

Vice President of the United States: Oh, Saddam Hussein is building weapons of mass destruction. There is a connection between Saddam Hussein and Iraq and the 9/11 perpetrators.

It was a lie. It was a lie. Mistakenly, Congress voted to approve the war based on false information.

So what I say today is that it is time for the Congress to accept its constitutional responsibility. I don't know how well we will do. Maybe we will screw it up as well. It is very possible. But that is what the Founding Fathers suggested, and I think they were right. We are closer to the people—the House and the Senate—than is the White House, this White House or any other White House.

So there are two issues today. Do we accept our constitutional responsibility to vote on matters of war? I would suggest that every Member of the Senate vote yes. Don't duck your responsibility. Don't abdicate your responsibility. Second of all, this war in Yemen, in my view, has been a humanitarian disaster as a result of Saudi intervention. But the most important vote is, do we actually have a vote on whether American troops are involved in the war in Yemen?

I hope very much we will vote against Senator CORKER's motion to table, and I hope that after we do that, we will vote for the resolution that says it is time for the United States to get out of Yemen.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JOHNSON). The Senator from Tennessee. Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, very briefly, I just want to set the record straight. The House of Representatives voted to say that the war in Yemen is not covered by the 2001–2002 AUMF, and I think this body would agree. They did not do as was just mentioned by the Senator from Vermont. As a matter of fact, they decided not to take up this measure that we are taking up today because they thought it was not a good measure to take up.

I don't want anybody in this body to think that the House has already supported this effort. The House not only didn't support it, they wouldn't take it up because they thought it was damaging to our country's foreign policy.

I hope that today people will join me in voting to table this motion and to let the committee do its work as it is supposed to do. Let's bring something to the floor that will actually have an outcome, and then let's have a debate down the road on the AUMF—the 2001 and 2002 AUMF—which I hope will be given floor time.

With that, I think all time has expired.

Mr. President, I move to table the Sanders motion to discharge S.J. Res. 54, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

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

The result was announced—yeas 55, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote 58 Leg.]

YEAS—55

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Reed
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Capito	Heitkamp	Rounds
Cassidy	Heller	Rubio
Cochran	Hoeven	Sasse
Coons	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Jones	Thune
Cotton	Kennedy	Tillis
Crapo	Lankford	Toomey
Cruz	Manchin	Whitehouse
Donnelly	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Young
Ernst	Murkowski	
Fischer	Nelson	

NAYS—44

Baldwin	Harris	Paul
Bennet	Hassan	Peters
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Lee	Tester
Collins	Markey	Udall
Daines	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Moran	Warren
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden
Gillibrand	Murray	

NOT VOTING—1

McCain

The motion was agreed to.

ALLOW STATES AND VICTIMS TO FIGHT ONLINE SEX TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, last night I came to the floor to talk about legislation we are debating in the Senate this week that has to do with combating human trafficking, an issue that every Senator in the Chamber cares about. Last night, I talked about some of the women and children who have been exploited online, their stories—some of the heartbreaking stories.

This opportunity we have before us is to pass legislation that addresses that very directly because we are seeing in this country, in this century, unbelievably, an increase in trafficking right now. The experts all say it is for one primary reason; that is, because the trafficking is moved online.

The ruthless efficiency of the internet, the dark side of the internet—Mr. President, you have been involved with this issue in our committee. As you know, we spent a couple of years coming to this point, an 18-month investigation of what is happening online,

why it is happening, and then coming up with a legislative solution. The reports of human trafficking to one of the major anti-trafficking groups in the country, called Polaris, through their hotline and through their text line, have increased 842 percent over the past 10 years. This is consistent across the board in talking to other experts. There is this increase. When they look at it, where they see it is happening is online. Victims have told me, have told you and other Members, this has now moved from the street to the smartphone, from the street corner to the internet.

According to National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, nearly 75 percent of the child trafficking reports it receives from the public involve one single website; that is, backpage. That is why we spend a lot of time looking into backpage, why this was happening, and how we could address it.

According to Shared Hope International—another advocacy group—the number is even higher than 75 percent. We researched this through a process that many in this body were involved with. CLAIRE MCCASKILL was the ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee On Investigations. We investigated that. I see she is on the floor now. She and I, along with our subcommittee, along with you, Mr. President, and other members of the full committee, looked into this issue. What we found was even more shocking than we expected. We knew people were being trafficked online by this website. We knew they had to be complicit with some of this. What we didn't know was they were actually taking ads and altering the ads, editing the ads to try to hide the fact that people were selling underaged girls online. As they put it, they were cleaning the ads for illegal transactions and then covering up the evidence of these crimes in order to increase their profits.

Last night, I talked about three brave mothers who shared the tragic stories of their daughters who were exploited and sold for sex on backpage.com. Their daughters were between the ages of 14 and 16 when they were trafficked. Kubiiki Pride was one of the women we talked about. She is also part of a documentary called “I am Jane Doe.” It tells the stories of her family and other families. It is a powerful, powerful presentation, and it is powerful in that you can feel their frustration, feel their pain. It is not easy to see, but it is important to see, and I recommend it. You can go on Netflix and find “I am Jane Doe.”

Unfortunately, for those mothers and countless others, backpage has gotten away with this. It is not because people haven't tried to sue them, prosecutors haven't tried to go after them; it is because the courts have consistently said they are shielded from prosecution, they are shielded from these lawsuits. They are shielded by a Federal law, one we passed in this Chamber 21 years ago.

It is called the Communications Decency Act. It was a well-intended law. In 1996, the focus was, when the internet was in its infancy, trying to ensure there could be freedom of the internet.

Ironically, part of the original intention of the Communications Decency Act was to protect children from indecent material on the internet by letting websites remove and block some of that explicit material. Now that same law is being used as a shield by online sex traffickers who promote and engage in this with immunity. This Federal law is being used by websites to get away with something that would be illegal, criminal if they were to do it on the street corner.

