting illicit overdoses—legal prescription overdoses.

So I am committed to fighting this with every breath I have in my body. I hope we will consider legislation we can work on, that is bipartisan and that will help every person in every State in America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, we are on a motion to proceed to the National Defense Authorization Act, and there are so many different aspects of national security and defense that we touch upon. The Senator from West Virginia actually touched on one of them. A lot of people may not consider it that way, but the threat posed to the United States by transnational criminal groups operating out of Mexico and other parts of the hemisphere are a direct threat to the security of our people.

We had a hearing earlier today in our subcommittee, the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, and we heard testimony from government officials and the administration talking about the threats being posed.

Here is the bottom line. You have these multibillion dollar, multinational entities operating south of our border. We all heard about El Chapo Guzman and the Sinaloa Cartel, but there are others as well, and they are both growing poppy opiates, but they are also manufacturing synthetic fentanyl. There is a prescription version of fentanyl, but this is a synthetic, nonpharmaceutical version, and all of it, basically 100 percent of the stuff they are growing, is being trafficked directly to the United States. There is not a State in the Union or territory in our country or jurisdiction represented by any Member of the Senate which has not been deeply impacted by this war they are waging against us. So it was an insightful hearing and I think reminds us that on the one side we need to deal with treatment aspects because people who are dependent on an opiate substance are sick and they need help as if it is a disease, not a crime.

The other aspect of it is the people pushing the stuff into our country, deliberately targeting us. They are murderers. They are not just killers because they kill each other and innocent people, they are killers because they know the people they are selling these drugs to, they are deliberately trying to hook them on these drugs and they read and know the overdose deaths we have seen. There is an extraordinary growing military-to-military relationship between the national defense parts of our government and our partners in Mexico and other countries and will continue to be. There has to be because these groups need to be defeated or they will continue to spread their poison and death into cities, towns, and our States.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Madam President, another aspect of national defense that people don't think about when people think about national defense is the issue of human rights. So much of the instability that is happening around the world that we have to respond to militarily out of our national security interests are driven by the violation of human rights.

Oftentimes our soldiers, sailors, our service men and women, when called to engage militarily or be present militarily in any part of the world, are also having to deal with the consequences of what is happening from a human rights perspective. Where it gets difficult is in many cases some of the countries that are violating the human rights of their people and others happen to be military allies of ours. It is always a balance that people argue, but no matter what our arrangements may be with any potential military partner anywhere in the world, we should never back away from the cause of human rights, for not only is it the right thing to do, which speaks to our values as a people and nation, but human rights is also a leading cause of instability. The violation of human rights leads to this instability. It is what causes people to take to the streets to try to get rid of their governments and their leaders.

So I come to the floor today to bring to your attention an ongoing human rights issue that weighs heavily on me and should weigh heavily on all of us. Every day people are unjustly detained, tortured, publicly shamed, and murdered, often at the hands of their own government. Here is what their crimes are: simply disagreeing with the government—disagreeing through journalism, blogging, peaceful organizing, or for simply being in a different religion. In jail cells all around the world, there are innocent men and women who wanted nothing more than to freely express themselves in the society in which they live.

The vast number of political prisoners held by repressive regimes is a sobering reminder of how much work remains to uphold basic human rights and advance democratic values. From Cuba to China, from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, people are suffering for exer-

cising freedoms that our Creator gave them.

I say the phrase “political prisoners,” but I remind you that these prisoners oftentimes are ordinary people like us—people who dream of a greater future for their country, people who envision a better life for their families and loved ones. They are journalists, bloggers, many are human rights activists, educators. Some are politicians. We also have pastors, mothers and fathers and students.

America traditionally has been a voice for those oppressed. We as a country and as a people have engaged in what Ronald Reagan once described as “the age-old battle for individual freedom and human dignity.” It is unacceptable for America to forsake this legacy today, to turn its back on our fellow human beings who are losing their lives or being imprisoned for exercising their fundamental, God-given freedoms.

This is why last September my office launched a social media campaign we call hashtag “expressionNOToppression.” Each week we highlight a different political prisoner or prisoner of conscience in an effort to put a human face on the many who suffer from oppressive regimes around the world.

Today I come to share the stories of some of the people we have championed in the past year.

In 2014, Tibetan writer and blogger Dawa Tsomo was detained for breaking China's cyber laws by publishing articles that the government considered “politically sensitive.” To this day, she is missing. Today, China is one of the most repressive countries in the entire world.

In Cuba, matters are just as serious, if not worse. Beatings, public acts of shame, and termination of employment are well-known consequences of disagreeing with the Castro regime. The Castro regime has rearrested almost all of the 53 political prisoners it released as part of the supposed normalization of relations that President Obama undertook at the end of 2014.

Remember the 53 names on the list of people they were going to let go as part of the normalization? Virtually all 53 of them have since been rearrested.

The Cuban people know they deserve better. Groups throughout the island have continuously stood up against oppression. One of the most prominent is the group the Ladies in White or, in Spanish, Damas de Blanco. Many of those who make up this group are the wives and relatives of jailed dissidents protesting the unlawful imprisonment of their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers. So each Sunday following Catholic mass, the Ladies in White take to the streets in a silent march. They are often harassed, arrested, and even beaten by the Cuban Government.

In fact, this last Sunday, the leader of the Ladies in White was arrested. She will soon be placed on trial and can face between 3 months and 5 years in

prison, but this sort of treatment hasn't stopped them. Week after week, these women continue to protest the Castro regime and fight for the freedom of their nation and of their loved ones.

In the disaster that has become Venezuela, due to its incompetent tyrant leader, Nicolas Maduro, a tyrant who is an incompetent clown, we have seen one of the most prominent opposition leaders, Leopoldo Lopez, arrested and sentenced to 13 years 9 months in prison on charges of terrorism, murder, and grievous bodily harm and public incitement—sounds like pretty serious charges. Here is the reality. Leopoldo Lopez, who was the Governor of a prominent state in the country, was imprisoned for advocating for a constitutional democratic and peaceful change in the Venezuelan Government. That is why he is in jail.

