

these weapons on the streets. There is only one reason—to kill as many people as you can as fast as you can without reloading.

Don't tell me hunters need this. That is a bunch of baloney. The people who want to keep these weapons on the street are the ones who sell them. Let's be clear. The vast majority of people support this. We can expand background checks—90 percent of the people support that, even a majority of NRA members—so we can keep guns out of the hands of criminals and the mentally ill.

We should prohibit the sale or possession of high-capacity magazines and end the ban preventing the Centers for Disease Control from researching gun violence. Have you talked to doctors who work in big city hospitals? I have. They say: We are prepared to go to any war zone. Those are the kinds of wounds they see. They tremble at what they see. They mourn about what they see.

Somebody goes out to a nightclub. They hide in the bathroom. They call their mother. They never see their family again.

My State of California has created a new research center on gun violence to understand the impact of firearm fatalities and injuries and, hopefully, reduce them in the future. It should happen at the Federal level.

There are 30,000 of our people killed a year by gun violence. We lost 55,000 to 60,000 in the Vietnam War—a 10-year period. It tore the country apart. This is 300,000 of our people over 10 years.

So I am going to close with this. There will always be bad people. I have lived long enough to know that. There will always be bad people. There will always be lost people. There will also be mean people. But we cannot and must not allow them to poison this Nation wherever they are. Good people—and that is most of America—must join hands across every line that divides us—race, religion, color, creed, and, yes, politics.

We must call out the racists, the prejudiced, and the haters—whoever they are, wherever they are—even if they are in elected office. We have to support those who believe in community, who believe in community policing and not support those who refuse to admit that there is a problem with profiling. Just read what Senator SCOTT said about his life, about his fears, about what happened to him. Ask CORY BOOKER, a Rhodes Scholar, what it is like.

We have to support those activists who bring us together, support steps to improve our institutions, and reject those who inflame fears on any side in which they are found.

We must speak out and support those who believe this is the United States of America, not the “Divided States of America,” and we will not allow this Nation to be divided by race, color, creed, religion, or whom you love. I know America. I believe we will over-

come. I want to quote JOHN LEWIS as I close. He was beaten, bloodied, and jailed, fighting for civil rights. He tells this story, and I quote:

“I saw those signs that said ‘white men,’ ‘colored men,’ ‘white women,’ ‘colored women,’ ‘white waiting,’ ‘colored waiting.’

I would come home and ask my mother, my father, my grandparents, my great grand-parents, ‘Why?’

They would say: ‘That’s the way it is. Don’t get in the way. Don’t get in trouble.’”

He goes on:

“In 1957, I met Rosa Parks at the age of 17.

In 1958, at the age of 18, I met Martin Luther King, Jr., and these two individuals inspired me to get in the way, to get in trouble.

So, I encourage you to find a way to get in the way. You must find a way to get in trouble—good trouble, necessary trouble.”

That is JOHN LEWIS. We are blessed to have this hero, JOHN LEWIS, among us in the Congress. We must listen to him because he is right. It is our job to get in the way of prejudice and hate. We may do it each in his or her own way. My way may not be your way, but our way is to fight against prejudice and hate wherever we see it. Our job is to move forward with respect and understanding, with tolerance and love.

Our Founders knew we were not a perfect union. They told us we had to make a more perfect union. That is our job. I know we can do it, and we must do it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COLA ACT OF 2016

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 5588, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5588) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2016, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 5588) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY ACT OF 2016—CONFERENCE REPORT—Continued

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, there is a great deal of discussion this week on very difficult and hard issues.

The comments of the Senator from California, which were preceded by the comments of our colleague from South Carolina, remind us that as lawmakers, as policymakers, our jobs are indeed difficult, as we do try to make good on that pledge for a more perfect union because we are clearly not there today.

I am on the floor to speak to another type of killer that we face in this country, and that is the killer that comes with drugs, substance abuse, illegal drugs, opioids, heroin—this insidious scourge that has afflicted us as a nation. We are fortunate in that we have an opportunity—hopefully soon—to be voting for the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA.

I thank all of my colleagues who have been involved in this effort, very aggressively pushing this bill. Senator PORTMAN from Ohio, Senator AYOTTE from New Hampshire are among the many who have stepped forward to really shine a light on an area where we know that we need to work to develop a comprehensive solution, a community-focused solution to so much of what we are dealing with.

The CARA act touches on all areas of this issue, from education to awareness, from access to treatment to preventing and treating overdose, from families to veterans to infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome, and even teens who may suffer a sports injury. Opioid and heroin addiction is a serious threat to our Nation's prosperity, and the legislative initiative that we have in front of us is one way to fight back.

The rates of opioid abuse have skyrocketed. Drug overdose-related deaths have more than quadrupled since 1999. When an addict can no longer afford to get access to opioids, we find, unfortunately, that they oftentimes turn to heroin, a cheaper alternative with similar effects.

The rates of heroin overdose have tripled between 2010 and 2014. In my State of Alaska, we like to think that sometimes we are far enough away geographically that we are isolated or insulated from some of what happens in the lower 48. But in fact we have seen instances of heroin use, opioid abuse, that have resulted in statistics that are shattering. Efforts to prevent those deaths by overdose have resulted in many States, like the State of Alaska, passing legislation which has removed the liability for a family member to administer the lifesaving drug naloxone. CARA does this, as well, through grants that improve access to medically assisted treatment, opening access treatment to overdose treatment, and it provides for first responder training.

Over the course of these many months, there have been so many personal horror stories about the impact of opioid and heroin addiction in our respective States. We have witnessed the sense of urgency and desperation as we hear those stories from families who are truly desperately seeking help.

Too often those families face a multitude of different challenges from treatment centers that are at capacity, very expensive private options—if you can find them—that put families in a financial bind. In so many cases, there is just no option. In Alaska our options are extraordinarily limited, so what happens is that you have to send your loved one outside of the State to find treatment if you can find it. There are so many of our families that simply lack the tools or the resources to help those they love who are suffering from substance abuse. They don't have the resources, and they really don't know where to turn. They don't even know whom to talk to.

Addiction to opioids and heroin does not just harm the individual; it breaks the community. It leaves these communities with a sense of hopelessness amongst the loss.

But despite the anguish that we know that addiction brings, I actually have been very inspired by several of the communities in my State that have really come together to fight back and to deal with the levels of addiction that they see in their communities and say: No, we are going to be engaged; we are going to come together to make a difference.

In 2014, the community of Juneau lost seven young people—all in their early twenties—to drug overdoses. After they lost their loved ones, what happened was that these families just kind of closed up. It was very difficult, extraordinarily hard, to be able to talk about what had happened because, quite honestly, of the stigma that is attached to drug abuse.

