

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

USA FREEDOM Act

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I rise today to talk about the transparency provisions in the USA FREEDOM Act. I am a proud cosponsor of Chairman LEAHY's bill, and I am particularly proud to have written its key transparency provisions with my friend Senator DEAN HELLER of Nevada. As I said yesterday, both of us are indebted to Senator LEAHY for his leadership on this issue.

For over a year now there has been a steady stream of news stories about the National Security Agency's surveillance programs. Yet right now, by law, Americans still cannot get very basic information about these programs.

Americans understand that we need to give due weight to privacy on the one hand and national security on the other. But when they lack an even rough sense of the scope of the government's surveillance programs, they have no way to know if the government is getting that balance right. There needs to be more transparency.

The controversy unleashed by Edward Snowden's disclosures has been going on for over a year. Yet Americans still don't know the actual number of people whose information has been collected under these programs. They don't even know how many of these people are Americans, and they have no way of knowing how many of these Americans had their information actually looked at by government officials as opposed to just being held in a database. This lack of transparency is pretty breathtaking.

I believe the provisions Senator HELLER and I wrote will go a long way toward addressing and fixing this. It will give Americans the information they need to judge the government's surveillance programs for themselves.

Three programs are at the center of this debate: the telephone call records program, the collection, through 2011, on Americans' Internet communications records, and the so-called PRISM Program that targets the communications of foreigners abroad.

Our provisions would require detailed annual reports for each program. The government will have to tell the public how many people have had their information collected and how many of those people are likely American. For the call records program and the PRISM Program, the government will also have to say how many times it has run a specific search for an American's data.

By creating these reporting requirements, the government will have an in-

centive to also disclose the number of Americans who have actually had their information reviewed by government officials, and we give the government authority to do that too.

We don't just require the government to issue more detailed transparency reports. We are also helping American Internet and phone companies tell their customers about the government requests for customer information they are receiving. For years those companies have been under gag orders. As a result, people around the world think the American Internet companies are giving up far more information to the government than they likely are. Those companies are losing billions of dollars because people think they are handing over all of their customers' data to the NSA.

Our provisions expand the options that companies have to issue their own transparency reports, and they let companies issue those reports more quickly. Our provisions give the public two ways to check on the government—government transparency reports and company reports as well.

Like all major bills, this bill is a compromise, and we didn't get everything we wanted, but our provisions will go a long way toward giving the American people the information they need to evaluate the government's surveillance program.

After 9/11, our Nation faced a security crisis. Most Americans had never lived through anything like that. We are now experiencing a crisis of trust where a big part of the American public now thinks our intelligence agencies are out to spy on them, not on foreign countries.

The administration has committed to end the bulk collection of Americans' data, and Congress has written a bill to ban the bulk collection of Americans' data. But unless we pass these transparency provisions, Americans have no way to know if the government is making good on those promises. Our transparency provisions will force the government to prove annually and publicly that bulk collection is over. This is an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability which will allow the American people to decide for themselves whether the government is striking the right balance between privacy and security.

We should take up this bill as soon as possible so that Americans are not in the dark a single day longer. We should take it up so that American companies stop losing business because of misperceptions about their role in domestic surveillance. We should take this bill up so that Americans can get the information they need to hold their government to account.

TRIBUTE TO ALVARO BEDOYA

Before I yield the floor, I wish to take a moment to recognize and thank Alvaro Bedoya, my chief counsel, who is to my left. This is Alvaro's last week on my staff. Alvaro has been a member of my team since my very first day in

office, and I have relied on and trusted his counsel on so many things in the 5 years since.

He has been instrumental in helping me launch and set the agenda for the Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law that I chair, and we would not have reached this point in working to make the NSA more transparent and accountable to the American people if it were not for Alvaro.

Alvaro's counsel has also been crucial as we have sought to improve our Nation's broken immigration system, as we fought for marriage equality and LGBT rights, including the right of all children to be free from bullying in schools, and as we work to ban apps that allow domestic abusers to stalk their victims.

Alvaro was even at my side during my very first week in office when the Judiciary Committee held confirmation hearings for Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the Supreme Court. That was my fifth day in the Senate, and I remember pulling some late nights preparing for that.

Alvaro's departure is bittersweet for me. I am, of course, sad to see Alvaro leave, but I am very excited for him as well. He will soon become the founding executive director of Georgetown Law School's new Center for Privacy and Technology. I have no doubt the folks at Georgetown soon will learn what I already know—that Alvaro is one of the most talented, intelligent, hardest working, decent, good-guy lawyers I know.

Thanks, Alvaro.

And I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. WARREN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CORPORATE INVERSIONS

Ms. WARREN. Madam President, our Tax Code is tilted toward the rich and the powerful. Huge corporations hire armies of lobbyists and lawyers to create, expand, and protect every last corporate loophole. That is how we end up with a tax code that makes small businesses and restaurants and construction companies pay, that makes teachers and truckdrivers and nurses pay, but that allows huge American corporations to make billions of dollars in profits and not pay a single dime in taxes.

The Tax Code is rigged. Apparently, even this rigged game does not go far enough for some corporations. Those companies are taking advantage of a new move—a loophole that allows them to maintain all their operations in America but claim foreign citizenship so they can cut their U.S. taxes even further.

Here is how the loophole works. An American company merges with a

much smaller company located in a foreign country, usually a tax haven such as Ireland or Bermuda. As long as the shareholders of the foreign company own 20 percent of the newly merged company, our tax laws allow that new company to claim foreign citizenship. That means American companies can hire a bunch of Wall Street bankers and a bunch of lawyers, fill out some paperwork, keep everything the same in their operations, and dodge their U.S. taxes.

Tax lawyers call this process a corporate inversion, but do not let that bland name fool you. These companies are renouncing their American citizenship, turning their backs on this country simply to boost their profits. They are taking advantage of all the good things our government helps provide—educated workers, roads and bridges, a dependable court system, patent and copyright protections—and then running out on the bill.

If a person did that, we would call them a freeloader. We would insist that they pay their fair share. That is exactly what our tax laws do for people who renounce their American citizenship. Even if they do not sell their property in the United States, when they renounce their citizenship, we treat them as if they had sold it. If they try to send money back to a U.S. citizen, we tax that amount too. And if someone attempts to evade their tax obligations by renouncing their American citizenship, we bar them from coming back to this country.

For a person who does not want to pay a fair share, our message is clear: You can renounce your citizenship but do not come back and expect the rest of us to pick up the tab. But we do not do that for corporations. Corporations can renounce their American citizenship—and make absolutely clear in legal documents that they are doing it to avoid their U.S. tax obligations—and not suffer any consequences.

In this corner of the Tax Code we have gone way past treating corporations as people. In this corner of the Tax Code we are treating corporations better than people. That is not right. That is why I have teamed up with Senator LEVIN and more than a dozen of our Democratic colleagues to introduce the Stop Corporate Inversions Act. The bill is simple. It allows American corporations to renounce their citizenship only if they truly give up control of their company to a foreign corporation and truly move their operations overseas. The bill would help protect \$17 billion in tax revenue—money we could spend on Head Start Programs, on fixing our roads and bridges, on investing in medical research.

President Obama and Secretary Lew have spoken in favor of the proposal. I commend their leadership, and I join them in urging the Senate to pass this bill right away.

Some say wait. They say we should address this loophole in the context

only of broader tax reform. I am all for a major overhaul of our tangled tax system, but make no mistake, more and more companies are rushing to renounce their citizenship to take advantage of this inversion loophole before we can get to full tax reform. We cannot allow the larger fights over tax reform to stop us from holding these freeloaders accountable.

I believe the Senate should act on this, but I am also realistic. Even if the Senate passes this bill today, we know that, like so many good Senate bills before it, it will face a tough road in the House. If we have learned anything from the past few years, it is that House Republicans will claw, scratch, whimper, beg or do whatever else it takes to defend every last corporate tax loophole.

But the administration does not need to wait for Congress. It can use its existing authority to slow down and reduce the attractiveness of these sham inversions right now. According to a paper published this week by Steve Shay, a Harvard Law School professor and former senior tax policy official at the Treasury Department, the administration could take action today to reduce the tax benefits of corporate inversions.

It could use its authority under section 385 of the Tax Code to prevent companies that renounce their citizenship from using any other loopholes to shield themselves from additional taxes that they would otherwise be required to pay. This will not totally solve the problem, but it would significantly reduce the benefits of corporate inversion. It would be an important first step toward treating companies that renounce America the same way we treat people who renounce America—as freeloaders who get cut off from other benefits.

America is a great place to do business because of the investments we have made together. In Massachusetts and across this country, we invest in public education, and our colleges and universities produce millions of skilled workers. We invest in infrastructure, in our roads and bridges and ports, making it easier for our companies to move their products across the country and beyond. We invest in scientific and medical research, giving our companies access to the most innovative and cutting-edge technology. We invest together to make America a place where any kid will have a chance to come up with an idea and turn it into the next great American corporation.

The companies that are pursuing these corporate inversions know all of this. That is why they are not actually leaving America behind. They just do not want to pay for it. Our achievements are not magic. They did not simply happen on their own or through dumb luck. America works, our government works, our democracy works because we all pitch in and do our part to build that which none of us can build alone, giving everyone a chance to succeed.

If these companies want to leave all of that behind, well, that is their right. But if they exercise that right, if they leave America behind, then they should not get to turn around and claim all of the privileges of being an American company. We have had enough of rich corporations taking whatever they want and expecting everyone else to pick up the pieces. The time for freeloading is over.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for up to 20 minutes as in morning business.

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

ISRAEL

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, it has been 22 days now since Hamas began its most recent campaign of terrorist attacks against the innocent citizens of Israel. Since the operation began, 32 tunnels have been uncovered that would have been used to attack Israel. On Saturday and Sunday—this past Saturday and Sunday alone—almost 100 rockets were fired at Israel. In the Gaza strip, since the beginning of Operation Protective Edge—that would have been July 8—there have been over 2,000 Hamas rockets fired into Israel, with Tel Aviv and Jerusalem both targets.

Israel has responded, as any nation protecting its people would, with air strikes and ground troops to silence these Hamas terrorists. Israelis are tough. I have to remind people all the time that since their independence back in the 1940s, they have been attacked—Israel has been attacked—six different times.

Remember how they were outnumbered in the Six-Day War in 1967. They won. They prevailed. Then again, the same thing in Yom Kippur—that was in 1973. Again, they prevailed. I have often kidded with them—I have told Prime Minister Netanyahu this, that the Israelis consider a fair fight being outnumbered two to one. So they are a great bunch of people. We have got to continue to support them.

The Hamas terrorists are not only killing Israelis; they are killing their own people too because they place their rocket launchers—we see this is happening, just yesterday we saw a picture of this—in the middle of their own population centers. We are talking in homes, in hospitals, in mosques. Like the cowards they are, they use civilians as human shields. Despite Israel's extensive precautionary behavior and measures to avoid collateral damage, casualties, unfortunately, have occurred. Hamas bears complete responsibility for the civilian deaths.

As Prime Minister Netanyahu said: Israel is using missile defense to protect our citizens, and Hamas is using their civilians to protect their missiles. To date, the Israeli missile defense system, called the Iron Dome, has

successfully intercepted over 400 Hamas rockets headed toward the populated areas in Israel. I was just in Israel last month. I visited the Iron Dome battery. You see, there has to be a place where they initiate these protective devices. Here they are over there. I was so impressed with the young Israeli troops who operate it in the southern city of Ashkelon. The same battery you see on TV every night intercepting Hamas rockets comes from the Gaza Strip, 13 kilometers away.

I have a picture here I want the Presiding Officer to look at. This beautiful young first lieutenant in the Israeli Army I met. She is the one in charge of the Ashkelon battery down there. She is doing her duty right now as we speak, bravely protecting her fellow citizens. Her name is Lee Shmulevitch. I salute her.

It gives people an idea of the commitment that is being made by the Israeli people and the successes they are having. As ranking member, which I am, of the Armed Services Committee, I am proud to say I have been a constant supporter of the Iron Dome, which we have done on a nonpartisan basis. We have put in the authorization for \$175 million in this last authorization bill. Then we added another \$176 million that would take care of not just the Iron Dome but also other systems that we have such as David's Sling and Arrow 3.

These are jointly developed by the United States and Israel. I think it is important that people understand. I have heard people say: Well, you are just sending all this stuff over from us to Israel. If that were true, it would be worth doing it anyway, because they are looking out after our interests. Those things which they are not able to do in the Middle East we would have to be doing with our equipment, with your young people.

This is not the case. They have a lot of brave people over there. In the case of the Iron Dome, of David's Sling, of Arrow 3, and of a lot of the UAVs, their technology is technology that we use. So it is not something that we are doing for them. We are doing it mutually for each other.

I think it is important also to note at this point that—and nobody seems to put this together—Hamas would not have the rockets and capability of trying to kill all of these Israelis if it were not for Israel's greatest threat, and that is the country of Iran. Quite frankly, I think Iran is the greatest threat to the United States also. A lot of people do not realize this, but back in 2007 our—at that time it was classified—Our intelligence said that by 2015, Iran would have the weapon and a delivery system. Well, that is only 6 months from now.

That has been reconfirmed in our unclassified intelligence starting in about 2010. So right now it is really Iran that is responsible for what Hamas has been able to do. I might ask the question:

What is President Obama doing? His rush to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran has undermined years of bipartisan sanctions that were working. We have sanctions, not just by us but by European countries and other countries that have really brought Iran down—not to their knees, because they are still developing their weapons. But nonetheless, they were working.

As part of the President's agreement—this is what he is doing right now. His agreement is to reduce Iran's sanctions, as he announced in January. He has endorsed Iran's right to enrich uranium. So let's stop and think about it. This is a deal he has cut. He said: All right. We will pull off our sanctions so you will be able to receive the benefit of that. At the same time we are going to let you go ahead and continue to enrich uranium.

He has allowed Iran to keep 19,000 centrifuges while unlocking \$7 billion in assets. These are assets that were held which they can now use to their benefit. He has just extended the deal by agreeing to provide Iran with an additional \$2.8 billion in frozen assets. That brings the \$7 billion up to almost \$10 billion. While Iran is building a bomb, Obama is releasing sanctions.

I believe the Iranians are using negotiations to buy time as they are developing their nuclear weapon. Again, Netanyahu called the President's agreement a "historic mistake" that is making the world a much more dangerous place. History is going to prove that he is right. Obama should demand Iran dismantle its nuclear program, but he will not do it. We should reinstate full sanctions now and consider additional sanctions. But President Obama will not do it.

