

we might end up with a government shutdown. We should never end up with a government shutdown. It is terrible policy. It hurts government workers. It is bad for taxpayers.

We will be issuing a report from the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations tomorrow in this regard to show how the last three government shutdowns have resulted in tremendous pain, not just to those who get furloughed and those who work without pay but also to the taxpayer, and they are fairly inefficient. Let's not even talk about a government shutdown. Why are we going down this road?

OHIO

Mr. President, in the Senate, this is the first week back in session after what is called the August work period. Today, I want to talk a little bit about my travels around the State of Ohio over the August district work period and talk about what I learned that can help inform us here as to what we can do better in the Congress to help on issues that are important to people I represent in Ohio.

One that was striking for me, and it has been for the last several years, is workforce needs. There aren't enough workers to fill the jobs that are out there. What a great opportunity it is for people to come in out of the shadows and get to work, but also what a necessity it is now for our economy to have these workers. I learned a lot about that and heard a lot about that.

The changing drug crisis. We in Ohio have been hit hard with the opioid crisis, but it is evolving, as always. There is fentanyl, which is a synthetic form of opioids, but now crystal meth is much more powerful and cheaper than ever and is coming in from Mexico, and we need to be responsive to that change.

Challenges in Ag country. Our farmers are hurting. Low prices the last few years have been compounded by terrible weather this year. It was the worst planting in my memory in Ohio. A lot of crops didn't get in at all. Of those that did, about half of them are not in good shape. This is tough on our farmers.

Ways to do a better job in protecting Lake Erie. This is a huge issue for us in Ohio. It is our No. 1 tourist attraction, and it is an incredible source of income in jobs. We have about a \$6 billion fishing industry now in the Great Lakes. The most important lake of all is Lake Erie. As an example, several million people get their drinking water from Lake Erie. I learned a lot about that over the break.

Then, also, there is the importance of our military having the support they need. I went to our military bases around the State and learned about what we can do to help them more, and also I got the opportunity to visit two of our NASA centers in Ohio. One of the 10 NASA research centers is in Cleveland, OH, NASA Glenn. There is Plum Brook Station, where we test equipment heading to the Moon soon.

That was very helpful to understand better about how we can be providing steady funding in the Congress so that we can indeed fulfill our missions that we have always had here in this country, which is to push beyond the bounds and, in this case, to go back to the Moon and have the first woman on the Moon and, then, eventually, to go to Mars and the benefits of that.

It was a busy month. I traveled to 39 different counties in Ohio over the last several weeks and more than 4,000 miles in my pickup truck, which now has over 180,000 miles on it, traveling around our State and to 75 different events.

When I began my second term representing Ohio in 2017, I made it a goal of mine to visit all 88 counties in Ohio during this term. I am happy to report that just during August we achieved that goal. A few years early, we hit all 88 counties. We will continue to go around our State and to see people in every part of our State, hear them out, and, again, to know what the best thing is to do in Congress to be able to help them and their families and to help our State.

I also traveled by train and by ferry in Lake Erie, by bike on charity bike rides, and even by kayak on the Cuyahoga River, to meet with constituents about how Washington can be a better partner for them and their families. I met with a lot of small businesses, and I talked to them about how they are doing. The tax reform and the regulatory relief has really helped, and this is why we have a stronger economy now than anybody projected. It is why we have more jobs being created. It is why we have wages going up for the first time in a decade in Ohio.

Last month, we actually had nationally wage increases of 3.5 percent year to year, well above inflation. That is a welcomed change. Really, in Ohio, after about a decade and half of flat wages and not keeping up with inflation and people feeling like they are working hard and playing by the rules but they couldn't get ahead, now you finally see wages going up. The biggest increases are among lower income and middle-income workers. That is exactly what you want.

I am happy to report that, and I am happy to report that small business owners in Ohio are happy that it is working for them because they expanded their plants and their operations and they hired more people.

What I did hear consistently from employers at every level—and for that matter, from hospitals and nonprofits and from State and local government—is one thing: workforce. They don't have enough qualified workers to fill the jobs they have. Again, it is a great opportunity to bring people off the sidelines—people who are not applying for work, not looking for work—and to raise labor force participation, which economists say is relatively low, and bring them off the sidelines. We also need these people to be able to meet our economic needs.

If you go on OhioMeansJobs.com, this morning, in that website you will see about 150,000 jobs being advertised—150,000 open jobs. When you look at those jobs, a lot of them require skills. They are not the kind of skills you get from a college degree but the kind of skills you achieve somewhere between high school and college—things like welding, machining, coding, other IT jobs, techs for hospitals, and truckdrivers. These jobs are open right now in Ohio. Economists call these jobs “skilled jobs” but, again, they are the kind of jobs that you can get the skills from in short-term training programs.