Since the Venezuelan Government's crackdown on opponents began in February of 2014, dozens of innocents have been killed, thousands have been beaten and targeted for intimidation, and hundreds more have been jailed, not to mention that most of these political prisoners in Venezuela are men.

Do you know what happens to the wives of these men in jail when they go visit their spouses in prison? They are often stripped-searched by male guards in front of their families as the act of ultimate humiliation. This is what we are dealing with in Venezuela.

In late March of this year, the Venezuelan National Assembly passed a law that would extend amnesty to more than 70 prisoners in Venezuela because they had an election. Even though the Maduro government always steals the elections in Venezuela, the loss was so overwhelming they couldn't steal this election. So the opposition won control of the Venezuelan National Assembly, and they passed a law that extended amnesty to more than 70 political prisoners who are in Venezuelan jails simply because they opposed Maduro, not because they committed a crime.

To no one's surprise, the tyrant Nicolas Maduro promised to block it. He claimed it was unconstitutional. Only a few weeks later, he sent a law to the supreme court and urged them to overturn it. Four days after his request, the supreme court—a supreme court which is illegitimate because it is completely stacked with his cronies—granted him his wish and declared the law unconstitutional.

So that is why there has been a coup d'etat in Venezuela. That is why democracy has been canceled and why there is now tyranny. You have an elected national assembly being ignored, and you have a supreme court being stacked with cronies who are basically a rubberstamp for the tyrant. The result is the gross violation of human rights, most prominently of Leopoldo Lopez.

In Pakistan, we have seen proponents of religious freedom murdered for criticizing blasphemy laws. In March of

2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister of Minority Affairs—and, by the way, the only Christian to serve in Pakistan's Cabinet—was shot to death by the Pakistani Taliban outside of his mother's home. Five years have passed. The Pakistani Government has failed to bring his murderers to justice and have failed to reform the blasphemy law that continues to encourage violence, murder with impunity, and the marginalization of religious minorities. As a result, numerous other prisoners of conscience in Pakistan suffer behind bars.

Finally, as President Obama visited Vietnam this week, a Vietnamese blogger and human rights activist named Nguyen Huu Vinh was languishing in a state prison for having voiced the wrong opinions about his government.

These examples are just a tiny window into the world of political oppression that exists today. Their cases are only a few that we have highlighted in our hashtag “expressionNOToppression” campaign.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a list of additional political prisoners we have featured.

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

The list is as follows: Danilo Maldonado of Cuba, Jason Rezaian of the United States—held in Iran, Bao Zhuoxuan of China, Sawan Masih of Pakistan, Raif Badawi of Saudi Arabia, Ko Htin Kyaw of Burma, Arif and Leyla Yunus of Azerbaijan, Luaty Beirão of Angola, Atena Farghadani of Iran, Ismail Alexandrani of Egypt, the Todos Marchamos group in Cuba, Eskinder Nega of Ethiopia, Erdem Gül of Turkey, Can Dündar of Turkey, Vladimir Kara-Murza of Russia, Mikhail Kasyanov of Russia, the SOS Venezuela group in Venezuela, Sombath Somphone of Laos, Boris Nemtsov of Russia, who was murdered, the Ladies in White in Cuba, Zainab Al-Khawaja of Bahrain, Osvaldo Rodríguez Acosta of Cuba, Mohammed Zahir al-Sherqat of Turkey, Waleed Abu Al-Khair of Saudi Arabia, Khadija Ismayilova of Azerbaijan, Nguyen Van Dai of Vietnam, and Youcef Nadarkhani of Iran.

Mr. RUBIO. They span the globe from Angola to Laos, from Iran to Burma. All of these men and women were seen as a threat to the leaders of their nations. But I—and I agree the Presiding Officer as well—see them as heroes. Just because they aren't fighting on a battlefield doesn't mean they aren't putting their lives on the line for the greater good of their people and their nation.

In a country where we are free to express ourselves, it is hard to grasp this risk. It is difficult to imagine a prominent journalist in the United States fearing for his or her life solely for doing their job or to fathom a popular blogger facing the death penalty solely for expressing their thoughts. Well, this should be just as unimaginable, to jail independent journalists in the rest of the world.

The families of the prisoners I mentioned today have also paid a price.

Most of these families spend their days and nights unsure if they will ever again see their loved ones. There are no visiting hours. There are no phone calls. In the cases of many on death row, their families often find out they have been executed on the state-run media. Children are being left to grow up on their own, wondering where their mother or their father has gone, wondering if they will ever feel their embrace again.

But there are reasons to be hopeful, for when free people speak out, it can make a difference in the lives of the oppressed. As a result of numerous international efforts, including our hashtag “expressionNOToppression” campaign, some prisoners of conscience have been released from jail and reunited with their families, although they may not be able to return to their home country. We saw it in the case of the Cuban street artist known as El Sexto, who was freed last October after 10 months in prison. We saw it in the case of prominent Azerbaijani human rights activist Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif, who were released from jail only on the grounds of deteriorating health but have since been allowed to travel to the Netherlands for medical care and to be reunited with their daughter. Once released, many have agreed that our advocacy on their behalf was a great encouragement to them and their families and, by the way, likely resulted in better treatment or even a speedier release.

A few years ago, famed Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky testified on Capitol Hill. He said of himself and fellow prisoners of conscience in the USSR that “we could never survive even one day in the Soviet Union if our struggle was not the struggle of the free world.” We should take to heart this sentiment he expressed and embrace the struggle of political prisoners who languish unjustly as I speak.

We must do everything we can to raise awareness of the brutality taking place in repressive regimes around the world. We must not forget the hundreds of people who are being tortured or being deprived of their lives for trying to bring freedom to their land while illegitimate governments desperately cling to power.

Even with our strategic allies, such as Saudi Arabia, we can never stop insisting that they show respect for women, for all human life, and for the God-given fundamental rights of all people.

Oppressed peoples do not stay oppressed forever. Oppressive governments do not stay in power forever. Inevitably, the human yearning to be free and to achieve a better life for one's self and one's family eventually cannot be restrained.

