

count on to plan their budgets. I note that the leader, Senator SCHUMER, is here. He has been very supportive of this bill. He sat next to me and Senator Rockefeller for years and is supportive of the children's health program.

The Hatch-Wyden bill passed with a strong bipartisan vote in the Finance Committee. Again, I am highlighting the priorities where there was time for the multinational corporations to get that permanent relief, but there wasn't any time to put the CHIP bill—one that had only one vote in opposition in the Finance Committee—on the Senate floor. In the House of Representatives, they weren't pursuing it like we did in the Finance Committee. They never could get past a purely partisan approach, out of line with CHIP's long, bipartisan history.

Now, obviously after months of delay, it is time to act, and I want to wrap up with a quick comment about what is going to happen if you don't move and move quickly. Just last week, the Congressional Budget Office announced that the cost of CHIP has plummeted from \$8.2 billion to \$800 million. That is because premiums in the individual market are set to skyrocket after the repeal of the Affordable Care Act's coverage requirement in the Republican tax bill. Many of the families who currently count on CHIP will have to get their kids' healthcare on the private market at a higher cost. As if Congress needed more reasons to act, the budget office has demonstrated what is now at stake for kids and their families who are counting on quick action for affordable healthcare.

There is a long history, as I have noted, of the Senate working on the Children's Health Insurance Program in a bipartisan way. We started building on that tradition in the Finance Committee with virtual unanimity. Somehow at the end of the last Congress—and your priorities can always be illustrated with what you find time to do—there was time at the end of the year for the agenda of the multinational corporations, but there wasn't time for the youngsters and their families who walk an economic tightrope and depend every night, when they turn the lights out, on making sure there is a way to pay for healthcare if there is an emergency in the morning.

I want it understood that we are working day in and day out now to quickly make sure kids and their families get the certainty and predictability they deserve. They deserve the kind of certainty the powerful got with the tax bill at the end of the year.

So we are going to be on this floor until this critical legislation is passed. It needs to be passed quickly.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, my dear friend and I got to Congress in

1980, and I thank him very much for his leadership on the CHIP issue, as on so many other issues that pass through the Finance Committee, where he has done a terrific job. His caring for kids is unmatched, and he is a great asset to his State of Oregon, to this body, and to our country.

We have 2 weeks until funding for the government runs out. Alongside our talks about extending government funding, we have also been engaged in serious bipartisan negotiations on a number of issues that should coincide with that deadline. We have to lift spending cuts, pass disaster aid, a healthcare package, reach an agreement to enshrine DACA protections alongside additional border security, and of course there is the issue of 702 as well.

Those negotiations, though difficult, have been proceeding quite well. In fact, the four congressional leaders met with representatives from the White House last Thursday and had an encouraging meeting. Unfortunately, following that meeting, the White House issued a series of unreasonable demands entirely outside the scope of our ongoing negotiations about DACA and border security. It is part of a pattern of behavior on the part of this White House during sensitive bipartisan negotiations.

Over the past year, the White House has much more frequently been a disruptive force rather than a unifying force. To throw down a list from the hard-line wing of the White House at the last minute is not a very fortuitous or smart thing to do.

I hope we can keep on the track that we were on because the issues we are facing are mounting, and a major deal requires dedicated, bipartisan effort. Democrats are going to keep working toward a global agreement with our Republican colleagues, one that lifts the spending caps for defense and urgent domestic priorities in tandem, that sends our men and women in uniform the support they need, and that puts a downpayment on tackling the pressing issues here at home, such as combating the opioid epidemic, improving veterans' healthcare, and shoring up pension plans. These are every bit as important as helping our troops.

Our troops are extremely important, but we are a great country, and we don't have to say: To help the troops, we can't help the victims of opioid addiction. To help the troops, we can't help the veterans who once were troops themselves. To help the troops, we can't help working Americans keep the pensions they paid into year after year. All these folks want is to retire to a life of some degree of dignity.

When the majority leader said this morning that he is not for parity, he is saying we can't do both. He is telling victims of opioid addiction, many of whom are soldiers who have PTSD, and he is telling pensioners—some miners in his own State—and he is telling veterans who have to wait in line for

healthcare that this country can't do both, that we can't protect our military, give them the funds they need, and deal with our domestic needs.

