

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package that acknowledges the new realities of the healthcare markets, which were disrupted by Republicans when they repealed the mandate in the tax bill last year; and just as we can reach a deal on DACA—protecting young people who were brought here as kids through no fault of their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

of the Communications Decency Act even applies to those alleged to support the exploitations of others by human trafficking.

That is an invitation to Congress to act. It is clearly up to Congress to act. It is past time we update this 21-year-old law for the 21st century and allow victims who have had their most basic human rights violated to get justice against those who facilitate these crimes.

We have an opportunity this month during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month to fix this. We can and we must.

The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act, or SESTA, is a bill I introduced with my bipartisan colleagues—Senator BLUMENTHAL, who will speak later this afternoon, and Senators JOHN MCCAIN, CLAIRE MCCASKILL, JOHN CORNYN, HEIDI HEITKAMP, AMY KLOBUCHAR, and 18 other colleagues. As of this morning, that legislation has 64 cosponsors. It is totally bipartisan, supported by both sides of the aisle. It is popular: 64 out of 100 have already cosponsored it because it will fix this injustice with two very narrowly crafted changes to the Communications Decency Act.

First, it will allow victims to get the justice they deserve by removing the Communications Decency Act's broad liability protections the judge discussed, specifically for websites that knowingly facilitate sex trafficking crimes.

Second, it will allow State attorneys general to prosecute these websites that violate Federal sex trafficking laws. These changes will hold bad actors like backpage accountable while doing nothing to impair the free internet. In fact, they will protect websites that do not actively and knowingly engage in online sex trafficking.

The "knowing" standard is a high bar to meet. The California attorney general, Xavier Becerra, testified at the Senate Commerce Committee about that this fall. He said:

We have to prove criminal intent. We can't win a prosecution unless we can show the individuals we're prosecuting, like Backpage, had the intent—the knowledge—to do what they're doing. The legislation we have before you is very narrowly tailored. It goes only after sex trafficking.

The Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act passed the Senate Commerce Committee by a vote that was unanimous. It was bipartisan. It was unanimous, and the legislation has the support of an extraordinary coalition of law enforcement organizations, anti-trafficking advocates, trafficking victims, survivors, faith-based groups, and even some major tech players, although some in the tech community continue to be concerned. This includes the Internet Association, which now represents companies such as Facebook, reddit, Amazon, and others. It was endorsed by businesses, including Oracle, 21st Century Fox, Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, and the Walt Disney Company. Other companies such as IBM

and others have stepped up to support it.

Last year, 50 attorneys general across this country wrote a letter calling on Congress to amend the Communications Decency Act in the exact way we are proposing in this bill—50.

Again, in the Senate, a bipartisan group of 64 Senators has now cosponsored the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act. Those 60-plus cosponsors are significant because 60 is how many votes we need in the U.S. Senate if there are objections to the legislation to be able to get it passed. We already have that many Senators who have now put their names down. They said they want to be part of the solution to this tragic problem. They want to stop this increase in sex trafficking that unconscionably is happening in this country in this century.

So we shouldn't wait any longer to pass this bill in the Senate. Every day we do, those who sell women and children will be allowed to continue that, continue to profit, and victims will continue to be denied justice.

It is not an issue of politics or partisanship. It is about preventing exploitation and providing justice. I am hoping we can have a vote on this bill in the Senate this month, during National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. This Thursday is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. I urge the leadership to have the bill on the floor as soon as possible. We have every reason to act and no reason not to.

These victims deserve justice, and Congress should help provide it. Passing the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act is an opportunity.

Thank you.

I yield back my time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I don't know whether it is four, five, or six, but some Senators would like to have colloquy on the issue of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and I ask unanimous consent that we have that privilege.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DACA

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise with my colleagues to offer remarks about the current status of the negotiations on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA Program, as it is known in the U.S. Senate.

Unfortunately, this body still isn't closer to a legitimate and fair deal that accomplishes two goals: First of all, to promote and protect the interests of the American people in a lawful immigration system and, two, provide a fair and equitable solution on DACA.

Back in December, I introduced a bill, along with Senators CORNYN, TILLIS, LANKFORD, PERDUE, and COTTON. The bill, with the acronym SECURE Act of 2017, was a product of months of discussion between this Sen-

ator, these other Senators I just named, and the White House. Our plan, simply put, has five pillars.

First, based on the hard work and leadership of Senator CORNYN, our bill provided real, robust border security by mandating the construction of tactical and technological infrastructure at the border.

Second, our bill took meaningful steps to end the lawlessness of dangerous criminal aliens by cracking down on sanctuary cities, ending the misguided catch-and-release policies of the previous administration, and, finally, taking steps to address intentional visa overstays.

Third, our bill took steps to eliminate many of the "pull" factors that encourage people to immigrate illegally by permanently authorizing the E-Verify Program and by taking meaningful steps to reduce immigration court and asylum adjudication backlogs.

Fourth, thanks to the leadership and advocacy of Senators GRAHAM, PERDUE, and COTTON, our bill eliminated the phenomenon known as chain migration and made a major downpayment toward transitioning to a merit-based immigration system.

Fifth, and finally, our bill provided a bipartisan solution to protect undocumented young people brought to the United States as children by adopting Senator DUREN's Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy—that has the acronym BRIDGE Act.

Our plan was fair, serious, and bipartisan. Most importantly, it was and is pro-American. As I have continually said since the bill's introduction, this group of Senators is ready and willing to negotiate with our counterparts in good faith and to find an equitable solution to the DACA situation that incorporates our bill's five pillars of reform.

I said negotiate. I had at least one Democratic Senator infer that I could not negotiate in good faith because I did not vote for the Gang of 8 immigration bill in 2013. So, sadly, our good-faith offers have consistently been rejected by Democratic leadership. Instead, they decide to engage in a game of brinksmanship.

So I ask several questions: Why doesn't Democratic leadership negotiate with us? Because we refuse to simply pass what is referred to as the Dream Act, as is, with no proportional border security and interior enforcement majors. As the Democrats see it, it is take it or leave it, their way or the highway. This isn't good faith, this isn't negotiating, and that approach is doomed to failure.

I have to ask: Why do my colleagues in the Democratic leadership refuse to even consider measures that would beef up border security and interior enforcement? Do they want people to continue to immigrate to this country illegally? Do they want sex offenders and human traffickers to continue to manipulate