

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) would have voted "yea."

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

The result was announced—yeas 56, nays 42, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 27 Ex.]

YEAS—56

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Alexander | Gardner | Murkowski |
| Barrasso | Graham | Paul |
| Blunt | Grassley | Perdue |
| Boozman | Hatch | Portman |
| Burr | Heitkamp | Risch |
| Cassidy | Heller | Roberts |
| Cochran | Hoeben | Rounds |
| Collins | Inhofe | Rubio |
| Corker | Isakson | Sasse |
| Cornyn | Johnson | Scott |
| Cotton | Jones | Shelby |
| Crapo | Kennedy | Sullivan |
| Cruz | Klobuchar | Thune |
| Daines | Lankford | Tillis |
| Donnelly | Lee | Toomey |
| Enzi | Manchin | Warner |
| Ernst | McCaskill | Wicker |
| Fischer | McConnell | Young |
| Flake | Moran | |

NAYS—42

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Baldwin | Gillibrand | Peters |
| Bennet | Harris | Reed |
| Blumenthal | Hassan | Sanders |
| Booker | Heinrich | Schatz |
| Brown | Hirono | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Kaine | Shaheen |
| Cardin | King | Smith |
| Carper | Leahy | Stabenow |
| Casey | Markey | Tester |
| Coons | Menendez | Udall |
| Cortez Masto | Merkley | Van Hollen |
| Duckworth | Murphy | Warren |
| Durbin | Murray | Whitehouse |
| Feinstein | Nelson | Wyden |

NOT VOTING—2

Capito
McCain

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Arkansas.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and 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.

The Senator from Arkansas.

(The remarks of Mr. BOOZMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2364 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. BOOZMAN. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

STOP ACT

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today I want to talk about the opioid epidemic that has gripped our country and my State of Ohio and talk a little about a report we issued last week with regard to synthetic opioids coming in through the U.S. mail system.

This tragedy has hit Ohio hard. We are not alone, though. Opioids affect every American regardless of age, area code, class, or color. Every State represented here in this body has experienced this—broken families, devastated communities, higher crime rates, friends lost, and, of course, lives taken through opioid overdoses.

The Centers for Disease Control recently reported that more than 63,600 Americans died in 2016 from drug overdoses. That is the last year for which they have statistics, but we all believe it was worse in 2017. With 63,600 Americans dying of overdoses, that means, on average, more than 174 Americans die every single day. That is up from approximately 143 Americans who died, on average, every day from drug overdoses a year earlier in 2015 and 105 Americans who died every day in 2010.

The problem is getting worse, not better. Drug overdoses, in fact, are now the No. 1 cause of death—not just accidental deaths but the No. 1 cause of death—in America for Americans under the age of 50. The reason for this increase in overdose deaths is the spread of heroin, prescription drugs, and now the synthetic opioids—fentanyl and carfentanil. Opioids were involved in more than 42,000—about two-thirds—of the overall deaths in 2016. Opioid deaths were five times higher in 2016 than they were just a few years ago.

This is a national epidemic. It has unfolded in three different waves.

The first wave was the prescription drug epidemic—pain pills—15 to 20 years ago. That started to increase dramatically.

Next, heroin deaths spiked. Heroin was turned to as a less expensive and more accessible way for people who were addicted to pain pills to continue to receive the high—in this case, from heroin coming mostly from Mexico.

Now synthetic forms of heroin are overtaking the illegal opioid market, and the results have been even more deadly. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50 times stronger than heroin, has become the new scourge of the epidemic. Fentanyl is so deadly that 2 milligrams of it—as little as two flakes of it—can be lethal. It is cheap, easily accessible, and can be added to make any number of illegal drugs more potent—cocaine, heroin, pills.

In Ohio, fentanyl and its variations, such as carfentanil, were responsible for 60 percent of our State's more than 4,000 overdose deaths in 2016—the most recent year for which we have statistics. That 60 percent is a huge increase from just the previous year, 2015, when fentanyl was responsible for about 37 percent of the deaths. We have had more deaths from overdoses and a lot more deaths linked to fentanyl.

Sadly, again, this situation is getting worse, not better. Just last week in Ottawa County, OH, outside of Toledo, we had five overdoses in 1 single day. We had three people die of overdoses in 1 week. The suspected cause, of course, is fentanyl.

Earlier this month in Akron, a 57-year-old man—a board member of the Akron Public Schools system—was found unconscious in his car from a drug overdose. First responders were thankfully able to revive the man with Narcan—a miracle drug that reverses the effects of overdoses—and treat him at a local hospital. Again, fentanyl caused that overdose.