Today, I pray for those who are victims of their own government. I pray for the release of prisoners of conscience and their families. I pray that our own country stands firmly by its principles by calling for the sacred

right of every man and woman and child to be free.

TRIBUTE TO MAGGIE DOUGHERTY

Lastly, Madam President, on a point of personal privilege, I would like to take a moment to thank Maggie Dougherty, who has been a valuable member of my legislative team for the past 5 years and specialized in issues of human rights around the world.

Her expertise and, just as importantly, her passion on these issues have been invaluable to me and to my staff. Her service to our country, to the people of Florida, to the Senate, and to many individuals and families like the ones I just mentioned who suffer around the world will not be forgotten.

I thank you for your service, Maggie. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG CHEMICAL SAFETY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY BILL

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, today I rise to discuss the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act. This is landmark legislation that will honor the legacy of our dear colleague Frank Lautenberg. I had the privilege to serve with Frank for a number of years and know how passionately he wanted to undertake this challenge of the toxic substances that are in our everyday products, our household products, that are causing cancer and causing other diseases because we have completely failed to regulate them. I so much appreciate that Frank Lautenberg took on this cause, pushed it forward, and presented it in a bipartisan fashion—a fashion that continued following his death.

In this Congress, this bill is the equivalent of a unicorn, as the phrase goes, a bipartisan, bicameral compromise that majorly reforms a badly broken law. It has brought Democrats and Republicans together to take action to protect public health. I felt honored and privileged to be a part of this coalition that has worked toward a final bill for over a year. This process has not been easy, but things that are worth doing rarely are easy.

I think it is important to recognize some of the champions in this process. Of course I recognize Frank Lautenberg and all he did to put this in motion.

Following his death, Senators TOM UDALL and DAVID VITTER deserve a tremendous amount of credit for having the bold vision to come together and to carry the torch of bipartisan compromise after his passing. Their persistence and their dedication in this effort through thick and thin have been remarkable.

Chairman INHOFE also deserves a great deal of credit for his work to shepherd this bill through the Environment and Public Works Committee.

Hopefully, we will get it through the floor of the Senate. Certainly the result of the bicameral negotiations that have been completed—the bill has now gone through the House and is coming back over here.

I commend Ranking Member BARBARA BOXER for her leadership and her determination to make this the strongest bill it could possibly be. Her determination to make sure of the ability of States to act was not compromised, knowing that her State, California, has been a major leader—one of the few States that really have gone after toxic chemicals and set an example for the country. Her tenacity unquestionably has led to a stronger bill.

Senator MARKEY, as the subcommittee ranking member, brought enormous depth of knowledge and leadership to this process and was instrumental in the negotiations.

Finally, I especially want to thank Senators WHITEHOUSE and BOOKER, who teamed up with me to push for important changes before the markup in committee and who have been tremendous partners through the process.

There are many others, of course, in the Senate and in the House, on the Republican side and the Democratic side, who have played a role in getting this bill to where it is now—a few small steps from being signed into law.

I would like to specifically thank the Environmental Defense Fund. On any project like this, you need forces inside the building, but you also need forces outside the building marshaling expertise, creating a conversation among grassroots proponents, and bringing their expertise and their insights to bear. Their lead senior scientist, Richard Denison, played an instrumental role in the preparation of this bill.

Many Americans don't know that the chemicals in their household products are completely unregulated. It has been 40 years since the last major reform to our Federal chemical laws took place. There has been absolutely no action of any kind since 1991, when there was a failed effort to regulate asbestos, which, again, citizens believe must surely be regulated given its incredible impact on the public health of our Nation.

But for 40 years the law has been badly broken, and for 40 years generations of Americans have been exposed to unsafe chemicals and the Federal Government has been powerless to act. That is four decades too long.

The most powerful Nation on the Earth should not be powerless to regulate toxic chemicals in our everyday products. Now we are on the cusp of passing a historic bill that will change all of that.

How bad is this problem? Last year I partnered with the Environmental Defense Fund and with researchers at Oregon State University to find out just

that. The Oregon State University researchers developed a small silicone wristband that picks up toxic chemicals that each of us is exposed to every day, in the air and water around us, in our furniture, and in our household products. Twenty-five participants wore one of these silicone wristbands for a week, and then the wristbands were taken to a laboratory to analyze what the individual had been exposed to. The results were sobering. Each participant had been exposed to at least 10 potentially dangerous chemicals.

Beth Slovic, a reporter for *Willamette Week* who wore one of the wristbands, described scouring labels in her household after her results came back, trying to find out which products were the culprits so she could get rid of them, but largely she couldn't find the source.

She wrote:

Even if I had [found the source], I wouldn't have been safe from worry. You can try to avoid certain synthetic chemicals in your own home, but try avoiding them at work or on the bus. Products with industrial chemicals, such as those sprinkled in carpets and cushions supposedly to keep them from bursting into flames, break down and are in our dust.

As the information packet for the [wristband] experiment explained, "You can't shop your way out of the problem."

Beth mentioned the issue of industrial chemicals that are put into our carpets, supposedly to keep them from bursting into flames. There is quite a story behind these flame retardants in our carpets, in our upholstery, in our foam cushions, and it is not a story that will make any of us feel good. It will make all of us feel we need to have this bill passed, however.

Here is the challenge: These flame retardants are cancer-causing. The chemical industry got a bill passed requiring them to be put into household products such as foam, upholstery, and carpets.

Imagine that you are a new mother or a new father and your little baby is down there on the carpet, their nose 1 inch from the floor, and then you read about the fact that carpet is permeated with cancer-causing chemicals, that those chemicals cling to the dust that comes from the carpet as it is worn out, walked on and so forth, and that virtually every child gets exposed in this fashion, increasing their risk of cancer. Wouldn't you as a mother or father say: That is outrageous. Why doesn't Congress do something about that?

We are now poised to do something about that, to regulate cancer-causing toxic chemicals in our household products. It is way past time, but we have to seize this moment and make it happen.

Right now Americans are powerless to protect themselves from chemicals that hurt pregnant women, chemicals that hurt young children, chemicals that can hurt their child's development, and chemicals that could cause cancer.

