I am ready to have those conversations. I want to move forward with the fiscal year 2020 appropriations bills. Let's get the work done the American people sent us here to do. If we have to stay a few evenings and if we have to stay a few weekends, let's do it. It is for the greatest Nation on Earth. Let's do it. I urge leadership on both sides of the aisle, in both Chambers of Congress, to begin these negotiations now.

Then we have to take up, with urgency, a disaster package. In the last 2 years, we have had the deadliest disaster seasons in recent memory—Hurricanes Michael, Florence, Irma, and Maria, the California wildfires, volcanic eruptions in Hawaii, and typhoons along the Pacific coast. These communities, States, and territories need our help.

When Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont in 2011, I found out firsthand how devastating natural disasters can be. Roads were washed away, towns and villages were cut off from vital services, and people's homes were destroyed.

The day after Irene, I went around the State of Vermont with our Governor and with the head of our National Guard in a helicopter, landing in small towns. Many times the only way you could get into these towns was by helicopter because roads were gone and the bridges were gone.

You would see bridges, like a child's toy, twisted and a mile from where it was supposed to be. A farmhouse that had been on the north side of the river was now upside down on the south side of the river. We were in the middle of the State, and we knew it was critical. The Federal Government provided assistance to help recovery because we are part of the United States of America.

The people of Puerto Rico and others that have been so badly damaged, these are Americans. We should stand together to help them. I am sorry we were not able to reach agreement to include a disaster package in the fiscal year 2019 minibus we passed just 2 weeks ago. We were so close to an agreement on a package—so very close, Republicans and Democrats alike. It would have addressed the needs of all impacted communities.

It broke down because the President insisted we eliminate disaster assistance for Puerto Rico. I guess he thought tossing rolls of paper towels for the people is good enough. Puerto Rico is part of the United States. It is not, as the White House described it, an island surrounded by water, I guess, as compared to those other islands. It is a part of the United States. These are American people. They have served in our military. They help us in our medical facilities. They are Americans, and they cannot be left out.

Hurricanes Maria and Irma—they had two hurricanes—devastated Puerto Rico. They destroyed the island's homes and infrastructure. They caused the deaths of an estimated 2,975 people. It was one of the deadliest hurricanes our country has ever seen, certainly in my lifetime.

Now, we provided Puerto Rico assistance in past disaster bills, but they have so many unaddressed needs that have to be met. Many people, even after the hurricane, are still living in temporary housing. Roads, bridges, and communities still need to be rebuilt. One of the largest infrastructure projects to be undertaken on the island is the rebuilding of Puerto Rico's energy grid, which needs more assistance.

Most importantly, in the absence of supplemental assistance, we estimate that 140,000 Puerto Ricans, U.S. citizens, are going to lose nutrition assistance at the end of March.

We are the United States of America—United States of America—and this is the U.S. Senate. We are supposed to take care of all our citizens when they have crises. We do not pick and choose based on with whom we are politically aligned.

I voted for disaster relief for States that were predominantly Republican and other States that were predominantly Democratic, but I don't look at it like that. I look at the fact that they are part of the United States of America, and they had a disaster. They should be helped.

Last month, the House passed H.R. 268, a comprehensive disaster package that provided over $14 billion to help all States and territories impacted by recent disasters to help them recover and rebuild. I worked closely with the House on this bill. I believe it will address the needs of all disaster-impacted communities.

On Tuesday, Senators PERDUE and JONES and others, working very hard, introduced a similar but not identical bill. I am taking these bills with me this weekend. I am going to review them carefully. I thank the bipartisan group of Senators—Senators PERDUE and JONES and others—for bringing the issue back to the forefront of the Senate. I am certainly committed to working with my good friend Chairman SHELBY. I also worked with Republicans and Democrats in the House Appropriations Committee. I want a package that can pass both Chambers in addressing the needs of all States and territories hit by recent disasters.

I certainly urge the majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, to commit to bringing this to the floor as soon as possible. With that, I see other Senators on the floor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

REMEMBERING OTTO WARMBIER

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, in the context of the ongoing negotiations with North Korea, there has been a lot of discussion today in the media about Otto Warmbier.

