

they need to keep our Nation safe from threats both at home and abroad, and this bill, the national defense authorization bill, fulfills part of our commitment to do just that.

There are more than 200,000 military men and women stationed in Texas at places like Fort Hood, Fort Bliss, Lackland Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, and Ellington Field. We in Congress have a duty to provide these men and women with the training, the tools, and the resources they need to achieve the most difficult missions they face today and embark on those that will inevitably arise tomorrow.

I have no doubt that these talented servicemembers could have chosen any career—certainly one that involved fewer sacrifices and more time spent at home with their families—but, instead, they have chosen to serve their country. That decision should never stand in the way of their ability to exercise one of the most fundamental rights we have as American citizens, and that is the right to vote.

In 2016, only 46 percent of Active-Duty military voted by absentee ballot—46 percent. What concerns me is the fact that one-third of those who did not vote said that the absentee voting process was too complicated. We have to change that, so I have introduced a bipartisan bill called the Military Voter Protection Act that simplifies the absentee voter registration process for servicemembers stationed abroad. It would ensure that within 30 days of arriving in theater during a deployment, servicemembers are provided with a briefing on absentee voting registration and an opportunity to fill out the registration form or application.

Currently, 28 States allow the Federal write-in absentee ballot to serve as both the registration form and the actual ballot itself. My bill encourages the remaining States to follow suit, reducing the amount of paperwork military members have to fill out in order to exercise their right to vote.

This is an important step to simplify that process for our men and women in uniform and ensure that arduous and cumbersome paperwork does not deter them or dissuade them from casting their ballot. I have been working with the chairman and the ranking member on the Armed Services Committee to ensure that this provision will be included in the Defense authorization bill for fiscal year 2020 to make it easier for our servicemembers to make sure their voices are heard at the ballot box.

As we prepare to consider the Defense authorization bill here in the Senate, I want to thank the men and women who serve our country and assure them that we will continue to do everything we can to support them and ensure they are empowered and mission-ready and, yes, that they can also cast their ballot.

#### TEXAS STORMS

Madam President, on another matter, like many parts of the country,

Texas has been impacted by severe weather. Last weekend, parts of my State were impacted by severe storms, bringing hail, rain, and winds up to 70 miles per hour. The quick-moving storms hurled debris and caused extensive and widespread damage. One of the most devastating scenes was an apartment building that was sliced by a construction crane and took a life.

In the wake of the storm, hundreds of thousands of North Texans lost their power, and many of them are still waiting for the lights to come back on. And if you have been in Texas during June, you know it is not just your lights you want; you want your air-conditioning to run as well. There is never a good time or circumstance to be without power, but in Texas, June is far from ideal.

As many Texans keep working to get back to some sense of normalcy, I want to express my gratitude to the first responders who have been working tirelessly to support our communities. I have immense respect and gratitude for those who take on these difficult and sometimes thankless jobs. We need to tell them every chance we get that we appreciate the work they do to protect our communities every day and especially during times of natural disasters.

Somehow, these challenging times have a way of bringing communities closer together and reminding us that through the hard times, we still have a lot to be thankful for.

In the wake of these storms, I have read dozens of stories about friends and neighbors and kindhearted strangers helping one another.

There was a man who lived in the apartment building that was struck by the crane I mentioned a moment ago who said he spotted a neighbor trapped inside his car in the garage, which he described as “facing straight down.” He and another neighbor said “We can’t leave him like that” and exposed themselves to danger to pull the man through the back window and help him escape safely.

A neighborhood in East Dallas came together to help a woman cut and remove trees that fell over her home, saving her a lot of time and money.

Even though the neighborhood is dealing with widespread power outages, one person with a generator has kept a refrigerator on with the community’s groceries.

I also read about restaurant workers who helped a woman from Frisco whose car had been hit by a falling tree. While the woman and her 3-year-old niece were able to escape the vehicle, her friend was trapped inside. The employees at this restaurant ran into the storm to help lift the tree so her friend could escape. They then gave her food, blankets, and even drove them to a nearby Target so they could find some dry clothes.

