

blow into Tennessee. The result is that when you come see the Great Smoky Mountains, you can call them the Great Smoky Mountains and not the great smoggy mountains, which they were some time ago.

So I would congratulate Bill Johnson on his tenure as CEO. He has got TVA on the right track, and I would urge the Board of Directors to think long and hard as they select someone to fill his shoes because as a former Governor of that State and now as a U.S. Senator from Tennessee for 16 years, I know the importance of having ample supply of low-cost clean electricity to heat our homes, run our computers, and attract our jobs.

Now, I have a Thanksgiving thought, to move away from the disagreeable, acrimonious dealings of the Senate for a moment.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Mr. President, I suggest two more things that Tennesseans can be grateful for this Thanksgiving.

One, there is a new 16-mile section of the Foothills Parkway, creating a spectacular view of the Great Smoky Mountains, and, two, because the air is now so much cleaner, you can actually see the mountains from this spectacular drive.

In the 1990s, on the clearest days, according to the National Park Service, you could see for around 50 miles in the Smokies. Today you can see more than 90 miles on the clearest days. Even on the haziest days, visibility has improved. In the 1990s, visibility was less than 10 miles. Today you can see more than 30 miles on the haziest days, according to the Park Service.

While that is still less than the natural visibility of 150 miles on the clearest days—by natural visibility, I mean the blue haze the Cherokees used to sing about that exists because of the moisture in the Smokies—and 90 miles on the haziest days, we have made great improvements in the last two decades, and visibility is continuing to improve in the park.

The new section of the Foothills Parkway between Walland and Wears Valley is one of the prettiest drives in America. If you want the best view of the highest mountains in the Eastern United States, you will drive the Foothills Parkway. Last Sunday, when my wife and I drove it on the third day, it was open; it was packed, most of it with local people taking pictures of each other because they were so astonished by the view. It was a view so magnificent it surprises even those of us who grew up driving through the Smoky Mountains. Soon this drive will attract many of the more than the 11 million visitors who come to our park each year—twice as many as any national park.

But 16 years ago, these visitors would not have had such a good view. In 2002, the year I was elected to the Senate, the National Parks Conservation Association said that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was the most

polluted park in America. There were 3.5 million people who would visit the park in the summertime and the air was hazardous to breathe. The views were extremely limited due to pollution. Instead of the blue haze I mentioned earlier, we saw smog. The Great Smoky Mountains had become the great smoggy mountains just 16 years ago. Then a lot of people went to work. Federal clean air regulations, which I supported, required cleaner burning diesel fuels and cleaner vehicle engines, which also helped lower emissions. This especially helped the Smokies because of the large number of visitors' vehicles and because three interstates carry heavy truck traffic through nearby Knoxville, TN.

I also voted to support other Federal clean air regulations that limited emissions from smokestacks of sulfur, nitrogen, and mercury and established rules to prohibit dirty air from blowing from one State into another. I have always thought that operating a coal-fired powerplant without air pollution control equipment on it was like driving at night without the lights on. We have equipment and TVA has proved, as other utilities have, that you can burn coal in a clean way if you will simply put on pollution control equipment for mercury, nitrogen, and sulfur.

One of the biggest impacts, therefore, came in 2008, when the Tennessee Valley Authority began installing pollution control equipment on some of its coal-fired powerplants near the park. TVA has invested nearly \$6 billion to reduce air emissions. That is money out of our pockets—we ratepayers. These efforts have resulted in a 94-percent reduction in sulfur dioxide emissions and a 91-percent reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions. Nitrogen and sulfur emissions have harmful effects on human health, the environment, and visibility.

Those of us who live near the park can see the impact of TVA's actions almost immediately. Today, TVA has installed some type of emission control equipment on all of its coal-fired powerplants and continues to improve that equipment so that the air will become even cleaner.