I have been a big fan of improving those skills, and we have made some progress here. We started a caucus called the Career and Technical Caucus. I am the cochair and cofounder of that. It is to focus on these practical, hands-on, skills-training for jobs that can help us to be able to fill this need.

The openings we have in Ohio are also all around the country. I was pleased that recently the President signed my Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Act into law, which allows States and localities to use Perkins grant funding to establish these career and technical education academies at the high school level, but we need to do more.

One that would really help is if we could pass what is called the JOBS Act. It is legislation I have introduced consistently with Senator TIM Kaine from Virginia. It is really very simple. It says we ought to be able to use Pell grants not just for college but also for these shorter term training programs. In fact, they are much more relevant to what we need right now.

Sadly, most people who get a Pell grant to go to college don't end up with a college degree. I support Pell grants in colleges and universities. It is an important way for lower income students to get access to education. But why not allow those same students to get a shorter term training program under their belt? Right now they can't afford it. If you want to get a welding degree to get an industry-recognized credential to become a welder in Ohio, you can get a job right away—a good-paying job with good benefits. Yet it is costly to go through that program. They are less than 15 weeks. So they don't qualify for Pell.

A student is told: You can go to college and get a history degree, but you can't get a welding certificate and use a Pell grant. That is just wrong. It is unfair. I heard the same thing again and again at visits I made to community colleges around Ohio over August and visits I made to career and technical schools around Ohio, which is why they want the JOBS Act, and they want it now because they know it will help them.

I heard from one student at a welding program at a CTE school who told me she wanted to get an advanced welding certificate so she could get a great job. She knows exactly what she wants to

do, but she can't afford it. This is an 18-year-old in her last year of high school. She is working three jobs right now, but she can't afford the cost. So she is probably going to take a Pell and go to college when she would prefer to take a Pell and get this advanced certificate that is internationally recognized so she can get a good welding job. Again, that is something we should pass here and do it soon.

The Higher Education Act may well be passed this year. It is a perfect vehicle for it. I want to thank Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER, who has been supportive of this commonsense change to be able to get our young people and others the training they need to be able to access the jobs that are out there.

Elsewhere around the State, I did meet with our farmers in several counties. The heavy flooding has led to the worst planting season in our modern history in Ohio. We have helped a little bit because the Department of Agriculture, at our urging, has included Ohio in disaster declarations. So some of these farmers who have not been able to plant are getting low interest loans right now and eventually will get some grant money. That is good.

These farmers also want to have the access to more markets around the world because they know that is going to increase their prices and enable them to get back on their feet after these tough times with the weather.

They are particularly concerned about what is happening with regard to the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. Remember, we have this existing agreement called NAFTA, which is with Mexico and Canada, our two largest trading partners. For Ohio, they are by far our two largest trading partners. But right now, the NAFTA agreement is 25 years old, outdated, not keeping up with the times, and not opening up markets enough. So we have this new agreement that has been signed by Mexico and signed by Canada. We are ready to go with it, but it has to be confirmed in the U.S. Congress. Right now, unbelievably, it is being held up, even though our farmers desperately want it. You know who else wants it? Our workers, because it is going to help manufacturing.

The people who are involved in trade understand the importance of Canada and Mexico because they are our largest markets, and it is going to be so helpful for our country and for my State of Ohio if we can get it done. The International Trade Commission, which is an independent body, studied this and said: Yes, it is going to create over 150,000 new jobs in the auto industry. It is great for Michigan, Ohio, and other States. Again, all we have to do is have a vote here in the U.S. Congress to be able to confirm this, and we can put it in place. It will help our economy. It will help create more jobs. It will help create some certainty going forward. We need to get this done.

Many of the things in the agreement are things that Democrats have been

calling for for years—tougher labor standards that are enforceable, as an example. It actually has a minimum wage—40 to 45 percent of vehicles made under USMCA must be produced by workers earning an average of \$16 an hour. It has a 70-percent requirement to use North American steel. It has a number of things that the Democrats have called upon us to do for years.

If we don't pass USMCA, the alternative is the status quo, which is NAFTA. In effect, if you don't support USMCA, it must mean that you support the status quo, which is NAFTA, which, again, so many Democrats have been criticizing over the years. Let's get this done. The 25-year-old NAFTA is not the status quo that anybody should want when we have this better agreement in front of us.

Specifically, if the House of Representatives were to bring the bill to the floor, I believe they could pass it just because of the logic, the fact that this agreement is so much better than the status quo. Then, over here in the Senate, we would have no trouble passing it, in my view.

During my tour over the August break, I also spent time visiting with a lot of groups and organizations that are combating the drug epidemic that has gripped my State of Ohio and our country. As you know, we now have more people in Ohio dying from overdoses than from any other cause of death. It is unbelievable. In 2017, 72,000 people died of overdoses in this country, more than we lost in the entire Vietnam war, just in one year—72,000 Americans.

