

Today, we can't turn our backs on the millions of families just like mine who need a path forward to pay back their student debt. These students want to stay in school to finish their degree even as the costs go up, and they want to one day be able to save up so their kids can afford to pursue their dreams.

It is time to make college more affordable and make sure students can graduate without the crushing burden of student debt. It is time for Democrats and Republicans to work together on solutions, and it is time to reaffirm that, in our country, earning your degree will pay off for you, your future, and the future of this country.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate in morning business and to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from South Carolina, Mr. GRAHAM.

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

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AND SYRIA

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, not surprisingly, the talks that are commonly known as Geneva III, in an effort to stop the ongoing genocide taking place in Syria, have now been "suspended."

I quote from this morning's Washington Post: "Syrian peace talks are suspended before they even really begin."

That should surprise no one. The fact is that the situation on the ground, thanks to our total lack of a coherent strategy or even a serious effort, has resulted in Russian airstrikes, ensuring Bashar al-Assad's continued strength. Along with the Iranians, along with Hezbollah that the Iranians have brought in from Lebanon—they all have given the overwhelming majority position to Bashar Assad, who is not about to leave office with the advantage he has now obtained on the battlefield, to a large degree because of Russian airstrikes that are relentless and that have mostly targeted the Western-backed opposition to Bashar Assad's rule. Those airstrikes, according to the Washington Post, have proven sufficient to push beyond doubt any likelihood that Assad will be removed from power by the nearly 5-year-old revolt against his rule.

The gains on the ground are also calling into question whether there can be meaningful negotiations to end the conflict Assad and his allies now seem convinced they can win.

Let's go back about 4 years. Bashar Assad was about to fall. The President of the United States said that it is not a matter of whether Bashar Assad will fall, it is a matter of when. All the momentum was on their side.

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, the Secretary of Defense—then Leon Panetta—said that the departure of Bashar Assad was "inevitable." And then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said it was inevitable that Bashar Assad will leave.

So a policy which was doomed to failure—rejecting a no-fly zone, rejecting robust training and equipping of those who were seeking to stop the slaughter—has now resulted in what many now view as an international crisis; that is, the refugee problem where millions of refugees are flowing into European countries not just from Syria but primarily from Syria, Iraq, and other countries as far away as Afghanistan. So everyone—especially our European friends—is moaning, and their hearts go out and they are trying to accommodate this.

This is not the cause of the problem; this is the result of a failure of American leadership, a feckless American leadership, and a Secretary of State—this Geneva Convention is not the first or the second but the third time—this is the third time our Secretary of State has convened a whole bunch of people in five-star hotels in Geneva, where, of course, the result has been nonexistent because the facts on the ground favor Bashar Assad, the Russians, and Hezbollah.

So what has happened? Now, for the first time since 1973, when Anwar Sadat threw the Russians out of Egypt, the Russians now have a major role to play in the Middle East. They now have protected their base at Latakia. They now are conducting airstrikes in an indiscriminate fashion against—guess who—not ISIS but against the moderates who were fighting to overthrow Bashar Assad, while our Secretary of State calls him up, has conversations with him, begs them to start peace talks, et cetera. And it goes on.

I think sometimes we all get a little numb, but we shouldn't be numb. We shouldn't be numb to 250,000 killed and slaughtered, chemical attacks that indiscriminately kill men, women, and children. These Russian airstrikes are pervasive in the areas where the moderate opposition exists, and they are using what we call dumb bombs—not the precision bombs—slaughtering hundreds of innocent men, women, and children. Places are surrounded where people are starving to death, and our Secretary of State calls for another meeting in Geneva. It is absolutely remarkable.

I wish to point out again that according to the Washington Post story, Secretary of State John F. Kerry scrambled to rearrange his Thursday schedule after de Mistura—that is the U.N. guy—decided to delay the talks. The article states:

"The continued assault by Syrian regime forces—enabled by Russian airstrikes—against opposition-held areas, as well as regime and allied militias' continued besiegement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, have clearly signaled the intention to seek a military solution rather than enable a political one." . . .

Kerry repeated demands made by the opposition groups as preconditions for negotiations. . . . [but] both the opposition and human rights organizations have cited an increase in Russian bombing over the past several days that they said has targeted civilian areas, including camps for displaced persons in the western part of the country.