Over the years, I met and worked with mayors in counties surrounding the park who did what they could locally to make the air cleaner; that is because one of their top priorities is clean air. The Sevierville Chamber of Commerce, when I walked in there not long ago, told me it was their top priority because tourists come to spend money in Sevierville and Pigeon Forge to see the Smokies, not to see the smog. Now ground-level ozone that creates the smog that is harmful to human health and the environment and reduces visibility has improved significantly—by 36 percent according to the Great Smoky Mountains Association. All of the counties in the region around the park meet the EPA's environmental quality standards for ozone pollution.

On the parkway, in 1944—that was the year Congress first authorized the Foothills Parkway—this is what was going on: Allied Forces were invading Normandy Beach, Franklin D. Roosevelt was President, and Bing Crosby was singing "I'll Be Seeing You." The State of Tennessee began acquiring right-of-way to the parkway and donating it to the Federal Government.

In 1960, the construction of the parkway actually started. Dwight D. Eisenhower was President. Elvis had just come home from 2 years in the Army, and American women were wearing beehive hairdos. That was 1960, when construction on this parkway began.

When I became Governor in 1979, the State had completed acquiring the right-of-way, and the State took the lead on 10 miles of the parkway between Carrs Creek and Wears Valley. Then construction halted because of environmental problems.

By the time I got to the Senate in 2002—the same time the Smokies was declared the most polluted national park—all of the parties had agreed on a plan to build bridges to complete the so-called 1.65 mile "missing link" on the parkway. Then President Bush's administration and the 2005 Federal highway bill, President Obama's administration, and Governor Bill Haslam's State administration in Tennessee all chipped in effort, time, and taxpayer money to finish the job after 50 years and \$200 million of construction.

Since it was first authorized, it has taken 75 years to build a parkway and two decades to make the air clean enough so that visitors can see the mountains for 90 miles. So if you are looking for something else to be grateful for on Thanksgiving, try being grateful for the many visionaries, park officials, road builders, engineers, scientists, editors, and political leaders who have had the foresight to make it a priority to build the Foothills Parkway and clean up the air so that we can see the mountains. It has taken 75 years, but the views are so picturesque that it has been well worth the wait.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. President, on another subject, to people who come up to me with some wonderment and ask what it is like working in the U.S. Senate, I often say: Think of Washington, DC, as a split-screen television.

Let's take the 30 days between September 4 and October 6, between the beginning of Judge Kavanaugh's hearing and his confirmation. On one side of the screen there was as much acrimony as you could ever expect to see in the U.S. Capitol—protesters, Senators upset, Judge Kavanaugh upset. It was a very difficult situation. That was on one side of the television set. But on the other side of the television set was one of the most productive 30 days we have ever had in the U.S. Senate, with 72 Senators working together—half Democrats, half Republicans—to pass landmark opioids legislation to deal

with the largest public health crisis we have today.

A lot of other things happened during that time. There was a major copyright bill, the first in a generation, to make sure songwriters get paid for their work. The Senator from North Carolina helped with that. There were appropriations bills which, for the fourth consecutive year, had record funding for national laboratories, supercomputing, biomedical research to cure cancer, all of those things, all of those miracles, and an important bill to make our airlines safer for the next 5 years, probably the most important infrastructure bill on locks and dams that we have had in several years. We even passed a bill Senator FEINSTEIN and I had worked on for a few years to make it illegal to make cell phone calls from airplanes so that you won't have to sit next to somebody revealing their innermost thoughts on a 5-hour flight across the country. All of that happened on this side of the screen during the same 30 days we saw the Kavanaugh hearing. I want to talk about the most important thing that happened during those 30 days, which is the opioids legislation.

Opioids affect every single part of our country—we have established that—which is why 72 Senators worked together, eight committees in the House and five in the Senate, to produce a complex bill right in the middle of an election—right in the middle of the Kavanaugh hearing. One of the things we talked about was what do we do about synthetic opioids—fentanyl.

