

that still bears that same H.R. number. Then it was changed in the Judiciary Committee. Look, I am glad that there is more awareness and consciousness about this issue and that both the House and Senate want to act, but let's not water this legislation down. Let's not take away this core element of our legislation that simply says that under the Communications Decency Act, we should have the opportunity to allow people to sue and allow prosecutors to go after these evil websites.

We can set up new causes of action. That is fine. We can do more things as we have done in this body. As I said, over the last 5 or 6 years, we passed a number of important bills to try to raise the consciousness and to try to help on this issue, but if we don't deal with this internet part, we will continue to see an increase, which is a stain on our national character—that at this time in our Nation's history, we are seeing an increase in people being sold for sex online, often underage.

Another story came not from testimony before the permanent subcommittee where we spent 18 months studying this, but it came before the Commerce Committee, and Senator BLUMENTHAL was there for part of this. This woman came forward. By the way, you could have heard a pin drop in that room when she talked about her 16-year-old daughter who was sold on backpage.com and was sold to a man who murdered her on Christmas Eve of 2016. This is what this mom said: My daughter never should have been on that site; that should never be allowed. She is right. It should never be allowed. How can we allow that to happen?

So Senator BLUMENTHAL and I introduced this legislation. We had 24 cosponsors almost right away, and it was bipartisan from the start. This is not a political or partisan issue. As of yesterday, I think we had 64 cosponsors. These are thoughtful Members, including the Presiding Officer today, who looked at this legislation. They have heard the arguments from both sides. The other side of the argument is from the tech community, some of whom are supporting our legislation, some of whom are not. But for the people in technology who are concerned about this, I just have to state: I don't get it. This is very narrowly crafted for this issue. We are not trying to affect the freedom of the internet—just the opposite.

If you don't start cracking down on this obvious crime against humanity, which is what I believe trafficking is, I think we are going to see much broader legislation to deal with the internet. This just says: If you are violating a Federal law on trafficking and you are doing it knowingly, you are facilitating it, you are assisting it, then you have to be held liable and held to account.

In fact, we keep in the law a Good Samaritan provision that says if a website wants to clean up its site, it is

protected. The good guys should be protected. We want them to clean up their site. We want to be sure that we continue to have freedom of the internet, but we don't want to allow—nor do I think it was ever intended in this law to allow—criminal activity to occur that affects our children and our constituents over the internet without any sense of accountability or responsibility. It is narrowly crafted. It is focused on a real issue that affects real people.

On Friday I was back home in Ohio, and I was at a drug treatment center. I had an opportunity to meet some of those who are recovering addicts. As often happens when I am in those kinds of settings, it turns to what kind of treatment options are out there for trauma. Why? Because there is a link between opioids—particularly heroin and fentanyl—and trafficking. This is what has been told to me many times by some of these women, sometimes underage: Senator, trafficking has moved from the street corner to the iPhone, from the street corner to the cell phone. That is a reality.

I met a woman on Friday who was going through treatment, and part of it is to treat the trauma that is associated with this. Drug treatment is one thing, but the trauma associated with sex trafficking, repeated rapes is a course that is a deeper and even more difficult road to recovery. I believe she will recover. She has a great attitude. She gets it. She is going to have to focus on it and dedicate herself to it.

I will just tell you that this is a real issue in our communities today. It is affecting every single State in this body, and we cannot continue to ignore the reality that while the internet has brought a lot of good things to us and the internet has helped our economy to grow, there is a dark side and this dark side of the internet is why we think it is so important for us to address this issue and address it now so that the next mom who is out there right now wondering, "Where is my daughter? She has gone missing," will not find that she has been advertised online to multiple men, that her life is forever changed, and that she will never achieve her God-given potential in life because of the trauma she has experienced. That is happening right now today.

We have to pass this legislation. It will help. I am convinced it will help. It will help to avoid the reality today, which is that these websites in your communities don't care and they are not going to care until we make them accountable.