Does anyone really believe Iran is not involved with Hamas and its attacks?

Today, Obama is rewarding Iran by releasing more financial assets to Iran, funding that will be used to support more terrorism against Israel. There is little to show for the administration's reckless gamble for Israel. President Obama is negotiating with an Iranian regime that has repeatedly deceived us and concealed its nuclear program for over 2 decades.

I see nothing different in this deal. Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood, surrounded by terrorists who refuse to even acknowledge the Jewish state's right to exist. They need all the friends they can get. I keep hearing people talk about the two-state solution. The two-state solution between Hamas and Israel is kind of interesting because Hamas does not consider Israel to be a state. So how can you have a two-state solution if you only have one state? That is the situation.

That is why I want to salute the country of Egypt. There are some other friends that we have over there. I have been upset with some of the Members here in this body because they do not have an appreciation for what Egypt does and the part they play in the Mid-

dle East and their support for Israel. Let me tell you, this started a long time ago. The Camp David Accords was in 1979. In the Camp David Accords they made a deal with Israel. Now, you have to keep in mind that this was the military of Egypt. It is hard for people in this country to see that sometimes there is a difference between the administration in a country and the military.

So it is the military here that has said: We will be protecting Israel. We had, not too long ago, an effort from this body to try to stop the shipment of some F-16s that Egypt had already bought. Now, granted, that was back during President Morsi and his radical Muslim Brotherhood. But nonetheless, these were going not to him but to the military. The newly elected President Sisi has destroyed—he is working right along with the Israelis. He has been involved, and his people and his military, in destroying over 90 percent of the tunnels that are going from the Sinai to Gaza.

So I only mention this because those individuals who do not understand this might consider punishing Egypt. If you punish Egypt, you are punishing, to the same degree, Israel.

The turbulent times we face serve as a reminder why the United States and Israel have to continue to work together. The same enemies that threaten the existence of Israel also want to destroy America. Over the years the United States has greatly benefited from the cooperation with Israel on missile defense technologies. We have to continue that critical partnership. Israel is our most faithful ally, our most critical partner in the region, and acts as a roadblock against terrorism, terrorism that would be hitting the United States of America.

The United States stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel and supports its right to defend itself.

Since his first budget, President Obama has been degrading our military while also making the world more dangerous through an apologetic and reactive foreign policy of appeasement. I often quote Hiram Mann, who said:

No man escapes
When freedom fails,
The best men rot in filthy jails;
And they who cried: "Appease, Appease!"
Are hanged by men they tried to please.

We have to get out of that system. We have to stand by Israel and hang tough with our best friend. We can't survive without them.

I often look back wistfully at the days of the Cold War. That was back when they had two superpowers in the world, the USSR and the United States. We knew what they had, and they knew what we had. We knew what their capacities were, they knew ours.

They had a system called MAD, mutually assured destruction. It meant: You shoot at you, we will shoot at you. You die, we all die, and everyone is happy.

That doesn't work anymore. Now we have these rogue elements out there

that are developing weapons that can wipe out an entire U.S. city. I am about not just the Middle East but about North Korea also.

So we are looking at the Middle East. We are looking at our only way of defending our allies there and working to stop the capabilities of countries such as Iran to have a weapon that would reach the United States of America. So we have to hang tough with our best friend Israel, and I pray that we do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

49TH ANNIVERSARY OF MEDICARE

Mr. KAINÉ. Madam President, I rise in honor of a birthday.

Forty-nine years ago, Medicare was signed into law. Every year, the trustees prepare a report about the fiscal health of Medicare and Social Security, and that report was issued earlier this week. On this 49th birthday of Medicare, I wish to talk about Medicare's health because there is some good news.

The 2014 trustees' report released earlier this week looks at the trust fund financing for Medicare hospital coverage and indicates that trust fund, under current projections, will remain solvent until 2030. Last year the 2013 report indicated that solvency period would go to 2026. So in 1 year the fiscal projections for Medicare and Medicaid improved by 4 years—solvency until 2030.

In addition, the projected Part B premiums, the Part B portion of Medicare, which is the prescription drug premium program for seniors, for the second year in a row the premiums will not increase one penny.

This improved health of Medicare is significant. The health of it has improved dramatically, even in the last year. But where the improvement truly looks significant is if we compare the 2014 report with the 2009 report, the report that was done on Medicare's 44th birthday 5 years ago. The 2009 report said the hospital insurance trust fund was not adequately financed for the next 10 years, and it would be exhausted in 2017.

Again, just to compare, 2009 Medicare trustees' report, the trust fund will be exhausted by 2017; 2014 Medicare trustees' report, the trust fund will be solvent all the way through 2030. There is a difference of 13 years of additional solvency in Medicare, according to the projections and the change just from 2009 to 2014.

I think we know where I am going with this subject. What explains the improving solvency of the Medicare trust fund? Why would it have changed so dramatically from the 2009 to the 2014 projection and added 13 years of solvency to the trust fund?

The Congressional Budget Office and others have indicated it was not the 2009 recession that was the primary driver for Medicare spending reduction. Instead, the CBO and others are indicating that a large part of the improved solvency of Medicare is because

of the reforms that were included by Congress when Congress passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010. When it comes to reducing costs, bending the cost curve, the Affordable Care Act is working.

That is not the only reason Congress passed the Affordable Care Act. Coverage is expanding. Certain health care indicators are improving. More people have access because they are not denied insurance because of preexisting conditions. Kids can stay on family policies. Businesses can get tax credits if they are small.

But one of the areas—and that was why the first day the ACA was affordable. It was to try to do things that would control health care costs.

This Medicare trustees' report on Medicare's 49th birthday shows on cost reforms the ACA is working. The innovative systems of changing the payment model from pay-for-procedure to pay for quality, paying for value over volume, for reducing costs and improving health care delivery systems are extending the solvency of Medicare.

Not only is this cost containment good for the Federal Government, for the Federal Treasury, it is also good for Medicare recipients: 8.2 million Medicare recipients saved more than \$11.5 billion on prescription drugs thanks to closing the Medicare Part D doughnut hole.

In Virginia, people with Medicare saved \$254 million on prescription drugs because the Medicare Part D doughnut hole was closed just since the ACA was enacted—\$254 million since the 2010 enactment. In 2013 alone, 37.2 million Medicare recipients received free preventive benefits, including more than 900,000 in Virginia, because of the Affordable Care Act.

The work obviously needs to continue to bend the cost curve the right way, but the trustees' report from Monday is not the only evidence of the improving health of our fiscal expenditures.

Just this month CBO again revised downward its 10-year estimate for spending on Medicare and our Nation's major health care programs. Since 2010 CBO has lowered its estimates for Medicare and Medicaid and other health care programs by \$1.23 trillion—lowered projections of health care spending since the Affordable Care Act was passed.

The CBO said in a recently issued long-term budget outlook that the government will spend 1.6 percent of GDP less on health care programs than estimated in 2010 before the ACA was passed. A report released this week by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at HHS reported essentially no growth in Medicare expenditures on a per capita basis last year.

That report also said Medicare spending between 2009 and 2012—for beneficiaries in the traditional program—was approximately \$116 billion lower than it would have been if the average

growth rates from years 2004 to 2008 had been projected forward.

So there are many reasons we should be thankful the Affordable Care Act passed, that we should be absolutely committed to maintaining it, and that we should also be committed to maintaining it wherever we can. But as we celebrate the 49th anniversary of Medicare today, one of the reasons we should be thankful is it is clear that the ACA is helping us make health care more affordable.

To conclude, the report that was issued this week was not all good news because it also had challenges with respect to Social Security. The Social Security trust fund will be exhausted in 2033, and that represents no change from last year. The solvency of the trust fund was not changed at all in the interim year.

But in the area of Social Security disability income, that insurance program—at current projections—will be completed by 2016.

Secretary Lew indicated this week that measures need to be taken to make sure that program—which is of critical importance to millions of Americans who are on disabilities—requires that we take action to fix that program so they can count on it.

So what we see is when Congress in the Affordable Care Act acted in a smart way to deal with Medicare, we have improved the area of Medicare costs and we are saving money. Congress has not acted with respect to Social Security and the Social Security disability insurance program, which is critical to folks with disabilities. It is going to need some quick fix.

I conclude and just say it is good for Congress to act. We can filibuster. We can debate. We can consider nominations. We can do a bill in one House and send it over and wait—as with immigration reform for 1-year-plus—for the other House to do something about it. None of that is action. None of that will fix any of the challenges that face us.

But when we do act and we are willing to tackle tough problems such as Medicare cost growth, we do it in both Houses and take the risk, we will find we will be better off than if we don't act. Social Security needs to have the same kind of focused and careful attention to it, especially the disability insurance program, as we paid to Medicare in 2010.

Medicare is one of the best programs this Nation has ever embraced. I wish it a happy 49th birthday today and congratulate those who were in the Senate in 2010 for being willing to risk action and thereby found a way to save costs and make Medicare work better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I rise to speak on the urgent supplemental bill, and I rise as the chair of the full Committee on Appropriations that is actually trying to move the urgent supplemental.

“Supplemental” is an important word. It means it is in addition to fiscal year 2014 funding. There are elements where we make requests for an urgent supplemental because of unexpected emergencies, either within our own country or affecting a treasured ally—such as the State of Israel—or the crisis at our border because of what is going on in Central America. Remember, it is the crisis in Central America that is creating the humanitarian surge at our border.

Although I rise now to speak about one element, I have spoken about the fires in our Western States and later today I will speak about the children and actually try to paint a picture for people about what is going on in Honduras, El Salvador, and other countries that are also affected, but now I am going to speak about Israel.

Israel is under attack, and it is under attack by a terrorist group that denies its very right to exist. It is under attack by an organization called Hamas that is sending thousands of rockets to Israeli cities and towns targeting innocent civilians. Its very survivability is being defended by missile defense technology. The most crucial for short-range missiles is a technology called Iron Dome. This missile defense technology has saved hundreds of lives.

I can speak to this—when I say personally, not because I am in Israel and see the horrific attacks, but because I have a classmate from college, a very dear friend, and we have stayed in contact over a number of years. She is a psychiatric nurse. When she married, they made aliyah and moved to Israel, where she has taught at Hebrew University and her husband is a distinguished psychiatrist. They live in a town called Ashkelon.

She sent me the most poignant of emails. I will not read it to my colleagues, but she did tell me what is going on. Every day there are these rockets going on. They spend their lives going to shelters. They can only move around in a small patch because they have to be, under safety rules, within 2 or 3 minutes from a shelter. She said in her email to me that it is literally Iron Dome that is saving their lives.

Iron Dome is a technology that needs to be replenished. It needs to be replenished, and the State of Israel has discussed this with our government. Secretary Chuck Hagel wrote to our committee asking that this be in the supplemental essentially because of this war or terrorist attack against Israel.

The committee has responded by placing \$225 million in there, but in order to replenish it. There are many who say: I don't know if I am going to vote for this. What is Iron Dome, and is this an attack technology?

Let me say what Iron Dome is.

Iron Dome is a high-tech defensive system. It is not an offensive system. It is used as a missile defense system. How does it work? Approximately 10-foot-long missiles intercept rockets.

Their rockets aren't designed to shoot out; they are designed to shoot rockets at rockets that are being fired on Israel from a range of between 2.5 and 43 miles. Each interceptor missile—remember, they intercept another rocket—costs about \$50,000. Stunning, isn't it? Israel has invested over \$1 billion of its own money in Iron Dome. Our government has worked with them on Iron Dome so they can maintain their qualitative edge. But just think. In order to protect themselves, every rocket going off costs \$50,000.

As of July 30, over 2,730 rocket launches have been directed at Israel itself. Iron Dome has sent over 515 interceptions; 9 batteries have been deployed; more than 4,100 targets were attacked since the beginning of the operation.

But remember, over 2,700 rockets have been directed at Israel. Iron Dome has deployed 515 at the cost of \$50,000 apiece. Now what they are saying is, help us replenish our interceptor rockets because we are using them up. Essentially, it is bullets—not directed at people—it is rockets in the air.

Israel has a 90-percent success rate in intercepting these rockets coming from the Gaza. What they are asking for is help from us, the ability to replenish these rockets. I hope we do this in order for them to continue to be able to defend themselves. It is absolutely crucial that Israel has the opportunity to defend itself while others are working on cease-fires or political solutions. Those are excellent diplomatic and humanitarian goals, but right now we have to make sure that Israel can defend itself.

This is important because Israel is a treasured ally. It is important that we enable them to guard themselves against a terrorist organization.

We all know that the long-range solution is that the Hamas infrastructure must be eliminated. That is absolutely so. These so-called—well, they are not so-called. As a member of the Intelligence Committee, I have had many briefings on this. I can't go into detail, but there are tunnels that go right through Gaza and into the edge or, actually, in some instances into Israel itself. During this conflict Israel has discovered 31 tunnels. This is extremely disturbing. And they are big. When we think of a tunnel—this isn't like a little pipe for water. This is a tunnel where as many as two people could cross side-by-side going through and, in some instances, actually weapons being able to be put through. These tunnels are a very threat to Israel's existence.

In addition to the tunnels, the rockets that are pummeling Israel continue to be fired every single day.

We believe, for our allies, in the right to self-defense. We have signed memorandums of agreement to enable them, with their missile defense system, to maintain their qualitative edge.

Now, when they are in the very struggle for their safety and perhaps

their future, we need to be able to pass this important legislation.

We also know that when we pass this legislation, Iron Dome should stand alone. Many people who support the Iron Dome legislation, such as myself, want to also support those people who are also under threat.

That takes me to the children, because right now the children in Central America are under threat. And what are they under threat of? Well, I will talk more about that around 5:00. But what are they under threat of? They are under threat because of the narco drug dealers who have created the most vicious and violent gangs that have now almost taken over some of these Central American countries. They want to recruit the young men to be part of the gang, part of the drug trade, part of the couriers, part of what is involved in doing a drug trade. Then, when they refuse, they either threaten them with death or the most grisly and ghoulish of torture.

There are reported incidents, not in our classified briefings but in public media, of children being tortured to death because they refused to join a gang. They are literally fighting for their lives. These children coming to our border are fighting for their lives, and the way they fight for their life is to flee. They are fleeing the violence.

