

economy moving forward while keeping this country secure.

With that, I would encourage a “yes” vote on this bill. I would just ask that next time around, which is going to start immediately, we let the subcommittees on appropriations do their work and bring these subcommittee bills to the floor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). Under the previous order, the motion to refer with amendment is withdrawn and the motion to concur with amendment is withdrawn.

Under the previous order, the question occurs on agreeing to the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 244.

Mr. WICKER. 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. SASSE).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) would have voted “yea” and the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. SASSE) would have voted “nay.”

Mr. SCHUMER. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN) is necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 79, nays 18, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 121 Leg.]

#### YEAS—79

Alexander	Gillibrand	Perdue
Baldwin	Harris	Peters
Barrasso	Hassan	Portman
Bennet	Hatch	Reed
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Roberts
Blunt	Heitkamp	Rounds
Booker	Hirono	Rubio
Boozman	Hoeven	Sanders
Brown	Inhofe	Schatz
Burr	Johnson	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Shaheen
Capito	King	Shelby
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Lankford	Sullivan
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Cassidy	Manchin	Thune
Cochran	Markey	Tillis
Collins	McCain	Udall
Coons	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Cornyn	McConnell	Warner
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warren
Donnelly	Merkley	Whitehouse
Duckworth	Moran	Wicker
Enzi	Murkowski	Wyden
Feinstein	Murphy	Young
Franken	Murray	
Gardner	Nelson	

#### NAYS—18

Corker	Fischer	Lee
Cotton	Flake	Paul
Crapo	Graham	Risch
Cruz	Grassley	Scott
Daines	Heller	Strange
Ernst	Kennedy	Toomey

#### NOT VOTING—3

Durbin	Isakson	Sasse
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The motion was agreed to.

#### PROVIDING FOR A CORRECTION IN THE ENROLLMENT OF H.R. 244

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the enrollment correction.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 53) providing for a correction in the enrollment of H.R. 244.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 53, is agreed to, and the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

The majority leader.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 53, Scott Gottlieb to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Scott Gottlieb, of Connecticut, to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant 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 nomination of Scott Gottlieb, of Connecticut, to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services.

Mitch McConnell, John Cornyn, Tom Cotton, Dan Sullivan, Shelley Moore Capito, John Barrasso, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Orrin G. Hatch, Bill Cassidy, Pat Roberts, Mike Crapo, Lamar Alexander, Richard Burr, John Thune, Jerry Moran, James E. Risch.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the cloture vote on the Gottlieb nomination occur following disposition of the Wilson nomination on Monday, May 8.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

#### NATIONAL DAY OF AWARENESS FOR MISSING AND MURDERED NATIVE WOMEN AND GIRLS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, tomorrow, May 5, Hanna Harris should have been 25 years old. Instead of celebrating a birthday, we will be celebrating her memory. Hanna was a 21-year-old member of the Cheyenne Tribe. She lived in Lame Deer, MT, with her 10-month-old son. The last time she was seen alive was the Fourth of July of 2013. After that, she went missing, and 5 days later, her body was found. Hanna was found to have been raped and murdered.

For too long, the stories of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native women have gone unheard. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide was the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between the ages of 10 and 24 years and the fifth leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between 25 and 34 years of age.

According to a study commissioned by the Department of Justice, American Indian women face murder rates that are more than 10 times the national average. Let me repeat that. American Indian women face murder rates 10 times the national average. If this were the case in any other community outside of Native communities, there would be public outcry, but there hasn't been until now. In fact, yesterday the Senate approved my resolution to designate May 5, Hanna Harris's birthday, as a day of remembrance. It will be a day to join together to commemorate the lives of those we lost tragically, like Hanna. It is a day to validate the pain Tribal communities have felt and feel every day. It will mark a national day of awareness for Native women and girls who have gone missing or have been murdered.

I was joined by 12 of my colleagues in passing this resolution to declare that the tragic loss of Native women and girls is not just an issue, it is an epidemic, and I thank them for their support.

Tomorrow, on Hanna's birthday, I will walk with Melinda Limberhand Harris, Hanna's mother, and with Tribal leadership, as well as members in Lame Deer, MT, who have also lost a mother, a daughter, a sister, or a friend. On May 5, we will remember RoyLynn Rides Horse, we will remember Kenzley Olson, and we will remember the thousands of other American Indian and Alaska Native women who have been killed or have disappeared without a trace. And we will remember Hanna Harris on her birthday tomorrow as we walk together in Lame Deer, MT.

Mr. President, I yield my time.

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

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

#### HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, the House of Representatives has just passed a bill that would make major changes in the Affordable Care Act by a vote of 217 to 213. I congratulate the House. The Senate will carefully review the House bill, and we will go to work on a Senate bill.

Here are my goals for a Senate bill. I don't pretend to speak for every Member of the Senate or even every Republican, but these are my goals for a bill we will fashion here.

No. 1, rescue the thousands of Tennesseans and millions of Americans who, under the Affordable Care Act, will be trapped in ObamaCare exchanges with few or zero options for health insurance in the year 2018 unless Congress acts.

My second goal is to lower premium costs. Premium costs have increased and, in some States, are going through the roof under the Affordable Care Act.

No. 3, gradually transfer to the states more flexibility in administering the Medicaid program and do that in such a way as to not pull the rug out from under those who rely on the Medicaid program.

No. 4, make sure those who have pre-existing health conditions have access to health insurance. This is one thing in the Affordable Care Act that has strong support from just about everybody, including the President, that if you have a preexisting condition, you must have access to healthcare. We need to make sure that is still true in any bill we create in the Senate.

There is some urgency here because of what is happening in the individual market. When we say "individual market," here is what we are talking about. Most Americans get their insurance either from the government or on the job. About 18 percent of Americans get their insurance through Medicare. We are not talking about Medicare today. The bill in the House or the bill we will create in the Senate does not affect Medicare.

