

and independent investigation without political interference, passing legislation that is bipartisan that has been offered by Republicans as well as Democrats, including myself, and should be moved through the Judiciary Committee and to the floor of this Congress. That message is all the more important now as this investigation penetrates the White House for the first time in the Flynn conviction, coming closer to the Oval Office itself. A real and robust congressional investigation of those efforts through the Judiciary Committee, as well as obstruction of justice, continues to be necessary, but we should combine our efforts to make sure that law enforcement and the judicial process moves forward without political interference that will undermine its credibility.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, I yield the floor to Senators JOHNSON and MARKEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I wish to thank my colleagues Senator WARNER and Senator BLUMENTHAL for their words on the Senate floor—Senator WARNER's words yesterday especially, defending Special Counsel Robert Mueller, in his leadership on the Senate Intelligence Committee's Russia investigation. Senator WARNER is absolutely right that we must protect the integrity of the Justice Department's independent investigation.

Congress needs to make clear that there are redlines. Any attempt to fire Robert Mueller, to shut down the investigation, or to presumptively pardon key witnesses essential to the investigation would be an abuse of power and a direct threat to the rule of law and to our constitutional system.

Ohio's Ukrainian community knows the impact of unchecked Russian aggression in Russia's effort to undermine democracy around the world. Getting to the bottom of Russian interference and protecting our future elections from that interference are critical.

My priority is getting to the bottom of what happened so that our democratic process is upheld and so we can move forward with the business we were sent here to do—creating jobs, combatting the opioid crisis, as Senators JOHNSON, MARKEY, and I will speak about in a moment, and helping middle-class families. Any efforts to delay that conclusion or interfere in the investigation, I believe, will not be tolerated by Senators in either party.

Thanks to Senator WARNER for making that clear. Thanks to my colleagues in both parties who take this seriously. All of us have had serious conversations with Members of both parties to discuss what all this means, and thank you for all of us working to-

gether to complete the independent Senate investigation. It is important that we make clear to the American people that this is not a partisan issue. It is about the integrity of our elections, about protecting our country from foreign powers.

Any attempt to discredit Robert Mueller and his investigation and to turn it into a partisan issue makes us less safe as a nation. Let's allow the Justice Department and the special counsel to do their jobs. Let's get back to doing ours.

INTERDICT ACT

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, as we await Senator MARKEY's and Senator JOHNSON's remarks, I wish to set the stage. The CDC released a new report last night showing a massive increase in the number of Americans dying from drug overdoses.

My State is second to the Presiding Officer's State. It has the second highest rate of deaths per capita in the country. In my State of Ohio, unfortunately, far too many people die from opioid overdoses than any other State in country. Families are torn apart. Children lose parents. Parents lose sons and daughters.

The CDC pins much of the blame of this epidemic on this relatively new deadly synthetic fentanyl. Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin. Senator CAPITO knows that, as do Senators Johnson and Markey. All of us in the Senate are aware of that.

This drug is being illegally trafficked into this country from Mexico and China. We have a bill to stop this today. The INTERDICT Act. I want to thank Senator MARKEY for his leadership on this bill and also my colleague Senator PORTMAN for his support. Senator PORTMAN and I have been working on a number of issues across party lines for months and months. It would provide more funds for Customs and Border Protection to screen packages effectively and safely, to stop fentanyl whenever possible before it reaches Akron, Toledo, Dayton, or the smaller cities of Chillicothe, Mansfield, and Zanesville.

This passed the House with only two or three negative votes. It has the support of major law enforcement organizations, including sheriffs and police officers. Our law enforcement officials, better than anybody, see the devastation that fentanyl causes our communities. They know the risk our officers face dealing with this deadly substance. That is why this bill needs to pass into law.

Just this week, the National FOP, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative—a recent phenomenon, unfortunately—all publicly asked us to pass the bill.

Americans are dying in record numbers. Life expectancy in our country—I believe, for the first time in the lifetimes of any of us—actually dropped last year. Think about that.