Since TSCA passed in 1976, over 4 million babies have been born with birth defects and 15 million babies have been born preterm. Since 1976, 21 million people in the United States have died of cancer. And just since the Fifth Circuit case that struck down the Environmental Protection Agency's ban on asbestos in 1991, about 375,000 Americans have died from mesothelioma, a disease directly linked to asbestos exposure.

Clearly we need to change our law and replace a dysfunctional law with one that will work. This bill is set up in a fashion that it will take on the most serious, high-risk products that are already in our environment—the high-risk molecules—and have a thorough process for studying them and then acting appropriately in the cases where citizens are exposed to those products. This bill provides a process for looking at future chemicals before they are put into our products, before they cause health problems for Americans, before they cause disease, before they cause cancer, before they cause birth defects, and before they are attached to dust that gets into the lungs of our little babies crawling on carpets. That would be a tremendous improvement. We will make sure everyday products are safe before they are in our classrooms, before they are in our workplaces, and before they are in our homes.

Because of this bill, the EPA will have the tools and resources needed to evaluate all of the dangerous chemicals that are already in the market, and they will have the muscle to eliminate unsafe uses. There is nothing more important than helping the health and well-being of Americans now and for generations to come.

One key element of this dialogue has been on whether it compromises the ability of States to act when they detect chemicals they are concerned about. This bill has been specifically constructed to make sure States have that power. Any law written before April 22 is grandfathered. Certainly any bill that was written to control lead pipes in homes, that was written in the past, is grandfathered. You don't have to worry about any sort of pause or preemption of State authority.

Anytime the Federal Government says there is a high-priority chemical—one they are going to take a close look at—there is a period of time called scoping. In that period of time, any State that proposes a rule—all action on that rule is grandfathered; it can go right ahead. If the State has passed a law in that period, the law is grandfathered.

Then, during the period of time which is referred to as risk evaluation following the scoping and determining what particular forms of exposure are ones that create a risk, during that time, the only thing that would cause a State to be unable to act is if it was exactly the same chemical in exactly the same use out of the hundreds of thousands of chemicals in the world.

Furthermore, even then, there is a waiver that says the State can act if they show there is a scientific paper that shows that chemical is a risk, if they are not violating the supremacy clause of the Constitution and if they are not violating the commerce clause of the Constitution. So, in fact, States have full power to operate throughout these phases as a result of these various clauses.

The bipartisan team that has worked on this has run a marathon together. Now, after many miles, innumerable meetings, and late nights, we are just inches from a momentous improvement over current law. Current law has been completely, 100 percent dysfunctional for decades, leading to the exposure of our children, our babies, ourselves, and everyone in America to a huge list of toxic chemicals.

Senators in this Chamber will get a lot of attention for their work on this bill, but I wish to note that behind the scenes, the staff has labored day and night—a bipartisan team of staff. They worked many late nights and they had many sleepless moments while trying to figure out and finesse good policy and a path that would keep this bipartisan effort rolling forward.

I especially wish to thank my staffer who has taken the lead on this issue. Adrian Deveny has done a tremendous job. He has put in an enormous amount of time contributing substantial expertise and has worked hard to reach out to other staff members and other offices to listen and understand the challenges and the many perspectives and find a way forward. He made sure that when things were tense, lines of communication stayed open.

Because people stayed in the room and listened to each other, the staff and the Senators, on a bipartisan, bicameral basis, remained committed to the vision laid out by Frank Lautenberg that we will no longer allow Americans to be routinely exposed to toxic chemicals in their household products. That means taking on the existing chemicals, and that means having a process for new chemicals before they are introduced and making sure they do not pose a new challenge, a new disease, a new risk.

The finish line is within sight, and it is up to all of us to get there for the safety and health of every American. Let's get it done.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are postcloture.

Mr. WICKER. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, let me congratulate my friend from Oregon for his remarks and simply point out to the Chair and to my fellow Members that this is another example

of bipartisan accomplishments in the Senate and in the House. This represents a lot of work on both ends of the building, Republicans and Democrats coming together. As my friend said, it is about to get done.

When we put this on top of a number of accomplishments, including education, including dealing with the Zika virus, including dealing with the drug problem and so many other things, we have actually been able to get legislation done and sent to the President and signed into law to help make our country better, stronger, and better protected.

I appreciate what my friend said about the TSCA bill. I am also optimistic about it.

Madam President, switching gears to the National Defense Authorization Act, I am also optimistic about that. Obviously, we had hoped to pass the bill before Memorial Day as a tribute to the people who have gone before us and paid the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom we enjoy as Americans. Obviously, the bill has taken longer than I hoped it would and for reasons that are hard for me to understand. Nevertheless, we are going to get to it. We are on the bill now, and we are going to hopefully finish it the week after the Memorial Day recess.

I very much appreciate the fact that we are going to pass another bipartisan NDAA bill, which will be signed by the President. It is going to give our troops the opportunity to have the tools and resources they need in a very dangerous world.

It funds the Defense Department at \$602 billion. Our friends should know and the public should know that this \$602 billion is the figure requested by the President of the United States, so we are coming with a bipartisan number. We have had some questions on the part of our friends on the other side of the aisle about spending elsewhere, but we should be clear—and there is no question about it—the President requested \$602 billion for defense, and this bill gives our troops and the President that \$602 billion. It deals with such important issues as preserving the progress we have made in Afghanistan, continuing our fight against the Islamic state, bolstering readiness against an aggressive Russia, standing up on behalf of one of our most important allies, the state of Israel, in a very troubling time.

Earlier this year, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said it correctly. He reiterated the reality of unpredictable instability. And that is what we are facing, Madam President. So this bill is designed to address that.

Also, I would mention it is designed to alleviate some of the shortages caused by the Budget Control Act when it was passed in 2011. The world is a lot different today than it was in 2011. As a last resort, the law put in place across-the-board defense cuts that were really never intended to take place.

Collectively, we should have addressed the mandatory programs where the spending problems actually are, but instead, over the past 6 years, the Budget Control Act has required almost \$200 billion in defense cuts. Sequestration remains the law of the land and will return unless Congress acts in 2018.

