agents from coming in and being consumed by Americans. Now is the time. This is the time to vote no, to protect American consumers from cancer-causing agents.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

The joint resolution was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 55, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 86 Leg.]

YEAS—55

Alexander	Franken	Nelson
Ayotte	Gardner	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Reed
Blumenthal	Hatch	Reid
Booker	Heinrich	Risch
Burr	Heller	Rubio
Cantwell	Isakson	Sasse
Carper	Johnson	Schumer
Casey	Kaine	Shaheen
Coats	King	Sullivan
Coons	Kirk	Tillis
Corker	Klobuchar	Toomey
Cornyn	Lankford	Udall
Crapo	Lee	Warner
Daines	Markey	Warren
Enzi	McCain	Whitehouse
Ernst	McCaskill	Wyden
Feinstein	Menendez	
Flake	Murray	

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Perdue
Barrasso	Graham	Portman
Blunt	Heitkamp	Roberts
Boozman	Hirono	Rounds
Boxer	Hoeven	Schatz
Brown	Inhofe	Scott
Capito	Leahy	Sessions
Cardin	Manchin	Shelby
Cassidy	McConnell	Stabenow
Cochran	Merkley	Tester
Collins	Mikulski	Thune
Cotton	Moran	Vitter
Donnelly	Murkowski	Wicker
Durbin	Murphy	
Fischer	Paul	

NOT VOTING—2

Cruz	Sanders

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 28) was passed, as follows:

S.J. RES. 28

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Congress disapproves the rule submitted by the Secretary of Agriculture relating to ''Mandatory Inspection of Fish of the Order Siluriformes and Products Derived From Such Fish'' (80 Fed. Reg. 75590; December 2, 2015), and such rule shall have no force or effect.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 469, S. 2943, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

John McCain, Thad Cochran, Lindsey Graham, Joni Ernst, James M. Inhofe, Tom Cotton, Kelly Ayotte, Richard Burr, Cory Gardner, Jeff Sessions, Thom Tillis, Mike Rounds, Dan Sullivan, Orrin G. Hatch, Tim Scott, John Cornyn, Mitch McConnell.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to S. 2943, an original bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 98, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 87 Leg.]

YEAS—98

Alexander	Corker	Hoeven
Ayotte	Cornyn	Inhofe
Baldwin	Cotton	Isakson
Barrasso	Crapo	Johnson
Bennet	Daines	Kaine
Blumenthal	Donnelly	King
Blunt	Durbin	Kirk
Booker	Enzi	Klobuchar
Boozman	Ernst	Lankford
Boxer	Feinstein	Leahy
Brown	Fischer	Lee
Burr	Flake	Manchin
Cantwell	Franken	Markey
Capito	Gardner	McCain
Cardin	Gillibrand	McCaskill
Carper	Graham	McConnell
Casey	Grassley	Menendez
Cassidy	Hatch	Merkley
Coats	Heinrich	Mikulski
Cochran	Heitkamp	Moran
Collins	Heller	Murkowski
Coons	Hirono	Murphy
Murray	Rubio	Thune
Nelson	Sasse	Tillis
Paul	Schatz	Toomey
Perdue	Schumer	Udall
Peters	Scott	Vitter
Portman	Sessions	Warner
Reed	Shaheen	Warren
Reid	Shelby	Whitehouse
Risch	Stabenow	Wicker
Roberts	Sullivan	Wyden
Rounds	Tester	

NOT VOTING—2

Cruz	Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 98, the nays are 0.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion to proceed.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 469, S. 2943, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, it is an honor to serve in the Senate. It is an honor to serve the people of Arkansas. I would never complain about the tasks we are given.

There is one small burden I bear, though. As a junior Senator, I preside over the Senate—I usually do it in the mornings—which means I am forced to listen to the bitter, vulgar, incoherent ramblings of the minority leader. Normally, like every other American, I ignore them. I can't ignore them today, however.

The minority leader came to the floor, grinding the Senate to a halt all week long, saying that we haven't had time to read this Defense bill; that it was written in the dead of night.

We just had a vote that passed 98 to 0. It could have passed unanimously 2 days ago. Let's examine these claims that we haven't had time to read it—98 to 0—and in committee, all the Democrats on the Armed Services Committee voted in favor of it. When was the last time the minority leader read a bill? It was probably an electricity bill.

What about the claims that it was written in the dark of night? It has been public for weeks. And this, coming from a man who drafted ObamaCare in his office and rammed it through this Senate at midnight on Christmas Eve on a straight party-line vote?

To say that the Senator from Arizona wrote this in the dead of night, slipped in all kinds of provisions, that people don't have time to read it, that is an outrageous slander. And to say he cares for the troops, how about this

troop and his son and his father and his grandfather—four generations of service, to include almost 6 years of rotting in a prisoner of war camp. To say he is delaying this because he cares for the troops, a man who never served himself, a man who, in April of 2007, came to this very floor, before the surge had even reached its peak, and said the war was lost when over 100 Americans were being killed in Iraq every month, when I was carrying their dead bodies off an airplane at Dover Air Force Base—it is an outrage to say we had to delay this because he cares for the troops. We are delaying it for one reason and one reason only: to protect his own sad, sorry legacy.

He now complains in the mornings that the Senate is not in session enough, that our calendar is too short. Whatever you think about that, the happy byproduct of fewer days in session in the Senate is that this institution will be cursed less with his cancerous leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I believe that the other side of the aisle has been informed that, at noon, I will ask that we move forward with the bill.

Mr. President, it is my understanding now that, most likely, the Democratic leader will object to moving forward with the defense authorization bill. That is deeply regrettable. That is, in fact, confounding to me; that even though there may be differences on the other side of the aisle, that we would not move forward, given the situation in the world today and the men and women who are serving in our military.

I would remind my colleagues that this legislation was passed through the committee with a unanimous vote from the Democrats and under the leadership of my friend from Rhode Island, Senator REED, who has also served this Nation honorably in uniform, albeit, poorly educated. The fact is, we have a tradition the Senator from Rhode Island and I have been scrupulously observing; that is, to work in a bipartisan fashion for the good of the country.

I would mention a couple of things. One is the Democratic leader yesterday or the day before said they hadn't had time to read the bill. The bill has been online since last Wednesday—last Wednesday, a week ago. Obviously, that seems to be sufficient time for most to be able to examine the bill. We have been on the floor explaining it. There have been press releases. There have been all kinds of examination of the legislation.

As has been pointed out, we have had legislation when the Democratic leader was in the majority that we never saw until the time he demanded a vote, particularly when they had 60 votes in order to override any objections that we might have—including, by the way, the passage of the now-disastrous ACA, or known to some of us as ObamaCare, which now we are seeing the catastrophic consequences, including our citizens seeing dramatic increases in their premiums to the point where it is simply unaffordable, and there is more to come.

The fact is, after 13 hearings with 52 witnesses, a unanimous vote on the other side, 3 in opposition on my side, we came up with a defense authorization bill. The defense authorization bill has reached the President's desk and has been signed by the President for 53 years. In my view, there is no greater example over that 53-year period of the ability of both sides to work together for the good of the country.

Here we have, just recently, what appears to be—most evidence indicates—a terrorist act, the blowing up of an airliner. We have almost unprecedented suicide attacks in the city of Baghdad, which have killed over 1,000 people in the last year. We have ISIS metastasizing throughout the region, including Libya, and now rearing its ugly head in Afghanistan. We have a situation of abuse of human rights that is almost unprecedented. We have a migrant refugee flow into Europe, which obviously it is well known that Mr. Baghdadi has instructed some of these young men and possibly young women to be prepared to commit acts of terror in European and American countries. Already, some of those plots have been foiled.

The Director of National Intelligence has testified before our committee that the world is in more crises than at any time since the end of World War II; that there are more refugees in the world than at any time since the end of World War II; that America is in danger of terrorist attacks.

Whom do we rely on? We rely on the men and women who are serving in the military. That is why we passed, on a vote of 24 to 3 through the Senate Armed Services Committee—work on both sides in a cooperative and bipartisan fashion—the Defense authorization bill.

You would think that all of those facts would argue for us to take up this bill immediately and debate and vote. That is what the Senate is supposed to do. That is what our Founding Fathers had in mind.

So, again, the Democratic leader is going to object to us moving forward. Why in the world, with the world as it is today, with the challenges we face, with the men and women who are serving our Nation in uniform with courage—one of whom is a citizen of my own State who was just killed—why are we blocking the ability of this Nation to defend, train, equip, and reward the men and women who are serving in the military? Why? Why won't we move forward and debate? We have always had lots of amendments, lots of debates, lots of votes, and we have done that every year in the years I have been here.

The Democratic leader and I came to the Congress together, by my calculation, almost 34 years ago. We have had a very cordial relationship from time to time, and we have strong and spirited differences. Those differences have been honest differences of opinion because of the party and the philosophy he represents. But I must say to my friend from Nevada, I do not understand why we would not go ahead and take up this legislation and begin voting. That is what we are supposed to do. That is what has happened for 53 years where we have debated, we have gone to conference, we have voted, and it has gone to the desk of the President of the United States. A couple of times it had been vetoed, and we had gone back, but the fact is, we have done our job.

What greater obligation do we have than to defend this Nation? What greater obligation do we have than to help and do whatever we can to assist the brave Americans who are serving in uniform? What is our greater obligation? I think it is clear to everyone what our obligation is. That obligation is to do our job and do our duty.

The American people have a very low opinion of us—on both sides of the aisle. When they see that we are not even moving forward on legislation to protect, help, train, and equip the young men and women who have volunteered to serve this Nation in uniform, no wonder they are cynical. No wonder.

We have a piece of legislation that is literally a product of hundreds of hearings, literally thousands of hours of discussion and debate, of work together on a bipartisan basis, and we are not able to move forward with it and begin the amending process. I don't get it. I say to the Democratic leader, I don't get it. I do not understand why he doesn't feel the same sense of obligation that the rest of us do; that is, as rapidly as possible, for us to take care of the men and women who are serving, meet the challenges of our national security that our larger—according to the Director of National Intelligence—than at any time since the end of World War II. That is what I do not get. Maybe the Democratic leader will illuminate us on that issue, but I don't see that there is any argument.

When the Democratic leader and I meet the brave men and women who are serving in uniform—those who are at Nellis Air Force Base and in Yuma at Luke Air Force Base—and tell them that we wouldn't move forward with legislation that was to protect and house and feed and train those men and women, I would be very interested in the response the Democratic leader might have to that.

I urge my friend of many years—for the last 34 years—to allow us to move forward and begin debate on this very important issue. I know of no greater obligation we have than to address this issue of national security, which is embodied in the Defense Authorization Act. In all these 34 years, I have never objected to moving forward with this legislation. I have had disagreements. I have had strong problems with some of

the provisions. But I thought it was important to debate and vote.

I urge my colleagues not to object. The bill has been available for people's perusal for over a week now. Everybody knows the major points of the bill. So I hope the Democratic leader will not use that as a flimsy excuse because it is not one. But most importantly, I appeal to my colleague from Nevada to think of the men and women in uniform who are serving our country and to think of our obligation to act as best we can to protect them and help them carry out their responsibilities and their duties as they go into harm's way.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all postcloture time be yielded back and that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2943.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Is there objection?

The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, every time I come to the floor when my friend is on the floor speaking, I need not tell everyone within the sound of my voice how much I admire him and the service he has rendered to our country, both as a naval pilot and as a Senator and as a Member of the House of Representatives. However, he has a job to do and I have a job to do.

I, like most people in the Senate, have not served in the military. I acknowledge that. But I didn't go to Canada. I did my best. I had civil obligations during the time my friend was in Vietnam.

Mr. MCCAIN. If my colleague will yield, I believe you have served the State of Nevada and this Nation with honor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I do believe we have a job to do. He does his job the best he can, and everyone knows how hard he works. But I also have obligations to my caucus, to this body, and to the country.

This is a very big, important bill. I have had the good fortune for all these years to work on it. It has been difficult sometimes where we just barely made it. I can remember one year that Senator Levin, who was our man on defense, and Senator MCCAIN—we were able to do the bill in 2 days. It was an emergency situation. But we have gotten the bill done over all the years I have been here. We have gotten it done all the years I have been the leader.

Here is the situation in which we find ourselves. This bill is almost 2,000 pages long. As he indicated, it could have been online from sometime Wednesday night, but the truth is that we didn't get the final version of this bill until last night at 5 o'clock. The committee voted on the appendix to this bill last night. They completed it at 5 o'clock last night. An important part of the bill deals with the intelligence aspect of this bill, and a lot of people want to read that and the rest of the bill.

I don't think it is asking too much to allow Members to understand the bill, to have the opportunity—the Presiding Officer is a very studious man; maybe he will read every page of that bill. Most Senators will not, but they will make sure their staff reads every line. Why? Because they need to do that.

This bill was marked up in closed session. It was marked up privately. There was no press there. It was done in closed rooms in the Russell Building. I believe that is where all the markups took place. The bill came to the floor.

We have amendments we want to offer. We have a caucus tomorrow to talk about that. We have a number of Senators who are preparing amendments, and they want to discuss them with the rest of the Democrats prior to moving to this bill.

We will be out for a week for the Memorial Day recess. When we come back, it would seem to me it would be much more efficient and productive if we were ready on that Monday we come back to start legislating. We are not ready to do that yet. We are not ready. We are going to proceed very deliberately in spite of all the castigations about me made on the Senate floor. I am going to ignore those because, to be quite honest with you, anytime we need to talk about any statements I have made at any time, I am happy to do it, but I think it would distract from what we are doing here today to go into the statements made by the junior Senator from Arkansas. But I do have to say this: I am not the reason we are having such short workdays in the Senate, even though that was alleged by my friend from Arkansas.

If we are going to do our job, we are going to do it the best way we can because it is important.

I have said it here on the floor, and I won't go into a lot more detail than what I am saying here, but in the room where we meet on a closed, confidential basis, last Thursday I met with the Secretary of Defense. I have the good fortune every 3 weeks to be briefed on what is going on around the world by the military and by others who help us be safe and secure in this country. We talked about a number of things that we need not discuss here openly, but one thing we can talk about openly here is that the Secretary of Defense thinks it is really, really, really—underscore every ''really'' I said—to put in this bill what my friend from Arizona said he is going to do, and that is move $18 billion from warfighting—the overseas contingency fund—into regular, everyday authorization matters that take away from the ability of this Pentagon to plan what they are going to be doing next year or the year after—this is something we—I—need to take a hard look at.

I said earlier today that I appreciate very much the Republican leader responding to a letter we wrote to him, saying that on these budgetary matters, he would stick with the 2-year deal we made. I am glad. That is great. But my friend from Arizona wants to violate that deal, and I think that is wrong. We are going to take a hard look at that because we believe that a secure nation not only depends on the Pentagon—bombs and bullets—but it also depends on all the other agencies of government that help us maintain our security: the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, all of the different responsibilities of the Department of Homeland Security.

Let's understand that no one is trying to stall this legislation. If nothing happens on this bill in the next 24 hours, I think it will be a much better process to finish the bill when we come back. We will do it with our eyes wide open. No one will be able to say: I didn't know that was in there. What I said—and I will say it with my friend on the floor—is there are a lot of little goodies in this bill. I think we need to take a look at those.

My friend, of all people, who has worked hard during the entire time he has been in the Senate—he and I didn't get much done in the House. When you are there for two terms, you don't get much done. But in the Senate, he has gotten a lot done, focusing on what he believes is wasteful spending in the government. I disagreed with him on some of the examples he has pointed out—some of them have dealt with Nevada—but he has done that well.

We have a responsibility and we have been trained pretty well by the senior Senator from Arizona to look at these bills, what is in them. I have been told by my staff that we better take a close look at some of the things that have been identified in this bill.

I am not here in any way to not give my full support to the efforts made by JACK REED, the ranking Democrat on this committee. This bill is not JOHN MCCAIN's bill. It is not JACK REED's bill. It is our bill. I want to make sure that this bill—our bill—comes out in a way that is good for the American people. My view of what is good for the American people may be different from others, but I think we have a responsibility to do everything we can to proceed in a very orderly fashion.

As soon as we get on this bill, I will do my very best to move it along just as quickly as possible.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

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

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

CUBAN REFUGEE BENEFITS

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I came to the floor a few weeks ago to bring to people's attention an abuse that is occurring in our welfare system, and it involves Cuban immigration.

Let me describe the situation we face today. If an immigrant comes to the United States from Cuba legally, entering the United States from another country—let me rephrase that. If an immigrant legally enters the United States from any country in the world, except for Cuba or Haiti, they cannot immediately receive Federal benefits. If you are a legal immigrant and came to the United States from Venezuela, Mexico, or Japan—you did your paperwork and paid your fees—you do not qualify for any Federal benefits for the first 5 years you are in this country. However, there is an exception for people who come from Cuba. Under the Cuban Adjustment Act, anyone who comes from Cuba legally or illegally—if you cross the border and say ''I am a Cuban''—you are immediately accepted into the United States legally. I am not here today to talk about changing that status, even though there is a significant migratory crisis that is building, and I do think that issue needs to be reexamined.

Here is the exception to the law: If you come to the United States from Cuba, whether you entered across the border or entered on a visa, you are one of the only immigrants in America who immediately and automatically qualifies for Federal benefits. You don't have to prove you are a refugee or prove you are fleeing oppression. You don't have to prove anything. You are automatically assumed to be a political refugee and given not just status in the United States but a series of public benefits.

For decades this has been because U.S. law made the presumption that if you were leaving Cuba to come to the United States, you were obviously a refugee. I believe for a lot of people who are still coming that is true because they are fleeing a horrible and oppressive regime and have had nowhere else to go because in many cases they fear for their lives in Cuba. For some time now, there has been growing doubt about whether all of the people who are now coming from Cuba are, in fact, fleeing oppression. Or are they increasingly becoming more like an economic refugee?

From what we see in South Florida with our own eyes and also because of the investigative reporting by the South Florida SunSentinel, we know there are growing abuses to this benefit. The reason is that many people who are coming from Cuba, supposedly as refugees seeking to flee oppression, are now traveling back to Cuba 15, 20, or 30 times a year. That raises an alarm right away.

If you are entering the United States and immediately and automatically given status as refugees—in addition, you are being given access to a full portfolio of Federal benefits—because you are supposedly fleeing oppression, but then traveling back to Cuba 15, 20, or 30 times a year in many cases, it causes us to have a serious doubt about whether everyone who is coming here from Cuba should be considered a refugee for purposes of benefits, but today they are.

Even at this very moment, we are seeing a historic increase in the number of people who are originally from Cuba crossing the Mexican-U.S. border. We have seen an increase in the number of rafters. Last week there was a standoff between the Coast Guard and some Cuban migrants who went up to a lighthouse and wouldn't come down because they wanted to get the status under the wet-foot, dry-foot policy.

I think we can debate that issue. I am not here today to propose changes to the status, but I do think we have to ask ourselves: What about the Federal benefits? What about the benefits they are collecting which are specifically and exclusively intended for refugees and refugees only? Obviously, if you are traveling back to Cuba over and over again, you are not a refugee and therefore should not be eligible for these benefits.

The abuses we have now seen are extensive. The stories of people who are actually living in Cuba—they are living in Cuba but collecting government benefits in America, and their family is wiring the money to them. There are people who are collecting an assortment of benefits from housing to cash, and that money is being sent to them while they live in Cuba for months and sometimes years at a time. It is an outrage. It is an abuse. By the way, I am of Cuban descent and live in a community with a large number of Cuban exiles and migrants. Our own people in South Florida are saying that this is an outrage. They see this abuse. It is their taxpayer money, and they want something done about it.

Today we learned from the Congressional Budget Office, which analyzes these issues in-depth and determines how much they actually cost taxpayers, that the long-term cost of this abuse over the course of the next 10 years will be approximately $2.5 billion to the American taxpayer. A significant percentage of that $2.5 billion is going to people who aren't even living in the United States. We know from investigations that the money often ends up back in Cuba. We have seen people abuse the system over and over again by having a relative in the United States who goes to the bank every month, takes a cut, and sends the rest of the money to them. That is your money that is being sent to them.

The American people are a generous people, but right now those who abuse the system are taking American taxpayers for fools, and we need to stop it. That is why I am hopeful that today's report from the Congressional Budget Office will give us renewed momentum to end this problem and reform the system. The way to do it is by passing a law I have introduced with Congressman CARLOS CURBELO in the House that ends the automatic assumption in U.S. law that assumes all Cuban immigrants are refugees. It says that in order to receive refugee benefits, they have to prove they are refugees or legitimately fearing for their lives if they were to return to Cuba.

This is how the process works: If you cross the U.S.-Mexico border and you are from Cuba or arrive on a raft, you will get your status and will be legal in this country, but you will have to prove you are actually coming because you fear persecution before you automatically qualify for refugee benefits. In essence, all I am asking is that people prove they are political refugees before they qualify for Federal benefits that are available only to political refugees.

