

terrific public servants—Federal employees, including many dedicated employees of the EPA. You can listen to them, but you can read about accounts in many of the publications we have seen about the incredibly low morale at the EPA.

Leadership starts at the top, and Scott Pruitt has taken an agency with strong morale and led it down the tubes. I guess it is not surprising, since he has been seeking to cut the EPA team, the professionals there, by roughly 20 percent. I should say, he is talking about cutting those folks who are working every day on behalf of the American people at the same time he is increasing the number of political appointees at the EPA—people who really do nothing more than the politics of the Administrator. So he is increasing the number of high-paid political appointees while proposing to cut, by 20 percent, the EPA workforce that looks out for the American people.

Under his directorship, already 700 employees have left the Agency either because they found it a hostile place to work or were actually forced out. So I do find it ironic that the Agency that is supposed to protect the country from toxic pollution has created a toxic environment under its own roof.

Beyond my concerns about how he actually manages his staff, concerns about undermining protections for the Chesapeake Bay and other environmental efforts, we have seen a total disregard for basic public ethics from the current Administrator. His conduct is not appropriate for a public official and has violated the public trust time and again. It seems every day now, when you open a newspaper or look online, you can find another example of the current Administrator abusing the public trust.

We have to ask ourselves whether Andrew Wheeler is going to be someone at the EPA who addresses those serious problems we have with the current Administrator. How will he help stabilize the situation? Will he be any kind of counterbalance on these important issues? The clear answer, from the record, is no. In fact, the clear answer is that Mr. Wheeler would just reinforce Mr. Pruitt's worst instincts. One might say he is a carbon copy of Mr. Pruitt. And when we look at his history—Mr. Wheeler's history—we find a very cozy relationship between the nominee, Mr. Wheeler, Mr. Pruitt, the current Administrator, and an army of lobbyists for the coal industry. In fact, Mr. Wheeler, as we have noted, has been a lobbyist for that industry. When we look at his relationships, we find that he was advising Murray Energy. Murray Energy was at that time a top donor to Scott Pruitt's super PAC. This was before Mr. Pruitt became the Administrator of the EPA. He had a super PAC, Murray Energy, for whom Mr. Wheeler lobbied, was one of the top donors to that Pruitt super PAC.

The relationship between Pruitt and Wheeler and Bob Murray gets even

cozier when we see that Bob Murray was a co-plaintiff in 8 of the 14 lawsuits that Pruitt brought against the EPA before Pruitt became the Administrator. So I want to get this right. We have Mr. Wheeler, who is the lobbyist for Mr. Murray, and Mr. Murray joined with Pruitt in filing 8 of 14 lawsuits against the EPA. So we can see that we have a very cozy relationship there and one that will only reinforce, not counterbalance, Mr. Pruitt's worst instincts at the EPA.

Among those challenges is the question of climate change. Just yesterday, in the Environment and Public Works Committee, we had a hearing. We had a hearing on using Federal incentives to have more carbon sequestration, to try to take carbon out of the environment, and carbon recapturing technology.

What was interesting was that every single one of the witnesses—those called by the majority and those called by the minority—every one of them, when asked whether climate change represented a serious threat, answered yes. All of them acknowledged that human activity was contributing to that climate change—every one of the witnesses, right down the table.

It is also interesting that that legislation, which has bipartisan support, uses taxpayer dollars and, combined with the tax measures we passed recently, creates tax incentives for carbon capture. So we are agreeing on a bipartisan basis to use public funds for the purpose of reducing carbon pollution. The only reason to do that would be that we agree carbon pollution represents a threat.

I will tell my colleagues who believes carbon pollution represents a threat: the U.S. military. I represent the Naval Academy. A little while back, I went out there and talked to the head of the Naval Academy, who talked about the fact that even today, sea level rise is creating threats, and we can actually see the results of sea level rise with the flash flooding down in Annapolis, MD, which is home to the Naval Academy. That is just one small example. Yet, if we look at Mr. Wheeler's record and statements, we find just another person with their head in the sand, and that is not the kind of person we should have as the No. 2 at our national Environmental Protection Agency.

I was looking to see if the No. 2 appointment might provide some kind of counterbalance to Mr. Pruitt. Unfortunately, everything we find shows not only that they had this prior, very cozy relationship—lobbyist, Attorney General, and a lot of coal industry companies—but on all of the issues that are important to protecting the health of the American people, we have a Deputy nominee who is actually going to take us in the wrong direction.

So I urge all of my colleagues to oppose the nomination of Andrew Wheeler.

I yield the remainder of my postcloture time to Mr. CARPER.

I see that Mr. LEAHY is on the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

GUN SAFETY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the Chair. I am a proud Vermonter. My family has lived there for over 150 years.

