

country about the potential of being one of the pilot States in excellence of mental health. Senator STABENOW from Michigan and I introduced legislation a few years ago that would combine—that would treat behavioral health, treat mental health just like all other health. This is another way to save money, because of that mental health situation.

By the way, the National Institutes of Health says that one out of four adult Americans has a diagnosable and almost always treatable mental health issue. If that mental health issue is being treated, whatever your other health issues are, they are likely to be treated in a much more effective way.

We are looking for more choices to deal with the issues suffered by our Vietnam veterans to our youngest veterans, giving them more options and more choices.

Eight States are going to be doing that and 24 States have applied. Senator STABENOW and I will be talking more about what happens and what we might do to encourage those other 16 States.

The President says he wants to spend more money on mental health. It really doesn't matter how you share your mental health information or what your provider last told you or how many mental health care providers you have if there is no place to go and if there are no access points to treat behavioral health like all other health issues, and that is what excellence in mental health does for patients.

I will close with one final area. I think there has been a lot of response to understanding and addressing the opioid epidemic and the drug issue. Deaths from prescription opioids and other pain-related drugs quadrupled between 1999 and 2013, claiming more than 145,000 lives over the past 10 years, but a substantial portion of those deaths occurred over the last couple of years. These overdoses cost the economy an estimated \$20 billion in medical costs and lost work productivity. Some people die from overdosing, and many other people have to be treated by their health care provider. There is a personal loss to those individuals who become addicted to prescription drugs.

I mentioned that I had a chance to talk to the Missouri General Assembly last week, and I talked about how our veterans are often the victims just because of the serious injuries they sustain and the painkilling drugs they are given to help deal with the pain of those injuries. But that then leads to an addiction to that drug and other drugs.

Approximately three out of four new heroin users abused prescription drugs before switching to heroin. We have made a new commitment to this issue with new programs that are targeted to combat opioid abuse at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration with

almost three times the investment that the country made before. This is truly becoming an epidemic, and we need to deal with that epidemic sooner rather than later.

Many of our Members and their States have talked effectively about fighting heroin and drug addiction but also about dealing with the transition from taking drugs that they were prescribed to drugs that they shouldn't have. We are looking at new opportunities there. The new Republican-led Senate is looking at how to deal with these opportunities in new ways. I hope we haven't made those successes for the spending year we are in now a one-time only event but a new commitment to try to solve the problems early so that society and the programs which taxpayers fund aren't overwhelmed by those problems later.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

THE STATE OF THE UNION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I appreciate the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BLUNT, addressing some of the issues that the Republican majority has attempted to accomplish, including the advances made over the last year, which I think will lay a foundation for the future and for further successes in the coming year.

Tonight President Obama will come to Congress to deliver his final State of the Union Address, which raises this question: What is the state of our Union? The truth is that while the strength and spirit of the American people remain a beacon of hope for our future, our country is facing a number of serious challenges. Global unrest has grown over the course of the President's administration, most notably with the rise of ISIS, one of the most brutal terrorist groups in existence.

On President Obama's watch, we have experienced the worst economic recovery since the Eisenhower administration, with stagnant wages and millions dropping out of the labor force. American families are seeing their dreams for the future erode as they struggle under ever-increasing government burdens and a lack of economic opportunity.

Any serious discussion of the state of our Union needs to address these challenges and offer solutions. That is the kind of speech that I wish we were going to hear tonight, but unfortunately all indicators suggest that is not the kind of speech the President plans to give. Instead, the President apparently intends to take a victory lap despite the fact that the American people clearly don't think there is much to celebrate. A recent New York Times/CBS News poll found that 68 percent of the American people think our country is on the wrong track, and most Americans believe the next generation will be worse off, not better off.

In a preview of the President's speech, the White House notes: "We

have made extraordinary progress on the path to a stronger country and a brighter future." That is not how the American people are feeling, and it doesn't reflect the reality of the President's administration.