This month is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month—January. President Trump just wrote a beautiful proclamation about it. It was a call to action. President Obama did previously. Thursday is the day in which a lot of the advocates will be here in town talking about this issue. I just urge my colleagues and their staff, if they are listening today,

please sign up on this legislation if you haven't already. To our leadership, let's get this to the floor for a vote. This should not be an issue that we drag out. Let's deal with it. We spent years studying this. We know what the issue is. We know what the problem is. Then, to my House colleagues, let's work together to actually solve this problem.

For those in the tech community who continue to oppose this legislation, I ask you to look into your hearts and think about the impact this is having on families all across the country. Yes, we all want a better world, and that is part of what many of these internet companies are professing to want, and many of them, by the way, have spent considerable resources in fighting trafficking. But if you don't get at this issue—it has moved from the street corner to the smartphone. If you don't get at this issue, I don't believe we will see the progress that all of us desire.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from South Dakota.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the beginning of a new session of Congress provides a good moment to look back at the previous year and take stock of the challenges ahead, and today what I would like to do is just take a few minutes to talk about the national security challenges facing our country and the importance of equipping our military to meet them.

By the end of the Obama administration, our military was facing a serious readiness shortfall. The Obama administration's failure to prioritize defense had left our armed services with manpower deficits and delayed the acquisition of 21st century weapons and equipment. Military effectiveness had been compromised by a culture of micro-management in the Obama administration that seriously hampered the ability of troops and commanders to respond to conditions on the ground in a timely fashion, but within days of his inauguration, President Trump made clear that all this was going to change.

You can look at the situation we faced in the Middle East. The timeframe I am referring to right here, the mound of ground that is held by ISIS, that is in January of 2017.

Well, just a week after his inauguration, President Trump issued a Presidential memorandum on rebuilding the military. He directed a review of our military's readiness, and he set out an action plan to address manpower shortfalls, maintenance backlogs, acquisition costs and delays, and other drains on our military capabilities. President Trump also acted to free up military commanders to make decisions and to respond to conditions on the ground.

The fruits of his commitment to rebuilding our military and trusting our military leaders are already evident, most notably in the significant gains made against ISIS in 2017.

If you look at the chart I just showed, in January of 2017, and then you look at December of 2017, in terms of territory held, ISIS has been routed. In the first 11 months of the Trump administration, over 15,000 square miles were liberated from ISIS control, exceeding the total area freed in the preceding 2½ years. ISIS has lost over 98 percent of the territory it once held, and it hasn't gained any back.

Just a month ago, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi declared his country "fully liberated" from ISIS. In Syria, ISIS has lost control of its strongholds and now only remains in small pockets of the country.

All told, in the last year, more than 5.3 million people have been freed from the brutal grip of ISIS—more than double the previous gains. Families who have spent years fearing for their lives are seeing a chance for stability, peace, and order. If this year has shown us anything, it is that we can trust our military to do its job and deliver results.

President Trump delegated tactical authority and permitted our military to take action when action was needed, and military leaders credit this tactical authority for significant gains made on the ground.

The swift rise of ISIS was enabled, in part, by the Obama administration's shortsighted desire to withdraw from the fight against terrorism in the Middle East. The withdrawal of U.S. troops—on a timeline the Obama administration announced to our enemies—left a power vacuum in the region, and ISIS stepped in to fill the void. This is a mistake we cannot repeat.

While we have made tremendous strides against ISIS in the last year, we cannot simply take these wins and let our guard down. We know ISIS and other dark actors can operate in the shadows of the internet and social media, using their extensive networks to recruit and influence other would-be attackers in the United States and around the world.

As chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, which shares jurisdiction over some of these matters, I am committed to looking at what steps we can take to thwart terrorist recruitment and planning efforts and to keep America safe. Next week, I am holding a Commerce Committee hearing on what social media companies can do in this fight.

While we focus on combating terrorism, we cannot forget the conventional threats faced by our Nation and our allies. I mentioned gains against ISIS and Syria, but there remains the alarming challenge of growing Iranian influence there. Syria provides a convenient land bridge to connect Iran with Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is well on its way to being a proxy for the Iranian Army.