By 2015, a year later, that community came together and said: Enough. Our silence is not going to help anyone.

So they came together to help support families. They formed a group that provides support, educational tools, and community outreach.

This group, which is called Stop Heroin, Start Talking, works proactively with Alaska's young people, goes into the classrooms to talk with the kids early on about drug abuse, and focuses on making kids active participants in the discussion, instead of just kind of preaching the talk to them.

In the Matanuska Valley, another group called Fiend 2 Clean runs a Facebook page and reaches out to at-risk teens in the community. They also run a peer-run support system that really empowers these young people by reminding them: Look, you are not alone in this. We are here as a resource, we are here to talk to, and we are here with you.

Fiend 2 Clean works with another organization called MyHouse to empower young people and really support them as they are developing job skills, building self-worth, and understanding their role in the community. These peer-focused programs make the difference. They really help make the difference in the day-to-day lives of these young people, their families, and their com-

munities. More importantly, these efforts highlight the importance of making sure that all members of the community are involved in addressing addiction.

CARA acknowledges that any successful efforts at combating opioid and heroin addiction must focus on building community-centered and culturally inclusive methods that engage everyone who may be impacted by drug abuse.

The grants within CARA will give States and local communities the funding, as well as the tools they need, to build these sorts of relationships and work toward not just treating but really preventing that abuse up front.

We have seen rapid rates of prescribing opioids for pain, largely due to a lack of consensus on uniformity or prescribing opioids. While many State legislative bodies in the Department of Health and Human Services have already begun to do their part in addressing prescribing guidelines and establishing prescription drug-monitoring programs, CARA takes this one step further. The task force on pain management will provide more information about pain management practices by supporting evidence-based practices as they examine the trends of opioid prescription nationwide.

CARA also offers support for our Nation's veterans by improving opioid prescribing safety measures within the VA system through education and training on pain management for our providers. I think we have all heard far too many stories of concerns from our veterans or from their families where, in an effort to get a vet through the system and with not enough providers or with a backlog, the easiest thing to do is just to provide a prescription for pain medication rather than really trying to work to rebuild that body.

In addition, there are provisions to improve patient advocacy, support the integration of care, and enable multiple treatment options—depending on that particular veteran's needs—really moving away from this rush to prescribe opioid medications.

CARA provides the support and treatment needed for postpartum mothers and infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome and establishes a pilot program meant to enhance funding flexibility so that States can support the services that will properly benefit women and their children. CARA will also improve the reporting and understanding of addiction related to youth sports injuries. I think we recognize that kids are out playing soccer or basketball, doing things, and they get hurt. Those providers who are treating them need to be included in the discussion of how to treat sports-related youth injuries. Kids shouldn't just be given highly addictive medications, opening them up to possibly future addiction. Again, let's look at comprehensive pain management care that is focused on different treatment options.

The families, friends, and communities that are working together to address opioid addiction need to know that they are not alone and that the situations they face are not hopeless.

We can provide that hope. We can provide the tools needed to build up these communities so they can really come together to fight back against the addiction that we see. I think that by moving forward and passing CARA, we take the steps to do this.

This legislation takes into consideration the diversity and the magnitude of the opioid epidemic and works to address this issue head-on through improved research, pain management practices, community-focused programs, and opening up the dialogue about drug addiction because we know that the more we allow ourselves to talk openly and honestly about this issue, the more that stigma fades.

CARA is an encouraging first step. We all know there is much more work to be done, and I certainly remain dedicated to the fight against substance abuse now and well into the future.

With that, I yield the floor.

(At the request of Mr. LANKFORD, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD).

• Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today we have the opportunity to vote on an important piece of legislation that will support efforts to combat the opioid epidemic our country is facing. In my home State of Oklahoma, we have seen deaths from prescription drug overdose on the rise. In 2014, Oklahoma set a new record in the number of deaths by overdose. During that time, 864 people lost their lives and 510 of those people had prescription drugs as the cause. Oklahoma has continuously ranked near the top of the nation in narcotic prescribing activity and overdose deaths.

In 2015, Oklahoma sought to address this problem by introducing House bill 1948 that requires doctors to check an online database before prescribing opioids. This law went into effect in November and was designed to help spot patients who are receiving prescriptions from several physicians at the same time, a practice known as doctor-shopping. Oklahoma is taking an important step in addressing the opioid epidemic, but as we know, this does not just affect my State, but the entire Nation.

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA, will provide grants to States to fight the abuse of prescription pain relievers and heroin, as well as grants that address criminal justice activities, treatment of pregnant and postpartum women with substance abuse problems, first responder education and training and treatment and recovery programs.

In addition, CARA addresses the opioid issue as it affects the veterans' community specifically. Our veterans have put their lives on the line to protect our Nation, and it is our job to make sure that they are getting the

treatment and prevention services they deserve. Many of our veterans come home with painful injuries that will alter their daily lives going forward. It is important that, through the Department of Veteran's Affairs, we develop best practices for pain management that do not lead to addiction. CARA addresses this by requiring that all VA employees who prescribe opioids receive education and training on pain management and safe opioid prescribing practices.

This truly is a comprehensive response to the opioid epidemic, and I hope my colleagues will join me in support of this bill as we take an important step in combating this addiction crisis.●

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

IRAN

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, tomorrow will mark 1 year since the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran reached an agreement to prevent Iran from obtaining or developing a nuclear weapon. This afternoon, I intend to review where we are today 1 year after the deal—also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. I am grateful a number of my colleagues will come to the floor today as well, or are submitting statements for the RECORD, reviewing where we are 1 year later.

As I said 1 year ago, roughly—in September—when I ultimately decided, after long and thorough and detailed consideration, to support the agreement, those of us determined to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran have a real, enduring, and ongoing responsibility to undertake consistent and clear-eyed assessments of how this agreement fares and not just over the course of its first year but over the many years to come.

In short, in my assessment so far, this deal has done what it intended to do. Because of aggressive enforcement of the terms of the agreement, the JCPOA has cut off Iran's most likely short-term uranium and plutonium pathways to building a nuclear weapon. The time it would take for Iran to break out, to assemble enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon has extended significantly from just 2 to 3 months to well over a year.

The international community, in turn, has upheld its commitments under the deal, providing Iran with relief from nuclear-related sanctions. More importantly, the agreement has given the IAEA, or the International Atomic Energy Agency—the world's nuclear watchdog—unprecedented searching access to oversee all of Iran's nuclear activities with intrusive inspections and round-the-clock remote monitoring.

I will review for a few more minutes all the different ways I and some of my colleagues have worked to ensure effective enforcement of this agreement.