Most of that fentanyl originates in China. Last week, I led a delegation of five Senators and two Members of the House of Representatives to China, where we met with officials for the express purpose of asking for their help in dealing with our opioids problem—our fentanyl problem. We didn't say to them: It is all your fault. We said: Look, it is our problem. China doesn't have a user problem with opioids today like we do. In fact, no other country has had more of a struggle with opium throughout its history than China. They know how terrible it can be. We said: We would like for you, Chinese officials, to help us by doing more of what you are already doing, by doing what we have done about fentanyl, by controlling every form of it, listing every form of fentanyl as a controlled substance so that our Department of Justice and our Drug Enforcement Agency can go after people who are distributing it illegally.

Fentanyl is a white powder synthetic opioid that can come in a small package. If you open the package and a few grams escape into the air, DEA agents tell me they are almost overcome. They have to leave the room. A few grams can kill you, and it often is killing Americans. Among drug overdoses, it is the fastest rising killer in our country, with a 70-percent increase in our State between 2016 and 2017.

The government of China has already been a good partner. I said this to the

Chinese officials with whom we met. They work with our Drug Enforcement Agency and other law enforcement agencies to try to stem the flow of the chemicals that are produced in China but then find their way through Mexico and Canada, mainly, into the United States or through the mail directly into the United States.

What China has already done, which we appreciate—and I said that to them—is that they have made 25 fentanyl compounds illegal, and according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, when China did that, we saw an immediate and dramatic decrease in those chemicals coming into the United States. This action boosted our counternarcotics operation and made a dramatic decrease in the amount of those substances subsequently found in the United States.

China cooperates with the United States, but our cooperation faces challenges when a fentanyl substance is not on China's control list. So the request that I made at each of our meetings was this: Would you please control all fentanyl substances? The Trump administration did this in the United States in 2017. We would like for China to do the same thing. That is the way to help stem the flow of fentanyl substances from China to the United States and other countries.

I said to them: Look, we are trying to do our part. We just passed our landmark opioid legislation. It included Senator PORTMAN's STOP Act, which many of us cosponsored, which would make it easier for us to stop fentanyl through the mail. We are doing everything we can think of to do, but when you do not control all fentanyl substances, what happens in China is, outside of the 25 you have controlled, some smart entrepreneur in China will figure out a different class of fentanyl and begin to sell it and mail it, and it comes to the United States through Mexico and Canada, and the drug agencies in China aren't really empowered to deal with that.

To be clear, this is not a problem that the Chinese Government has caused, but this is a problem the Chinese Government can help us solve. This is not pointing a finger at China and saying: You are doing the wrong thing.

In fact, they are doing the right thing by cooperating with us and classifying 25 substances. We want them to do more than what they are already doing, and they can be seen as the world leader in dealing with this dangerous synthetic opioid because most of the chemicals are produced in that country.

On the trip with me was a very senior delegation: the chairmen of the House Appropriations and Budget Committees this year, Congressmen FRELINGHUYSEN and BLACK; then Senator SHELBY, ENZI, ROBERTS, and KENNEDY from this body.

We worked with the U.S. Ambassador to China, Terry Branstad. He is an exceptionally able representative of our

country. He is the longest serving Governor in the history of the United States. Six months ago, when I first talked to Governor Branstad about our proposed trip to China, he said: I am going to ask you to do one thing, make fentanyl and the opioid crisis the primary point of your visit in China to help Chinese officials understand how important it is to us because we are working on many other issues with China right now.

The President of the United States is meeting, apparently maybe next week, with the President of China in Argentina. Perhaps out of that, we will have a great deal. We have a lot of issues with China.

Fentanyl and opioids doesn't rise to the top of the list in the Chinese minds, our Ambassador was saying. One reason it doesn't is because China doesn't have much of a problem with people using illegal opioids. Certainly, it has nothing like what we do. We know—and we heard and we said on this floor and we all voted for the opioid bill because we know what is happening in our country. Overdoses involving opioids killed more than 42,000 people in this country in 2016, and roughly 45 percent of those were due to synthetic opioids like fentanyl, the kind we are asking China to help us with.