Otto Warmbier was a young man from my hometown of Cincinnati, OH. This is an emotional issue for me because, through the process of trying to bring Otto home, I got to know his family very well.

He was a young man with a lot of promise, 22 years old, and a college student at the University of Virginia. He had gone as a tourist to North Korea. He was pulled out of the line at the airport.

Here he was, a kindhearted college kid, found himself a prisoner in North Korea. He was there for about 18 months. His detainment and his sentence were appalling; unacceptable by any standards. At some point soon after being sentenced to 15 years of hard labor, from what we know, Otto suffered a severe brain injury. What happened? We may never know the details, but we do know one thing, and that is he was severely mistreated.

Who did the North Korean Government tell about the fact that he had this brain damage? No one. Unbelievably, for the next 15 months of his life, they kept this a secret. They denied him access to the best medical care he deserved, which of course we would have provided.

I was in communication with the North Korean Government during this time through their offices at the United Nations in New York. They didn't even tell us about the terrible mistreatment he had suffered and the condition he was in. They refused repeated requests for consular access that normally would have been provided to someone who has been detained, regardless of their health situation. This included denying requests, of course, from me, from others in this body and other bodies of Congress but also from the Obama administration, the Trump administration, the Red Cross, also from the Government of Sweden, which typically acts for us in North Korea as a consular service. I say that because while I support engagement with North Korea—in fact, in my experience with Otto Warmbier, it makes me even more convinced we need to have communication because we had no good lines of communication.

I support the ongoing talks with North Korea, specifically about denuclearization. I want to make clear that we can never forget about Otto. His treatment at the hands of his captors was unforgivable, and it tells us a lot about the nature of the regime. We can't be naive about what they did to Otto, about the brutal nature of the regime that would do this to an American citizen.

Of course, it is not just about Otto or other visitors. It is about how the people of North Korea are treated, many of whom also have had their human rights violated. No one should have to go through what the Warmbier family has gone through. They have been incredibly strong, by the way, through this whole ordeal. I watched them channel their grief into something constructive, exposing some of the human rights abuses in North Korea, as an example.

Throughout this ordeal, I have stood with Fred and Cindy and their entire family. I will continue to, but I also want to say today, as we discuss these broader issues with North Korea, let's keep Otto Warmbier at the front of our minds. Let's be sure he is high on our agenda and in our consciousness as we deal with North Korea and, again, understanding, because of our experience with Otto, the brutal nature of this regime.

CHINA INVESTIGATION

Mr. President, I will now talk about the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations' hearing we had today.

I am here to talk about China and the impact it is having on the U.S. education system. I chair the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which is a subcommittee of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. My colleague TOM CARPER, on the other side of the aisle, is the ranking member. We worked together on bipartisan—I believe you would say nonpartisan investigations.

We had success working on the opioid crisis in coming up with legislation to stop fentanyl from coming through the mail, the deadliest of all the drugs. We also had success in pushing back against human trafficking, leading to actually shutting down the website that trafficked more women and children than any other one, backpage.com.

Today we looked at something that is also very important for our country; that is, understanding better how these Confucius Institutes work. We issued a bipartisan report today talking about how there is a lack of transparency in how American colleges and universities manage their Confucius Institutes. These are located at more than 100 colleges and universities around the country. These institutions in America have received more than $150 million in support from the Government of China for these Confucius Institutes since 2006.

Confucius Institutes are enterprises that engage in the teaching of Chinese culture and language, and they are at universities and colleges around the world. These Confucius Institutes are designed, funded, and primarily staffed by the Chinese Government. The Chinese Government bills them as an opportunity for cultural exchange, and the funding comes from them. It is an appealing prospect for many U.S. schools trying to meet their demand for language instruction, but we need to be careful.

There needs to be more transparency in how these institutes operate in the United States, and there needs to be more reciprocity so the United States can also provide its cultural institutions in China. That is not happening now because China has systematically shut down comparable U.S. State Department public diplomacy efforts on college campuses in China.

Let me be clear. I do support cultural exchange—we all should; it is a good thing—with China and with the international community more broadly, but there needs to be reciprocity, and there needs to be appropriate engagement without, in this case, the Chinese Government determining what is said and what is done on U.S. campuses.

