

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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child tax credit, and incentivized U.S. businesses to create jobs here at home rather than overseas, and, finally, it repealed the ObamaCare individual mandate, making the Affordable Care Act voluntary and not mandatory.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.

It believes that now is the time to move forward, and that is something, hopefully, all of us will agree with.

LULAC believes the President's framework will keep the momentum of progress on its proper trajectory, they say. What this means is, President Trump is now on the brink of delivering something to the American people—certainty to DACA recipients, enforcement of our immigration laws, and securing our borders—that previous Presidents have been unable to do. Let me say that again. What this means is, President Trump is now on the brink of delivering to the American people certainty for the DACA recipients, enforcement of our immigration laws, and securing our borders, something previous Presidents have been unable to accomplish.

Democrats remain at a standstill on the very issue they have advocated for years, though. To my Democratic colleagues, I say the following: We are still waiting to see your alternative that could become law. The President has made a proposal. So you owe it to the American people, and you certainly owe it to the DACA recipients—whom some people call the Dreamers—you owe it to them to come up with an alternative. We can't negotiate with ourselves; we need a negotiating partner who will work with us in good faith to get to a solution that can get a Presidential signature. We are running out of time, and we need to get this done.

One unsung story of President Trump's first year has been the reshaping of the Federal judiciary. He nominated 73 Federal judges, including Neil Gorsuch, above all, who was confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court last spring. We have helped him see that 12 appellate court judges have now assumed the robe and taken to the bench. This, of course, is the intermediate appellate court that, for all practical purposes, is the court of last resort, since the Supreme Court of the United States only hears about 80 cases a year. They decide cases where the appellate courts disagree or where there is a dissent by one of the judges, and usually it is the circuit courts that are the final word, interpreting, of course, Supreme Court precedence.

I am particularly proud of two of those supreme court justices: Don Willett, formerly of the Texas Supreme Court, and Jim Ho, who has served as my chief judiciary counsel, among other distinguished service, and who was a law clerk for Clarence Thomas and served as solicitor general of Texas. I am proud of the fact that these two men are now serving on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Last but not least, the President has worked to increase defense spending and shown deft leadership in handling a broad array of foreign threats. I think that is, in part, responsible and due to the incredible team he has surrounded himself with, including General McMaster, the National Security Advisor; Rex Tillerson, the Secretary of

State; and James Mattis, Secretary of Defense. They are a strong and impressive team, and they serve the President and the Nation well by providing the President the kind of advice he needs to lead and to keep our country safe and to maintain America's leadership in world affairs.

We know, for example, that under our military leaders' strategy, as authorized and enabled by the President himself, the terrorist organization ISIS has lost most of its territory and many of its followers.

This administration has also strengthened U.S. policy in Iran, which is the No. 1 state sponsor of international terrorism. He has held Syria accountable for crossing redlines when they violated international norms by using chemical weapons—something the previous administration declined to do. This administration has stood up to an increasingly belligerent North Korea and used diplomacy to encourage China to use its clout as a bordering nation to North Korea to try to dissuade Kim Jong Un from pursuing his nuclear power goals. I hope that is successful.

It is no surprise, then, that based on polling data, Americans are substantially more satisfied with the Nation's military strength, security from terrorism, and the state of the economy now than they were at the end of the previous administration.

Our President is only 1 year into his term, but he has already changed this country's political landscape. I share his goal of continuing to build a safer, stronger, and prouder America.

The question then becomes how, working together, we can do that. During tonight's State of the Union Address, there are a few specific topics I look forward to hearing more about—shared priorities for the upcoming year—for example, rebuilding our Nation's depleted infrastructure. I recently introduced a bill with our colleague the senior Senator from Virginia. It would expand an infrastructure financing authority already in use by many States and local governments. I come from a big State, where we have a growing population, and we need to continue to build our infrastructure there to keep commerce flowing and to keep our roads safe and to protect our environment. This legislation I have introduced with my colleague from Virginia would raise the statutory cap on something known as private activity bonds, which assist various types of transportation construction.