When Donald Trump ran, he said that we have to pay more attention to America. What the majority leader is saying is that is not the case. So let no one be fooled. When the majority leader says he is not for parity, he is not for helping opioid folks to the extent they need, he is not for helping veterans to the extent they need, and he is not for helping pensioners to the extent they need. We Democrats are there for both—helping the military and helping these folks here.

Over the weekend, I was in White Plains, which is a suburb of New York City. I stood with a mother who lost her son to an opioid overdose. A mother should never have to bury her son, especially Stephanie Keegan, whose son Daniel was a veteran who served our country bravely in Afghanistan. He did very well in school but had a duty to country. He was in the intelligence unit for a while, he was so brilliant. But he came home, as some do, nerves shattered by war, struggling with a severe case of PTSD. Stephanie told me that her beautiful, brilliant son Daniel—I saw his picture; an all-American boy, if ever there were one—her son Daniel waited 16 months for treatment by the VA and died 2 weeks before his first appointment.

"There are so many things that can be done to change this situation," Mrs. Keegan said. She is right. We can make a real investment in combating the scourge of opioid addiction, putting real resources into treatment and recovery, as well as interdiction. We can make a real investment in improving healthcare at our veterans hospitals so kids like Daniel don't have to wait almost a year and a half before they get the treatment they desperately need.

And what about hard-working Americans who need pensions? Retirement is one of the things Americans worry about most these days. For years, Teamsters and miners and carpenters paid into pension plans week after week, month after month, year after year. They took a little less salary in their negotiations because they wanted to know that when it was time to retire, they could retire with some degree of dignity. No one is going to get rich on these pensions, but at least they are there and provide a little bit of a nest egg for people in their golden years. As they put the money in week after week, month after month, year after year, they were told: You may not become rich when you retire, you may not be able to buy luxuries, but at least you will have a life of dignity.

Now those pensions may be stolen from millions in America, in this country. These folks contributed to and earned every penny of their pensions. Are we going to shrug our shoulders and say: We can't do that. Most Americans want us to do that; they don't want it to be an either-or situation.

Our colleagues would say: Well, that might increase the deficit. Don't come talking to us about the deficit anymore when you put together a \$1.5 trillion increase in the deficit, the majority of which went to big tax cuts for the wealthiest individuals and the biggest, fattest corporations in America. No more deficit talk from my colleagues here.

When we Democrats ask for parity in budget agreements, this is what we mean: We mean opioids. We mean veterans' healthcare. We mean pensions.

We need to defend and support the middle class here at home just as we must protect America from her adversaries abroad, which our military does so proudly and bravely. We agree that we need to support our military wholeheartedly, but we don't think that is a reason to leave the middle class behind. So let's do both. Let's lift the spending caps equally for defense and these urgent domestic priorities.

Our two parties can reach a deal like that, just as we can reach a deal to pass a disaster aid package that treats all States and territories fairly; just as we can have an agreement on a healthcare package that acknowledges the new realities of the healthcare markets, which were disrupted by Republicans when they repealed the mandate in the tax bill last year; and just as we can reach a deal on DACA—protecting young people who were brought here as kids through no fault of their own—while at the same time making reasonable, appropriate, and smart investments in border security—something that in the past both Democrats and Republicans have supported.

In conclusion, an agreement can be reached on all these issues. Nobody wants a shutdown. Nobody wants sequestration to come into effect for either the military or the domestic side of the budget. So let's continue to work together. Let's commit to work together in good faith to make progress on these issues and get it done before January 19.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Ohio.

NATIONAL SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING
PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. In a recent proclamation, President Trump continued what President Obama had begun in making this the ninth annual year where we designate our first month of the year to awareness and prevention of trafficking, awareness and prevention of this crime against humanity.

President Trump issued a call to action. The proclamation said, in part:

Human trafficking is a modern form of the oldest and most barbaric type of exploitation. It has no place in our world. This month, we do not simply reflect on this appalling reality. We also pledge to do all in our power to end the horrific practice of human trafficking that plagues innocent victims around the world.