About 60 percent of Americans get their insurance on the job and about 20 percent or so through Medicaid, and that leaves about 6 percent who go into an Obamacare market to buy it. Many of these Americans buy their insurance on marketplaces or exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act. We call those the ObamaCare exchanges. About 85 percent of those who buy their insurance on the exchanges have a government subsidy to help them buy the insurance.

As every day goes by, we hear and we are going to continue to hear about insurance companies pulling out of counties and States. Yesterday we heard that the only insurer left in Iowa is now likely to leave. That means more than 70,000 people on the exchanges

will have no insurance to buy. Most of them will have subsidies from the government. So it is like thousands of people in Iowa have bus tickets in a town where no buses run.

That is what is happening right now because of the 2010 law that we call the Affordable Care Act. I know this all too well because 34,000 people in Knoxville, TN, my home area, are going to have subsidies in 2018 but no insurance to buy with their subsidies unless Congress acts. That is because of the 2010 law that we seek to change. In 2016, last year, 7 percent of counties in the United States had just one insurer offering plans on their Affordable Care Act exchanges. This year, 2017, that number jumped to 32 percent. In one in three counties in the United States, if you have a subsidy to buy insurance on the ObamaCare exchange, you had only one insurance company offering you insurance. Five entire States have only one insurer offering ACA plans in their entire State this year: Alabama, Alaska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming. That is because of the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010.

Unfortunately, every day we are going to be hearing not just about insurers leaving counties and States, but about the ones that remain because they are going to be charging sky-high premiums.

Premiums went up by as much as 62 percent this year in Tennessee and by 116 percent in Arizona. As the new rate increases are proposed to the States over the next few weeks and months, our constituents are going to be saying: What are you going to do about that? So there is an urgency, but we want to get it right.

So, again, here are my goals for the Senate bill we will write in the next few weeks:

No. 1, rescue—and "rescue" is not too strong a word—the millions of Americans across this country who are going to have few or zero insurance options in the year 2018 because of collapsing ObamaCare exchanges, unless Congress acts.

No. 2, lower premium rates because, in many States, premiums are going through the roof under the Affordable Care Act.

No. 3, gradually transfer to States more flexibility in managing their Medicaid programs. About 18 percent of Americans get their insurance on Medicaid. We will do so in a way that does not pull the rug out from under those who are currently served by Medicaid.

Finally, preexisting conditions—make sure Americans who have insurance for preexisting conditions continue to have access to it. If you are on Medicaid or if you are on Medicare or, in almost every case, if you get insurance on the job, you have insurance for preexisting conditions. Under the Affordable Care Act in 2010, there had to be insurance for people with preexisting conditions. We want to make sure that those Americans continue to have access if they have a preexisting condition.

We will move ahead with deliberate speed. We are doing that because the exchanges are collapsing, people could be without insurance, and premiums will go up if we don't act, but we want to get it right. There will be no artificial deadlines. We will carefully consider the legislation passed by the House. We will work together carefully to write our own bill. We will make sure we know what our bill costs when we vote on it. In fact, by law, we have to do that. We will get it right, and then we will vote. And hopefully, Mr. President, the end result will be significant improvements for most Americans, giving them more choices of health insurance at a lower cost, and do that by gradually transferring more decisions from Washington, DC, to the states and to individuals.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I followed the remarks of the Senator from Tennessee. We speak to the American people in light of the House just voting 217 to 213 to repeal and replace ObamaCare. If there is somebody watching right now, quite likely she is concerned about her healthcare premiums.

On the campaign trail—I remember this so vividly—on the campaign trail when I was running for the Senate, I was in Jefferson Parish, on Veterans Boulevard, and a woman named Tina came up. I am going to paraphrase what she said a little bit because this is a G-rated program. She said: My name is Tina, and I am angry. I am paying \$500 more a month, \$6,000 more a year. My husband and I have no children and I have had a hysterectomy, and I am paying for pediatric dentistry and obstetrical benefits. I am angry.

If there is something right now that the average middle-class voter is saying about his or her insurance premiums, it is that they are angry. They feel they are being forced by Washington to buy things they do not need and sacrifice other parts of their budget because if they do not, they know the Federal Government will come after them with the force of law, penalizing their family, and they do not want that.

So what can we do? First, we acknowledge, as the House has, that ObamaCare is not working. Premiums are going up 20 to 40 percent per year. In Eleven States, so I am told, individual markets are in a death spiral.

I could go through that, which we already know. President Trump knew it. As Candidate Trump, President Trump pledged four major things:

No. 1, he pledged to eliminate mandates. The Senate is committed to working with the House and the President to eliminate those mandates. Washington, DC, should not tell you what to do.

No. 2, he pledged to care for those with preexisting reasons. As Senator ALEXANDER said, it is something that

touches every family. The President was particularly concerned about those whose preexisting condition was opioid addiction. We have to recognize that they will not get better unless they receive treatment. It is better to treat than it is to incarcerate or to bury. So we must honor the President's pledge there.

He also pledged to cover all and to lower premiums. It is this last I wish to focus on now.

How do we lower premiums? How do we say to Tina, who 2 years ago was paying \$500 more a month, that her premium will be lower? Well, there are several ways. Let me focus first on lowering the cost of care.

Right now, healthcare is way too expensive. If you go in for an urgent care visit, you may pay \$1,500 in one urgent care center and \$50 in another. As a patient, you do not know. You would never buy a car that way. Can you imagine walking into a car dealership, picking your car, and then saying: Bill me 6 months from now, and I will pay whatever you ask. No one would do that. We shouldn't ask the average patient to do it because when we hide those costs from the patient, we do not allow her to be an informed consumer. Lacking information, she inevitably pays more.