Congress did not intend this broad immunity, but numerous courts across the country have made it clear their hands are tied because of the illegal precedents that have been set the way the courts have interpreted this law. As the lawmaking branch of the Federal Government, it is up to us to fix this injustice. No one else can do it.

One of the Federal courts said this cannot be fixed by litigation; it has to be fixed by legislation. That is why America's district attorneys, 50 of the State attorneys general in this country, judges all over the country, and many others have called on Congress to amend the Communications Decency Act and fix this injustice.

In one of the most direct calls for congressional action yet, in August of last year, a Sacramento judge cited the broad Communications Decency Act in dismissing pimping charges against backpage.com. The court opinion stated: "If and until Congress sees fit to amend the immunity law, the broad reach of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act even applies to those alleged to support the exploitation of others by human trafficking."

This judge issued an invitation to Congress to act. Others have as well. Websites that knowingly sell vulnerable women and children for sex are profiting and getting away with sex trafficking because of a Federal law. It is up to Congress to do the right thing, to fix this loophole. That is why my co-author, RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, who is on the floor this evening, and I introduced the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, or SESTA, alongside a bipartisan group of four other original cosponsors: Senator JOHN MCCAIN, Senator CLAIRE MCCASKILL, Senator JOHN CORNYN, and Senator HEIDI HEITKAMP. Soon, others joined us. In that first day, we had 24 cosponsors, bipartisan. Soon, we had a majority of Republicans and majority of Democrats cosponsoring this legislation. I want to thank those five original cosponsors because they helped us put together legislation that was targeted, focused, and actually fixes the problem.

SESTA will provide justice for victims of online sex trafficking and hold accountable the websites that knowingly facilitate these crimes by making two very narrowly focused changes to

Federal law. First, it allows victims to get the justice they deserve by removing the Communications Decency Act's broad liability protections for a narrow set of bad actors, specifically for websites that knowingly facilitate sex trafficking crimes. Second, it will allow State prosecutors and State attorneys general to prosecute these websites that violate Federal trafficking laws.

SESTA says if you are violating sex trafficking laws and you are doing it knowingly, you are facilitating it, then you have to be held to account. That is common sense. This bill includes legislation from the House side that creates new criminal penalties. It creates a new Federal crime for websites that have the intent to promote or facilitate illegal prostitution.

All of these changes will help to hold bad actors accountable while doing nothing to impair the free internet. In fact, SESTA will protect websites that do not actively and knowingly engage in online sex trafficking. We do that by preserving the Communications Decency Act's Good Samaritan provision, which protects good actors who proactively block, and screen for, offensive material, thus shielding them from frivolous lawsuits.

SESTA's fair, commonsense approach is why this bill has an extraordinary coalition of support. National law enforcement organizations, including the Fraternal Order of Police, faith-based groups, the civil rights community, major businesses, even including a number of tech companies, support this legislation. Most importantly, anti-trafficking advocates and trafficking survivors are the ones who support SESTA. They are the ones we listened to when we drafted this legislation. They are the folks back in Ohio, back in Connecticut—back in our States—who came to us and talked to us about this issue. They are the ones we not just listened to but actually worked with to help draft something that would work to close this loophole.

This bill makes all the sense in the world, and it will do its part in helping to close this gap, in helping to deal, in this century, in this country with the amazing ability that people have to exploit someone online criminally and not be held liable.

I thank Leader MITCH MCCONNELL for his leadership, for his commitment to combat sex trafficking, and for putting this bill on the floor for a vote.

I thank Senator JOHN THUNE, who chairs the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, and BILL NELSON, who is the ranking member. They held a hearing on this bill and marked it up, and it addressed some of the concerns that had been expressed by the tech community.

Here in the Senate, we now have over 60 cosponsors. This has not been an issue of politics or partisanship. It has been an issue of the heart. It is about preventing exploitation. It is about providing justice. There are some in

this Chamber who will want to change this legislation over the next couple of days as we debate it.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague from Oregon, Senator RON WYDEN. I talked about him last night on the floor. I talked about the work he has done to combat human trafficking. I talked about the legislation I did with him to provide better data for sex trafficking, which was his legislation. He was also a leader in passing the Communications Decency Act, which we are amending through this legislation. I understand he is passionate about that bill that passed 21 years ago.

We took a very targeted approach here, which is why the Internet Association, which represents much of the tech community—not all but much of it—actually endorses our efforts. This is the Senate's immediate opportunity to help stop online sex trafficking while protecting a free and open internet. It is the right balance. It has already passed the House of Representatives. The White House has shown a commitment to it and is willing to sign the legislation. Now it is the Senate's turn to act.

So let me tell you where I stand. I stand with law enforcement officials all around the country and with prosecutors all around the country who have asked us to pass this legislation to give them the tools they need to stop this exploitation. I stand with Kubiiki Pride, whom I talked about earlier, Nacole S., Yvonne Ambrose, and the mothers across the country who have had their children exploited at the hands of online sex traffickers. I stand with the young women and children I have met in Dayton and Columbus and Akron and Toledo and Cincinnati and Cleveland—all over Ohio—who are sex trafficking survivors, who are victims who want justice.

I know that, together, we will all stand on the right side of history when the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act is voted on, has passed this Chamber, and eventually becomes law so as to immediately help provide justice for these victims. Justice cannot be seen, but its absence is felt. Those who have been trafficked online, who see the websites that have knowingly facilitated in this prosper and escape legal consequences, are the ones who have experienced real injustice. They have felt that injustice. We can right this wrong. Let's pass the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act to provide these victims the justice they deserve.

I notice again, as I mentioned earlier, the coauthor of this legislation—my colleague—is on the floor. He is a former Federal prosecutor. He has dealt with these issues both as a prosecutor and as a legislator. We are the cochairs and cofounders of the Caucus to End Human Trafficking, which we started 6 or 7 years ago. I thank him for his work on this important legislation.