Lest anyone think this is some sort of partisan trick, this is a bipartisan measure that my Democratic colleague, the senior Senator from Florida, supports. It has over 50 bipartisan cosponsors in the House, including the chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

I hope we can get this done, even if the best way to do it is on its own merits with a straight up-or-down vote or as an amendment included in a larger bill. With all the talk about paying for Zika virus funding, maybe this is one of the ways we can pay for some of that, but let's get it done.

Mr. President, $2.5 billion is still real taxpayer money, a significant percentage of which is being misspent on a loophole that exists in the law that most people don't even know is there. I truly hope we can address it. It makes all the sense in the world. Everyone is asking for it. There is no good-faith or reasonable reason to oppose it, and it is my hope we can address it before this Congress adjourns at the end of this year, or sooner if possible, and that we can put an end to these abuses once and for all.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wish to add my voice to Chairman MCCAIN's comments a little bit ago about moving forward on the Defense authorization bill. I have the honor of serving with him and Senator REED, the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee. It is a huge honor, but as Senator MCCAIN mentioned, we also have an enormous obligation and responsibility. The biggest, most important thing we do here is probably our national defense.

The chairman asked a really important and simple question: Why? Why are we not taking up the Defense authorization bill at this time? Why is the minority leader moving forward with a filibuster on this important bill that was voted out of committee almost on a complete bipartisan basis?

We have an enormous obligation to our troops and to the national defense of our country, and that is what this bill is all about. We can debate it, but we need to begin that debate.

My colleague and friend from Arkansas was on the floor here a little bit

ago, expressing his frustration about why we are delaying this legislation. I share that frustration, and I share the chairman's frustration.

Why? Why are we filibustering? Why is the minority leader filibustering this important bill?

I remind my colleagues on the floor that this is actually a pattern. If you remember, at this time last year the minority leader led a filibuster of the Defense appropriations bill. It funds the bill so we can support our troops who are, by the way, overseas in combat. Despite the fact that the President and others in the White House want to tell the American people they are not in combat, they are in combat. We all know it. We know it is a fiction.

Last year the minority leader led a filibuster of the Defense authorization bill—spending for our troops—not once, not twice, but three times on the Senate floor. This pattern of procedural delays clearly undermines our troops. There is no doubt about that.

I want to add my voice to my colleague. I believe it is a bipartisan frustration, not just Republicans. Remember, the NDAA came out of committee with huge bipartisan support.

One of the most important things we do here is focus on our national defense, focus on having a strong military, and focus on taking care of our veterans. We should be bringing that bill to the floor, not delaying it any longer, and debating its merits and moving forward. I just don't understand why we are not doing that right now. I certainly don't think the American people understand it.

THE U.S. ECONOMY

Mr. President, another important topic that we should be talking about on the Senate floor more often is the state of our economy. In my view, national defense and economic opportunity for Americans are the critical things we need to debate in the Senate.

As I have been doing recently, I wanted to come down here and talk about the health of our economy and the importance of getting to a healthy economy because—make no mistake—we have a sick economy right now. We need to bring the U.S. economy, the greatest economic engine of growth the world has ever known, back to life. We need to bring opportunity once again to people who have lost economic hope.

Let me be clear. Americans don't easily give up on hope. We are a country of hope, a country of dreams. Progress is in our DNA. We are always moving forward. But Americans are starting to lose hope because they are not seeing opportunity, they are not seeing progress, and they are not seeing a healthy economy. So what is going on?

I would like to provide a quote from a recent article in the Atlantic Monthly entitled: ''The Secret Shame of the Middle Class.'' I would recommend this article to my colleagues. The author is talking about Americans from all spectrums who, because of the weak economy and because of no economic opportunity, are living paycheck to paycheck. Millions of Americans, as he describes in this article, are living paycheck to paycheck. He says:

> It was happening to the soon-to-retire as well as the soon-to-begin. It was happening to college grads as well as high school dropouts. It was happening all across the country, including places where you might least expect to see such problems. I knew that I wouldn't have $400 in an emergency. What I hadn't known, couldn't have conceived, was that so many other Americans wouldn't have that kind of money available to them, either. My friend and local butcher, Brian, who is one of the only men I know who talks openly about his financial struggles, once told me, ''if anyone says he's sailing through, he's lying.''

Then the author goes on to make a very important statement. He says: ''In the 1950s and '60s, American economic growth democratized prosperity.'' Everybody had opportunity with strong economic growth. But, ''in the 2010s,'' he says, ''we have managed to democratize financial insecurity.''

That is what is happening across the country. In my opinion, a big part of the problem—one that is playing out in our politics right now—is the fact that those who are hurting are not being heard. They see their lives. They know their lives. They know the challenges. Nearly half of Americans would have trouble finding $400 in a crisis, as this article lays out, and yet it doesn't match up with what their leaders are telling them.

Let me give you an example. In a recent speech, President Obama actually said: ''We are better off today than we were just seven years ago.'' He said that anybody who tells you differently ''is not telling the truth.'' That is the President.

I guarantee you the President is not agreeing with this article. I hate to inform the President, but even former President Bill Clinton recently had this to say about the Obama economy: ''Millions and millions and millions . . . of people look at the pretty picture of America [President Obama] painted, and they cannot find themselves in it . . . ''

That is former President Bill Clinton on the current State of the U.S. economy. It is not hard to see why so many can't find themselves in the picture that the President has painted of our current economy. During nearly 8 years of the Obama administration, the number of Americans participating in the labor force shrank to its lowest level since 1978. What does that mean? It means Americans have just quit looking for jobs. In the last 8 years, more Americans have fallen into poverty, family paychecks have declined, and the number of people on food stamps has skyrocketed by 40 percent—all during the last 8 years. The percentage of Americans who own homes, the marker of the American dream—homeownership—is down by over 5 percent.

Let me give you another number that, although many Americans aren't familiar with, impacts them deeply. A few weeks ago it was announced by the Commerce Department that the economy essentially stopped growing. Last quarter we grew at 0.5 percent of GDP, or gross domestic product. That is an indicator of progress, an indicator of the health of our economy, of our country, of opportunity. It was stagnant. It didn't grow.

Let me put this in perspective. In the past 200 years, American real GDP growth through Democratic or Republican Presidents—it doesn't matter; we have had ups and downs—has been about 4 percent, or 3.7 percent. This is what has made our country great. This is what has fueled the engine of the middle class of America. Under this administration, the average has been an anemic 1.5 percent of GDP growth. We have never had even one quarter of 3 percent of GDP growth. Now the administration doesn't talk about that. In fact, very few do. We need to talk about it more on the Senate floor. But the American people feel it.

This article describes it. They see it again and again when one of their neighbors or loved ones loses a job, when they see their paychecks stagnant for 8 years, when they see another small business in their community closing, or when they start wondering how they are going to put their children through college. They see it in the long road ahead of them that shows no promise of a brighter future because of the lack of economic opportunity. They see it, and, as this article describes, they feel the stinging shame.

The bottom line is that we have had a lost decade of economic growth and opportunity in the last 10 years. We need to get serious about this problem. We need to focus on this problem almost above any other issue.

My colleagues a lot of times come down here and talk about a moral imperative. This is a moral imperative—to create a healthy economy for the entire country—but we are not doing that.

Now, what are the solutions? Well, we ask the experts: How do you grow the economy? How can we create articles that talk about opportunity and not the shame of the middle class? One idea certainly is that we have to reform a Federal Government that tries to overregulate every aspect of our economy, especially the small businesses. When asking the experts or politicians, they all agree. A number of us had an opportunity to talk to former Chairman of the Fed Alan Greenspan yesterday. This clearly is one of the issues where he thinks we need to ignite traditional levels of economic growth—regulatory reform.

Again, Bill Clinton, in a Newsweek cover article in 2011 said that the No. 1 thing we need to do is to move forward on regulatory reform to get projects moving, to build this country again.

Even President Obama, in his State of the Union Address this year, said we have to cut redtape and we have to

lessen the regulatory burden on Americans. So there seems to be widespread agreement, but it is all talk.

When we actually try to act, when we actually try to do just minimal reforms to this explosion in the growth of Federal rules and regulations over the last several decades—when we try to do just a little of this—we are stopped, stymied, and caught up in politics.

Let me give you just two recent examples. I introduced a bill called the RED Tape Act, a very simple bill debated on the Senate floor that essentially would put a cap on Federal regulations—a ''one in, one out'' rule. If a Federal agency is putting more regs on the U.S. economy, then we have to look at our big portfolio of regulations and sunset the equivalent economic burden in terms of regs. It is a very simple idea. It is a 4-page bill. The UK is doing this, Canada is doing this, and it is working.

Some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle certainly thought it was a good idea, but when we brought it to the floor—the simple idea that would help our economy—there was a party-line vote. It goes down.

Just last week, as we were debating the Transportation appropriations bill, we wanted to move on another simple reg idea. The idea is simple. If there is a bridge in a neighborhood and it is structurally deficient—and by the way, the United States has 61,000 structurally deficient bridges—and the bridge is not going to be expanded but is just going to receive maintenance or be reconstructed, the permit can be expedited so that it doesn't take 5 years to build or reconstruct the bridge. Again, it was a very simple amendment that used common sense on regs. We were told: No, the other side viewed it as a poison pill. We even heard that the White House was thinking about threatening to veto the bill if that amendment was attached to it. These are simple, commonsense ideas that the American people fully support to keep them safe and to grow our economy.

We need to grow our economy. We need to take action on the Senate floor to help grow our economy. We need to bring this sick economy back to health, but we are not doing it right now. Instead, we see articles such as the one I just mentioned about middle-class Americans living paycheck to paycheck because they don't have opportunity.

What we need to do, in addition to focusing on the defense of our Nation and taking care of our troops, is to get this anemic economy—this lost decade of economic growth that we have seen over the last 10 years—roaring again, to provide opportunity and hope for Americans. That is what we should be focused on.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to speak on S. 2943, which is the National Defense Authorization Act that we recently invoked cloture on the motion to proceed. I guess we are going to be on this bill, and I am glad we are. In particular, I want to address section 578 of this act.

Section 578 is designed to protect our servicemembers' children when they are in school—specifically, to protect them from convicted pedophiles and other dangerous felons who try to infiltrate our Nation's schools, when they can, to find more victims. This is a cause I have been working on for at least 2½ years in the Senate. We have a serious problem. We have made some progress, but we have a long way to go.

For me, this effort to address this began with a terrible story of a child named Jeremy Bell. The story begins in my home State of Pennsylvania, in Delaware County, PA.

A schoolteacher had molested several boys and had raped one of them. Officials at the school figured out that something was going wrong, prosecutors were brought in, but they never felt they had enough evidence to press charges to bring a case. The school decided they would dismiss this teacher. They didn't want him around anymore, but, shockingly and appallingly, they decided that to facilitate his departure from the school, they would help him get a job in another school. They would actually recommend him for hire somewhere else. Well, he did get a job in another school, in West Virginia, in part, with the help of the letter of recommendation he got from the Delaware County School District.

That teacher went on to become a school principal, and of course he continued his appalling victimization of children. It ended when he raped and murdered a 12-year-old boy named Jeremy Bell.

Justice eventually caught up with that monster who had gone from Pennsylvania to West Virginia. He is now in jail, where I hope he will remain for the rest of his life, but for Jeremy Bell, of course, that justice came too late.

Sadly, Jeremy Bell is not alone. Year after year, we see staggering and heartbreaking numbers. In 2014, at least 459 teachers and other professional school workers across the country were arrested for sexual misconduct with the kids they are supposed to be taking care of. That is more than one per day. In 2015, the number went up. It got worse—it was 496 arrests—again, schoolteachers and school personnel who have unsupervised contact with these children, and so far 2016 is not doing any better. We have had 185 arrests in just 144 days.

One way to look at this is, just since I got engaged in this battle 2½ years ago, we have had at least 1,140 school employees arrested for sexual misconduct with the children in their care. Of course, these are just the ones who have been caught. These are the ones we know about. These are the ones where there is enough information and evidence that the law enforcement folks were comfortable in making an arrest. How many more? How much is this going on?

Of course, every one of these stories is a terrible tragedy for the victims. Like the child whose sexual abuse began at age 10 and only ended when, at 17, she found she was pregnant with the teacher's child or the teacher's aide who raped a young mentally disabled boy who was in his care. These are hard things to talk about but think about how infinitely harder it is for the victims who suffer through this, and the examples go on and on.

This has to stop. We have to be doing everything we can to try to prevent this and to protect the kids who are in our country's schools. This is why, in 2013, I introduced a bill that was meant to do exactly that. It was called the Protecting Students from Sexual and Violent Predators Act. It is a bipartisan bill, and it included fundamentally two protections.

The first was a ban on this terrible practice that led to the murder of Jeremy Bell. It holds that a school would have to be forbidden from knowingly recommending for hire someone who was a known child molester. It seems so appalling. How could this happen? But the Jeremy Bell case is not the only case. In fact, this phenomenon by which schools try to get rid of their monsters by making him someone else's problem is so widely recognized that schools will facilitate that person getting a job somewhere else. This phenomenon has its own name. It is called passing the trash. People who are advocates for crime victims, people who help children cope with the horrendous experience they have been through, know this very well. They know this phenomenon because they have seen it all too often. That is the first piece of my legislation from 2013, make it illegal to knowingly pass the trash.

The second piece is to require a thorough background check—a thorough criminal background check whenever someone is being hired who will have unsupervised contact with children in the school. That means teachers, but it also means coaches, it means the schoolbus driver, it means contractors, if the contractor will have that kind of access to the children.

Last December we had an important victory on this because the first protection, the prohibition against knowingly passing the trash, passed the Senate. It was a battle. There were people here who fought this very aggressively, but eventually I was able to get a vote on the Senate floor and it passed overwhelmingly. It was then included in

the text of the Every Student Succeeds Act. That legislation has since been signed into law. So it is now the law of the land that it is forbidden to knowingly recommend these pedophiles for hire.

As I said, that was only the first part of our legislation. The success we had back in December was only a first step. We were not able to succeed with the tougher, more comprehensive background checks we need. So I said at the time: I am not finished. We are going to continue this fight—and we are.

That is why I am here today—because the legislation we are about to take up, the National Defense Authorization Act, takes us another important step forward, which helps in this effort to have more comprehensive background checks.

I have a personal interest in this. I have three young children—a 15-year-old, a 14-year-old, and a 6-year-old—and I represent 12.8 million Pennsylvanians. The vast majority of the people I represent have the same view I do, which is: When we put our kids on a bus in the morning to go to school, we have every right to believe we are sending our child to the safest possible environment. So that is what this is about.

What this legislation does in the Defense authorization bill is it incorporates a bill I introduced earlier this year. That bill is called the protecting our servicemembers' children act. The national defense authorization bill takes my bill, this protecting our servicemembers' children act, and incorporates it. It builds it in. It covers DOD, Defense Department-operated schools in the United States, of which there are many, but it also covers schools in school districts that receive Federal impact aid because children of our military folks attend those schools. So that is one of the ways we cover some of the cost of educating the children of our men and women in uniform. We do it by providing this impact aid to the school districts to which they send their kids.

What my legislation does and what the NDAA therefore does is it requires these schools to conduct the same kind of background check that the DOD requires of its own schools, which is exactly the right thing to do. It also provides that if a person has been convicted of certain serious crimes—which includes violent or sexual crimes against a child—then that criminal may not be employed in a position that gives him unsupervised access to children. It is as simple as that.

This will cover schools that serve about 17 percent of our schoolchildren, roughly 8.5 million kids. I think this is just common sense. A background check for school workers is simply common sense. All States, all school districts do this to some degree. The problem is, not everyone does it to an adequate degree. It should not be possible for a person who has been convicted of child rape to walk out of prison, walk down the street, and get a job in an elementary school. That should be absolutely impossible.

I am not suggesting that a convict shouldn't be able to get any job, but I absolutely am suggesting that he should not be able to get a job in which he has unsupervised contact with children. To me, that is a no-brainer.

This feature—my bill, this legislation—does not impose any new burdens on the Department of Defense. The DOD regulation already requires this thorough background check on all DOD-operated schools. But what we do is reaffirm that so that no future administration could water that down by Executive order or some other way.

Also, I suggest that there is an important reason why it is absolutely essential that we provide this protection to the members of our military; that is, the men and women who put on the uniform of this country don't always have a say in where they are going to be stationed. They don't necessarily get to decide which base and which State they are going to work and, therefore, which school their children will attend. So when they get moved to another State, over which they have no say, they certainly have no say in the background check policy of that school or that school district or that State. The least we can do for these men and women who take enormous personal risks and make huge sacrifices to protect us is to protect their kids when their kids are going to school.

I should salute the efforts of State Senator Tony Williams from Pennsylvania because the children in Pennsylvania are protected by a very rigorous background check system, thanks largely to Senator Williams' insistence that we do this and his advocacy for legislation that gets that done.

When Pennsylvania servicemembers are stationed in another State, they still deserve the same level of protection that they get in Pennsylvania. But Tony Williams' bill that is now the law of the land in Pennsylvania does not apply beyond the borders of Pennsylvania, and that is why we need this legislation—to make sure that all the men and women who wear the uniform of this country can know that their children will have this protection. The least we can do for the people who are ensuring the safety and security of all of us in our country is to make sure their children are safe from convicted pedophiles and other dangerous felons who attempt to infiltrate the schools.

Let me also thank someone else. I want to thank the chairman. Senator MCCAIN has been an ally of mine in this ongoing battle to keep our kids safer for years now. His leadership has been outstanding. It is because of his commitment to the safety and security of our kids that my legislation is in the National Defense Authorization Act, the legislation that we are considering today.

Senator MCCAIN was a cosponsor of my first bill to protect kids in the classroom. His support was essential in the victory we had last year when we were able to prohibit passing the trash. It is absolutely the case that without his steadfast support, we would not have this provision in this legislation today. So I am very grateful to Senator MCCAIN for his leadership on this, and I am proud to be standing with him on this important issue.

Let me close with this. It is past time to act; it is past time to do something about this. In the 2½ years since I have been trying to make sure that we stop permitting schools to pass the trash, in the 2½ years since I have been trying to get the most rigorous standards for doing background checks—during that time alone—there have been over 1,100 school employees arrested. Those are the ones we know about.

How much bigger does this number have to get? How much longer do we have to wait? More importantly, how many kids have to be brutalized? How many kids have to have their childhood shattered before we are going to impose the toughest possible regimen to protect these kids? I have seen way more than enough. The families who have been torn apart by this devastating crime have seen way too much.

I urge my colleagues today to get this done. Let's take a big step forward in providing a significant additional level of security and protection for the children of the men and women who sacrifice so much to protect all of us.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BOOZMAN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to use a visual aid during my speech.

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

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD LABELING

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, the most important three words in our Constitution are the first three words: ''We the People.'' When our Founders were crafting our Constitution, they put those words in oversized print so that hundreds of years later Members of Congress—the House and Senate—and citizens across this Nation would remember that this is what our Constitution is all about—''We the People.'' It is not ''we the powerful'' or ''we the privileged.'' It is ''We the People.''

President Jefferson said that we can only claim to be a republic to the degree that the decisions of our government reflect the will of the people. He went on to say that the only way our government will make decisions which reflect the will of the people is if the

people have an equal voice. An example of that was the town square, where each individual could stand up and make their position known before a vote was held on whom they were going to elect, and so on and so forth.

The challenge today is that the town square is the television, radio, and Web. Unfortunately, those are not free, the way the town square was in Jefferson's day, and that means that the role of money can change everything.

Unfortunately, we have had a couple of Supreme Court decisions that do not do due accord to the very heart of our Constitution because they have essentially said that even though the commons, or town square, is for sale, we are going to allow the few people and corporations with billions of dollars to buy up the town square and use the equivalent of a megaphone sound system to drown out the voice of the people. That is the opposite of what ''We the People'' is all about, and that is the opposite of what our Constitution is all about.

Periodically, I have come to the floor to talk about a variety of issues that are relevant to the Jefferson vision—that we can only be a republic to the degree that our decisions reflect the will of the people. The issue I will talk about today—and this is an issue that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents overwhelmingly support—is about whether or not their food has been genetically modified, and if so, should those ingredients be listed on the package.

I am raising this issue today because on July 1 of this year, Vermont will have a new law which will require labeling on the packages of food that have genetically modified ingredients, and that has led to a conversation here in this Chamber about whether we at the Federal level should allow that to happen. Should we allow Vermont to make this requirement? There are a lot of food producers who say: We really don't want the people to know about the details of their food. Well, I think Americans across this country disagree.

As I mentioned, the overwhelming majority support the right to know. The argument has been made that we can't allow State after State or county after county to have conflicting standards about what we list on food labels because that would be impossible for interstate commerce, and that is a fair point. How can a food manufacturer be expected to accommodate a multitude of different labeling requirements from county to county, city to city, or State to State? That is a fair case if there is a risk of multiple standards. There is no risk of that at this moment because only one State has passed a standard which will be going into effect in a couple of months. Just as we have seen with other policies across this Nation, to something that one State tries, another State might say: Yes, let's do that but in a slightly different way. So there is a legitimate concern about conflicting standards. Again, it is not an immediate concern or something to cause this Chamber to act today. But if indeed other jurisdictions say they would like to have the same type of information available to their citizens, who also overwhelmingly want that information, then there is a potential for that and a legitimate cause for us to discuss it here.