In the near future, I expect to introduce other infrastructure initiatives, and I look forward to working with my colleagues as well as this administration to see them signed into law.

I am also keen to hear the President's thoughts on issues relating to public safety and law enforcement. I myself am a strong proponent of the Second Amendment, but I believe tragedies like that which occurred in Sutherland Springs prove the incredible

danger of dangerous felons purchasing and possessing firearms. That is illegal, but it happens, and, unfortunately, the consequences can be devastating to the families affected.

That is why I have introduced the bill we call the Fix NICS Act. NICS, of course, is the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which makes sure that when you go in to purchase a firearm, if you are a convicted felon, if you have been committed for mental illness, or if you are guilty of domestic violence, you cannot legally buy a firearm in America, but if the background check system isn't uploaded properly, as in this case the Air Force declined—or I should say failed—to provide the necessary information to the criminal background check system, somebody can go in and lie and purchase firearms they can't otherwise legally purchase. That is why it is so important that we fix the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. That is something that has broad bipartisan support, and I hope to see it passed into law soon.

I see my colleague from Rhode Island here whom I have been working with on prison reform, another issue I hope the President touches on this evening, and I believe he will. I believe one of the most effective ways for us to legislate is to let the States be the laboratories of democracy. In this case, many of our States have been laboratories of democracy when it comes to reforming our criminal justice system and specifically our prison system. I know, for a long time, people had this idea that we are going to lock up folks and throw away the key, but the reality is, people who go to prison usually get out of prison. The question is, Are they going to be better prepared when they get out and hopefully avoid reincarceration and hopefully become productive members of society or are they just simply going to be warehoused and then let out, only to repeat their criminal acts and end up back in prison again?

We have had some enormous success in Texas and others States about incentivizing low- and medium-risk offenders, to provide them an opportunity to deal with their drug or alcohol problem or to learn a skill that they can earn a living with once they get out of prison or to get a GED. They have been very successful in cutting down on the rate of recidivism, decreasing the crime rate, and along the way saving the taxpayers money because they don't have to just build another prison to warehouse more people. We can keep the hard-core criminals locked up while we extend an olive branch and some help, a helping hand to those who will take advantage of it to turn their lives around and become productive members of society. So I am looking forward to the President talking about that.

I know the President will be talking about that and other important issues, such as immigration, and he will be

speaking from the heart tonight, and we should all listen to his words carefully. Whether we voted for this President or not, he is the duly elected President of the United States, and we, I believe, are obligated—those of us in Congress—to work with him, where we can, to try to help make things better for the people we represent.

Once he concludes his remarks tonight, then the ball is in our court to follow up on his calls to action, and I hope we will.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for several minutes and then turn the floor over to the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and then, thereafter, that we may be permitted to engage in a brief colloquy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have come to the floor with a shared concern that the raiding parties are circling the Mueller investigation and preparing for an attack on that investigation.

We see this with collateral attacks on individual members of law enforcement. We see this with efforts to discredit the FBI and the Department of Justice in general. We have seen it even with Presidential tweets seeking to discredit folks who might be witnesses before a grand jury, which would, with the right state of mind, actually amount to obstruction of justice itself.

The first thing I want to say is that the Senate is entitled to a full and truthful explanation of why Deputy Director McCabe of the FBI left. We do not know the reason behind his sudden, abrupt departure. But we do know that Sally Yates was fired; we do know that Jim Comey was fired; we do know that Bob Mueller was not fired only because White House Counsel threw himself in front of that decision by President Trump and said: If you do that, I am out.

So firings at the top of our Department of Justice are becoming an unpleasantly frequent thing, and they tend to relate to matters where investigations touch on the White House: Sally Yates and the Flynn investigation; Jim Comey and the obstruction of justice, Russia collusion investigation; and, of course, Bob Mueller leading that investigation. I think we are entitled to answers, and I call for a full and truthful explanation.

The second thing going on is the more general attack on the FBI, the latest episode of which is this so-called Nunes memo, which has been described by Democratic House Members who have seen that memo and the under-

lying documents out of which it was selectively cherry-picked as profoundly misleading. It had the political purpose of spreading a false narrative—the political purpose of spreading a false narrative. This is like the information operations the Kremlin used to run against the free world if they had a political purpose of spreading a false narrative.