First, as to the IAEA inspections I just mentioned. At my urging, the Sen-

ate State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee provided nearly \$95 million in funding for the IAEA—a \$5 million increase over the level requested by President Obama. On top of giving the IAEA greater resources, this increase, I believe, sends a strong signal to Iran and our international partners that we intend to enforce the JCPOA; that we intend to encourage voluntary contributions by our international partners to strengthen the agency and to sustain its ability to take advantage of the unique opportunities under this agreement for a searching and continuing insight into Iran's nuclear activity.

Advocating for additional U.S. support for the IAEA is just one of the steps my colleagues and I have taken over the past year to ensure the nuclear agreement is implemented effectively and enforced strictly. In a series of 15 floor speeches since December, during which I have been joined by nearly a dozen members of my caucus, I have sought to keep this agreement on our radar to ensure that Congress is effectively monitoring it and that we are relentlessly enforcing its terms.

Holding Iran accountable doesn't just mean enforcing the JCPOA. It also means pushing back on that regime's bad behavior across the Middle East—behavior that falls outside the scope of the nuclear agreement. That is why I have called for the Obama administration to strengthen its efforts to interdict Iranian arms shipments to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and—like a police department after a successful drug bust—to then publicize that those interdictions have occurred and the weapons they have seized, demonstrating to the American people and our partners in the Middle East the full scope of Iran's destabilizing activities and our intention to keep cracking down on those activities, which is crucial to building a broad coalition that will sustainably counter Iranian aggression.

That is why I have also worked with my colleagues to provide \$117 million this year for the U.S. Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, which enforces American sanctions against bad actors, including enforcing some of the very sanctions that crippled Iran's economy and forced it to the negotiating table in the first place. That funding represents a significant increase of \$17 million since 2013, and I am fighting for an additional \$6 million this next fiscal year.

I have also held discussions with foreign leaders, from Israel to Saudi Arabia, India, Qatar, Turkey, and Russia, about how we can work together to sustainably counter Iranian aggression. I have called on the administration to levy new sanctions against an entity affiliated with Iran's hardline Revolutionary Guard Corps, known as Mahan Air, and I will make the same demand of the next administration.

I have worked to impose penalties on Iran for its dangerous and provocative

behavior, which means taking action against their destabilizing support for the murderous Assad regime in Syria and their promotion of terrorism throughout the Middle East, Iran's ongoing ballistic missile tests, and the regime's human rights abuses, from its executions of juveniles to its detention of journalists and Iranian-American citizens.

I have also joined my colleague Senator GRAHAM in leading a letter to President Obama calling on the administration to include a strengthened 10-year MOU, or memorandum of understanding, on defense priorities with our vital ally Israel.

I am determined to continue these efforts in the months and years to come. We cannot avert our eyes from Iran's destructive behavior, even as we review what progress has been made in the year since the JCPOA.

If we are to ensure that agreement remains intact, if we are to succeed in our task of preventing Iran from developing or obtaining a nuclear weapon, Congress must play an active role. If the agreement succeeds, we should recognize those successes. If Iran falls short of the terms of the agreement, we need to make certain the international community reacts swiftly to bring Iran back into compliance.

Regardless of whether my colleagues opposed or supported this agreement a year ago, regardless of where one stood then, we all have an interest today in working together to ensure we prevent Iran from ever being able to develop a nuclear weapon. We have a responsibility then to review Iran's actions and hold them accountable through aggressive enforcement of the deal, pushing back on their bad behavior, and maintaining a credible conventional deterrent.

As my colleagues comments later today will make clear, in addition to holding Iran to the terms of the nuclear deal, we have to push back against their dangerous nonnuclear bad behavior—as I mentioned, the ballistic missile tests, human rights violations, and support for terrorism.

I know my colleagues and I remain committed to overseeing strict enforcement of the nuclear agreement with Iran and protecting the security of our allies and partners in the Middle East, especially our vital ally Israel. I also know we remain committed to showing that international engagement and multilateral diplomacy can be effective, even with rogue regimes like Iran.

These commitments are why my colleagues and I are on the floor this afternoon and evening. These commitments will continue tomorrow, as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which I serve, holds a hearing that will review closely where we are 1 year since the JCPOA.

I thank Chairman CORKER and Ranking Member CARDIN for regularly holding hearings to assess the nuclear deal and for convening tomorrow's hearing, which I look forward to attending.

Our commitment to overseeing the implementation of this important agreement can and must continue for its entire duration. Even if another crisis emerges, we must remain vigilant and push for the most aggressive enforcement of this deal and not be distracted by developments in other parts of the world. That is my commitment for as long as I have the honor of representing the people of Delaware in the Senate.

I am grateful to some of my colleagues who will join me on the floor later today—Senator CARPER, Senator PETERS, and Senator BLUMENTHAL. I would also like to thank the senior Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. CASEY, for his steadfast effort to support our vital ally Israel and ensure swift multilateral consequences for JCPOA violations.

In closing, let me say this. We—this body, this Congress, the people of this country—must make a clear distinction between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people. The Iran regime deserves scrutiny, condemnation, and opposition for a decades-long pattern of human rights abuses, support for terrorism, and bad behavior, but the Iranian people deserve our support in their fight for freedom, democracy, and human rights.

With that, I am hopeful we will hear soon from my good friend and fellow Delawarean, the senior Senator from our State of neighbors, who has been a leader in my State for decades. I know later this evening we will also hear on these important topics from Senators PETERS and BLUMENTHAL as well.

I am grateful to all of my colleagues who have joined me in colloquies and statements on the floor on this important topic in the past, and I just hope we can, in a sustainable and bipartisan way, insist on effective and rigorous enforcement of this deal throughout its entire term.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, this week we are marking the 1-year anniversary of the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This week, 1 year ago, my colleagues and I began the enormous task of reading, analyzing, and making a decision about whether or not we would support the deal.

For me, that task took 6 weeks of careful study, several classified briefings, countless meetings with experts and conversations with constituents. As I wrote, on September 1 last year, “This agreement will substantially constrain the Iranian nuclear program for its duration, and compared with all realistic alternatives, it is the best option available to us at this time.”

We were under no delusions that the JCPOA would be a panacea for all of our problems with Iran. Rather, it was envisioned and designed to meaningfully address one major issue: Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability.

In my decision, I wrote, “We need not, and indeed should not, trust the

Iranian regime.” On the 1-year anniversary of the deal, that statement remains true.

One of the strengths of the JCPOA is a robust, arguably unprecedented, monitoring and verification mechanism. We need to fully fund the International Atomic Energy Agency in support of its efforts to monitor Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA; that is why I supported an increase to the U.S. voluntary contribution to the IAEA in this year’s budget.

We also need to see greater transparency from the IAEA. On July 6, Ambassador Dennis Ross wrote, “Recent reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency indicate that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA, but the level of information they provide is dramatically less than that found in previous IAEA reports on Iran’s nuclear program.”