Russia maintains that it is only bombing "terrorists," but its definition of that word includes parts of the opposition that has been fighting a civil war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for more than four years, whose representatives are among those on the opposition negotiating team in Geneva.

How can we expect them to negotiate while the Russian airstrikes are intensified? How can we possibly expect something positive to happen, when clearly the momentum and the strength is on the side of the Russians, the Iranians, and Bashar Assad?

Friends, this is another chapter in American history of humiliation and a failure of leadership. Of course, all of that is no better epitomized and symbolized than by what happened when the Iranians captured two American vessels that happened to stray into their territorial waters. Everybody should know that when a ship goes into another country's territorial waters, the first thing to be done is to go out and guide them out of it. It is against international law to take them at gunpoint all over the world but particularly—all over the Middle East is the picture of American servicemen and one woman on their knees with Iranian Revolutionary Guards holding their automatic weapons on them. This is an incredible act of arrogance and a humiliation for our American sailors.

What is the most aggravating is the response by the administration after this totally unlawful action and humiliation of American servicemen and sailors. The response by the administration was—and I am not making this up—White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said that the sailors were offered "the proper courtesy that you would expect." Being held at gunpoint on their knees with their hands behind their neck is, in the words of the White House Press Secretary, "the proper courtesy that you would expect."

The Secretary of State, John Kerry, offered his "gratitude to Iranian authorities for their cooperation in swiftly resolving this matter." That is the American Secretary of State after a gross violation of international law. Our American servicemen are put on their knees by a bunch of two-bit Iranians.

Vice President JOE BIDEN described the incident as "standard nautical practice." The Vice President of the United States says that when you put Americans on their knees and point

weapons at them with evil intention, that is standard nautical practice. What planet has the Vice President of the United States been on?

Now, to cap it all off, this week the Iranian Ayatollah Khamenei pinned the Order of Fat'h Medal to the chests of those who mistreated and humiliated American personnel. These people were given awards and medals by the Ayatollah Khamenei. The Obama administration has still failed to condemn Iran's behavior for what it was, a violation of international law and centuries of maritime tradition. According to a recent article in the *Navy Times*, legal experts all agree that this hostile incident represents a gross violation of international law.

So I ask my friend from South Carolina: Is there any explanation that could possibly be understood about this act, a violation of international law and the humiliation of American servicemembers? There is only one reason; that is, they don't want to upset the Iranians. They don't want to disturb the \$100 billion or so that is going to the Iranians as we speak while they buy weapons and toys all over Europe.

So here we have now seen American service personnel put on their knees with guns to their heads, and the most important people in our government praised the Iranians for their actions. I would ask my friend, how else could you explain—not passivity, but—the absolute endorsement by the Vice President of the United States and the Secretary of State for this kind of humiliating behavior?

Mr. GRAHAM. I say to Senator McCain, I think it is a disconnection from reality—trying to shape a reality that does not exist.

Can you imagine your good friend Ronald Reagan, if he had been President, what the Iranians would have done?

Mr. McCain. Could I remind our colleague that some of our colleagues recall that the day Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President of the United States, the hostages that were being held from our Embassy in Iran came home.

Mr. GRAHAM. This is about lack of respect for the Obama administration, John Kerry, and everybody else in our government. The Iranians did this, Senator McCain, I think for one reason—to show the region they are not intimidated by the United States.

Mr. McCain. Or that they can intimidate the United States—

Mr. GRAHAM. Right, that they can test our resolve. They do it all the time. They fired two missile tests in violation of existing U.N. resolutions. The Obama administration did nothing about it. They captured two boats. These are lightly armored naval vessels with two 50-caliber machine guns. One of them became disabled and they drifted into Iranian waters. The Iranians reacted as if it was some kind of invasion by America. They humiliated these sailors.

Instead of standing up for our naval personnel, basically we thanked the Iranians for being so nice to people that they captured at gunpoint in violation of international law, but it goes to a deeper point. The Iranians are letting everybody in the region know they are not changing their behavior with this nuclear deal: Don't mistake us having a nuclear agreement with a behavior change.

The Ayatollah and his henchmen are still in charge. They are not part of a family of nations. Since the deal has been signed, they fired missiles in violation of international resolutions, they are on the ground helping the "Butcher of Damascus." Iranians are still the largest state sponsor of terrorism, and this is just the cherry on top of all that misbehavior.