I yield my time to Senator BLUMENTHAL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, at the very start, I am grateful, and I praise my cosponsor, Senator PORTMAN, who has helped to lead in the championing of this measure. He has really been steadfast in the face of a lot of challenges. It was a difficult bill to draft and then to redraft and change again in response to suggestions that we received from friends and adversaries, but Senator PORTMAN has been really stalwart throughout it.

I join him in thanking our partners, Senator MCCASKILL, Senator MCCAIN, Senator HEITKAMP, Senator CORNYN, and, of course, Senator THUNE, who is the chairman of the committee, and Ranking Member NELSON.

This road began for me more than 10 years ago when I was the State attorney general in Connecticut, and I wanted to pursue legal remedies against the websites. Back then, it was Craigslist or MySpace that promoted sex trafficking and prostitution as well as pornography. My staff informed me that there was a provision of Federal law—section 230 of the Communications Decency Act—that would stop me in my tracks. Indeed, it has stopped others, most recently some of the survivors of sex trafficking who were told by a Federal court of appeals, in effect, that what happened to you is outrageous, and there should be a remedy for you, but section 230 of the Communications Decency Act blocks your day in court. It closes the courthouse doors to you in your seeking a legal remedy.

Along the way, there were many who said to Senator PORTMAN and to me that we could never pass this legislation because it would hold trafficking websites accountable. They said the opponents of this change were too powerful, too big, too entrenched. They said the victims and survivors were too powerless, too invisible.

We have met them. We know their stories. They are heartbreaking. They are children—some younger than the pages in this Chamber today—who have endured torture that is unspeakable and unthinkable for anyone of any age, and they deserve their day in court, rights, and remedies—real remedies that make the rights real.

So I thank Senator PORTMAN, and I thank, as he has also done, those survivors who have come forward and been the faces and voices of our cause. Their courage and strength and that of their family members have enabled us to reach this point.

I emphasize that this measure is very carefully and narrowly written to address a specific harm, and I want to take a couple of minutes to correct any misunderstanding that there may be in this Chamber.

First, some of the legislation's critics have claimed it will impose liability on the so-called Good Samaritan. In reality, this bill explicitly preserves subsection 230(c)(2)(A) of the Communications Decency Act, commonly called

the Good Samaritan provision. This provision ensures that websites cannot be held liable on account of actions taken in good faith to restrict objectionable material. SESTA is crystal clear on this point. A website operator's good deeds cannot be used against him.

This measure is also technology neutral. It imposes no requirement that website operators use a particular technology to screen their sites for objectionable content. They are free to use whatever technology they wish. That is why the Internet Association and its member companies support this legislation. They know that if technology companies work to prevent human trafficking and not to profit from it, they have nothing to fear from this measure.

I understand that an amendment has been offered to restate SESTA's Good Samaritan provision. Even if the amendment only protected Good Samaritans, it would be unnecessary and potentially confusing to the courts. I emphasize that point. It would obfuscate and confuse the good intent of the Good Samaritan provision. It would also derail this widely popular legislation by sending it back to the House, where special interests will have another chance to kill it. Unfortunately, this proposed amendment—perhaps unintentionally—would not simply protect Good Samaritans; it would also protect websites that operate in bad faith. It would also protect websites that identify sex trafficking ads and then leave them up in order to continue profiting from them.

I will briefly talk about one other amendment that has been offered—again, while being well-intentioned—that threatens to derail this legislation.

The amendment would provide additional money to Attorney General Sessions to investigate and prosecute websites that criminally facilitate human trafficking. I believe law enforcement ought to have additional resources. I firmly support more funding to investigate and prosecute this criminal activity, but this bill is not the means by which to do it.

In fact, law enforcement and the community against human trafficking are strongly against these amendments. Let me repeat. These law enforcement groups include the Fraternal Order of Police, the Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies, the FBI Agents Association, and I could go down the list. In fact, there is no need to.

I ask unanimous consent that the letters from these groups 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, March 19, 2017.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
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 advise you of our strong support for H.R. 1865, the "Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act," which includes language from S. 1693, the "Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act," which the FOP also supports.

This legislation will allow law enforcement to investigate and prosecute individuals and businesses that advertise or facilitate sex trafficking more effectively. The bill will create a new Federal offense prohibiting the use or operation of an in-state facility, like a website, that promotes or facilitates illegal prostitution.

The FOP is opposed to the two pending amendments because they may have the unintended consequence of derailing this important legislation. Amendments to this bill will only continue to deprive the survivors and victims of sex trafficking of getting justice.

On behalf of the more than 335,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, we urge you both to pass this legislation without any amendments on the Senate floor. If we can be of any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or my Senior Advisor, Jim Pasco, in my Washington office.

Sincerely,

CHUCK CANTERBURY,
National President.

MARCH 19, 2018.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. CHUCK SCHUMER,
Democratic Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MAJORITY LEADER MCCONNELL AND DEMOCRATIC LEADER SCHUMER: We, the undersigned organizations, representing prosecutors, chiefs of police, sheriffs, rank and file officers and chief executives of state investigative agencies at the federal, state, and local level, write to urge a clean vote this week in the Senate on the House-passed POSTA/SESTA package so that victims and federal and state law enforcement can better seek to hold all responsible parties accountable for the facilitation of sex trafficking. At the same time, we urge you to reject the proposed amendment that would create a shield for companies vaguely attempting to filter content on their websites and the proposed amendment that would provide additional funding through the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute website operators that criminally facilitate sex trafficking. Simply put, the amendment to create a liability shield is bad public policy and the funding amendment is a poison pill that is dead on arrival if sent back to the House.