In July of last year, a 12-year-old Columbus boy encountered fentanyl while he was at his cousin's for a sleepover. He was rushed to the hospital but died days later from a lack of oxygen to his brain as a result of fentanyl.

These synthetic drugs have invaded communities across Ohio and across the country. Unbelievably, this deadly poison is primarily shipped into America from China through our U.S. Postal Service. The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I chair along with ranking member Senator TOM CARPER, recently held a hearing on this issue. It came on the heels of our year-long bipartisan investigation that resulted in a 100-page investigative report that examined how these drug traffickers in China exploit vulnerabilities in our international mail system to ship these deadly synthetic drugs into our communities.

I encourage people to look at that report on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations website. The results of the report were shocking. We found that it was incredibly easy to buy fentanyl online. By simply searching "fentanyl for sale" on Google, our staff identified hundreds of websites, many affiliated with Chinese labs, all openly advertising this deadly drug. Online sellers were quick to respond, unafraid of being caught, and ready to make a deal. They even offered discounts for bulk purchases and tried to upsell us to carfentanil—fentanyl's even more powerful and deadly cousin.

This is an email from Chinese traffickers offering "a hot sale" for one fentanyl analogue before it is discontinued. Their preferred shipping method is the U.S. Postal Service because, as they told us, the chances of the drugs being seized were so insignificant that delivery was essentially guaranteed.

This chart shows a carfentanil advertisement and the online traffickers

suggesting “USPS” as their preferred shipping method. Why? Because USPS is the way in which the delivery is virtually guaranteed. “DHL, UPS, FedEx, TNT are quicker, but not safe, and will be detained frequently.” Instead, they say: “We suggest USPS only.” Wow.

It is inexcusable that these drugs are as easy to ship as a postcard and that traffickers’ preferred shipment method for these deadly poisons is through a Federal agency. Our post office has become a conduit for these deadly drugs.

By the way, this is incredibly dangerous for the postal employees, the letter carriers, those who have to handle these packages.

I should note that our team never purchased any of these drugs online, but we did use the online sellers’ payment information to determine if others were buying. Of course, we found out that they were. We narrowed our search to just six websites. From those six sites, we identified more than 500 payments to those six online sellers by more than 300 Americans in 43 States just in the last couple of years.

This map shows where the fentanyl went. As you can see, just from those six websites and those few hundred people, it went all over the country. The largest concentration of buyers was in my home State of Ohio, where you see the red. They were also in Pennsylvania and Florida. But, as I mentioned, it went to all 43 States. We were able to track hundreds of packages related to the online purchases.

By analyzing more than 2 million lines of shipment data obtained in our investigation, we located three individuals in the United States who seem to be distributing these drugs. We also identified two other individuals who purchased items to make pills, including pill presses, chemical bonding agents, and empty pill casings.

Our report also reinforced the risk associated with these deadly synthetic drugs. We identified seven individuals who died from fentanyl-related overdoses shortly after receiving packages from these online sellers. One of those seven individuals who died was a 49-year-old Ohioan from the Cleveland area who sent about \$2,500 to an online seller and received 15 packages through the Postal Service over a 10-month period. His autopsy confirmed he died from “acute fentanyl intoxication” just a couple of weeks after receiving a package from this online seller.

We are already working with law enforcement authorities to make sure these drug dealers can be brought to justice. We recently released all our documents to the Department of Homeland Security for them to do their own investigation.

China has responded to our report. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said last week that China stands “ready to work with the U.S. to enhance our coordination in this field.” I welcome China’s cooperation and coordination in this fight. But we need more than words. We need action. We need China to ban

more of these deadly drugs and do it quicker. We need China to shut down these illegal fentanyl laboratories and arrest those responsible for shipping drugs into our country.

I had the opportunity last year to travel to China as part of a congressional delegation, and I was able to speak directly to some of the Chinese authorities, including Premier Li. We talked about these deadly poisons coming into our communities and how we needed more help to be able to shut down these labs and to arrest these individuals. I also made the point that there is evidence that some of this opioid material that is being synthetically produced in China is leaking into their communities and that they have a problem too. We need to work together to shut this down.

One way that we can assist law enforcement in this war on synthetic opioids is by simply providing them the tools they need to identify packages coming in that likely contain these drugs. Whether they are from China, whether they are shipped somewhere else, or whether they are from another country that begins to produce these drugs, we have to do a better job finding these packages and stopping them.