Here is the thing. If you are going to take away the ability of cities, counties, and States to respond to the citizens' desire to know about whether there are GMOs, or genetically modified ingredients, in their food, then you have to replace it with a national standard that answers that question. If you fail to do so, you are simply denying the rights of citizens across the country to know what is in their food, and that is just wrong.

There is a name for the bill for denying Americans the right to know, and it is called the DARK Act, or Deny Americans the Right to Know Act. It is appropriate that it be called the DARK Act because it is all about keeping consumers in the dark about something they would like to know. There are many people here who say: Well, we know better than consumers. They want to know, but we don't want them to know because there is no reason they should know because why would they have any concern if they knew all the facts? Is that our decision to make?

We decided to label food and let people know whether there is salt in it. Some people want it, some people don't. We decided to put calories on the package. Some people want more calories, and some want less, but they have the right to know. Some people want preservatives to make it taste better and some don't, and so on and so forth. It is simply the consumer's right to know and make choices accordingly.

This conversation is not about whether GMO food is safe to eat. Person after person has come to this floor and said it is safe to eat, there is no proven impact on citizens, and so therefore it is legitimate to strip citizens from the right to know. There are lots of ingredients we put on packages that have no carcinogenic effects, but citizens want the full list, and that is what we provided them. Some want to know the individual pieces of that story.

Let's turn back to this question about the fact that GMOs themselves—genetically modified plants—are not substantially in one camp or another, wonderful or terrible. There are all kinds of genetic modifications that have taken place. For example, this chart shows golden rice. Golden rice has been modified to have vitamin A. In parts of the world where there is vitamin A deficiency, this has been very beneficial. Let's turn to carrots. Some carrots have been modified to treat for a genetic disorder called Gaucher's disease, a metabolic disorder where people lack a specific enzyme which helps rid the body of fatty substances that then accumulates causing enlarged livers and spleens and bone damage, bruising, and anemia. So people are very happy we have a way to address that.

Researchers have been developing sweet potatoes that withstand multiple viral infections commonly encountered in Southern Africa. That enables sweet potatoes to be grown and be part of the subsistence and is a substantial source of food in that region. There are also genetic modifications that cause concerns. Most genetically modified crops grown in the United States have been altered to confer resistance to a chemical herbicide known as glyphosate. Glyphosate is a weed killer, and essentially as the application of glyphosate has gone up dramatically from 1994 to the current time—we can see the huge increase in the application of this weed killer on this chart—we have had a corresponding general depletion of the monarch butterfly in those regions where glyphosate is used. That is a concern. Monarchs have been crashing, and that is a concern to folks.

Look at and think about the runoff. If you put billions of gallons of weed killer on crops, and there are billions of gallons running into the waterways, it has an impact on the waterways. It changes the makeup of the waterways because of the weed killer killing various organisms within the streams. Herbicides in our waterways can have a negative impact on fish, mussels, amphibians, and microorganisms.

There is also a challenge in which plants evolve in response to the applications of glyphosate. We can end up with what are called superweeds, which are weeds that have been in the presence of the herbicide so often that the natural mutations occurring cause the weeds to evolve and they become superweeds. We had the same problem with these corn-destroying rootworms. They have been evolving to be resistant to the pesticide that is placed into the plant cell by genetic modification.

In short, there are competing considerations to balance, some benefits and some concerns. Some people have reached the conclusion that they are very comfortable consuming genetically modified foods, and other individuals can reach a different equally justifiable conclusion that they have concerns and want to know more about the specific types of modification. The way they find out is, they get an alert on the package to show there are GMO ingredients and they can go to the Web site and look at the herbicide involved. That is why labeling matters. It is an alert to the citizens so they can gain more information and decide if they are comfortable or uncomfortable.

What we have seen are companies that are starting to say, because we value the relationship with our customers, because our company believes in having high integrity in that relationship, we do not want to be part of the DARK movement—the ''deny Americans the right to know'' movement. We want to be part of the movement that says if our consumers want

to know, we are going to give them that information.

There are a variety of companies that have announced they are going to provide that information on their foods. One of them is the Mars company. Here I have a package of M&Ms, and right on the package they are now disclosing. They have a phrase. I know it would be impossible to read this so we have enlarged this a bit and reproduced it. It says ''partially produced with genetic engineering.'' So they give a heads-up on every package of M&Ms across the country. They give a heads-up to consumers, and if they want to know more about the details, they can contact Mars to find out about the details. That is integrity. That is honoring citizens who have a desire to know what is in their food.

We have all grown up seeing the wonderful pictures of Campbell's soups in advertisements and the warm hearty meal of tomato soup. I know when I was sick as a child I always looked forward to that Campbell's tomato soup. Campbell's has said: We want to honor the integrity of the relationship with our consumer. We are not going to be part of the ''deny Americans the right to know'' movement. We are not going to be on the side of the DARK, and we are going to be on the side of information that citizens desire to have. They are putting labels on their products, and a number of companies are following suit in honor of protecting the consumer's right to know.

That is certainly commendable, and I commend the companies that do not feel like they are trying to mislead or hide from their consumers, but in fact support the integrity of the relationship with the folks who buy their products. Some of the companies that have done this are ConAgra, General Mills, Kellogg's, and, as I mentioned, Mars. They have already begun to label their products in anticipation of Vermont's July 1 requirement.

Vermont has a 6-month grace period—so, again, it is not just around the corner—but the beginning period companies are asked to meet is July 1. Because companies are now putting it on their labels, they are discovering there is nothing scary to consumers about it. Just like anything else on the ingredients list on labels of packages, it is information that different consumers can evaluate when it matters to their life.

There is a group of Senators who have said they do want to be part of the DARK Act, deny Americans the right to know. So we will have a voluntary labeling plan nationally. We will take away State's rights to put information on the package and replace it with a voluntary request for companies to disclose. That is no justification for taking away the ability of States to require what consumers want, which is not a voluntary disclosure, it is a required disclosure. If a State wants to do that, they should be honored. If we take away that right, we need to do a replacement at the national level.

As a part of this movement, this Deny Americans the Right to Know Act, they say: You know what. We are willing to suggest that companies put a barcode on their product and consumers can scan that code or they can put a quick response computer code, which is a square code with all the little squares on it—something like what you have on an airline ticket. They suggest that we put this quick response code on it, and if somebody wants to know what is in our product, they can scan it with their smartphone and look it up on a Web site. That is not a consumer-friendly label. That is a scam.

Not all consumers have a smartphone. Not all consumers have a digital plan that allows them to scan something in that fashion. They don't all have a phone with a camera. We are asking them to have to spend money out of their phone plan in order to look up information that should have just been on the package in the first place. That is a tax. That is a DARK Act tax on American consumers.

Some of my colleagues who talk about not putting taxes on individuals just voted for that DARK tax a few weeks ago. I hope they reconsider that type of imposition on the moms and dads and brothers and sisters throughout America. No one going down the aisle to shop is going to sit there and compare four different soups by taking pictures of four different soups and going to four different Web sites to look up that information. Plus, consumers are also disclosing information about themselves when they go to those Web sites. That is an invasion of privacy on top of the DARK tax that my colleagues want to impose on American consumers. It is wrong on multiple levels.

Some of my colleagues say: Let's put an 800 number on the label, with no explanation of why it is there. Well, you can take most products in America and you can probably find an 800 number somewhere on that package with some corporate information line, but when you put an 800 number on with no explanation of why it is there, that is not consumer information. That is like taking an ingredients list on the package and replacing it with an 800 number. Call this and we will read you a list of ingredients on the phone. It is absurd, it is ridiculous, and it is offensive to try to say that type of scam is a replacement for consumer-friendly information right on the package.

Do you want to know how to determine whether you are being true to the desire of consumers to have a consumer-friendly label? Well, I will tell you. It is called the 1-second test. We have a product on the shelf. We pick it up, turn it over, and look—1 second. I see the answer that there are or are not genetically modified ingredients in this package. That is the 1-second test. That is a fair replacement for State standards.

It can be done in a variety of ways. There can be a symbol on the package. I suggest that the FDA or USDA can choose a symbol. Brazil chooses to have a key for transgenic in a triangle. We can do that. We can put a ''B'' on it for biotechnology. We can put a ''G'' or ''GM'' for genetically modified. There are all sorts of options that would be a simple way for consumers to see what is there. We can put a phrase such as Mars has done on their candy or we can put an asterisk on the ingredients that have been modified with a phrase below to explain the asterisk. All of those are possible, but an unlabeled phone number, an unlabeled barcode or quick response code—because it is a deliberate effort to pretend you are solving something when you are not, that is a shameful scam, and it should never pass scrutiny on the floor of the Senate.

I said earlier that citizens across this country want a consumer-friendly label. We can look to a survey that was done. This is a 2016 likely election voters survey that was done in November of 2015, and it shows that 89 percent of Americans said they would like to have the information on the label. They say they favor labels on foods that have been genetically engineered or contain genetically engineered ingredients. So it is basically 9 out of 10 who not only favored but strongly favored such labeling. To put it simply, 9 out of 10 Americans want the information on the label, and rounding off, 8 out of 10 feel very strongly about this.

Here is something that is interesting. We are often divided by party here. The Republicans are sitting on the right side, the Democrats are on the left side. There is partisan division—maybe Independents have a view in the middle. On this issue, Democrats believe, 9 out of 10, rounding off, that we should have these labels. Republicans believe, 9 out of 10, that we should have these labels. Wouldn't it be ironic if the one thing Americans can agree on—whether they are east coast or west coast or North or South or Democrat or Republican or Independent—the one issue they can all agree on, this body decides to do the opposite and take away that ability. That certainly counters the fundamental principle that Jefferson put forward of the ''we the people'' democracy. We can only claim to be a republic to the degree that what we do reflects the will of the people.

So we should think about that a lot because there is a lot of conversation about folks who want to spring a surprise on the American people. They want to come down here to the floor on some bill in the near future, with some amendment or some motion or some reconsideration, and spring a surprise and drive the DARK Act through with little public notice. Why is that? Because they are afraid of the opinions of the American people. They want to hide their decision in a short period of time with no ability for the American people to be filled in on the fact that

they are attempting to pass legislation that overturns what 90 percent or 9 out of 10 Americans want. So we need to be aware of this.

I encourage my colleagues: Do not be part of this ''deny Americans the right to know'' movement—this movement that is opposed by 9 out of 10 Americans in the Democratic camp, in the Republican camp, in the Independent camp, in every geography of America. Don't be part of going so profoundly, so fundamentally, so overwhelmingly against the will of the American people.

We put a lot of things on packages because the American people ask for that information. If you buy in a grocery store of any size, they are required to put whether fish is farm raised or wild. Why do we require that? It is not because being farm raised is going to kill people; it is because citizens have a desire to know and to vote with their food dollar—vote with their food dollar for something they believe to be important. It may have to do with the taste of the product. It may have to do with the difference in antibiotics that are used in farmed versus wild. It may have to do with their desire to envision that food when it was swimming the broad, beautiful Pacific Ocean, the incredible salmon of the Pacific Ocean and the salmon of the Atlantic Ocean. But the point is, it is their right to know. Nothing much is as important to us as what we put into our bodies.

People fundamentally feel they should be able to have full information. We, indeed, provide information on whether juice is reconstituted from concentrate or is fresh, not because it will cause you to get sick, not because it is unhealthy to consume, but because consumers desire to know and they want to exercise their food dollars appropriately. Some people say: I really would like to have the stuff the way it was squeezed out of the fruit rather than frozen and condensed and reconstituted. So we provide that information because of that citizen desire. Should we not honor our citizens in this issue as well? Isn't it wrong for a group of Senators to plot to come to this floor and to put forward an amendment or put forward a reconsideration or put forward a bill on short notice so that the American people have little chance to weigh in? Personally, I think it is very wrong. That is why I am speaking today.

It is not as if this question of putting labels on food is something new or different; it is being done all around the world. Sixty-four countries, including 28 members of the European Union and Japan and Australia, already require mandatory GMO labeling. We can add Brazil to that list. We can add China to that list.

China has no democratic forum in which to respond to the will of the people. The decisions are top down. Yet the leadership of China has said: Our consumers care enough about this that we are going to disclose that information. Isn't it profoundly ironic that here in the United States of America, where citizens have a voice, a group of Senators are trying to suppress that voice, are trying to implement and deny Americans the right to know, when the leaders of China have decided this is information consumers deserve?

Let me return to where I started—the vision of a ''we the people'' democracy. We have gone far afield from that. The role of money in politics has put us in a very different position because that money weighs in, and it corrupts the fundamental nature of our legislative process. That is why we are having this debate over denying Americans the right to know when 9 out of 10 want that information—because of the corrupting power of massive concentrations of campaign cash in our system.

So let's do something we should do all the time: Set aside the campaign. Set aside the desire to raise money. Set aside those issues and ask yourself, aren't we here to help pursue the will of the people? In this case, in our ''we the people'' democracy, shouldn't we give our citizens the same right to know—a right they overwhelmingly expect and demand—as 64 other countries in the world?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TULSA RACE RIOT ANNIVERSARY

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I would like to ask this body for just a moment to remember something that there are probably many people who have never heard of for the first time because, for whatever reason, a bit of America's past seemed to just disappear from memory as soon as it occurred. Let me take us back almost 100 years for a moment.

The summer of 1919 was commonly referred to after the fact as the ''Red Summer.'' The Red Summer included race riots all over America, White-on-Black riots specifically. There were White individuals moving into Black neighborhoods and devastating those communities. That happened in Charleston, SC; Long View, TX; Bisbee, AZ; Norfolk, VA; Chicago; Washington, DC; Elaine, AR; Knoxville, TN; Omaha, NE; and many other places. Scattered around the country, one after another, month after month, those race riots moved.

As World War I veterans—at that time, we called it the Great War—as those veterans returned home, many looking for jobs—and the anxiety that rose up from that—as many Black Americans who had bravely fought in World War I pursued jobs and were unable to get them or were hated by Whites because some of these Black individuals came home and took some of the jobs that they were ''entitled to,'' the tensions began to rise across the country. It burst out into riots.

Oklahoma was mostly spared from that in 1919 and in 1920, but on May 30 of 1921, a young man named Dick Rowland who worked downtown, an African-American gentleman, was 19 years old. He was actually shining shoes in downtown Tulsa, which, if you have ever been to Tulsa and if you have missed it—if you have never been there, you need to go. It is an absolutely beautiful town. If you can ever see the pictures of what Tulsa looked like in the 1920s, you would be astounded. It was an oil boom town. Oil was discovered all around Tulsa, and people came from all over the country. Most of those individuals around Tulsa who put in oil wells suddenly became rich, and Tulsa became a wealthy community extremely rapidly. The architecture and history of it is beautiful. But, like every other town in Oklahoma in the 1920s, it was also segregated by law.

The Northern District of Tulsa at that time was called the Greenwood District, just north of downtown. It was an incredibly prosperous community. In fact, African Americans from around the country moved to Tulsa because there were doctors and lawyers and businesses, grocery stores, department stores. It became a very wealthy community because some individuals lived in Greenwood and worked in Tulsa, which was a fast-growing, wealthy city.

Also, there was great freedom within the Greenwood District. Oddly enough, the segregation that was required in Oklahoma at the time also caused Greenwood to grow because many African Americans could not buy groceries or could not go to certain restaurants or go into certain businesses or department stores in Tulsa. So when those businesses opened up in Greenwood and the population continued to grow, it became a fast-growing city as well. In fact, it was nicknamed the Black Wall Street of America. That community was extremely well educated, had many World War I veterans who had come home, many businesses and entrepreneurs. It became known as a place where Blacks could come from around the country and start businesses, grow businesses, and grow into prosperity. I would love to be able to show you all the homes and the places—what that looked like in the 1920s. It was a beautiful district.

I will get back to my story about Dick Rowland. Working downtown in Tulsa—most buildings in downtown Tulsa would not allow a Black man to go to the bathroom there, but the Drexel Building would, so he would go to the Drexel Building to go to the restroom. He would go on the elevator because the restroom he was allowed to use was on an upper floor. That particular day, on May 30, 1921, he got into

the elevator, and the elevator operator was a 17-year-old young lady, a White lady named Sarah Page. The elevator doors closed. As they got to the upper floor, they got off. At that point, Sarah Page screamed. To this day, we don't know why. We don't know if there was an altercation. We don't know if Dick Rowland bumped her and she screamed. We don't know if she was just scared, and we don't know why. But a friend heard her scream, came running, saw Dick Rowland stepping out of the elevator, and accusations started immediately. Within 24 hours, the police arrested Dick Rowland and took him to the courthouse and the jail in downtown Tulsa.

By the time the afternoon paper had been released on May 31, 1921, the word was out that a young African-American male had raped a White female in the elevator at the Drexel Building, and a mob began to form outside of the courthouse. That mob gathered around. They say it started out with around 100 and then quickly grew to 200.

The sheriff in Tulsa, understanding the threat there of this mob gathering around the building calling for Dick Rowland to be delivered to the mob, immediately turned off the elevator in the courthouse building and put up armed guards in every staircase around that building to not allow any of the people from the mob to get into the building, to try to get upstairs, and to be able to get Dick Rowland out. But the mob continued to grow outside that building. I understand that by the end of that day, it was now approaching over 1,000.

Not far away from there at all, the men who lived in the Greenwood District heard that the mob was gathering. As I mentioned before, many of them were World War I veterans. They loaded up with their weapons and went to the courthouse to offer their assistance to the sheriff to be an additional armed guard there.

The sheriff denied it, said they had the situation well in hand, and turned the men away. As the mob continued to grow and continued to press the sheriff, the men returned and said: You need our help here. We do not want a lynch mob in our city. We have all heard what had happened in other cities just a year ago. We don't want that happening here.

The sheriff again turned them away and said: You are not needed here; we have the situation at hand.

But as the men left that second time, some White men in the crowd confronted some of the African-American men as they left. There was a struggle as one of the White men tried to take away the guns from the African-American men and a shot was fired.

The rest of it was chaos. Many of the African-American men headed back to the Greenwood District as quickly as they could as that mob turned into a riot. They pursued them back to the Greenwood District of Tulsa. It was not far away, literally just on the other side of the tracks from downtown Tulsa. They pursued them back into the Greenwood District and started a massive riot the evening of May 31.

The police, trying to quell this massive riot that broke out, immediately deputized many White men who were gathered around downtown Tulsa, gave them weapons, and told them to go arrest as many Black people as they could to stop the riot.

They ran into the Greenwood District and shootings began all over the Greenwood area. Many African-American men—the numbers are up over the thousands—were arrested, dragged into Tulsa, and were put in temporary detention facilities there and held, which left the Greenwood District completely unprotected.

Looters and rioters moved through that part of Tulsa all throughout the night and into the next morning, literally looting every home, looting every business, doctor's office, grocery store, and department store—looting each one of them and burning them to the ground. By the time the National Guard arrived the next day to try to stop the riot, almost every building, home, and business—everything in a 1-mile square that was the Greenwood District before—was completely destroyed.

It makes you wonder what happened then. It is estimated that over 300 people died that night in Tulsa. No one was ever charged with a crime.

Dick Rowland, whom I mentioned before, was released from jail because no charges were ever pressed against him. Sarah Page never pressed charges against him.

Insurance companies refused to pay the African-American businesses that were burned to the ground. They walked away.

What happened next is even more surprising to me. I am not surprised that many African-American individuals who lived in the Greenwood District left. I don't blame them, but most everyone stayed. They literally rebuilt their homes by living in tents for a year.

The American Red Cross moved in and helped build wood platforms where there used to be homes so that tents could be built in that spot and people could live there while they rebuilt their own home and rebuilt their own businesses. One by one they rebuilt.

Mount Zion Baptist Church had just been finished a few months before that and had a $50,000 mortgage on it. No one walked away from that church. They rebuilt that church, and they repaid the $50,000 mortgage that was owed from before. Block by block, individuals started rebuilding Greenwood.

By the 1940s, and given all the struggles that had happened, it never fully recovered to what it was before. What is also fascinating about it is that the State of Oklahoma quietly ignored what happened that day. Most folks growing up in Oklahoma have never even heard of the Tulsa race riot. In many ways, the Tulsa race riot is kind of like that uncle you know in your family who ended up in jail and at Christmas no one talks about. Everyone kind of knows they are out there, but you never discuss them. That was the Tulsa race riot for Oklahomans for a very long time, until just a couple of decades ago, when the conversation quietly started again about a very difficult part of our history.

So 95 years ago this week, the worst race riot in American history broke out in Tulsa, OK. In 5 years the entire country will pause and look at Oklahoma and will ask a very good question: What has changed in 100 years? What have we learned in 100 years?

I would say a few things. I would say we can remember. There is great honor to be able to say to people: We have not forgotten about what happened. We have not ignored it. We have not swept it under the rug and pretended it never happened. We remember.

I think there is great honor in that. We can recognize there is more to be done and that we can't just say: You know what; that was then, and this is now. There is more to be done.