The law must be followed. That is why transparency is so important.

This morning we held a hearing following an 8-month investigation into this issue. Based on our findings, let me focus on these two issues of transparency and reciprocity—transparency in how colleges and universities manage the institutes which are controlled, funded, and mostly staffed by the Chinese Government and the lack of reciprocity in how China does not permit U.S. State Department programming in China.

Our report details how China, known for its one-sided dealings in trade—not having a level playing field in trade—also does not have a level playing field with regard to these cultural changes.

Our report documents how U.S. officials had expressed concerns about China's influence through its Confucius Institutes. Recently, the FBI's Assistant Director for Counterintelligence testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee that the Confucius Institutes are ''not strictly a cultural institute'' and that ''they are ultimately beholden to the Chinese government.'' The State Department has labeled Confucius Institutes ''China's most prominent soft power platform.''

Higher education groups have also expressed concern. The American Council of Education, the National Association of Scholars, and the American Association of University Professors have all recommended that U.S. schools fundamentally change how they manage Confucius Institutes or consider shutting them down.

Other foreign governments have already acted. For example, the UK Conservative Party Commission on Human Rights called for the suspension of further agreements until it can complete a more comprehensive review of potential threats to academic freedom at the Confucius Institutes in the United Kingdom.

The Canadian Province of New Brunswick recently announced that it would cease its Confucius Institute operations, citing academic freedom concerns and that the program provides a ''one-dimensional'' view of China. Finally, an Australian State, New South Wales, is currently reviewing the Confucius Institute program, citing that it exposes children to propaganda.

These concerns are well-founded. Past statements by Chinese officials make clear the purpose of Confucius Institutes. For example, in 2011, a former member of the Chinese Government explained:

> The Confucius Institute is an appealing brand for expanding our culture abroad. It has made an important contribution toward improving our soft power. The ''Confucius'' brand has a natural attractiveness. Using the excuse of teaching Chinese language, everything looks reasonable and logical.

The Director General of Confucius Institute Headquarters has also commented on how the program controls messaging about controversial topics. She said in 2014:

> Every mainland China teacher we send . . . will say Taiwan belongs to China. We should have one China. No hesitation.

So with regard to issues like Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen Square, the Confucius Institutes stay away from those issues that are considered controversial.

We know that Confucius Institutes exist as one part of China's broader, long-term strategy, but China has invested heavily in them, giving about $150 million to U.S. schools just in the last decade. China's other long-term initiatives include its Made in China 2025 plan, which is a push to lead the world in certain advanced technology manufacturing. The Thousand Talents Program is another state-run initiative designed to recruit Chinese researchers in the United States to return to China for significant financial gain, bringing with them the research knowledge gained at U.S. universities and companies. We plan on continuing to examine the U.S. Government's responses to these issues as well.

Confucius Institutes, by the way, do not stop at colleges and universities alone. China has also opened more than 500 Confucius Classrooms programs at U.S. K–12 schools. In fact, the Confucius Classroom program is a priority for the Chinese Government. A document obtained by the subcommittee during our investigation details a plan to expand Confucius Classrooms by seeking ''top-down policy support from the state government, legislative and educational institutions, with particular emphasis on access to the support from school district superintendents and principals.''

Over the last 8 months, we interviewed U.S. school officials, teachers, and Confucius Institute instructors. We also reviewed tens of thousands of pages of contracts, emails, financial records, and other internal documents obtained from more than 100 U.S. schools that were either active or recently closed Confucius Institutes.

Since our investigation started, more than 10 U.S. schools announced they would be closing their Confucius Institutes. We found that Chinese funding for Confucius Institutes comes with strings attached—strings that can compromise academic freedom. The Chinese Government vets and approves all Chinese directors and teachers, events, research proposals, and speakers at U.S. Confucius Institutes. Chinese teachers sign contracts pledging with the Chinese Government that they will follow Chinese law and ''conscientiously safeguard China's national interests.''

Some schools actually contractually agreed that both Chinese and U.S. law will apply at Confucius Institutes in