Because of the roughly 500 million packages that come in by mail every year, interdicting these small packages is very difficult. It can be like finding a needle in a haystack. So law enforcement has asked us to help them be able to get the information they need to target suspect packages.

That is why what is called advance electronic data is so very important. This is information that comes in advance—such as what is in the package, where it is from, where it is going—is information for packages entering the United States that can greatly assist our law enforcement.

Customs and Border Protection is responsible for this mail coming into our country, and they want to identify these suspicious packages and be able to trace them back to both the U.S. distributor and user but also, of course, to their overseas traffickers. When they have that information, they are able to stop packages but also then initiate investigations, prosecutions, and arrests.

As part of our investigation, we found that last year the Postal Service only received this advance electronic data on about 36 percent of the more than 498 million packages coming into our country. That means the United States received more than 318 million packages with no data. That means there was little to no screening at all.

We also found that the quality of the data that was provided was often inadequate and unhelpful to law enforcement. Even when the Postal Service conducted a pilot program to screen for these drugs through the use of this data, they only presented 80 percent of these packages targeted by Customs and Border Protection for inspection. In other words, about 20 percent of

these suspect packages came into our communities without inspection, despite being suspect packages.

With these glaring holes in the screening process, it is no wonder these drug dealers choose the Postal Service as their preferred drug delivery system. It is a massive loophole that is undermining the safety and security of our country.

After the September 11, 2001, attacks, collecting the advance electronic data was identified as a national security priority.

In 2002 Congress wrote legislation that required private carriers to collect this advance electronic data and authorized and encouraged the Postal Service to do it but left the implementation up to the Postal Service. That was 16 years ago.

Because of the 2002 law, private carriers like UPS, FedEx, DHL, and others, require useful data on every package entering the United States, while the Postal Service gets its data for less than 40 percent of the hundreds of millions of packages it receives every year. Again, the Postal Service data is sometimes not usable, and 20 percent of those packages targeted because of the data are never presented to law enforcement to be inspected. Folks, this is just wrong. We can and we must do better.

We talked earlier about the number of people dying from fentanyl overdoses and the fact that this is the new scourge. It is coming in our mail system. We have to be able to do better, and we can.

This is why I have introduced what is called the Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention Act, or STOP Act. This bipartisan bill will require the Postal Service to get that electronic data on all international packages entering the United States. The coauthor of the STOP Act is Senator AMY KLOBUCHAR of Minnesota, and we now have 29 Senate cosponsors from both sides of the aisle. The bipartisan House companion bill is now, I believe, cosponsored by a majority of the House of Representatives. Why? Because this is just a commonsense solution that people understand has to be done.

I urge all of my Senate colleagues to join us in doing what we can to stop some of this poison from coming into America and to at least raise the price on the street of this synthetic heroin that is cheap and accessible.

By holding the Postal Service, a Federal agency, to the same standard we have for private mail carriers, we can give law enforcement the necessary tools they are asking for to identify and stop these deadly poisons from reaching our communities.

I understand that this is just one part of the solution to deal with the opioid epidemic. Trust me; I get that. I have been working on this for over 20 years, focused mostly on the prevention side, treatment, and the recovery. Those are all important. We need to continue to do that because our States

are gripped by these opioids, and all of us need it. But there is clearly a need for a legislative solution to prevent these drugs from entering our country through our own mail system.

The STOP Act is a clear opportunity and responsibility for Congress to help turn the tide of addiction. I urge all of my colleagues to join us in supporting the STOP Act and, by doing so, in saving lives.

I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as we all know, tonight the President will address the Nation from the Chamber of the House of Representatives. This is called the State of the Union, and its tradition dates back to George Washington's time when he gave his first annual message in 1790.

Tonight is an important speech. It gives the President a chance not only to look forward but to look back on the first year of his term in office. That first year was marked by a steady stream of impressive accomplishments working together with Congress. These successes are easily missed when the decibel level here in Washington remains so high. The good news all too often gets drowned out by the noise, although, the truth is that the President's policy decisions have been spot-on, particularly when it comes to our Nation's economy.

First and foremost, last year he signed comprehensive tax reform into law. This is something we haven't been able to do since 1986. Our reforms lowered rates across the board for every tax bracket, doubled the child tax credit, and incentivized U.S. businesses to create jobs here at home rather than overseas, and, finally, it repealed the ObamaCare individual mandate, making the Affordable Care Act voluntary and not mandatory.