The Army now has 100,000 fewer soldiers than it did 4 years ago. The Marines will be nearly 5,000 below their optimal force. Our Air Force is the smallest it has ever been in the history of the Air Force. And with 272 ships in the fleet, the Navy is well below its requirement of 308 ships.

I am pleased to serve as chairman of the Subcommittee on Seapower of the Committee on Armed Services. As such, I was happy to work with other members of the subcommittee on the Navy and seapower title to this bill. I want to thank my colleague Senator HIRONO of Hawaii, the ranking Democratic member of the subcommittee, for her leadership.

As I said, we are years away from achieving the Navy's ship requirement of 308 ships. There is also no plan to meet the National Defense Panel's recommendation for more ships—either 323, at a minimum, or up to 346 ships. So we are well away from where we really need to be to protect America and our freedom of movement around the globe. Meanwhile, the Navy has significant budget constraints. Its 2017 request is \$8 billion less than the 2017 value presented in last year's budget.

Nonetheless, we worked on a number of items to do the best we can with the money we have. First, we looked at the viability of the 30-year shipbuilding plan. Secondly, we worked to ensure that limited taxpayer dollars are used wisely. Thirdly, we looked forward to the future and what should be required of our future surface combatant ships and what costs might constrain the budget. And fourthly, we worked to ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps can continue to provide force protection around the world.

So thanks to the members of my subcommittee and my ranking member Senator HIRONO for that.

But seapower is only one part of the bill. It may be the one I have worked on more carefully, but there are other parts of the National Defense Authorization bill. As you know, Madam President, there is no authorization in the bill for another round of base closings. I very much support that provision and believe that no further base closing rounds should be authorized, and we don't.

Also, there is an extension of prohibitions on the closing of Guantanamo Bay and a prohibition of the transfer of any detainees from there. There is also support for the recommendation of the National Commission on the Future of the Army regarding aviation force structure. I advocated the creation of this commission, along with my colleague Senator GRAHAM, in the wake of unvetted proposals to cut the size of

the National Guard and reallocate Apache helicopters. So I am glad we have addressed that problem and are on the way—hopefully week after next—to passing this important bill.

It is fitting that Americans will gather on Memorial Day in the next few days, remembering the patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice and honoring the patriots who are today voluntarily stepping forward to make our country strong and great and helping all our citizens enjoy the freedoms we have today.

I am glad to be part of this bill. I congratulate the leadership of the committee and the Senate, and I look forward to passing this Defense bill without further delay.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that on Monday, June 6, notwithstanding rule XXII, following morning business, the motion to proceed to S. 2943 be agreed to and the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2943 and Senator FISCHER, or her designee, be recognized to offer her amendment No. 4206; further, that the time until 5:30 p.m. be equally divided between the managers or their designees, and that at 5:30 p.m. the Senate vote on the Fischer amendment, with no second-degree amendments in order to the amendment prior to the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 1:30 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of Calendar Nos. 462 and 463; that there be 15 minutes for debate only on the nominations, equally divided in the usual form; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the nominations in the order listed without intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume legislative session without any intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

ZIKA VIRUS

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, we are here just a few days before Memorial Day, when all across the country, Americans are going to go to parades to pay tribute to troops who made the ultimate sacrifice. They will invite friends and family over and fire up the grill. I think we all look forward to those family gatherings.

At least that is what Americans usually do over this holiday weekend. This

year, they might have second thoughts. I know I am getting asked a lot of questions by my family, not because of rain but because of something more frightening. Since the beginning of the year, public health experts have been warning us about a severe threat to moms and babies—the Zika virus. It causes severe damage to fetal brains, birth defects, and even death.

Zika is not just coming to the United States; it is already here. People are concerned, and they want us to act. There are already more than 150 pregnant women in the United States who have been infected, and we are hearing of more every day. We have four in Michigan so far, and the threat is growing.

We are fortunate to have doctors and scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health who have the skills and the knowledge to get Zika under control. I have great confidence in their ability to create a vaccine, to do what needs to be done on testing, and to get the information we don't have right now on the full impact of the Zika virus.

These brilliant minds are ready to go to work in the lab to find a treatment, to develop a vaccine that can help protect the health of babies, of pregnant moms, and of women of childbearing age. We are now hearing about a different kind of reaction to the Zika virus in men, as well, so we are still learning every single day. But that work will be costly. Specifically, these doctors and scientists asked for \$1.9 billion, and they included an extremely detailed action plan for where the money would go and the work that would be done.

Unfortunately, we have not yet sent an appropriation to the President of the United States to sign so they can get to work. Republicans in Congress have said no to the full request. Senate Republicans have agreed to \$1.1 billion. I am glad we have been able to get agreement to move something forward as a first step, even though it is not what the scientists and doctors have said needs to happen. But I signed on because it was the best we could get at the moment, and we have to get started.

What is incredibly concerning is that the House of Representatives was even more shortsighted. They gave researchers only one-third of what they asked for—one-third of what they say they need to go into the lab and develop the vaccines that will protect our children, will protect pregnant moms, and protect all of us who may be impacted in some way.

On top of that, in the House, they are using gimmicks to disguise the fact that they are raiding one public health fund to pay for another. So it is as if there is a fire, and you send a fire engine out. Then another fire starts on the other side of town. And instead of sending a different fire engine out, you just take the one and send it to the

other fire. Well, wait a minute. People wouldn't put up with that in the community, and they certainly aren't going to put up with what we are seeing coming from the Republicans in the House. So they are playing games and denying doctors and researchers the money they need to keep us safe.

Many of these Members talk tough about keeping Americans safe, but right now we have a frightening virus that is getting more severe every passing day. Yet Republican colleagues, particularly in the House, have no sense of urgency. We haven't seen a sense of urgency to take the Senate compromise out of an appropriations bill, put it into an emergency bill, and send it to the President.

Madam President, I can't imagine how scary this must be for a pregnant woman right now—even for women in Michigan, where the threat is far less severe than in other parts of the country. Yet when my own family members, when others across Michigan—friends I talk to, the others I have had a chance to talk to in the last couple of weeks—turn on the television, they have to hear from Republicans in Washington who refuse to take this threat seriously.