The restaurant owner downplayed their actions saying:

I don’t think we really did anything out of the ordinary that anybody else wouldn’t do. We were just being good Samaritans.

I am grateful for the Good Samaritans across Texas who put themselves in harm’s way in order to help their neighbors. As I said earlier, in times of tragedy or hardship, it is heartwarming to see stories like these that remind us of how lucky we are, in Texas and across the country, to live in supportive communities.

In closing, I want to thank the first responders, utility workers, and newfound friends who have supported one another through these storms. I will continue to keep the families of those killed and injured in my prayers, and I hope power will soon be fully restored.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I am on the floor again today to talk about developing the American workforce. Why? Because it is such a big issue back home in Ohio and around the country.

Pro-growth Federal policies, including tax cuts, have really worked. I just had another group of Ohio small businesspeople visiting me today, telling me how they have taken those tax savings and used them to invest in their workers, invest in machine and technology, helping to create more economic growth. It is working.

The most recent report released by the Commerce Department shows that the economy grew by 3.1 percent in the first quarter this year. That is significant. By the way, it is about twice what was projected for that same quarter prior to tax reform being put into place. So we are doing about twice as well as the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office thought we would be doing at this point.

Official unemployment is now 3.6 percent. That is tied for the lowest in 50 years. We continue to see solid wage growth, including better wage growth—which is really exciting for me—among people who are not, as I said, supervisory employees; in other words, blue-collar workers, a 3.4-percent increase in wages. That is after about a decade and a half of flat wages when you take inflation into account. Finally, we are seeing a real increase in wages.

I hear from our small business owners back in Ohio how this is working for them, but I also hear something else, which is that they are looking for workers.

The good news is, the economy is growing. There is a demand for workers, but that is not the whole story. We are still seeing a lot of individuals who are missing out on the benefits of a growing economy, not working, and not even looking for work. I have visited dozens of factories and businesses

over the past year, and I keep hearing the same thing: We just don't have enough skilled workers to fill all the positions we have in order to keep on growing, to keep expanding as a company. Yet, in Ohio and elsewhere, we do not have enough working-age adults participating in the labor force.

So how do we solve this problem? How do we bring this together? How do we take people off the sidelines and into work? By the way, I am told it is over 8 million men right now not working at all; meaning, they are not looking for work; they don't show up in the unemployment numbers. Labor force economists call this the labor force participation rate. It is relatively low. It has fallen in the past decade, meaning there are a lot of unemployed Americans not even looking for work, not being recorded in those official Department of Labor unemployment numbers.

It is so low that if our labor force participation was simply at its normal prerecession level—so go back 10 years and what was normal for decades before that. If you just went back to that labor force participation rate, our country's unemployment rate would not be 3.6 percent today. Guess what it would be. More like 8.3 percent. If we had an 8.3-percent unemployment number out there, all of us would be pulling out our hair thinking, how do we deal with this? How do we get more people back to work again? That is essentially what we have.

Again, of particular concern to me are those who are of working age, 8 million men, between the ages of 25 and 54, who are not working. We need to get these people off the sidelines and back into the workforce, where they can have the dignity and self-respect that comes from work and where our businesses can have their talents. We need them to have our economy continue to grow.

To achieve this, I think there are a number of challenges we have to address. First, we do need to focus on what is called the skills gap. This skills gap is essentially a mismatch between the skills in demand today and the skills our workers have. This labor force out there that is not finding the work doesn't have the skills that are needed to get the jobs that are available. It is a widespread issue. It is holding back our economy from fulfilling its full potential. In the most recent skills gap study from 2018, Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute highlighted this skills gap. The study found that it may leave an estimated 2.4 million positions unfilled between 2018 and 2028, with a potential negative economic impact of \$2.5 trillion. This skills gap is real, it is hurting our economy, and we have to figure out how to address it in more innovative ways.

One way to address it is to have more robust training for the jobs that are going unfilled. Pretty simple. Often, of course, these are technical jobs. These

are trade jobs, plumbers, welders, nursing assistants, IT jobs like coders. Economists call these jobs middle-skilled jobs. What they mean by that is that typically these are the kinds of jobs that don't require a college education, but they do require some training after high school. That is what is really missing right now. That is where this skills gap can be closed.