Our own racial challenges and what has happened in the country just over the past few years remind us again that we don't have legal segregation any more, but we still have our own challenges as a nation. We still need to have a place in the Nation where every person of every background has every opportunity. It is right for us. We can respect the men and women who lived, worked, died, and rebuilt. We can pour respect on those individuals who are still working to rebuild.

These are people such as Donna Jackson, who is leading a group that she calls the North Tulsa 100 who say that by the time we get to the 100th anniversary just 5 years from now, there will be 100 new businesses in the Greenwood area. The jewel of Black Wall Street was the number of businesses, entrepreneurs, and family businesses that were there. Donna Jackson and the group that is around her—business leaders, church leaders, individuals from the area, family members, and some of them even connected to the survivors of the riot itself—are all committed to what they can do to reestablish the business community again in Greenwood and North Tulsa and not looking just for Black businesses, but businesses—period. They wish to reengage a community that is still scarred years later and to be able to have some respect for those folks who run the cultural center at John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park and the individuals who are willing to talk about it in a way that is open, honest, and not accusatory. But my fourth ''r,'' after remember, recognize and respect, is reconciliation. What are we going to do as a nation to make sure that we are reconciled?

This simple speech on this floor is not going to reconcile our Nation. We have for years said this is something

we need to talk about. Quite frankly, we do need to talk about it, but we also need to do something about it. What can we do to make sure that our children do not grow up in a nation that forgets its past but also to make sure it is not repeated again and to make sure that all individuals are recognized and respected and that every person has the same opportunity. There is no simple answer, but I bring to this body a story that I think is important for us to talk about—the worst race riot in American history, in my State, and in all of our States.

I bring to us a question. Five years from now, we as a nation will talk about this even more when it is the 100-year anniversary. Who are we as a nation? How far have we come, and what do we have left to do to make sure that we really are one Nation under God, indivisible?

With that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I thank our colleague, the Senator from Oklahoma, for telling that marvelous story and offering some hope—not just talking about it but doing something about it as well.

Of course, it reminds me a little bit of our recent trip to Charleston and the amazing thing that happened there after a terrible tragedy when a young man opened a gun in a church and a killed a number of innocent people who were there worshipping and who had taken him in.

Just as the story told by the Senator from Oklahoma, one of the things we found when we visited Charleston later, as the Presiding Officer will recall, was the power of forgiveness. This changed the entire conversation when people in great pain, suffering an unspeakable tragedy, had the faith and the fortitude to stand and say: You hurt me, but I forgive you.

It was very, very remarkable. It reminded me of that experience. What Senator LANKFORD was telling us about Tulsa—the Tulsa race riot—reminded me of the similar lesson and example. There is perhaps nothing more powerful than a good example, and we saw that rising out of great hurt and great hate.

I thank the Senator for telling the story and reminding me of that recent experience in Charleston.

Mr. President, sometimes when I go home to Texas, my constituents tell me: I don't know how you stand it. I don't know how you stand the frustration of working in Washington and dealing with some of the politics, the unnecessary obstacles, the procedures, just the delay—the do-nothing aspects of this job.

Unfortunately, I was reminded of that again because we are here ostensibly working on a national defense authorization bill, burning daylight and wasting time when we could actually be dealing with the needs of our men and women in uniform—making sure they have the equipment, training, and the tools necessary to fight our Nation's wars and keep our Nation safe.

But we are just burning hours on the clock because the Democratic leader, in his—I was going to say in his wisdom. I don't think it is in his wisdom. I think it is just an effort to delay our ability to progress with this important legislation on a bipartisan basis. This is legislation, after all, that was supported by every Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee. They know what is in the bill. It has been posted for a long time. Anybody who really cared enough to find out could have found out what was in this bill. We could be having a debate and a discussion about how we can improve it, about how we can reconcile the House and Senate versions and get it to President Obama for his signature so our troops don't have to wonder, so they don't have to wait, and so they don't have to worry about whether we care enough to get our work done to support them.

Despite all the foot dragging we have seen and the frustrations that are just inherent in this job—because things never happen as quickly as any of us would like, and I think certainly that adds to the public frustration—we actually have been getting some things done around here. It is just that we have had to grind them out and take a long time do them.

But I know the majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL of Kentucky, is determined to complete this legislation, and we will. In Senator MCCAIN, the chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, we couldn't have a more forceful advocate for the men and women in uniform and the veterans. Of course, he was a great example of that true American hero—a former prisoner of war himself. You can tell how passionately he feels about doing our duty by our troops.

I did want to mention a few things I will be offering by way of amendments that I think will help make America safer and take some small steps toward correcting some of the foreign policy mistakes we have seen from this administration over the last few years.

The first two amendments I intend to offer focus on countering the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism; that is, the nation of Iran. The first amendment I have specifically targets an airline called Mahan Air, which is that country's largest commercial airline—the largest commercial airline and the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism. This airline has repeatedly played a role in exporting Iran's terrorism. It supports the efforts of the Quds Force, an elite fighting unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards, and supports Hezbollah as well. We might as well call Mahan Air ''Terrorist Airways.'' That might be a more appropriate name. Because of its role in ferrying Iranian personnel and weapons throughout the region in the Middle East, it plays a big hand in undercutting the interests of the United States and our ally Israel.

Of course, everywhere you turn, Iran is up to some sort of mischief—in Syria, obviously, with their efforts to shore up the corrupt and brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad, its support of Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist organizations. It seems like everywhere you turn, they are up to no good. And, of course, there is the nuclear agreement, which I think was enormously misguided, and they have thumbed their noses at the very basic elements of that agreement, demonstrating they have really no interest in complying with it. And the United States, in turn—well, actually the administration; because it is not a treaty, it doesn't bind future Presidents—but we have essentially, in the words of Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, not contained or prevented Iran from gaining nuclear weapons; we have essentially paved the pathway.

Today, Mahan Air is working to add more international airports to its flights, including several in Europe. Given the links to terrorist activity, we have to consider the potential security risks to Americans and others who fly in and out of airports where Mahan aircraft may land.

This amendment would require the Department of Homeland Security to compile and make public a list of airports where Mahan Air flies, and it would require the Department of Homeland Security to assess what added security measures should be imposed on flights to the United States that may be coming from an airport used by Mahan Air.

I recently had the chance—and I have spoken about this—to go to Cairo with the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, my friend MICHAEL MCCAUL of Texas. One of the things we looked at was airport security because there are flights that currently exist between Cairo and JFK Airport in New York. It is my understanding there are also flights planned from Cairo to Reagan National here in the District of Columbia.

Following the explosion on a Russian plane out of Sharm el-Sheikh in southern Sinai, it is pretty clear Egypt has a lot of work to do to improve its homeland security measures in both its screening of baggage and also personnel who work at airports.

So you can see why people would necessarily be concerned about the action of Mahan Air and what risk that might expose innocent passengers to. I hope my colleagues will review the proposal and support it.

The second amendment I have related to Iran would require President Obama to determine if Iran violated international law several months ago when it detained a number of U.S. sailors. Under bedrock rules of international law, all ships, including U.S.

Navy ships, have the right to innocent passage through another nations' territorial waters. In other words, when one of our Navy's riverine boats is innocently transiting across Iranian waters and is not engaged in military activity or taking any other action that would prejudice the peace and security of Iran, it is against the law—against the law—for Iran to stop, board, and seize that vessel. Iran can't just remove our sailors from their boats and detain them in Iran because they feel like it or steal the GPS units from those boats.

In addition, the Geneva Convention makes clear that Iran can't detain for no reason and exploit another nation's military servicemembers, especially not for propaganda purposes, which is clearly what they did. Iran can't force our sailors to apologize when they have done nothing wrong. Iran's Revolutionary Guards and their state-controlled media had a heyday with the videos and images of our sailors they captured and purposely humiliated.

It seems very likely, based on available evidence, that they violated our sailors' rights of innocent passage and very likely the Geneva Convention itself, and I think we need the Commander in Chief to call Iran into account. This type of destabilizing and dangerous behavior by Iran cannot occur without some consequences.

My amendment would require the President to determine if the rules of international law were broken and, if so, require the imposition of mandatory sanctions on Iranian personnel who were involved.

A third amendment I have introduced would grant tax-free income status to U.S. troops deployed to the Sinai Peninsula.

As I have mentioned before, after our trip to Cairo, we flew out to North Camp, a peacekeeping mission in the northern part of the Sinai. This is an area between the Gaza Strip and Egypt where, as part of the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, negotiated by Prime Minister Begin, President Sadat, and President Carter, this peacekeeping operation was established. It is called the Multinational Force & Observers, and it is largely made up of U.S. military, although it is led by a two-star Canadian general and a number of Colombian soldiers and others.

Our troops play a strategic role in maintaining peace between Egypt and Israel right there in the northern Sinai, and their work is incredibly dangerous. Unfortunately, some Bedouin insurgents have now affiliated themselves with ISIS. They have claimed allegiance to the Islamic State and are regularly putting out improvised explosive devices, which kill Egyptian peacekeepers.

By granting our troops tax-free status for their pay, we can put them on equal footing with other American troops who are deployed in other dangerous places, such as Afghanistan and Iraq and other similarly dangerous hot spots around the globe.

Finally, I mentioned earlier this week that I will be submitting an amendment to support the human rights of the Vietnamese people. The President has been in Hanoi for the last couple of days, but, frankly, the conduct of the Communist regime is marked by the regular silencing of dissidents and the press and anti-democratic, heavyhanded tactics to stay in power at any cost, not to mention the denial of religious freedom. By one estimate, Vietnam is currently detaining about 100 political prisoners.

Clearly, this country does not come anywhere close to sharing the values we have here in the United States, democratic values, and rather than steadily improving, I am afraid there is no sign the Vietnamese Government is working to advance more freedoms for its people.

Just this last week, during the visit of President Obama, it was reported that several activists who planned on meeting with the President were detained by the Communist Party and prevented from doing so. Similarly, a BBC correspondent said that the Vietnamese Government ordered him to stop his reporting, simply silencing this reporter from the BBC. Earlier this month, the wife of a Vietnam activist testified before a subcommittee on the House Foreign Affairs Committee about her husband, a human rights lawyer, who was beaten by plainclothes officers and imprisoned. What was his crime? Well, according to the government, he was charged with ''conducting propaganda against the state.'' His wife hasn't seen or heard from him in months.

While I support increased economic and security ties with Vietnam, I don't believe we should sacrifice our commitment to human rights in the process. We should not be seen as tolerating this sort of anti-democratic behavior. At the very least, we shouldn't be rewarding it with new access to arms deals by completely lifting the long-time arms embargo against Vietnam. And what did we get in exchange? Well, I think it approaches zero or nothing.

My amendment would help ensure that we don't reward Vietnam for bad behavior, such as human rights abuses, when we confer upon them benefits, such as lifting the arms embargo, and that they show some respect for democratic values, religious liberties, and human rights.

We have to keep in mind that the Vietnamese people in that country have no real voice because they are subjects of a Communist dictatorship. We must do more to put pressure on the regime in Hanoi to empower their own people.

CROSS-BORDER TRADE AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

Separately, Mr. President—and I see my colleague from Wyoming wants to speak, so let me conclude with this—earlier today, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee passed legislation I have introduced called the Cross-Border Trade and Enhancement Act, a bill that would help our ports of entry by strengthening public-private partnerships at air, land, and sea ports.

In Texas, because we share a 1,200-mile common border with Mexico, we have seen upfront and close the security challenges—which we need to do much more to address—but also the benefits of bilateral trade. As a matter of fact, trade between the United States and Mexico supports about 6 million American jobs.

We have seen time and time again how important these public-private partnerships are in helping to reduce wait times for the flow of commerce across the border and moving people and goods across safely and efficiently. This isn't just about convenience; this is about security and compliance with our laws, interdicting illegal drugs and other activities.

This legislation would also improve staffing, in addition to modernizing the infrastructure to help better protect legitimate trade and travel and keep our economy running smoothly.

I thank the chairman, Senator RON JOHNSON, for his commitment to this issue and commend him for his diligent effort in leading the committee. I am glad the committee understands that the priority here is to strengthen our ports of entry at the border and across the country.

I am grateful not only for the committee's support but also the bipartisan support of other cosponsors, including Senator KLOBUCHAR, the senior Senator from Minnesota, and Senator HELLER, the junior Senator from Nevada.

As always, I appreciate my colleague on the House side, HENRY CUELLAR, for working with me on a bipartisan basis and introducing companion legislation in the House.

I hope now that the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee has acted, this Chamber will take up the bill soon so we can build on the success of similar programs in Texas and across the country.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

OBAMACARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk once again about the health care law.

This past weekend I was home in Wyoming—as I am just about every weekend—visiting a community called Lovell, WY. At Lovell, we had a health and fitness fair that was focused on kids and adults in terms of prevention of problems and early detection of problems. They could get their blood tests done there. In talking to hundreds of people there at the hospital, what I heard again and again, as I do each weekend, is that this health care law is having a negative impact, a hurtful impact on the people of my home State of Wyoming.

I want to spend a little time today talking about what is happening there. On Monday night, Senator ENZI and I had a chance to have a telephone townhall meeting. We talked to a lot of people around the State, and this continues to come up: the high increases in costs, in spite of what the President promised. He promised that insurance rates would go down by $2,500 per family if his health care law was passed and signed. In fact, the exact opposite has occurred. Today I had lunch with a number of students from Lander, WY, in Freemont County, and again this came up as a topic of discussion.

What we see is that the insurance companies at this time of year are turning in their rate requests—the requests they have to increase their rates for next year.

I am going to talk about places all over the country now because it is not just Wyoming that is suffering under the President's health care law, it is all around the country.

Families in Iowa now know that their insurance company wants to raise premiums by as much as 43 percent for some plans. Some families in New York have learned that their rates may be going up as much as 46 percent. Let's turn to New Hampshire. There are families in New Hampshire who have gotten the news that they could be paying 45 percent more. So when we look State by State by State, what we are seeing across the country is rates going up dramatically, impacting the ability of people to even afford their insurance.

A health care group looked at nine States where information has been released. They found what they call a standard shopper for insurance. The average cost of a silver plan—the most commonly sold plan—will go up 16 percent next year. That is for a typical, say, 50-year-old person who doesn't smoke. It adds to an average cost of about $6,300 per year for that person trying to buy insurance.

What we are seeing today is more and more people getting sticker shock under ObamaCare. The health care law has created so many problems for the American public—for taxpayers—because taxes have gone up as a result of this for providers of health care and certainly for patients. The health care law has caused mandates. It has put restrictions in place. It has been made so expensive that most people think it is not a good deal for them personally, which is why, in terms of the number of people who were uninsured when the law was passed, fewer than one in three of them have actually signed up for ObamaCare. That is because all these mandates and all these restrictions have made insurance much more expensive when it comes down to actually trying to get care.

Let me point out that the President is very specific when he talks. He doesn't talk about people getting care; he talks about coverage.

The headlines in the New York Times have been that there are a lot of people with coverage who can't get care. There was a story last week about so many people in New York City who feel that ObamaCare is a second-class program. They have that insurance card, but it doesn't help them get to see a doctor—certainly not one they want or need for the problems they are having.

Some insurance companies have lost so much money by selling insurance on the ObamaCare exchange that they have decided to drop out of the exchanges entirely. They said: We are done with it. We can't afford to continue to sell it this way.

We know the insurance company Humana is dropping out of several States. We know that UnitedHealthcare is leaving all but a handful of States. In Colorado, 20,000 people have received letters saying that they are losing their insurance plan next year because companies cannot afford to sell it. And it is only going to get worse.

According to a recent survey by McKinsey & Company, it turns out that only one out of every four health insurance companies made a profit last year. Those are the ones I am talking about specifically selling insurance on the ObamaCare exchange. So one out of four made a profit; three out of four lost money. And we say: How is it that they were able to make a profit?

Well, this is what they did: The ones that were able to make a profit tended to be companies that have a lot of experience offering Medicaid insurance. Basically, they took their Medicaid plans and sold them to people on the ObamaCare exchange. These are plans with very narrow networks of doctors, so you can't just go to any doctor you like, and they have very narrow numbers of hospitals, so you can't go to any hospital you like. For these specific companies, a lot of these plans are ones that have very high deductibles. So somebody may have an insurance card, but the deductible is so high—the dollar-for-dollar out-of-their-pocket expense—that they say they can't afford to see a doctor, and they have ObamaCare, which they are finding is essentially useless for them.

There were different levels of insurance plans that ObamaCare came out with—bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. Most of the people have been choosing the silver plans because that was thought to be sort of the midrange plan. Well, now those silver plans are coming with very high costs. This means that people may be paying, again, for coverage, but they are not getting care.

There is a company in Virginia. They have decided they are getting rid of the bronze plan entirely. They have said ''No, we are not going to sell the bronze plan anymore,'' and they are pushing all of their customers up into the silver plan. They are doing this, but if you are one of the people who had the bronze plan that they are not going to sell anymore, you can see your rates going up 70 percent from what you were paying this year—an increase of 70 percent. Some of these silver plans have gotten so inadequate that they are now what the bronze plans used to be. This is all as a result of what the Obama administration forced down the throats of the American public and every Democrat voted for and every Republican voted against.

One insurance company is actually offering a silver plan next year that comes with a deductible of more than $7,000. Now, that is how much someone would need to pay out of their pocket before insurance actually kicked in. Blue Cross of Idaho is talking about a deductible of $6,850 for their silver plan. That is for the silver plan—the one that Democrats said was supposed to be the benchmark plan, the one that the subsidies are linked to.

Let's think about what a $6,850 deductible means for most people. According to a new poll out by the Associated Press, two-thirds of Americans say they would have a hard time actually coming up with $1,000 for an emergency. So, then, how are they supposed to come up with over $6,800 in case of a situation that they may find confronting them?

These kind of plans, where people pay a lot and don't get much in return, are what President Obama and the administration used to call ''junk insurance.'' I remember the President talking about that. ''Junk insurance'' is what he said. He said that the health care law would stop that; that would never happen under an Obama administration and an Obama plan. Instead, this President, under ObamaCare, is pushing more and more people into these kinds of plans, and this administration is even subsidizing them.

So premiums are going through the roof. The deductibles are going up so high that people have insurance—which is mandated by law that they have—but it turns out that, for many of them, it is useless. People may have to find a new primary care doctor or a new pediatrician every year because they are getting switched from plan to plan to plan because they can't afford the plan that they have, and the rates continue to go up. And the President, who had once said ''If you like your plan, you can keep it,'' now says ''Oh, no, you had better shop around.'' He said that if you like what you have, you can keep it. He completely flipped and now says that you had better shop around.

People continue to lose plans because insurance companies are going out of business or they just quit selling insurance entirely. To me, this is just one more sign that this health care law is a sinking ship. It is falling apart. And insurance companies have found that one reason they are losing so much money is that their customers are sicker than the President thought they would be and that the insurance companies thought they would be. The people who are healthy basically aren't interested in buying this very expensive

insurance. They feel it is a waste of their money and would rather just pay the fine to the IRS.

On Monday, the head of the State ObamaCare co-op in New Mexico was on the television network CNBC, talking about this problem. His name is Dr. Martin Hickey, and he is the CEO of New Mexico Health Connections. His company is asking to raise premiums for some of its plans by 34 percent next year. Still, he said, ''With these heavy rate increases''—and these are heavy rate increases—''the problem is the people who are going to say 'for a $695 penalty, to heck with it.'' So of the people the President is mandating to buy insurance, many are saying, ''to heck with it.'' That is what we hear from this CEO.

Look, this is just what Republicans have been predicting ever since Democrats first brought this health care law to the floor and they passed this extraordinarily expensive law and mandates on the American public.

Dr. Hickey, CEO of New Mexico Health Connections, said, ''The healthy are abandoning insurance, and what you're left with is the sick, and you can never raise your rates high enough.'' That is not what Democrats promised. That is not what they stood up here on the floor and talked about. They promised—and so did President Obama—that the health care rates would go down. They promised insurance coverage would get better. It has not. It has gotten much worse. They promised that if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. In many cases, you can't. They promised that if you like your insurance, you can keep your insurance. In many cases, you cannot.

People all across this country are getting a reminder of ObamaCare's broken promises as the health care requests for increases come out. Democrats want to double down on this failed health care law and add more mandates and more restrictions. They want more government control over people's health care.

It does seem that everything the Democrats propose just makes prices go up faster. That isn't what the American people wanted, and it is certainly not what we need from health care reform in this country. This law was passed 6 years ago, and it is getting worse every day.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OUR NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I want the Presiding Officer and my colleagues and the people of America to know what is keeping me awake nights. It is actually thoughts of my grandkids and their future that keep me awake nights. I see a bleak future for them because of our overspending, and I hear their small voices saying: You were there. Why didn't you fix it? Why didn't you give us the chance you had? We didn't want anything for free. We just wanted an opportunity to earn our own way to what was the American dream.

How are we going to answer that question? I am not just asking the Members of Congress, I am asking everyone in America because everyone has and is getting benefits from this great country at the expense of the future.