Amen. I commend the President for his strong stance, and I commend the U.S. Senate for the work we have done over the past several years, in a bipartisan way, to help combat trafficking. We made some progress.

About 6 years ago, Senator BLUMENTHAL—who will speak about this topic later on the floor—and I co-founded the Senate Caucus to End Human Trafficking and legislation since that time to increase penalties on people buying sex from children; stop international trafficking by U.S. Government contractors overseas; find missing children more quickly—the most vulnerable among us—by ensuring that their photographs and other identifiers are available; improve data on trafficking to find out what the problem is, where it is going; and, of course, change the paradigm—treat children who are exploited as victims rather than, as they have been treated over the years, as criminals.

We have made some progress in these areas, but I have to tell you, despite these efforts and despite the increasing awareness of the fact that trafficking occurs right here in this country, in all of our States, we now know that one form, at least, of sex trafficking is actually increasing in our country. Think about that. It is increasing in this country, in this century. What experts say when you ask them about it is that is primarily because of one reason; that is, the fact that the internet is being used to sell sex.

By the way, doing it on the internet, it turns out, occurs with ruthless efficiency. Victims I have visited across Ohio tell me, including one this past Friday in Ohio: ROB, it has moved from the street corner to the iPhone, from the street corner to the cell phone, from the street corner to the internet.

There was discussion earlier from my colleague from New York about the role opioids play in causing harm in our society. Of course, the internet combined with opioids is deadly. The young woman I met with on Friday was one of those who had become addicted to opioids—in her case, fentanyl, which is an incredibly powerful, dangerous drug—and depended on her trafficker to be able to provide that. That is one form of dependency you see in sex trafficking. And again, online is where people are increasingly being bought and sold.

This increase in sex trafficking is a stain on our national character. It is only Congress that has the power to stop it.

There is one website—backpage.com—that is the leader in online sex trafficking. They have knowingly sold underage girls online. I say that because we have done an investigation, and we determined that. We now know from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that backpage.com is involved in nearly 75 percent of all child trafficking reports the organization receives from the public.

The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I chair, along with then-ranking member CLAIRE McCASKILL and now-ranking member TOM CARPER, has conducted an extensive, 18-month investigation into online sex trafficking and specifically backpage.com. We found that backpage.com knowingly facilitated criminal sex trafficking of vulnerable women and young children. It coached the traffickers on how to edit adult classified ads to post so-called clean ads for illegal transactions, and then it covered up evidence of these crimes in order to increase its profits. All this was done at the cost of human suffering—and sometimes human life—with the sole purpose of increasing the company's profits.

In the fall, I testified on this issue in front of the Senate Commerce Committee—about our legislation. With me at the witness table was Yvonne Ambrose, a mother whose 16-year-old daughter, Desiree, was found murdered on Christmas Eve 2016 after being sold for sex on backpage.

Desiree's death should never have happened—and neither should online sex trafficking of minors happen at all—but this tragic trend is compounded by the fact that backpage has evaded justice for its role in these tragic crimes. Courts across the country have consistently ruled that a Federal law—and this is why Congress has such a key role to play here—called the Communications Decency Act actually protects backpage and others from the liability they should have in sex trafficking.

The Communications Decency Act is a well-intentioned law originally enacted back in 1996, when the internet was in its infancy, and it was meant to protect third-party websites from being held liable for crimes that users might commit on those websites. Ironically, part of the original intention of the Communications Decency Act was to protect children from indecent material on the internet by holding liable users who send explicit material to children. Now this same law is being used as a shield by cynical sex traffickers who promote and engage in online underage sex trafficking with impunity, thanks to this Federal law.

Congress didn't intend for this broad immunity in the law—I am convinced of that—but numerous courts across the country have made it clear that their hands are tied because of the legal precedent that has been formed. As the lawmaking branch of the Federal Government, it is up to Congress to fix this injustice. No one else can do it.

In the most blatant call for congressional action I have seen yet, in August of last year, a Sacramento judge cited the broad immunity provided by the 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