The best known training you have probably heard about for these kinds of jobs is called career and technical education, CTE. For those who are older, you might think of vocational education. CTE programs are doing great work all over the country.

I have seen this a lot firsthand in Ohio. I am a big fan of career and technical education, so I visit our CTE programs—Butler Tech near Hamilton, OH, and Max S. Hayes High School in Cleveland, OH.

I cofounded and cochaired something here in the Senate called the CTE Caucus, alongside Senator TIM KAINE. We have meetings here. We have conferences here. We try to encourage more career and technical education back home. It is important. But the training we need goes well beyond these great high school programs. Shorter term technical workforce training programs post-high school are another key way to help close the skills gap. Think of the many workforce training programs that might be offered in your community college. We need to encourage more of those.

We need to be sure that the Federal Government is playing a role here to hold up career and technical education generally but also to ensure that these training programs are given the same opportunities that we give to 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities. One impactful way to close that skills gap is through Pell grants.

Currently, we use Pell grants to help expand access to college-level education to Americans. You have to meet the criteria, which is basically an income criteria. For lower income families in America, if you want to go to a 4-year college or university and you otherwise qualify, you can get a Pell grant to do it—not a loan, a grant. That is great, but, unbelievably, you can't get that same grant if you want to go to a 15-week, 14-week, 13-week, or 12-week training program to learn how to be a welder or a coder or a hospital tech. To me, that makes no sense.

Our bipartisan JOBS Act, which I cowrote with Senator TIM KAINE, would allow us to use the Pell grant for these shorter term job-training programs with an industry-recognized credential at the end of the process. That is what employers are looking for. That is what these people need, young people and mid-career people who are looking for a job. Under current law, you are eligible for an associate's or a bachelor's degree but not to enroll in a CTE program under 15 weeks. It doesn't make any sense, and the JOBS Act would fix that.

By the way, these kinds of workforce training programs provide students with academic and technical skills knowledge and training that are necessary today to fill the 21st-century jobs we have. They encompass the kinds of high-quality and rigorous job-training programs that are easily transferrable to the in-demand jobs we have. Whether it is learning HVAC installation, how to operate factory machinery—which, by the way, often involves computer skills—or how to be a programmer or a coder, these programs teach students the practical, transferable skills that keep our economy moving.

I have seen firsthand how this can work in my home State of Ohio. Most recently in May, I had the opportunity to deliver the commencement address at two of our community colleges that specialize in these types of programs—Sinclair Community College in Dayton and Marion Technical College in Marion County. I was happy to go to these graduation ceremonies.

First, both schools were great partners in helping us develop the JOBS Act, and these schools are getting it done. They are giving students what they need, the tools they need to be able to succeed in today's workforce.

Second, I am always inspired by attending commencements at our community colleges. At these two colleges, as an example, I saw individuals as young as 15 years old walk across the stage. This one young man was getting his associate's degree that he started at a career and technical education program in high school before he got his driver's license. I also saw individuals as old as 74 years old. I saw the whole range. And they weren't just graduating; they were commencing a new stage of their lives that will be filled with opportunity because they are getting jobs.

That is why the JOBS Act is so important. It has the potential to help thousands more students, like the ones I met at Marion and Sinclair, in gaining the skills necessary to be their best and to get a job.

(Mr. YOUNG assumed the Chair.)

At the same time, we know that addressing the skills gap will not fully solve the challenges we face in raising our labor participation rates. Another is overcoming the scourge of addiction we have seen in Ohio and elsewhere around the country, from both opioids and, more recently, crystal meth.

Opioids, prescription drugs, heroin, and fentanyl have hit us really hard in Ohio. I see my colleague from Indiana is here on the floor. He sees the same thing. It has torn our families apart. It has devastated our communities. It has forced a lot of able-bodied adults out of the workforce while they struggle with their addiction.