So one thing I have proposed, along with Senator COLLINS and four other Senators—Senators from South Carolina, South Dakota, Georgia, and West Virginia—is price transparency, which is to say that when someone goes in to get their daughter's ear ache addressed, they know what it would cost at this urgent care center versus another.

A good example of exactly what I am talking about—there was an article in the Los Angeles Times a few years ago about the cash price of a CT scan in the Los Angeles Basin. It would vary from \$250 to \$2,500, and the person purchasing the service with cash would never know.

I envision a time when someone takes their smart phone and they scan a barcode, and the barcode says: You can go at midnight on Thursday and get a CT scan of your daughter for \$250 or you can go right now and pay \$2,500. You look at a quality code, and both have equal quality. I can see the mother turning to her daughter and saying "Baby, we are staying up Thursday night" because that mother knows she can take care of her family's financial health, as well as her daughter's health, just by being an informed consumer.

So one way we lower premiums is by lowering the cost of healthcare, and the way we lower the cost of healthcare is by empowering patients with the knowledge of price.

The second way we can manage to lower the cost of premiums is to take care of those who are sick. The Senator from Tennessee ended by speaking about our commitment to care for those with preexisting conditions. Of

course it is in the interest of the patient that he or she who has cancer is able to get care for their cancer. Jimmy Kimmel just spoke about his son being born with a congenital heart condition. He would have quickly died. Mr. Kimmel choked up as he spoke about it. Well, shouldn't every family have the reassurance that their child born in such a way would also have their needs addressed? I was struck that Nick Mulvaney, President Trump's OMB Director, agreed with Mr. Kimmel. This is not a Republican issue, not a Democratic issue; it is an American issue. But it is also in society's interest.

I am a physician. I worked in a public hospital for the uninsured for 30 years. I tell folks, as long as that emergency room door was open, no matter what time, day or night, in through that door came folks who had all kinds of healthcare conditions. Some of them would come every week. Some of them would come twice a week. We called them frequent fliers. They may have been addicted or mentally ill. They may have had terrible diabetes which was fully controlled or bad asthma, and they would come in with an exacerbation and could not breathe. Every time they came in, there was a \$2,000 to \$20,000 charge—every time. But if you manage that patient through a primary care office or an attached urgent care center, what you are charging \$2,000 for here, you can manage for \$150 there. Not only that, when you manage it for \$150 there, if that person actually works, she is more likely to hold a job, more likely to support her family, less likely to go on dependence, more likely to pay taxes. Society wins as she wins. That should be our goal. So another way to lower premiums is to actively manage the cost of disease.

People always say: We want government to run like a business. Let me describe what happens in a large corporation. Take ExxonMobil. You will find that ExxonMobil has an insurance company, a third-party administrator. They look at someone who is a high-cost employee, and they actively engage in managing that patient's illness so that, one, they are better, but, two, they lower cost. We as a government should do that, which a responsible employer does as well.

The last thing I want to mention is that the way to lower premiums is by expanding coverage. When Candidate Trump said he wanted to lower premiums and preserve coverage, he understood that the two are linked. If you have a big risk pool—and a risk pool is just the folks who are insured. Everybody who has insurance—that is called the risk pool. If it is big, with lots of young folks who are in their twenties, others in their thirties and forties, and then a few folks like me in their fifties, if someone gets sick, you spread the expense of that one over the many. Particularly if the many include the younger and healthier, there is a subsidy for the older and sicker.

Go back to ExxonMobil. Let's imagine they have 50,000 employees. If they have 50,000 employees and 10 of them get cancer, have liver transplants, terrible car wrecks, or accidents, their premiums don't even blip. Because you spread the cost of these expensive illnesses over the many, all benefit, and cost is held down.

So when President Trump pledged to preserve coverage, he was recognizing that nexus between having a big risk pool and lowering that premium.

Let me finish by saying this: My commitment to Tina and my commitment to the voters of Louisiana and the people of the United States is to try to lower premiums. They cannot afford the un-Affordable Care Act. The way we can do that, which I have outlined today, includes empowering patients with the knowledge of price to lower the cost of healthcare; encouraging coverage that manages those who are sick so that those who are sick stay well and are less likely to consume expensive emergency room care, as an example, but are also more likely to live full, vibrant lives; and lastly, restoring what is called actuarial soundness, the law of big numbers, a risk pool in which if one of us gets cancer, that cost is spread over many.

Mr. President, if we manage to lower premiums, we will fulfill our promise to the American people, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to fulfill that promise.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

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

#### NORTHEAST COLORADO FIRES

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the recent impact of prairie fires in northeastern Colorado. A lot of times when you turn on the national news in the spring, summer, or fall, you might see fires in Colorado, but most of the time those fires are located in western Colorado in the mountains.

We have had some horrible fires in recent years. The past decade has been littered with far too many fires of great consequence to our environment, to families, and to homes—and the damage they have caused. Oftentimes we don't see as much in the news about fires in other parts of the State, including the Eastern Plains of Colorado, the Great Plains and prairies.

At the end of March, Logan and Phillips Counties saw a blaze that burned 32,000 acres, destroying homes, harming cattle and farm operations, and shutting down a key interstate corridor. To put 32,000 acres into perspective, in 2016, the largest fire in Colorado was the Beaver Creek fire near

Walden, burning tens of thousands of acres over the course of 3 months. The fire burned about 38,000 acres. The fire burning 32,000 acres in northeastern Colorado took only about 24 hours of time. So we had 38,000 acres burn in 3 months, and 32,000 acres in northeastern Colorado burned in 24 hours. In both cases, these were incredibly dangerous situations to land, people, and those around them.