I know people are dismissive of some of this and they say: Oh, there you go. You are a soft-hearted social worker, you are a liberal, you love children. The answer is: Yes. Yes to all that. Yes, you betcha, I claim it; I own it; that is who I am.

But I don't do this because of some “gushy-poo” feeling here. I am doing this because of the actual documented violence in these countries, and I believe we need to respond to the needs of the children. Let them tell their case not only to a social worker—which is a good step, in my mind—but also to an immigration judge, and using the laws of our country, the legal criteria for asylum and refugee status, let's listen to the stories of the children. And if those children qualify for asylum and refugee status, then they should remain in this country. If they don't, there are other avenues for them to return home. But for gosh sakes, could we stop punishing the children for the crimes of the drug dealers and the human traffickers? Don't punish the children.

There are those who want to further militarize our border by calling out the National Guard. Well, what are they going to do when the children present themselves with little strips of paper saying what their name and their hometown is, and where their aunt is living in Langley Park, MD? That is not the job of the National Guard.

And if we want to use guns at the border, yes—don't use them about the children, use them about the drug dealers. And by the way, it is our insatiable, vociferous desire and appetite for drugs that has fueled this whole economy in these countries.

I am going to say more about this, but I do want to say that what is in this supplemental is the tools for people to defend themselves. For our friends in the Western States, this is money to protect themselves; and for firefighters—and gosh knows our local communities need that help; it is for a great nation such as Israel, our treasured ally, to continue to have the interceptor rockets to be able to defend itself; and it is also here that we take a look at the border, we honor our law in terms of determining refugee status for those fleeing from violence in their home country; and then we go after what is creating the violence which is right there in Central America against the narcotraffickers, because remember—and the Presiding Officer is very knowledgeable in this—if someone is willing to trade in drugs, they are also willing to view everything like a commodity. So they view drugs as a commodity and they view women and children, girls and boys, as a commodity, and they are then moved into human trafficking in the most vile, repugnant sexual trafficking.

We need to get some of our darker appetites under control, and we need to be able to fight. If we want to fight with guns, join with Central America and fight against the narcotraffickers.

I hope that clarifies the intellectual underpinnings of this bill, the compelling financial necessity, and humanitarian issues that are facing people in our own country, at our own border, and with a treasured ally.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON DISABILITY RIGHTS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I come before the Senate to call again for the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I would like to give a little history. We passed the Americans with Disabilities Act here in 1990. It was signed into law by President George Herbert Walker Bush on July 26, 1990—24 years ago last Saturday. That changed the face of America. Anywhere you go, you can see ramps and curb cuts and automatic door openers and accessible bathrooms and in education kids being integrated fully into schools under the IDEA and ADA. It really did change accessibility and also opportunity in the workplace, for example, for people with disabilities.

Some years after the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, the United Nations set up a committee to study

whether there should be a treaty, an international convention on the rights of people with disabilities. That committee drafted it after consultation with us here in the Senate. In looking at the ADA, in fact—I was told by one of the persons instrumental in this that the Americans with Disabilities Act, which we refer to as ADA, informed them on what they needed to put into the convention. That convention was sent out to member states for ratification in 2008. Since that time, 148 nations have ratified it, with one exception—well, there has been more than one exception, but one glaring exception is the United States.

Under our constitutional system, this treaty was sent to the President. The President sent it to all of his Departments to find out what laws we had that needed to be changed. So it goes to the Department of Commerce, the Department of State, the Department of Agriculture perhaps, and everywhere else to see what laws we would have to change to comply with this treaty. Well, it came back after about a year, and because the Americans with Disabilities Act was so good, we didn't have to change any of our laws—none—because we are the best in the world on it. It was sent to OMB to see if there would be any budget implications, and OMB said there were no budget implications either.

After that, the President sent it to the Senate for ratification under our Constitution. It was sent to the Committee On Foreign Relations. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts was then the chairman of the committee. They had hearings. In fact, the first two witnesses at the hearings were Senator JOHN MCCAIN and I. There were a lot of other people who testified, both Republicans and Democrats, disabilities leaders, disability rights advocates, and others. This was in 2011.

Then it was brought to the floor in December of 2012, and that was a lame-duck session. It turned out that 38 Senators—all on the Republican side—had signed a letter that we should not vote on a treaty in a lame-duck session. There were some other issues raised, but that was the big one. So we brought it up for a vote. In the Constitution, a treaty requires a two-thirds vote of those present and voting, and so we fell five votes short.

That Congress ended, so the treaty had to be resubmitted from the administration to the Senate. It went through another hearing process. I spoke with the ranking member on the Foreign Relations Committee about what we could do to advance it, and they wanted more hearings. So we did that. Senator MENENDEZ from New Jersey is now the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, and he had more hearings on it.

Thanks to the leadership of Senator MENENDEZ, the bill was reported out of the committee last week and it was put on the Executive Calendar yesterday. There has to be 3 days before they can

send it to the floor. They sent it to the floor on Monday, 24-hour layover, and it is now on the Executive Calendar ready to be brought up.

I understand we have a busy week this week and there are a lot of things happening. I suppose people could look around and say: What? There is not much happening around here today.

But we are in postcloture, and under the rules there is 30 hours of postcloture time unless time is yielded back, and evidently—I don't know if that is going to happen. I am hopeful that sometime today or late today maybe or tomorrow, we will have a unanimous consent request in terms of bringing up this treaty, this convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

So that is what I wanted to talk about today, but I wanted to give a brief history of where we are and why we are at this point.

During the past week we have seen extraordinary efforts to move forward with this treaty. As I said, Senator MENENDEZ, the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, has marked up the treaty and brought it out with a 12-to-6 bipartisan vote. The committee added new reservations, understandings, and declarations that thoughtfully addressed the concerns that have been raised, including the matter of a parent's right to decide how their children are schooled as well as issues related to federalism and sovereignty.

This week we are hearing from disability advocates from across the country. Yesterday afternoon there was a big rally on the Mall calling for passage of the treaty. Many of our offices have been flooded with calls and visits from people with disabilities, veterans groups, and business leaders asking us to vote on and pass this treaty. Businesses such as Walmart, AT&T, Sprint, and Coca-Cola have urged passage of this treaty. In the days ahead we will hear from many more calling for its passage.

Now let me talk about a few of the issues that have been raised. First, I will talk about the issue of sovereignty. Some of our colleagues continue to express concern about some aspects, particularly with regard to sovereignty and reproductive health. Let me talk about sovereignty first, but I want to say this first of all: It is important to address these issues thoughtfully and respectfully. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a bipartisan fashion did so last week when it approved a series of new reservations, understandings, and declarations.

For those who don't know what that means, every treaty we adopt has what are called RUDs—reservations, understandings, and declarations. What are those? Those inform other free nations on how we will adopt this treaty, how under our laws and the Constitution we will comport with that treaty. Just about every treaty we have has some reservation or understanding or declaration.

So the Foreign Relations Committee adopted new reservations, declarations, and understandings, but concerns remain.

Last week my good friend the senior Senator from Utah spoke eloquently about his genuine concerns about the loss of or possible loss of U.S. sovereignty. In answering my question as to why this convention is different from the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor treaty, he expressed his fear that the disabilities convention would “threaten American sovereignty and self-government.” The Senator from Utah stated that the child labor convention we passed in 1999 is the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The Senate adopted it in 1999. So the Senator from Utah says that convention gives authority to ratifying countries to determine whether they are in compliance with the convention while under the disabilities convention—the CRPD, as it is known—the U.N. determines whether ratifying countries are in compliance with their treaty obligations. On the Senate floor, my good friend from Utah stated that “the Disability Treaty gives the last word on whether a nation is in compliance to the UN, the child labor treaty leaves that entirely up to each nation.”

Well, the fact is that the review process of compliance is essentially identical in both the Worst Forms of Child Labor treaty that we adopted in 1999 and the CRPD that we are discussing right now.

Let me further explain that. When an ILO member—that is the International Labor Organization, under which that treaty was signed—when an ILO member state ratifies this convention, it is required to submit regular reports. Those reports are reviewed by the ILO’s independent committee of experts. Keep that phrase in mind—“committee of experts.” It is reviewed by them on the application of conventions and recommendations, and they are known as the committee of experts. The task of the committee of experts is to assess the extent to which the ratifying member’s legislation and practices are in conformity with the ratified treaty. This is an external review committee, and the United States has always supported this type of review. The process guarantees fairness and openness in the implementation of treaty obligations.

While it has been suggested that the United States should conduct its own compliance with treaty obligations, I ask my colleagues, would we be comfortable with all countries assessing their own compliance with important international standards? I don’t think so.

For example, take any treaty—take the START treaty, the arms control reduction treaty. Would we be content to say to Russia “Tell us how you are in compliance with that” and just accept their word for it? We wouldn’t do that. We wouldn’t do that with any

country with which we have a treaty. That is why there is always an external review process to see whether country A, B, C or D that has signed on to any treaty is in fact in compliance with it. You wouldn’t make a treaty and say: OK, Country X, tell us whether you are in compliance and we will just accept that. No one would do that. It goes back to Ronald Reagan’s phrase: Trust but verify. We will trust, but we want verification.

The Worst Forms of Child Labour treaty, the one we adopted here in 1999, has the same conclusions and recommendations as this committee of experts as far as external reviews. It is the same in the CRPD, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and sets up a “committee of experts,” just as it is under the Worst Forms of Child Labour treaty, to review whether a country is basically in compliance. Are they really implementing the treaty as they said in the treaty?

Again, we have the two committees of experts—the one in the CRPD and in the Worst Forms of Child Labour treaty, which was adopted here unanimously in 1999. The Senator from Utah supported that. The recommendations and conclusions of that committee of experts under the Worst Forms of Child Labour treaty that was set up in 1999 are not legally binding on the United States or any other country. Although these recommendations often have great moral weight and persuasive value, the findings cannot be imposed on any government. It is up to each ratifying member to determine whether and to what extent it will act upon those recommendations. That is the same as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This committee of experts will certainly go in and do external reviews of whether a country is in compliance or working to be in compliance. They may issue findings and conclusions and recommendations, but they are not binding on any country. They are not binding on the United States. Let me repeat: It is up to each ratifying member to determine whether and to what extent it will act upon those recommendations.

A review of practices is common whenever a nation undertakes an international obligation, whether it is by treaty or any other international agreement. This does not equate to forfeiture by the American people of our right to govern or of our sovereignty. It does not relate to any abandonment of our cultural and social values in America.

In terms of this external review of compliance, there is no substantive difference between the child labor convention we passed in 1999 and the U.N. disabilities convention that we hope to bring up. Both treaties have much the same reporting requirements, oversight mechanisms, recommendation process, and “committee of experts.” And just as in 1999 with that earlier treaty, the

United States is in no danger of losing any of its sovereignty with the disability treaty—none whatsoever. If we weren’t before, we aren’t now. These are recommendations.

Why should we be afraid of an external review by a committee of experts to see whether we are in compliance with this treaty on the rights of people with disabilities? It was modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, for crying out loud, and we were already in compliance. We are far ahead, quite frankly, of any other country. Why should we be afraid of any review of our laws and practices in terms of people with disabilities? We should not be. We ought to be proud of it. In fact, we ought to be proud of exporting the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Given these facts, I ask my colleagues: Why is it acceptable to have sufficient reservations to protect our sovereignty for a treaty about the worst forms of child labor and a treaty on torture and a treaty on degrading punishment and not be able to have sufficient reservations that protect our sovereignty when it comes to a treaty regarding people with disabilities? What is the difference? From my review of this issue, and the review of legal experts, there is no substantive difference to the threat to our sovereignty. As I have stated previously here, scores of Republican policymakers agree with me.

I have heard that some of my fellow Republicans are concerned about losing our sovereignty under this treaty. I will point out that former President George Herbert Walker Bush, who signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, is in strong support of this treaty. Are you telling me he doesn’t care about our sovereignty? I don’t think so. Former President Bush was a strong supporter. I kind of think he cares about our sovereignty. Since the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, every former Republican leader of this Senate—I am talking about Senator Dole, Senator Lott, and Senator Frist—supported this treaty. I kind of think they care about our sovereignty a lot too. I know every one of them.

Dick Thornburgh, former Attorney General of the United States under George Herbert Walker Bush, is in strong support of this treaty. Don’t tell me he doesn’t know what is in the treaty. He knows every legal part of it. He cares deeply about our sovereignty, and he says this is no threat to our sovereignty whatsoever.

The American Legion is a big supporter. Are you telling me the American Legion commander and all of those veterans are not concerned about our sovereignty? You bet they are. They know this treaty and have read the treaty, and they said it doesn’t affect our sovereignty. Every veterans group supports this bill, and they do care about our sovereignty.

I hope we can lay that issue aside. This does not impinge or threaten our

sovereignty any more than other treaties. Every treaty we have signed has a reservation that basically says a treaty shall be applied in the United States in accordance with the Constitution as interpreted by the United States. That is in every treaty we sign, and it says, basically, we are sovereign and our Constitution is sovereign.

There was a court case called the Bond case which was recently decided, I think in May, by the Supreme Court. A lot of people wondered whether that would affect this treaty. It was a case that was brought up by the United States against a woman for violating the chemical weapons ban treaty because she had been trying to poison one of her husband's lovers or something like that. The Supreme Court said: That is nonsense. Get out of here. Those laws are covered by the State of Pennsylvania, not by a treaty. So that kind of put to rest any idea that somehow this treaty overrode our Constitution—our federalism—and the fact that these criminal laws are State laws. That just happened in May.

The other issue that has come up is reproductive health. Some of our colleagues have also voiced concern regarding the provision on sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities as it was mentioned in article 25 of the treaty. For those not familiar with this provision, the treaty simply says "persons with disabilities have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability."

The article goes further and says that those countries ratifying the treaty shall "provide persons with disabilities with the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other persons, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health . . ."

Critics of the treaty say this phrase "creates and expands rights to abortion." That is not correct. This phrase has nothing to do with abortion. What it is about is equality and access.

Historically, people with disabilities have been disproportionately discriminated against when it comes to health care—especially women with disabilities around the world—because they are blind or have cerebral palsy or autism or any number of physical or mental impairments. They were often viewed as not being able to be mothers or wives or partners in a family.