We have begun to make some progress on this front. After 8 straight years of rising overdose deaths—8 straight years; every year more people dying from overdoses, to the point

where we are losing 72,000 Americans a year—finally, we saw a drop in the last year. In Ohio, we had a 21.4-percent decrease based on a study that was done by the Centers for Disease Control. This is the last data we have from the most recent numbers. We will see. We expect to have some new numbers soon for all of 2018. We will see. That is good. A 21.4-percent decrease is good. The problem is, it started from such a high-water mark.

Frankly, what I am hearing this year, 2019, is that some of these overdose rates are increasing in some areas of Ohio. But we have seen some progress. Again, according to the studies that have been done, we are reducing the overdose deaths, but we still have so many people who are addicted, and we still have this issue of how to get them into the workforce.

The bills we have passed here in the Congress, like our CARA legislation—the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act—and the Cures legislation, have really helped. The STOP Act has helped to try to keep this deadly fentanyl, which is the opioid that is killing most people, out of our country. There is \$3 billion in increased funding that has gone out from this Congress over the past few years to deal with education, prevention, treatment, longer term recovery, and providing Naloxone—this miracle drug—to reverse the effects of an overdose. Those are good, and we are making some progress but not enough yet—not enough. Our work is far from finished.

What I see happening in Ohio is that as we are making progress on the opioids, we are seeing crystal meth beginning to increase—pure crystal meth—methamphetamines coming from Mexico, across the Mexican border, into our country. Back in the day, we had meth labs in Ohio, in Indiana, and in other States represented in this Chamber. Those meth labs are pretty much gone now. People aren't making it in their own homes or in communities in Ohio. Instead, they are buying it on the street because it is cheaper and more powerful to buy pure crystal meth. That is not a good thing. It is a bad thing because it is indicating that the crystal meth is spreading.

By the way, these drugs are causing more law enforcement concerns than ever because, like cocaine, this is a stimulant. They call it a psychostimulant, which creates more violent crimes and more challenges for our law enforcement officials.

We have to ensure that we continue this downward trend in overdose deaths and address the crystal meth issue, which I will be talking about more over the next couple weeks, with some ideas on crystal meth.

Another factor that undermines our efforts to develop our workforce is the increasing number of people with a felony record. Having a felony record can be a heavy burden to bear when trying to find employment. Far too often, we see the downward spiral that occurs

when inmates are released back into the community without any kind of job training, any kind of a way to deal with their mental health or drug abuse history or their addiction. So people find themselves out of a job and then committing crimes again to get by. This often goes hand in hand with the issue of addiction, as so many people are jailed for nonviolent drug offenses related to opioids, meth, and other drugs.

Fortunately, we are making some progress in getting these individuals the help and treatment they need, thanks to some actions we have taken here at the Federal level as well.

The Second Chance Act, which was signed into law about a decade ago, is helping. I was the coauthor of that back in the House and a coauthor again this year for the reauthorization of that legislation. It provides Federal grant money to State and local entities to help people, when they get out of prison, get their lives back together—again, provide job training in prison, as they get out of prison; that transition—and help them deal with issues they have, including mental health and addiction.

In so many cases, that has been remarkably successful in reducing the recidivism rate—the number of people who go back into the system. Unfortunately, about two-thirds of those who get out of prison get rearrested within 2 or 3 years.

So there is a great opportunity here, if you use these programs, to keep these people out of the system and to get them back on their feet, back with their families, and back at work.

Last week, I was able to see firsthand how groups at the State and local level are using some of these Federal resources to create strong and effective pipelines to get individuals off the sidelines and back into participating in the workforce.

In Cincinnati, I had the opportunity to attend a graduation in supply chain logistics for 11 women incarcerated on nonviolent drug offenses. These 11 women now have a skill, a tool, to be able to go out and get a job in this 21st-century economy we have. In Cincinnati in particular, we have a lot of supply chain jobs that are available. They are excited about it.

I also visited one of the companies where a few of these women are going, where they hire a lot of second-chance folks, people who are returning citizens. They have had great success. These workers are grateful. They show up on time. They are local. We need more companies to take that person who has been down on his or her luck, gone through a program, and is ready to work. A lot of these women were repeat offenders of low-level crimes, and they had circulated in and out of prison for years.