Yesterday, Vermont set an example for the Congress, and for the Nation. A Democratically controlled legislature and a Republican Governor, in a rural State with a strong gun-owning tradition and very few gun laws, worked together to debate, forge, and enact meaningful, commonsense gun safety laws.

Yesterday, Governor Phil Scott, who is a Republican, signed three bills into law. They expand background checks, require those under 21 to complete training before purchasing a firearm, create extreme risk protection orders, and ban bump stocks and high-capacity magazines. Vermont did that, and other States are also acting. It makes me wonder why Congress can't do its job and follow that example.

In Vermont, this was a debate about what the people of the Green Mountain State could do to keep their communities, schools, and citizens safe. We had some difficult conversations in my home State. Difficult compromises were made. And for the Republicans and Democrats in our legislature, these were difficult votes. In our State, as in every other, there are honest differences on this and many other issues. Vermonters made their voices heard, particularly a brave new generation of student activists inspired by their peers in Parkland, Florida.

This isn't the first time that our small but brave State has stepped in and stepped up to tackle difficult but significant issues. On July 1, 2000, Vermont became the first State to offer same-sex couples the same legal rights and responsibilities of traditional marriage.

David Moats, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial page editor of the *Rutland Herald*, wrote a book about this debate entitled "Civil Wars: A Battle for Gay Marriage." Ted Widmer, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, said this in his review of the book:

Near the end of "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," the Vermonter played by Gary Cooper dishes out a series of homespun metaphors for how government is supposed to treat people, from helping to push a car up a hill to saving a swimmer who's drowning. Obviously, life isn't quite that simple. This will take time. But in the long run, the question will be answered in the vast middle where most Americans live, and where they privately decide what is right and wrong.

In his remarks at yesterday's bill signing—and I note that the Governor signed the bill sitting at a table outdoors in front of the statehouse, where people who were opposed and people who supported it could watch what he was doing—at that bill signing, Governor Scott spoke as well about civility and public discourse. In a democracy,

civility is more than a virtue; it is foundational for the democratic process to work. That is something all of us—all of us in both parties in the Congress and at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue—should remember.

Here is some of what the Vermont Governor said:

Today in America, too many of our fellow citizens—on both sides of every issue, not just on guns—have given up on listening, deciding to no longer consider other opinions, viewpoints or perspectives.

Our national dialogue has been reduced to angry, hateful social media posts that you can either ‘like’ or not, with no room for conversation or respectful disagreement, and where facts and details no longer seem to matter.

We would be naive to believe that the way we talk to each other, the way we treat each other, and the rise of violence are exclusive to one another.

The Governor concluded:

These things are hurting our nation. If we can reduce the polarization we’re seeing across the country, we can diminish some of the anger at the root of these larger challenges. And this must be part of our ongoing pursuit to reduce violence and make our communities safer.

He is right. Those are Vermont values that draw from time-tested American values.

Three weeks ago, students from schools across this country led millions of fellow Americans of all ages, races, and backgrounds in marches against gun violence. On that Saturday morning, hours before the march on Washington, I met hundreds of Vermonters who came to the Nation’s Capital. My wife Marcelle and I hosted a gathering with them. They were here to lend their voices to what has become a national outcry for commonsense reforms to reduce gun violence.

Thousands more rallied in our capital city of Montpelier, in Rutland, and in other Vermont towns for a ban on military-style assault rifles and on high-capacity magazines; for universal background checks, so that if you have a felony record you are not going to be able to buy a gun; and for laws that keep guns out of the hands of the mentally ill and those who seek to do us harm.

I have rarely been more inspired than when I was listening to the eloquence, the clarity, and the indignant frustration in the poignant speeches of those students. To hear their stories, to hear of the loss and grief and the unsettling and unyielding fear resulting from not knowing whether your school will be next.

I am reminded again of the appalling number of school shootings and the other daily tragedies caused by guns and the lasting and physical scars and trauma that gun violence has had on children, families, and neighborhoods, in cities and towns in every State of this country. How can one not feel that our generation has failed miserably to deal with the epidemic of gun violence? How can one not feel that the gun lobby and others who reflexively oppose all efforts at reform, no matter

how modest or grounded in common sense, have won?

Commonly exploited loopholes in our gun laws allow practically anyone—even those who are criminals or those who openly intend to do us harm—to buy 1 or 10 or 50 guns, guns that can shoot as many rounds per minute as you can pull the trigger or even more with the assistance of readily available accessories, like bump stocks. What have we done to stop it? Not nearly enough.

Over a period of many years, I have introduced or cosponsored and advanced through the Senate Judiciary Committee many pieces of legislation to stop it. This includes legislation to close background check loopholes—loopholes that allow criminals with records of violent crime to buy weapons—to ban military-style assault rifles, and to shut down the black market for firearms by strengthening tools to prosecute straw purchasing and firearms trafficking. We have gotten some of them through committee. Sometimes we have passed them on the Senate floor. But each time, the gun lobby has prevailed in blocking these efforts, just as they have blocked the efforts of others who have dared to take steps to reduce gun violence.