Specifically, Ambassador Ross identified several key elements of the deal that were not included in the IAEA’s most recent report: the amount of low enriched uranium currently stockpiled in Iran, the number of centrifuges still operating at Natanz, and research and development activity on centrifuges, to name a few. I urge the administration to work with the P5+1 and the IAEA to increase the transparency of these reports. If Iran is indeed complying, there should be no need to hide the details.

My decision was also predicated on the assumption that Iran would continue to foment instability and support terrorism in the region. The JCPOA did not address this issue, and likewise, it in no way curtailed our ability to sanction and hold accountable terrorist groups and facilitators. These tough sanctions remain in full force and effect.

Iran continues its aggressive and destabilizing actions in the region, including by providing robust financial and material support to its terrorist proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as to the murderous Assad regime in Syria and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Iran unequivocally remains the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism. The Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah recently stated, “Hezbollah’s budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran.” We know that Hezbollah is seeking advanced rocket capability, which could be used against Israel. We know that Hezbollah has become the ground force of the Assad regime in many parts of Syria.

Last week, I introduced bipartisan legislation with Senator ISAKSON called the Stop Terrorist Resources and Money, or STORM Act. This bill will authorize the President to designate countries that are not doing enough to stop terrorist financiers and facilitators as “Jurisdictions of Terrorism Financing Concern.” With that designation comes significant penalties or the requirement to enter into a

technical assistance agreement with the United States to improve their capability to investigate and prosecute terrorist financiers. Although Iran is already designated a state sponsor of terrorism, the President could use this new authority to hold accountable jurisdictions where Iranian terrorist proxies and their supporters operate with relative impunity.

When the Iranians complain that they are not getting the influx of European business that they anticipated following the deal, maybe they need to take a hard look at their support for terrorism. With the sanctions on Iran for terrorism and human rights still firmly in force, it is no wonder that European financial institutions and other businesses are wary of doing business in Iran.

One year on from the signing of the JCPOA, I continue to believe that implementation of this agreement is firmly in our strategic interests. We knew that implementation would be difficult and that the Iranians could not be trusted.

Rigorous congressional oversight has been critical in this first year. We have pushed for increased sanctions on illicit ballistic missile activity, and the administration responded. We have tightened sanctions on Hezbollah and introduced new legislation to counter terrorism financing more broadly. We have advocated for a transformative investment in our defense relationship with Israel, which continues to face threats from Iran and its proxies. We will continue to ask tough questions and demand answers.

We will also continue to prepare for the possibility that Iran may violate the agreement. This means maintaining the legal architecture that would be needed to snap back sanctions in the event of a violation; I have said that I will support a clean reauthorization of the Iran Sanctions Act. This also means toughening our deterrence policy, both here in Congress and in the White House, to ensure, as I wrote in my statement last year, “The Iranian regime should not doubt our capability and willingness to respond swiftly should they attempt to break out and develop a nuclear weapon.”

One year after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed, we should redouble our commitment to ensuring that Iran cannot acquire a nuclear weapons capability and be firm in our resolve to counter their aggressive actions in the Middle East. But we should also commend the wisdom of this body for allowing the agreement to go forward, as it remains the best available alternative to constrain Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the only remaining postcloture time be the following: Capito-Baldwin, 15 minutes; Carper, 10 minutes; Markey, 10 minutes; further,

that following the use or yielding back of that time, that all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate vote on the adoption of the conference report to accompany S. 524.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONGRATULATING CARLA HAYDEN

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I would like to begin my statement first of all by congratulating Carla Hayden, who was just confirmed as the 14th Librarian of Congress. I know she will do a good job. I am very proud of her and I look forward to working with her and the Library.

Mr. President, earlier today I was proud to support cloture for the CARA bill. It puts us on track to reverse this epidemic and promises to provide help to so many who are impacted by addiction. We will be hearing also from my friend and colleague Senator BALDWIN because we both believe strongly that our veterans are one of those many groups this bill seeks to assist.

A little over a year ago, under the leadership of Senator BALDWIN—and I thank her for that—the two of us introduced the Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act, which provides safer and more effective pain management for our Nation's veterans. This legislation, named after U.S. Marine veteran Jason Simcakoski of Wisconsin, who died at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center as a result of a mixed drug toxicity, is included in the CARA bill. In fact, title IX of the bill is titled the Jason Simcakoski Memorial and Promise Act.

Tragically, stories like Jason's exist all around the country, including my own State of West Virginia. Andrew White, another marine, returned home to West Virginia only to be placed on a cocktail of drugs, including antipsychotics, over twice the recommended dosage. Andrew died in his sleep at the age of 23.

Far too many of our veterans have returned home from overseas to fight another battle here at home. This legislation will update and strengthen the guidelines for opioid prescriptions and require—require—the VA to expand the scope of research, education, delivery, and integration of alternative pain management.

Chronic pain should not be something our veterans are forced to live with, and the VA must be on the cutting edge of developing effective pain management. Our hope is, this will provide the VA with the tools it needs to help prevent these types of tragedies from occurring.

Again, I thank Senator BALDWIN for her very great work in this area.

So many across the Nation, and particularly in rural States like West Virginia, which has the unfortunate distinction of having the largest amount of drug-related overdose deaths—more than twice the national average—are impacted by addiction. CARA is a comprehensive step forward in the national response to this drug epidemic.

We have heard throughout the day how it expands prevention, education, promotes resources for treatment and recovery. It includes reforms to help our law enforcement create alternatives to incarceration, such as successful drug court programs.

We have also heard of the many organizations that are in support of this—over 200. It may be approaching 300 now. These organizations deal with addiction and the results of addiction on a daily basis. I believe one of the reasons so many organizations support this bill—and I know that part of the reason I am so proud to support the bill—is it addresses how addiction affects not only the addict or their family but the well-being of an entire community.

Following a drug prevention seminar I held last year, one of my constituents said:

There is a need for the community to be involved in resolving the drug addiction issue. It is my hope and prayer that we can find community based solutions that will improve the lives of all the citizens in our community, county and state.

CARA contains many ideas and opens the door for communities to take actions to help neighborhoods and schools. It authorizes much needed programs for prevention and education.

Another one of my constituents wrote:

Our young people are dying off by the dozens and a generation of children think of this as normal.

Some of the saddest letters I have received have been about those who have already lost their battle to the scourge against addiction. A grandmother from Martinsburg wrote the following:

Our granddaughter—that tall, exuberant redhead who laughed her way into our hearts, is now a statistic.

As a grandmother myself, I love the way she phrased that—laughed her way into our hearts.

Several days ago our son called to tell us that she had died the night before from a heroin overdose. . . . It was that quick. Our granddaughter started her drug journey with prescription drug opiates. When those pills weren't enough, heroin stepped in, and the downward spiral began.

