

It is a really hard job because when you are the executive assistant and the scheduler, you have to say no to a lot of people, and you have to say it nicely. You have to make everyone happy, even when you are telling them that the schedule will not allow that to happen. You have to manage phone calls from all seven of my children and my husband, who is upset, and manage the birth of grandchildren, the birthdays, the schedule of when I can get there and when I can't. Is the plane delayed, or is it not? Can you get on Southwest? No, maybe you can make the American flight. On top of it all, he gets me to a million meetings and a million places all at the same time, with a smile on his face, with kindness in his heart, with a whip-sharp intellect, and with a work ethic that is astounding.

I am really upset because he has the nerve to leave and go to law school. I am proud of him for his determination to seek a degree in law. I know he will be an amazing lawyer because he has that touch, where even when he is giving you bad news, you know that he is delivering it with kindness. We need much more of that in the legal profession.

Lorenzo is really important to me, and I will miss him terribly. I think it is important that all of us around here—who crave the lime light, who want all the attention, and who want everybody to think that we are moving mountains—know that it is the people around us who are moving the mountains. We are just lucky to be on the ride.

We will all miss you, Lorenzo. Congratulations to you and to your parents, Linda and Sergio. I know they are here today. I know how proud they are of you. We will miss you terribly, and we will be really mad at you if you don't stay in touch.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

VA MISSION BILL

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I will start by congratulating Senator KLOBUCHAR, who was on the floor earlier to speak about the Congressional Accountability Act, and Senator BLUNT for their hard work to enact legislation that will make this place work better. It is a rare display of bipartisanship, coming together to improve our processes with regard to sexual harassment and other issues, and I thank them for that.

Earlier this week, some of us talked about the veterans bill that passed this Chamber—another sign of bipartisanship. It passed with a big vote, and it will help our veterans in Ohio to get the care they need, where they want it. Going into Memorial Day, I am very glad it passed.

We have heard a lot of concerns that my colleagues raised about veterans not being able to get the care they

wanted in their hometowns or the specialist they wanted or not being able to get reimbursed appropriately for care outside of the VA system, and now they will be able to do it.

Another part of that legislation that helps our veterans deals with an issue that is affecting all of the States in this body and sadly has become an epidemic in our country; that is, the opioid epidemic. It is an issue that some of our veterans are facing when they come back from service. Some have PTSD. Some have traumatic brain injuries and other injuries that require procedures. In response to the acute pain and some of these other conditions, they are given opioid medication. As a result, sadly, a number of our veterans have become addicted to opioids.

This legislation will help by, No. 1, cutting back on the overprescribing of opioids but also by using nonaddictive pain alternatives—medicines that do not have opioids in them—and other forms of therapy to help them deal with pain. These therapies will now be used more in our VA hospital system. That is a good thing for our veterans.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, talking about the opioid issue, sadly, this is gripping my State of Ohio in a way that has caused us to have more deaths by opioids than any other cause of death. But it is not just Ohio; it is an epidemic because now, nationally, it is the No. 1 cause of accidental death, and for Americans under 50, it is the No. 1 cause of death, period. This makes it the worst drug epidemic we have faced in this country—the worst since, we will recall, back in the 1980s and 1990s when we were very concerned about cocaine and other drugs. This has become the worst drug epidemic we have ever faced.

We had a tele-townhall meeting this week where I called several thousand Ohioans. We had about 20,000 people on the call at any one time. During that call, we had a survey question. Among other questions, it asked about opioids, and it asked a very simple question: Do you know someone who has been personally affected? Have you been or do you know someone who has been personally affected by this opioid epidemic? The numbers were shocking this week. Typically, over half of the callers say yes. That is how bad it is in Ohio. This week, it was 66 percent—two-thirds of the callers. Thousands of people in Ohio reported back from a tele-townhall. So it is not a self-selected group; it is people who have called in to talk about various issues, and 66 percent said they know someone who has been directly affected by this opioid addiction issue.

It has unfolded in three waves. The first wave was really prescription drugs, and this was back in the late 1990s and into the 2000s. There were pill mills in Southern Ohio and other

States. Kentucky and West Virginia were hit hard. This was medication that was being abused, in many cases leading to an addiction.

The second wave was the heroin wave. This was when heroine became more readily available and was actually less expensive than prescription drugs, and many people turned to heroin. That heroin led to many more overdoses and other issues, including diseases associated with the use of needles, hepatitis C and others.

Now there is a new wave, and the new wave, sadly, is even more deadly than the first two. It is what is called synthetic opioids or synthetic heroin. The one that you have probably heard of is called fentanyl, sometimes carfentanyl, which is even more powerful. It is truly at epidemic levels in my State, and it is being made worse by this new wave of synthetic heroin.

There are other drugs, as well, that are affecting us in our country. In my own State, in some regions of Ohio, crystal meth now coming up from Mexico is creating a bigger problem. Cocaine is certainly an issue. But as I have looked at the statistics and traveled the State, it is clear that our No. 1 issue is opioids and that synthetic opioids—50 times more potent than heroin—are the new face of the opioid epidemic.

Fentanyl was involved in about 37 percent of the deaths in Ohio as recently as 2015. By 2016, it was responsible for 58 percent of the overdose deaths. So it has gone from 37 percent to 58 percent in 1 year. We don't have all the numbers yet for 2017, but unfortunately the numbers we do have from various regions of the State indicate that 2017 is going to be just as bad, if not worse. Columbus, OH, as an example, has seen a staggering increase in opioid overdoses due to fentanyl. Two-thirds of the county's 2017 overdose deaths were due to fentanyl—two-thirds.

I am told by law enforcement that fentanyl—again, this drug that is so deadly that a few flakes of it can kill you—has also been sprinkled into other drugs. I have talked to recovering addicts who told me their stories about finding out that they were actually taking fentanyl when they thought they were taking another drug. It has been sprinkled into other street drugs, according to law enforcement and some of these recovering addicts I have talked to, including cocaine, even including marijuana, and including heroin.

Just last week, two men in the Toledo area were arrested for drug conspiracy with the intent to distribute. A little more than half a pound of fentanyl was seized upon their arrest. Half a pound of fentanyl would be equivalent to about 1 cup of fentanyl—small enough to fit into a ziplock bag in your kitchen. Yet that one drug seizure of 1 cup was enough fentanyl, according to experts, to kill 16,000 people. Remember, just a few flecks of it can