We have to take this seriously. Make no mistake, this is a major public health emergency. These mosquitoes are not picking and choosing whether they are going to bite Democrats versus Republicans. The reality is that this is a public health emergency for all Americans, and we need to treat it as that.

For Republicans to go home for Memorial Day without dealing with this threat is incredibly insensitive and irresponsible. We have work to do. This is another case where we need to make sure we are doing our job. We are here; we are willing to do that. We must equip our doctors and medical researchers with the tools they need to keep our families safe.

For a threat of this scale, we should not be delaying in any way, and we can't do this on the cheap. We can't only do part of it. We have to do what needs to be done with the doctors, the researchers, and the people we trust in our country. We have the most brilliant minds in the world. They are telling us what needs to be done, but they need the resources to get it done.

The richest Nation in the world can't afford to take the steps necessary to defeat the world's most urgent public health crisis. Really? I don't think so. It is time to act.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that since Senator

INHOFE and I will speak on the same important topic, we speak back to back for up to 15 minutes total.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG CHEMICAL SAFETY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY BILL

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, we rise together with so many other Members of the Senate on a bipartisan basis to strongly support the chemical safety bill which passed the U.S. House of Representatives with enormous bipartisan support and is ready to pass here in the Senate.

This is a long day coming. First, this is an element of Federal law that has been in dire need of updating. All stakeholders—left, right, and middle—have said that for decades. Secondly, we have been working on this specific bill, this solution to that problem, for over 5 years.

I started over 5 years ago with what I think we would reasonably characterize as a Republican proposal, in contrast to a clearly Democratic proposal by then-Senator Frank Lautenberg. We had these competing partisan proposals for some time, but in early 2013 we made a very determined effort to try to bridge that divide and come up with a strong bipartisan proposal to achieve two absolutely necessary objectives: one, to make sure we fully protect the health and safety of all Americans with regard to chemicals that are in products we use every day—that is paramount, and that has to happen—and two, to make sure we do it in a way that allows American companies to remain science and innovation leaders in this important sector of our economy.

I have to say that when we started these discussions in early 2013, I think both Frank Lautenberg and I were very cynical about our chances of success. We were miles apart, but we were determined to get this done. We met and negotiated and discussed in good faith. Our staffs did as well. That led to a real breakthrough in 2013—a bipartisan bill to update this area of environmental law with regard to chemical safety.

In 2013 we introduced the first bipartisan proposal with regard to that. Sadly, Frank Lautenberg passed shortly after we completed that work and introduced that bill. But I am very happy that many others took up the cause, led on the Democratic side by TOM UDALL of New Mexico. Many others were involved. I see Senator BOOKER here, Frank Lautenberg's successor in that New Jersey Senate seat. He has been involved. Certainly the chair of our committee, JIM INHOFE, has been extremely involved and in the weeds in a positive way and supportive. Over the 3 years since the introduction of the first version of the bill, that led to this strong bipartisan bill we have before us that passed the House with overwhelming support.

Not many things pass the U.S. House of Representatives with that sort of

overwhelming support—I think there were a total of 12 “no” votes. Not many things come to the U.S. Senate with this sort of near unanimous or unanimous support. Nothing in the last several decades in the category of major environmental legislation has done that.

This is a major achievement, and it is a positive achievement when we look at the substance of the legislation. It ensures the proper protection of health and safety for all Americans because these are chemicals in products that we use and touch every minute of every day and that enhance our lives and quality of life, and it is a workable regulatory regime that does it in a workable way so that American companies in this sector—and a lot of them, I am proud to say, are in Louisiana—can remain science and innovation leaders. That is why it has widespread industry support. That is why it has widespread support among many other groups, including environmental groups. That is why it garnered such an overwhelming bipartisan vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. And that is why it has overwhelming bipartisan support here in the Senate. The Senate version of this bill passed by voice vote. There were no articulated objections to it. It passed by voice vote with very strong support. That remains the base of this bill. That remains the heart and soul of this bill.

The final version—the bill we are considering now—has been posted online for almost a week. Under the House rules, that needed to happen. That happened late last week, and it has been publicly available for some time, certainly enough time for all Members to dissect and digest it. So I encourage final positive action on this bill to move us forward in a significant way.

Madam President, with that, I yield to the chairman of the committee, who has been a great leader to advance this cause.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, first, let me thank the Senator from Louisiana. It has been a long fight for a long time. Of course, I understand that Bonnie Lautenberg—who has been a very significant part of the discussion as we have gone along—is here today, and she is living this historic day with us. I say “historic day” because the Senate can take the final steps necessary to send the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act to be signed into law. That can happen today. Today the Senate can pass a bill with a tremendous amount of support. I think the Senator from Louisiana articulated it very well. We had individuals from the far right and the far left all in agreement.

I would add to that that we have an impressive list of groups that are supporting this: the Obama administration, American Chemistry Council, Environmental Defense Fund, U.S. Cham-

ber of Commerce, Humane Society, National Association of Manufacturers, March of Dimes, American Petroleum Institute, National Wildlife Federation, Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, Americans for Tax Reform, National Association of Chemical Distributors, and American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturing. Everybody. We are talking about labor unions and manufacturers. It is very rare.

I agree with the Senator from Louisiana. I don't recall, in my experience here, ever having the array of support from organizations and people that we have with this. I have been working along with that group since 2012, and then Senator Lautenberg approached me and asked for my help. I think that was the time Republicans became a majority—no, we were still a minority at that time. But he wanted to have everyone involved in this from the different parties and different philosophical realms, and that is exactly what happened.

I know my friend Bonnie Lautenberg, as I mentioned, is here today. I have never seen a bill in process that has garnered the support of someone like, in this case, the widow of Frank Lautenberg. She is there all the time, making sure this proper tribute we are going to make today becomes reality.

I think the key provisions have been covered by my friend from Louisiana. Let me join him in thanking all our friends from the left and friends from the right for joining together on something that is really good for America.