Let's look at the problem together. Here is where we are right now and where we are headed: Our national debt isn't sustainable because of the interest alone. Interest on the debt could mean we would have to make cuts to programs we never dreamed of cutting. We already owe $1,900 billion. Sometimes that is called $19 trillion. I prefer to call it $19,000 billion; it sounds like more. That is soon headed to $20,000 billion, or $20 trillion. We have already exceeded that. At 1 percent interest—and that is interest alone—interest would amount to $200 billion a year.

We need to worry about when the interest rate gets to the norm of 5 percent, and that could happen as early as in the next 3 years. Imagine if the interest rate went to 5 percent; 5 percent is the historic average for Federal borrowing. Excluding mandatory spending, we currently only get to make decisions on $1,070 billion a year. Do the math. Five times $200 billion is $1,000 billion. Remember, we only get to make decisions on $1,070 billion a year. So interest alone could crowd out almost the entire annual budget. What would that extra $70 billion fund? When that happens, could we forget about funding defense or education or agriculture or any of the other programs we are expected to fund?

What we are doing is not sustainable. What would we be forced to cut just to pay the interest? How many people do you think would be willing to invest in America just in order to get their own interest paid? The answer is no one. Incidentally, we may already be borrowing to pay interest, but so far no one knows it—yet.

From a Bloomberg business article, ''There's an acknowledgement, even in the investor community, that monetary policy is kind of running out of ammo.'' That was said by Thomas Costerg, the economist at Standard Chartered Bank in New York City. A lack of monetary ammo will drive up interest rates dramatically, forcing us to pay even more interest on our debt. Because we are the largest economy in the world, there isn't anyone who could bail us out.

There are lots of causes to this problem. Let me cover some of them. We don't ever look back at what we have done. We keep looking forward to new things we would like to do to help everyone out. Every elected official has great ideas for something that might make a difference, but we don't look to see if it already has a similar program or if what we already do in that area is working. In fact, the bills we passed don't have enough specificity to know if we are achieving what we hoped we would get done.

Without measurable goals, we can't measure progress. We don't include specificity for how we are going to achieve our goals, which allows or forces agencies to go where they want to go. We never know if we actually solved the problem we started out to solve. For some Federal employees, it is important never to get the problem solved as their jobs might be eliminated.

Have you ever had an agency come to you and suggest that their mission no longer exists so we should end their funding? Not that I know of.

Once a young man came to me and he said: This will probably cost me my job, but what I am doing doesn't have to be done at all. By telling you this, I will probably lose my job, but I feel strongly about it.

I told him he ought to be promoted and worked to have that happen.

I want to congratulate Senator GRASSLEY for his efforts on whistleblower protection so employees can point out problems without retaliation. We have regulations that cost jobs and the economy for very little value. We have a rule that there has to be a cost-benefit analysis for any project over $100 million of impact, but that is seldom done, and there are few standards for doing it anyway or requirements to actually force it to be done. The benefits might be costed over decades while the costs are immediate and continuing.

If we can improve the private economy by 1 percent, we would increase revenue to the Federal Government by $400 billion without raising taxes. Instead, we have gone from GDP—that is private sector productivity—from 2.7 percent down to 0.5 percent. That is a huge loss of tax revenue.

We have regulations that have been on the books for years that haven't been reviewed to see if technology has made them outdated. Regulations cost jobs but only in the private sector. When is the last time you remember a Federal employee being laid off because of budget cuts or ending a program? I know we passed a major education bill here recently, and we eliminated the national school board and a lot of the national requirements.

So when we had the new nominee for Secretary of Education, I asked him how many jobs that was going to save in the Department of Education. He said: Well, none. We are just going to move them around and use them in other places. Wrong answer. According to the Congressional Budget Office, we saved 237 jobs that will not have anything to do.

There are 96,000 Federal employees in the District alone. What are they all doing? An example is a principal who came to see me my first year here. He had been filling out Federal reports for a long time, and he wondered where they went. So I sent him to the Department of Education, and he spent a semester there and followed all those reports around. Then he came and reported to me. He said: You know, they really look at those carefully. They make sure every single blank is filled in. They make sure every single blank has a logical answer. If it doesn't, they send it back. They get it back, and they check it over again. Then, they file it and nobody ever looks at it.

I have been trying to get rid of some of those forms since that time.

How about expired Federal programs? Last year I spoke often about the 260 programs we still have that expired, but we are still spending money on them to the tune of $293½ billion a year—260 programs expired, $293½ billion paid out to them each year. One of them expired in 1983, another one in 1987, and most of them before 2006, and we are still giving them money.

After a year of harping on it, I find that we have reduced the number of expired programs from 260 to 256, but we have increased the spending on expired programs from $293 billion to $310 billion. That is not progress.

Here is another part of the problem. I have this housing chart. There ought to be savings from better organization. We have 20 Federal agencies here. Somebody once said that if you take the 26 letters of the alphabet and you picked any 3 or any 4 and you put them in any order you want to, there would be a Federal agency by that name. We have 20 of those right here, and that isn't the whole chart. It would take a much bigger chart to show the whole story, because these 20 Federal agencies oversee 160 housing programs. How many housing programs does it take? What are they doing? Could they be combined? We don't look at that.

Wouldn't consolidation of these result in some kind of savings? Maybe consolidation would result in some efficiency. Shouldn't all of this be controlled by one entity? What are we trying to achieve in housing? Do we have 160 different plans and goals? Shouldn't we consider that a major economic sector and have that a separate part of our budget? Can't some of the programs be combined?

When I came to the Senate, there were 119 preschool programs for children. We all know and acknowledge the value of preschool and how it increases their earnings later on and cuts down on the amount of crime and helps the economy. We all know and acknowledge that value, but Senator Kennedy and I found that many of them have been evolved into expensive childcare services rather than education, and they weren't meeting their goals. We were able to get those programs down from 119 to 65. That was all that was in our jurisdiction of Health and Education. Later we were able to get some of those others down to 45. Two years ago, I got an amendment passed that the programs had to be reduced to five and all of them put under the Department of Education. Even though that is the law, that hasn't happened yet.

Does the Federal Government ever take a cut in dollars? We get instant complaints if the requested increase is less than what was asked for—not less than what they had the year before, less than what was asked for. Only in government is that considered a cut. Our budgets and spending are set up to allow everyone to get what they got last year, plus the amount of inflation. We call it baseline budgeting. Many governments have gone to economic sector budgeting under a cap of expected revenues. You don't look at what the expected revenues are. Some governments only borrow for long-term infrastructure investments. We borrow for day-to-day expenses. As I mentioned earlier, we could be borrowing to pay our interest on our debt.

I am not even going to cover the Tax Code that has evolved from raising the basic money to run the government to a way to legislate social programs or for special benefits to individuals and businesses. Our Tax Code is costing us jobs.

What are some of the other causes of our debt problem? We are really good at new and super ideas. Every idea is designed to help out the folks back home. They all lend themselves to the greater good, but if they aren't paid for, they steal from the future. We found many ways to steal from the future. We are spending money that will not be there for our kids or our grandkids to spend. As my grandpa would say, it is ''like milking a cow in a lightning storm, they'll just be left holding the bag.''

We fudge these new ideas into existence. The easiest way is to do a demonstration program. Demonstration programs let you ease into the spending a little at a time—boil the frog slowly. You just start it in a few cities or States to show what a difference that idea would make. Demonstration programs are always sold on the basis that a successful program will show the local benefit and will be taken up locally because they have seen the advantage.

I am not aware of a single program that hasn't been spectacular. Every program works out as planned, except for the part about being valuable enough to be adopted and paid for locally. So the need for the money to continue to be spent continues and continues. Not only that, if it worked so well for the few, it needs to be expanded nationally so everyone can benefit. Unfortunately, while there may have been offsets for the original programming, there was never a source of ongoing funds for the continuance of the program, let alone for its expansion.

The next way to trick hard-working, tax-paying Americans is to make it a mandatory program. Here is a mandatory versus discretionary chart. This is the $1,070 billion I talked about that we get to make decisions on. These are the mandatory programs that we have, and they are growing faster and faster. As the baby boomers kick in, you will see such a rapid escalation here that I don't know how we will ever be able to afford it.

Fifty years ago, 30 percent of spending was mandatory. We got to make annual decisions on 70 percent of the money. Because of the expansion of the mandatory programs, 70 percent of spending is on autopilot and funded every year without a vote, and we only get to make decisions on 30 percent of the money. Some of the mandatory programs used to have their own revenue stream, sufficient to cover the amounts paid out. Social Security is a prime example. When it was set up, you couldn't retire until you were 65, and life expectancy was 59.

There used to be more people working and paying into Social Security than the amount paid out to recipients. When that happened, the excess money was spent—yes, spent—and bonds were put in a Social Security drawer backed by the full faith and credit of the United States. If interest rates go to 5 percent, how well do you think that will work out? Pension funds for bankrupt companies of coal miners and the Central States multiemployer pension fund are going broke now, not 20 years, not 30 years, not 40 years in the future. They are going broke now. But they are a symptom of what we are about to face.

People are talking about Puerto Rico and how they need a bailout. Who would bail out the United States? Who would have enough money to do that? We go to mandatory programs, so we don't have to figure out how to pay for programs. It continues without further votes or review. Everyone wants their favorite program to have dedicated funds, except we don't dedicate funds to it and we ran out of real money. Mandatory spending used to mean that there was a dedicated stream of money sufficient to cover the cost of the program without dipping into the general fund.

Here is a chart that shows how we are doing on that score. Let's see. Here is dedicated income as a percent of spending for 2015—actual—and income covered just 51 percent of spending. In 2016, we only covered 49 percent, and in 2017, it might bump back up to 50 percent. Where does the other 50 percent come from? It either has to be stolen from the future or taken from the present, which means that less can be done under the regular budget.

Another funding trick that we use is to allocate funds from the future to spend in the present. We take funds from up to 10 years out. We imagine that they already came in and sometimes we spend them in 1 year. That is

borrowing from the future. That is borrowing money that our kids will need for the dreams they have for their kids and America.

That brings me to emergency spending. Any event that can be considered a crisis can be considered for emergency spending. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and even failures by Federal agencies can be considered emergencies.

In earlier years when I looked at emergencies, it looked to me like we spent about $6 billion a year on emergencies. Recently, I decided I needed to have that figure checked. To my surprise, I found out that we have $26 billion a year in emergencies that is unpaid for and will be borrowed from the future or borrowed on the debt. This little chart points that out. We are billing an average of $26 billion for emergencies.

Anytime you know you are going to have some expense every year, maybe that ought to be a part of the budget. Maybe we ought to plan on it. Maybe we ought to figure out how we are going to pay for it.

What are you going to tell your grandkids you did to give them opportunities? Do you want to be here to answer that question when Social Security is cut by 20 percent to fund defense because interest payments have used up all of the money we get to make decisions on? Can we consolidate programs? Can we be sure they have measurable goals and hold them to achievement? Can we watch regulation to see that it achieves its goal with a minimum of jobs lost? Can we review old programs for elimination or consolidation when we look at new ideas? Can we find ways to fund our ideas without stealing from the future? How will you answer to your grandkids for what you have done?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

GUN VIOLENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, about a week ago, Josh Cortez was found shot and lying on the pavement in Hartford's South end. Josh was 22 at the time. His girlfriend, who was 23 years old, was found in a parked car nearby with a gunshot wound. She was rushed to Hartford Hospital where she died a half hour later. They were the sixth and seventh homicide victims in Hartford this year.

They had been dating for about 2 years, and they had a 2-year-old daughter. He had just celebrated his 22nd birthday. His cousin said:

> [Josh] was a great kid. He turned his life around for the better. He had a rough start, but he was doing a complete 360 for his baby girl.

His cousin said that he was just wrapping up a jail diversionary program at the time of his death and that he was ''committed to the program,'' making every appointment and following every regulation.

Two days later, across the country in Iowa, Senquez Jackson was 15 years old when his 13-year-old friend accidentally fired a small .38-caliber semiautomatic pistol. His friend thought the gun was unloaded when he pulled the ammo clip from the handle. He killed his friend, Senquez, who was 15 years old, and now that 13-year-old boy has been charged with involuntary manslaughter. In addition, they layered on charges of obstructing prosecution and carrying a weapon.

Senquez is remembered by his friends and family as being a great athlete. He loved basketball. He dreamed of playing in the NBA. He always told his auntie that he was going to be just like LeBron James.

One speaker at his funeral said that they had never met another child with more gratitude than Senquez. He had deep gratitude for the things he had been given. He died from an accidental gunshot wound on March 18.

Earlier in the year, Romell Jones was standing outside the Alton Acres housing complex with a group of kids his age in Alton, IL. He was 11 years old. They were waiting to get picked up to go to basketball practice. While they were waiting outside, a red car pulled up and someone inside the car fired multiple shots into this group of kids, and Romell was killed.

His friends remember him—frankly, like Senquez—as always having a basketball in his hands. The middle school coach, Bobby Everage, who was planning on coaching this incredibly talented kid, said:

> This young man's life was cut short and he had so much potential. I know he was a good kid and has a lot of friends. When life ends that way, it is so sad.

His fifth grade teacher said that Romell was well liked by all of his teachers and all of his classmates.

> He was always happy, sensitive, and an excellent student. As a fifth grader he mentored younger students at our school.

He was only 11 years old when he was killed while waiting to go to basketball practice.

At the end of last year—this is a story I pulled out of the dozens that were killed in Connecticut cities—Antoine Heath was 29 years old when he was shot in the chest while sitting in a parked car on the outskirts of Edgewood Park in New Haven. His wife of 4 years and mother of his two children, ages 4 and 3, said that her husband was a family man. ''He was loving and hard working.''

Antoine's nickname was ''Champ,'' in large part because he was such a champion of causes in and around his community. A childhood friend said:

> He tried to get me to see things clear. He made sure everybody was all right. He just wanted his family to be together.

He had big plans for the weekend just following his death. He was going to be baptized. His sister said:

> He was ready to give his life over to God, and he made the decision on his own. That was something he wanted to surprise the family and do.

Those are just four stories—four voices—of victims of gun violence. As the Presiding Officer and many of my colleagues know, I try to come to the floor every week or couple of weeks to tell a handful of stories of the 31,000 a year, 2,600 a month, and 86 people a day who are killed by guns, resulting from a variety of reasons. Most of these are suicides, many of them accidental. They happen in large numbers and small. Last year we had 372 mass shootings, which I categorize as 4 or more people being shot at any one time. Many of these are domestic violence incidents or gang-involved incidents. There are a lot of different stories as to why this happens.

I come to the floor to talk for a moment today on a specific aspect of our path forward on addressing gun violence. Tomorrow Senator CASSIDY and I will host a summit here in Washington on mental health reform. Senator CASSIDY and I, with the help of 16 of our colleagues—eight Democrats and eight Republicans—have introduced a bipartisan comprehensive mental health reform act that we think, if it passes, will dramatically improve the experiences of individuals who are trying to seek help for their mental illness.

Given the fact that we are going to have hundreds of people at this summit tomorrow, that many of us are living with the daily ramifications of unchecked gun violence, and that we are continuing to press for legislation on this floor—as I know the Presiding Officer is—I want to talk about the mistakes I think we make in how we talk about the intersection between mental health and the epidemic of gun violence.

I will talk about it for a second through the lens of Sandy Hook. On the same day that Adam Lanza walked into Sandy Hook Elementary School and murdered 26 children and educators, another mentally ill man in Henan, China, walked into a school and attacked 22 students—almost the same number. Now, in Sandy Hook, every single child who Adam Lanza fired a bullet at and hit died. In China, every single student survived. Both assailants were unquestionably deeply mentally ill, but only one incident resulted in a worldwide tragedy. The difference is that Adam Lanza walked into that school with a semiautomatic rifle, and the attacker in China walked into that school with a knife.

Our Nation has seen the horror that unfolds when mental illness and gun violence intersect in devastating ways and the cycles of shock, despair, horror, and grief that accompany mass shootings are still a uniquely American routine. We can't fathom what would drive someone to commit such horrifying acts. It is easy for society to blame that shooting in Newtown or in Aurora or wherever the next one may be on the mental illness. If we truly want to stop these mass shootings and do something about the 86 people who are murdered every day, we have to stop ourselves for a second and ask why this epidemic of gun violence

doesn't happen in any other industrialized country the way it happens here. We have to ask ourselves: Is it because more Americans suffer from mental illness? No, the statistics don't tell us that. Is it because the mentally ill in America are more violent than the mentally ill in a place like Europe? No, the data doesn't tell us that. Do other countries spend more money on treating mental illness than the United States does? Is it that their systems are more adequate than ours? No, the data doesn't tell us that either.

What is the difference between the United States and every other developed nation? Why is our gun homicide rate 20 times higher than the average OECD nation? Why don't other countries that experience the same level of mental illness and spend the same amount of money treating it have a comparable number of shootings—mass and individual shootings? Well, one of the differences is guns. The difference is that in America we are awash in illegal guns—high-power military-style assault firearms that are designed to kill as many people as quickly as possible. The reality is that whoever shot that couple in Hartford or that father New Haven didn't have to try very hard to find a weapon. It was either in their house or around the corner or at a friend's apartment.

There are a lot of people who would like to very easily conflate the conversation about gun violence with the conversation about fixing our mental health system. Let's just think about two States: Wisconsin and Wyoming. These are States that have very similar mental health systems and spend the same amount of money. Yet one State, Wyoming, has a gun homicide rate that is twice that of Wisconsin. There is no data that suggests that mental illness explains the difference between those two States, just like there is no evidence that mental illness explains the difference between two countries.

This argument about an inadequate mental health system being the reason for epidemic rates of gun violence has become a very convenient political fate that is perpetrated by people who don't want to get to the question of whether our gun laws have something to do with these epidemic murder rates.

There is no doubt that the mental health system in this country is broken. It is dramatically underresourced. People have to wait for months to get an outpatient appointment. We have closed down 4,000 mental health inpatient beds in this country just in the last 5 years alone. It is ridiculously uncoordinated. We have built up a system in which your body from the neck down is treated in one system, and then you have to drive two towns over if you want to get treatment for your body from the neck up. People with mental illness die 20 years earlier than people without mental illness because those two systems are not coordinated.

The stigma around mental illness is still crippling. I know we passed a law that requires insurance companies to say on your statement of benefits that you have coverage for mental illness. Everybody knows that when you actually try to access those benefits, bureaucrats put up bureaucratic hurdles in front of your actually getting reimbursed for mental health care that they never would if you were trying to get reimbursed for a broken leg or heart surgery.

Now, fortunately, the Mental Health Reform Act, which this summit will cover tomorrow, really does start to unlock many of these most difficult problems. The Mental Health Reform Act will properly capitalize our mental health system by putting back into it funding for inpatient beds and starting to marry the physical health system with the mental health system. It attacks this stigma by requiring insurance companies to administer benefits in the spirit of parity and not just say that you have a mental health benefit. It invests in prevention and early intervention and treatments so that we are not just hitting the problem at the back end. It gets into tough issues, like how our HIPAA laws unfortunately stand in the way of caregivers actually being part of the treatment plan for their seriously mentally ill young adults.

The Mental Health Reform Act is a path forward to fixing our broken mental health system. But pretending that mental health reform is a sufficient response to gun violence is not only wrongheaded, it is also dangerous because the facts are incontrovertible that individuals coping with serious mental illness commit less than 5 percent of all violent acts in this country.

Let me say that again. People with mental illness commit less than 5 percent of all violent acts in this country. They are frankly far more likely to be the victims of gun violence than they are to be the perpetrators of it.

Obviously, people like Adam Lanza, Jared Lee Loughner, and James Holmes had complicated and devastating behavioral health disorders. There are Adam Lanzas, Jared Loughners, and James Holmeses in every other country in the world, but in these other societies mental illness doesn't lead to mass murder. Something is different in America such that people who are coping with mental illness turn to a weapon. This celebratory culture of firearms and violence, this easy access to weapons of war that enable men and women with a severe mental illness to instantly transform themselves into mass murderers is unique in this country.

Even if Congress passed a bill today that magically eliminated all mental illness in the United States, our country would still have more gun violence and shooting deaths than any other country in the developed world. Given that only 5 percent of these crimes are perpetrated by people with severe mental illness, curing mental illness would be a remarkable achievement, but it wouldn't solve this problem.

It is even worse than that because draping the scourge of gun deaths around the necks of everyday Americans who are struggling with mental illness just increases the stigma I was talking about that surrounds disorders of the mind. Scapegoating the 44 million Americans with mental illness just reinforces the idea that they should be feared rather than treated.

We have a mental health crisis in this Nation, and we have a gun violence crisis as well. These two epidemics overlap—there is no doubt about that—but solving one, the mental health epidemic, doesn't solve the other. And conflating mental illness and gun violence may serve the political ends of those who don't want to have a conversation on this floor about background checks or assault weapons or more resources for the ATF, but it is not going to make America any demonstrably safer.