We have made progress, as I mentioned, in this body. I wear a pin on my lapel of a canary in a bird cage. The mine workers in West Virginia, Ohio, and elsewhere would take this canary down to the mines. If the canary died, the mine worker was on his own. He didn't have a union strong enough or a government that cared enough to help him. In those days, people lived 45 years on average—for a person born in the United States in 1900.

Today we live 30 years longer for a whole host of public health reasons—from Medicare to Medicaid, to safe drinking laws, to clean air, to minimum wage—all the things that we do. For the first time, I believe, in our lifetime, life expectancy actually has dropped because of drug overdoses for the second year in a row, and it is in large part because of these overdose deaths.

Why shouldn't we take steps today to stop this? We can do this by putting the INTERDICT Act on the President's desk, immediately giving law enforcement the tools they need to keep fentanyl out of the country and off our streets.

Mr. MARKEY. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BROWN. Of course.

Mr. MARKEY. I thank the Senator for yielding, and I thank the Senator from Ohio for talking about this very important issue.

Fentanyl is a killer that is descending upon every single community in the United States. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine. Fentanyl is the Godzilla of opioids.

Senator BROWN represents Ohio; I represent Massachusetts. The fentanyl epidemic has a bull's-eye on Ohio and a bull's-eye on Massachusetts. The deaths from fentanyl are skyrocketing. In 2016, upwards of 70 to 75 percent of all of the opioid deaths in Massachusetts were because of fentanyl. Fentanyl was found in the blood system of those people who died. Last year, 2,000 people in Massachusetts died of overdoses. Three-quarters of them had fentanyl. If the epidemic had been hitting the rest of the country at the same rate that it has been hitting Massachusetts, last year 75,000 people would have died with fentanyl in their blood systems.

Last night, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released shocking new numbers on drug overdose deaths in the United States. These numbers show the spike in deaths caused by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

Here are the new numbers nationwide. More than 42,000 Americans died from an opioid overdose last year. That is a 27-percent increase over the number of Americans who died from an opioid overdose in 2015. It went up 27 percent from 2015 to 2016. Of the 42,000 lives lost to opioids last year, nearly half of them nationwide—just over

19,000—can be directly attributed to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. The number is a much higher percentage in Massachusetts.

Fentanyl is overrunning our communities, laying waste to them. There is no easy solution, but we know that we must staunch the flow of this drug before we lose an entire generation to this terrible killer. That is why I introduced legislation with Senator BROWN and Senator RUBIO to help those on the frontlines stop this deadly drug from ever getting into our communities. The bill is called the INTERDICT Act. It provides badly needed high-tech equipment and other scientific resources to U.S. Customs and Border Protection to catch illicit fentanyl being trafficked into the United States, mainly from China and Mexico.

When U.S. Customs and Border Protection detects a suspicious package or substance, it has had very good success identifying an illicit drug like fentanyl with the help of high-tech, hand-held chemical screening devices. Using these devices, Customs and Border Protection agents can detect, identify, and seize illicit drugs like fentanyl on the spot. Those rapid results provide vital information for border agents to continue their investigation and, if appropriate, proceed with seizure and arrest.

What is more, these devices and their ability to immediately identify fentanyl and other hazardous illicit substances also serve to safeguard the health and well-being of Customs and Border Protection agents so they are not accidentally exposed to fentanyl. That is what these devices help to make possible.

So we introduced the INTERDICT Act with SHERROD BROWN of Ohio; Senator CAPITO, the Presiding Officer in the Senate today; Senator RUBIO; and we have added another 16 Senators from both sides of the aisle.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I would be glad to yield.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I thank Senator MARKEY for his leadership on this issue. This has gotten this far because of his efforts in so many ways.

I want to enter into the RECORD three letters that are dated yesterday and today. Actually, one is from the National Fraternal Order of Police, signed by Chuck Canterbury, their national president, in support of this bill, with a very persuasive, passionate laying out of reasons it matters. The second is a letter from the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, signed by Dominick Stokes. Mr. Stokes is a longtime friend of mine. The third letter is from the Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative group, signed by Frederick Ryan, all making endorsements for this bill.

