

his gloves, he put on a mask, and he proceeded to determine it was fentanyl they had spread around the car to try to hide the fact that they were moving drugs.

When he got back to the police station after the search to book these individuals, Officer Green noticed there was something on his shirt, and he did what any of us would do; he reached down to brush it off of his shirt. Unfortunately, it was fentanyl, and the fentanyl became exposed to his fingers. Just that small amount absorbing through his skin caused him to have an overdose. This is a big guy, 6 foot 2, 220 pounds, great shape, and he fell to the ground unconscious.

Luckily, he was able to get immediate medical assistance at the police station, but it took four doses of Narcan to revive Officer Green. He said at the time he would have died had he been alone. Think if he had gone home to his family and he had hugged one of his kids and his kids had been exposed to that fentanyl.

So this is a great danger, obviously, to our communities generally and to individuals but also to our first responders who are, unfortunately, finding out that these dangerous poisons are more and more of a danger.

Children are also being exposed. This fall, a 12-year-old Columbus boy died as a result of fentanyl exposure. He was at a sleepover for a birthday party when he came into contact with the deadly poison someone had left lying around. He was unconscious by the time paramedics arrived, and he died in the hospital 2 days later.

These synthetic forms of heroin have created a new challenge for law enforcement as they increasingly account for more and more of our overdose deaths. Combating this threat requires solutions from across the Federal Government, along with local, State, and private sector initiatives. We talked earlier about an organization in Ohio that is dealing with this threat that is coming into our communities, and the private sector and nonprofits have a huge role to play but so does the Federal Government, and so does the Department of Homeland Security. Again, Kirstjen Nielsen understands that need. The Department of Homeland Security plays a critical role in countering the significant threat because it comes through the U.S. mail system, and it is Customs and Border Protection officers who are meant to screen those packages that come in through the mail.

Unlike heroin, which enters the U.S. over land, typically from Mexico, manufacturers, mostly in China, ship fentanyl through the U.S. mail directly into our communities. The Federal Government is responsible here. We are supposed to combat the spread of illegal drugs coming through the mail system, but in the case of fentanyl coming from labs in China, the U.S. Postal Service is oftentimes used as a conduit without any check. Drugs should not

be as easy to send as a postcard, and the U.S. mail service should not be able to be exploited as a drug trafficking service.

This is why we have introduced in the Congress legislation called the STOP Act. It is bipartisan. It is sensible. If enacted, it would give Customs and Border Protection officers, along with their law enforcement partners, the tools they need to identify suspicious packages by requiring the U.S. Postal Service to provide advanced electronic data on all of the packages and mail entering the United States. Already information as to what is in the package, where it is from, where it is going, the name of the center is required if you send it through one of the private carrier systems—UPS, FedEx, DHL, and others. Unfortunately, the Postal Service is not required to do that and, as a result, traffickers do what one would think they would do, they choose our U.S. Postal Service to send this poison into our communities, to a post office box, maybe to an abandoned warehouse address.

This fentanyl is being spread throughout our communities. We need to hold the Postal Service to that same standard.

At a recent hearing, Acting Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan voiced his support for reforms like those in the STOP Act and said advanced electronic data would enhance their detection and prevention efforts. I have seen this firsthand. I have visited the sites in Ohio where Customs and Border Protection is asked to screen these packages. When they are with these private carriers, they can find packages, take them offline, and carefully—because it requires a lot of care, given the poisonous nature of the packages—deal with it.

President Trump's opioid commission recently issued its recommendations. They endorsed the STOP Act and called for it to be enacted and implemented into the Commission's final report just a month ago.

At her confirmation hearing last month, Ms. Nielsen voiced her support for the STOP Act. I was pleased to have her commitment to getting this bill into law and implemented by CBP—Customs and Border Protection—so we can keep more of these deadly poisons off our streets.

There is no one solution to the opioid epidemic, but the STOP Act will give law enforcement the tools they need to help stop this synthetic form of heroin from entering our communities in the first place, while also raising the cost of this synthetic heroin. The end result will be saving countless lives.

So to get back to Ms. Nielsen, again, she is eminently qualified for this post and able to address so many of the tough issues we face as a country, including the evolving threats like the fentanyl issue and the terrorism issues we have talked about today. We need her at the Department of Homeland Security. We need her now. She is the

leader we need for this critical and sprawling Department at a time when our homeland security posture has never been more critical, more important.