As membership organizations charged with protecting our communities, we can't afford to sacrifice the opportunity to pass good public policy to hold facilitators of sex trafficking accountable. Through extensive discussions over the past couple of years, a delicate balance has been struck among a wide variety of stakeholders to achieve the legislation pending before the Senate. The House passed version, which included language from the Senate SESTA version, was a carefully crafted piece of legislation to help state and local law enforcement bring more of these sex trafficking cases forward and we

encourage you to provide us with the tools needed to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies;

FBI Agents Association;

Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association;

International Association of Chiefs of Police;

Major Cities Chiefs Association;

Major County Sheriffs of America;

National Association of Police Organizations;

National District Attorneys Association;

National Fusion Center Association;

National Sheriffs' Association.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, my colleagues should take heed of what these groups are saying because they see through the potentially derailling impact of these amendments.

I close by again thanking my friend and partner, Senator PORTMAN, as well as Senator MCCASKILL, Senator HEITKAMP, Senator CORNYN, and Senator MCCAIN.

This measure is truly bipartisan, as it should be. There is nothing partisan about sex trafficking. There is nothing excusable or tolerable about it. I hope the Senate will do its job tomorrow and send this legislation to the President's desk.

I yield the floor to my partner, Senator PORTMAN, with my thanks.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I know there are other Members who are interested in speaking.

Let me just say, Senator BLUMENTHAL's role as a prosecutor has informed him; therefore, the legislation is better for it.

We just heard what Senator BLUMENTHAL said. He understands this bill inside and out and the fact that there are well-meaning amendments that are being offered that would derail this legislation, which is something we want to avoid. We want to get this to the President's desk for his signature and begin to save people.

I notice my other colleague, Senator MCCASKILL, whom I mentioned earlier a couple of times, is on the floor. She was the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee that investigated this issue of looking at the websites and that came up with not just how it was happening and why it was happening but a legislative response.

I yield a few minutes to Senator MCCASKILL.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I thank Senator PORTMAN, Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator WHITEHOUSE, and my other colleagues for allowing me to jump in here for a couple of minutes.

This body—this entire body—is really responsible for where we are right now because it was during the investigation package that we realized that section 230 was being used as a shield for the bad guys. All of the attorneys general around the country and various law enforcement agencies and individuals who were trying to sue backpage were met every time with a 230 defense. They were not even able to penetrate

to get the documents from backpage in order to learn about what backpage was really up to. It was an investigation by which backpage thought it would be able to win again in court and deny us our opportunity to look at the documents and to look at the underlying evidence that one should always look at in an investigation.

Frankly, our getting the contempt-of-the-Senate resolution through this body almost unanimously—I think it was unanimously, wasn't it, I ask Senator PORTMAN?

Mr. PORTMAN. Yes.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. And then our going all the way to the Supreme Court and winning was finally the first time backpage had to turn over the dirty evidence of its knowingly facilitating sex trafficking on its page. That is why this language is “knowingly facilitate”—just to make sure that in going forward, no bad guys can hide behind section 230.

The other part of this bill that, I think, is very important and that, I think, a lot of people forget—and with all due respect to my friends who are in this Chamber who were U.S. attorneys—is that over 90 percent of the crime that is prosecuted in this country is prosecuted by local prosecutors, State prosecutors, who are called prosecutors or district attorneys, depending on the State's term that is used. They have been handcuffed in terms of being able to bring these kinds of cases. This legislation not only opens up the courthouse doors to victims who have been victimized by this but also so that the full force of American law enforcement can be brought to bear on this problem, not just the limited jurisdiction that was available around the problem of sex trafficking.

This is so important to getting to the bottom of it because many U.S. attorneys don't have the time, and, frankly, many attorneys general don't have the time or the jurisdiction to get after crime, but the local prosecutors don't get to decide which cases to go after. If there is a 9-1-1 call, they have it. The Feds can come in later and say: We have it, and we are going to take it. But they are the ones who day after day are in the trenches of sex crimes, and they are the ones who now have the ability to go after these cases in a way that will be very meaningful.

I am proud of the bipartisan nature of this. I am proud of the partnership we have, Senator PORTMAN, on the Subcommittee on Investigations. I know we will get a big vote on this. I think people see through these amendments as ways to slow this bill down or possibly kill it, and I hope we will all can join together and take this to the finish line tomorrow.

I thank my colleagues for giving me a few minutes.

Mr. PORTMAN. I thank Senator MCCASKILL, Senator BLUMENTHAL, and the other Members who came to speak. We will continue this dialogue tomorrow on the floor before passage.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Senator PORTMAN and Senator BLUMENTHAL for their work on this. Senator PORTMAN and I have spent untold hours, and he has been a leader on this. I thank him for his leadership, in Toledo and Cincinnati, but especially in Toledo, where the sheriff, the community, Celia Williamson, and so many others have been so important in combating this terrible affliction in our society. I thank them.

WALL STREET AND AMERICAN WORKERS

Mr. President, last week, the House passed another giveaway to Wall Street, siding with special interests and rolling back accountability on some of the biggest banks at the expense of taxpayers. It comes on the heels of last year's tax giveaway that will benefit those same megabanks. This Congress bends over backward to help Wall Street while working families continue to struggle.

It is not just that we are helping Wall Street with tax breaks, we are helping Wall Street with rolling back regulations. Let me outline what exactly all that means.

In a series over several months, I am laying out the case for how Wall Street undermines America's workers and some of the changes we need to make in this country to grow our middle class and make work pay off.

Remember, one of the points I made was that American Airlines announced that they were going to increase workers' wages, as did Chipotle, and Wall Street hit them with a lower stock price as a result.

In each installment of this series, we have talked about these issues. I want to talk specifically this time about what Wall Street's war on workers does to employment. You can follow each installment on my medium page at www.medium.com/@SenatorBrown.

Last time, I talked about workers' paychecks. Today, I want to talk about layoffs.