In fact, because of this prejudiced attitude—which still exists in so many places around the world, and probably some places here in America too—women with disabilities were, and in many cases still are, denied such vital services as Pap smears, gynecological exams, breast cancer screenings, and cervical cancer screenings simply because they are disabled. Denying women with disabilities the same health prevention, screening, and intervention services that are provided to women without disabilities is bla-

tant discrimination, prejudicial, and unethical.

The entire purpose of article 25 of the U.N. convention is to address this prejudiced view of the world that has led to thousands of unnecessary deaths of women because they have not been afforded the same access to reproductive health care as women without disabilities. That is why that was put in there. It has nothing to do with abortion. Article 25 simply reflects the underlying principles of the treaty: equality and access for all. These same principles are the bedrock of our own Americans with Disabilities Act. It has nothing to do with abortion, but some people have whipped it up and said it does.

In some countries women with disabilities have been the most preyed upon. It is women with disabilities—physical and intellectual disabilities—who are the subject of maltreatment, mistreatment, and sexual abuse. All we are saying is they have to be treated the same as any other woman without a disability under the laws of that country. So if a country banned all abortions, that is their right to do so. They cannot then say: Oh, you may have an abortion if your unborn child is disabled. They can't do that. They can't make exceptions.

If they provide any kind of services, they can't say to one woman: Because you are not disabled, you get this service, but if you are disabled, you don't get it. No, no. Equality of access.

There are 71 countries that have absolute prohibitions, or significant restrictions on abortion, that have signed the treaty without reservations about reproductive health. Imagine that—71. They felt no harm would come from a reservation because they correctly determined that the treaty is no threat whatsoever to their sovereignty and their national laws limiting access to abortion.

Poland, a country with strict abortion limitations, was not going to sign this treaty because they were concerned about article 25. I will read the exact language of the reservation put in by the Nation of Poland:

The Republic of Poland understands that Article 23.1(b) and Article 25(a) shall not be interpreted in a way conferring an individual right to abortion or mandating state party to provide access thereto, unless that right is guaranteed by the national law.

Well, when they adopted that reservation, Poland signed it on the treaty. Poland's reservation states exactly what this treaty is about, a guarantee that women with disabilities will have access to the same health care services guaranteed to all other citizens by their national law. To say the treaty is about creating and expanding abortion rights is just plain wrong, and to make such a claim is utterly unfounded and unfair. It is unfair to women with disabilities around the globe. It is creating a false claim out of thin air with no other purpose but to prevent ratification of this important treaty.

Most of the concerns raised by my colleagues are serious concerns. They are also concerns that can be addressed by thoughtful reservations, understandings, and declarations to the treaty. Indeed, they have been addressed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They have acted, and now it is time for the full Senate to act.

Let us bring the treaty to the floor of the Senate. Listen to Senators' concerns, address those concerns, and then vote on the treaty. We owe this to millions of Americans with disabilities—our veterans and others who want the same rights and access afforded by our own Americans with Disabilities Act. They want it to apply to the globe. We owe this to our veterans who want to be able to travel and pursue opportunities in other countries, knowing they can enjoy the same rights and access they have here in America.

Senator MARK KIRK from Illinois said it very eloquently in a press conference we had with the veterans groups last week. He said: "Our veterans fought for freedom around the globe. They ought to be able to move freely around the globe."

We owe this to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, and countless companies that know that not only is this the right thing to do for veterans, it is the right thing to do for business. There are all kinds of markets opening all around the world for people with disabilities—new software, new kinds of equipment, new devices that are helping people with disabilities live more full and meaningful lives. A lot of that was developed here in America. I know our businesses would like to be involved with this treaty, to be able to be involved in raising the level of accessibility and opportunity for people with disabilities around the globe. Scores of religious groups want to see this treaty ratified.

In closing, it is time to bring this to the floor. As I say, I know Members have serious concerns and those concerns should be addressed. I believe the Foreign Relations Committee has addressed them. If not, then let's have a discussion about how we meet those reservations. We shouldn't just say I don't like the U.N., so therefore we shouldn't adopt it.

I think there are some people who maybe don't like the U.N. OK, fine. I remember when we passed the convention on the worst forms of child labor. I was in Geneva with President Clinton when he signed it. We came back, re-submitted it to the Senate, and I went to see Senator Jesse Helms to ask him to move this. There was probably no one in my 30 years of history in the Senate who disliked the United Nations more than Jesse Helms of North Carolina. So he went on to tell me just how bad the United Nations was but he would bring the treaty to the committee and have hearings and a markup. He called me as the first witness. I always appreciated that.

So Senator Helms, the chairman of the committee—the Republicans were

in charge of the Senate at the time—brought the convention to the committee and reported it out. I remember him saying one time he didn't like the United Nations, but if this makes them do something good for a change, he would be all right with it, and it passed the floor unanimously.

I say to those who maybe don't like the United Nations: Fine, that is their right; perhaps they have good and sufficient reasons not to like the United Nations. I have some problems with the United Nations myself at certain times with some of the things they do or don't do. But I see this in the same light as the convention on the worst forms of child labor. This makes countries change for the better through persuasion, not through mandate. No country has to change their laws because of what the committee on experts says, but through moral weight, through persuasion, through working with other countries under this umbrella on the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. If this causes countries to change their policies and make life better for people with disabilities around the globe, shouldn't we do it, even though we may not like the United Nations? As Jesse Helms said, if this makes them do something good for a change, we ought to be for it.

So I hope colleagues will listen to the veterans groups who are for it. All business groups I have met with support it strongly. Religious groups and disability groups are united behind this. Listen to our former Republican leaders, including former President George Herbert Walker Bush, President Bush; former Senator Bob Dole, the majority leader of the Senate, worked his heart out on this. He cares about sovereignty. He knows this is not going to take away our sovereignty. Every former Republican leader of the Senate—Senator JOHN MCCAIN—colleagues tell me Senator JOHN MCCAIN doesn't care about our sovereignty? I happen to think he cares a lot about our sovereignty. He gave a lot of his life protecting our sovereignty. MARK KIRK, Senator KELLY AYOTTE, Senator JOHN BARRASSO, Senator MURKOWSKI, and Senator COLLINS are all strong supporters of this.

I have been involved in disability policy since I first got here in 1975, starting in the House. Everything I have ever worked on, including Education of All Handicapped Children Act, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA Act Amendments later on in 2008—these were all nonpartisan. They didn't devolve into any kind of partisan issue. Now, that didn't mean that everybody voted for it, but it passed overwhelmingly with both Republican and Democrat support. That ought to be the case with this too. Yes, we should address the legitimate and honest concerns people have about home schooling, abortion, and sovereignty. I believe we can do

that with reservations, but I want every Senator to know that nothing this committee on experts will ever do under the CRPD takes precedence over our Constitution or over our laws. It does nothing to take away our sovereignty, and we can spell that out just as we have in every other treaty we have signed in the past.

So I hope we can bring this to the floor, and I hope we can have a discussion. I hope we can work these areas out and have strong support from both sides to pass this treaty and help change the face of the globe as we have changed the face of America for people with disabilities.

I see the Senator from Wyoming is on the floor. I was listing all the people who support the treaty, and one of the strongest supporters of this treaty from the very beginning has been Senator JOHN BARRASSO from Wyoming. I inadvertently, going through the names, left it off, but I see him here, and I apologize because he has been such a strong advocate for people with disabilities in this country and a strong advocate for people with disabilities in the world. I personally want to publicly thank Senator BARRASSO for his great leadership on this issue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I thank my colleague from Iowa for his kind comments. We have worked on this issue, and I do this as a physician who has taken care of patients in Wyoming for a quarter of a century. I have so many friends and there are so many folks who have had extra challenges in life, and I was happy to stand with Senator Dole and Senator MCCAIN and others in this effort. So I thank my colleague for his comments.

HEALTH CARE

As a physician, I come to the floor today as I have week after week since the President's health care law was passed because I have many concerns about the way this health care law is impacting families in my home State of Wyoming, as well as across the country—people who find out their rates are going up, they are paying higher deductibles, higher copays, higher premiums. They feel the government is in control, Washington is in control rather than them, when Washington decides if the insurance policy they have had and that worked for them is something they will be able to keep, and many times they weren't because the President's law said no, it wasn't good enough for them, even though the families in Wyoming are better able to make the decision about what is better and more important for them. They don't like it when the President tells them they need to buy insurance they don't want or need or can afford, in many ways, with a long list of provisions that Washington mandates be included.

I hear every week, as I did last weekend in Wyoming, from folks who have had work hours cut, resulting in lower

take-home pay because of the impact of part of the law that resulted in bipartisan opposition that says the work week is 30 hours. So people who are working part-time have had their hours cut to below 30 hours and have lower take-home pay.

I talked to ER doctors at home and around the country where I have trained and where I have gone to medical school. The Wall Street Journal even wrote about it last month: "ER visits rise despite the law. Health act isn't cutting volume." On the front page the lead paragraph said: "Early evidence suggests that emergency rooms have become busier since the Affordable Care Act expanded insurance coverage this year, despite the law's goal of reducing unnecessary care in ERs." It says: Democrats who designed that law hoped it would do the opposite, but that hasn't been the case.

I heard last weekend in Wyoming the story about all of these fake applications that—actually I guess the Government Accountability Office said let's see how well this works; is the Obama health care law working? So they made up 10 fake applications, sent them in, and they found out that actually a dozen fictitious applicants, online or by phone, using invalid or missing Social Security numbers—this is the Washington Post writing about this, but it was in stories across the country—invalid or missing Social Security numbers, inaccurate citizenship information—all but one of the fake applicants ended up getting subsidized coverage.

So here we are, a health care law that is supposed to provide a number of things, including integrity, and we find out that when the Government Accountability Office says, let's just put in a number of applications and see what happens, it is not working.

The administration set up the Health Insurance Marketplace in ways—we are hearing from the Government Accountability Act—that leave it vulnerable to fraud and a waste of taxpayer money. That is what we are dealing with in this health care law.

I know many Senators are preparing to head home, and they will be traveling around their home States in the month of August. I expect every Senator who goes home will hear from people in their State about very damaging side effects that so many people across America are feeling from the President's health care law. I hear it every weekend, but I hear it when I travel as well. As chairman of the Republican policy committee, one of my responsibilities is to study how policies that come out of Washington, such as the President's health care law, affect people all across America, and that is what I try to look at. So in looking around the country, here is what I found in Louisiana.

Last month, the Shreveport Times in Louisiana had an op-ed written by a Dr. Regina Fakner. The headline was: "Washington ties doctors' hands"—not

the doctor, not the hospital, not the patients—“Washington ties doctors’ hands.” The doctor who wrote this op-ed says she has practiced pediatric medicine in Shreveport since the early 1990s.

We need pediatricians. We need people to take care of children. We need primary care physicians. There is a gross shortage of nurses, of physicians, of additional health care personnel.

She says health care was and is impossible to navigate because it is wrapped in layers of red tape and government regulations. This doctor knows America’s health care system needed reform. We needed to do something.

That is what Republicans here in the Senate have been saying too: We need to do something. The American people wanted reform that gave them access to high-quality, affordable care. That is not what people got.

As this doctor writes in the Shreveport Times: ObamaCare only adds to the mess, she said. This is a pediatrician who takes care of lots of children. She says “patients and health care providers suffer for it.” The government does not suffer. The Senate Democrats who voted for it do not suffer. Patients and health care providers are suffering. She puts patients first, which is what doctors do.

The President’s health care law has added tens of thousands of pages of red-tape and Washington mandates—thousands of pages of red-tape and mandates. The doctor says in her op-ed that “this one-size-fits all approach limits patient freedom, while picking their pockets.” This is a doctor who talks to her patients every day. She says she has seen for herself in Louisiana how Washington is standing between her and her patients. Nothing should be between a patient and that person’s doctor—nothing—not a government bureaucrat, not an insurance company bureaucrat, no one. The doctor-patient relationship is one that is sacred.

This doctor’s experience is typical of what I am hearing and what we are hearing from all across the country from doctors.

Every Democrat in the Senate voted to pass this terrible health care law. President Obama says Democrats who voted for the health care law should, as he said, “forcefully defend and be proud of” the law.

Is the President proud that patients and health care providers such as this pediatrician are suffering because of his health care law and all of its dangerous side effects? Where are the Democrats ready to forcefully defend standing between Louisiana doctors and their patients? Where are they? I do not see them coming to the floor.

Democrats in Washington were so eager to pass the President’s health care law that they made a lot of promises, and they were not true. They said people could keep their insurance. That was not true. It seems as though 5 mil-

lion people received letters saying their insurance had been canceled, in spite of what the President had promised them.

People in Wyoming, people in Louisiana, people all across the country lost the insurance they had because it did not include all the unnecessary coverage the President’s health care law mandated.

Democrats said people could keep their doctor. That was not true. People in Wyoming, Louisiana, all across America lost their doctor because the new, narrow provider networks made people lose the doctor they had worked with, who treated them, who treated members of their family, whom they knew and trusted.

The President said the American people would save \$2,500 per year, per family on insurance premiums. Democrats in the Senate who voted for the law promised the same. I remember them standing here. I can see one after another saying that. It was not true.

People all across America are paying more than ever because of the health care law. Well, people in Louisiana specifically, where this pediatrician lives and works and takes care of patients, are paying a lot more.

There is an article from the Associated Press newspaper in Lake Charles, LA, last Thursday: “Health insurance price increases could top 10 percent for thousands in Louisiana.” That was the headline on the front page above the fold.

According to the article, Blue Cross—that is the largest health insurer in Louisiana—is planning to raise rates by more than 18 percent next year.

Is President Obama ready to forcefully defend these premium increases because of the law? He is the one who said premiums were going to go down. The American people see what has happened. The President did not say, well, they are just not going to kind of go up as fast. He said they were going to go down \$2,500 per year, per family. So we are seeing large increases all across the country.

Are the Democrats in the Senate proud that families in Louisiana are getting hit with another 18-percent premium increase in some locations? Higher premiums, higher copays, higher deductibles—all to pay for coverage that people do not want, do not need, cannot afford, but were mandated to have.

People in Louisiana were already paying more because of the President’s health care law. There is a recent study which found that health insurance premiums for an average 27-year-old man in Louisiana are over 100 percent higher this year than last year—double, double this year from last year. That is before they were forced into the ObamaCare exchange. Premiums for an average 64-year-old woman are \$2,000 more this year than they were last year. These are very expensive side effects for families in Louisiana as a result of the President’s health care law.