In my home county of Blount County in East Tennessee, there are 130,000 people. Last year there were 130,000 opioid prescriptions—1 for every person. The legislation we passed will help reduce the number of prescriptions. That is one way to deal with the problem.

Another way is to stop the fentanyl from coming into our country. Our new law helps address the opioid crisis by the STOP Act. That is the fentanyl bill. The new law supports research to find new nonaddictive painkillers. It helps reduce the supply of opioids by empowering the FDA to require manufacturers to sell certain opioid pills in so-called blister packs. It provides more opportunity for treatment and recovery and helps babies born with opioid withdrawal. During this past year in our appropriations bills, we appropriated \$8.5 billion to deal with opioids.

Still, we have our problem with fentanyl that the Chinese can help us solve. Several of the Chinese officials reacted with surprise—and some not too well—when I told them most of the fentanyl that comes into our country originates, in one way or another, in China. The reason for that is not because they are not helping us; it is because of the ingenuity of Chinese entrepreneurs who, as soon as China lists a fentanyl substance as controlled, they create another kind of fentanyl substance and keep selling it. The Chinese officials were generous and respectful of our time. They listened and promised to consider our request. We met with Li Keqiang, the Premier; Zhao Kezhi, State Councilor and Public

Security Minister, under whom directly are the narcotics agents; Yang Jiechi, the Politburo Member and Communist Party Foreign Affairs Director. They understand how serious this is for us. They know it hurts because they had a long history with opioids which they dealt with. I appreciate the fact that they said they are willing to explore this. I intend to report our visit to President Trump and urge him to continue to ask China to help us.

We also met with Ambassadors of other countries who are affected, such as Mexico and China and other countries whom Ambassador Branstad invited to the U.S. Embassy for a meeting. They agreed to form a working group to try to help make clear to the Chinese we weren't pointing the finger at them saying it is your problem. We are just saying the only finger we would like to point is saying you can do more than anybody else to help solve the problem.

I want to thank Ambassador Branstad, Terry Branstad, for setting up the relationships we had with the Ministers in China to help deliver the message that opioids is our biggest public health epidemic and that the fentanyl flowing into the United States is the most severe part of that.

The staff at the U.S. Embassy were very helpful. In particular, I would like to thank Steve Churchill, Rob Fordan, and Richard Jao for all their work.

I want to thank, again, some of the Chinese officials with whom we met, Premier Li Keqiang, Minister Zhao Kezhi, and Director Yang Jiechi, for the time they spent with us and the commitment they made to continue to work with us on this public health epidemic.

In conclusion, there is no public health crisis in the United States of America that compares with the opioid crisis. The most severe part of that crisis right now is the flow of fentanyl coming into the United States. What we respectfully ask China to do is more of what they are already doing. They are already controlling 25 different classes of fentanyl. We want them to control all of those classes of fentanyl. That frees their narcotics agents—and they are pretty good—to go after anyone in China who uses or produces fentanyl illegally or improperly.

We saw the difference that made when China controlled 25 of the fentanyl substances. We look forward to the difference it will make when it controls the rest.

My hope is, the President of the United States and the President of China will discuss this and that they see each other next week in Argentina. I hope the President will thank President Xi for what they have already done and ask him to do more. It is not China's problem. It is really our problem. We are the ones with the opioids problem. China can help us solve it by doing what we have already done about fentanyl in this country and doing more of what they have already done.

If they do that, China can be seen as the country in the world doing the most to stop the flow of this deadly fentanyl, and the American people will be grateful for that action.

I thank the President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Alaska.

COAST GUARD REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I want to echo what my colleague from Tennessee just mentioned about a lot of bipartisan accomplishments on the Senate floor over the last several weeks. They are really important ones.