The President plans to talk about his supposed economic successes tonight. While our economy has recovered to a certain extent since the recession, it has never fully rebounded. Wage growth continues to lag. December marked the 77th straight month in which year-over-year hourly wage growth was at or below 2½ percent. Underemployment also continues to be a problem with millions of Americans continuing to work part-time jobs because they can't find full-time work. Almost 5 years after the recession ended, the percentage of Americans working full time has still not returned to prerecession levels.

While the most commonly mentioned unemployment rate is 5 percent, the U-6 unemployment rate, which measures the number of both unemployed workers and underemployed workers, is 9.9 percent. Of the unemployed, those who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, or those considered long-term unemployed, make up 26 percent. Labor force participation remains near record lows. In short, stagnation has become the new normal for the economy under the Obama administration and economic opportunities for families have been few and far between.

In addition to the lack of economic opportunity, families have had to shoulder new burdens thanks to the Obama administration. Chief among those burdens, of course, is ObamaCare, the President's disastrous health care law, which has failed to reduce the cost of health care, ripped away millions of Americans' preferred health care plans, forced families onto insurance plans they don't want and can't afford, reduced patients' access to doctors and hospitals, increased taxes, and wasted literally billions of taxpayer dollars.

Then there are the burdensome regulations the Obama administration has imposed, which have made it more challenging for businesses, large and small, to grow and create jobs.

The Obama Environmental Protection Agency, in particular, has done more than its fair share to make things difficult for Americans. During the course of the Obama administration, this Agency has implemented one damaging rule after another, from a massive national backdoor energy tax that would hurt poor and working families the most to a new rule that would subject ponds and puddles in Americans' backyards to a complex array of expensive and burdensome regulatory requirements.

Again and again, I have heard from South Dakota farm and ranch families, homeowners and small businesses about the difficulties they are facing thanks to the Obama EPA's massive regulations.

If the President's record on the economy and middle-class opportunity is

bad, his record on foreign policy is even worse. A White House preview of the State of the Union touts the President's work to "redefine American leadership for the 21st century." During the President's last year in office the White House says: "We can show the world what is possible when America truly leads."

Republicans couldn't agree more that America should truly lead. The problem is that the President's first 7 years in office have generally been distinguished by a lack of leadership. Back in June, former President and fellow Democrat Jimmy Carter described President Obama's successes on the world stage as "minimal." He said: "On the world stage, just to be as objective about it as I can, I can't think of many nations in the world where we have a better relationship now than we did when he took over." Again, that was a quote from former Democratic President Jimmy Carter. Well, neither can I.

The White House claims that the President ended two wars. Yet it neglects to mention that since the United States withdrew from Iraq, large sections of the country have gone into chaos thanks to ISIS. The President's failure to enforce his redline in Syria when President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons on his own people and the President's lack of a strategy to defeat ISIS have contributed to a massive refugee crisis with no easy solution. Meanwhile, Assad remains in power, and ISIS continues to thrive.

With the terrorist attacks in Paris, ISIS officially expanded its theater of operations beyond the Middle East. As we witnessed in the case of the San Bernardino shooting, as long as ISIS continues to exist, its demented ideology will inspire disturbed individuals to commit acts of terror. The United States is in desperate need of a comprehensive strategy to confront the threat posed by ISIS. Yet the President has so far made no move to develop one.

On another foreign policy front, the President has repeatedly touted his nuclear deal with Iran as one of the major foreign policy achievements of his Presidency. Yet the agreement he signed actually improves Iran's long-term prospects for developing a bomb. In a clear violation of U.N. restrictions, Iran tested a ballistic missile, demonstrating once again that it has in no way curbed its aggressive behavior. Elsewhere, Russian aggression has increased on the President's watch. North Korea recently conducted yet another nuclear test.

The Obama administration has left the American people with a host of problems at home and abroad, but once again, it sounds like President Obama's State of the Union Address will fail to offer any substantial solutions. More than that, it sounds as if the President will largely ignore the problems, and that is unfortunate.