These images from the Denver Post paint a frightening picture of the devastation the area faced. We can look at these pictures here. You can see what happened with the dirt, debris, smoke, and weather that was created by the fire, and you can see the damage and what happened. You can see the damage to property here.

I want to go back to the earlier picture and talk about some of the other impacts we saw. You can see the firemen from eastern Colorado working to protect property, trying to stop the fire before it reached the homestead.

You can see someone with a tractor, and they are trying to disc up the ground, trying to create a firebreak. People from around eastern Colorado, northeastern Colorado were getting into their tractors, getting their tillage equipment, their chisels, discs, and sweeps to try to break up the ground to create a firebreak so that maybe they could stop the fire. I commend the first responders for containing this fire and preventing any loss of life while also preventing other fire hotspots from breaking out into larger, devastating blazes because of the work they did.

In the middle of these fires, I remember talking to a county commissioner from Logan County, and he described the situation where they had tried to create a firebreak with their road graders and the farmers in the field trying to disc up the ground to stop the fire from moving.

I remember vividly when the county commissioner told me that at a certain time of the day he had to make a phone call that he would never forget in his life. He called the county commissioners from the neighboring county and said that the fire was moving that way. He said: Hey, I want you to know, Logan County is unable to stop the fire. It is coming your way. I am sorry; it is in your hands now.

Imagine that phone call. This horrible thing that has happened in your county is also spreading to the next county, and you can't do anything about it, despite the incredible efforts and acts of heroism to try to stop it.

Fire departments from across Colorado came to northeastern Colorado in that part of the State to stand alongside local firefighters to get this fire under control. Dozens of agencies and departments responded.

Being from Yuma County, south of where this fire took place, I know how alarming and unforgiving these fast-moving prairie fires can be on the farmers, ranchers, and communities in their path. I fought prairie fires as well

in northeastern Colorado and know how fast they move and how indiscriminate they are in their destruction.

I also know the challenges people now face in Phillips and Logan Counties as they try to recover in the spring, but I can confidently say that the community is recovering. According to local agronomist, Dave Gibson:

Within six days of the fire, 85 percent of the cropland was planted with oats to prevent soil erosion with neighbors volunteering to help and donate. It was an amazing effort.

My office has been in communication with State and Federal officials, along with those impacted, to ensure we are doing everything possible to assist in this process.

Those from northeastern Colorado are dependent upon agriculture for their way of life. Two-thirds of Colorado's agricultural production comes from the South Platte River valley, those areas considered to be in northeastern Colorado. I have spoken on the Senate floor about the difficult times these farmers are facing outside of the context of national disasters. When times are already tough, seeing your land and cattle operation burned up in a prairie fire makes things even worse. It is during these challenging times in agriculture, whether it is the impact of fire or low commodity prices, that we are reminded of the need for effective leadership.

I was pleased this last week when the Chamber came together in a bipartisan fashion to confirm Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia as our Secretary of Agriculture. Senators on both sides of the aisle recognized that supporting our Nation's farmers and ranchers is not a partisan issue.

It is my hope that we can support Secretary Perdue to expeditiously confirm the rest of his team at USDA because we need it in agriculture. Whether it is the FSA or a crop insurance issue as a result of a fire or a situation relating to trade and how we are going to address low commodity prices, the Secretary of Agriculture needs a team around him. Congress must work with Secretary Perdue to address this crisis in agriculture.

In Colorado, we have seen net farm incomes drop 80 percent since the record highs of 2011. If you look at this headline, this was in the Wall Street Journal some weeks ago. The headline says: "The Next American Farm Bust Is Upon Us." That is because if you look at just the State of Colorado alone, there has been a drop of 80 percent in farm income from the record highs of 2011. That is net farm income down 80 percent.

I believe this Congress needs to act with a four-pronged approach.

First, we need a long-term farm policy in place. With the farm bill expiring in September of 2018, Congress must begin negotiating about how we are going to move forward in a responsible fashion. I commend the Senate

and House Agriculture Committees for holding hearings on the next farm bill, and I look forward to conducting our own roundtables and listening sessions to talk about and to learn about and to listen to how we can make a difference. Federal policy certainty with a long-term farm policy is essential for farmers and ranchers.

The second thing we must do is to provide regulatory relief. We have already repealed about \$85 billion worth of regulations over the last 3 months. That is an incredible feat to relieve the American economy from the harm and pressure of \$85 billion worth of regulatory overreach. By relieving the American business community of that \$85 billion worth of regulations and relieving the American family of that pressure as well, it also means we have been able to reduce paperwork by 54 million hours.

Imagine that: \$85 billion worth of regulatory reductions means there is 54 million hours of paperwork that no longer has to be completed. Instead, that money, time, and effort can be invested in growing opportunities and following up on sales leads and making that money work for the business and family instead of just for the government.

When it comes to agriculture, the regulatory relief to address this next American farm crisis—some of that regulatory relief, the \$85 billion, includes measures such as repealing the Bureau of Land Management 2.0 rule or finally getting the waters of the United States regulation out of the way. That is the kind of regulatory relief we have to continue to pursue.

To those who may not know what waters of the United States regulation did, let's take an example in Colorado. Under the EPA's own study, two-thirds of Colorado waterways are described or defined as intermittent flow. Intermittent flow means they don't have water in them year-round. But according to the government, they would be considered navigable waterways. I don't know how you get anything to float down a dry river, but apparently the EPA can. That \$85 billion of regulatory relief includes stopping the waters of the United States rule. We have to continue to peel back the burdensome regulations on American agriculture.

The third thing we have to address is access to finance. Finance is critical to any farmer. There is an old joke, an old saying that if you go out to a farmer—and they may know this already—and ask: How do you make a small fortune in agriculture? The answer is that you start with a large one. I think it is time we fixed that.