They also said it has the purpose of undermining legitimate investigations. Guess which legitimate investigations they mean.

This business of selectively cherry-picking things out of classified information to spread a false narrative has a very unpleasant echo for me because this is what the Bush administration was up to when it was trying to defend the torture program. They selectively declassified, for instance, that Abu Zubaydah had been the subject of what they called their enhanced interrogation techniques program and that he had produced important, actionable intelligence. What they did not declassify was that all the actionable intelligence he gave them had been provided before they started on the torture techniques. Then, once the pros from Dover came down—who didn't know anything about how to interrogate somebody but only knew how to do torture techniques—he clammed up, and that was the last actionable intelligence we got out of him. So deliberately misleading by selectively declassifying is an established technique, and it is one that is both shady and dangerous.

The process by which this so-called Nunes report or memo came out smells. It is the first ever invocation of an obscure House rule allowing for the selective declassification of material. It happened on a purely partisan vote. Trump's own appointees to the Department of Justice have called efforts to release the memo "extraordinarily reckless." Yet, on a purely partisan vote, using this previously never used rule, they are putting the selectively cherry-picked false narrative out into the public debate.

Why are they steaming ahead with a report that Ranking Member ADAM SCHIFF says "contains significant errors of fact, mischaracterizations, and omits critical context and detail"? At the same time, they are pulling one more procedural stunt, which is to stall for at least a week a Democratic report that would rebut and expose the misleading character of the Republicans' document.

The only conceivable purpose is to take the false narrative and give it a headstart of a week so that the poison gets out into our information system. Sure enough, they are pounding away at getting that information out. FOX News is already whipping it up, talking about how it is going to be a bombshell and explosive. The House Freedom Caucus has Trump revved up about the memo, urging him to support its release—against the advice of his own law enforcement and national security officials.

Over at Breitbart, FOX News, and throughout the rightwing echo chamber, hashtag "Release the Memo" became the rallying cry. Not only was it the rallying cry of Breitbart and FOX News—guess what. It was the rallying cry of our friends, the Russians. Hashtag "Release the Memo" remains the most used hashtag by social media accounts associated with Russian influence operations. Even the President's son, Don Junior, got involved in the game, tweeting out that "Democrats & deep state govt officials"—I guess by that he means the Trump appointees who said that releasing this report would be extraordinarily reckless—are behind some mischief and therefore, all caps, "RELEASE THE MEMO."

When you see a political steamroller like that happening, when you see bizarre, peculiar, and unprecedented procedures, when you see that it is entirely partisan and against the advice of our national security officials, it is hard to draw a good conclusion about what the heck is going on.

Mr. President, I yield to my distinguished colleague from Connecticut.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, we are here at a historic moment. The President of the United States will come before us for his first State of the Union tonight, at a time when there is a credible case of obstruction of justice against him and an overwhelming case to show that the campaign that elected him was aided and abetted by the Russians. But the immediate threat is even more dire.

Yesterday was a new low for the House Intelligence Committee. The House Republicans, in an act of partisan gutter politics, voted to release a four-page, misleading, deceptive characterization of warrants submitted to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. This partisan gutter politics brings us to a dark day of character assassination much like the McCarthy days, when Members of this Chamber were counted in history as to whether they stood up and spoke out against this kind of smear campaign.

Not only is there character assassination at work here but also, equally dangerous to our democracy, the potential compromising of sources and methods vital to our national intelligence and our national security. That is the reason President Trump's own appointee at the Department of Justice, Stephen Boyd, stated that the release of this memo would be "extraordinarily reckless."

Those words come from a former staffer for a Republican Congresswoman and then-Senator Jeff Sessions—hardly a Democratic partisan. "Extraordinarily reckless." Why? Because this memo, four pages long, summarizing a warrant that typically is tens or hundreds of pages, will reveal sources and methods vital to the continued operation of our intelligence community.