Wall Street's singular focus on padding their own pockets is bad enough, but worse, it comes at the direct expense of American workers. Corporations focus almost exclusively on their quarterly performance on the stock market. That is how a CEO's performance is evaluated. They are compensated in large part with company shares. They do better when their stock price goes up. They do things to make their stock price go up, and then they do even better because they are compensated in large part with company shares.

Wall Street analysts like it when corporations minimize their cost to boost their short-term profits; hence the stock price goes up even when the company is already profitable, and that leads directly to layoffs. Corporations lay off workers to show they are serious about cutting expenses, and their stock prices often rise as a result. Wall

Street's war on workers means not only smaller paychecks but also pink slips for those workers.

How did we get to a point where stock prices are more important than workers? It didn't happen overnight.

I was talking with Senator WHITEHOUSE about this, and whether it is Cranston, RI, or Mansfield, OH, companies used to consider their employees, their customers, and even the people in the town they did business in, as stakeholders. They cared about their community, they cared about their workers, and they cared about their customers. They felt a duty to fulfill obligations to a broader community, not just their own corporate board members and their own corporate executives.

I grew up in Mansfield, OH, a city of about 50,000 in North Central Ohio halfway between our State's two largest cities, Cleveland and Columbus. I remember that there were so many companies in our town. I didn't know those company presidents—they were the big people in town, and I was a kid—but I do remember what those companies did. They sponsored Little League teams. They were involved in local Kiwanis clubs. They cared about workers, and they cared about the community. They cared about their customers. They weren't always interested in shareholders; they were interested in stakeholders, in all of us as a community. All the workers, all the customers, and all of the community were stakeholders. But now the focus has narrowed to just shareholders.

As Wall Street's influence has grown, corporate priorities have shifted from shareholders kind of writ large, and the way success is measured has changed fundamentally to stockholders. Businesses have become beholden to those quarterly earnings reports. They have left employees, communities, and customers behind in many ways. They do everything possible, including laying off workers, to make sure their balance sheets and profit margins look as good as they can—the impact on the workers and the long-term health of the company be damned.

In the 1980s, investors began to pursue hostile takeovers of companies that failed to maximize profits. Executives at other companies began to fear takeovers if they didn't keep profits and stock prices high. The pay packages of top management became greater and greater and became more and more closely tied to short-term stock performance.

Wall Street's and Main Street's interests began to diverge. Folks in the corporate boardroom were no longer forced to consider what was in the long-term interests of their workers and of their small-time investors. For top corporate executives, workers became nothing more than a line item in the budget, a cost to be minimized.

By the 1990s, even profitable companies started laying off workers to boost profits even further. Look at what hap-

pened to Xerox, an iconic American company that had never had a major layoff in its history. In 1993, the company announced plans to cut 10,000 workers despite being profitable. The company was doing fine. It wasn't a case of an industry moving south, facing an agonizing decision with bad options, but the CEO justified the job cuts as necessary "to compete effectively" and to have a "lean and flexible organization." He also said he expected to see higher profits because of the layoffs the following year.

Xerox wasn't alone. In the first 10 months of 1998, when the economy was booming, corporations laid off over half a million U.S. workers—200,000 more than were laid off the year before. This is the definition of profits before people, and things have gotten worse and worse since the late 1990s.

In 2015, Sysco announced a 3-year plan that included reducing its workforce—corporate-speak for laying off workers. It might have made sense if the company had experienced a year of sluggish sales, but guess what—the opposite was true. Their sales had increased. They generated \$1 billion in cash flow, and they were able to pay \$700 million in dividends to the company shareholders. If the large dividend payout the year before wasn't generous enough, the CEO said that one of the goals of the 3-year plan and its layoffs was to "maximize shareholder returns"—not stakeholders, not employees, not the communities, not the customers, but shareholder returns.

The next year, 2016, Tyson Foods announced layoffs despite having a good quarter in beef sales. The following year, the company's president touted "exceptional financial results." What was the reason for those results? Cost-cutting. It is always cost-cutting—more corporate-speak for laying off workers. Do you know what else he cited as the company's good health? Not great sales, not new products or investments in more workers, but the ability of the company to buy back billions of dollars of its own stock. So an accounting trick that funnels money to executives is what the company cited as a measure of its success. Buying back means executive compensation goes up. That is the key to what it was doing with cost-cutting. The company buys up shares of its own stock to drive up the price and increase the value for shareholders and the compensation for executives whose pay is tied to stock performance. Sounds familiar.

It is no coincidence that since the biggest corporations reaped their tax windfalls in September, they have announced billions of dollars in buybacks. It is always about the executives—about the executives' tax cuts, about the executives' compensation, about the executives' buybacks. Again and again, we see Wall Street consider workers as simply a cost to be cut but executive pay as essential to a company.

Last year, Humana announced that it was eliminating 2,700 jobs despite \$13

billion in revenue. In the same call that the CEO announced the layoffs, he also announced an increase in executive pay. Workers lose their jobs to pay for more money for corporate executives. Sound familiar again and again and again? And the cherry on top? A month later, Humana announced \$3 billion in stock buybacks. Again, what is that about? Higher executive compensation.

Of course, cost-cutting measures typically include workers losing their jobs. Cost-cutting measures almost never include pay cuts for corporate executives. In each of these examples, the company cited cost cuts that were so necessary, they had to fire workers, upend thousands of employees. I wonder how many of those executives and how many of those corporate leaders actually brought some of those workers into their offices and looked them in the eye and told them they were laying them off. My guess is that they had a much lower paid employee make that announcement and face the media and, more importantly, face the employees who lost their jobs.

How many of these executives actually listened to the story of an employee who loses her job, loses her house, whose total life is upended? How many of them ever listened to the stories of what happened to their workers who got fired? The company cited cost cuts that were so necessary, they had to fire those workers.