The students are right. They don’t just want our thoughts and prayers. They don’t want us to stand up and piously say: What a tragedy. They don’t want their teachers to have guns, and neither do their teachers. They don’t just want a ban on bump stocks. They want real, meaningful change. They are saying enough is enough.

Columbine, Virginia Tech, Newtown, Roseburg, Parkland—these are school shootings that made the front pages, but there are hundreds of others. There were 18 school shootings in the first 3 months of 2018 alone. As horrific as that is, it is only a part of the problem. Every day, an average of 318 people in America are shot in murders, assaults, suicides, and suicide attempts—every day, 318. That is an epidemic, and we need to treat it like one. You can hear the outrage, and the fear, in the students’ voices.

I am probably the only Member of this body who has gone to murder scenes, who has been there in the middle of the night and seen a child who has been shot to death, knowing that I would be the one who would have to order the autopsy and have investigators from my office, when I was a prosecutor, notify the parents that their child was not coming back. I have seen so many people shot to death, I still have nightmares about them.

Those who hold up the Second Amendment as somehow justifying their opposition to commonsense gun control laws could not be more wrong. None of the tragedies those students, our schools, our communities, our country are experiencing today are the price we must pay for the Second Amendment. None of the proposals in Congress threaten an individual’s right

to own a gun, nor would the bills signed by Governor Phil Scott. Any such argument is nothing more than baseless fearmongering.

I have heard the NRA and some of its defenders ridicule the students for speaking out about seeing their fellow students shot. If you have seen somebody who has been shot to death, as I have on many occasions, you do not forget that. It was over 40 years ago that I was a prosecutor. There is hardly a day that goes by that I don’t remember some of those scenes. When high-priced lobbyists or pundits go on national TV to belittle teenagers who saw their friends gunned down in their classrooms and who had the courage to speak for those who died, then the corrosive power of money and politics is glaringly apparent. Those children will never forget what they saw. I know. I know they will not.

It reminds me of how the first and loudest voices in favor of using military force are rarely those who have actually experienced combat themselves. I wonder how many of those who represent the gun lobby have experienced what those students went through or have seen people who have been shot to death as I have and—worse yet—as those children did, seeing it when it happened and when it was friends of theirs. As much as I shudder to remember what I saw, it was nothing compared to what they saw.

The only solution I have heard offered by those who oppose reform is to put more guns in the hands of good people. Well, I am a gun owner. We do need well-trained, well-equipped community police officers. I strongly support school resource officers, and we should invest more in our police. But police armed with assault rifles at every school, at every movie theater, in every church, on every street corner in America, at every shopping mall, at every museum—is that the solution? Is that the United States of America we want?

We should talk to the police. We would find that police across this country support stricter, commonsense gun safety laws. It is Congress’s job to regulate when regulations are needed, and we have a responsibility to do so when so many Americans’ lives are at stake. Let’s use the power we have to do what the Constitution requires of us and what the American people overwhelmingly are asking us to do.

The students who organized these marches have challenged us. President Trump, your party controls the Congress. Members of Congress can act or they can continue to make excuses or remain silent in hopes that this issue goes away. But, I can tell you, these students aren’t going away—not the students I have met, not the students whose determination is in their eyes and in their voices.

It is time for you, President Trump, and for this Congress to do right by these students and by all Americans who are asking their leaders to stop

gun violence. Follow Vermont's example. Support comprehensive, common-sense gun reform legislation, just as you said you would when you met with Members of Congress of both parties after the Parkland shooting. Keep your word. Do what you said you would do, but this time follow through. Fight for it so that it passes, and sign it.

Listen to the words we heard yesterday in Montpelier, VT. Stop the shouting on either side. Have people sit down and talk about what the American people really want and what the American people really need, and listen to each other. But then let's do it. Let's do it.

I think it can be done. I know any killing is terrible, but as a parent and a grandparent, I wonder how anyone can think of a child or grandchild having to witness such a horrible thing. It should stop.

I yield the remainder of my time to Senator CARPER from Delaware.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware has been yielded 2 hours as provided by rule.

The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Delaware for allowing me to speak for up to 12 minutes.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. President, I rise today to discuss three bipartisan bills that I have introduced this week to combat the vast and growing opioid epidemic. I want to begin by first thanking the chairman and the ranking member of the Senate HELP Committee for their leadership in putting together a comprehensive bill to address opioid addiction and abuse.

The HELP Committee has held seven bipartisan hearings on opioid issues since October, and I commend the committee's leaders for crafting a bipartisan framework, the Opioid Crisis Response Act, which the committee intends to mark up later this month. My hope is that the three bipartisan bills that I am about to describe will either be incorporated into their more comprehensive legislation or approved separately.

