

that invest in education, infrastructure, and opportunity for all have higher per capita incomes, enjoy more prosperity, and rely less on Federal handouts. These are the types of investments that make New Jersey a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

You don't have to take my word for it. Earlier this year, Save the Children named New Jersey the No. 1 place in America to raise a child. I want it to stay that way.

In New Jersey, we invest in public schools because we know that they prepare students to compete in high-paying fields like biotechnology, sustainable agriculture, and medicine. In New Jersey, we invest in public health and law enforcement because we know we are all better off when our streets are safe and our families are healthy. In New Jersey, we invest in mass transit and infrastructure because we know it connects workers with opportunities to climb the income ladder.

We do these things for a reason. New Jersey is stronger when we open the doors of opportunity for as many people as possible. We see it here: State investments, better education, higher wages, a stronger middle class, top three States by SALT deduction. They also do incredibly well in educational achievement and income. There is a clear correlation.

But the Republican Congress has put these job-creating, economy-growing, opportunity-expanding investments in the crosshairs by gutting the property tax deduction. In the process, they are threatening the validity of legitimate programs operating in 30 other States.

The Federal Tax Code has always worked to ensure that Americans don't pay taxes twice on their hard-earned money; that was until Donald Trump came along. Then Republicans abandoned their so-called fiscal conservatism, and together they passed a tax scam that subjects hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans, and many more in other States, to double taxation.

For as long as I can remember, I have heard my Republican colleagues preach about protecting, not punishing, success. But the Republican tax law is a tax on New Jersey's success, slamming hundreds of thousands of families with higher property tax burdens, not in a few years, not in a decade—no, right now—now. It is not fair, and it is not right. It is wrong to force New Jersey families to pay more just so that big corporations and wealthy CEOs can pay less.

In the end, I can't in good conscience support this nominee. He will not protect New Jersey's middle class—and those in other States like it—from higher property tax bills. He will not respect perfectly legal State-based programs like those 32 other States that offer tax credits in return for contributions to nonprofits that do critical work in their communities. He will be nothing more than a Republican rubberstamp for President Trump's po-

litically motivated tax policies. The last thing we need is an IRS that is politically weaponized.

Whether you want to take a stand against double taxation or you don't agree with the Trump administration's politically motivated assault on the rights of States to set their own tax policies, I hope Republicans and Democrats alike will join me in voting down this nomination. Taxpayers in New Jersey and across the Nation deserve better than tax policies that knock the knees out from underneath them and an IRS Commissioner who kicks them while they are down.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I intend to address the Senate on the topic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but I want to observe that the distinguished leader may be coming in just a moment for a unanimous consent request. If he does, I will be happy to yield during the middle of my remarks so he can take care of that item of business.

#### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Mr. President, it is important for this Senate and this country to once again be interested in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During my time in Congress, and particularly since joining the U.S. Helsinki Commission, which I now chair, the Western Balkans have been an ongoing concern of mine. Although our relationship with all of these countries of the Western Balkans is important, the United States has a specific interest, a particular interest, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We need to concentrate more on that.

I had the opportunity in July to lead a nine-member bicameral delegation to Bosnia. The delegation sought to see more of the country and to hear from its citizens, rather than meet only in the offices of senior Bosnian officials. We visited the small town of Trebinje in the entity of Republika Srpska, and we visited the city of Mostar in the entity of the Federation. Then, we went on and visited in Sarajevo, the capital, engaging with international officials, the Bosnian Presidency, and citizens seeking a better Bosnia.

Bosnia was a U.S. foreign policy priority when I came to the House in 1995. In less than a decade, Bosnia had gone from international acclaim while hosting the Winter Olympics to the scene of the worst carnage in human suffering in Europe since World War II. The conflict that erupted in Bosnia in 1992 was not internally generated. Rather, Bosnia became the victim of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the extreme nationalist forces this breakup unleashed throughout the region, first and foremost by Serbian leader and war criminal Slobodan Milosevic.