Of course, we continue to see the deadly consequences of Iran's continued smuggling of arms to Houthi

rebels. Iran is a serious threat to stability in the Middle East and to our allies there, and we need to keep that in mind as we consider the failed Iran nuclear deal and the ongoing protests in Iran.

We also have to stay focused on the threat posed by North Korea. South and North Korea reestablished communications and just met to discuss the upcoming winter Olympics in South Korea. They announced, in addition to North Korea sending a delegation to the winter games, the two countries have agreed to hold military talks, but North Korea said it will not discuss its nuclear program at this time.

I think North Korea's nuclear program has to be addressed as a condition of any lasting peace, and the United States should lead its allies in making that crystal clear. While the talks are a notable development after 2 years of no communication between the two countries, we obviously need to be wary of North Korea's motives. We will have to see what actions follow and if the talks lead to any substantive steps by North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program.

President Trump and Ambassador Haley have made it clear that North Korea must abandon its dangerous ambitions, and increased sanctions are providing additional pressure. We should make no concessions without fundamental progress. Of course, this will require cooperation from China to help exert pressure on North Korea and uphold U.N. resolutions.

China has sought to tip the regional balance in its favor by objecting to the installation of missile defense platforms that would defend the United States and our allies against North Korean missiles. Meanwhile, it has been simultaneously expanding its own military, continuing to develop islands in international waters and exercising economic coercion.

President Trump's national security strategy correctly acknowledges both China and Russia as challengers to American influence, interests, security, and prosperity.

I have spoken on the Senate floor more than once to denounce Russia's continued annexation of Crimea, its subversion of Ukrainian sovereignty, and its efforts to undermine NATO, not to mention its continued denial of attempting to meddle with our election. Both the conventional challenges that our Nation continues to face and the persistent threat of radical terrorism underscore the perennial need to ensure that our military is the best prepared and the best equipped fighting force in the world.

I have said it before, and I will say it again. If we don't get national security right, the rest of what we do here is just conversation. We have to be able to defend our country and our allies.

Yes, investing in our national security and restoring our military, especially after years of neglect, will come at a cost, but as Army Chief of Staff

GEN Mark Milley has said, "The only thing more expensive than deterrence is actually fighting a war, and the only thing more expensive than fighting a war is fighting one and losing one."

In the next few weeks, the Senate will have a chance to vote to increase funding for our troops and to take real steps to restore our military readiness. I hope my colleagues across the aisle will work with us. If there is any issue—any issue—in this Chamber that should be bipartisan, it is this one. It is not an exaggeration to say the security of our Nation, our ability to live as a free people, depends upon the strength of our military. It is time to make sure our military men and women have the resources they need to defend our Nation.

RECESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:25 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. BURR).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the distinguished Presiding Officer, the Senator from North Carolina.

I ask unanimous consent to speak for 2 minutes on the nominees on whom we are about to vote.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, on December 1, 2016, Judge Todd Campbell stepped down as a district court judge for the Middle District of Tennessee. On April 15, 2017, Judge Kevin Sharp stepped down, creating a second vacancy in the Middle District. Those two vacancies have resulted in increased caseloads for the only two remaining full-time Federal district court judges, Waverly Crenshaw and Aleta Trauger.

Things are almost as bad in Tennessee's Western District, where we have two vacancies. Fortunately, help is on the way. In July of last year, President Trump nominated Chip Campbell to serve in Tennessee's Middle District and Tommy Parker to serve in the Western District. I was pleased to see the President select such qualified individuals, and I thank him and his counsel, Don McGahn, for working with us throughout this process. I was equally pleased to see the Senate Judiciary Committee approve both nominations by voice vote last October. And it is easy to see why Tennesseans are excited about these nominees, too.

Chip Campbell is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and the University of Alabama School of Law. Before attending law school, Mr. Campbell