I ask unanimous consent those three letters be printed in the RECORD.

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

NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE,

Washington, DC, December 20, 2017.

Hon. A. MITCHELL MCCONNELL, JR.,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.
Hon. CHARLES E. SCHUMER,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATORS MCCONNELL AND SCHUMER: I am writing on behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police to urge the Senate to consider H.R. 2142, the "International Narcotics Trafficking Emergency Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband with Technology (INTERDICT) Act," which passed the House 412-3 in October.

Heroin and prescription opiates have created a devastating epidemic across our country, and now these overdoses outnumber gunshot deaths and motor vehicle deaths. This epidemic has worsened with the influx of synthetic opiates like fentanyl from foreign countries, especially China and Mexico. For example, synthetic fentanyl is cheaper than normal opiates bought on the street and it is 50 times more deadly than heroin.

Our law enforcement officers at the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are on the forefront of stopping the deadly influx of synthetic fentanyl into our communities from these foreign countries. The CBP needs all the resources they can get to stop this devastating flow of drugs into our country.

This legislation will ensure that CBP will have additional portable chemical screening devices at ports of entry, mail and express consignment facilities, and more fixed chemical screening devices at CBP laboratories. The bill will also provide CBP with sufficient resources, personnel, and facilities, including scientists to interpret the screening test results from the field.

With all the additional resources CBP will be better equipped on all fronts to thwart the deadly flow of synthetic opiates across our borders.

On behalf of the more than 330,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, I want to thank you for helping fight against the heroin and opioid epidemic and fighting every day to rid our communities of these drugs. If I can be of any additional help to you, please feel free to contact me or my Senior Advisor, Jim Pasco, in my Washington office.

Sincerely,

CHUCK CANTERBURY,
National President.

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

OFFICERS ASSOCIATION,

Cabin John, MD, December 21, 2017.

Hon. A. MITCHELL MCCONNELL, JR.,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.
Hon. CHARLES E. SCHUMER,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATORS MCCONNELL AND SCHUMER: I am writing on behalf of the members of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association (FLEOA) which is a professional organization representing more than 26,000 federal officers and agents in 65 law enforcement agencies including the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP). FLEOA has endorsed H.R. 2142, the "International Narcotics Trafficking Emergency Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband and Technology (INTERDICT) Act" which passed the House with a 412-3 vote. I urge the Senate to consider this bill for passage.

Probably the most serious crisis facing law enforcement is the proliferation of heroin and opiate drugs, which are causing more deaths from overdoses than ever experienced before. In fact, synthetic opiates like fentanyl are now the leading cause of overdoses because they are cheaper and dramatically stronger than heroin.

The INTERDICT Act will provide CBP with portable screening devices at ports of entry

and mail facilities. In addition, it will increase detection devices at CBP testing facilities and laboratories. The Act will also provide CBP with additional staffing and resources. This will allow CBP to successfully diminish the importation of synthetic opiates into the United States.

FLEOA applauds your assistance in helping CBP and the other federal agencies in their efforts to reduce the plague these illegal substances have induced on our country.

Sincerely,

DOMINICK STOKES,
FLEOA V.P. for Legislation.

POLICE ASSISTED

ADDICTION RECOVERY INITIATIVE,

Gloucester, MA, December 21, 2017.

Hon. A. MITCHELL MCCONNELL, JR.,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.
Hon. CHARLES E. SCHUMER,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATORS MCCONNELL AND SCHUMER: The Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative (PAARI) is a nonprofit organization that trains and supports more than 360 law enforcement agencies that have launched programs that serve as a pre-arrest bridge to treatment. PAARI was pleased to offer its strong support for S. 708, the bipartisan INTERDICT Act, which was introduced by Senators Markey, Rubio, Brown, and Capito. This bill will expand U.S. Customs and Border Protection's ability to use technology to detect fentanyl and other narcotics coming into the United States from abroad and which are causing a public health epidemic in our communities.