At this point, I will be happy to yield to the distinguished majority leader for whatever purposes he would choose.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Mississippi. I will be brief.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the cloture motion on the conference report to accompany H.R. 5895 be withdrawn; that if cloture is invoked on the Rettig nomination, all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate vote on the nomination; further, that if the nomination is confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid on the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that the Senate then resume legislative session and resume consideration of the conference report; that there be 10 minutes of debate equally divided in the usual form; that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on adoption of the conference report; and finally, that S. Con. Res. 46, correcting the title of H.R. 5985, be considered and agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

Mr. McCONNELL. For the information of our colleagues, these will be the only rollcall votes during this week's session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

#### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, back to the subject of Bosnia, the carnage and tragic conflict that occurred in the early 1990s was more than about Bosnia. It was about security in a Europe just emerging from its Cold War divisions and the international principles upon which that security was based. For that reason, the United States, under President Bill Clinton, rightly exercised leadership when Europe asked us to, having failed to do so themselves. The Clinton administration brokered the Dayton peace agreement in November 1995 and enabled NATO to engage in peacemaking and peacekeeping to preserve Bosnia's unity and territorial integrity. That was the Bosnian peace agreement.

Almost a quarter of a century later, after the expenditure of significant diplomatic, military, and foreign assistance resources, the physical scars of the conflict have been largely erased. As we learned during our recent visit, the country remains far short of the prosperous democracy we hoped it would become and that its people deserve. Mostar, a spectacular city to visit, remains ethnically divided with Bosniak and Croat students separated by ethnicity in schools, even inside the same school buildings. Bosnian citizens, who are of minority groups, such as Jews, Romanis, or of mixed heritage, still cannot run for certain political offices.

This is 2018. They can't run for State-level Presidency, simply because of their ethnicity. Neither can Bosniaks and Croats in Republika Srpska or

Serbs in the Bosnian Federation run for the Presidency because of their ethnicity, in Europe in 2018. Nor can those numerous citizens who, on principle, refuse to declare their ethnicity because it should not replace their real qualifications for holding office.

This goes on despite repeated rulings by the European Court of Human Rights that this flaw in the Dayton-negotiated Constitution must be corrected. In total, well over 300,000 people in a country of only 3.5 million fall into these categories despite what is likely their strong commitment to the country and to its future as a multi-ethnic state. This is simply wrong, and it needs to end.

In addition, youth employment in Bosnia is among the highest in the world, and many who can leave the country are doing so, finding a future in Europe and finding a future in the United States. This denies Bosnia much of its needed talent and energy.

Civil society is kept on the sidelines. Decisions in Bosnia are being made by political party leaders who are not accountable to the people. They are the decision makers. The people should be decision makers. Corruption is rampant. Ask anyone in Europe, and they will tell you, Bosnia's wealth and potential is being stolen by corruption.

General elections will be held in October with a system favoring the status quo and resistance to electoral reforms that would give Bosnians more rather than fewer choices.

The compromises made two and a half decades ago in Dayton to restore peace and give the leading ethnic groups—Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats—an immediate sense of security make governance dysfunctional today. Two-and-a-half-decades-old agreements make governance inefficient today in Bosnia. Collective privileges for these groups come at the expense of the individual human rights of the citizens who are all but coerced into making ethnic identity their paramount concern and a source of division, when so many other common interests should unite them. Ethnically based political parties benefit as they engage in extensive patronage and corruption. Beneath the surface, ethnic reconciliation has not taken hold, and resulting tensions can still destabilize the country and even lead to violence. Malign outside forces, particularly Vladimir Putin's Russia but also influences from Turkey and Gulf States, seek to take advantage of the political impasse and malaise, steering the country away from its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

As a result of these developments, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not making much progress, even as its neighbors join NATO and join the EU or make progress toward their desired integration.

In my view, we should rightly credit the Dayton agreement for restoring peace to Bosnia. That was 25 years ago, but it is regrettable the negotiators did

not put an expiration date on ethnic accommodations so Bosnia could become a modern democracy. As one of our interlocutors told us, the international community, which has substantial powers in Bosnia, has steadily withdrawn, turning over decision making to Bosnian officials who were not yet committed to making the country work and naively hoping the promise of future European integration would encourage responsible behavior. That has not happened.

Of course, we can't turn back the clock and can't insert that expiration date on the Dayton agreement, but having made a difference in 1995, we can and should help make a difference again today. It is in our national security interest that we do so.

I suggest the following. The United States and our European friends should state, unequivocally, that Dayton is an absolute baseline, which means only forward progress should be allowed. Separation or new entities should be declared to be clearly out of the question.

Secondly, U.S. policymakers should also remind everyone that the international community, including NATO, did not relinquish its powers to Bosnia but simply has chosen to withdraw and exercise them less robustly. We should seek an agreement to resurrect the will to use these powers and to do so with resolve if growing tensions make renewed violence a credible possibility.