This program is run by the Hamilton County Office of Reentry, which in 2010 was established in part from grant money from the Second Chance Act we

talked about. Again, in coordination with local partners, this office of reentry has run programs like this that have given incarcerated individuals a chance to reenter society and the tools and support they need for gainful employment. That is one of the reasons we have the opportunity out there to reduce this problem with so many people out of work altogether. There is great potential here to get people back to work.

In May, I attended a roundtable with a number of workforce development nonprofits in Northeast Ohio, Cleveland, OH, including the Boy and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

Bloom Bakery is an example of an entity that is taking advantage of some of these Federal opportunities in the Second Chance Act. Their parent, a nonprofit, received a Second Chance Act grant that allowed them to help ex-inmates reenter the community. During their time at Bloom, individuals have a chance to contribute to the operations of the bakery, learn culinary skills, learn how to bake, learn how to deal with people, because it is a retail outlet, and also learn how to be good in the service industry.

I had the opportunity to meet a number of these individuals. Ashanique Johnson was one person I talked to. She talked about how Bloom was really a second chance for her, how she intended to use what she was learning there to find long-term success in the culinary field.

I also met with TreShon Bankhead. TreShon is a participant in another program, one of their sister programs that train healthcare professionals. He is currently working at University Hospitals as a nursing assistant and is pursuing a degree in nursing. It was great to see that. Again, it is a second chance for him.

Meeting them, hearing their life experiences, and seeing what they have accomplished underscore the need to continue to provide these opportunities so they can get ahead in life and so our economy can have them in the workforce.

Let me conclude by saying that when it comes to our economy, more participation is better for everybody. We want more people coming out of the sidelines, coming out of the shadows, and getting to work.

Let's make sure all Americans have the tools they need to go to work and to find success. Let's close that skills gap by doing the career and technical education programs that we have talked about but also providing more help at the Federal level. Rather than the help going to just colleges and universities for a degree, let it go to the short-term training programs so they get a meaningful certificate and can go to work right away. Let's help get the JOBS Act passed to be able to do that. Let's help individuals overcome their addiction. Let's help people stay out of jail and stay with their families and

get to work. Let's give every single American the opportunity to get the tools they need to achieve their God-given potential.

Thank you.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

#### NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, the national debt is what actually pulled me and you and others, to some degree, into this political process. I have come to this floor many times over the last 4½ years to talk about this. Today, again, it is very timely. It is why I ran for the U.S. Senate. Today, we have—I just checked—\$22.3 trillion, and it is going up \$100,000 a second, as we speak. I have a debt clock in the reception area of my office, in the Russell Senate Office Building, and that thing spins all day long, 24 hours a day.

Even more concerning, we have more than \$130 trillion of future unfunded liabilities coming at us like a freight train over the next 30 years. That is \$1 million for every household for every American.

What we have learned is that we can't cut our way out of it, we can't tax our way out of it, and we can't grow our way out of it alone. Any one of these three will fall short. It has to be a combination. We have to have a balanced approach over the long haul to solve this \$22 trillion of debt problem.

I believe we will not solve this debt crisis unless and until we fix the way Congress funds the Federal Government. The current funding process is designed to fail. It really is. It doesn't work. It hasn't worked. It will never work.

Since the Budget Act of 1974 was put in place, Congress has only funded the Federal Government on time four times. That means that by the end of the fiscal year, Congress has only funded the Federal Government four times by the end of that fiscal year. Let me say that again. It has been four times in 45 years since the 1974 Budget Act was put in place. The last time it was actually done was in 1996, some 23 years ago, under President Clinton.

Congress is supposed to pass 12 appropriations bills to fund the government. Over the last 45 years, we have averaged just 2½ per year. Because of that, Congress has used a little known tool up here called a continuing resolution. In the last 45 years, Congress has used a continuing resolution 186 times. It is a release valve that lets the government continue to operate and on the surface doesn't really sound that onerous. You just keep spending at the same level you did last year. The problem with that is that it is devastating to some Agencies and, particularly, the Department of Defense, with regard to long-term contracts, long-term training, purchases, and maintenance over the end of the fiscal year, and so forth. They are devastating to our military. They create inefficiencies and uncer-

tainty that hurt the bottom line and increase our procurement costs by dramatic amounts. The end result of that is that it lowers our readiness, and it causes the ability to fight to be reduced.