One thing that hasn't been talked about very much is the number of jobs. I talked to a large group of manufacturers yesterday, and they said we never talk about jobs. There are jobs overseas today because of the uncertainty here in terms of how we are treating chemicals in this country. They can't put forth the money and resources necessary unless they know there is certainty that they are going to be able to use whatever chemicals they have to use to produce whatever they are producing. Where are they now? They are in China, India, Mexico—places where they don't have to deal with this problem. So that is a major thing that is happening.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2576

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, the Chair lay before the Senate the message to accompany H.R. 2576; further, that the majority leader or his designee be recognized to make a motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment; that there be no other motions in order and there be up to 3 hours of debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees on the motion; finally, that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, reserving the right to object, one of the pledges I made to the people of Kentucky when I came here is that I would read the bills. This bill came here on Tuesday. It is 180 pages long. It involves new criminalization—new crimes that will be created at the Federal level. It includes preemption of States. It includes a new Federal regime which would basically supersede regulations—or lack of regulations—in Louisiana or Texas or Oklahoma. I think it deserves to be read, to be understood, and to be debated, so I object to just rushing this through and saying: Oh, you can't read the bill.

I told people—everybody involved in this—I just want to read the bill. We have been working on it now for 2 days, looking at the bill. We have been talking to people who worked on the bill. Is it not unreasonable to ask that we have time to read a bill?

Here is the other problem: Every day in my office, business comes into my office. And what do they say? We are regulated to death. We are sick and tired of regulators from the executive branch who are out of control.

So what does this bill do? It takes the power away from the States and creates a new Federal regulatory regime.

Here is the whole problem: People are now saying "Please regulate us," and when they get overregulated, they say "Please stop overregulating us."

We should think through how we are going to do things around here. We should take the time to read the bills. We should take the time to understand the bills.

I will continue to object until we have had time to look at the bill thoroughly. With that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Objection is heard.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Madam President, let me say that I regret an objection to this very reasonable path forward. No one objects to all Members of the Senate reading the bill. I encourage all Members of the Senate to read the bill. There has been and is continuing opportunity to do that.

As you heard, that unanimous consent request wasn't rushing through anything; it was a 3-hour debate and a rollcall vote.

The final version of the bill has been publicly available for everyone to read, dissect, and digest for about a week. It is largely similar to the Senate version that passed months ago and to which there was no objection raised. That passed by voice vote. So there is no impediment to everyone having adequate time to read and digest the bill. The final version has been available for that purpose for about a week.

I think it is unfortunate that we can't move forward in this sort of clear, reasonable, and straightforward

way, but we certainly will in the near future, and I look forward to that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I regret that the Senator from Kentucky has left the Chamber because the two things he mentioned were the criminal provisions and the preemption. The criminal provisions and the preemption have been with us for 6 months—not for 2 days, not for 3 days, but for 6 months. That is exactly what we voted on in December. You can't ask for more time than that to consider the provisions of a bill.

The other thing is that we are all supporting the two components of the bill—that is, the criminal provisions and the preemption. Again, they have been here for 6 months.

I ask that we have a chance to reconsider. We know this is going to pass. We know that when we get back, it will pass. It will pass because we have to go through all the procedures of a cloture vote on the motion to proceed and all that. So we know it is going to pass. That is not the issue. It is just that if we could do it now instead of 2 weeks from now. There are people making decisions today as to what they are going to be doing and what products they are going to be manufacturing and where they are going to do it. And to put that off for 2 more weeks after we have been working on this for 6 months is not a fair way to conduct business.

I hope that later on today we will have an opportunity to get this done. There is no reason not to do it. Everyone is for it. Every group I mentioned is for it. Every Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative is all for it. This is our opportunity to get it done. There is still time today to do that. I hope that between now and 1:45, which is the scheduled time for our vote, that will be a reality.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, I am very grateful that my chairman of my committee, Environment and Public Works, spoke so eloquently about the issues surrounding this bill. I am new to the Senate—at least in Senate terms—because I have been here for 2½ years, but I have never seen such a broad-based coalition involved in supporting a bill—a coalition that extends from the far right to the far left, a coalition that brings industry and activists together, a coalition that brings environmentalists together, as well as those who seek economic growth. This is a tremendous coalition. But even more so for me as a relatively new Senator, it has been one of the greatest privileges I have had in the Senate to work together in such a cooperative way to bring about legislation for which you really could build such a broad base of support.

I applaud my colleagues, and I applaud the chairman and the ranking member. I applaud all the members on

the EPW Committee and others for working on a bill that does earn, in my opinion, speaking as a man from New Jersey, the right to have the name of my predecessor Frank Lautenberg on it.

Senator Lautenberg was a giant in New Jersey. He served this country with distinction. He was a veteran. He was a public servant. He actually ran a business and grew it to be a mighty one in my State and beyond. You cannot truly begin to appreciate the void that was left by him, but the great thing about this champion of transportation, of infrastructure, of consumer safety, of fighting for his fellow citizens, this champion's work, where he began working in partnership with Senator VITTER to try to move this forward and then sadly died—this is one of his great legacies. One of his great contributions was his effort to begin what has now been a multiple-year effort to reform the toxic hazardous chemical law. Senator Lautenberg's efforts were the instigating factor, the ignition of this success that we are having today of such a broad-based bill, of such broad-based support. It reflects his work, his efforts, and his legacy.

I am very proud I had the honor of finishing Senator Frank Lautenberg's term in the Senate last year. During that time and still today, I see on a daily basis the urgency around his efforts.

I know that after Senator Lautenberg passed, his spirit was still very much manifest in this area when his wife, Bonnie Lautenberg, took up the important cause and served as one of the fiercest champions in strengthening this bill we are talking about now. She was here working, lobbying, nursing, pushing, cajoling, convincing, making sure we got to this day.

I am very proud that during my 2½ years, I was able to enter into the work to get this legislation to where it is today. I saw Senator TOM UDALL's leadership, and I want to praise that. I saw how tireless he was working on this. I am grateful for Senator UDALL's, Senator VITTER's, Chairman INHOFE's, and everyone's staff, as they worked together to get this bill to where it is today.