It isn't just the problem kids . . . who get hooked. Our granddaughter came from a stable, affectionate home. Even though her parents tried their best to save her with countless sleepless nights, multiple trips to rehabs, tough love and loving persuasion, that drug won the battle.

Now, we are not even allowed to grieve. We must also contend with the many forms of our anger; impatience with our granddaughter for not being stronger, rage at those who sold her the drugs, frustration with the authorities for not doing more to stop the trafficking or establishing more treatment centers, and self-recrimination for maybe not doing enough.

We are also trying to cope with the guilt of feeling relief that her hell is finally over. There is nothing more we can do for her now, no more treatments that we can try.

She's gone. Just . . . gone.

Will the passage of CARA stop all overdoses or ensure that no other grandmother or family feels this an-

guish? No. But it does begin to address the frustrations and pain this grandmother and so many others feel. CARA attempts to break the cycle of repeated overdoses by encouraging the use of followup services for those who have received the drug naloxone to reverse the opioid overdose.

Too many stories of addiction start like this one, with prescription pain killers. By allowing the partial fill of certain opioid prescriptions, reviewing best practices for acute pain management, and expanding prescription take-back days and locations, CARA will reduce the number of unused painkillers and hopefully prevent future cases of drug abuse and addiction.

We cannot continue to lose 129 granddaughters, sisters, fathers, neighbors, and friends every single day to drug overdoses. As I have said before and will say again, we will lose a generation if we don't address this crisis now. This cannot be the new normal for our young people or for our communities.

I commend all who have worked on this bill to get us to this point. It is time to pass CARA and send it to the President's desk. Our communities in West Virginia and across the country cannot afford to wait any longer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, Congress is taking a critical first step to combat our country's opioid crisis and a major step in providing safer, more effective, and higher quality care for America's veterans.

I want to speak about my bipartisan Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act, which is included in the final version of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, known as CARA. This bipartisan legislation reforms opioid prescribing and pain care at the VA.

These bipartisan reforms to veterans health care that I authored, along with my colleague Senator SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, should unite us all. They represent our responsibility to honor and care for those who have served and sacrificed for our Nation, and their families—and all our families.

This bipartisan legislation is named in honor of Wisconsin Marine Veteran Jason Simcakoski. On August 30, 2014, Jason tragically died. He died in Wisconsin's Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center of mixed-drug toxicity. At the time of his death, Jason was on 14 different prescription drugs, including opioids.

Jason's heartbreaking story is just one example of the overprescribing and pain care problem within the VA in Wisconsin and across the country. I believe the VA's overreliance on opioids has resulted in getting our veterans hooked rather than getting them the help they need, and it is our job to act now to address this epidemic.

At this time last year, I joined Senator CAPITO on the Senate floor to introduce our bipartisan measure in honor of Jason and the entire

Simcakoski family. I was proud to work closely with the Simcakoski family, as well as medical professionals and veterans service organizations, to craft these reforms to prevent Jason's tragedy from happening to any other veteran or their family.

This legislation, shortly to be approved by the U.S. Senate, will provide safer and more effective pain management services to our Nation's veterans by strengthening and updating VA opioid prescribing guidelines. It will enhance education and training and expand access to opioid alternatives. It will create an independent Office of Patient Advocacy at the VA to give veterans and their families a stronger voice in their care. The bill strengthens VA hiring practices to help prevent bad doctors from treating veterans. It will hold VA accountable for providing quality care to our veterans by strengthening opioid oversight and reporting.

The story of Jason's bill is a story of Congress doing the job that we were elected to do by the families of our States and the communities we represent.

The Simcakoski family called on us to stand up for our brave men and women in uniform, and we took action. For more than a year, I have worked across the aisle with Senator CAPITO and leaders of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to advance my reforms in the Senate. The House of Representatives did their part by moving forward with a House companion measure based on our bill. When it came time for my colleagues to agree on the final package that we have before us today, I worked with the Simcakoski family to ensure that it reflected the strongest possible response to the opioid overprescribing and pain management problems at VA.

I thank my colleagues—particularly the 20 Senators who cosponsored the bill—for their work and help in passing the Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act today.

I thank my partner in this bipartisan endeavor, Senator SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO of West Virginia.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman ISAKSON and Ranking Member BLUMENTHAL and their staffs for their commitment to combating opioid abuse at the VA.

I thank Leader REID and Senators MURRAY, SCHUMER, LEAHY, WYDEN, ALEXANDER, and all the members of the conference committee for their steadfast support of these reforms. And importantly, I want to thank and recognize all of their staffs and my staff for their tireless work through late nights and weekends to get this bill to the finish line.

This legislation is informed by the collaborative efforts of a broad range of outside health and veterans organizations, and I am grateful for their expert contributions.

I cannot forget the incredible work of Senate legislative counsel—specifically

Tom Heywood for his expert drafting, redrafting, and redrafting, and technical expertise on this bill.

Today we send major veteran reforms—my Jason Simcakoski Opioid Safety Act—to the President's desk for his signature. I am proud that Congress put aside differences and joined together to help fix what has been broken and help restore the sacred trust with our veterans and their families.

The Simcakoski family has inspired us by showing tremendous courage and strength in sharing their tragic story of loss and in working to make a difference in the lives of other veterans and their families. I believe that today's passage of the Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act marks one of Congress's great accomplishments—to provide our veterans and their families with the care they have earned and deserve.

My closing message comes from Jason's widow Heather. Heather said:

When I look back at the past, I want to know we made a difference. I want to believe we have leaders in our country who care. I want to inspire others to never give up because change is possible.

I want to say to Marv and Linda, Jason's parents; to Heather and Anaya, Jason's wife and daughter; and to Jason: Thank you for inspiring me. Thank you for demanding that we stand together to enact the strongest opioid safety reforms for veterans and their families. You have inspired true change. This change will save lives, and you have given us all hope for a brighter future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, before I talk a bit about the 1-year anniversary of the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, with Iran, I want to take a moment to say to the Senator from Wisconsin that I am privileged to serve with her on the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. I have had a chance to see and witness her sincerity, her commitment, and her dedication on this front, and I commend her.

I serve with the Senator from West Virginia—not on Homeland Security but on Environment and Public Works. I commend her for her bipartisan spirit that we see here and I commend the leadership they have both shown to ensure that the right thing is done.

IRAN

Mr. President, I thank Senator COONS, my colleague from Delaware, for organizing a floor colloquy of Members to take place this afternoon to discuss the 1-year anniversary of something we call the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—or the Iran nuclear deal—that was signed literally a year ago tomorrow by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, with Iran.