What does the President have to say about these outrageous rate hikes that he caused because of his health care law? What does he have to say to the people suffering from the costly side effects of the health care law?

Well, the President went to Kansas City, MO, in the last couple days. I think when he travels outside of Washington, the President should actually meet with doctors who live in those communities, doctors such as this woman, this pediatrician, who practices in Louisiana. He should sit down with the women whose children are patients of doctors such as this one, talk to the parents of these children about what the impact of his health care law has been on them.

The President should hear directly—directly—from these people about the devastating side effects of his health care law and how it is hurting them and hurting their families.

Every Democrat in the Senate voted for this health care law—every one of them.

Where are the Democrats willing to forcefully defend these costly and damaging side effects of their health care law? Democrats do not want to defend this terrible law and all of its devastating side effects.

Republicans are going to keep talking about this law. We are going to keep standing for American families who are being hurt by this law. We are going to continue to come to the floor to talk about stories that we hear from back home, what we hear from families in our home States, people who have lost their insurance and end up having to get insurance they do not need or do not want or are never going to use that is much more expensive than what they had before because the insurance that worked for their families the President said was not good enough.

We are going to continue to come and talk about the families who have seen their take-home pay go down because instead of being able to take that money home and working the hours they want, they have had their hours cut, not because they were not needed at work, not because there was not a demand for their services, but because of the health care law that says anybody working over 30 hours a week is then considered full time, and by the President’s mandate, they have to be supplied with health insurance at work.

So what happens? Businesses—and it is not just businesses—what we are seeing are school districts, counties, county governments, the whole State of Virginia—the different governing bodies—as to any part-time workers, they are saying: Well, we have to keep them below 30 hours because we cannot afford the insurance for these folks. So these folks are saying: Well, I lose my take-home pay. And the reason is the President’s health care law. School districts are having to say: Well, we can keep them above 30 hours and then have to pay for their insurance, but

then we are going to have to fire a number of reading teachers, fire the coach, fire the bus driver, fire someone else who works in the school.

That is not a way to help people in a community. That is not good for anybody's health. But those are the side effects of the President's health care law—a bill that so few people actually read before they voted for it because, as NANCY PELOSI famously said: First you have to pass it before you get to find out what is in it.

So we are going to continue to talk about patient-centered reforms, reforms that get people the care they need from a doctor they choose at lower cost. We are going to talk about restoring people's freedom, freedom to buy health insurance that works for them and their families because they know what is best for them. It is not Washington controlled; it is local decisions, families making decisions for themselves. And we are going to talk about giving people choices, not Washington mandates. Republicans are going to keep offering real solutions for better health care without all of these tragic side effects.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, there is a long list of items on the Senate agenda that are important to our country, including reforming the VA health system, addressing the crisis at our border, and ensuring funding is available for improvements to our roads and bridges.

While it may seem as though other issues are on the back burner, they are not. I want Arkansans to know I hear you loudly and clearly about your dislike for ObamaCare. Recent court rulings confirm ObamaCare is unworkable. Americans understand how the law infringes on our rights. The Supreme Court reserved the right for business owners to object to overbearing government mandates that would violate our religious beliefs.

The promises that were made were not true—like the law will lower our premiums. The reality is ObamaCare drives up health insurance premiums and copays, and that is what hurts our wallets.

Sean from Hackett, AR, wrote to me about a blood test his fiancée needed to help diagnose her illness. In the past, she had a copayment and the rest of the bill was paid by her insurance. But Sean wrote:

Normally it would only cost \$25 for a copayment. Now she received a \$200 bill.

You remember the other promises, such as you can keep your doctors and Medicare will not be cut.

Cyndi, who lives in rural Arkansas, detailed the problem she is having with Medicare because of ObamaCare. The changes made through ObamaCare have cost her both time and money. "Not everyone lives in the big city where clinics, doctors and hospitals are easily available," she wrote. "Many of

these facilities have closed their doors or the doctors are not accepting Medicare patients."

Connie, a registered nurse in Arkansas, told me that she is sick of ObamaCare and sees the problems her patients and family have to deal with under the law, which includes losing their doctors and the use of the local hospital. She wrote that the cost of the insurance payments increased and customers have to pay such high deductibles that they cannot afford to go to the doctor.

These failed promises are negatively impacting Arkansans. The ugly reality is people are struggling under this law. Amanda's story is what so many middle-class families are experiencing. Her family is already trying to make ends meet, but she says ObamaCare is not affordable. "There is no way humanly possible that my family can afford a monthly fee of \$654," she wrote.

ObamaCare costs American taxpayers more than \$2 trillion, but like in the case with Amanda's family, health care is more unaffordable.

I believe we need to start over by creating real reforms that lower costs, increase choice, and eliminate Washington's control of our health care. We need health care reform, but ObamaCare is not the answer. We need to transition the employer-based private insurance market toward one that allows for flexibility, choice, portability, and fairness.

Let's allow small business owners to pool together to purchase group insurance. Let's allow individuals to purchase insurance across State lines to increase competition. Let's expand health savings accounts and flexible savings accounts. Let's address medical malpractice reform and prevent lawsuit abuse.

I want you to know that unraveling ObamaCare and starting over is at the top of my agenda because health care needs to be much more affordable than it currently is under ObamaCare.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I join my colleagues here to talk about some of the stories we are hearing from the people we work for. I have been to the floor many times talking about the stories we are getting from families, from moms, from people trying to get that first job, from people who suddenly are no longer working the 40 hours they used to work because of the impact this has had on the 40-hour workweek.

Let me mention, as I am here between Senator BOOZMAN and Senator JOHANNIS, just two recent contacts we have had. We have had one from Joanne in Fulton, MO. She said her premiums went up from \$110 a month to \$311 a month—an increase of \$201 a month. She said:

Our monthly premium has gone up to \$311 a month. It is a large increase for us—it is nearly triple of what we paid before my hus-

band's retirement. It really takes a bite out of our budget.

She believes this would not have happened without what is happening in our health care system. I had a list of employees from one of our counties in Missouri the other day. Because it is a small county, they rate their employees. Each one of them pays a different premium, even though the county helps some with that premium. Everybody who is over 50 had their premium—that is going to be the premium next year—at least doubled. If you were 19, 20, 21, your premium was about what it had been the year before. If you were 51 or 61, your premium was twice what it had been before.

Then we got a letter from Jerrold of Kansas City, who said he has seen significant increases in his out-of-pocket costs, both for what he pays in premiums and what he pays for prescriptions. Jerrold said that instead of retiring at 65, he has had to keep working to help pay for his medical and prescription costs. Jerrold says:

I started paying \$131.00 a month for health and \$31 for prescriptions. As soon as ObamaCare was phased in my premiums went up to \$149.00 for health coverage and my prescription plan went to \$49.

Like many other people, he expects his plan to go up even more next year.

So these are real impacts on the lives of families, people who are paying more for the care they get and finding the choices they have as to where they get their care are less than they have ever been before. These stories keep coming. This is affecting the health care needs and the health care of individuals and families. We need to do something about it.

I thank Senator JOHANNIS for letting me tell those two stories before he took time to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I was here during the days when the Affordable Care Act was being debated, if you could call it that. I was here during the time when the effort of Senate Democrats was simply to keep 60 together so they could pass this bill under any circumstances. There were all kinds of promises made as to what this bill was going to do.

President Obama himself, when he talked about his plan for health care, said: My plan is going to reduce your premiums by \$2,500 a year.

But I could go on and on. I could spend the whole afternoon talking about the promises that were made. Now it is time though to take stock and determine whether those promises were in fact kept. The people of our States tell that story. A Nebraskan from the central part of the State wrote to me recently and said this: He and his wife are losing the health insurance they have had for over 21 years. Their premiums had doubled, threatening their retirement savings.

He went on to say, "ObamaCare has ruined the lives we planned and we

worked so hard for.” So let me compare what this gentleman from Central Nebraska has seen with the promises that were made. Remember that promise the President made over and over again. Members on the Democratic side of this body made the same promise. The promise was, if you like your plan, you are going to get to keep it—and the promise that your health insurance premiums would go down.

This gentleman from Central Nebraska is living proof that those promises were not kept.

Another Central Nebraskan wrote to me about the effect of the health care law on his wife’s job and on his family: “Because of the ACA she was cut back to less than 25 hours a week and lost our health insurance.”

He went on to say that their new premium is twice as much as the plan they liked and the one they lost because of ObamaCare.

So you see again we have a situation where we can compare reality with the promises that were made. The promises that your premium would go down, that you could keep the plan you had if you liked it went out the window for those two families.

A small construction company from the western part of Nebraska shared this with me: They will be paying an additional \$5,000 in ObamaCare fees this year. They expect to dedicate over 52 hours to report and comply. To them this is incredibly frustrating because these fees and hours of compliance have no direct benefit on their employees, their employees’ benefits or their business mission. It is just the Federal Government has now taken this small company and forced upon them additional costs and additional compliance requirements.

One of the most compelling stories comes from the mother of a family in Omaha, NE. She explained in her letter that they qualify for a subsidy on the exchange, but the options on healthcare.gov were still unaffordable for this family. The lowest cost plan had a \$9,600 deductible. Does the Presiding Officer know what a \$9,600 deductible means to most Americans and to most Nebraskans? It means that if they have the kind of illness or accident or whatever it is that requires significant medical care and if they have to eat through a \$9,600 deductible, that means bankruptcy.

When considering this massive deductible, she wrote to me and said, “It makes more sense to put more money away in savings and just pay for the whole doctor’s visit.” Due to the high cost of plans and their other expenses, she said, “We are forced to make the choice to go with no insurance.”

I was on the floor during this debate. Democrat after Democrat promised: You are going to have insurance now, promised that premiums would go down, promised that if you liked your plan, you got to keep it. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

With the new enrollment period on the horizon, the stories will of course

continue to roll in. The supporters of ObamaCare, just as when this bill was being debated, would like us to believe their train wreck has been cleaned up, the train cars are no longer lying next to the tracks, and this law is finally on track. But that is not consistent with recent headlines, reality, court decisions, inspectors general reports or just the average American who takes the time to write to us.

Politico reported earlier this month: “Most state health insurance rates for 2015 are scheduled to be approved by early fall, and most are likely to rise.”

This law should have never been passed, but now it is time to scrap this law and its Washington-knows-best mandates; instead, work toward solutions that truly do address the cost of care and give Americans the flexibility to choose a plan that makes sense for their families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, we are now several months into the implementation of ObamaCare. The dust has settled. People from my State, Hoosiers, continue to see the reality of this law. Unfortunately what they see is not what they had hoped for. Earlier this month a news report revealed that health insurance rates will increase fairly dramatically in “most States”—not just a few, not some but most. They said they are likely to rise in the coming year.

Unfortunately, my State is one of those States. Unfortunately, “likely to rise” is an understatement. “Dramatic increase” would be a better phrase. The recent headline from the Indianapolis Business Journal reads, “Indiana’s ObamaCare rates for 2015 are all over the map.” The first sentence of the article states, “Initial 2015 premiums filed for the ObamaCare exchanges in Indiana range from as high as a 46-percent hike to as low as a 9-percent cut.”

The article continues: “Those are the average changes in premiums proposed by the four health insurers that sold plans on the ObamaCare exchanges for 2014.” One of those insurance companies providing health care to the State exchange we now learn is requesting rates that range from a 31-percent to a 59-percent increase in premiums. So the picture ahead for those who have been incorporated into ObamaCare in my State is the shock of double-digit and significant double-digit increases in their health care costs, not to mention that under their current plans they are paying higher deductibles, which result in higher costs they first have to put out before they are reimbursed. But now there is an increase of significance for their premiums going into next year.

I know the majority leader said all the stories we have been telling about real people and their reactions to the Affordable Care Act, ObamaCare, are fiction. I was on the floor when he said that. We all did a double take because

we have been receiving thousands—literally thousands—of emails, physical mail, and phone calls. The phones are ringing off the hook about people alarmed over what they were experiencing signing up for ObamaCare, and, secondly, what the terms were going to be.

So we collected all of these. We have hundreds if not thousands of real live examples, not made up, not fiction, basically describing the impact on them and their families as Obamacare was put in place. Let me state one of those incidents. I will use just the first name. I do not want to put this person at risk for some kind of pushback. But Charles from Auburn, IN, emailed me and shared that his wife had just received a cancellation notice from her insurance provider. Charles said the notice indicated that the wife—he said:

They said my wife’s policy did not comply with the requirements of ObamaCare and the replacement policy—

Which she would have to take if she wanted the coverage.

—would be \$695.38 a month as compared to her current policy premium of \$316 a month.

By my math, that is over a 100-percent increase. That is more than a doubling of what he had paid before. Also, the notice said, “Your deductible will be \$6,000.” That is every medical expense that she has will have to be paid for before Charles and his wife can get any reimbursement. Now I wish these stories were fiction, but unfortunately I receive emails such as this on a regular basis.

Thousands of Hoosiers have lost their coverage that they liked, that they chose and relied on because of the implementation of Obamacare.

We have been talking about replacing this act with something far more sensible and something far more reasonable. Yet we have been denied the opportunity to go forward with offering any kind of amendments, modifications, repeal or any other process. That is unfortunate but not just for us. It is unfortunate for the country and unfortunate for all of those people whom we represent who would like to see modifications and a much more affordable and much better range of choices for the provisions of health care.

The 2,000-page ObamaCare law was sold to the American people on what now has turned out to be false pretenses. I believe we owe it to them to replace this law with some common-sense solutions that increase access to quality care without increasing costs. It is doable if we had the opportunity to do it. Unfortunately, we have been denied that, but the American people are speaking. I think they will continue to speak about the need for those reforms that will have to take place if we are going to provide affordable care for Americans.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, today there are wildfires burning across the West. I wish to speak for a few moments about some very important work that Chair MIKULSKI and her colleagues have done on the Appropriations Committee that is really built on a bipartisan proposal that Senator CRAPO, our colleague from Idaho, and I, with a large group of bipartisan Senators, are proposing to change the way in which forests are managed and reduce the likelihood of some of—what I call—these infernos. These are fires that are bigger, hotter, more damaging, and they act like a wrecking ball pounding at the rural West.

What has happened over the years is that the preventive efforts in the West in terms of our forests are underfunded. There isn't enough effort that goes to hazardous fuels management and thinning and programs that reduce the huge load of fuels on the forest floor.