At the beginning of 2015, my colleagues, Senator WHITEHOUSE and Senator MERKLEY, and I began by negotiating with Senators UDALL and VITTER to make what we saw as urgently needed improvements to this bill. Working together, I am proud we were able to make those improvements to the preemption provisions that were involved in some of the things my colleague from Kentucky was just talking about—making sure that States still have a role in the process, still have power and authority in this process, and have the ability now to co-enforce with the Federal Government around this bill.

I was also very proud of a provision in this bill that will significantly minimize new animal testing and potentially save tens of thousands of animals from unnecessary suffering.

I am proud that the revised bill passed out of the EPW Committee with strong bipartisan support. I am also proud that since the EPW Committee has improved this bill, Senators UDALL and VITTER have stayed at the negotiating table and continued to take input from folks on both sides of the aisle, continuing to make this a better bill.

Senators MERKLEY, DURBIN, BOXER, the bill's sponsor, and others have made additional changes to make this bill strong.

We would never have gotten this strong of a TSCA reform bill if it weren't for the work of people on both sides of the political aisle, if it weren't for the work of people within industry, if it weren't for the work of advocacy groups, and if it weren't for groups I have come to respect a tremendous amount, such as the Environmental Defense Fund, whose early engagement and constant pressure played such an important role.

This is one of those rare moments where you have a full court press, both sides of the aisle and individuals who are representing multiple sectors all coming together to make a strong bill. They are making a strong bill because everyone was in agreement that the legislation we had—decades' old, the TSCA bill—was broken. It was broken in that it did not protect consumer safety. It was broken in that it did not give predictability and certainty to the industry. It was broken because it put America's health at risk. Whether it was children or our seniors, it created an environment where people could get sick. It had no teeth. It had no strength. When this bill becomes law, it will protect American families, it will protect our children from dangerous chemicals, and it will give industry the certainty it needs.

I urge my colleagues to pass the Frank Lautenberg bill today. I want to thank everyone again. This is a result of a tremendous coalition of efforts, a symphony of focus and work, of people coming together to do something that many people think is rare in the Senate—that we all can work together across partisan lines to make good legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

TRIBUTE TO DAVID MCBEE

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, I want to recognize today David McBee of Gassville, AK, as this week's Arkansan of the Week for his charitable contributions to his North Arkansas community. By day, David is the regional manager at Arvest Bank's Yellville branch, but he spends much of his free time after work and on the weekends volunteering for several causes in the area.

Last year, David's leadership helped his Arvest branch become the top fund-

raiser in the State for the Cotter Backpack Program, a local charity that provides backpacks of food to schoolchildren in need. His efforts led to Cotter schools receiving the Spirit of Arkansas Award 2 years in a row.

David also spends countless hours organizing the annual Cotter Warrior 5K Color Run each fall. Earlier this year, David planned a community Feed the Pack Day, where volunteers collected change at intersections and various other sites around the Mountain Home and Gassville area and donated the proceeds to fight hunger in the region.

On the weekends, you can find David at the football field, where he is one of the voices of the Arkansas Tornados, a local semiprofessional football team. I think Cotter High principal Amanda Britt said it best when she wrote in her nomination of David, "He is always willing to step in and help for anything we need."

David's tireless dedication to his community is Arkansas at its very best, and I am proud to recognize his many contributions in this small way.

David, on behalf of all Arkansans, thank you for all you do to make our home State a better place.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to executive session for the consideration of the nominations previously ordered.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nominations of Laura S.H. Holgate, of Virginia, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Vienna Office of the United Nations, with the rank of Ambassador; and Laura S.H. Holgate, of Virginia, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the International Atomic Energy Agency, with the rank of Ambassador.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 15 minutes equally divided for the consideration of these nominations.

The Senator from Ohio.

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I rise today to talk about an issue that affects all of us in this Chamber and all of the communities we represent. I also rise on behalf of the 200,000 Ohioans who are currently struggling with an addiction to prescription drugs or opiates.

Heroin and prescription drug addiction has gripped our country. Unfortu-

nately, we are facing an epidemic now, and I want to rise today to talk about how we can do a better job to address that. This is the seventh time I have come to the floor of the Senate to speak on this issue since the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act passed the Senate on March 10. That vote was 94 to 1, showing that Members from every single State are affected by this and want to address it. The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA, is a good start and will make a big difference because it is comprehensive and it addresses every aspect of the issue, from education and prevention through treatment and recovery, and helps our law enforcement folks and helps get these prescription drugs out of our communities. It is a good piece of legislation that I hope we will be able to get to the President's desk for his signature.

For the first 5 weeks I came to the floor, I talked about the fact that I hoped the House would act. I urged the House to act quickly on this emergency that is affecting our communities. Last week I came to the floor to say thank you to the House because they did act. They voted on 18 separate bills. Combined, they were a response to this epidemic, and I think that was a very important step forward.

I am encouraged that now the two Chambers, the House and Senate, are trying to figure out a way to come together with a conference to come up with one bill that can be sent to the President for his signature. I do believe the legislation we passed in the Senate is more comprehensive, and I hope the House will be willing to take some of our measures, particularly in the area of prevention, which was left out, because I think preventing this addiction in the first place and keeping people out of the funnel of addiction is incredibly important.

It has been 77 days since the Senate passed CARA, and we lose about 120 Americans a day to drug overdoses or about 1 every 12 minutes. This means we have lost about 9,000 Americans to drug overdoses since the Senate passed this legislation back on March 10. About 300 Ohioans have lost their lives to heroin and prescription drug overdoses.

We were told by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that in 2014 Ohio had the second most overdoses of any State in the Union and fifth highest, overall, overdose death rate.

I have seen the consequences of this every time I go home. I will be home tomorrow and will have the opportunity to visit with some people who are trying to help on this issue, but everywhere I go I hear about it.

Last night I had a tele-townhall meeting. We have about 25,000 Ohioans on the phone at any one time at these tele-townhall meetings. Somebody called in to talk about our legislation, CARA. His name was Joe. He is from Delta, OH, and he was very open about