

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.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

LANCE CORPORAL TAYLOR CONRAD

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I honor today the life and sacrifice of one soldier in particular, U.S. Marine Corps LCpl Taylor Conrad, who was 24 years old and was a Central Louisianan.

Our military men and women deserve recognition. They sacrifice time away from family and friends and put themselves in harm's way to advance our country's interests. Every day, they risk their lives to secure our safety. In the case of Taylor Conrad, along with three of his fellow marines, he tragically lost his life last week when their helicopter crashed during a training mission in California.

A Louisiana native and Central High School graduate, Taylor exemplified the qualities of a good marine. He was tough, compassionate, and wanted to help others. In high school, Taylor played football and was an accomplished powerlifter. He also volunteered in the Best Buddies program, which matches students with schoolmates in the special ed program.

A teacher said:

The one thing that made Taylor such a special friend with our kids is he didn't approach them in a way that he felt sorry for them. He approached them in a way where he truly wanted to be their friend.

The school's athletic director said Taylor's "love for those who need the most is something I'll never forget." There was one child who would never speak except, with Taylor, he would laugh. That was the effect Taylor had on others.

After school, Taylor decided to serve our country by joining the Marines. He went on to become a CH-53 helicopter crew chief in the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing's Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465. One marine who served with Taylor had this to say of him:

He was the gold standard. He pushed everybody and he cared about everybody. I wouldn't be the Marine I am now if it wasn't for him.

Our hearts go out to everyone whose life was touched by Taylor. We especially pray for his family, including his daughter, who was born just last October. Their loss is great, and their hearts are heavy. I want them to know that Louisiana and our entire country mourn with them because our loss is great too. When they lost a brother, a son, and a dad, we lost a good man, a great marine, and a fellow American.

Thank you.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

Mr. President, I would like to speak about nominations for the U.S. Department of Education and the approval of them or, I should say, their lack of approval.

It is no secret that Democrats in Congress hate President Trump. For months, they have held up his nominees for key positions in the government. This strategy may serve in their hatred of President Trump, but it is harmful to our country.

One example is the nominee for the Federal Railroad Administration, whose nomination was held up for months after he had been approved unanimously by the committee of jurisdiction for his appointment in the Federal Government. As a result, there have been multiple fatal crashes in the railroad system—Republicans were on a trip when one of them occurred—that may have been prevented had there been leadership on that railroad commission.

We have a sense that there can be a consequence to this kind of unremitting "whatever Trump proposes we are going to oppose, no matter, just because it is Trump" when folks die in railroad accidents. I will note, after the last set of fatalities, that hold was lifted, and the nomination was allowed to proceed.

Sometimes it is not so clear that damage has occurred from this kind of "whatever Trump proposes we shall oppose." In multiple cases, it involves the Department of Education. One example is the nomination of BG Mitchell "Mick" Zais for Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. President Trump nominated General Zais in October 2017. It has been over 6 months since his nomination, and we still do not have a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education.

General Zais is qualified for the position. He served as South Carolina's elected State superintendent of education, the president of Newberry College, and as a commissioner on South Carolina's Commission on Higher Education. He also served his country honorably and faithfully as an infantry soldier in the U.S. Army for 31 years—again, retiring as a brigadier general.

A little known fact about the general is that he is dyslexic—an issue I care passionately about that affects 20 percent of our Nation's population. He knows firsthand of the struggles of one with dyslexia and how, with the proper evidence-based resources, our children with dyslexia can learn to read and have as successful futures as any other. Ensuring children with dyslexia have the resources they need to succeed is a legislative priority for me and also will be for General Zais, as he indicated, when he is finally confirmed.

Democrats have imposed 30 hours of debate on nominees they support by forcing cloture votes. They have forced more cloture votes in the first year of the Trump administration than in the entire first terms of the last four Presidents combined. These delay tactics have consequences for the rail system just as they do in the education of our children. It is a tragedy that Democrats are blocking or playing games with our children's futures.

One example—and it is not a very good example, not good for those affected—is with the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NEPA, which released its Nation's Report Card. The results show that our Nation's children have not made gains in reading and math. In 2017, nationally, only 40 percent of fourth graders were considered proficient in math, and only 36 percent were reading at grade 4 levels.

This is unacceptable. If a child learns to read in grades 1, 2, 3, after that, he or she reads to learn, and if one can't read by the fourth grade, one may never be able to read to learn as effectively as one needs in order to succeed in today's economy. Democrats hate Donald Trump so much, they would rather risk a child not learning to read than to have their future prospects dimmed and easily approve a Trump appointee.

Mr. President, the time is now to stop the obstruction. Let's put our Nation's children's educational needs first and confirm the remaining nominees to serve at the U.S. Department of Education.

This is not about Donald J. Trump; this is about the children of our country who, if they don't learn to read or do math proficiently, will have a future that is less than it should be, and that should be a bipartisan concern.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rarely rise three times in the same day to give a speech. This is a special day for me and maybe for the Senate. But I want to assure my colleagues that the concerns many of us have been expressing about the current chaos at the Environmental Protection Agency and the nomination of Andrew Wheeler—the person who could predictably replace the EPA Administrator—are not ours alone. Editorial boards around the country, including those from newspapers in Republican-leaning States, are expressing concerns regarding EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's recent slew of ethical lapses—it would be charitable to call them lapses. It is these failings by Mr. Pruitt that Andrew Wheeler will be expected to address if he is confirmed by the Senate.

I can assure the citizens of all these States, the editorial boards of all these papers, and all my colleagues that the Environment and Public Works Committee has not considered the nomination of Andrew Wheeler with these ethical failings in mind. Mr. Wheeler has been nominated to serve as the individual who will oversee day-to-day operations of an EPA currently in chaos. We have had no opportunity to ask Mr. Wheeler about the Administrator's questionable behavior, nor have we had a chance to ask him how he plans to right a ship that has so clearly lost its way.

I am sobered but not shocked to read what people who have their fingers on