Just this past weekend I was in Medford in rural southern Oregon and in Portland, meeting with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. They told me about the problems that Senator CRAPO and I are trying to address in bipartisan legislation that Chairman MIKULSKI has included in her appropriations bill.

The heart of the problem is that these prevention efforts are underfunded. When it gets very dry and very hot, and particularly when there is a lightning strike or a series of lightning strikes, what we have is an enormous fire in a hurry. All through the West there is an effort to try to share resources, and communities work together and try to share efforts—airial resources and others—but the reality is there is not enough money in the agency's budgets to put out those huge fires.

What happens then is the bureaucracy borrows from the prevention fund in order to have funds to put the fire out. Then we are on our way to two bigger problems. We are on our way again to a lack of preventive dollars because of this fire borrowing. Some of our colleagues call it fire robbery, but I am trying to be diplomatic. It is fire borrowing, I guess, if we want to be diplomatic. But we underfund prevention. Then, of course, we don't have enough money needed for suppression as well.

This trend that I have described is getting more and more pronounced and more and more serious. So what Senator CRAPO and I are proposing to do in order to put the focus on wildfire prevention is in effect to say that the most serious fires, especially in the West—the kind of fires that are dominating our TV screens night after night—1 percent of those infernos

ought to be treated like the major natural disasters they are and would be funded in the same way as other natural disasters, such as floods and hurricanes.

Specifically, the legislation that Senator CRAPO and I and others are advancing would move any spending above 70 percent of the 10-year rolling average for fire suppression outside of the Agency's baseline budget by making these additional costs eligible to be funded under a separate disaster account.

So far this year, more than 33,000 fires have burned a total of 1.6 million acres nationwide, and the numbers are growing by the minute.

Just this past weekend, visiting with our wonderfully talented folks at the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in Medford, they were telling me that their concern is that in southern Oregon it is very hot and very dry and there can be lightning strikes. They were concerned about the prospect of another Biscuit Fire, which we had at the beginning of the century and which burned 500,000 acres—really, our most destructive fire ever. That was what was on the mind of the firefighting professionals when I visited with them in Medford last Friday.

This year the administration already expects to exceed its firefighting budget by more than \$600 million, and that isn't going to surprise anybody in the West. In 8 of the past 10 years, the Forest Service has spent more than its wildfire suppression budget, requiring the Agency to engage in what I have just called "fire borrowing" to cover these wildfire suppression costs. The reality is that, in many cases, the borrowed monies are not repaid. In the cases where the funds are repaid, it is only through costly supplemental spending bills that Congress has to enact or by taking money out of future years' budgets.

So what we have is this kind of borrowing that is extraordinarily disruptive to the ongoing work the Forest Service and their contractors are in the middle of performing. And, I might add, what all this does is it makes it more expensive in the future and makes it less likely that we are going to get the important prevention work that is so necessary.

In our part of the world, I think it is fair to say that westerners are coming to consider that the Forest Service charged with managing the Nation's forests for multiple uses and users has really become something that more appropriately should be called the U.S. Fire Service, because in effect that is what this agency is month after month using more of its resources on.

What I was told in Portland last Saturday, having visited rural Oregon on Friday and Portland on Saturday—the specialists in Portland on Saturday told me that the fire season is 70 days longer than it was until recently.

So we have this challenge of more fuel load built up on the forest floor,

drier conditions, lightning strikes, and fire seasons lasting longer. That is a prescription for trouble in the rural West, and in fact that is what we are seeing.

My hope is that, as a result of the work that Senator CRAPO and I and others are seeking to do, we can have more hazardous fuel treatment, more preventive work that will be effective at reducing fire risks and lowering costs.

A fire in central Oregon this year slowed to a halt when it reached treated areas outside the city of Bend. I saw that when I was in Bend looking at the difference between treated areas—this preventative kind of approach—and areas that were untreated.

A study published by Northern Arizona University's Ecological Restoration Institute concluded that treatments "can reduce fire severity" and "successfully reduce fire risk to communities."

Based on Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture analysis, 1 percent of wildland fires represents 30 percent of firefighting costs. That is what Senator CRAPO and I want to address in our bill.

What we are saying is, for that 1 percent, the 1 percent that is really driving up costs, let's handle those fires as what they are, which are natural disasters. And then, instead of raiding the prevention money to put the fires out, we will be able to cause less problems in the future because we will have the kind of preventive work that is so effective that I saw in Bend and elsewhere.

It seems to me, as we see in a lot of parts of government, there is a choice. We can spend modest sums up front on prevention in order to generate significant savings down the road. If we have \$1 to spend, we ought always to try to put it in prevention and then target scarce resources to fight fires. To the greatest extent possible, we must target disaster money on those infernos that are bigger and hotter and more damaging and cost about 30 percent of the overall budget.

In summary, the legislation that Senator CRAPO and I and others are pursuing would fund the true catastrophic fire events under separate natural disaster programs. Routine wildland firefighting costs would be funded through the normal budget and appropriations process.

Oversight hearings, letters, and numerous discussions with the administration and colleagues helped to produce the approach that Chairman MIKULSKI has included. I remember not long ago being in Idaho, being hosted by our colleagues Senator CRAPO and Senator RISCH. We had Members from across the political spectrum. Congressman LABRADOR from the other body was there. We had progressive Members. This is something that is common sense. It just makes sense to make sure that the small number of

fires, these infernos which are dominating our news accounts, that we handle them from the natural disaster fund. Then let's put most of the money and allow the Forest Service, BLM, and professionals to put their focus and their resources where we can prevent as much of the problem as possible—and prevent it early on.

That is the point of our legislation. We are very grateful to Chairman MIKULSKI for her effort. I thank Senator CRAPO for his support. He and I have been at this with Senator RISCH, Senator MERKLEY, Senator CANTWELL, Senator MURRAY, Senator BENNET—Western Senators and others such as Senator BALDWIN and MANCHIN that understand the importance of national forests. Senator UDALL has been doing important work on this in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. All of the Western Senators are of like mind here. Chair MIKULSKI recognizes what we are looking at and the prospect that we would be leaving this week without this change to make better use of our resources. I call it legislative malpractice because we have an opportunity in a bipartisan way to make a real difference here. If our colleagues are outside the West, I would say it is a chance to spend scarce dollars more effectively. For us in the West, it is nothing short of survival.

Mr. President, I yield the floor

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I say to my colleague from Oregon, his leadership, along with Senator CRAPO, on this firefighting budgeting and fire borrowing issue—that is really what it is—is critical to all of us in Western States. Every single one of us has seen communities touched by these catastrophic wildfires as our climate is changing and we see fires get bigger and bigger. But we have solutions, and the solutions are bipartisan and common sense.

I can only hope that we are able to move quickly to make these budget changes. They will make a real difference for all of us up and down in the Intermountain West.

BORDER CRISIS

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I thank all of my colleagues who have been vocal about their commitment to address the Central American refugee crisis along our southern border.

We have heard the stories of unimaginable violence, of corruption, of instability in places such as Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala—factors that are driving many children to the United States and to other neighboring countries in Central America. In some cases these children are literally fleeing for their lives.

Our Nation has responded with a spectrum of attitudes toward immigrants ranging from hostile to downright hospitable. It is my hope that our attitude as a nation continues to be defined by the image of the Statue of Liberty and not by shouting protesters

holding signs labeled “Return to Sender” as they stand in front of buses full of Central American children.

I recently received a letter from a constituent in my home State of New Mexico whose grandmother, as a result of extreme poverty, left her family and emigrated by herself to the United States from Ireland at the age of 14 at the end of World War I. Brendan said that when he was growing up, his grandmother frequently shared this Irish proverb with him. She said, “Courage is the trust that your feet will bring you to where your heart is.” Brendan asked that I continue to remind my colleagues that the immigrants who arrive at our borders come by foot following their hearts and do so in the hope of building a better life.

Last week I sat down with Ambassadors from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, and we discussed how our Nation's approach to stemming the influx of unaccompanied children to the United States must be collaborative and get at the root cause of the dire situation in these countries. With out-of-control drug cartels and nearly 90 murders for every 100,000 persons annually, Honduras now has the highest murder rate in the world. Similarly, El Salvador and Guatemala have the world's fourth and fifth highest murder rates. There is no easy solution to these problems, but Congress has an opportunity and a responsibility to act on pragmatic measures before time and resources run out.

Secretary Johnson has warned that Immigration and Customs Enforcement will run out of money in August and Customs and Border Protection will run out of money in mid-September if nothing is done. With resources already running scarcer by the day, Customs and Border Protection won't have any other choice but to direct border agents away from other sectors of our southern border and into the Rio Grande Valley.

So let's be clear. Those who would choose not to support this emergency supplemental are putting our border security at risk. New Mexico, California, Arizona, and West Texas will all see fewer agents and fewer resources on our border if the House and Senate do not act.

This is no way to address a crisis. We must pass the Senate's emergency supplemental funding bill introduced by Senate Appropriations Committee chairwoman BARBARA MIKULSKI. This emergency funding bill includes important resources to help stem the current refugee crisis while continuing to treat these refugee children humanely as required by the law. This situation is an emergency, and we need emergency funding.

Passing the emergency supplemental would also allow the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice to deploy additional enforcement resources, including immigration judges, Immigration and Customs Enforcement attorneys, and asylum officers, as well as

expanding the use of the alternatives to detention program.

Instead of ensuring that we provide these necessary resources to address this crisis on our border, some of our colleagues are actually proposing that the solution is to actually weaken Federal child trafficking law and to roll back protections for unaccompanied child refugees seeking asylum. The proposal introduced by our colleague from Texas Senator CORNYN would weaken the 2008 William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Act and short-circuit justice in order to deport refugee children faster and without the due process afforded under our law.

According to a poll released Tuesday by the Public Relations Research Institute, 69 percent of those surveyed believe that U.S. authorities should treat the children as refugees and allow them to stay in the country if it is determined it is not safe for them to return to their home country.

Some would use this crisis to eliminate crucial child trafficking protection, punish some of our Nation's brightest DREAM Act students, and promote a narrow border-enforcement-only agenda. I believe we are a better nation than that, frankly.

Let's step back and remember that just 1 year ago the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill that included provisions to further strengthen the border but that would also protect refugee children and crack down on smugglers and transnational criminal organizations. Notably, the bill was widely supported by both Democrats and Republicans in the Senate. Public support and good economics have not been enough to convince House Republican leaders to hold a vote on immigration reform, but they cannot turn a blind eye to the current humanitarian crisis along our southern border.

The bipartisan Senate bill that passed more than a year ago includes provisions for family reunification and for the protection of children who have been the victims of human trafficking. The bill also includes measures that would address refugee and asylum laws.

The public, including faith-based organizations, educators, local elected officials, small businesses, and many others, overwhelmingly supports this balanced approach to immigration reform. However, here we are more than 1 year later, and House Republicans are still unwilling to even hold an up-or-down vote on the Senate's proposal. Each day the House fails to act on serious solutions to our broken immigration system is another day our Nation and our economy suffer.

The Congressional Budget Office reported that last year's bipartisan immigration reform bill that passed this body would reduce the budget deficit by \$197 billion—billion with a “b”—over the next decade and about \$700 billion in the second decade. In a companion analysis, CBO also estimated

that fixing our broken immigration system would increase our country's GDP—our economic output—by 3.3 percent in 10 years and 5.4 percent after 20 years.

The evidence is clear. Immigration reform is good for our economy, good for our workforce, and it is good for the future of the American middle class.

I am familiar with the promise America represents to its families. My father fled from Nazi Germany in the 1930s as a young boy. As the son of an immigrant, I know how hard immigrants work and how much they believe in this country and how much they are willing to give back to our Nation. Those of us who represent border communities understand the difficult challenges we face, but there are solutions before us that are pragmatic, bipartisan, and that uphold rather than compromise our American values.

In the short term we must approve the Senate's emergency supplemental bill, and in the long-term we should partner with Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to stabilize their nations and end the cycle of gang violence we see there. A key part of our long-term solution is for House Republicans to finally put the Senate's immigration reform bill on the floor for an up-or-down vote.

We in Congress have a historic opportunity to pass comprehensive immigration reform and to address root causes rather than just symptoms for a change. I believe we will have failed if the only immigration legislation we pass as a body in this Congress is to weaken legal protections for refugee children. With this in mind, I will continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that we address this humanitarian crisis and fix our immigration system once and for all. Let's seize this opportunity.

Mr. President, I see that I have been joined on the floor by the Senator from Florida, and I would ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with Senator NELSON.

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

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I thank my colleague for his leadership, and I wish to ask my colleague if he is aware of the testimony the commanding general of U.S. Southern Command, General Kelly—a marine four-star general—gave to the Armed Services Committee and to the Foreign Relations Committee recently, in the last couple of weeks?

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I am aware of the testimony of General Kelly, but given his role at SOUTHCOM and in particular its location in Florida and the fact that the Senator from Florida was there for the testimony, I would ask him to remind us exactly what General Kelly had to say about how we are or in some cases are not interdicting and dealing with the flow of narcotics and particularly

cocaine that has been at the root of so much of the instability and violence we see in these three Central American countries today.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, the Senator from New Mexico has put his finger on exactly the root cause of the problem. It is the substantial loads of cocaine that are coming into these three Central American countries; that because of the violence, because of the killing, the parents have three choices when their child gets on up toward their teenage years. Their first choice is to let their kid join the gang.

These gangs are criminal gangs, and they are tied in with the drug lords. The drug lords have taken over the country because of all the money that is being made from these big shipments that come in.

The parents have three choices: No. 1, let their kid join the gang; No. 2, go to their child's funeral; or No. 3, they become subject to the subtle and direct plea by the coyotes: Oh, for \$1,500, \$5,000, we can get your kid to the border and your child will be safe in America.

Why those three countries? Why are the children who have been showing up in the last several months at the border not coming from Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama? They are coming from three countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—because that is where the big shipments of drugs are coming from—from South America into those areas in a boat with 1 to 3 tons of cocaine. Once they get on land, they break them down into small packages, and they go through a very efficient distribution system that is drugs and criminal elements—they can distribute just about anything they want, including trafficking in humans. And they are going north.

So if Honduras is the murder capital of the world and if El Salvador and Guatemala are not far behind, how do you get at that immediately to stop the flow of children going north? You more effectively interdict the drug shipments. That is why the United States has been so successful.