Wouldn't it be nice if people weren't just relying on the bank, but they could actually produce enough money to help them into the future, to help them thrive, prosper, grow, and bring in new generations of family? During difficult economic times, when we are facing incredible challenges and low commodity prices, we do need to have

access to financing. Whether it is through the community bank or banks on Wall Street or the Farm Credit Union or farm credit system, farmers, ranchers, and those in agriculture need access to financing to get through this difficult time.

That production loan, that operating loan is how they make it from season to season, harvest to harvest, and planting to planting to make sure they have the ability to stay on the farm. Right now we have a system that I am worried about—a financial regulatory system in place that perhaps a farmer walks into a bank one day, a bank they have been doing business with for 100 years, and they have never missed a payment, but all of a sudden, based on some Washington, DC, formulary, they can no longer get the loan they need to keep them into the next year, even though that bank in their hometown on Main Street knows they will be able to make that payment.

What we have created is a system and financial regulations that are going to make it impossible for some of these farmers to work out the crisis that is upon them. I sent a letter 2 weeks ago to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, requesting a review of all regulations potentially inhibiting rural access to finance.

The fourth thing we have to get right is trade opportunity for American agriculture. With corn and wheat prices near 10-year lows, the most obvious solution is to open up more international markets for agriculture to continue to look for new opportunities to export American agricultural products overseas. The price of commodities for a bushel of corn is about the same price today as it was back when I was born in 1974. Opening up trade opportunities, opening new markets will give us the value-added opportunity to help get more for that bushel of corn.

Some of the greatest opportunities lie in Asia—50 percent of global population, 50 percent of GDP in the near future. Those are markets we have to open up in U.S. agriculture. Those are markets that already have access in many cases to U.S. markets, but if we want to sell products there, sometimes we are hit with tariffs. That is not fair. We have to make sure we are reducing the tariffs we face when we go into their markets because they seem to have unfettered access into ours much of the time.

Those are all measures we can address. The four things are long-term farm policies, regulatory relief, access to financing, trade opportunities that work for the American farmers and ranchers.

Those recent fires in northeast Colorado, as well as fires in past years in Colorado and across the West, are another reminder of the need to address wildfire borrowing. Wildfire borrowing is a process where the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service spends money that it has budgeted for the fires. It runs out of money because it

didn't budget enough money to fight the fires, and it turns around and starts cannibalizing other areas of spending that could actually have been used to help reduce the next forest fire. We have to end the practice of fire borrowing, and we have to work with Secretary Perdue as head of the U.S. Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture to end wildfire borrowing and to improve forest and land management to prevent these uncontrollable fires that we have seen.

Supporting those impacted by fires, whether it is in the forest or around the prairie, is something we should all be able to get behind. In Logan and Phillips Counties, neighbors banded together. They worked to recover and rebuild from the devastation shown on these images. It has happened for generations in eastern Colorado and across this country. When there is a crisis, when there is a tragedy, neighbors help their neighbors. You can see it in these pictures. But we can also help our neighbors here in Washington, DC, and across our country's vast farmlands by doing what is right in addressing these challenges. Just as Logan County and Phillips County banded together, we should band together with American agriculture.

It is my hope that Congress can learn from the lessons taught in the aftermath of these difficult situations to come together, support rural communities, support agriculture, and make sure we support our fire response efforts, importantly, to prevent that next catastrophic fire.

Mr. President, 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.

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

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

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING LEGISLATION

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, earlier today, the Senate voted to pass the Omnibus appropriations bill for 2017.

This bill is a product of bipartisan negotiations and hard work on the part of our Appropriations Committee, of which I am proud to be a member, and the leadership of both of our parties.

I am encouraged by the overwhelming support for this important legislation that reflects our Nation's priorities and funds the government in a responsible way. I am very pleased—and I can't emphasize this enough; very pleased—that the bill includes a bipartisan provision that keeps the promise of lifetime healthcare benefits for 22,000 coal miners and their families, including 8,500 West Virginians—my home State.

Bankruptcies in the coal industry meant that these miners would have lost their critical health insurance coverage at the end of last year. We passed that little, short-term extension for 4

months, and it was set to expire this coming week.

This appropriations bill provides certainty to these coal mining families. Because of this bill, they will keep the healthcare they earned through their years of hard work.

I worked closely with my West Virginia colleague, Senator JOE MANCHIN, as well as our Representatives—Representatives DAVID MCKINLEY, EVAN JENKINS, and ALEX MOONEY—to get this permanent miners' healthcare fix included in the bill.

I also want to particularly thank our majority leader, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, for his leadership on behalf of the miners in West Virginia and in his home State of Kentucky, and the rest of Appalachia. I would also like to thank my fellow Republican from the State of Ohio, Senator ROB PORTMAN, who was a champion for those miners as well.

But, most importantly, I would like to thank the miners from across coal country who came to Washington to advocate for their healthcare benefits. I met with dozens—probably hundreds, over the course of the years—of West Virginia miners in my office over the last several years.

Last September, miners came by the thousands to the west front of the Capitol and stood for hours in just excruciatingly hot conditions. These miners and their families put a human face on the issue. They are the reason—they are the reason—that we have a successful result today.

Many of these miners have shared their stories with me through letters and emails and personal stories and visits, and I want to share just a few of their thoughts.

Brenda, a coal miner's widow from West Virginia, wrote that continued healthcare coverage presented a life or death situation for her. She wrote:

I have medical problems, which require monthly doctor visits and prescriptions and I will no longer be able to see my doctors—nor afford the prescriptions should our health insurance be taken away.

Alfred, a retired West Virginia coal miner wrote:

We were not given our health benefits as a gift. We worked hard in the mines every day for a long time, and it was backbreaking, year-to-year.

Howard, another retiree, wrote that he worked in the West Virginia coal mines for 41 years to earn this promise of healthcare benefits.