At this time a year ago, there were a lot of skeptics as to whether Iran would keep its part of the bargain and not go forward with developing nuclear weapons. We heard arguments that they would evade inspection and that Iran would never live up to their obligations under the agreement that we signed a year ago tomorrow. We heard that they couldn't be trusted. We heard that they would not keep their word. We heard any number of accusations and speculation. We heard that the people of Iran wished death upon America and wished to continue the antagonistic relationship with the United States that dominated U.S.-Iranian relations after the Iranian revolution.

I just want to say a year later that I believe there is good reason to believe the critics were proved wrong when Iran took those irreversible steps to dismantle its nuclear weapons program—steps that were certified by the nuclear watchdogs at the International Atomic Energy Agency. For example, national inspectors certified that Iran had reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent and that the remaining enriched uranium was only enriched at levels consistent with peaceful energy uses. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency certified that the nearly 15,000 centrifuges for enriching uranium have been dismantled, leaving Iran with only its least sophisticated centrifuges that can be used solely for peaceful purposes. The inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency have also certified that the special heavy water reactor that could produce the kind of plutonium needed for a nuclear bomb will produce no more. Inspectors saw firsthand that the core of that reactor had been filled with concrete, rendering it incapable of ever producing plutonium again. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency continue to assess that Iran is keeping up with its commitments in the nuclear agreement.

I have never been to Iran. I hope to go someday. But a place I have been to is Southeast Asia. I served 3 years in a war in that part of the world, with a country with which we were at war—in some cases, almost a proxy war but at war for many years, the Vietnam war. The names of 55,000 men and women are on a granite wall about 2 miles from where we are standing here today, close to the Lincoln Memorial.

When the war was over—the war was winding down—my Active-Duty tour with the U.S. Navy as a naval flight officer came to an end, and I resigned from my regular commission and assumed a Reserve commission and continued to fly with the Navy as a P-3 aircraft mission commander in the Naval Reserve for another 18 years.

The month after I retired from the Navy as captain, I was a member of the House of Representatives. I led a delegation of six of us—all Vietnam members of U.S. House of Representatives—back to Vietnam in August of 1991. We

went at a time when, even though we were not at war with Iran, there was still great animosity between our two countries. Some of that was spurred by the fact that we never found out what happened to thousands of American MIAs. They disappeared, in some cases almost without a trace. We had very little cooperation from Vietnam to try to find out the truth of their demise. There is a lot of speculation that they are being held as POWs in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos, and there were actually photographs of people alleged to be our MIAs who were being held in captivity—we didn't know where but the assertion was in Vietnam or Cambodia or Laos.

During our congressional delegation trip in August of 1991, it turned out that the pictures that were shown on the cover of Newsweek and TIME magazine and on the front pages of newspapers across the country were not Americans; they were Soviet nationals. There was an effort by people in Cambodia—bad people—to try to extort money from the families of the American MIAs who never came home. The people in those pictures were actually Soviet nationals, not missing Americans.

During the midst of all of this back-and-forth about the MIAs from America from that war, six of us participated in a congressional delegation. We went to Vietnam. We met with the new leader of Vietnam, a fellow named Do Muoi, who became the leader in August of 1991 of the Communist Party, making him the top leader of Vietnam. We presented to him from the George Herbert Walker Bush administration a roadmap to normalize relations. This was the deal: Vietnam, if you will open up your archives, open up your war museums, allow us to explore, excavate crash sites, have free movement around your country to see if Americans respond or people believed to be Americans respond—if you will do all those things, we will reciprocate, and we will move toward normalized relations with your country.

There was a lot of lack of faith on the sides of both countries, Vietnam and us. The Vietnamese were fearful that we would move the goalposts, that even if they did all the things they were required to do under the roadmap to normalize relations, we would move the goalposts and still not normalize relations. For our part, there was concern that they would never do those things anyway, so why should we both-

er. At the end of the day, we engaged with the Vietnamese, and they engaged with us. They did the things they were supposed to do, and we did as well. We normalized relations about 4 years later.

John Kerry and JOHN MCCAIN did good work in the Senate. Our delegation did good work in the House. The George Herbert Walker Bush administration passed the baton to President Clinton, and normalized relations were

established about 4 years later. The first U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam was a member of our delegation, former POW and former Air Force pilot Pete Peterson.

Fast-forward about 25 years later, a month and a half ago, President Obama was nice enough to invite me to join him on a trip to Vietnam, along with a couple of Congressmen. A lot changed in those 25 years. Today the United States of America is Vietnam's top export market. Today Vietnam is part of the 12-member transpacific trade partnership we are endeavoring to establish and get approved here and in 11 other countries.

While we were over there a month and a half ago, the Vietnamese announced an \$11 billion deal with Boeing. They are going to buy 100 737 jets valued at \$11.3 billion from Boeing. They announced that they are going to buy from Pratt & Whitney—a big aircraft engine company—another \$3 billion worth of engines to put in 63 Airbuses.

The President lifted the ban on arms sales to Vietnam, and a lot of other announcements were made. While we were over there, we learned that a survey of the Vietnamese people done earlier that year indicated that 84 percent of the Vietnamese people had a favorable opinion of the United States. Another survey indicated that 95 percent of the Vietnamese people have a favorable opinion of the United States. They like us more in Vietnam than we like us.

Meanwhile in Iran, Iran is not unlike Vietnam—a young nation. There are about 78 million people who live in Iran. More than half of them are under the age of 25, and they have a great affection for our country. Some of the leaders do not, but many of the people do, particularly the younger people. They want a better life with us and a better relationship with us.

They have had elections since the joint agreement was agreed to, elections in their Parliament and in the Council of Experts, which elects the next Supreme Leader. The moderates, the reformers made great strides in those elections earlier this year. There were very encouraging results.

A year later, among other things that have happened, the Iranians decided they have had a hard time accessing capital to be able to purchase things—

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. CARPER. I request 1 more minute, Mr. President.

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

Mr. CARPER. Just as the Vietnamese have finalized a large deal—the purchase of American jets—the Iranians announced about 2 weeks ago that they will be purchasing a number of 747 jumbo jets built by Boeing, 737s, 777s. The value of the deal is worth about \$17 billion over the next 4, 5, 6 years.

I would suggest to our colleagues who say we can't trust these guys that we still have problems with what they are doing with some of their missile testing. We have problems with support of Hezbollah and other terrorist groups like that. For the most part, they have kept their word on the joint deal we signed, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

We are starting to see some commerce transact between both countries that actually inure to our bottom line to strengthen the economy of this Nation.

I just want to say—is it time for us to spike the football? Is everything fine? No. Eyes wide open. That is important. Eyes wide open. Having said that, I think most fairminded people would say: So far, so good. Let's continue to be vigilant, and hopefully a year from now, the second anniversary of the signing of this joint agreement will have even better news not just for us but for the rest of the world.