The President is missing an opportunity to offer substantial solutions

before turning the problems of his administration over to his successors. I don't want to give credence to those Obama administration accusations that the Republicans are all "doom and gloom." As I said, I believe the strength and spirit of the American people mean that the future of America is always bright. But realizing that future requires understanding and developing solutions to the problems facing our Nation, and that is something the President has been unwilling to do.

Republicans have worked hard over the past year to make our economy stronger, our government more efficient and accountable, and our Nation and our world safer and more secure. But there is a lot more work that needs to be done, and we need a partner in the White House who is willing to meet us half way. We hope the President will use the last year of his Presidency to work with us as we seek to address the challenges that are facing the American people.

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

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

FUNDING FOR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, a few months ago my colleague from Missouri, Senator BLUNT, took the floor and spoke to two issues we have in common. I will speak to one of them in a moment—the flooding in the Midwest—but I wish to also address another one that he raised.

Senator BLUNT is in an extraordinary position, having been given an opportunity to handle the appropriations bill for the Department of Health and Human Services. Within the Health and Human Services appropriations bill is funding for most of the biomedical research by the Federal Government.

I have spoken to Senator BLUNT over the past year and even before about my strong feelings on this subject. I feel, as most Americans do, that our investment in biomedical research is a wise investment, potentially sparing people from disease and death that could follow an illness but also making an investment in America's innovative economy, creating opportunities for jobs and for expanded research and new products and pharmaceuticals. Senator BLUNT took that challenge to heart, and when he was faced with the appropriations bill for this Department, he made a special effort when it came to medical research. I am so happy that he did.

It was only a few years ago that we had automatic, across-the-board cuts called sequestration. It was dev-

astating. As a net result of that, many of the youngest and most promising researchers gave up on the field because they didn't think there was a commitment from Congress, from the President, and from the government to continue to expand biomedical research. We saw the median age of researchers climbing because younger researchers looked for other jobs. That is a horrible waste of talent and a squandering of an opportunity, I am sure, to find ways to make life more bearable and to cure diseases across America.

Several years ago, when I visited the NIH, the head of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Francis Collins, told me that if we could have 5 percent real growth in biomedical research at the NIH for 10 years, he could light up the scoreboard. We were on the cusp of so many discoveries that this was an opportunity, if the investment were made, to really have some medical breakthroughs. I took that to heart and introduced a bill called the American Cures Act, and I am sure Senator BLUNT and many of my colleagues are tired of hearing about it. The notion is 10 percent by Congress; 5 percent real growth each year when it comes to the NIH.

As it turns out, this year we are knocking on the door of doing just that with the investment that was made by the appropriations bill. This investment is almost \$42 billion in biomedical research, \$32 billion in the National Institutes of Health, a 6.6-percent increase over last year; \$7 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a 4.5-percent increase over fiscal year 2015.

There are two other areas of research opportunities in biomedical research: the Veterans Medical and Prosthetics Research Program and the Department of Defense Health Program. That is an appropriations bill I have something to do with, working with the chairman, Senator COCHRAN. Both of those programs received a 7-percent increase over the previous fiscal year. These increases at NIH, CDC, Veterans, and Defense are a real turnaround. They bring to an end a decades-long downward trend when it comes to biomedical research.

Senator BLUNT has said—and I have, too—this shouldn't be a one-hit wonder. We have to repeat that this year when it comes to the appropriations for the next fiscal year beginning October 1. We have to make sure we make our promise and keep it when it comes to biomedical research. If we do it, I know this level of funding is going to result in dramatic, positive developments.

There are so many areas we need help with. I can think of a few that are obvious, including Alzheimer's. An American is diagnosed with Alzheimer's once every 67 seconds. When my staff told me that, I didn't believe it. I said: Go back, recalculate, and tell me the real number. It turns out they were right. Once every 67 seconds, a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's.