William, also a retired West Virginia miner, wrote that he has had several surgeries, including one on New Year's Day, 2017. The possible expiration of health benefits and the thought of temporary benefit extensions left him worried about whether he would be able to access necessary followup medical care for his surgery.

After learning that permanent healthcare would be included in this bill, Gisele wrote:

Tonight I will rest soundly knowing that we will be able to afford our medicines.

For Brenda, Alfred, William, Howard, Gisele, and thousands of other miners and widows across West Virginia, this bill keeps the promise of lifetime healthcare.

There is more work to be done to protect the pension benefits of our retired miners and to bring jobs back to coal country, to areas that have been hit hard by the previous administration's policies. But the permanent healthcare in this bill is a critical victory for our coal mining families and the communities where they live.

I would also like to quote a young man who sent me an email. I met him at a Chick-fil-A on a Saturday—not a Sunday, of course, on a Saturday. We struck up a little friendship, and the day he learned that this was in the bill, he texted me and said:

Senator, I met you in the Chick-fil-A. Thank you, you have now secured the benefits for my Paw Paw.

I thought it was such a heartfelt message that he sent to me—a new friend of mine who had been struggling along trying to figure out a way to help his grandfather.

There are a number of other important priorities in this bill as well. Mining communities will also be helped by tens of millions of dollars across different agencies to help us retrain our miners who have lost their jobs.

This bill also includes a significant investment in new fossil energy research, including carbon capture and sequestration. These funds will help spur the development of new markets for coal to keep coal mining jobs for years to come.

The appropriations bill also includes funding increases for rural broadband deployment, something I have been very concerned about, as well as continued funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission. Access to broadband is absolutely critical for economic development and improved access to health and education opportunities in our rural communities, and we are sadly underserved. There is much work to be done to bring access to high-speed internet to many communities, but this bill is a positive step.

As chairman of the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, I am glad that we included increased funding for the Drug-Free Communities Support Program and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program, or the HITDA Program. Unfortunately, cascading across this country is the devastating problem of prescription drug abuse, opioid abuse, and heroin addiction. The Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education portion of the bill includes an \$800 million increase to combat opioid addiction. This includes the \$500 million authorized for the 21st Century Cures Act to help States with their response to the crisis. It also includes an increase for medication-assisted treatment programs and for other programs outlined by the CARA bill that we passed last summer.

In addition to these important treatment resources, we have also funded important enforcement and prevention aspects of the problem as well, including \$50 million for the Department of Veterans Affairs for opioid and substance abuse for the treatment of our veterans. This is a real problem for our returning veterans who have addiction issues. There are funds to implement the Jason Simcakoski act that Senator BALDWIN and I introduced.

Unfortunately, West Virginia is the epicenter of the opioid crisis that has struck communities across the country. Passage of this appropriations bill will make a difference—a big difference—for people who are struggling to overcome addiction and to help our States that are financially strapped and our local communities combat this terrible problem.

Another area of significance to a lot of people in my State and across the country is the increase in the funding for the National Institutes of Health. There is a \$400 million increase for Alzheimer's research—something important to me, as I lost both of my parents who suffered from Alzheimer's, this terrible disease. We need to find not just treatments, but we need to find a cure, and I think NIH is where we are going to find it.

There are many other reasons to support this bill. It has additional flood relief for our devastated flood areas. I know the Presiding Officer has major floods in Louisiana, and we had them in West Virginia, and we have had them across the country.

Just to mention a few other things, this bill includes a pay increase for our troops, which is so important. They are on the frontlines.

The bill also works on scientific research for our educational institutions, something important to our universities in West Virginia.

But, most of all, I just want to voice my appreciation for the bipartisan work by the members of the appropriations committees, who worked hard to get this bill where we are. It is a responsible bill. It is a commonsense bill. It sets our priorities. Today, because of the fact that we passed it with support from both parties, I believe it will achieve a positive result for our country.

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.

#### NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, it is a busy day. There is a lot going on in Washington, DC. Quite frankly, at home there is a lot going on in homes, families, and lives. Today is also a unique day for America as well. It is the one day that we as a nation have

something called the National Day of Prayer. It started in 1988. It was an official day on this day, the first Thursday of May. But in the 1950s, Harry Truman started this process of a national day of prayer. So it far precedes that.

Our Nation has a rich and beautiful history in prayer. Members of the House and Senate, as the Presiding Officer knows, open the day every day with a prayer. It has been that way from the very beginning. Even the first Continental Congress on September 7, 1774, opened in prayer.

Tonight, Americans will gather in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol to celebrate the National Day of Prayer. Statuary Hall was once the House of Representatives, where the House gathered. It was also the largest gathering place in Washington, DC, and many churches for years met in Statuary Hall to be able to pray. It was the common meeting place. In fact, for a period of time in the early 1800s, four churches a Sunday used at that time the House of Representatives Chamber—what is now known as Statuary Hall—as their place for worship.

Thomas Jefferson worshipped there. In fact, every President from Thomas Jefferson all the way to Abraham Lincoln attended church on Sundays in Statuary Hall, what was at that time the House of Representatives Chamber.

That is an interesting fact. I have had folks talk about Thomas Jefferson's statement about the wall of separation between church and state. That was actually in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association, saying they would not allow the State to take over churches—that there would be this wall of separation between church and state. Two days after President Jefferson wrote that statement, he attended church in the House of Representatives Chamber on a Sunday.

Even earlier, at our Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin stated: "In the beginning of the Contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection."

Many U.S. Presidents have signed proclamations for national prayer since 1799, from George Washington all the way to the present.

The National Day of Prayer is a good day for us to be able to reflect as a Nation and to be able to remember well that there are many people of faith in our country that do believe there is a Creator God and that he has made a difference in our own personal lives and he has made a difference in our Nation.