One thing I do want to talk about—and I will get your view of this because you are so knowledgeable. Syria has literally held on, and 250,000 people have been slaughtered in Syria by Bashar Assad and his regime. Those people who took to the streets during the Arab Spring in Damascus were from all different backgrounds and different sects. They wanted to live in a country not run by Assad in such a brutal fashion. His response to their plea for better transparency, democracy, and economic opportunity was literally to shoot them down.

Now we have an all-out war in Syria. The radical Islamic groups have moved into Syria. The caliphate headquarters of ISIL is in Syria. It has been the biggest misjudgment since Munich by this administration. They had Assad on the ropes 3 or 4 years ago and they didn't act, and what you see today is a result of a failure to act.

What I find astonishing is that the Syrian people, who are being slaughtered by the thousands, are being asked by the U.S. Government to sit down with Assad and negotiate an end to this war. The Russians and Iranians are all in for Bashar Assad. The people we have trained to replace Assad have been killed by the Russian President. Our President hasn't lifted a finger. Now we have a Secretary of State basically browbeating the Syrian opposition to go to Geneva and enter into peace talks with Bashar Assad, who is in full control of his part of Syria. I can't believe we would do this to the Syrian people. The Syrian opposition called Senator McCain—this says a lot about you, my friend. They were calling Senator McCain to pass on a message: You have been our best friend. We are not going to sit down and talk with Assad until the U.N. resolutions calling for his removal have been honored.

Our government wants a deal in Syria—regardless of the quality of it—to say they stopped the war on their watch. They are now asking the Syrian people basically to kowtow to the man who has killed their families.

This deal with Iran is a nightmare for the region. You give the Iranian Ayatollah a pathway to a bomb, even if

he doesn't cheat, a missile to deliver the bomb, and money to pay for it all. Now they want to take the same negotiating team into Syria and lock into place Bashar Assad's regime, which has slaughtered the Syrian people, give the Russians and Iranians a foothold in Damascus through negotiations that they could never have dreamed of a year ago.

I ask Senator McCain, what do you think the consequence would be of any peace agreement as long as the Russians and Iranians are supporting Assad and we are indifferent to the Syrian opposition in terms of their military needs?

Mr. McCain. I think it is very possible that the Secretary of State will call another gathering in Geneva. After all, this is only the third. He has another year, and maybe we will have Geneva IV and V.

Mr. GRAHAM. What leverage do we have over Assad?

Mr. McCain. That is the point. There is no leverage, I say to my colleague. Meanwhile, while the Secretary of State is pressuring the Free Syria forces and threatening to cut off assistance to them, Russia is escalating their bombing campaign and continues the slaughter of innocent people. Meanwhile, there are also enclaves around Aleppo and other places where people are literally starving to death—literally starving to death. There are pictures, my friends, on the Internet, if you would like to see it.

What does our Secretary of State do? He calls Lavrov. He calls Lavrov and complains. Lavrov, of course—it would be very interesting to know what is going through Mr. Lavrov's mind—but it is very clear that the Secretary of State is a supplicant, and this incredibly weak economy, with a brutal dictator in charge, is now achieving goals that have been age-old ambitions of the Russians. They are now playing a major role in the Middle East.

Mr. GRAHAM. I ask Senator McCain, may I read to you an exchange?

This is John Kerry 2 days ago:

"[T]here will be a ceasefire," Kerry predicted Tuesday in Rome. "We expect a ceasefire. And we expect an adherence to the ceasefire. And we expect full humanitarian access."

Two days later, the Russian bombing hasn't stopped and thousands of Syrians remain starving.

Not only has the Russian bombing continued, Putin has sent in advanced fighter jets to do the bombing.

Kerry said he was assured by the Russian counterpart [Lavrov] the Russians would stop bombing.

When asked, Lavrov said, "Russia's strikes will not cease. . . . I don't see why these air strikes should be stopped."

Whom is he talking to? The Russians are telling John Kerry to his face: We are going to keep bombing. John Kerry keeps telling the world they are going to stop bombing. In the meantime, Syrians are being slaughtered and starved

to death and we are fiddling while Syria burns.

Mr. MCCAIN. I want to mention one other aspect of this with my colleague, and that is the refugee issue.