We have made some progress recently. We should be proud of that. Last year, for the first time in 8 years, we saw a reduction in overdose deaths. It is partly because Congress has stepped up—over \$4 billion in new funding for prevention, longer term treatment programs, recovery programs, and more Narcan for our first responders. This is important, but we also have to realize that the threat is evolving and changing.

One thing I learned when I was home and talking to groups all over the State about this issue is that, yes, the legislation we passed is helping. I got to see how it is helping and to see how my legislation, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, is being put to work in Ohio.

The new threat in Ohio is these new drugs that are coming in, particularly crystal meth. The crystal meth coming in from Mexico is more powerful and less expensive than ever. We used to have meth labs in Ohio. You may have had them in your communities as well. You probably will not hear much about meth labs anymore. Why? Because the stuff on the street is even more powerful than you can make in a meth lab, in someone's home, and it is less expensive.

In fact, the law enforcement folks in Ohio are telling me that the meth on the street in Ohio is less expensive

than marijuana, and it has a much more corrosive effect on our communities and a devastating impact on families and individuals, increasing crime. This is the psychostimulant, like cocaine, that is causing more aggressive crimes, in fact.

With regard to the opioid crisis, we need to keep our eye on the ball. We need to continue what we are doing. Congress deserves credit for expanding the treatment, longer term recovery programs, some of the prevention money, the use of Narcan, but at the same time, we have to be more flexible.

The legislation I have introduced—and I hope we will be able to pass—will provide more flexibility to our communities to take that money for opioids and use it for whatever the community needs to address substance abuse.

When I was home, I also heard a lot about Lake Erie, which is our treasure in Ohio. It is the No. 1 tourist attraction in the State. It is the place where Ohioans have come for generations and generations for recreation, for fishing, for swimming. Also, so many Ohioans depend on it for their drinking water.

There are several million Ohioans who require us to have clean drinking water out of Lake Erie, and those individuals are worried. Why? Because in Toledo a few years ago, we actually had a recommendation that we shut down the water system because of the toxic algal blooms that are in Lake Erie. This year was another tough year for the toxic algal blooms, cutting off fishing opportunities and swimming opportunities. We need to do more to address it.

Again, Congress has made progress in this area. We have passed legislation that is helping. We have added more money that is helping. My legislation to deal with harmful algal blooms is giving the Federal Government a bigger role. That is important.

Clearly, we need to do more, and one is to ensure that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Federal legislation, continues to be funded. That is the fight we are having now in the appropriations process. Senator STABENOW and I have introduced legislation to authorize that program going forward and to increase the funding slightly. Why? Because it is working. These are public-private partnerships all around the Great Lakes to deal with the harmful algal blooms, to deal with the pollution, and to deal with the invasive species coming in. It is one of those Federal programs that works well.

We also had the opportunity to go to all of our military bases around the State of Ohio and to go to our two NASA facilities. Again, I am so proud of the individuals in Ohio who are standing up for our troops in their own way—whether it is the Lima tank plant, where I got to visit individuals making our M1 Abrams tanks and our Stryker vehicles, or whether it is at NASA, where we are preparing for the next mission to the moon.

NASA Administrator James Bridenstine came with us to the Glenn

Research Center in Cleveland and the Plum Brook testing facility. We got to see how those scientists and engineers—the best in the world—are working to complete the Artemis Program. Again, this is an ambitious effort to put a woman on the moon and the next man on the moon within the next 5 years, laying the groundwork for our mission to Mars.

It was great to be home. It was great to have the opportunity to visit with folks all over the State of Ohio. We were busy, but it is also great now to have the opportunity to come back refreshed and to talk about how we can make a bigger difference for them here in the U.S. Congress with some of the legislative initiatives I have talked about today.

There is so much we can and should do this fall. I am eager to roll up my sleeves and have a productive session here, working on a bipartisan basis to get things done for the people I represent and for all Americans.

Thank you.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I think people are surprised when they come to Texas and find out how diverse a State it really is. Not everybody there looks like me or pronounces their last name the same way.

In fact, we are a huge melting pot of people from all over the country and, literally, many from around the world who come to the State because we have a growing economy, creating jobs and opportunity. People can find work to provide for their family and achieve their dreams.

It shouldn't surprise anybody that Texas is increasingly diverse. We have benefited a lot from the variety of folks and cultures and ideas that have come around the world and planted roots in the Lone Star State.

When I ask folks if they know what the second most spoken language in Texas is, they say: Well, that is easy. It is Spanish.

I say: Well, that is right. Let me give you a harder one. What is the third most commonly spoken language in Texas?