General Kelly, the commanding general of Southern Command, tells us that sadly he has to sit there with his Joint Interagency Task Force—all the agencies of the U.S. Government arrayed together and headquartered in Key West—and they have to watch 74 percent of primarily these boats—not so much the flights; primarily boats because they can carry big loads of cocaine—get through.

If it gets to the point of voting for the supplemental, I would certainly vote for it, but it doesn't get to the root cause of the problem. What we have done—and I have shared this with as many people as I can, consulting with General Kelly. They boiled this down to \$122 million out of the President's request of \$3.7 billion, and the Senate Appropriations Committee has pared that down to \$2.7 billion.

This Senator is asking for \$122 million, and it will cover such things as

\$31 million for U.S. Government interagency task force maritime patrol craft; \$40 million for maritime patrol requirements to deploy U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachments; \$15 million for intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance by putting up contractor-owned Predators 24 hours a day, 5 days a week. That contract is being drawn up. If we did this, General Kelly could execute that contract immediately, and then you would start to see some results.

Mr. HEINRICH. If I understand the Senator from Florida correctly, General Kelly simply does not have the resources to do the job we have done historically in terms of interdicting cocaine moving north for the market that, frankly, is in North America—

Mr. NELSON. That is correct.

Mr. HEINRICH. —in the United States and Canada. They have to literally sit there and watch these narcotics go by without having the resources to stop them in their tracks.

Mr. NELSON. The Senator is correct. Whereas General Kelly—and I am just using him as the symbol since he is a four-star general. It is the Joint Interagency Task Force in Key West that is actually headed by a Coast Guard admiral. They can interdict, and do interdict, about 25 percent of those big shipments coming from South America. They go through the Caribbean on the east and also through the Pacific on the west. And because they have been effective at 25 percent of the shipments, what we are seeing is a shifting of those shipments. They are now actually sending more of them to the east—not only to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, but now to Puerto Rico, which is a U.S. territory. When they get those drugs into Puerto Rico—and that is American territory—they can ship them by mail from there to the rest of the United States and avoid detection.

Mr. HEINRICH. My understanding is that the resource situation in Southern Command has changed so dramatically in recent years that not only is this interagency task force limited, but they have literally canceled more than 200 engagement activities and multi-lateral exercises with our partners in the region who can multiply that effect and interdict even more narcotics as they are moving forward.

Mr. NELSON. The Senator is correct. As a matter of fact, the staff of the Senate Appropriations Committee, with whom I have consulted, is very familiar with the great operation of the Joint Interagency Task Force to go after these drugs. As the Senator from New Mexico said, you can imagine their frustration when they know about the boat shipment, and sometimes they can watch it from their overhead assets, and they can't do anything about it.

As a result, look at what has happened over the last several months. We are trying to solve the problem on the border. We have all of these children

showing up at the border. We ought to solve that problem. We need to go back to the very beginning and stop what is causing this problem.

Mr. HEINRICH. The Senator from Florida also brought up another issue that I think is worth exploring. It is my understanding that he was recently briefed on the relationship that exists between these drug cartels and the entities that are actually engaging in human trafficking and moving people, for a fee, through Central America and Mexico and to the U.S. border. Can the Senator tell us a little bit about the nature of that relationship?

Mr. NELSON. The Senator is correct on how all of these things are interlocked. You can imagine how a sufficient quantity of drugs, which is worth so much, is a corrupting influence on any kind of law and order. As a result, the systems of governments—and Senator KAINE and I both met with the President of Honduras. He is trying as hard as he can. He has a bounty on his head by these drug lords because he is opposing them. The judicial system is corrupted. The local police are corrupted. When that happens, then you can imagine when other criminal activities occur, in addition to other drug activities, such as human trafficking, and terrorists potentially being utilized in these efficient delivery networks, then it is all the more a threat to the national security interests of the United States.

I think the U.S. Congress and the U.S. administration better wake up to the fact of what is happening right under our nose and get at this, in addition to solving the problems that we see that are a symptom, ultimately, of the root cause—the creation of a whole criminal network that is, in large part, fueled by the drug trade.

Mr. HEINRICH. If the Senator from Florida will yield for a minute, the sad thing is it didn't used to be that way in this part of Central America, and I know that for a fact because my wife and I traveled there 15, 16 years ago. We traveled extensively in Honduras, and at that time these gangs simply did not have the influence. They did not have this level of destabilization and they did not have this murder rate.

I always joke about trying to drive into Tegucigalpa, and I would not recommend it to anybody who has not had time to acclimate to the speed and crush of cars in that capital city, but it was a completely different country at the time. We traveled extensively in urban areas in San Pedro Sula and rural areas such as Santa Rosa de Copan, and it was an economically challenged country.

For those folks who have claimed that all of these immigrants are simply heading north out of economic desperation, the economic situation has not changed all that much. It is worth looking at the rest of Central America. The surrounding countries, such as Belize and Costa Rica and other countries in Central America, are also seeing refugees from these countries.

Nicaragua, which has substantial economic challenges right now, is losing economic immigrants, and those immigrants are not making it to our southern border in any substantial numbers. In fact, less than a year ago, I was in Costa Rica and many Nicaraguans are working in Costa Rica because the economy is better there. Yet we don't see them showing up—especially the unaccompanied minors, 7, 8, 12-year-olds—at our border by themselves. They are not being driven out by the extreme violence we have seen in these three nations where the drug cartels have such a disproportionate influence on their country's stability.

Mr. NELSON. If the Senator will yield, to underscore his point, we can look at the extraordinary success of Plan Colombia. Outside of Central America—if you go a little further south, you are on the continent of South America. And lo and behold, 15, 20 years ago, a large part of Colombia was controlled by elements that were controlled by the drug lords. With the assistance of the United States and extraordinary heroism on the part of the Government of Colombia, we have seen the Government of Colombia take back control of most of its country. Even though cocaine is still grown there and the FARC is still operating, their criminal element is a diminished insurrection of what it used to be. If you visited a place like Bogota, the capital city, it was not safe to go out alone and walk on the streets. Now you can easily walk on the streets. The situation there has changed.

We are seeing the same replicated now in Central America where the drug lords have basically taken over by buying off people with considerable money, and therefore it makes it very difficult to have the rule of law in those struggling governments, as it is for the President of Honduras, who is trying so hard to bring back his country.

Mr. HEINRICH. If the Senator from Florida will yield for a moment, having formerly served on the House Armed Services Committee, I know the Department of Defense budget is somewhere in the order of \$550 billion. Surely SOUTHCOM must have a substantial amount of resources to be able to meet this, right?

Of that \$550 billion, does the Senator from Florida know how much actually goes to Southern Command?

Mr. NELSON. What this Senator knows is that before the sequester started hitting the defense budget—even though we were conducting a war in two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq—with all of the multiplicity of threats that are around in the region, including what we see now with ISIS between Syria and northern and western Iraq, the Department of Defense had to make some hard choices. They had to cut back because of this mindless budgetary meat ax called the sequester, and as a result they had to set their priorities.

When they came down to it, they had to support the troops out in the field

and had to cut back on other commands. The U.S. Southern Command is one of those commands that was cut back. But now we are seeing the lack of wisdom to these budgetary policies—sequester—and the scarcity when you cannot allocate the defense resources to other agencies. Remember, this is a Joint Interagency Task Force. We are now seeing the effects of that in what has been on the front pages of the newspapers which is reporting all of the children coming to the border.

By the way, the children are just a diminutive percentage of the total people still coming to the border. I can't remember if it is 20 percent or 40 percent, but it is something well less than half of all of the people who are still coming to the border. But, of course, the children, because of the humanitarian crisis for them, are the ones who have received the attention.

If we know there is a problem, how do we fix the problem? Well, we need to go back to the root cause, and that is the case I have been making on that side of the aisle and on this side of the aisle. Yet we are at this point of impasse, and needless to say, it is very frustrating to this Senator.

Mr. HEINRICH. I thank the Senator from Florida for continuing to be an advocate for this cause. I know that Southern Command's annual budget now is about \$1 billion—literally \$1 billion out of \$550 billion in the Department of Defense. Given the necessity of engaging with Central and South America on these issues, I think it is time to reevaluate, in terms of resources but also in terms of priorities, how we look at Central and South America, to reengage with our neighbors and try to address some of these issues at the root level instead of always at the symptom level.

I see we have been joined by our esteemed chair of the Appropriations Committee, Senator MIKULSKI of Maryland. So I thank the Chair for allowing the Senator from Florida and I to indulge in this colloquy. And, once again, I wish to say how much I hope we take this opportunity to do something, not just about the symptoms of the current crisis which has to be dealt with, but also the underlying causes of this crisis.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I think we have just heard something really interesting and I think—excuse me. The way the Senator from New Mexico concluded—was the Senator from California scheduled to speak next?

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I believe so.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I thought I was at 4:52. I didn't mean to jump the line. I really do want to hear from the Senator from California, the chair of the intelligence committee, as well as the chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security of the Judiciary Committee. She is a Senator with a lot of experience, and I look forward to her remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I thank the Senator. I wish to begin by saying the Appropriations Committee is in very good hands. Chairman MIKULSKI has done an excellent job, and I strongly support this supplemental that she has put together.

I wish to give my colleagues just some brief background of my involvement in the unaccompanied alien children issue. It began around 1999. On Thanksgiving Day, a 5-year-old in an inner tube off the coast of Florida, 3 miles out, was picked up by a fisherman. His name was Elian Gonzalez. The fisherman rescued him and he was taken to a hospital, but his mother and 11 others on the raft had drowned in their attempt to come to the United States from Cuba. That launched in this country a major debate about an unaccompanied alien child, whether he goes back to his father or whether he remains with his uncle in Miami.

Then, secondly, I am home one day and I turn on the television set, and I see a 15-year-old Chinese girl who had been placed on a container ship from China by her parents to flee China's rigid family planning laws. She came to this country. She was alone. She was desperate. She was picked up.

I saw her asylum hearing. She was unrepresented. She was shackled, her wrists were bound, and big tears were rolling down her face. She couldn't understand a single word that was spoken. She was held in a jail cell for eight months and in another detention facility for another four months after that. She eventually received asylum in our country, but she unnecessarily faced an ordeal no child should undergo.

At the time, she was only one of 5,000 other foreign-born children who were apprehended in the United States in need of protection. I remember thinking that that such treatment was terrible, and I had to do something.

In 2000, I introduced the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act. I also pushed for the change in the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which successfully transferred the responsibility for the care of unaccompanied alien children from the former Immigration and Naturalization Service to the Department of Health and Human Services.

However, that change by itself was not enough to ensure that unaccompanied children were properly treated. Therefore, over the next 6 years, I continued to consult with relevant Federal agencies, children's advocates, immigration attorneys, House Members such as ZOE LOFGREN on the House Judiciary Committee, and fellow Senators.

Finally, in 2008 the legislation was included, amazingly enough, by voice vote in both Houses, as part of a larger trafficking bill, the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. It was signed into

law by President Bush on December 23, 2008. It took effect 6 months later. That year, the number of children was in the vicinity of 8,000. It provided the framework for how unaccompanied children would be treated while in the United States and for their safe and orderly return to their home countries without undue delay if they did not qualify to stay.

We now have a dramatically escalated situation that was not foreseeable at that time. Last fiscal year 2013, 24,000 unaccompanied children arrived in our country. This year more than 62,000 unaccompanied children have arrived in our country, and the Department of Homeland Security is preparing for as many as 90,000 such children to arrive in the country by the end of this year.

The numbers are so great and so unprecedented that our Federal agencies understandably are having difficulty carrying out the procedures and timelines in place. I have sent members of my staff in California to every Office and Refugee Services shelter in the State, and they have sent me photos and their impressions. I wish to take a moment to thank all our people, whether it is Border Patrol or ICE of Homeland Security or anybody else—such as Health and Human Services—for the excellent job they are doing. I saw 8 to 10 facilities through pictures and reports, where children were in bright rooms, had beds with covers, and a day program. So, every effort has been made.

But the numbers are so great and unprecedented that the difficulties continue. When we run out of money, there is going to be a different story.

But we must remember that the children at issue, who are unaccompanied, are primarily from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, three Central American countries which are deeply troubled. Many have entered as victims, I am sorry to say, of rape, abuse, poverty, and above all, violence.

They are alone, subject to abuse and exploitation. Many are young and unable to articulate their fears, their views, or testify about their needs as accurately as adults can. Considering this, there is no other option but for us to help and continue to treat them humanely, with compassion and due process. That is what this supplemental does.

I have met with Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, and the head of the Department of Health and Human Services, Sylvia Burwell, and both tell us their agencies run out of funds by September. We must responsibly fund these agencies, for not only are they managing the current humanitarian crisis at our border, but they are also charged with protecting human life and our homeland security.

With this funding, not only can we preserve our commitment to treat children as the children that they are, we can improve the way that the current law is being administered and more efficiently put our resources to work.

Earlier today, I met with immigration judges from the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office of Immigration Review. They informed me they are desperate for increased resources with which to handle not only the influx of children's cases but also a current backlog of 375,000 cases. Due to there being only 243 immigration judges across the country, immigrants today wait 587 average days for a hearing. That is one year and 7 months before they have the opportunity to come before an immigration judge.

With adequate funding from this supplemental, which provides for immigration judge teams, legal representation and services, government immigration litigation attorneys and courtroom equipment, among other things, this crisis can be managed and make the processing of children more efficient.

One of the judges who sits in Miami told me that through her court where a child has representation, a voluntary return to the country of origin was able to be achieved in a majority of her cases. So the majority of children actually took voluntary departure and returned to their countries. A judge can't make a phone call, but a counsel can—the attorneys could make the calls to do the necessary preparation and see that a safe home could be arranged. Because of this representation, cases are processed more quickly and children could safely return.

I understand there has been concern that unaccompanied children will not appear for their immigration court proceedings. That is simply not true. The fact is, whether represented or not, 60.9 percent do appear, and the number increases to 92.5 percent when represented by counsel. So these children do get before a judge—60.9 percent of them, and if they have a lawyer, 92 percent.

With this supplemental funding, the immigration courts, with help from legal representatives, would be able to hear more quickly immigration cases and determine with justice who may stay and who must go.

I was contacted recently by Winston Lord, a former U.S. Ambassador and Assistant Secretary of State, who is all too familiar with managing situations of international crises while preserving our national interest. In reflecting on the current crisis, he acknowledged the need for effective border control and immigration enforcement to ensure national security and a comprehensive solution. However, he also identified the heart of the matter here: "These challenges . . . need not be met by using ineffective and indiscriminate approaches that harm innocent children."