I think this is a very important conversation to have, and I don't want to shy away from these intersections that exist, but I want to get it right. In the end, I want this body to commit itself to solving our mental health crisis and then doing what is additionally necessary to do something about the 31,000 a year, 2,600 a month, and the 86 a day who are killed by guns in this country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, while the Senator from Connecticut is still here, I want say through the Chair that I am glad I had a chance to hear his remarks. I agree with him that there is a mental health crisis, and I congratulate him for his leadership, especially with the Senator from Louisiana, Mr. CASSIDY, in focusing the Senate's attention on dealing with it this year. I think he has a very passionate and practical way of making the argument that while there may not be a consensus on what we do about guns, there is a consensus, I believe, in this body on what we do about mental health or at least an important step in the direction of dealing with the crisis. If we are able to do it, Senator MURPHY, Senator CASSIDY, and Senator MURRAY, the ranking Democrat on the HELP committee, will deserve great credit for that happening. I plan to attend for a while the summit tomorrow that Senators MURPHY and CASSIDY are hosting. It will help to draw attention to the efforts that the Senators made.

Last year the full Senate passed the Mental Health Improvement Act. This year, working with the Senators from Connecticut and Louisiana, and the Senator from Washington, Senator MURRAY, we have incorporated that into the Mental Health Reform Act. We are very hopeful we can pass that legislation on the Senate floor in June and work with the House to turn it into a law this year.

No doubt we will have more to do on the mental health crisis after that, and we will have more debates on this floor about what the Senator from Connecticut calls the gun crisis. But there is no reason we cannot move ahead with what we already have a consensus on in mental health. I am committed, as I know Senator MURRAY is, and so are other Members on this side of the aisle. I know that Senator BLUNT from Missouri feels passionate about mental health needs. Senator CORNYN is working on helping us resolve this legislation. And Senator MCCONNELL has said that if we can find a consensus among ourselves and reduce the amount of time it takes to put it on the floor, he will interrupt the appropriations process, put it on the floor, and try to get a result this year.

So I am glad I had a chance to hear the Senator. I pledge to continue to work with him to get a result on the Mental Health Reform Act that he has played such a key role in fashioning.

21ST CENTURY CURES LEGISLATION

Mr. President, I would like to speak on another issue that the Senator from Connecticut has also played a role in because he is an important Member of the HELP committee in the Senate, and that is what we call the 21st Century Cures legislation. This legislation, in which President Obama is interested and which we have mostly finished in terms of our committee work in the Senate, has already passed the House.

A little over a week ago, the New York Times Magazine published a special health issue on the new frontier in cancer treatment—how doctors and researchers are trying new tips, new drugs, even new ways of thinking about cancer. This month the photographer Brandon Stanton, who documents the stories of ordinary people in his popular photography blog, ''Humans of New York,'' turned his lens on the pediatrics department of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City to help raise money for cancer treatment and the research hospital there.

Also this month, two former U.S. Senators, both of them physicians and one a cancer survivor—Dr. Bill Frist and Dr. Tom Coburn—wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal about what the Senate is doing to help bring safe treatments and cures to doctors' offices, patients, and medicine cabinets more quickly.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the op-ed by Dr. Frist and Dr. Coburn at the conclusion of my remarks.

In the New York Times Magazine issue, one oncologist writes:

> [For patients] for whom the usual treatments fail to work, oncologists must use their knowledge, wit and imagination to devise individualized therapies. Increasingly, we are approaching each patient as a unique problem to solve. Toxic, indiscriminate, cell-killing drugs have given way to nimbler, finer-fingered molecules that can activate or deactivate complex pathways in cells, cut off growth factors, accelerate or decelerate the immune response or choke the supply of nutrients or oxygen. More and more, we must come up with ways to use drugs as precision tools to jam cogs and turn off selective switches in particular cancer cells. Trained to follow rules, oncologists are now being asked to reinvent them.

The article continues:

> Cancer—and its treatment—once seemed simpler. . . . A breakthrough came in the 2000s, soon after the Human Genome Project, when scientists learned to sequence the genomes of cancer cells.
>
> Gene sequencing allows us to identify the genetic changes that are particular to a given cancer. We can use that information to guide cancer treatment—in effect, matching the treatment to an individual patient's cancer.

In another Times story, the reporter writes:

> Today, a better understanding of cancer's workings is transforming treatment, as oncologists learn to attack tumors not according to their place of origin but by the mutations that drive them. The dream is to go much deeper, to give an oncologist a listing of all a tumor's key mutations and their biological significance, making it possible to put aside the rough typology that currently reigns and understand each patient's personal cancer. Every patient, in this future situation, could then be matched to the ideal treatment and, with luck, all responses would be exceptional.
>
> This idea, more broadly, has been called precision medicine: the hope that doctors will be able to come to a far more exact understanding of each patient's disease, informed by genetics, and treat it accordingly.

I am here today to insert these important stories from the New York Times Magazine, the ''Humans of New York'' blog, and Drs. Frist and Coburn's Wall Street Journal op-ed into the RECORD and to remind everyone that this year the Senate HELP Committee has passed 19 bipartisan bills that will help drive medical innovation. I am working today with Senator PATTY MURRAY of Washington, the senior Democrat on the committee, on an agreement that will give the National Institutes of Health a surge of funding for the President's Precision Medicine Initiative, which will map 1 million genomes and give researchers a giant boost in their efforts to tailor treatments to a patient's individual genome. It will also provide funding for the Cancer MoonShot, which the Vice President is heading, to try to set us on a faster course to a cure.

To raise money for cancer researchers at Sloan Kettering, Bradley Stanton used photos on his ''Humans of New York'' blog, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. He writes: ''The study of rare cancers involves small and relentless teams of researchers. Lifesaving breakthroughs are made on very tight budgets. So your donations will make a difference. They may save a life.''

The fundraiser wrapped up this past weekend. More than 103,000 people donated more than $3.8 million to help fight pediatric cancer. More than $1 million was donated in the last day of the campaign in honor of a young boy named Max to help research and cure DIPG, the brain tumor that ended his short life.

Stanton shared photos and stories of Sloan Kettering patients and their parents, as well as the doctors and researchers working to treat and cure them—many stories hopeful, all difficult to read. As Stanton put it: ''These are war stories.''

In one post, a researcher at the pediatric center says:

> In the movies, scientists are portrayed as having a ''eureka moment''—that singular moment in time when their faces change and they find an answer. . . . [I]t's hard to say what a ''eureka moment'' would look like in my research. Maybe it's when I'm finally able to look patients and parents in the eye and say with confidence that we have what's needed to cure them.

In another, a doctor at the center says:

> It's been twelve hours a day, six days a week, for the last thirty years. My goal during all these years was to help all I could help. I've given 200%. I've given transplants to over 1200 kids. I've published as many papers as I could. . . . But now I'm almost finished. It's time for the young people out there to finish the job. They're going to be smarter than us. They'll know more. They're going to unzip the DNA and find the typo. They're going to invent targeted therapies so we don't have to use all this radiation.

How do we make good on these dollars? How do we ensure that these remarkable new discoveries of targeted therapies are able to reach the patients that need to be reached?

We must give the Food and Drug Administration the tools and the authority it needs to review these innovations and ensure that they are safe and effective, that they get to the patients who need them in a timely way. That is exactly the goal of our Senate Cures Initiative that I am committed to seeing through to a result.

Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health—he calls it the National Institutes of Hope—a Federal agency that this year funds $32 billion in biomedical research, offered what he called ''bold predictions'' in a Senate hearing last month about major advances to expect if there is sustained commitment to such research.

Listen to what he said. One prediction is that science will find ways to identify Alzheimer's before symptoms appear, as well as how to slow or even prevent the disease. Today, Alzheimer's causes untold family grief. It cost $236 billion a year. Left unchecked, the cost in 2050 would be more than our Nation spends on national defense.

Dr. Collins' other predictions are equally breathtaking. Using pluripotent stem cells, doctors could use a patient's own cells to rebuild his or her heart. This personalized rebuilt heart, Dr. Collins said, would make transplant waiting lists and anti-rejection drugs obsolete.

I had a phone call from Doug Oliver in Nashville, 54 years old, a medical technician. Vanderbilt Eye Institute pronounced him legally blind. They said: No treatment, no cure, but check the Internet. Last August, he went to

Florida for a clinical trial. The doctors took cells from his hip bone using an FDA-cleared device, put them through a centrifuge, and injected them into both eyes. Within 2 days, he was beginning to see. He now has his driver's license back. He is ready to go back to work.

He is sending us emails about our legislation urging us to pass it and give more Americans a chance to have the kinds of treatments he had that have restored his sight.

Continuing with Dr. Collins' predictions for the next 10 years, he expects the development of an artificial pancreas to help diabetes patients by tracking blood glucose levels and by creating precise doses of insulin.

He said that a Zika vaccine should be widely available by 2018 and a universal flu vaccine—flu killed 30,000 people last year—and an HIV/AIDS vaccine available within a decade.

Dr. Collins said that to relieve suffering and deal with the epidemic of opioid addiction that led to 28,000 overdose deaths in America in 2014, there will be new nonaddictive medicines to manage pain.

Our Senate HELP Committee has approved 50 bipartisan strategies designed to make predictions like these of Dr. Collins come true. These include faster approval of breakthrough medical devices, such as the highly successful breakthrough path for medicines enacted in 2012, and making the problem-plagued electronic health records system interoperable and less burdensome for doctors and more available to patients. We would make it easier for the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration to hire the experts needed to supervise research and evaluate safety and effectiveness. We approved measures to target rare diseases and runaway superbugs that resist antibiotics.

As Drs. Frist and Coburn—the former Senators—wrote in their Wall Street Journal op-ed that this 21st century cures legislation ''touches every American'' and that ''[m]illions of patients and the medical community are counting on Congress.''

The House has already passed by a vote of 344 to 77 companion legislation called 21st century cures, including a surge of funding for the National Institutes of Health. The President has his Precision Medicine Initiative. The Vice President started his Moonshot to cure cancer. The Senate HELP Committee has passed 19 bipartisan bills, as I said, either unanimously or by a wide margin.

There is no excuse whatsoever for us not to get a result this year. It would be extraordinarily disappointing to millions of Americans if we did not. If the Senate finishes its work and passes these bipartisan biomedical innovation bills, as well as a surge of funding for the National Institutes of Health, and takes advantage of these advancements in science, we can help more patients live longer and healthier lives and help more researchers who want to look the parent of a small child in the eye and say: We found a cure.

I notice that the Senator from Pennsylvania has come to the floor. I am ready to yield my time, but before I do—and I see the Senator from Missouri as well—before I do, I want to say of both of them, the Senator from Pennsylvania has been a critical component of the 21st century cures committee work in the Senate. Several of the 19 bills that our committee approved were sponsored by him. I thank him for his work. The Senator from Missouri—I spoke a little earlier about the mental health focus and consensus that we are developing and how we hope to get a result this year on mental health in the Senate, as well as 21st century cures. The Senator from Missouri has been key in both of them. Last year, working with Senator MURRAY, he was the principal architect of a boost of $2 billion in funding to the National Institutes of Health. This year, he is pushing hard for advances in mental health. So with this kind of bipartisan cooperation, we ought to be able to get a result in June or early July, and I am pledged to try to do that.

I yield the floor.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, May 11, 2016]

STREAMLINING MEDICINE AND SAVING LIVES

(By Bill Frist & Tom Coburn)

As doctors, patients and former U.S. senators, we've seen firsthand how medical innovation benefits patients. Those on our operating tables and in our practices—and we ourselves when we've needed medical care—have benefited from breakthroughs in science and newly approved treatments that translate into better health and longer lives.

Yet, tragically, millions of Americans are still suffering and dying from untreatable diseases or the lack of better treatment options. Now is the time to pass legislation that we know will safely speed treatments to patients in need. Lives are at stake.

Before the Senate is a powerful medical-innovation package of 19 bills—a companion to the House-approved 21st Century Cures Act—that will streamline the nation's regulatory process for the discovery, development and delivery of safe and effective drugs and devices, bringing the process into the new century.

Today, researchers and developers spend as much as $2 billion to bring a new drug or therapy to market and the regulatory process can take more than 10 years. That's too long and too expensive for the five million Americans suffering from Alzheimer's; the 1.6 million who will be diagnosed with cancer this year; the 60,000 Americans with Parkinson's; and the nearly 800,000 people who die from heart disease each year.

This legislation, crafted by the Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, touches every American. Each of us has personal health battles or knows family members and friends who are fighting against devastating diseases. Passing this package will help ensure that patients' perspectives are integrated into the drug-development and approval process and speed up the development of new antibiotics and treatments for those who need them most. It will also give a big boost to President Obama's cancer ''moonshot'' and his Precision Medicine Initiative, which will map one million genomes and help researchers develop treatments for diseases more quickly.

The U.S. has invested more than $30 billion in electronic health records over the past six years. Yet the majority of systems still are not able to routinely exchange patient information. This legislation will improve interoperability and electronic-information sharing across health-care systems, playing a fundamental role in improving the cost, quality and outcome of care. It encourages the adoption of a common set of standards to improve information sharing. It also allows patients easier access to their own health records and makes those records more accessible to a patient's entire health team so they can collaborate on treatment decisions.

The legislation will also improve the Food and Drug Administration's ability to hire and retain top scientific talent, which is vital to accelerating safe and effective treatments and cures. Additional provisions in the bills will improve the timeliness and effectiveness of processes for developing important combination products, such as a heart stent that releases medication into the body.

Alzheimer's is already the most expensive disease in America, and the number of people diagnosed with this debilitating neurological condition is expected to nearly triple to 13.8 million by 2050. This legislation will help advance our understanding of neurological diseases and give researchers access to more data so they can discover new therapies and cures—giving families hope for the future.

Collectively, these 19 bills are expected to deliver new, safe and effective treatments. Any political impediments to this should be overcome immediately. We believe, along with patients, providers, innovators and policy makers, that the nation's current process for developing and delivering drugs and devices to cure life-threatening diseases must change.

Millions of patients and the medical community are counting on Congress to help make that change. After 10 committee hearings and more than a year's work crafting bipartisan legislation, it's time for a Senate vote.

American lives depend on it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I mentioned what incredible leadership Mr. ALEXANDER, the Senator from Tennessee, provides on these issues. I was pleased, as he was pleased, and I know the Presiding Officer was also, that last year, for the first time in 12 years, we were able to have an increase in NIH research.

The future statistics that the Senator from Tennessee talked about on Alzheimer's and other things can be disrupted. In fact, that 2050 number of twice the defense budget spent on Alzheimer's alone with tax money—if you could delay the onset of Alzheimer's by an average of 5 years, you would reduce that number by 42 percent. So those research dollars not only have the impact we want to have on families and the individuals involved in that and other diseases we are dealing with now but also have an incredible impact on taxpayers, have an incredible impact on what we can do with the rest of the health care revolution that is occurring.

The mental health effort the Senator from Michigan, Ms. STABENOW, and I

were able to work on together a few years ago is about to produce at least eight States—and hopefully more—where, at the right kinds of facilities, mental health will be treated just like all other health.

This Congress is talking about doing the right things. We are making important steps in that direction.

Mr. President, I want to talk today about another thing that really impacts families—in this case, military families. I have this bill on my desk, the National Defense Authorization Act. I notice it is only on the desk of half of the Members of the Senate. Members on this side of the floor are ready to get to this bill and get this work done. Maybe there is a message on the other side of the floor that this bill is not there. We had hoped to get to it this week. We have not yet. But certainly we should get to it as soon we return to our work after the end of this week.

In the National Defense Authorization Act—I am really glad that bill includes the Military Family Stability Act, a measure that I introduced with Senator GILLIBRAND to provide more flexibility for military families. Today we have the most powerful military in the world, but we also recognize that our military men and women do not serve alone. The former Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Ray Odierno, often said that the strength of our Nation is in our military, but the strength of our military is in its families. So our military families need to be understood, recognized, appreciated, helped.

Those families have changed a lot over the years. They have sacrificed much. In the last 15 years, those families have dealt with persistent conflicts somewhere in the world and the likelihood of deployment to that conflict. But more importantly, the stress that puts on those families generally is what matters to them—maybe not more importantly in the greater context of what is going on but very important to them.

More military spouses are working today than ever before. In the world we live in today, this is good news. But all too often, military spouses sacrifice their own careers to meet the needs of the spouse who is in the service. Frequent redeployments, frequent deployments, and frequent relocations really have an impact on those careers.

According to a study done by the Military Officers Association of America, 90 percent of military spouses—that is more than 600,000 men and women—are either unemployed or underemployed. More than half cite the concerns about their spouse's service and the deterrent of moving from job to job—a deterrent not only for employers but a deterrent in that they sometimes have a hard time having the kind of recognition for the skills they bring to a new State or a new location that they need.

It is unfair to our military families for the spouse to needlessly have problems that could be avoided. Clearly, if you decide to pursue a military career—and that, by necessity, means relocation from time to time—this is not going to be the same career as if you went to work and you had every likelihood that you would work there for the next several years.

These frequent and sometimes abrupt relocations take a heavy toll on students as well. Research shows that students who move at least six times between the 1st and 12th grades are 35 percent more likely to fail a grade. I am not sure that exact research applies to military families. That is an overall number of what happens when people move. But the average military family will move six to nine times during a child's time in school—three times more often than the nonmilitary family.

These relocations of military families means that we need to find a better way to deal with those challenges for working families, and the Military Family Stability Act does that. The costs of needlessly maintaining two residences so that someone can finish school or someone can complete a job are the kinds of things that this act and this inclusion in the National Defense Authorization Act gives us a chance to deal with in a different way. It would allow families to either stay at the current duty station for up to 6 months longer than they otherwise would be able to stay or to leave and go to a new location sooner.

This probably is most easily understood in the context of school. If you only have a month left in school and your family could stay there while the person serving in the military goes ahead to the next post and is responsible for their own housing during the time they are there as a single serving individual—often they are going to find space available on the post itself for one person while the family stays until that school year works out better.

A job could be the same. One person we had who came and testified—Mia, who now lives in Rolla, MO—is married to a soldier who was being reassigned from Hawaii to Fort Leonard Wood, MO. That reassignment was supposed to occur in June, so she applied for a Ph.D. program at St. Louis University that would begin in August. She applied for a teaching position at Missouri Science and Technology at Rolla that would begin in August. Then her husband's transfer did not happen in June and it did not happen in July, but she needed to be there in August.

Under this change, moving the family household could easily occur in August and her husband could follow in October, as he did, but all of the expense of her going early was on her. She really had two options: One was to not pursue her graduate school class when it started, and the other was to not have a teaching job. Neither of those was a very good option. She went ahead and moved. Her husband essentially couch-surfed, but they had to pay for the move rather than the way that normally would have happened. This would not have to happen otherwise.

When Senator GILLIBRAND and I introduced this bill last year, we were also joined by Elizabeth O'Brien, who coached Division 1 college basketball for 11 years, with stints at West Point, Hofstra University, and the University of Hawaii. But she married into the Army, and because of the lack of flexibility, she gave up her coaching career.

The story she wanted to tell that day was that when she and her family were in Germany, where her husband was serving, her two children were in a German public school. They needed 2 more months to finish that year in the German public school. There really wasn't a very good transition when he was sent back to the Pentagon. There were no German public schools where they could have finished the classes in the Washington area. Basically, they wound up having to finish that year as home schoolers and then start another year the next year.

It would have been very easy for him to move on ahead, if that is what the family wanted to do, and for the family to stay in Germany for 2 months so the children could finish that school year in a way that it couldn't possibly be finished anywhere else, and then the family would move. That is the kind of thing that would happen under this legislation.

The day after we introduced this legislation, I happened to be hosting a breakfast for people who are supportive of Fort Leonard Wood and working at Fort Leonard Wood. I sat down at a table with two officers. One of their wives, a retired master sergeant, mentioned that we had proposed this legislation the day before. All three of them immediately had a story about how this would have benefited their family if at some time at a specific moment in their career, they could have stayed another 30 days or if the family could have gone forward 30 days earlier.

I am proud this bill has widespread support, including from the National Military Family Association, the Military Officers Association of America, the Military Child Education Coalition, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Iraq And Afghanistan Veterans of America, Blue Star Families, the National Guard Association, and the Veterans Support Foundation.

After more than a decade of active engagement around the world, frankly, at a time when military families have a lot more challenges than military families may have had at an earlier time, this is exactly what we ought to do.

We have had hearings on other issues over the last year. Over and over again, I have asked people who were testifying, representing the military, what they think about this. Usually these are admirals and general officers. In all cases, a story from their career immediately comes to mind. Universally,

they say: We have to treat families different than we used to treat families because too often the failure to do that means we are losing some of our most highly skilled people, who are still willing to serve but are no longer willing to put an unnecessary burden on their spouse or their children.

The Military Family Stability Act goes a long way toward removing one of those unnecessary burdens. I am certainly pleased to see it included in the National Defense Authorization Act and look forward to dealing with this important bill at the earliest possible date.

I see Senator ISAKSON on the floor, and I yield to him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The Senator from Georgia.

MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I thank Senator CASEY of Pennsylvania for giving me a couple of minutes to come to the floor of the Senate to pay tribute, preceding Memorial Day, to those men and women—less than 1 percent of our population—who have sacrificed, fought, and died on behalf of the people of the United States of America. We would not be where we are today had it not been for veterans who died on the battlefield so we could have free speech, democracy in government, and so our people could peacefully decide whom their leaders were and leave it up to us to lead the country.