We go back to President Truman's statement. He said in 1952: "The President shall set aside and proclaim a suitable day each year, other than a Sunday, as a National Day of Prayer, on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation in churches, in groups, and as individuals."

As I mentioned, in 1988, President Reagan even affirmed that.



I don't think I could find very many Americans who would say we are running out of things to pray for: debt; anger in the Nation; conversation about hard, difficult issues that we face; terrorism and threats of violence from around the world. We are not out of things to pray for. Far from it. But people of faith believe that, regardless of the obstacles we face, there is a God that we can call out to who hears us and who cares about our daily lives. He is not a God who just created and walked away. He is a God whom we can know, and we feel confident that God knows and loves us.

Philippians 4:6 says: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

I am always encouraged when I travel around Oklahoma and around the Nation. I even ran into some people this week who stopped me in the hallway and just said: "I want you to know I'll pray for you."

I encourage Americans to pray for the President, for the Vice President, for their Cabinet, for the Supreme Court, for Members of the Senate and of the House, for the staff who serve around us and with us and serve people around this country, for our military, and for first responders. The list could go on and on of people who set aside their time and their life to be able to serve. It is not an unreasonable request to be able to say: Pray for them; ask God to continue to protect them.

It is amazing to me how many Christians I bump into of my own faith who find it easier to complain about government than it is to pray for those in government. I think that is an issue we need to fix, and today is a good day to begin that, on this National Day of Prayer.

I remember well, personally, that I grew up around the church. My mom dragged me to church. I mean it. She made me go. But I remember extremely well sitting in the balcony of the church one Sunday and actually paying attention to our pastor as he would read through Scriptures. Probably for the first time in my life, I started actually thinking about this one simple truth: There is a God, and I don't know Him.

I couldn't shake that reality. Laying in bed late that Sunday night by myself, I remember praying—probably for me, for the first time in my life, actually praying. And I prayed a very simple 8-year-old prayer. My prayer was this: God, I don't know You, but I know I have done things wrong in my life and I need Your forgiveness. Would You come into my life and take control?

It was the beginning point for me—just the most simple of ways for me to begin a relationship with God, trusting in His forgiveness and His ability to forgive.

I have in my office two paintings that hang. One painting is the hands of a potter at a wheel, shaping the clay as

they choose to. It reminds me of the sovereignty of God. Below it is a painting of those same hands sitting at that same bowl holding it, but this time the bowl is done. It is full of water. There is a towel in it, and there are feet around the bowl. It reminds me of the call to serve that we all have—to be able to serve people in the most humble of ways. It reminds me that there is a God, and that He has called us to a task. Part of that task is to pray.

The National Day of Prayer is not a mandate from the Federal Government that all people should pray—far from it. It is just a reminder. It is a reminder for people of faith who choose to pray that this is a good day when we can reset to be able to pray for our Nation and for our leaders. It is an acknowledgement, quite frankly, that millions of people of faith believe in God and that those individuals believe that God hears our prayers and responds. So thus we should pray.

Culturally, it is fascinating to me to be able to talk to people about prayer. I ran into some people that find it perfectly permissible in times of great struggle and anguish to pray, but in times of thanksgiving, it seems odd. Let me give a for instance.

A couple of years ago, a football coach in our country was fired from his job because at the end of a football game he would kneel down after the game was over and thank God for the safety of his players. For that, he was released from his job because, for some reason, Americans don't accept prayers of thanksgiving. But at those same football games, if a player was injured and the coaches and players were to kneel down, the crowd would see that as a good sign of respect—that we respect someone who is injured, and it is entirely reasonable to pray when there is an injury on the field but maybe not if it is just a prayer of thanksgiving.

It is an odd season for us as a nation, trying to figure out who we are and what we believe and if Americans of faith can live their faith. I would challenge us as a country, for those of us who have faith, to be able to live our faith with integrity and with consistency, and on a National Day of Prayer like this, to remind our Nation that there are millions of people of faith but that there are also millions of people that have no faith at all. They are also Americans, and they are also to be respected because many people are on a journey with God.

There are many people who don't practice faith at all today that consider simple things in their life. Their financial house may be in order. Their family life may be in order. But their spiritual life remains a vacuum, and they are, quite frankly, trying to figure that out.

I am always interested in the stories of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln in his earliest political campaigns was chastised that he was anti-faith or that he was secretly an atheist because he never attended church everywhere. He

said he had respect for the Bible and read the Bible and had respect for faith, but he just personally didn't practice it. In his earliest campaigns, he was really challenged by that and only narrowly won at times. In fact, he lost some of his campaigns, and he had attributed losing those campaigns to people having challenged him that he was anti-faith.

But then we read his words when he was President of the United States, and we find a person who was on a journey with God. It wasn't anti-faith. He just didn't practice faith.

But listen to these words in 1863 from President Lincoln. He proclaimed a National Day of Prayer, as every President before him has, and he wrote this:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and in prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

That is a man who was on a journey with God, who came to the Presidency as a person of no faith, who understood the responsibilities, and his heart dramatically changed.

It is a good day for us to reflect on this National Day of Prayer. I would encourage the Nation, if they choose, to be able to watch and join in or to just quietly be able to pray on their own, to remember again that those of us who pray for others should probably spend some time praying for ourselves as well. At times, as we criticize others, we should probably self-evaluate and ask the simple question: Do we live the values that we demand of others?

It is a good day to pray. Later tonight, I will stand in that historic Statuary Hall where Presidents and Members of Congress and individuals have prayed for a long time, and I will read Daniel, Chapter 9 to the group, which reads:

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear us.

It is a similar prayer that many of us pray in gatherings all over this Capitol every week. Members of the House and the Senate and staff quietly find places in this building to pray. It is not a bad idea for the Nation to join us.