I hope my colleagues will come together, on a bipartisan basis, and vote Ms. Nielsen out this week as the next Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wish to first compliment my colleague from Ohio, Senator PORTMAN, on his leadership on so many different fronts in the U.S. Senate. His leadership is nowhere more important than what he has been doing on the opioid epidemic that is raging through Ohio, Alaska, and almost every State in the country. The STOP Act he just talked about is legislation I have cosponsored, and he is leading on it. It is one of the many things we need to do to really get a handle on this.

This should be a bipartisan issue. The opioid epidemic is ravaging through States, families, and communities. There has been no better leader in the Senate than Senator PORTMAN on these issues so I just want to thank him for that.

Mr. PORTMAN. I thank the Senator.

TAX CUTS AND JOBS BILL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I also want to express appreciation to a number of my colleagues and, again, Senator PORTMAN is certainly one of them. We had an important night the other night with regard to the critical passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. I think it is going to be very important legislation to help grow our economy and, finally, get money in the hands of middle-class families and small businesses so we can finally start growing this economy nationally and, back home in Alaska, get my State out of a deep recession that it is in.

There are a lot of Senators who played critical roles. Senators HATCH, PORTMAN, TOOMEY, SCOTT, and so many others, but, in particular, I want to thank the majority leader. There is a provision in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which I think is going to be critical for America and certainly critical for my State, which is to help unlock more of the vast energy resources we have in Alaska, particularly on the coastal plain of the North Slope—what we call the 1002 area of Alaska. That pass is part of this bill. It is something in Alaska we have been working through in a bipartisan manner. Over 70 percent of Alaskans want to get this done. We have been working on it in Alaska for over 40 years to get this done.

I really want to commend and thank the majority leader, MITCH MCCONNELL. Over a year ago, he and I sat down to talk about doing this. Every step of the way, his commitment to me and to the people of Alaska to make this happen for my State as well as for our great country—he was there for us.

So I want to thank the majority leader for that firm commitment to helping on an issue that has been critical to Alaskans for decades. We have never realized it. We have a lot more work to do before we get there, both on the tax bill and the 1002 area provision in it, but we are closer. We are closer, in large measure, because of the leadership of the majority leader, and I thank him.

Mr. President, I have been coming to the floor—many of us have been, actually—for the last several weeks to talk about a really important issue for the country; that is, getting administration officials in the Trump administration confirmed by this body. There has been a resistance, a desire to not want to move very qualified people, unfortunately, by my colleagues on the other side. It is just not helping the country.

With each new administration, our great Nation sees a peaceful transition of power. It is a remarkable pillar of American democracy. This doesn't include just the transition with regard to the President and Vice President but also the team of officials in the Federal Government at senior levels who are required to run this country. Good people, whether it is a Democratic or a Republican administration—Republican administration is not always easy to serve—and what we have been trying to do is help this administration find, get nominated by the President, and confirm high-quality American people in these jobs to serve their country.

As a Senator from Alaska, I have had particular focus on Alaskans to serve in positions of the Federal Government, and I will say that the Trump administration has been very receptive to a number of these highly qualified Alaskans who want to serve their country, but, unfortunately, what we are seeing on the other side is just obstruction. They don't want to move people. They never explain it.

I have come to the floor and given this speech several times, and I have asked for the minority leader to come to the floor to explain why they are delaying all of these very well-qualified Americans who want to serve their government. Come to the floor and explain it. Tell the American people why Assistant Secretaries across Federal agencies who have been waiting months to be confirmed by this body, who have been voted out of committee, with big bipartisan numbers, sit and wait and wait and wait. What good is that doing for the country? Come to the floor and explain it. I have been asking them to come to the floor and explain it, and they never take me up on the offer.

So, unfortunately, we know the numbers. At this point, 8 years ago in the Obama Presidency, almost 70 percent—almost 70 percent—of the nominees by President Obama, who won his election, were confirmed by the Senate.