I want to put a personal face on Memorial Day for just a moment.

First, I wish to talk about a guy named Tommy Nguyen. Tommy Nguyen is my legislative staffer on military affairs information. He volunteered for the U.S. Army Guard. He went to Fort Benning, GA, and graduated No. 1 in his class. You know what that means at Fort Benning. Right now he is deployed in Afghanistan and has been deployed for the past 5 months.

While we sit here in peace and relative security in our country, people like Tommy are protecting us all over. I am grateful for Tommy. He is in my prayers every night. He is exemplary of all the other people who have gone before us and sacrificed.

I wish to mention three people who are gone and aren't here any more, but they are the faces of Memorial Day, as far as I am concerned. I honor them at this time.

The first is Jackson Elliott Cox III. Jackson Elliott Cox III is from Waynesboro, GA, Burke County, the bird dog capital of south Georgia. He was my best friend at the University of Georgia in the 1960s. One night he came into the fraternity house—in his junior year, my senior year—and sat down beside me and a few other guys at the dinner table and said: Guys, I just did something this afternoon. I volunteered to go to OCS in the U.S. Marine Corps, go to Parris Island, and fight in Vietnam for the United States of America.

We all did the first thing all of you would do. We said: Well, Jack, have you thought this through? Is this really what you think you ought to do?

He said: You know, I have had everything as a young man to age 22. It is time that I fought to help defend the United States of America. I am going to become a marine officer, I am going to Vietnam, and I am going to help the United States win.

Jack did become an officer, and he did go to Vietnam. In the 12th month of his 13-month tour, he was killed by a sniper. Alex Crumbley, Pierre Howard, who was later the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Georgia, and I spent a week with his family as we waited for his body to come back from Southeast Asia.

The most meaningful afternoon of my life was the afternoon we sat up with Jack and his mother and father reminiscing about all the good times but deep down in our hearts knowing all the good times that would never be for Jack Cox because he had sacrificed the ultimate sacrifice for me, for you, and for all America.

Second, I wish to talk about LT Noah Harris, the Beanie Baby soldier in Iraq. Noah Harris was a cheerleader his junior year at the University of Georgia. He cheered on the Saturday before 9/11/2001. As everybody did, he watched the horror of the attack that day and all the people who were killed.

He went down to the ROTC building at the University of Georgia and he said: I want to volunteer to go after whoever those people were who attacked America in New York City.

The head officer said: Well, son, it is at least a 2-year commitment in ROTC, and you only have a year and a half to go. We cannot take you.

He said: I will make up the difference if you let me volunteer. I want to become an officer. I want to go after them, and I want to find them wherever they are.

The Army relented. Noah Harris volunteered. He went to OCS, and he went to Iraq in the surge on behalf of the United States of America. He became known as the Beanie Baby because he took Beanie Babies in his pockets and he won over the children of Iraq by handing out the Beanie Babies as he dodged bullets and put himself in harm's way.

About 6 months into his tour, he was hit by an IED while in a humvee. Noah Harris was killed that day in Iraq, and we have missed him ever since. To his father Rick and his mother Lucy—God bless them. Noah was an only child, and his memory is burned deep in their hearts and deep in my mind. They are so proud of what he did for you, for me, and for all of America.

Lastly, I wish to talk about Roy C. Irwin.

These three people are the faces of why we have Memorial Day. I get emotional because I went to the Margraten Cemetery in the Netherlands a few years ago as a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee to pay tribute to those soldiers who died in the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Normandy. Margraten in the Netherlands is where most of the soldiers who were not brought home from the Battle of the Bulge are buried.

On that Memorial Day in Margraten, my wife and I walked between the graves, stopping at each one, looking at the name, and saying a brief prayer for the soldier and a family. Then all of a sudden, in row 17, at grave No. 861, I stopped dead in my tracks and I looked down and saw on the white cross: Roy C. Irwin, New Jersey, Private, U.S. Army, 12/28/44.

Roy C. Irwin died on December 28, 1944, in the Battle of the Bulge. That was the day I was born. So there I was, a U.S. Senator looking at the grave of someone who died on the day I was born so I could be a U.S. Senator 64 years later. That is what the ultimate sacrifice is all about.

Selflessly, these people went into harm's way, fought for Americans, fought for liberty, fought for peace, and fought for prosperity. So everything we do today we owe in large measure to them—a small percentage of our population but a population that loves America and America's people.

So this Monday when you are at the lake or at the beach or with your grandchildren, wherever you might be, stop a minute, grab the hand of one of your grandchildren, and just bow and say a brief prayer, because going before all of us were men and women who volunteered and lost their lives so you and I can do what we are doing today.

We live in the greatest country on the face of this Earth. You don't ever find anybody trying to break out of the United States of America; they are all trying to break in. If there is a single reason that differentiates us from everybody else—when duty calls, we go and we fight.

As Colin Powell said in the U.N., before the request for the surge was approved, America has gone to every continent on Earth, sent her sons and daughters to fight for democracy, liberty, and peace, and when we have left, all we have asked for is a couple of acres to bury our dead.

I had the chance to walk a couple of those acres in Margraten, the Netherlands, and stand at the grave of Roy C. Irwin, who died the same day I was born. That memory is burned indelibly in my heart and indelibly in my mind, and I will always remember Roy C. Irwin. I never knew him, I never met him, and I never saw him, but I know his spirit. His spirit is the spirit of the United States of America.

This Monday, I hope God will bless each of you. Have a wonderful vacation and a wonderful holiday. But I hope you will pause and say thanks for the men and women who made it possible for you to do what you do today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I wish to first say that we appreciate the message Senator ISAKSON just gave to the Senate and, by extension, to the country. We are grateful for those remarks in the lead-up to Memorial Day.

MINERS PROTECTION ACT

Madam President, I rise to talk about coal miners and the promise—the obligation the U.S. Government has to coal miners on a range of issues but especially when it comes to their pensions and their health care.

Many Americans remember Stephen Crane as the author of the novel ''The Red Badge of Courage,'' but he also wrote something that probably not many Americans have read, but I have because it was about a coal mine near my hometown of Scranton. He wrote it just before the turn of the last century. For me, the pertinent parts were in terms of his description of what a coal mine looks like and all the dangers that are in that kind of work. His words in describing a mine were as follows. In describing the mine, he described it as a place of ''inscrutable darkness, a soundless place of tangible loneliness,'' and then he went on to catalog in horrific detail all the ways that a miner could be killed or could be adversely impacted by his work.

I am thinking about those dangers today when I speak about what coal miners have been through over many generations and what they confront today because of the pension issue we are going to discuss today. I am grateful to be joined by Senator MANCHIN of West Virginia, Senator BROWN of Ohio, Senator WARNER of Virginia, and Senator WYDEN of Oregon.

Senator WYDEN, as the leader of the Democrats on the Finance Committee, worked to have a hearing on this issue. It was in March, and I had the pleasure at that time of meeting two Pennsylvania coal miners, Tony Brusnak of Masontown, PA, which is in Fayette County, and Dave Vansickle of Smithfield, PA, also in Fayette County. Tony and Dave came to Washington to attend the Finance Committee hearing on pensions. I commend Senator WYDEN for helping us have that hearing and also for his work in negotiating with Chairman HATCH to hold that hearing and his continued efforts to get a markup in committee.

Those of us who attended the hearing heard United Mine Workers president Cecil Roberts testify about that promise I referred to before, the promise this Nation made to our coal miners, and how the Miners Protection Act carries out or carries through on that promise. It is one of the ways to fulfill that promise we made to coal miners.

At the time of that hearing, they were joined by mine workers from West Virginia, Ohio, Virginia, and Alabama on that particular day.

As I mentioned, Tony Brusnak from Fayette County had a 40-year work life in the mines, starting in the 1970s at J&L in Bobtown, PA. He is a member of the United Mine Workers Local 2300, and he is still active. He works at the harbor as a dockman now, and he is also a veteran.

Dave Vansickle began working in the coal mines about the same time, maybe a few months before Tony, so they are both 40-year miners. Dave worked at the Cumberland Mine and is a member of the United Mine Workers, Local 2300, as is Tony. Over his 40 years in the mine, Dave Vansickle has had numerous jobs, ranging from 20 years working on the long wall—miners know what that is—to working at the prep plant and also doing a range of other work in the mine. Dave Vansickle lost a finger doing that work, and he lost partial use of his right hand as well as several other fingers. So there is a price that has been paid by him and so many others.

These are very difficult jobs, and we know the men and women—women, I should add—who descend into the depths and the darkness of these mines assume a substantial personal risk and they work long hours. They stay in these jobs as long as they do, in part, because they have been given a promise—a promise by our government—that when they retire, they will have a pension and, most importantly, they will also have good health insurance so they are covered for the ailments they have sustained over the years of service.

The Miners Protection Act, which Senator MANCHIN and I have introduced, along with a bipartisan coalition of Senators, allows excess amounts from the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund to be used to preserve both coal miner pensions and retiree health care, as needed.

In Pennsylvania, we have more than 12,000 mine workers who are impacted by this—to be exact, 12,951 mine workers in Pennsylvania who are counting on us to pass this legislation. Here is the breakdown in some of our counties: just about 2,500 in Cambria County, PA, where Johnstown is; about 2,100 in Fayette County, where Tony and Dave have lived and worked; 1,900 in Indiana County; 1,500 in Washington County; and 1,000 in Westmoreland County.

Without passage of this legislation, something on the order of 20,000 retirees and 5,000 Pennsylvanians, their dependents or widows could lose their promised lifetime retiree health care within a matter of months.

Without the legislation, the United Mine Workers Act 1974 Pension Plan, which is the largest of the plans in the country, providing pensions to nearly 90,000 pensioners across the country and of course their surviving spouses, could be on an irreversible path to insolvency by next year.

Our coal miner men and women live on small pensions, averaging just $530 per month, plus Social Security. They rely greatly on the health care benefit they have negotiated and earned through their years of hard work in the coal mines. So these aren't just numbers, these are people. These are families who have worked very hard for Pennsylvania and worked very hard for our country. They have children and they have grandchildren. The Federal Government made them a promise and we must not rest until we fulfill that promise.

In 1990, a Federal blue-ribbon commission, the so-called Coal Commission, established by then-Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole, found that ''retired miners have legitimate expectations of health care benefits for life; that was the promise they received during their working lives, and that is how they planned their retirement years. That commitment should be honored.''

So said Secretary Dole's Commission in 1990.

It is important to note that the 1974 plan I mentioned has been well managed, with investment returns over the last 10 years averaging 8.2 percent per year. So despite being about 93 percent funded just before the financial crisis in 2008, losses sustained during the financial crisis placed the 1974 pension plan on the path to insolvency. That is because the financial crisis hit at a time when this plan had its highest payment obligations. That, coupled with the fact that 60 percent of the beneficiaries are orphan retirees whose employers are no longer in the coal business and the fact that there are only 10,000 active workers for 120,000 retirees, has helped to place the plan on the road to insolvency.

The 1974 plan's Actuary projects the plan will become insolvent in the years 2025–2026, absent passage of the Miners Protection Act. So we need to pass this legislation. We have made it very clear to Senators in both parties and more recently to the majority leader that we need to get this done.

By making small adjustments to existing law, the bill will allow us to fulfill that obligation, that promise I spoke of earlier. At the same time, even as we are working to pass the miners' pension legislation, we also have to be mindful of—and I will not spend time today talking about this in detail—and keep working on miner safety and of course those affected adversely by black lung.

So whether it is safety and health, health care itself, or whether it is retiree benefits of any kind—but especially the promise we made to miners with regard to their pensions—we have an obligation. This body needs to get on a track to pass this legislation before we leave in July.

I am honored to be part of this coalition, and I certainly thank and commend and salute the work done by Senator MANCHIN.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, let me first of all say thanks to my dear friend Senator CASEY from Pennsylvania. If you don't come from a coal-mining region or a coal-mining State, you probably don't understand the culture of coal mining, the people who do this work, and the families who support them. It might be hard to explain it, but we are going to try to give you a picture of the most patriotic people in America.

What I mean by that is they have done the heavy lifting. They have done everything that has been asked of them by this country to basically make us the greatest country on Earth—the superpower of the world, if you will. That has been because of the energy we have had domestically in our backyard and the people willing to harvest that for us.

So when you look at this country and you look at how we are treating people who have done the job and heavy lifting for over 100 years, the coal miners in West Virginia feel this way: They feel like the returning veterans from Vietnam, the returning servicemen who came from Vietnam—a war that was not appreciated and soldiers who were treated less than honorably for doing the job they did in serving their country. Americans now want to cast them aside. It is just unfair—totally unfair.

This country was so dependent upon this industry that in 1947—which will be 70 years tomorrow—President Harry S. Truman and John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers—and back then, in the 1940s, anybody who mined coal was a member of the United Mine Workers of America because it was all unionized—made a commitment and a promise they would get their benefits. It would be their health care, and they would get their pensions, which were so meager—so meager—just to keep working and to keep the country energized after World War II. If they had shut down and gone on strike, the country would have fallen on extremely hard times coming off of World War II.

That is how important this is. It is the only agreement where you have an Executive order by a President committing the United States of America to keeping its promise to our coal miners doing a job that made our country as great as we are today. Yet here we are, about ready to default on that, and we can't get people to move on it for whatever reason.

The miners are facing multiple pressures on their health care, pension, and benefits as a result of the financial crisis and corporate bankruptcy. This is not because of something they have mismanaged themselves. As we heard Senator CASEY mention, the 1974 pension plan was 94 percent funded, which is extremely healthy and solvent, up until 2008, when the financial collapse happened. It was not their fault, but now they are thrown into disarray.

Most of the people still collecting these pensions are widows. A lot of the husbands have died from black lung. These people are depending on a very meager amount of support for any type of quality of life, and we have it paid for also. We have had it paid for. We are talking about the excess AML money that could basically take care of this. Also, there is another pay-for. There is a $5 billion fine that Goldman Sachs paid the DOJ for their financial shenanigans during this financial collapse that could go to pay for this. I mean, it is Wall Street that caused the problem. It wasn't the miners, basically the miners' pension fund or the plan that was being managed at all.

When you couple this with the fact that 60 percent of the beneficiaries are orphan retirees, which has been explained, and that we have 10,000 active workers for 120,000 retirees, that has placed the plan on the road to insolvency. I think everyone understands that.

The Miners Protection Act is not only important to all miners in all States—my good friend here Senator WARNER from Virginia has a tremendous mining community in Southwest Virginia, along with our entire State. Pennsylvania is the home of anthracite coal. The coal industry really got started there. We have Senator BROWN in Southeast Ohio, which butts up to West Virginia and is a major mining area. So it is important to my State and all the other States that have retired miners.

People are asking about the non-union. I am concerned about the non-union miners, and I will do everything and commit myself to helping them also, but if we can't even keep our commitment to the United Mine Workers of America that was basically signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1947, we are not sincere or intent on helping anybody. This is something that must be done and must be done immediately. I have said that, and I have been preaching this, so I hope we all come to our senses and do something as quickly as possible about this.

These retirees—as far as basically their medical, runs out the end of this year. The following year they lose their pensions too. That is how desperate this is and what we are dealing with.

To address these issues the Miners Protection Act would simply do this: It would amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to transfer funds in excess of the amounts needed to meet existing obligations under the Abandoned Mine Land Fund to the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan to prevent its insolvency; second, make certain retirees who lose health care benefits following the bankruptcy or insolvency of his or her employer eligible for the 1993 Benefit Plan. These assets of Voluntary Employment Benefit Association, created following the Patriot Coal bankruptcy—and if you don't know about the Patriot Coal bankruptcy, I will give you a minute or two on this one.

Patriot Coal came out of Peabody. Peabody spun Patriot off and put all of their liabilities—all of their liabilities—which were basically doomed to fail, into Patriot. They threw all of the union workers into this liability. And guess what. They went bankrupt. It went bankrupt. It was designed to go bankrupt so they could be shed of all the liabilities.

It is our responsibility to keep the promise to our miners who have answered the call whenever their country needed them. They have never failed us. When our country went to war, these miners powered us to prosperity.

A lot of these young people we have here today don't understand that basically coal mining was so important to this country, when we entered World War II, if you were a coal miner, it was more important for you to stay and mine the coal to power the country—the coal that made the steel, that built the guns and ships—than it was to go on the frontlines and fight. They were on the frontlines every day. They never left the frontlines.

When our economy was stagnant, the miners fueled its growth and expansion. After the war, there was so much buildup, the economy started dipping. You had to continue to work and produce in order to make that happen, and we needed energy to do that, so the coal miners did that.

They kept their promise to us, and now it is time for us to keep our promise to them. We need to honor the commitment. We need to honor the Executive order signed by the United States of America to make sure they get their pension and make sure they get their health care.

Senator CASEY and I introduced the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act to, among other things, make it a felony for mine operators to knowingly violate safety standards.

Six years and 1 day after 29 brave miners were tragically killed at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia, former Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship received 1 year in prison, the maximum allowable sentence, for willfully conspiring to violate mine safety standards.

Put simply, the penalty does not fit the crime committed there, and we aim to change that. I stood with the families of the beloved miners in the days following the devastating tragedy at Upper Big Branch. Through moments of hope and despair, I witnessed again and again the unbreakable bonds of family that are as strong or stronger than anything I have ever seen. While no sentence or amount of jail time will ever heal the hearts of the families who have been forever devastated, I believe we have a responsibility to do everything we can in Congress to ensure that a tragedy like this never, ever happens again.

I thank Senators CASEY, BROWN, WARNER, WYDEN, and all of my colleagues for putting these miners first and keeping the promise that we made

to them. It is vitally important that we hold executives who are willing to put the health and lives of our workers at risk accountable for their actions. We must hold everybody responsible. We must hold ourselves responsible first to do the right thing. That is what we are standing here talking about today. If we don't stand up for the people who basically have stood up and defended us, powered a nation and did the heavy lifting and if we can't keep the promise that was made 70 years ago, then God help us in the Senate and the Congress.

I hope we do step up and do the right thing. I tell all of my colleagues that this is not a partisan issue. This is truly bipartisan. This is truly bipartisan. These people work for all of us, not just for part of us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I am pleased to join my friends—Senator CASEY, who led this debate; Senator MANCHIN, who has worked on this legislation and devoted much of his career to the people that go down into the mines and provide the coal and electricity for much of the eastern half of the United States; Senator WARNER, for his work with Senator CASEY and Senator WYDEN on the Finance Committee. Thanks to all of them.

I want to talk about two pension issues starting with what happened 2 weeks ago, when hundreds of thousands of Teamsters and their families received exciting news that the U.S. Treasury was rejecting the Central States Pension Fund's plan to cut the pensions and benefits they had earned through a lifetime of hard work. This was a win for all of us who urged Treasury to reject these cuts. More importantly, it was a win for the thousands of union members, their families, their supporters, and their friends who worked so hard to protect what their union had spent decades fighting for. That rejection, to be sure, is not the end of the fight for the benefits that workers have earned. It was just the latest battle in the fight to protect workers' pensions.

While Central States' 47,000 Teamsters in my State and tens of thousands in other States may have gotten a reprieve, we have more work to do. As Senator MANCHIN just spoke about, our Nation's retired coal miners are on the brink of losing their health care and retirement savings, and it is within the power of Congress to pull them back.

The health care and pension plans of the United Mine Workers of America cover some 100,000 mine workers, about 7,000 of them living in my State, mostly in Southeast Ohio. The plans were almost completely funded before the financial collapse in 2008, but the industry and its pension funds were devastated by the recession. The plan has too few assets, too few employers, and too few union workers now paying in. If Congress fails to act, thousands of retired miners could lose their health care this year, and the entire plan could fail as early as next year. This would be devastating for retired mine workers, like my constituent, Norm Skinner.

I met Norm in March before a Finance Committee hearing on pension plans that are under threat. Norm is a veteran. He started working as a miner for what became Peabody Coal in 1973. He worked for 22 years and retired in 1994. For every one of those years, he earned and contributed to his retiree health care plan and his pension plan.

Since he retired, Norm has had nearly constant health challenges—not that unusual for people who work in some of the most dangerous conditions in American business. He had triple bypass surgery in 2010. Three years later, they inserted stents, and he had angioplasty. Norm told me that 60 percent of his colleagues at the mine have died of cancer because of the chemicals. When they closed the mine, teams of people wearing hazmat suits came in to clean it. His entire shovel crew has died of cancer. Some were in their fifties when they passed away. But now, after putting in decades in this dangerous mine, Norm is in danger of losing the health care that has kept him alive.

I also met with David Dilly, who worked in the same SIMCO mine. David is also a veteran, and he worked for 14 years at the mine before it closed down in 1989. He was a UMWA member, even serving as president of Local 1188 for a couple of years, and he serves as recording secretary still.

Mining is hard, backbreaking work. It is dangerous. It is dangerous every day in the mine. It is dangerous for the air and the chemicals that mine workers ingest. They knew that when they signed up for the job. But that work has dignity. It is crucial to us and in our national interest as a country. It is a dignity rooted in providing security and opportunity for their family.