The shortsighted approach to running a company may work for top executives who can squeeze as much value out of the company in the short term without considering the business's long-term value. It is not just bad for the employees and communities, it is usually bad for the long-term health of the company. Making short-term decisions pays off if you are already well paid, but it doesn't work for those employees. Mainstream investors and workers only make a profit when a company's stock value continues to rise over time, but the corporate executives are no longer forced to consider what is in the long-term interest of workers and small-time investors. As long as Wall Street's analysis of one-size-fits-all measure of corporate success continues to be cost-cutting, workers are at constant risk of losing their jobs. As long as CEOs get paid based on stock prices instead of the company's long-term success, workers will keep getting fired from hostile companies.

We need to break this cycle of greed between Wall Street and CEOs. In the end, companies can't be profitable without good workers. We need policies that restructure our economy so workers share in the profits they create and Wall Street doesn't determine when workers keep their jobs or how much is in their paycheck.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, we are more aware than ever of the accelerating pace of climate change and of the serious threat that rising seas, higher temperatures, and changing weather poses. I suppose I don't need to lecture the Presiding Officer from Florida on the threat of rising seas.

The real-time effects of climate change are becoming clearer and clearer every year. Here is a telling example unfolding right now in the Arctic.

In this graphic, we see the mean area of Arctic sea ice over the last several decades. The maximum yearly extent of the ice, which occurs around this time of year, continues to shrink each decade.

This line tracks the sea ice in the Arctic in millions of square kilometers, running from February through to May. This is the track of the sea ice extent during the 1980s. If you take all the years in the 1980s and you average them together and you run through the calendar, it is like a clock going this way through these months. You would see the sea ice growing and fading away as spring came to the Arctic.

That is where the ice was when averaging the 1980s. This green line is the exact same thing; it is just for the 1990s. So we can see how much sea ice has been lost averaged decade over decade.

The blue line here is for 2000. Once again, we see a loss of sea ice—a considerable loss from the levels back as recently as the 1980s.

The purple line right here is the average of the years in this decade so far, from 2010 to 2017—that is the average of those 7 years. This dot is the high, the maximum ice extent recorded in 2016. This lower dot is the lower high of the ice recorded in 2017. So you can see that even though this is the average, the trend remains downward.

This red line is what we have measured so far in 2018. Here we are right now in March of 2018, and it is well below. Decade after decade, we see the ice melting away.

As these facts and so many others relentlessly pile up, it has become harder and harder for the fossil fuel industry and the web of front groups and the Trump administration officials who do its bidding to claim that there is nothing to see here: Folks, move along; it is all just a big hoax.

The University of Alaska is our closest university to the Arctic. The University of Alaska actually has a climate science center where they are studying and teaching the science of climate change. The University of Alaska also actually has the Ocean Acidification Research Center. As I have pointed out in these speeches over the years, one of the most obvious and pernicious consequences of climate change is that when you ramp the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere, the oceans, which cover 70 percent of the surface of the world, absorb not only

excess heat, but they actually chemically absorb the carbon dioxide. When that happens, they become more acidic. In the wee hours of a morning months and months ago, I actually did the experiment right here, where I blew the carbon dioxide from my breath through an aquarium bubbler into a glass of water that had pH-sensitive dye in it, and you could see, in the moment that it took for me to exhale that carbon-dioxide-rich breath through the water, how the color changed, and you could measure it against the color chart for pH and see how just that one breath changed the acidity of the water and made it more acid.

That is happening across the planet, and it affects creatures like terrapods, which are a very important species for salmon, which is, in turn, a very important industry for Alaska. That is why Alaska has the Ocean Acidification Research Center—some hoax.

For this, my 201st “Time to Wake Up” speech, I wish to get into some of the reasons why I remain optimistic even in the face of relentless attacks on the environment, both from the fossil fuel industry and from the Trump administration. There are success stories, including bipartisan wins in Congress and major advances outside of Congress. We are still making progress on climate and energy policy, even under political siege by the fossil fuel industry.

First, there is an explosion in renewable energy. In 2017, renewables provided nearly 20 percent of electricity generation in the United States. Wind and solar energy costs fell, and utilities across the country, even in red States, invested heavily. The renewable energy industry in America hit 3.3 million jobs—more than all fossil fuel jobs combined. The private sector is leading renewables purchases. One example is AT&T. AT&T recently signed onto the World Wildlife Fund's Corporate Renewable Energy Buyers' Principles, a criteria to help energy producers meet the needs of large customers like AT&T. As part of that commitment with the World Wildlife Fund, AT&T has signed two agreements with NextEra Energy for wind power—220 megawatts from an Oklahoma wind farm and 300 megawatts from a Texas wind farm. It is one of the largest corporate renewable energy purchases in history. I congratulate my Texas and Oklahoma colleagues for these new, home-State, renewable energy jobs, and I congratulate AT&T for its foresight and leadership.

Another business breakthrough came when the massive asset manager BlackRock helped break Exxon's and Occidental Petroleum's resistance and forced through shareholder resolutions requiring those oil producers to report their climate risk to their shareholders, to their investors. I, for one, don't think those shareholders are yet getting the full story.

The multinational insurance firm, AXA, announced that it would divest

from its tar sands holdings and it would stop providing insurance for pipelines that transport tar sands oil.

Credit rating agency Moody's announced that it will consider climate risk in rating coastal communities' municipal bonds. So our coastal municipalities in Rhode Island, the Presiding Officer's coastal communities in Florida, and coastal communities across the country are now going to have to take into account the climate risk, what infrastructure and what hazards they face from sea level rise and increased storm activity, and all of the things we associate with climate change. It is going to be part of how the rating agencies value their municipal bonds. That is going to change behavior, and it doesn't matter whether you are a red State or a blue State.

Companies like Microsoft and Unilever have baked into their own internal accounting their own internal carbon prices to help them reduce the carbon intensity of their operations. And, of course, virtually every Republican who has thought the climate change problem through to a solution has come to a price on carbon as being the market-based solution to that problem.