Hear, O God, our prayer. We need Your help.

Mr. President, I yield back.

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

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

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

### VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for the vote on the motion to concur in the House message to accompany H.R. 244.

On vote No. 121, had I been present, I would have voted yea on the motion to concur in the House message to accompany H.R. 244.

I want to take a few minutes to acknowledge today's bipartisan passage of the Omnibus appropriations bill to fund the government through the end of the 2017 fiscal year. While I am disappointed that the bill's passage comes more than halfway through the fiscal year, the bill that was sent to the President today is the product of months of bipartisan work by the appropriations committees on both sides of Capitol Hill and represents how Congress should and can work together to provide the American people with critical investments that will create jobs and grow our Nation's economy. It is my hope that the bipartisan cooperation that made this bill possible will continue as Congress begins its work on appropriations for fiscal year 2018.

This bill includes critical investments in the middle class, our Nation's infrastructure, medical and scientific research, and our national security. I am proud to report that much of the funding in this bill will benefit my home State of Illinois, funding a wide variety of Illinois projects and priorities. Most importantly, it takes the threat of a government shutdown, which would have hurt our economy, off the table.

This bill fully rejects President Trump's proposed assault on medical research and instead includes a \$2 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health, or NIH, bringing the agency's funding level to \$34.1 billion. This 6 percent increase in NIH funding matches the steady, predictable growth called for in legislation I have introduced over the past several years, the American Cures Act.

Thanks to the NIH, we have cut the cancer death rate by 11 percent in women and 19 percent in men. HIV/

AIDS is no longer a death sentence. Polio and smallpox are all but eradicated in this country. We are closer than ever to developing a universal influenza vaccine, to rebuilding parts of the human heart without needing to rely on transplants, and to finding new and effective therapies to delay the onset of neurological diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. These medical breakthroughs will not happen without sustained, robust Federal funding for medical research supported by the NIH.

President Trump's disastrous budget proposals for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 would have slashed NIH's budget by nearly 20 percent, bringing NIH to its lowest funding level in 15 years. I am pleased that Congress came together on a bipartisan basis to protect the NIH, and I want to thank my colleague Senator BLUNT, chairman of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee, for his efforts to provide this vital funding. I will be working hard to ensure that NIH gets another significant funding increase for fiscal year 2018.

While I am encouraged that this bill includes \$7.3 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, it is my hope that Congress will find a way to work together on a bipartisan basis to provide the CDC with even greater funding increases in the years to come.

The CDC has so many important responsibilities—from combating prescription drug abuse and fighting infectious disease outbreaks globally to preventing diabetes and protecting patients from antibiotic resistant superbugs. It is imperative that we provide this agency with the funding necessary to protect the public health.

Chairman COLE is a strong champion of CDC funding, and it is my hope that we can work together on a bipartisan, bicameral basis to plus-up overall CDC funding in the coming years.

I am pleased that harmful tobacco riders that would have severely undermined the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA's, ability to protect our Nation's youth from harmful, addictive tobacco products were not included in this bill. By omitting these terrible policy riders, the FDA can continue to regulate cigars and cigarettes. I have said it before and I will say it again: I remain troubled that Big Tobacco continues to market and develop products aimed at getting youth addicted to tobacco.

This bill includes more than \$1 billion to help combat our Nation's prescription opioid and heroin epidemic. This funding will be available to States and local communities to help with prevention, enforcement, treatment, and recovery. In 2015, more than 33,000 people in the United States died from an opioid overdose. To combat this epidemic, we must commit proper funding and resources toward solving the problem. This bill begins to do that.

I am proud that this bill increases funding to support critical transportation infrastructure projects in Illinois, despite President Trump's calls to eliminate funding for some of our most important transportation programs. The capital investment grant program, which President Trump has proposed to eliminate, allows communities to compete for funding to build and improve subway, commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit projects through New Starts, Small Starts, and Core Capacity grants. This program was increased by \$236 million in this bill to \$2.4 billion with \$100 million in Core Capacity funds specifically allocated to help fund the Chicago Transit Authority's modernization of the red and purple lines.

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, TIGER, grant program, which Illinois has relied on repeatedly to help fund transit, highway, and bridge projects throughout our State, was also protected from elimination in this bill. As a result of bipartisan support for this program, Illinois will now be able to compete for the \$500 million in TIGER funds included in this bill.

Funding for federal highway and transit formula grants to States was increased in this bill to the full funding levels authorized in the 2015 bipartisan FAST Act. As a result, \$43.2 billion in highway funding, a \$905 million increase, and \$9.3 billion in transit funding, a \$753 million increase, will be provided to States around the country to improve and maintain their roads and public transportation. Federal funding comprises 80 percent of the funds included in the Illinois Department of Transportation's multiyear highway improvement program.

This bill also includes critical funding to improve freight and passenger rail around the country. Nowhere is this more important than in Illinois, our Nation's rail hub. And \$98 million in newly authorized rail safety and state of good repair grants was included in the bill, as well as \$1.495 billion in nationwide funding for Amtrak, which commuters in both Chicago and downstate Illinois rely on every day to get to their schools and jobs. By providing adequate funding to Amtrak, more than 500 communities in 46 States across the country will continue to see improved passenger rail service.

The bill allocates \$150 million in funding to provide rural areas with reliable air service through the Essential Air Service program. This funding supports critical air service in Quincy, Decatur, and Marion, IL.

This agreement provides \$1.3 billion to permanently extend the health benefits of more than 22,000 retired coal miners and widows, including nearly 2,000 in Illinois. Coal mining is difficult and dangerous work, and these men and women who spent decades working in these mines risked their lives, health, and personal safety to ensure that our country had power. I heard