We used to have a covenant in this country that said: If you work hard, if you put in the hours, if you contribute to retirement and your health care, you will be able to support yourself and your family. What they are doing is giving up union negotiations and also giving up wages today to take care of themselves and their family in later years so that government or friends or other family members don't have to. What is more honorable than that? It is what made this country great. It is what built the middle class. So when earned benefits like collectively bargained pensions and health care can be cut, we are going back on a fundamental promise that our country has made to tens of millions of American workers.

There is a bipartisan solution proposed by the two Senators from West Virginia and supported by leaders in both parties. The bill uses the interest and surplus from an existing source of money, the Abandoned Mines Reclamation Fund, and funnels that money into the health care and pension plans. This is a fund for reclaiming the land of retired coal mines. So it makes sense to use the surplus to support retired coal mine workers and their families.

If this bipartisan legislation was brought to the floor today, it would pass with an overwhelming majority. It is time for the Senate to act. This legislation has been blocked by one Republican leader in this body. The support of Senator WYDEN, Senator WARNER, and Senator CASEY and in the committee seems to be unanimous from the chairman on down. We are just looking to the Republican leader to give us a vote on this because we are absolutely certain it would pass.

Miners worked in dangerous conditions their entire lives to put food on the table, to send their kids to college, and to help power this country. I have worn on my lapel a pin given to me at a workers' memorial day in the late 1990s, on an April day, where we were memorialized workers who had been killed or injured on the job in the steel industry. This is a depiction of a canary in a birdcage. In the early 1900s, the mine workers would take a canary down in the mines. If a canary died because of lack of oxygen or toxic gas, the mine workers knew they had to get out of the mine. Yet, in those days, there was no union strong enough to protect them and they had no government that cared enough to protect them. We are in the situation today where it is up to us to be that canary. It is up to us to provide for those workers—who have earned these pensions, who have earned this health care for themselves and, in far too many cases, for their widows—and to step up and do the right thing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I am proud to stand here with my colleagues and friends—Senator MANCHIN from West Virginia, Senator CASEY from Pennsylvania, Senator BROWN from Ohio, and, shortly after me, Senator WYDEN from Oregon—to echo what has already been said.

Senator BROWN said it best. He wears that canary pin. If we don't act now, if we don't hear that call and respond to it, then the basic promise and premise that so much of our country is founded on will really be crushed.

I join my colleagues in standing up and urging the Senate to pass the Miners Protection Act. We have mines—just as in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia—in southwest Virginia. Quite honestly, I think, as do my colleagues, that no one fully understands what it is like to mine coal until you have been underground, until you see the enormous challenges and conditions that men and women—mostly men—worked under for decades to power our Nation.

Senator MANCHIN often recites the history of this proud industry. But that industry has gone through dramatic changes. Some of those changes are due

to activities of certain companies that may or may not have been responsible. Some of these changes are because of a desire of many of us, frankly, on this side of the aisle, to make sure that we find cleaner ways to use energy. In a way, that is good. But it has meant that many of these coal companies and many of these operators that continue to mine what powered America are under enormous fiscal stress. The result is not enough miners, coal companies that went bankrupt, and, unfortunately, the pension funds that would protect these miners are now in jeopardy.

So now, through no fault of their own, these workers who have sacrificed their bodies, their health, and their livelihoods—when it comes to the U.S. Government to uphold our end of the deal to make sure that these workers or, more specifically, as my colleagues have pointed out, more often it is their widows, as so many of these miners have passed on due to things like black lung disease—are going to get the health care and pensions that were promised and whether we are going to be able to honor that commitment.

The UMWA 1974 Pension Fund affects about 100,000 miners and close to 10,000 in the Commonwealth of Virginia. They are looking to us and whether we are going to honor our commitment.

As Senator BROWN mentioned, I met a number of these miners, who are direct beneficiaries, when we had our most recent hearing. Many of these miners I had worked with and supported when I was Governor of Virginia, and I saw the challenges their communities had gone through. If we don't do our job, these communities that have been hard hit all throughout Appalachia—if these widows don't get the health care and their pensions, communities that have already been devastated will be further devastated. If we allow this pension fund to go bankrupt and go insolvent, it will put additional strains on the PBGC, which is already under enormous strain.

The truth is, as Senator MANCHIN has pointed out, there is a solution, and there is funding available for this miner pension act. It is critically important that we act. It is critically important, morally and economically. I would ask any of my colleagues to speak to any of these widows and explain why we wouldn't keep our end of the bargain when, come the end of this year, if we don't act, these health care benefits will disappear. I hope we will act on this bipartisan legislation. The Senator from Ohio has indicated it would pass this body overwhelmingly.

I appreciate all of my colleagues' work. I see and turn the floor over to the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee. He doesn't have a lot of coal in Oregon, but he understands that, when a commitment is made—particularly a commitment that was initially made by the President of the United States, President Truman, back in 1946—those commitments need to be honored. I look forward to continuing to work with his leadership to get this legislation out of the Finance Committee, get it to the floor of the Senate, get it passed, and make sure these miners' and their widows' health care pensions are honored.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Virginia, Senator CASEY, Senator BROWN, and Senator MANCHIN. They have been relentless in putting this issue of justice for the miners in front of the Finance Committee.

Week after week, month after month, they have been saying: When is this going to get done? When is the Congress—particularly the Senate—going to step up and meet the needs that these workers richly deserve to have addressed? We have had this documented again and again. I heard Senator CASEY talk about it—how difficult this work is. We have had that put in front of the Senate Finance Committee. Yet there has been no action.

Senator WARNER is right—my home State of Oregon does not mine coal. We do have a lot of communities with economies that over the years have been driven by natural resources. They have been up and down the boom-and-bust roller coaster. A lot of those communities are experiencing the very same kind of economic pain you see in the mining towns Senator CASEY and our colleagues represent.

You don't turn your backs on workers and retirees in these struggling communities, these struggling mining towns, just because the times are tough. These workers have earned their pensions. They have earned their health care benefits. But the fact is, if Congress does not act soon, all of this could be taken away.

There is a broader crisis in multi-employer pensions that I have talked about on the floor and in the Finance Committee. Part of this crisis goes back to a bad law that passed, over my opposition, in 2014. It gave a green light to slashing benefits for retirees and multi-employer pension plans. It said that it was OK to go back on the deal companies made with their workers and to take away benefits—benefits people had earned through years of hard work. So there are a lot of seniors now walking an economic tightrope every day, and this law threatens to make their lives even harder.

Now you have the mine workers' pensions—the pensions Senator CASEY and colleagues have been talking about—in such immediate danger, there is enormous financial pressure being put on the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. That is because the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation is an economic backstop for millions of retirees. It insures the pensions belonging to mine workers and more than 40 million Americans. But the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation is in danger of insolvency if the Congress doesn't step up and find a solution for the troubles facing multi-employer pension plans. And fixing the mine workers' pension plan is a critical component of any solution for the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's insurance program. If you don't come up with a solution there, you are going to put in place a prescription for trouble for generations of retired workers across the country.

Senator MANCHIN has worked strenuously for this cause, reaching across the aisle to Senator CAPITO. I mentioned my colleagues on the Finance Committee. There is now a bipartisan proposal ready to go to protect retired mine workers' health benefits and bolster their pension plan. It would stave off the threat of financial ruin for more than 100,000 workers and their families and would help safeguard the Pension Benefits Guaranty Corporation and the millions of Americans who count on it to insure their livelihoods. We understand that if you want to do something important in the Senate, it has to be bipartisan, so we have reached out to the majority to find a way to advance this proposal.

The mine workers are not facing some imaginary policy deadline. Their livelihoods are on the line. Their health care is on the line. The economic security of entire communities is on the line. So it is time for the Congress to step up.

I again thank my colleagues.

I wish to note that I have some additional remarks to make, and I am going to wait to give those remarks because I understand Senator HEITKAMP, Senator DONNELLY, and Senator COATS are going to go beforehand. I see our friend from North Dakota on her feet.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, let me add my voice to those of my colleagues who have come here to plead the case for mine workers and for equity for widows, equity for people who have worked their entire lives with their hands and now have their future jeopardized by the lack of attention to this critical issue of their pensions.

STUDENT DEBT

Mr. President, I rise today to talk about another very important middle-class economic issue and one that we have been talking about ever since I got here; that is, the overwhelming burden of student debt.

Earlier this week I spoke at Envision 2030 in Bismarck. It was a convening of academic and political leaders in my State to discuss the needs of students who will be embarking on and graduating from college in the next 15 years. Incredible amounts of time was spent on college affordability. I challenged many of the education leaders to take a look at what it is going to take to reduce costs so that students do not have to borrow so much money as they are pursuing their higher education opportunities.

Like the rest of the country, North Dakota's students are getting bogged down in debt before they even graduate from college. This debt impacts their futures, their families, and their communities.

I would argue that this debt is endangering the economic viability of our country. According to the Institute for College Access and Success, the average amount of student debt a person in North Dakota owes has now risen above $27,000. North Dakota students have some of the highest rates of indebtedness in the country, as 83 percent of the class of 2011 graduated with some form of debt. That is more than any other State in the country for that year.

Across the country, these statistics paint a bleak picture. I want to point that out as we are looking at debt and what debt can do to an economy. Certainly, we talk a lot about the debt we have in this country. If you take a look at this chart, you will understand that this peak in debt here is really right after the debt crisis. There was rising consumer debt in credit cards. Here is student loans. This is mortgage debt, obviously, at a peak. This is auto loan debt.

Notice this: Everything went down and has come down in terms of debt—percentage of balance that is 90 days or more delinquent—except one category, and that is student loan debt.

We like to tell the story honestly. These people who have credit card debt and mortgage debt are not deadbeats; they want to pay their obligations. These students also want to pay, but they are finding it virtually impossible to pay this amount of student debt with the lack of economic opportunities and with the rising number of challenges they have in meeting these obligations.

A lot of people think: Well, this is just a problem for kids in their twenties. That is not going to be a problem. They will work their way through it. That opportunity will be available to them.

Take a look at this. If you go back to 2004, 42 percent of everybody impacted was in their twenties, and now it is 32 percent. That growing impact goes not only into your thirties but also into your forties, and we have the highest percentage increase, probably, in the number of people 60 and older who are burdened by student debt.

This chart tells an incredible story of the burden all of this student debt is having on the economy. Well, what do we do about it? I have signed on many pieces of legislation here that would do one simple thing: It would help refinance this student debt.

We have record-low interest rates in this country. We have never before seen the continuity and consistency of low interest rates. Amazing. If you have a high interest rate and you have a car loan, you refinance it. If you have a high interest rate and you have a home, you refinance your mortgage. But can you refinance your student debt? You will never take advantage of this.

Well, in North Dakota we have an institution called the Bank of North Dakota. It might shock people here, given the kind of attitude I see toward the Export-Import Bank, but the Bank of North Dakota is owned by the people of the State of North Dakota. About a third of their capital is invested in students. It is an opportunity to develop our State. We make home mortgage loans. We make beginning-farmer loans. We participate with local banks in economic development loans. We have some great economic development programs at the Bank of North Dakota.

I am still in the ''we'' mode because when I was attorney general, I used to serve on their board of directors. Senator HOEVEN ran the Bank of North Dakota. It is an amazing institution.

When we find our citizens crippled with debt, what do we do? We try to figure out how to help them. We don't say: We are going to make more money on you by keeping our interest rates at 6.8 percent and not letting you refinance. We say: You know what, that is not helpful to our economy.

Let me tell you about the results of the consolidation program the Bank of North Dakota runs. First of all, there are qualifiers. The first qualifier is that you have to be a U.S. citizen. You can't be attending school any longer. You must have been a North Dakota resident for 6 months. And if this gets out, we may see a flood of young people coming to our State. You must meet Bank of North Dakota credit criteria or have a creditworthy cosigner.

Your loan options are any student loan that you have or your parents have or your grandparents have can be consolidated into this program. We will take Stafford; Perkins; parent loans for undergraduate students, which is called PLUS in North Dakota; Grad PLUS in North Dakota; and DEAL, which is another student loan program that they run at the Bank of North Dakota; and any private lending from any other institution.

What do we do? We consolidate all of that debt and refinance it into lower interest rates and offer people a number of different packages.

Let me tell you what the consequences are. Let's take a look at someone who is in a student loan program that charges 6.8 percent per annum for that student debt. If you have a loan amount of $35,000 at 6.8 percent and your repayment term is 300 months—think about that, 300 months. What is that in terms of a lifetime? That is a lot of months for a lifetime. Your monthly payment is $242 or almost $243. The total interest you will pay traditionally, without consolidation and without refinancing, is about $38,000.

Under this refinancing program, you can do it one of two ways: You can refinance on a fixed rate or you can refinance on a variable rate.

You may say: Oh, variable rates—isn't that what has gotten so many consumers in trouble?

What the bank does is they say you can only raise the rate 1 percent a year under the variable rate and you are capped at 10 percent. So you will never pay more than 10 percent. Or you can opt to lock in at our fixed rate, which at the time this chart was done was 4.71 percent. If you use the variable rate, you can lock in at just slightly above 2 percent.

Let's take those same payment terms—300 months. Your monthly payments for the Deal One fixed rate would be less than $200, compared almost to $250. Your total interest paid would be $13,000 less over the lifetime of that loan. If you go with the variable rate, assuming we don't see a dramatic increase in interest rates, you will pay $150 a month. It is almost $100 less. The total interest you will pay at these low rates is $10,000, compared to $37,000. Think about that. Think about what that means to a family.

If we take this even further and we speed up payments under the DEAL Program—let's try to do this in less months because no one wants to be locked in for 300 months of their life. If you look at going to a fixed rate for 157 months, you can greatly reduce your overall interest paid to about $12,000. Your monthly payment would be $300, and the total amount you will pay—let's compare that to the fixed rate going to 300 months; you pay almost $60,000. If you go to a shorter period of time, almost cut that time in half and increase your payments to $300 a month, you will only pay $47,000 on a $35,000 loan going with the fixed rate we currently have. If you go with variable, assuming the interest rates stay low, a $35,000 variable loan amount gets you down to just under $40,000.

Why can't we do this for every student in America? When I hear that the solution to the student debt problem is that we ought to limit the amount of repayment to 15 percent or we ought to forgive it after so many years, I don't think that is a solution for a lot of good North Dakotans who want to repay their debt. But to simply say we will not consolidate, we will not give an opportunity for students to take advantage of low interest rates is incredibly irresponsible. It is tone deaf to the impact that it has on whether we can start a new business, whether we can get a mortgage for a home, whether we can buy a car, whether we can save for our retirement so we don't have pension problems in the future, and whether we can save for our kids' college education.

Why aren't we doing this? Someone answer that question for me. If we can make this for students in the State of North Dakota, why can't we make this happen for students all across this country? That is the question I have come to ask because I think a lot of people talk about the ideas of restructuring student debt and what we can do

to help students, and a lot of it is about debt forgiveness. You know what. I think people want to pay their debt in America. If they signed a piece of paper that says they will repay it, they want to repay it. Let's give them a chance to do that without continuing to mortgage their future and make them slaves to student debt.

I have a personal story. My niece and her husband were able to use this program. They continued to pay the same amount as they were paying when they had four or five different loans and they consolidated. They are spending the same amount on their student loan, and guess what. They have cut the time for payment of their student debt in half. They are now able to save for their children's future and college education.

People say it can't be done. You bet it can be done. We are doing it in North Dakota, and if we can do it in North Dakota, we can do it in this country. Let's step up and recognize this for the economic problem that is not just for families but for this country, and let's do something. Let's quit talking about student debt and actually do something about that.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

RECOGNIZING THE 100TH RUNNING OF THE INDIANAPOLIS 500 MILE RACE

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I am on the floor with my colleague from Indiana Senator DONNELLY to talk about something that is very special to the State of Indiana which happens to be coming up this weekend. On Sunday, May 29, the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500, the greatest spectacle in racing, will take place in the town of Speedway, IN, a small town within the confines of the borders of Indianapolis.

The Indianapolis 500-mile race is the largest single-day sporting event in the world. It is almost staggering to think about this small town of Speedway, IN, hosting 350,000 fans this year. It is a logistical challenge that the city and security people have met year after year. It is something to see.

Since the first race in 1911, race fans from around the world have packed the grandstands and the speedway's expansive infield to enjoy the race and take in the experience of being at one of the world's most famous motor sports events.

I can't begin to describe the dimension of a 2½-mile track and the infield. There is a golf course—and a significant part of it is in the infield—that only takes up part of that infield. The 2½-mile track, with 350,000 people, is a spectacle you will not see anywhere else.

For those of us who are from Indiana, the Indy 500 is a celebration of our State, and along with basketball, is what it means to be a Hoosier. Timeless traditions, like the singing of ''Back Home Again in Indiana,'' are embedded into the fabric of Hoosier culture. When the announcer says the phrase ''Gentlemen, start your engines,'' as was said for many years, 33 cars' engines start to roar to the cheers of the crowd. Today that same phrase is now ''Gentlemen and ladies, start your engines'' because the race has brought women to the track to also race.

Thirty-three cars start the pace laps, and off the third or fourth pace lap, as the pace car races down the straightaway and pulls aside, 33 cars come roaring around the fourth turn and hurtling down the home stretch at over 200 miles per hour to plunge into the first turn while 350,000 people stand there holding their breath, maybe saying a prayer, and saying: How in the world can those 33 cars at 200 miles an hour pile into that very small banked first turn without cataclysmic consequences? But they do it, and it is a testament to the agility of the drivers and the technology that has been incorporated into the cars. It is something to see.

The roots of all of this date back to 1909, when a group of businessmen, led by Hoosier entrepreneur Carl Fisher, purchased the 320 acre Pressley Farm—that is not Elvis Presley, by the way—just outside Indianapolis and began construction of the gravel-and-tar racetrack.

At that time, Indianapolis and Detroit were competing to be America's automotive capital, and Fisher believed that a large speedway, where reliability and speed could be tested, would give Indianapolis an upper hand.

Fisher and other speedway founders hired a New York engineer and asked him to design a 2½-mile track with a banked corner, a unique design that still endures today. The first track surface proved to be somewhat problematic so Fisher and his partners needed a way to pave it. They settled on bricks, and covering the 2½-mile oval required an astonishing 3.2 million bricks at a cost of $400,000, which was no small change back then. That is why it is called the brickyard.

As time wore on, bricks didn't become the ideal surface, and when the current surface was put in place, we retained 1 yard of bricks at the finish line. If you are watching the Indianapolis 500 on Sunday—and I know all of these pages will be tuning into that spectacle after Senator DONNELLY and I are through convincing you that this is something you really want to see—that yard of bricks is there and symbolizes what that track has been.

With the bricks laid, about 80,000 spectators gathered around the track on Memorial Day weekend in 1911 for the inaugural Indianapolis 500 race. They witnessed Ray Harroun win the race in his yellow No. 32 Marmon ''Wasp'' at an average speed of 74.6 miles an hour—about what Senator DONNELLY and I try to drive when we are on the interstates in Indiana and going no faster than that so we don't get a speeding ticket, which wouldn't help our careers.

Initially, the cars had two people. One was the driver and the other was a mechanic. This is early on in 1911. We were still developing cars, and of course the impacts the car had to absorb going around a tar-and-gravel track caused many stops, so the mechanic would jump out, make the fix, put on a new tire, and help with the fueling. Ray Harroun surprised everybody by showing up without a mechanic. He was the only person in the car. It was the first such instance that had happened. What they did see in the car was something they hadn't seen on any of the other cars—a rearview mirror being used in an automobile. That is the first instance that we know of that automobiles used a rearview mirror. Since that first race, the Indianapolis 500 has occurred on every Memorial Day since 1911, with the exception of 1917 and 1918 when the United States was involved in World War I, and there was an exception from 1942 to 1945 when the United States was involved in World War II.

When the soldiers came home after the war was over, they looked at the track and it was in a state of despair. It simply was not ready to be used. It had been neglected, understandably, through the war years and was broken down. At that time, the talk was let's close it down, but Terre Haute, IN, native Tony Hulman purchased the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and under his leadership the facility was restored and rebuilt.

Beginning in 1946 until today, the Indianapolis 500 restarted with massive crowds and the event has only grown over time. In the decades since, the speedway has been owned by the Hulman-George family and all race fans are indebted to this family for their passion for Indy 500 and careful stewardship of the world's most famous racetrack.

As the years passed, the technology used at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway has progressed and so has the speed. In 2013, Tony Kanaan set the record for the fastest Indianapolis 500, winning the race in 2 hours 40 minutes, at an average speed of 187.4 miles per hour. Think about that. Think of driving for 2 hours 40 minutes, at 187 miles per hour, including yellow lights, when everybody has to slow down significantly because of an accident on the track, a loose tire or something that causes the race to have to slow down, and the pit stops where they have to change the tires and fuel the cars—230 miles per hour is an extraordinary speed, and you have to run at that top speed almost continuously while you are on the track in order to achieve that 187-miles-per-hour record.

There is nothing like being there and seeing cars at that speed so deftly handled by drivers in very difficult situations. The Indianapolis 500 is a showcase of ingenuity, human achievement,