Last year, in the State of Maine, 418 people died from overdoses—a record number and an 11-percent increase compared to the year before. Just this past weekend, there were nine overdoses in one night alone, largely as a result of fentanyl-laced heroin. Fortunately, first responders were able to save those individuals.

It is clear that we need to take an “all of the above” approach to tackling this crisis. This includes more support for education and prevention, treatment and recovery services, and law enforcement efforts. No single focus will be sufficient to combat this crisis.

The first bipartisan bill that I have introduced with Senators HASSAN, CAPITO, BALDWIN, and WARREN is the Safe Disposal of Unused Medication Act. Our bill would address the problem of unused prescription painkillers when a person is receiving hospice care at home.

Currently, hospice staff are not allowed to dispose of unused medications, including powerful opioids, even after the patient has died. As a result, these dangerous medications, with a high risk of diversion, theft, and abuse, are frequently left in the deceased person's home.

I have heard stories about criminals who actually scan the obituary pages to figure out when the family will be away at the deceased person's funeral so the criminals can target that time to break into the family's home to steal these dangerous drugs.

Our bill would allow certain hospice staff and emergency medical services personnel, such as paramedics, to dispose of these potentially addictive medications once the patient dies. Registered nurses and physicians involved in hospice care can not only help families who are dealing with difficult end-of-life issues, but they can also assist them by making their homes safer by disposing of dangerous leftover medications. All of these drug disposals would be documented in the patient's clinical records.

Our bill would also allow the Drug Enforcement Agency to develop regulations permitting hospice staff to dispose of drugs if a patient's plan of care has changed and the patient no longer needs the medications. The disposal of unused prescription drugs is key to making sure that they do not fall into the wrong hands, and this bill would help to solve that problem.

One way that families struggling with addiction are finding support is through peer-to-peer recovery groups. The second bipartisan bill, which I have introduced with Senator SHAHEEN, is the Opioid Peer Support Networks Act. This bill would foster the creation of peer support networks, also known as communities in recovery, and would provide them with the resources and training they need to be successful. In peer support networks, individuals and families battling addiction help one another stay on the road to recovery and assist with employment, education, housing, health, and overall well-being.

Last year, I visited the Bangor Area Recovery Network, known as BARN, in Brewer, ME. It is a volunteer-led organization that provides support to individuals who are recovering from addiction. BARN is a model for peer-led counseling and brings hope, recovery, and healing to those who are struggling with substance abuse. Individuals who are themselves in recovery can make that critical connection to others who are facing addiction, which, in turn, can make the recovery process sustainable and reduce the stigma of addiction and treatment.

Yesterday, the Senate HELP Committee, on which I serve, heard from three experts about the legislation that the committee is developing. Jessica Nickel, the founder and CEO of the Addiction Policy Forum, told us: “Peer recovery support specialists are a key

component to making sure that we provide the services that are needed for folks that are in recovery or those that need treatment.” The Opioid Peer Support Networks Act would bring critical training and assistance to these on-the-ground, peer-to-peer networks and help build up these important recovery support systems.

Finally, the Community Action Opioid Response Act, which I have introduced with Senator KLOBUCHAR, would provide competitive grants to help Community Action Agencies and Community Action Partnerships, known as CAPs in my State, expand their efforts to respond to opioid misuse and addiction problems that are experienced by low-income individuals and their families. Our bill would support a wide range of activities, such as treatment and recovery referral, direct services for children and their caregivers, including their grandparents, and two-generation anti-poverty models that respond to the needs and barriers that are facing both parents and children.

The CAPs are uniquely positioned to help take on and be our partners in the opioid crisis. They can leverage their current programs, community relationships, and existing infrastructures to respond to the unmet needs resulting from the opioid epidemic, but they need more help to do so.

CAPs in my State have told me about how the opioid crisis has affected their programs and how they are thinking innovatively to improve the services that they provide.

For example, the Waldo CAP in Belfast, ME, uses its transportation services to bring 175 people a week to drug treatment programs. That is 175 people who otherwise might lack the transportation that is necessary for them to receive the treatment services that are needed for them to cope with their addictions. Penquis, a CAP agency in Bangor, ME, has found that some clients don't access treatment because they can't find transportation for their children to safe childcare settings. In York County, the Community Action Agency has partnered with the Sanford Police Department to deliver access to medication-assisted treatment for clients who are struggling with opioid addiction.

Our bill would give these CAP agencies additional resources to develop the wraparound services that make it possible for treatment to succeed and for recovery to take hold.

Tackling the opioid epidemic, both its causes and its consequences, takes a multipronged approach. The three bipartisan bills that I have introduced provide additional ways to respond to this growing problem. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting them, and I look forward to their enactments.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.