It is surprising to many people in the world, this flood of millions of refugees, not just from Iraq and Syria but Iraq and even as far away as Afghanistan. Our European friends have treated it like maybe it was an earthquake or flood or natural disaster. It was not a natural disaster. It was a natural occurrence when the situation became so terrible that people believed they couldn't stay and live where they were.

Why did that happen? Because we watched the Russians, Bashar Assad, Hezbollah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard—we watched them commit all of this slaughter in Syria. No one can live in Syria today without fear for their very lives, unless they happen to be one of Bashar Assad's allies.

So now we have this huge refugee immigration crisis, which sooner or later we are going to have to be involved in, in some way or another, and it is a result of the failed policies of this President of the United States.

This President sat by and watched the chemical weapons use. This President refused to keep a sustaining force in Iraq. This President, when asked by his Secretary of State, his Secretary of Defense, and the head of the CIA to provide a safe zone turned it down. I still say to my colleague—and I would be interested in his views—that we still could establish a safe zone in Syria, where these people could go, we could protect them, and they wouldn't have to leave and flood Europe and eventually try to come to the United States of America.

That would be the best thing we could do in the short term, and this President refuses to do it.

Mr. GRAHAM. Well, let's get a little closer to the region. JOHN MCCAIN and LINDSEY GRAHAM have been saying for 3 years now that if we don't end the war in Syria—which means requiring the Islamic State, or ISIL, to be destroyed with a ground component and not by the air alone—we are going to get hit here at home and a Paris-style attack is coming our way. This strategy to destroy ISIL will never work. President Obama is trying to pass it on to the next the President. We have been begging the President to change his strategy in Iraq and Syria before we get hit here at home.

Another casualty of the war in Syria is the neighborhood itself. There are more Syrian children going to primary schools in Lebanon than Lebanese children. Our friends in Lebanon are being overrun by Syrian refugees because of the Hell-on-Earth nature of Syria.

But one of our best allies in the entire world is the King of Jordan. Let me tell you what he has experienced as a result of us as a nation allowing Syria to fall completely apart. This was yesterday:

The leader of a key U.S. ally in the Middle East warned Tuesday that his country [Jordan] is so packed with Syrian refugees, many with ties to the Islamic State terror group, that his nation has reached a "boiling point."

Sooner or later, I think, the dam is going to burst.

The bottom line is I have been saying this for 2 years now, along with Senator MCCAIN: If you don't end this war in Syria, one of the victims is going to be the King of Jordan. And the King of Jordan says that our welcoming nature has to come to an end.

Here is the lay of the land. Jordan cannot take any more. Lebanon is overrun. The Europeans are pushing back, and you are going to create a process where people in Syria have no place to go unless we help them. They are going to be slaughtered. They are in between ISIL and Assad. What we are suggesting is to create a safe haven inside of Syria where they can go without being killed, raped, and murdered so they don't have to go to Lebanon, Jordan, Europe or the United States.

If John Kerry and Barack Obama do not change their approach to Syria, Syria is going to be the catalyst for a meltdown in the Middle East. Their approach is going to allow the Iranians to control Damascus. Any deal done in Geneva under these circumstances is going to have one certain outcome: The Russians and the Iranians are going to win, and the Syrian people are going to lose. If we don't destroy the caliphate with a ground component soon—not just from the air—we are going to get hit here at home. The center of the caliphate is in Syria. If we don't bring this war to an end soon by getting rid of ISIL and Assad—which would require both to end the war—Lebanon and Jordan are going to fall.

So to the Obama administration, when you were Senators, you really took it to President Bush. He made his fair share of mistakes, but at least he corrected them. Senator Obama and Senator Kerry both opposed the surge in Iraq.

On President Obama's watch, he was handed an Iraq that was becoming secure and that was on a glidepath to stability, and he chose to withdraw all of our troops—against sound military advice—to fulfill a political promise. Three years ago, at the urging of Senator MCCAIN and myself, we had Bashar al-Assad on the ropes. His entire national security team advised President Obama to arm the Free Syrian Army while they were intact. That would have been the end of Assad, and Syria would be in the process of healing itself. But President Obama said no to his entire national security team. He drew a redline against Assad a couple of years ago and said: If you use chemical weapons, I will act. Assad used chemical weapons, and nothing of consequence happened. Assad is still in power. He will be in power when Obama leaves.