While the Senate has yet to act on S. 708, the House of Representatives took action and on 25 October 2017, passed companion legislation HR 2142, by a vote of 412-3. As this year draws to a close, we urge the Senate to take up and pass the House version of INTERDICT this year.

Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, with more than 54,000 overdose deaths reported in 2015. Almost 33,000 of those overdose deaths—roughly 60 percent—involved opioids, including prescription opioid pain relievers, heroin, or the synthetic opioid fentanyl. In particular, as the CDC's recent report has just shown, fentanyl and its analogs are becoming increasingly responsible for these overdose deaths.

Fentanyl is up to 50 times more powerful than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine. It is dangerous and potentially life-threatening to simply touch or accidentally inhale the white powdery substance. Sometimes, unbeknownst to the user, fentanyl is often mixed with heroin or other substances, or formed to resemble prescription opioid pills. Most illicit fentanyl comes to the United States from China and Mexico, delivered through the mail or express consignment carriers, or smuggled across the southwest border of the United States. The INTERDICT Act will help the United States better identify and stop these dangerous substances from landing in communities across America.

Now is the time to act. This holiday season too many seats at too many tables are empty due to the unrelenting flow of fentanyl into the United States. We must give our law enforcement personnel the tools necessary to stop this flow. We can do that, in part, by getting the INTERDICT Act to the President's desk this year. That is why PAARI strongly supports this important legislation which will give U.S. Customs and Border Protection the additional resources it needs to fight the flow of fentanyl and other deadly drugs into the United States.

Sincerely,

FREDERICK RYAN,

*Chief of Police, Arlington
Massachusetts,*

*PAARI Board of Directors Co-Chairman,
PAARI National Police Council Chairman.*

Mr. BROWN. I think it is pretty clear how important this is. This bill got, I believe, 2 or maybe 3 negative votes out of 400-some in the House of Representatives. There is no organization I know of that opposes it. I hear from people in my State consistently about how important this is, from police organizations to parents, to individual police officers and county sheriffs and all, and deputy sheriffs.

There is just no reason we shouldn't be able to do this before we go home for Christmas. There are a lot of things we should do before we go home for Christmas, including the Children's Health Insurance Program, but this is one we know we can do. There seems to be no substantive disagreement from any large number of groups or individuals that I can see, so I am hopeful we can move forward with this in the next few minutes.

Mr. MARKEY. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BROWN. Yes.

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I thank the Senator for yielding.

Can I just list the names of the organizations that support this bill so the police can interdict, stop the fentanyl from coming into our country?

It is the National Fraternal Order of Police, it is the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, it is the National Border Control Council, it is the Police Assisted Recovery Initiative, it is the National Sheriffs' Association, the National Tactical Officers Association, the National Association of Police Organizations, the National Narcotics Officers' Associations' Coalition, the Sergeants Benevolent Association, the American Legion, the International Union of Police Associations, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the Major County Sheriffs of America, and the Massachusetts Coalition of Police. So it is pretty much every single law enforcement agency at all levels in the country saying: Please give us this tool now so we can detect this incredible killer in our country.

Three former Commissioners of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, appointed by both Democratic and Republican Presidents, support the INTERDICT Act. President Trump's nominee to head the agency, Kevin McAleenan, testified that he supports getting more of these high-tech scanners into the hands of Customs and Border Patrol.

Despite working for months with Senate leadership to try and secure authorization for funding, we just can't seem to get this over the finish line so that in the new year they have these devices. The way it works is, you just put the device up next to a package, and it will tell you if it has got fentanyl or not. Right now, many law enforcement agencies will not even allow one of their police dogs to sniff

for fentanyl because it will kill the police dog. That is how dangerous fentanyl is, and that is why these electronic devices are so important. It ensures that we have minimized the exposure of our officers to these substances and, at the same time, dramatically increase the likelihood that we are going to identify the fentanyl in a package and, as a result, deter these people from China or from Mexico who bring it into our country and are killing us by the thousands.