When the President announced that he would withdraw the United States from the historic Paris Agreement, leaving us as the pariah nation—the only one in the world to reject this global pledge—many American companies pledged that, as to that Paris Agreement, they are still in.

The corruption of the Trump administration by fossil fuel interests has not affected many State and local officials. In Colorado, for instance, the Colorado State Public Utility Commission is working with Xcel Energy to build out a cleaner energy mix and retire older fossil fuel units. Specifically, Colorado is looking to retire 660 megawatts of coal-fired generation—close it down—and replace it with renewables. Their recent request for bids brought a flood of new renewable energy proposals at costs that came in beating out existing coal and natural gas facilities. New-built renewables on price beat out existing fossil fuel. The market is speaking, and it is saying that fossil fuel, even with all its scandalous and well-defended subsidies, can't compete. Fossil can't compete.

On the Paris Agreement, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Virginia, Washington State and—I am proud to say—Rhode Island all declared that they, too, are still in. They will meet their goals. Alaska announced that it would meet its Paris Agreement goals. What is more, California and Washington State have combined with Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico in a plan to put a price on carbon that would reach up and down virtually the entire Pacific coast of the Americas—from Canada all the way down through Chile.

One problem for the fossil fuel folks' political influence, which is so deadly

effective here in Congress, is that it doesn't do so well in government agencies where the rule of law, not politics, prevails. So the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, a Federal administrative agency bound by rule of law, more or less blew off a preposterous proposal by fossil fuel flunkies at the Department of Energy to subsidize coal even more. Instead, FERC recently finalized a rule for energy storage in America's electric grids. This will not only expand energy storage, but it will also accelerate renewables like wind and solar. A recent study predicted that the rule could spur—hold on—50,000 megawatts of additional energy storage across the United States, enough to power roughly 35 million homes. This estimate could turn out to be conservative, if renewables prices keep heading in their current trajectories. That FERC rule, by the way, was unanimous and bipartisan.

FERC oversees the system operators, like ISO-New England, which are steadily improving the role of renewables in regional markets, removing the obstacles that had kept renewables from competing fairly in capacity auctions and dispatch decisions. With wind power being such a large part of Iowa's energy mix, for example, its midwestern ISO figured out the algorithms to treat wind as reliable, baseload power. FERC's storage rule will give these system operators a new avenue for further progress on clean, renewable energy.

Believe it or not, even Congress has acted. Just last month, Congress passed a bipartisan budget agreement that included legislation I cosponsored with Senators HETTKAMP, CAPITO, and BARRASSO to spur investment and innovation in next-generation carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies. Our bill attracted what I would call an unlikely coalition of energy, industrial, agricultural, and technology companies, as well as environment and labor groups.

This bill puts a positive price on carbon reduction through a tax credit for projects that capture and utilize or store carbon dioxide emissions. Without that price signal, there was little incentive to innovate how to turn carbon pollution from powerplants and industrial facilities into something safe or even useful. The bill even incentivizes technologies to pull carbon pollution directly from the atmosphere. The key is that Congress, for the first time, put a dollar value on reducing carbon pollution.

The Senate also just passed a nuclear innovation bill written by Senator CRAPO and me to increase collaboration between private industry, universities, and national laboratories in advanced nuclear technologies. Our bill was also cosponsored by Senators BOOKER, MURKOWSKI, RISCH, HATCH, and DURBIN. It would put private innovators together with our National Labs, with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and with the Energy De-

partment—all working together on safe, new nuclear technologies.

My goal here is not only to help bring new carbon-free technologies forward, ultimately to a carbon-free power grid, but also to explore technologies that just may allow us to turn our present hazardous nuclear waste stockpiles to productive use—to generate clean energy, to move those waste stockpiles from the liability to the asset column on our Nation's books. What an achievement that would be.

Although Congress may be blockaded still by fossil fuel interests, it is nevertheless the law of the land that administrative agencies must take into account the social cost of carbon—the cost that fossil fuels carbon pollution imposes on society—in making energy-related decisions. That test will remain, and lawsuits are slowly closing in on the moment of discovery, when lawyers finally get access to the fossil fuel industry's files, and decades of lies, denial, and political manipulation are exposed for all to see.

The well-funded climate denial machine, with its front groups and trick-pony scientists and political muscle operation, can only keep the denial castle propped up for so long. But until that battlement of lies collapses—and it will—until it collapses, nevertheless, progress still continues all around us.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we are quickly turning to the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act legislation, coupled with the legislation that has come over from the House of Representatives, and I hope we will get a big bipartisan vote in support of that legislation when it is voted on, probably tomorrow.

Let me just say that for more than two decades, the commercial internet has been an undeniable force for good. It has delivered economic opportunity to people who would not otherwise have had it. It has empowered marginalized citizens around the world to fight back against oppressors. It has expanded educational opportunities and made news and information more accessible, and more. But like any tool, the internet can be used for evil as well as good, and right now, certain corners of the internet are being exploited to facilitate sex trafficking, including the widespread trafficking of children.

Each year, thousands of children are sexually trafficked within the United States. That is right. Thousands of children are trafficked each year in the United States—not in some faraway country but right here at home in our communities. More and more every day, this trafficking is being facilitated via the internet. Three out of four children who have been sexually trafficked in this country have been trafficked online.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported an 846-per-

cent increase in reports of suspected child sex trafficking from 2010 to 2015. The increase, the national center reports, is “directly correlated to the increased use of the internet to sell children for sex.”

Obviously, dedicated prosecutors and law enforcement around the country are working every day to combat the proliferation of sex trafficking on the internet, but some of their efforts have been stymied by a provision of a 1996 law called the Communications Decency Act. The provision in question—section 230—was meant to protect websites from being held accountable for material people create and post on their sites. It is thanks in part to this provision that such popular sites as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have been able to flourish. But certain websites have used this provision to defend themselves in court cases dealing with criminal activity that they have knowingly allowed or participated in—specifically, sex trafficking.