Next, the United States and Europe should adopt a policy of imposing sanctions on individual Bosnian officials who are clearly engaged in corruption or who ignore the Dayton parameters, Bosnian law, and court rulings in their work. Washington has already done this regarding Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik, and just recently, Nikola Spiric, a member of Bosnia's House of Representatives. However, the scope should be expanded, and European capitals need to join us in this regard.

Senior U.S. officials, as well as Members of Congress, should make Sarajevo a priority. I hope more of our Members will visit Bosnia and increase our visibility, demonstrate our continued commitment, and enhance our understanding.

Bosnia may not be ready to join NATO, but its Membership Action Plan should be activated without further delay. As soon as this year's elections are over in Bosnia, the international community should encourage the quick formation of new parliaments and governments at all levels, followed immediately by vigorous reform efforts that eliminate the discrimination in the criteria for certain offices, ensure that law enforcement more effectively serves and protects all residents, and end the corruption in healthcare and so many other violent areas of daily life.

Our policy must shift back to an impetus on universal principles of individual human rights and citizen-based government. Indeed, the privileges

Dayton accorded to the three main ethnic groups are not rights but privileges that should not be upheld at the expense of genuine democracy and individual rights.

We, in my view, have been far too fatalistic about accepting in Bosnia what we are not willing to accept anywhere else. We also underestimate what Bosnians might find acceptable, and we should be encouraging them to support leaders based on credentials, positions, and personal integrity, not based on ethnicity. There should no longer be a reason why a Bosniak, Serb, or Croat voter should be prohibited by law from considering a candidate of another ethnicity or a multiethnic political party. All candidates and parties would do well to seek votes from those not belonging to a single ethnic group. This may take time and perhaps some effort, but it should happen sooner rather than later.

Let me conclude by asserting that greater engagement is in the interest of the United States—the economic interest and the national security interest. Our country is credited with Bosnia's preservation after the country was almost destroyed by aggression, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Thank God our country was there for Bosnia.

Our adversaries—notably, but not exclusively, Russia—would like nothing more than to make an American effort fail in the end, and they would ensure that its repercussions are felt elsewhere around the globe.

Current trends in Bosnia make the country an easier entry point for extremism in Europe, including Islamic extremism. If we wait for discrimination and ethnic tensions to explode again, our engagement will then become a moral imperative at significantly greater cost.

The people of Bosnia, like their neighbors throughout the Balkans, know they are in Europe but consider the United States their most trusted friend, their most honest friend. They want our presence and engagement, and given the tragedies they have experienced, they have earned our support and friendship.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today I want to talk about some of the positive steps the U.S. Senate is about to take in pushing back against—

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield for 1 minute, I would like to make a unanimous consent request that at the conclusion of Senator PORTMAN's remarks, I be recognized, and that at the conclusion of my remarks, Senator SMITH be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Mr. PORTMAN. There is no objection.

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Thank you. Thank you, Senator PORTMAN.

## OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. PORTMAN. I thank my colleague, and I am going to talk about him in a second and the work we have done with regard to pushing back against the opioid epidemic that has hit our States. In this body, every single Member is affected by it, and our country is affected by it in very significant ways.

Because of the dangerous hurricanes that are approaching our coast, it looks as though the vote we had expected tomorrow and the debate we had expected tomorrow on the opioid package may be postponed based on what I just heard from the majority leader. But in the next several days, the Senate is expected to take up comprehensive legislation that comes from four or five different committees in Congress to fight the addiction crisis, to help our communities combat some of the deadliest aspects of this crisis nationally. This help is urgently needed.

Let's start with talking about how Congress got here.

First, just a couple of years ago, we passed two bills in Congress that were historic and are making a difference. One is called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA; the other is called the 21st Century Cures Act.

CARA, which I coauthored with my colleague SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, who is on the Senate floor with us—he spoke just a moment ago—provides resources directly to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery programs. These are nonprofit programs. For the most part, they are able to apply to the Federal Government directly for grant money. They are doing things that are innovative and new to try to get at this problem, and in many respects, they are working and making a difference.

This year alone, there will be about \$608 million spent on these programs that offer innovative solutions to this stubborn problem that is affecting everyone in this Chamber.

The Cures legislation, 21st Century Cures legislation, this year will be \$500 million annually. That goes directly to the States, and the States then give grants to various programs in those States.

In my home State of Ohio, for instance, \$26 million has come each of the last 2 years. Sadly, Ohio is one of the hardest hit States in the country, so we have a larger grant allocation than some States that have not had as many overdoses and deaths and rates of addiction that are as high as we have had.