With that, I thank you, Mr. President, for that extra minute.

I yield to the Senator from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I would like to start my remarks on the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act with a story I received from one of my constituents, David. He is a patient at Hope House in Boston. Hope House is the oldest and one of the largest residential treatment programs for adults in Massachusetts. This is what he said:

Senator Markey: Addiction has totally ruined my life. It quickly took everything from me and my family. It has stripped me of my dignity and self worth along with my self respect. I also lost the trust of my entire family.

Addiction started late for me. I was 44 years old. I had everything I could possibly dream of. A beautiful wife, a son, two stepdaughters that I raised and put through college. We also built a new home in 2000. I had a great career and was a few years away from 20 to retire.

Then my family and I went on vacation for two weeks and I came home with a parasite in my stomach for which I was prescribed pain medication. That was at the end of April that year. In May, I had my appendix taken out. In June, I had to have my gallbladder out. All the while being prescribed pain meds.

Before I knew it, I was addicted. It wasn't long after that there were no more scripts to be had. Then I was doing heroin. This was so scary for me because I had not used any drugs my entire life. Within two years, everything was gone. Wife, family, job, house. Everything.

It has been a real struggle to get out and stay clean between not being able to get a detox bed, or, if I did, after five days, only to be told that there were no beds available for further treatment. Which meant back on the street to start the whole process over again.

I finally did make it to the Hope House, which I am so grateful for. I know I am going to make it this time; I just feel it. Thank you for the chance.

I pray for David and all the patients at Hope House. They found the help they needed, and we hope they will

have the strength and the support to achieve long-term recovery.

I am proud that this opioid legislation contains provisions of the TREAT Act—The Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment Act—a bill I introduced with Senator RAND PAUL of Kentucky and other colleagues here in the Senate. The TREAT Act addresses the demand side of the opioid epidemic.

I firmly believe that if we are going to reduce the supply of heroin, fentanyl, and illicit prescription drugs, we have to reduce the demand through treatment. But for far too long, outdated and scientifically unsound Federal restrictions have severely limited access to effective medication-assisted treatment like Suboxone for opioid addiction. The TREAT Act removes these restrictions. Importantly, the TREAT Act would allow appropriately trained nurse practitioners and physician assistants to treat patients with these lifesaving therapies.

These TREAT Act provisions, which are included in the CARA conference report, will increase access to treatment, especially in community health centers and rural communities across this country. I am grateful that these provisions are included in the bill we will vote on today. I am hopeful they will have an impact in the future.

It has been a long haul and hard work over the last few years, but we have achieved a measure of success that will impact lives as soon as this bill is signed into law. I sincerely thank Senator MURRAY and Senator ALEXANDER for their support on the TREAT Act. I thank Senator HATCH and Representatives PALLONE and UPTON and all the CARA conferees who worked to get the TREAT Act provisions included in this final package we are voting on today. I would like to express my appreciation to Senators WHITEHOUSE and PORTMAN and all of the Senate and House cosponsors of the TREAT Act who supported efforts to get the law changed so that more people can get the treatment they need.

In Massachusetts, I am hearing enormous frustration from people who don't feel that adequate resources are being brought to bear on this enormous epidemic of prescription drug and heroin addiction. Just like David, countless people suffering from addiction cannot find a bed for detox, and then when they are at their most vulnerable moment in recovery, they cannot find a place or provider of long-term treatment.

For the months that we have been debating CARA in this Chamber, we have heard the statistics. Our Nation is experiencing more deaths from drug overdoses than from gun violence or auto deaths. Eighty percent of people suffering from heroin addiction started on opioid pain medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration and prescribed by doctors who aren't required to receive education on safe opioid prescribing.

Nearly 30,000 people in the United States died of an opioid overdose in

2014. Approximately 1,300 of those were in Massachusetts. Of those 1,300, 754 had fentanyl in their system. Massachusetts is 2 percent of America's population. If you multiply 754 times 50, you are up to 37,000 people dying from fentanyl in our country. That is like having a war in Korea every single year. We haven't even begun this battle on fentanyl. But it is coming, and it is coming with an urgency that is very difficult to even imagine. The total deaths from opioids in America would be equivalent to a Vietnam war every single year, and fentanyl is 50 times more powerful than morphine—unbelievable. That is how powerful it is—50 times more powerful.

This is just something that we are going to have to deal with, and approximately 2.5 million Americans abused or were dependent on opioids in 2012, but fewer than 1 million received treatment for their condition. Out of the 2.5 million people who needed help, only 1 million got it in our country. We are being overwhelmed by a tsunami of heroin, prescription drugs, and fentanyl addiction, and we must stop it before it drowns any more families in our country.

We had an opportunity here to make sure we put real funding into this bill for more treatment. We are not going to meet that challenge here today. We do need funding for those families—funding for treatment providers who help put people on the path to recovery and funding for our sheriffs, firefighters, and other first responders who carry the overdose prevention drugs that save lives. We need funding for the public education campaign so that we can prevent addiction before it takes hold. We will not save lives and stop this scourge of addiction unless we, in fact, ensure that there is full funding for treatment. We will save lives with more treatment options, more Narcan, more counselors, more education, more beds, and a better continuum of care, but we must fund it.

The bill we are voting on today is a good step, but we still have much further to go. Without that funding, this effort will not do the full job that our country wants us to do. Our cities are fighting a war, and we need to help them. We are hemorrhaging lives by the day. If we are to staunch the flow of suffering and death, we desperately need funding to implement all of the programs in this bill.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at a defining moment in our national discussion to address the public health crisis of addiction. Our work doesn't stop here. It has only just begun. Let's be clear. Stopping the overprescription of opioid pain medication that is fueling addiction and overdoses starts with the prescribers. We need to require anyone who prescribes opioid pain medication and other controlled substances to undergo mandatory training on safe prescribing practices and the identification of possible substance use disorder.

We need to make sure that people who enter the judicial system don't ar-

bitrarily have their Medicaid coverage terminated, making it more difficult to access treatment once they are released and fueling, once again, the vicious cycle of incarceration.

We need to make sure that all opioids approved by the Food and Drug Administration are first reviewed by independent experts to ensure that these drugs are not only safe and effective but also won't continue to fuel the epidemic of addiction in this country.

We need to make sure that prescription drug monitoring programs are fully utilized and nationally interoperable in order to prevent doctor shopping, and we must let Big Pharma know that their army of lobbyists on Capitol Hill will be matched by an army of advocates that work every day to raise awareness and save lives.

The Congress has an opportunity to let all those struggling with addiction know that help is on the way. We know that we have heard their stories, and we will not forget them.