Now, I wasn't in the Senate then, but I know my colleagues on this side of the aisle, if they didn't like someone,

they could vote against them; they could put a hold on them for a while and get their questions answered. So that is the way it worked. That is normal. Those numbers are about normal. At the same time now, under the Trump administration's Presidency, the Senate has only confirmed 40 percent—40 percent. Now, is that helping the country? No. It is not helping the country. Do they ever come to the floor and explain why they are resisting? No. So it is a frustration, and it is not helping the country. We need good people in government.

If this trend continues, with the number of people we need to confirm for the remaining Presidential-appointed positions, it will take us more than 11 years. Let me repeat that—more than 11 years. We all know a Presidential term lasts 4 years.

This is unprecedented. It is unprecedented; go take a look. Yet the other side doesn't want to explain why they are so focused on obstruction. It is certainly not helping the people. The vast majority of these nominees are really well qualified.

NOMINATION OF JOSEPH BALASH

I want to talk about someone I know really well who is part of this partisan logjam. He is an Alaskan. His name is Joe Balash. I am a little biased here; he was my former chief of staff in the Senate. But Joe is also the former commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources in Alaska; he was the deputy commissioner. What is the position he has been nominated for? To be the next Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Lands and Minerals—essentially, the Federal official who would be working with Secretary Zinke at the Department of the Interior to oversee Federal lands—minerals, mining, oil, gas, onshore, offshore—for the country. It is a really big job in Alaska; 66 percent of our lands are Federal. But this is a huge job for the country and a really important job, as we are trying to take advantage of this new energy renaissance in our Nation, which is great for the Nation, great for jobs, great for foreign policy, great for energy security.

Joe Balash comes super well qualified. The DNR commissioner in Alaska manages one of the largest portfolios of land, oil, gas, water, minerals, and timber of anyplace in the world—in the world.

Nobody doubts that Joe is very well qualified for this position. As a matter of fact, on September 19, Joe's nomination was voted out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee by voice vote, which means unanimously, with the exception of one Senator who said that he wanted to vote no. Every other Senator—it was very bipartisan.

We might not fully agree with all the policies he wants. I was talking earlier about opening the coastal region of the Arctic Slope, the North Slope, in Alaska, which we voted on last week in the Senate. Certainly, Joe Balash is supportive of that as an Alaskan. If someone doesn't like that, they should just

come down here and vote against him, but he has been put on hold. I have been trying for weeks to figure out why. Who has a hold on him?

I want to compliment the Democratic whip from Illinois, Senator DURBIN. I reached out to him several weeks ago. He mentioned to me that he had a hold on him. He said that there were certain things he wanted to get from the Secretary of Interior in some meetings. So I worked with Senator DURBIN and Secretary Zinke, and after those meetings it looked as if it was all good. The Senator from Illinois said to me: We are ready to move forward with him. So I appreciated that; it was very constructive.

As I mentioned, I am not opposed to holds. Sometimes it is important to put holds on administration officials. I did it in the Obama administration. I have done it even for some Trump administration nominees. But what is going on here, after working with the Democratic whip, seemingly clearing out everything—and he thought we were, too—getting ready to move Joe Balash. No, all of a sudden, there is a “secret hold”—a secret hold on Joe Balash. He is very qualified for the job, but somebody has a secret hold.

My colleagues on the other side talk a lot about transparency, but this has been months now. Working with the Democratic whip—again, in good faith, and he worked hard and I am complimenting him as much as I can on this. Then someone else decides: No, I am going to keep holding. But I am not going to come down here and say who it is or why or how long they want or what else they want out of the administration or maybe it is a question for Mr. Balash.

My point is, if Senators want to vote down or oppose a nominee, they should make their opposition known and transparent.

We are going to have a vote here in a couple of minutes. After the vote, I am going to come back to the floor. I could do it right now, but I am trying to be respectful to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, even the secret holder, whoever he or she is. But I am going to come down and make a unanimous request to move Joe Balash forward. We have been waiting for months.

Maybe they don't want to show who the secret holder is, but I really hope my colleagues will come down and will not object. We are going to do this in a little bit, and I am going to essentially try to free Joe Balash. I am hopeful that we can agree on that and move this very well-qualified candidate forward. Maybe there is going to be an objection. We will see. I am going to ask for this in about half an hour. But if there is an objection, I certainly hope the secret holder is going to come to the Senate floor, speak to the American people, and say: Here is why I am secretly holding this guy, even though he is very well qualified, even though