He led the charge on the opioid bill which is going to help our entire country and so many others. They don't always get reported in the press, but it is important to make sure our fellow Americans, our constituents, know that is happening.

This afternoon, I want to talk about another one that is a really important accomplishment that we were able to achieve on the Senate floor a couple of hours ago; that is, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018.

A number of Senators have already been down on the floor to talk about this: JOHN THUNE, the chairman of the Commerce Committee, which is where the oversight and responsibility of the Coast Guard lies; Senator WICKER from Mississippi; Senator CARPER—so many Senators contributed to this important piece of legislation that we just passed today by almost a vote of over 90 Senators.

It is a very bipartisan piece of legislation that we were able to get through the Senate floor today. As you know, this has taken some time. For almost 2 years, we have been working on the Coast Guard bill. A number of us put a lot of time and effort into it.

I do want to do a shout out to my staff: Eric Elam, my legislative director; Tom Mansour, a Coast Guard fellow in my office; and Scott Leathard. All of them worked literally for the last year and a half, night and day, on this bill.

Again, it is important for America and certainly important for my great State of Alaska. It raises a broader issue. We just celebrated Veterans Day. Our country was rightfully focused on our veterans. There was a lot of focus on the centennial of the Armistice of World War I, the ending of World War I. Often when there is a focus on the armed services, it focuses on the armed services at the Pentagon—Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines—and sometimes the brave men and women in the Coast Guard can be overlooked. They shouldn't be. We all know that.

One of the things I tried to focus on in my time in the Senate is making sure they are not. Prior to 9/11, the Coast Guard was probably the only service in the entire U.S. military—because they are a member of the services of the U.S. military—whose members were risking their lives every single day on the job. Post-9/11, with the

national security challenges we have, every member of our military—all the services—are risking their lives every day, but the Coast Guard does it day in and day out.

Pre-9/11 and post-9/11, men and women in that wonderful service undertake a heroic mission with actions that we see saving American lives and defending our national security.

What do they focus on and what does this bill focus on? Well, the bottom line is, this bill is focused on making sure the men and women of the Coast Guard have the resources to do their job. Their job is varied and extremely important.

We have all seen the Coast Guard coming out of the sky to rescue us—rescue Americans on seas when they are in trouble; with the hurricanes we have seen over the last couple of years; the heroic pictures of the men and women in the Coast Guard doing thousands of rescues. We see that as part of their mission. They have been described as angels in helicopters. When they show up, it is certainly witnessing America at its very best. We have seen a lot of that. The mission of the Coast Guard also includes ice-breaking, marine environmental protection, port security, and international crisis response. Many members are deployed overseas in places like the Middle East, combating illegal fishing by other nations, protecting American fishermen, protecting Alaskan fishermen, readiness to support the Department of Defense operation. It is a long list. The Coast Guard does it very well.

Importantly, the bill we just passed today will significantly help the men and women with this important mission. You and I serve on the Armed Services Committee. Again, what my colleague from Tennessee was talking about is another one of these bipartisan areas of achievement that we have seen in the Senate in the last year, year and a half, consensus on issues like rebuilding our military. We are doing that on the Armed Services Committee through the National Defense Authorization Act that passes the Senate and the House every year.

I am certainly honored to be on the Armed Services Committee, where we are working on rebuilding from the cuts of 2010 to 2015. They were almost 25 percent of the Department of Defense budget while national security challenges were increasing all over the world.

The other thing we are rebuilding—and it doesn't always get a lot of attention—we are rebuilding the Coast Guard. In essence, this bill we passed today is the NDAA for the U.S. Coast Guard. The recapitalization and rebuilding of the Coast Guard is a core element of the bill we just passed.

Let's run through a couple of examples. Like what we just did in the NDAA, increasing the end strength of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, this bill today works to increase the end strength of the U.S. Coast