In the meantime, Russia has introduced itself in the Middle East unlike at any time since the early 1970s.

Now the Iranians are on the ground, fully behind Assad. The balance of power has shifted. Assad is in a good place. The Syrian people are in a lousy, terrible, horrible place. John Kerry and Barack Obama's foreign policy is in free fall.

I will make a prediction—and I hope I am wrong—that if they don't change their policies toward Syria, the region is going to have an imbalance that we have never seen in our lifetime. An attack against this homeland is coming. It is coming from Syria. It is being planned as I speak. We didn't know exactly what they were trying to do before 9/11, but we were worried that we were going to get attacked by Al Qaeda.

I can tell you exactly where the attack is coming from. It is coming from Raqqa, Syria. It is being planned while I speak. Every day the caliphate is allowed to exist is another day of danger and peril for the United States.

So if President Obama and John Kerry do not change their policies to destroy the caliphate sooner rather than later, we will be hit here at home. If we don't get Syria in a better spot soon, Jordan and Lebanon are going to be victims of this war.

To Senator MCCAIN, I just wish to end with that thought.

Mr. MCCAIN. Let me make a couple of additional points and then we will yield the floor.

To go back, these refugees are putting a strain on Europe that may basically lead to the dissolution of the European Union. You cannot have so many thousands—tens of thousands or more people—flood into a country with which they are totally unfamiliar without there being some problems there. So the very fabric of the EU may be tested here.

But one of the things I want to mention to my friend is that the apologists for the Obama Administration have constantly and persistently pursued a dishonest line of interpretation of history, and that is that after the surge was won—and it is a fact—at great sacrifice, at enormous sacrifice we had Iraq stable. The attacks were down. The Shiite militias were repressed. The battle of Fallujah had been won at great cost. There was a bright future that could lie ahead for Iraq, but it required a continuing American presence. That was an absolute necessity. It was the same reason why we didn't leave Korea after the Korean war, the same reason why we haven't left Bosnia, and the same reason why we didn't leave Germany or Japan.

But the apologists in the liberal media—and we all know who they are—are saying: Oh, they couldn't stay because they didn't have a status of forces agreement through the Iraqi Parliament and it couldn't be done. That absolutely made it impossible for us to stay.

Mr. GRAHAM. If I may, could I interject?

Mr. MCCAIN. Yes.

Mr. GRAHAM. We couldn't have troops on the ground because Iraqis said no. Do we have troops on the ground today, I ask Senator MCCAIN?

Mr. MCCAIN. That is the point. Now we have at least 3,500 troops on the ground in Iraq.

Mr. GRAHAM. Where is the Parliament?

Mr. MCCAIN. We don't have a status of forces agreement. Their Parliament has not endorsed it. Where are our liberal friends on the other side? Aren't they concerned that there isn't a status of forces agreement and we continue to incrementally—a classic example of mission creep—gradually increase our presence more and more.

Actually—and I don't use this line very often but these apologists, particularly in the liberal media, the so-called commentators—they are lying. They are lying when they say that we couldn't keep a sustaining force there. We could, and we could have done it without the approval of their Parliament, including the fact that we have troops in a number of other countries where their Parliaments haven't approved a specific status of forces agreement. So it is really aggravating.

But the reason why they tell this lie is because if it were really a fact that at great sacrifice we had stabilized Iraq and it had a bright future at that time, their calls for a complete withdrawal and the President's announcement that the last combat soldier had left Iraq—remember that? Remember that one of his underlings said: We are leaving behind the most stable, prosperous, democratic Iraq in history. That was the statement. I think it was Blinken or one of those guys. It was great.

We have gotten everybody out of Iraq, just as the President promised when he ran for President of the United States. But leading from behind doesn't work. Just because you leave a conflict, that does not mean the conflict is over.

Again, this morning, they are trying to make that same mistake in Afghanistan, although I pray they have learned that they cannot go to what the President originally announced—that they would go to an embassy specific force of about 1,000. The question is how many and what their missions will be.

So I think it is important to emphasize that this did not have to happen. If we had kept that stabilizing force behind, you would never have had Baghdadi break off from Al Qaeda and move to Syria and seeing the things we are seeing today.