In addition, Congress has shut down the government, over the last 45 years, 21 times because they couldn't get together and agree on how to fund the government that year—21 times.

This funding process, in my opinion, is an unmitigated disaster, based on the actual results that have led to \$22 trillion of debt today, which, in my view, is indeed a crisis. Over the last 4½ years alone, we have looked at practices in States, other countries, and businesses to find best practices. No one else in the world funds their operation the way the U.S. Congress funds our government.

The problem is, we have a three-step process. We do a budget, an authorization, and then an appropriation. There simply are not enough days in the year to get all of those done. It is a 14-week budget process. We have 16 authorizing committees. If you did one a week, that is 16 weeks. And then you have 12 appropriating bills. Even if you did one a week, which is very hard to do, that is not enough time in the calendar year to do that.

Right now, Congress has yet to pass this year a single appropriations bill for the next year. This is not the appropriators' problem. They do their jobs. They proved that last year and the year before that. If given enough time and information, they can get their job done. The problem is that this year we have not even agreed with the House and with the White House on what the top-line spending should be.

As I stand here today, there are 17 working days until 31 July, when Congress leaves for a State work period called the August recess. When we get back, there are only 10 working days until the end of the fiscal year. That means we have 27 working days to reach a budget deal, pass 12 appropriations bills, and bring them to conference and get this government funded.

If we started today, we would need to pass an appropriations bill about every 2 days in order to pass all 12 bills by the end of the fiscal year. We are already behind, and I am afraid we are staring down the barrel of another CR unless we start taking these bills up immediately.

The minority leader and the majority leader in the Senate have been working diligently, along with the appropriations minority leader and chairman of the appropriations committee. They all have been working very well to get to a top-line number with the White House and the House of Representatives. I am told we are very close to a deal today. I hope we are.

Last year, when we paid attention to it, we got to 75 percent funding. But by 31 July, we had only done 12.5 percent of total government funding. Again,

this is just for the discretionary part of our spending, which is only about 25 percent of the total spending that we have in the Federal Government, which includes mandatory expenses.

Last year, 16 of us wrote a letter to Leader MCCONNELL, who agreed, and to his credit, kept us here in August, and we went from 12 percent to 75 percent funding by the end of August, including the Department of Defense and HHS, two of our biggest line items. By staying here in August, we did the people's work and did something that hadn't been done in 22 years.

I hope it doesn't come to that this year. It shouldn't. We have time to do what we need to do. I know the people in charge are doing everything they can to make that happen. That is not what this conversation is about today. I am hopeful that even this week we can get agreement on the topline number, move past the budget cap issue, and get to appropriating these bills so we can avoid any more CRs in our future this year.

The unfortunate reality is we have reached this same predicament almost every year since 1974. Einstein once said that "insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results." That is what this Congress has done continually over the last 45 years, with different Members and different colleagues. We keep doing the same thing.

I am convinced more than ever that we need a politically neutral platform to fund the government on time every year without all of this drama. It can be done. I think both sides want to do it. Both sides have talked about it when they were in the minority and majority at different times, but it is time to move on it.

Today 25 percent of our budget is discretionary. That is all. That is defense, the Veterans' Administration, and all domestic discretionary spending. That is 25 percent. That is what this is all about. This debate and drama is about 25 percent of the Federal Government.

What is the rest of it? We all know that is the mandatory expense side of our budget; 75 percent of what we spend in the Federal Government, over \$3 trillion, is for things like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, pension and benefits for Federal employees, and the interest on the debt. The interest alone has gone up \$450 billion over the last 2 years with nine Fed fund rate increases, and it is projected that by 2023 we will be spending more on the interest alone on this debt than we do on national defense.

If we borrow about 30 percent of what we spend, that means, by definition, every dime we spend on discretionary spending is borrowed money. What is discretionary again? Our defense. So every time we are spending on defense, it is technically borrowed money.

I believe it is time to fix this, and the way forward is pretty clear. The way I see it, there are three things we have to do to fix this funding process. No. 1,