After a couple of guesses, they are usually surprised when I say Vietnamese.

It is not in the overall numbers of Spanish or English, to be sure, but we have a vibrant Vietnamese community in Texas that was established after the fall of Saigon and the Vietnam war. Many of them immigrated to the Houston area or to the metroplex area.

Of course, they have faced many of the same struggles as those who have come to America throughout our country's history. In addition to adjusting to a new home, language, and culture, they have dealt with some ugly aspects of their new home: racism and bigotry.

From those challenges and from overcoming those challenges, they

have derived tremendous strength, demonstrated outstanding drive and a desire to succeed.

Our Vietnamese-American communities in Texas are growing and thriving, and they continue to play a very important role in our increasingly diverse State.

I had the chance to meet with a number of my Vietnamese-American constituents during the August break, and we talked about some of the issues that concern them the most.

Just last weekend, in fact, I visited Cali Saigon Mall in Garland, TX, for their annual children's festival. I participated in an on-stage discussion with a number of community leaders. Although the children seemed more interested in the tiger dance or musical performances and the colorful costumes, it was a great opportunity for me to hear from these folks firsthand. We had a serious discussion about the human rights climate in Vietnam, which has continued to decline.

The Vietnamese Government limits political freedom by denying its own citizens their right to vote in free and fair elections. It denies them the freedom of assembly and expression and due process rights—the sorts of basic rights we call human rights here in the United States.

Last year, one of my constituents, a young man named William Nguyen, was unjustly beaten and detained for participating in demonstrations in Ho Chi Minh City. We were fortunate enough to secure his release back home after the government convicted him on trumped-up charges. I was glad to welcome him back to the good old U.S. of A.

Sadly, the people who continue to live in Vietnam have to escape from a brutal Communist regime, which continues to disregard the most basic human rights, threaten religious freedom, and silence the press.

Vietnam remains one of the lowest ranked countries in the world when it comes to freedom of the press. In 2018, Reporters Without Borders ranked Vietnam 176th out of 180 countries worldwide.

It should come as no surprise that Vietnamese Americans who have lived under this type of rule—or who have family members who still do—don't take our freedoms here in America for granted. It is just the opposite. These immigrants are great patriots who fully appreciate the freedoms they enjoy here in America because they realize how close they came to seeing those same freedoms denied in their home country.

With them, I share their concerns about the rising interest here at home in failed ideas, like socialism, and will continue to dispel rumors that socialism can provide more than the free enterprise system, which has created the very prosperity that Vietnamese Americans and other immigrants enjoy here in the United States.

In addition to our efforts to strengthen our own democracy, we need to do

more to strengthen democracies around the world and to protect basic human rights. Earlier this year, I reintroduced the Vietnam Human Rights Sanctions Act to try to do just that. This bill would impose travel restrictions and other sanctions on Vietnamese nationals complicit in human rights abuses against their fellow citizens. These sanctions would not be lifted until the Vietnamese Government releases all political prisoners and stops the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators.

We simply can't avert our gaze and allow these practices to continue without any sort of accountability. I say the same for what is happening now in Hong Kong.

I appreciate the many Vietnamese Americans who have shared their experiences with me on this topic, and I will continue to advocate for a brighter future for the people of Vietnam.

TRIBUTE TO SANDY EDWARDS

Mr. President, on one other matter, I want to take a moment to recognize a member of my staff who is nearing her retirement—Sandy Edwards.

Sandy is the regional director in my Austin field office. She has been with me for nearly two decades—first, in my office when I was attorney general of Texas and now in the U.S. Senate, where she serves, as I said, as my central Texas regional director.

Everybody who knows Sandy knows she has the heart and spirit of a public servant. She works hard to make sure that every Texan who contacts my office feels appreciated, understood, and is happy with the support they receive.

She knows that our faces represent what people get for their tax dollars. With Sandy, central Texans have gotten some serious bang for their buck. Over the years, she has, of course, developed countless relationships with people and organizations that are working to improve our Texas communities in Central Texas.

I will never forget one year spending a December evening out in East Austin at an incredible nonprofit called the Community First! Village. We joined formerly homeless people for a Christmas tree lighting and spent a cold, rainy night with them rejoicing at what this organization and the good-hearted people who work there have helped them to achieve.

At one point, in 2012, Sandy had me biting down on a Starburst candy so students attending Girlstart Summer Camp could analyze my dental impression. I never got a report back of exactly how that turned out.

Sandy is not a fair-weather friend. She has also been by my side during some very difficult times. For example, in 2009, following the horrific shooting at Fort Hood, she was there as I fought to find words to provide even an ounce of comfort to the grieving post and the families there. We paid our respects to these American heroes and watched the ramp ceremony as their flag-draped caskets were loaded into a C-17 for their flight to Dover.