I am afraid my friend from South Carolina is right. In fact, I know he is right. There will be further attacks on the United States of America and Europe because it is inevitable. When Mr. Baghdadi controls a large piece of geography from which he can train, equip, motivate, and send people out to commit acts of terror, that will happen, and the responsibility will lay at the doorstep of Barack Obama and his minions.

Mr. GRAHAM. If I could, just to wrap this up, I wish we were wrong. When the President decided to withdraw all troops from Iraq against sound military advice, we cautioned—literally begged—the President and the Vice President. We went to Baghdad itself to try to help with this problem. I remember saying that I think all hell will break loose because this is so irresponsible. Iraq is in a good spot, but if we leave now, it will all fall apart. I hope I am wrong. Well, we weren't wrong.

When the Syrian people took to the streets to demand more freedom and our response was to ignore their plea, when the people of Iran went to the streets and the Ayatollah shot them down and our President said that he didn't want to discuss negotiations with the regime, when Assad had his back to the wall and President Obama declined to take good advice to arm the Free Syrian Army and the people of Syria to get rid of their dictator, all the things that Senator MCCAIN and I have predicted have come true.

The point of being here today is that the worst is yet to come and, God, I hope I am wrong because this is what I think is going to happen. I think there is going to be an attack on our country that is being planned as I speak, coming from Syria. If we went on the ground in the region—not 100,000 U.S. troops but mostly people from the region with some of us—we could destroy the caliphate and we could disrupt their plans against our homeland, but we are not doing that.

If we don't change our strategy regarding Syria, we are going to lose one of the best allies America has ever had, and that is the Kingdom of Jordan, because it is being overrun by refugees. The whole seam of the Middle East is splitting wide open.

I will say this. Everybody makes mistakes—Bush, LINDSEY GRAHAM, and JOHN MCCAIN. The key is to adjust. The problem I have with this administration is that they seem unable and unwilling to adjust. If they don't change their strategy, we are all going to regret it. As bad as it is today, the worst is yet to come.

Mr. MCCAIN. Could I just add one other point to my friend from South Carolina?

The President is very good at setting up straw men. He says that we only have two choices—to send in a couple of hundred thousand troops or to do nothing. Neither LINDSEY GRAHAM or I or any smart person I know are advocating that.

What we are advocating is about a 10,000 American force providing the capabilities of ISR training, forward air controllers and others, with a large contingent of Arab countries that would then move to Raqqa on the ground with the use of American air power.

Please do not be fooled by this constant barrage of untruths that are being said about those of us that we

want to send in hundreds of thousands. We do not. This has to be an Arab coalition with the United States a small part of it, and, by the way, have them pay for it as well. With the proper American leadership and commitment and credibility, which is totally absent now in the region, that could be done. Otherwise, we will fight them there or we will fight them here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The senior Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed in morning business.

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

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I had planned to be in the Senate Judiciary Committee today, debating and pushing for passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA. Unfortunately, the markup was postponed. I wish it had not been. So I hope next week we can make progress on this important bill. We have a need for this legislation, and we also need the money for it. Senator SHAHEEN has an emergency supplemental appropriations bill. These are actually both urgent matters.

States such as mine, Vermont, and our neighboring State of New Hampshire have been deeply affected by this wave of addiction. The media has covered this very personal and ravaging epidemic as never before. We have seen a transformation in how we talk about this issue and the need for solutions. It used to be that if you had a drug problem, they would bring in the police to straighten it out. We have removed the stigma of drug addiction, but we need more than talk. I have visited many of these communities. They are devastated by this epidemic and need resources for prevention and treatment. It is time for Congress to act.

For years I have been convening field hearings and sitting at kitchen tables, listening to Vermonters discuss innovative approaches to confront drug abuse and related crimes. I have also sat at kitchen tables and listened to tragic stories about a member of the family who had been hit with opioid addiction. What I have heard in the meetings I have had with the police, doctors, family members, faith community, and educators is that we cannot arrest or jail our way out of this problem. We have lost the war on drugs—if we were ever winning it—because we relied primarily on unnecessarily harsh sentencing laws.

I spent 8 years in law enforcement, and I know that law enforcement practices will always play an important role. That is why I have worked to secure funding for State-led, anti-heroin task forces. But if we want to find lasting solutions to these problems, we have to identify and support effective