All across the country, we have seen the chain reaction as at least 263 businesses, large and small, have used the tax savings to increase workers' wages, expand their operations, and create jobs. According to one poll, small businesses' optimism is now at an 11-year high. The economy, thank goodness, continues to improve. A key economic indicator rose more than expected last month, but the momentum has been building over the last 12.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average has reached record highs. Everyone with a 401(k), a savings account, a pension, or somebody who dabbles in the stock market has seen the value of their holdings go up by about 25 per-

cent in this last year. Federal workers who invest in their thrift savings plans through these index funds have seen their retirement funds grow to a huge amount—25 percent—consistent with the stock market.

President Trump's economic policies have been joined by his administration's strong insistence on suspending or eliminating job-stifling regulations. Now, don't get me wrong. Regulations are necessary for public health, safety, and welfare, but they can go too far and stifle innovation and economic growth. Unfortunately, that is what has happened.

He signed an Executive order when he first came to office and has cut at least 16 rules and regulations for every new one that was created. I think his original goal was to cut two for every new one, but, actually, he has done better than that. He has cut 16 for every new one that was created, and that has saved roughly \$8.1 billion in compliance costs.

We need to keep in mind here in Washington that when we pass a law or when we pass a regulation, somebody often has to hire somebody to comply with that law. If there is a change in the Tax Code, you have to hire an accountant to help you figure out how to comply with the law or, if you are a manufacturing facility, you want to make sure OSHA and other Federal agencies don't come in and fine you so you hire people to help you comply with regulations and laws. These aren't people who necessarily help you become more productive; these are just people to keep up with the rules and regulations that emanate from Washington. The savings, as a result of rolling back some of the unnecessary regulations, has been pretty dramatic.

We in Congress did our part using the Congressional Review Act to eliminate heavyhanded regulations passed during the eleventh hour of the last administration.

President Trump's policies have stimulated the economy in other ways too. They have expanded energy infrastructure projects like the Keystone Pipeline and, with the help of Congress, opened part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas exploration. This is something that was set aside specifically for energy production years ago, but as a result of the logjam in Congress, that important natural resource for America was out of bounds because of congressional inaction. Well, no more.

I have flown over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and, believe me, it is not someplace you would go on a vacation. It is a pretty rough area, but because people think of it as a wildlife refuge, they think, well, maybe this is a threat to the wildlife. Just the opposite is true. We know the caribou population has sprung up in areas where they have an oil pipeline because they use it for nesting grounds. It just goes to show how little the bureaucrats here in Washington who believe there is

nothing they shouldn't regulate or overregulate—they can be wrong.

Meanwhile, the President has been hard at work enforcing our immigration laws, something he was elected to do. He has added immigration judges and removed more than 36 percent more criminal gang members than in fiscal year 2016.

When it comes to immigration in the Senate, we have been working together to find a bipartisan solution for the recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—the so-called DACA Program.

People will remember this was something President Obama did, unilaterally circumventing Congress, and the courts later told him, no, he couldn't do it, placing the future of some 690,000 young DACA recipients in jeopardy. President Trump wisely has given us a deadline of March 5, but kicked it back to Congress to do what only Congress can do; that is, to come up with a solution. The President, helpfully, has laid out his priorities, and now we in this Congress have to come up with a consensus on how to move forward.

We know these young adults deserve future certainty, but also we don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. We finally need to secure our borders and fix the flaws in our immigration laws that are exploited by the human traffickers and coyotes, and we aim to do both. There has to be symmetry. On one hand, we can show the sort of compassion that Americans have always shown, but we also need to have the security and knowledge that our laws and our border will be enforced.

The President shares this dual aim. On Sunday, my friend and fellow Texan, Roger Rocha, the head of the League of United Latin American Citizens—or LULAC—sent a letter to President Trump. Now, you wouldn't ordinarily think that LULAC and President Trump would see eye to eye, but here, President Rocha congratulated the President for setting what LULAC called a reasonable framework for immigration reform and border security. LULAC stated that as long as we stay within the President's parameters, the organization can support the eventual proposal because they are eager to make sure these young people—some 690,000—have a positive future. The President has gone over and above that and said, not only the people who signed up for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, but those who were eligible and who did not sign up can still participate in this pathway the President has prescribed for them, as long as we do our job when it comes to border security—dealing with the diversity lottery visa and dealing with chain migration.

I think LULAC's endorsement of these four parameters is very encouraging. It is huge news. LULAC has more than 145,000 members, and it is heralded as one of the oldest civil rights organizations in America itself.