Needless to say, Congress never intended this provision to be used to protect websites that knowingly and deliberately facilitate trafficking, but courts have generally held that this provision does not permit them to hold websites accountable for knowingly facilitating sex trafficking.

Courts have also made clear that if Congress wants to ensure that these trafficking accomplices can be prosecuted, it needs to provide some more clarity on this provision. That is what we are here to do today.

Senator ROB PORTMAN of Ohio has been a leading voice in the Senate in the fight against human trafficking, and the legislation before us today includes his legislation, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, which will prevent section 230 from being used as a defense by those who are knowingly cooperating with sex traffickers. Under this Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, State law enforcement officials will be able to prosecute websites that knowingly assist in or facilitate sex trafficking, and victims will be allowed to sue websites that violate the Federal sex trafficking statute. State attorneys general will now also be allowed to file civil suits against websites that knowingly facilitate trafficking.

The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act is an outstanding bill and a great credit to Senator PORTMAN and the others he worked with to get it considered here on the Senate floor. It addresses a hole in our laws that is allowing sex traffickers to exploit the internet to facilitate their trafficking, but it ensures that only bad actors are targeted, and it maintains the key freedoms that have allowed the internet to flourish. Under this legislation, websites can only be prosecuted if they knowingly facilitate or support trafficking.

This bill is strongly supported by Members of both parties. In fact, 67 out of the 100 U.S. Senators are cosponsors of this bill. This bill is supported by

the White House. It is supported by law enforcement organizations. It is supported by organizations that fight sex trafficking. It is supported by faith-based organizations. It is also supported by a number of major technology companies. I was proud to help facilitate conversations with a number of technology companies that resulted in solid support for this bill among members of the technology community.

The process of getting this bill to the Senate floor today has been characterized by a wonderful degree of bipartisanship. I am hoping that continues as we debate this bill over the next couple of days, and I encourage my colleagues to reject any attempts to slow this bill down with amendments. We have a remarkable degree of consensus on the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, both within and without Congress, and we should not disturb this momentum. We need to get this bill over the finish line. Every day that we wait for this bill to be enacted into law is another day in which websites in the dark corners of the internet can facilitate the heinous practice of sexually exploiting vulnerable human beings.

During the Commerce Committee hearing that I chaired on this bill, we heard testimony from Yvonne Ambrose, whose daughter, Desiree Robinson, was sexually trafficked repeatedly before being murdered. Desiree was just 16, a bright and loving girl who dreamed of becoming a doctor in the Air Force. Instead, she was raped and murdered by a man twice her age who had sought her for sex after seeing her advertised on an internet site.

Every day across this country, there is another Desiree being trafficked. Some of these children are not yet teenagers. They should be going to basketball games and birthday parties. Instead, they are being taken to homes and hotels and being violated by strangers. Some, like Desiree, will die there.

Fighting trafficking has to be a priority for all of us.

I am proud to have helped draft two bills that became law earlier this year to address human trafficking in commercial vehicles. But while we have passed some good legislation over the past few years, there is a lot more work that needs to be done. There are many more Desirees out there in danger, and we have an obligation to do everything we can to protect them.

The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act will strike an important blow against this new wave of traffickers exploiting the internet to sell children, and the bill it is now part of, a bill that we are considering today—the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act—will further boost SESTA's impact by establishing new criminal penalties for facilitating sex trafficking.

I urge my colleagues to pass this bill and to get it to the President as soon as possible. There are a lot of children out there who are waiting for our help.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 735, 736, 737, 738, and 739.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The bill clerk read the nominations of William M. McSwain, of Pennsylvania, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania for the term of four years; Matthew D. Harris, of Utah, to be United States Marshal for the District of Utah for the term of four years; Johnny Lee Kuhlman, of Oklahoma, to be United States Marshal for the Western District of Oklahoma for the term of four years; Joseph D. McClain, of Indiana, to be United States Marshal for the Southern District of Indiana for the term of four years; and David A. Weaver, of Colorado, to be United States Marshal for the District of Colorado for the term of four years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the McSwain, Harris, Kuhlman, McClain, and Weaver nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a pe-

riod of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH AND TRAFFICKING PREVENTION ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, this week I joined my colleague, the senior Senator from Vermont, Mr. LEAHY, in introducing the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act. This bill would update and reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, which have provided lifesaving services and housing for America's homeless youth for more than 40 years.

Homelessness is affecting youth in unprecedented numbers. According to a recent study by Voices of Youth Count, an initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, approximately 4.2 million young people experience homelessness in the United States each year. Some of these youth may stay away from home for only 1 or 2 nights, and others have been living on the streets for years. Approximately 73 percent experienced a homelessness episode lasting more than 1 month. The study also found that homelessness is as prevalent in rural communities as it is in urban communities.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act would reauthorize and strengthen the programs that help homeless youth meet their immediate needs, and secure long-term residential services for those who, sadly, cannot be safely reunified with family. Three programs—the Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program, and Street Outreach Program—help community-based organizations reach these young people when they need the most support. These programs help runaway and homeless youth avoid the juvenile justice system, and early intervention helps these young people escape victimization.

As chairman of the Senate Housing Appropriations Subcommittee, working to end the scourge of homelessness—in both youth and adults—has been one of my top priorities. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, there has been a 27-percent drop in chronic homelessness since 2007. We must build on this success so that homeless youth have opportunities to succeed just as other youth. This bill is an important step in that direction.

The RHYA programs have produced powerful success stories. In 2015, the Housing Appropriations subcommittee held a hearing during which Brittany Dixon, a former homeless youth from Auburn, ME, testified about her personal experience as a homeless youth. After becoming homeless at age 18, she connected with New Beginnings, a service provider in Lewiston, ME, where