At 42,000 deaths last year, it is now approximating the total number of deaths in the war in Vietnam throughout its entire history. That is just 1 year, 42,000 people—1 year. That is a terrorist attack of a magnitude on our own streets that is unimaginable.

With these devices, we don't completely solve the problem, but we put more weapons in the hands of our law enforcement officials, detection devices that can minimize the likelihood that these terrible people from China, from Mexico, principally, can bring this stuff into our country.

So this is a huge issue. It goes right to the heart of the seriousness of dealing with this issue. My only hope is, we have an ability to be able to move this thing forward in a way that lets the American people say: We understand the issues you want us to work on, and the opioid crisis is at the top of the list. It is indiscriminate. It affects potentially every family. No one is immune to addiction. No family is immune from addiction. It could hit any family at any time, and fentanyl is the ultimate killer.

I thank the Senator.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I thank Senator MARKEY and hope we can work things out with Senator JOHNSON on this issue.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. BROWN. Yesterday, Madam President, a bunch of Members of Congress, with healthcare paid for by taxpayers, went to the White House and celebrated a handout for corporations that sends jobs overseas—companies that shut down in Mansfield, in Zanesville, in Lima, and Toledo moved to Wuhan and Sheshan and Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Families here in America, at the same time—I am still incredulous about this. Families in this country, at the same time—in this State of Virginia, just a few miles from here—are getting letters in the mail saying their kids are about to be kicked off their health insurance through something that was bipartisan and never interrupted for 20 years since Chairman HATCH and Senator Rockefeller and Senator KENNEDY wrote this bill to create CHIP—and a number of us worked on it in the House of Representatives—because Congress hasn't done its job.

Think about that. Because Congress hasn't done its job, we are about to go

home for Christmas—most of us—and those who don't celebrate Christmas are about to go home for the holidays and celebrate the new year. My grandchildren are coming from Columbus, and another one is coming from the Virgin Islands with his father—our son and his daughter-in-law. We are going to go home, and our families have health insurance, but Members of Congress who get good health insurance paid for by taxpayers are willing to leave here and not reauthorize, not continue the Children's Health Insurance Program. To make it worse, several States, including Virginia—Ohio is in a little better position because there is a little more money left over to take care of this—but letters are going out in State after State after State to parents saying: Sorry, the health insurance for your children is going to expire. The health insurance for your children will no longer be there.

Imagine you are a parent, and you get this letter. You are just vaguely aware that Congress is fighting about something. You are vaguely aware of the hard-heartedness of a whole lot of people in this Congress. You are vaguely aware that a bunch of politicians—privileged, elected officials who make good salaries and make good benefits—are going to turn their backs on you. You don't really think much about that. All you know is, you take this piece of paper, tear open this envelope, and you start reading this letter, and you see, oh, my gosh, the insurance for my children.

Now, overwhelmingly, these parents are people who are working. They are earning \$8, \$10, \$12, \$15 an hour. They are not making enough that they can afford insurance for their families. They are not working at a job where insurance is provided as part of the compensation your employer is paying you. So that is why the Children's Health Insurance Program is so important.

A new report from the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families reports that 1.9 million children could lose coverage in January—1.9 million children. Almost all of them have a mother or a father who will open a letter and see that, oh, my gosh, the insurance for my daughter, for my son is about to expire. That is 1.9 million in January and another 1 million will lose insurance by the end of February.

Parents will panic, parents will be confused, and parents, to be sure, will have their Christmas ruined by this. Think about those families getting that letter. It should be a joyful time of year for families, spending time with family, enjoying the holidays. Imagine checking that mailbox and kind of thinking maybe this is a Christmas card and opening it and finding out it is that letter. Imagine telling your daughter: I am sorry, honey. Santa is not going to bring much this year. We don't make a lot of money—you know that—but we will not have any presents under the tree. Then you have to