We must let them know that no matter how dark life seems right now, there is hope, and sunlight will grace them once again, and this Chamber has not finished this job—this journey—that we must be on with every family in our country. Substance abuse is a crisis the likes of which we have never seen in America. A decade from now people will ask: What did you do to help end this epidemic? That is why I stand today congratulating all of those who worked on this bill, and we must also pledge to continue to stand up and fight for the funding and other investments we need to make.

We must stand united to end this crisis of addiction in our communities now and for generations to come so that children will not have to look to the history books to find that there ever was a year like 2016 with an epidemic that is raging across the country.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time has expired.

The question is on agreeing to the conference report.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 92, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 129 Leg.]

YEAS—92

Alexander	Feinstein	Murkowski
Ayotte	Fischer	Murphy
Baldwin	Flake	Murray
Barrasso	Franken	Nelson
Bennet	Gardner	Paul
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Peters
Booker	Grassley	Portman
Boozman	Hatch	Reed
Boxer	Heinrich	Reid
Brown	Heitkamp	Risch
Burr	Heller	Rubio
Cantwell	Hirono	Sanders
Capito	Hoeven	Schatz
Cardin	Isakson	Schumer
Carper	Johnson	Scott
Casey	Kaine	Shaheen
Cassidy	King	Shelby
Coats	Kirk	Stabenow
Collins	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Coons	Lankford	Tester
Corker	Leahy	Thune
Cornyn	Manchin	Tillis
Cotton	Markey	Toomey
Crapo	McCain	Udall
Cruz	McCaskill	Vitter
Daines	McConnell	Warner
Donnelly	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Enzi	Mikulski	Wyden
Ernst	Moran	

NAYS—2

Lee Sasse

NOT VOTING—6

Cochran Roberts Sessions
Inhofe Rounds Wicker

The conference report was agreed to.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

VENUE ACT

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak in support of legislation I introduced, the Venue Equity and Non-Uniformity Elimination Act, or VENUE Act, that addresses patent venue reform.

Patents are an important part of our economy and are vital to promoting innovation and spurring growth, but the patent system is at risk. There is an ever-increasing problem of patent lawsuits brought by nonpracticing entities, also known as patent trolls. This problem is exacerbated by plaintiffs being able to handpick friendly judicial venues that are otherwise unrelated to the alleged infringement. An article in the Harvard Business Review states that “patent trolls cost defendant firms \$29 billion per year in direct out-of-pocket costs” and “in aggregate, patent litigation destroys over \$60 billion in firm wealth each year.”

It is clear these types of abuses impose substantial costs on the economy and simply cannot be ignored any longer.

Additionally, according to a 2013 White House patent report, the bulk of

patent troll suits target small and investor-driven companies. This is a real threat to innovation.

The VENUE Act addresses this issue and ensures that patent cases are litigated where there is a connection to the patent dispute. Under the VENUE Act, in order for a case to be properly litigated, it must be brought where either, No. 1, the defendant has a principal place of business or, No. 2, the alleged infringing act occurred or, No. 3, where the inventor conducted research and development that led to the patent.

In addition to the provisions relating to proper venue, the VENUE Act provides a more streamlined avenue for those seeking review of erroneous venue determinations. I believe my legislation strikes the right balance for determining when venue is proper, but I also understand that addressing venue is just one piece of the puzzle when we are talking about overall patent reform.

There are a number of ways patent reform can be achieved, and that is why I support the principles of the PATENT Act and believe it goes a long way in combatting this growing problem. The PATENT Act includes much needed reforms, such as fee shifting, heightening pleading standards, and customer stays that would provide relief to retailers, small businesses, and startups that are constantly under assault by these nonpracticing entities.

I commend Chairman GRASSLEY for ushering that legislation out of the Judiciary Committee. However, one piece missing from that comprehensive package is venue reform. Such a reform was included in the House version of the patent bill, and I believe it needs to be added to the Senate bill as well. All one has to do is look at the numbers and the problem surrounding venue becomes clear.

In 2009, 9 percent of all U.S. patent cases were filed in one particular Federal district. By comparison, in 2015, that number increased to just over 44 percent. That is an increase of over 400 percent. Again, the increase went from 9 percent in 2009 to 44 percent in 2015. In addition, of the cases brought in that Federal district in 2015, 95 percent of those cases were brought by nonpracticing entities. Such a distortion in case distribution is problematic, especially when the venue has no real connection to the alleged infringement at issue.

One hope for relief was the Federal circuit case in TC Heartland, but after the court's decision on April 29 declined to impose more stringent venue restrictions in patent cases, it appears judicial relief will have to wait. Therefore, this decision has only made the need for congressional action on venue even more important. I hope it will bring renewed attention to patent venue reform and the VENUE Act in the Senate.

While there are a number of solutions to the overall patent troll problem,

venue reform is of the utmost importance and must be central to any larger reform effort.

I urge my colleagues to support the reforms contained in the VENUE Act, and I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

INVESTIGATION INTO ALLEGATIONS OF FBI-FACILITATED RANSOM PAYMENTS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about allegations that the FBI has facilitated ransom payments to terrorist groups. Unfortunately, the administration has been stonewalling the Senate Judiciary Committee's investigation into the matter.

We have seen many terrible terrorist attacks recently. The government's highest duty is to provide for national security. That means fighting the radical Islamic terrorist groups that mean us harm.

An important part of fighting radical Islamic terrorist groups is going after their funding. The U.S. Government should do everything it can to stop money from flowing to groups like al Qaeda and ISIS.

The government has had significant successes in fighting terrorist funding. Ransom payments for hostages are one of the key sources of funds for terrorist groups to raise money.

The government should not be participating in helping to make such payments. Yet, in April of last year, the Wall Street Journal reported that the FBI had helped facilitate a \$250,000 ransom payment to al Qaeda.

It was from the family of kidnapped aid worker Warren Weinstein back in 2012. That report was later confirmed by 60 Minutes in an interview with Dr. Weinstein's widow.

Around the same time as that Wall Street Journal article, Army LTC Jason Amerine contacted Judiciary Committee staff. He is a decorated war hero who reached out to Congressman HUNTER, Senator JOHNSON, and to my office, to raise concerns about ineffective hostage-recovery efforts. He alleged that the FBI was involved in a ransom payment made in an effort to recover SGT Bowe Bergdahl.

To be clear, the U.S. Government should take all appropriate measures to recover American hostages.

But those measures cannot include ransom payments that end up funding more terrorist operations.

Ransom payments are big business for terrorist groups. According to a 2014 investigation by the New York Times, Al Qaeda and its affiliates have taken in at least \$125 million from kidnapping for ransom since 2008.

ISIS also takes in huge amounts from ransom payments. The United Nations estimated that ISIS collected between \$35 and \$45 million in ransom payments in 2014 alone.

This is a serious threat to our national security.