I was a very strong supporter of the 21st Century Cures funding, and I applaud Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY, as well as Senator BLUNT and other Appropriations Committee members on both sides of the aisle for their work on that.

Of course, with regard to the CARA legislation, it is actually working out there. I have now had the opportunity to see how it is working. I have been to

about a dozen CARA grant recipients in Ohio over the last year alone. I have seen new and powerful ways that the communities back in Ohio are helping to turn the tide of addiction.

Last month, as an example, I visited the Whitehall fire station outside of Columbus, OH. They are doing something innovative for a fire station. They have opened their doors and partnered with another organization. They get CARA funding, and the other organization gets Cures funding to provide immediate help for those who are coming in and are seeking it or have overdosed; Narcan has been applied and has reversed the effects of these overdoses. Yet that gap that so often occurs in our communities doesn't occur there because it is seamless. People can go right into treatment.

The program, again, was made possible by this CARA grant. It opens the doors of the fire station, and it is working.

I was there at a time when, just coincidentally, an addict came in. His name was Blake. Blake was, as he described himself, a heroin addict, and he had heroin on his person. I had the opportunity to speak with Blake and offer him some words of encouragement. I had an opportunity to ask him why he was there and what had happened in the past. He said that he had been to three treatment programs. They hadn't worked. He had gone straight from a short-term treatment program right back to the streets. The gap had occurred.

He also said that he was ready, and he appreciated the opportunity to go straight into a treatment program, which he had not had before.

I had a chance to speak with him, and I told him to stay in touch with me, to let me know what is going on. Last week, he called, and Blake said that he is now in a 3-month treatment program in Portsmouth, OH. He is optimistic; he is confident. He believes that because of this approach, he has an opportunity now to get clean, to get back with his family and get back to work.

This is what is often needed: a seamless transition from immediate medical attention—the application of Narcan to reverse the effects—to treatment, to longer term recovery in order for people to overcome their addiction. That is what CARA and Cures prioritize, and that is why these programs are so important.

Once again, we will see in the funding this year that those programs have been held up. The good parts of the programs, in particular, are being used as an example for the entire country.

Despite the legislative progress we have made, and despite what I see back home with communities beginning to make a difference, overall, the situation is not getting better; it is getting worse. You might ask: Why is that?

Well, I believe it is for one simple reason, and that is the advent of new drugs, particularly less expensive and

more powerful synthetic opioids that have come into our communities in the last few years. The new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, show that overdose deaths increased 9 percent from 2016 to 2017, the last year for which we have data. My home State of Ohio had a 9½ percent increase in overdose deaths.

In total, CDC estimates that 72,000 Americans—72,000 Americans—died last year from overdoses, the No. 1 cause of death for Americans under the age of 50. Over 48,000 of those overdose deaths were caused by opioids, and about 30,000 of those were caused by synthetic forms, particularly fentanyl. That is more than 60 percent, so this is the big issue right now.

Two-thirds of the overdose deaths in my home State of Ohio are being caused by synthetic opioids, fentanyl. Columbus, OH, unfortunately had a number of deaths over a short period of time, all due to fentanyl. There were about 20,000 fentanyl overdose deaths in 2016, meaning there has been a 50-percent increase in just 1 year.

When you go from 2013 to 2017, there has been an 850-percent increase just during 5 years—an 850-percent increase in fentanyl overdose deaths in our country.

The opioid crisis has continued to tighten its grip around communities across our country, and the emergence of fentanyl has presented a new challenge in turning the tide of this epidemic. Just as we were making progress, this more deadly, less expensive scourge has come into our families, our communities, our States. That is why we need to take action—and take action this week.

I would like to thank the majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, and the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, for agreeing to bring this legislation to the floor.

I would also like to thank Chairman LAMAR ALEXANDER for his good work in bringing together all of the different proposals from these four or five committees I talked about and negotiating with all sides to come up with consensus legislation. This should be non-partisan, not just bipartisan. This is something that is attacking our communities at their core.

I would like to thank and commend the several committees that have held public hearings and contributed legislative ideas to this mix. That includes the Judiciary Committee, the HELP Committee, the Finance Committee, and others.

This bipartisan consensus package puts politics aside and does what is right for our communities. It includes some additional legislative priorities I have been working on over the past couple of years that I believe are going to make a real difference in this fight.

Earlier this year, again with Senator WHITEHOUSE and others, we introduced CARA 2.0, the next version of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. A number of those provisions are included in this package.