He is right.

We are a great Nation, capable of safeguarding our national security while simultaneously proceeding with humanity in addressing this crisis, and any future challenges that this country faces. This problem demands action now to provide these agencies with the funds they need to meet this crisis.

Now, if we don't pass this, and if these departments run out of money, and if facilities have to be closed, and if there is nowhere for these children to go, let us think for a moment what happens to them. Should they experience the same thing in this country they have back home? What will they do? And what does that do to our conscience?

I think this supplemental is well put together. The chairman of our committee has gone through it with a fine tooth comb. She has reduced it in size. I think it is well representative of the situation that dramatically needs funding. So I really hope there is a heart in this body and that this supplemental appropriation is approved.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, to the Senator from California, I thank her for her excellent statement. She brings such experience and expertise. It is very much appreciated. Has the Senator looked at my supplemental recommendations where we have actually added money for judges and then support to pro bono lawyers willing to represent children?

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Well, that is exactly right. The chairwoman's supplemental does that. That is really what makes the difference for the child. If a child can't speak the language and if a child is held in a jail cell and if a child is shackled and handcuffed before a judge, and a child has nobody to help them and no one they know in this country, what can they do except cry? That is what I saw directly myself, and that is what sort of awakened me then to a problem, which was just 5,000 a year in the start of this. Now we are at 54,000, and probably 90,000 before the end of the year.

Ms. MIKULSKI. That is right.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. So I thank the Senator for her support and her energy and effort that she has put forward.

I hope this body does the right thing.

REMEMBERING ADMIRAL CHUCK LARSON

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I would like to continue the discussion on the urgent supplemental. But before I do, I want to say that the senior Senator from Arizona is on the floor, and I want to say something heartwarming to my colleague. I say to the Senator from Arizona, you are a graduate of the Naval Academy, class of 1958. We both have a very dear friend who has passed away, ADM Chuck Larson.

Admiral Larson served with distinction in the Navy. He did many tours of duty in the defense of our country but also did two tours of duty at the U.S. Naval Academy, where I came to know him, and then subsequent to that there was the wonderful role that he played in education and transformational leadership.

I know he was a good friend of the Senator from Arizona too. So I would like to express my condolences to you

and to the—of course, then it was guys only at the Naval Academy—class of 1958. I was the class of 1958 at Mount Saint Agnes College. We probably saw each other at a tea dance or two. I was the chunky one over there, not in the corner, though. But I just wanted to express my condolences. What a great class that seems to be. I hope we can work together on something that would truly recognize Chuck Larson and the great transformational leader he was.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have a colloquy with the Senator from Maryland.

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

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. I would say first of all to the Senator from Maryland, on behalf of all Naval Academy graduates and all of us who love the Naval Academy, your support of the Naval Academy has been consistent, unswerving. You have been probably the staunchest supporter of the U.S. Naval Academy I have ever had the privilege of encountering. I want to also tell the Senator that the devotion she has extended to the Naval Academy is reciprocated by the Naval Academy and its graduates to her. I thank her for that.

Yes, Mr. President, I say to my colleague from Maryland, a dear and beloved friend, ADM Chuck Larson passed away. I would be honored to join with her in any way that we could to honor his memory. I would just like to point out that the Senator from Maryland was heavily involved when there was a very serious cheating scandal at the Naval Academy. Senator MIKULSKI led the investigation and demand for correcting that situation, and Admiral Larson was called back from retirement to be the Superintendent of the Naval Academy, on the recommendation of the Senator from Maryland—the only naval officer in history who served as Superintendent twice. And he put the Naval Academy back on the right track.

I would like to say, again, that he mentioned to me often the consistent support for reform, for the institution, and they are incredibly proud of her representation not just of the people of Maryland but specifically of that wonderful institution. I know I speak for Chuck Larson when I say that.

I thank you.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I thank the Senator very much. I love our U.S. Naval Academy. But when you have great leaders, we want to in some way be able to memorialize them in a way that they inspired this ongoing, this next generation, and the generations to come about really what a great leader is and what value-driven leadership is all about.

So I look forward to working with the Senator from the Naval Academy and the State of Arizona.

Mr. President, I would also like to continue the discussion on the urgent

supplemental and the crisis—many people call it the crisis—at our border. Well, we have a surge of children at our border because of the crisis in Central America. The crisis is in Central America, creating a surge of children desperately coming across our borders to seek political asylum.

I would hope that when we look at this urgent supplemental, we understand what we are trying to do. Yes, provide humane care for the children, real support for judges and other legal assistance to determine their legal and asylum status and, at the same time, to do the prevention in Central America, by going after what the surge is all about. The surge is about the escalating narco criminal-driven violence in these countries.

People will say: Well, what does that mean? It means that when you look at where the children are coming from, they are not coming from every country in Central America. They are coming from three countries in Central America. They are coming from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, but they are not coming from Nicaragua and they are not coming from Panama and they are not coming from Costa Rica. Why is that? The reason is because the violence rate is not as high. Yes, in these countries, particularly in Nicaragua, the poverty rate is the same as the other three. So why are they coming? They are coming because of the violence, and this is what we need to be able to deal with.

Last week, along with many Senators, I met with the Ambassadors from the three countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. At the invitation of Senator MENENDEZ, the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, I met with the President of Honduras, the President of Guatemala, and the President of El Salvador to talk about these issues, to say: What is it that we need to do to deal with these issues?

This is what they talked about. They talked about the violence coming from the drug cartels and organized crime—organized crime—drug cartels fueled by America's insatiable demand for drugs. They have worsened in these three countries.

Then there is the recruitment. The narco criminals have gone after the children to recruit them, either for their profit or for their pleasure. I have to talk about this in a way that civilized people should not have to hear that this is going on against children in our own hemisphere. This is our own hemisphere. When I talk about the recruitment of children for profit or for pleasure, that is exactly what they are talking about—to recruit the children to be part of gangs, violent gangs, gangs to engage in narco trafficking, to engage in extortion, to engage in murder, to engage in intimidation. This is the particular targeting of boys—the particular targeting of boys to recruit them for the gangs. And if the boys do not want to join the gang and they resist, they hide, they try to run away,

they are often grabbed, many sometimes are kidnapped, threatened with torture or their mother or their grandmother or their sister is threatened with either death or violent sexual attack. All sexual attack is violent, but they talk about it in ways that I will not discuss on the Senate floor.

Then there is the recruitment for profit—yes, to make sure that maybe they are couriers for the drug trade, but also to recruit, nab or force young children to be involved in human trafficking and sexual slavery.

But we have to deal with this. We have to stop the violence with a tough battle. We have to go after the cartels, and we have to also really begin to deal seriously with our addiction to cocaine and to heroin.

When you talk to the President of Honduras about the drugs in his own country bound for the United States, he talks about how they smuggle drugs, and they smuggle children along the same trade routes. It is good trade to traffic in drugs and it is also good trade to traffic in women and children. You see, to the drug dealers, to the narco traffickers, to the seven organized crime units—and, yes, we know who they are and where they are; we just need to marshal the resources of our country and the hemisphere to go after them. We know who they are, where they are, what they do, and how they do it. They look at women and children, boys, as well as girls, as commodities to be sold across countries and across borders. My God. And we want to blame the children?

We hear: Let's send them back. Send them back to what? This is why these children are on the go. This is why these children are on the march. And the children do not care how they get here, as long as they escape the violence.

This is why we have included money of over \$112 million to the Department of Homeland Security for enforcement—no, not National Guard at our border, but really moving assets to Central America to deal with law enforcement, to strengthen the courts, and to be able to deal with the issues of narco trafficking and organized crime in their own country.

We also know that while we are doing this type of intervention down there to go after the smugglers, coyotes, and human traffickers, we also need to deal with the fact that when these children are here, they have the right to seek legal asylum. Now, as Senator FEINSTEIN pointed out, there are only 240 immigration judges in the country. The fact is there is a backlog of over 100,000 cases. These kids move to the front of the line, but even if they move to the front of the line, it could be as much as 2 or 3 years before their cases are heard. This is not right. It is not right for them and it is not right for our country.

So I have more money in this bill for more immigration judges to resolve the asylum cases, additional legal rep-

resentation for the children, including bilingual representation, and the kind of backup and support where pro bono lawyers are coming to the aid to be able to do this.

I hope we pass this supplemental so we can do this.

Second, I made the trip to the border. I will talk about this on another day. I know my time is exceeded, but what I wanted to emphasize today is why these children are coming, the legal services we need to present here, and I look forward to talking more about this. I know my time is up, and I do want to be courteous to my colleague from the other side of the aisle.

So let's pass this bill. Let's do the interdiction in Central America. And let's enforce our laws here and provide the legal representation the law requires.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business for as much time as I may consume.

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

SYRIA

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, quite often—on numerous occasions—I have come to the floor of the Senate to talk about the ongoing tragedy of Syria, not in the belief that any action may be taken of any real impact, although it has always been my hope and prayer, but because my conscience dictates that I come to the floor of the Senate and discuss one of the great and unfortunate and shameful chapters in our history.

Last February I came to the floor to appeal to the conscience of my colleagues and fellow citizens about the mass atrocities that the Assad regime is perpetuating in Syria. I brought with me at that time a series of gruesome images that documented the horrors the Assad regime has committed against political prisoners in its jails across that country. Those images were smuggled out of the country by Caesar—Caesar—a Syrian military policeman who risked his life and the lives of his family and friends to show the world the real face of human suffering in Syria today.

At the time I had hoped that those images would cry out to our national conscience and compel our great Nation to help end the suffering and genocide of the Syrian people. How could anyone—how could anyone—look at those pictures and not press for immediate accountability and an end to those mass atrocities?

In the months since those images were first made public, United States and European investigators have pored over the images and concluded that not only are these images genuine but they are evidence of an industrial-scale campaign by the Assad regime against its political opponents. According to the State Department, these photo-

graphs are evidence of systematic atrocities not seen since Hitler's Nazi regime exterminated millions during World War II.

Stephen Rapp, the State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes, stated that:

This is solid evidence of the kind of machinery of cruel death that we haven't seen frankly since the Nazis. It's shocking to me.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, after a briefing to the U.N. Security Council members, stated, "The gruesome images of corpses bearing marks of starvation, strangulation and beatings and today's chilling briefing indicate that the Assad regime has carried out systematic, widespread and industrial killing."

Despite the statements from these and other senior officials, the administration has yet to finish its investigation. Perhaps when the administration does complete its forensic analysis of the evidence provided by Caesar, President Obama will decide it is finally time to take action in Syria and prevent the continuation of mass atrocities that according to his Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities is "a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States."

I have to tell my colleagues I am not hopeful. In the time that the investigation to prove what we all know to be true has been underway, approximately 40,000 more people have died, another 1 million people have been forced from their homes, and over half of Syria's population is now believed to be in dire need of food, water, and medicine.

The Assad regime continues to bomb northern Syria, using crude cluster munitions known as barrel bombs with the sole purpose of terrorizing and killing as many people as possible when indiscriminately dropped from Syrian Government aircraft on schools, factories, and mosques. It continues to raze entire neighborhoods for no military purpose whatsoever, simply as a form of collective punishment of Syrian civilians.

It continues its "surrender or starve" famine campaign, starving people to death by denying entire neighborhoods any access to food or water. Just last month the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which has been tasked with destroying Syria's chemical stockpiles, announced there is credible evidence that toxic chemicals are still being used in a systematic manner in Syria.

Indeed, this kind of inhumane cruelty is a pattern of behavior for the Syrian government. As early as August 2011, a damning 22-page report was issued by the United Nations human rights office, which concluded that Syrian Government forces had committed crimes against humanity by carrying out summary executions, torturing prisoners and harming children, the evidence of which we now see clearly in those images.

The report prompted President Obama to issue a statement calling for President Assad to step down. The President declared:

We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a Democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.

That was 2 years ago. The President ended this statement by saying, "It is clear that President Assad believes that he can silence the voices of his people by resorting to the repressive tactics of the past, but he is wrong."

Following the President's statement, there was no shortage of administration officials publicly professing that President Assad's days were numbered. In December 2012, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told a NATO gathering that Assad's fall was "inevitable." She later repeated, "It is time for Assad to get out of the way." That was from our then-Secretary of State.

That same month White House spokesman Jay Carney echoed Clinton's proclamation stating:

Assad's fall is inevitable. As governments make decisions about where they stand on this issue and what steps need to be taken with regards to brutality of Assad's regime, it is important to calculate into your consideration the fact that he will go.

He went on to say, "The regime has lost control of the country and he will eventually fall." In May 2012, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey told FOX News that "escalating atrocities would likely trigger a military intervention following a massacre that left more than 100 dead."

One hundred dead—that was back when we were talking about Syria's dead in hundreds rather than thousands and tens of thousands. One month later, in June 2012, then-Secretary of Defense Panetta stated:

I think it's important when Assad leaves—and he will leave—to try to preserve stability in that country . . . I'm sure that deep down Assad knows he's in trouble, and it's just a matter of time before he has to go. I would say, if you [Assad] want to be able to protect yourself and your family, you better get the hell out now.

That was in June of 2012 by our Secretary of Defense.

Where are we now? Three years after President Obama and his administration rightly decided it was time for him to go, President Assad remains in power, and I know of no one who believes Bashar Assad is going to negotiate his departure. In fact, he just orchestrated another "reelection." I remember when an American President said that a foreign leader must go, it conveyed a commitment to doing something about it. But instead of taking decisive action in support of the President's declared policy, the administration has simply moved away from calls for Assad to step down over the past year.

In fact, instead of being forced to step down, Assad has continuously gotten the administration to treat his re-

gime as a central interlocutor, first with the chemical weapons agreement through which Assad forced the United States into acknowledging its legitimacy and ensuring that he would remain in place until the agreement was carried out, then by serving as the sole authority on distribution of aid within the country, and now by presenting himself as critical to the fight against terrorism and the Al Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

So as it turns out, President Obama was right that Assad's violence and repressive tactics could not silence the voices of the Syrian people who even in the worst imaginable conditions have continued to fight for freedom and a Democratic Syria. Instead, it has been the voice of President Obama and other administration officials that President Assad has managed to silence. We cannot be silent, but we cannot allow words to replace action either.

What has become exceedingly clear in the wake of recent events is that even if we can ignore the moral imperative to act, the growing threat to American national security interests means that doing nothing is now out of the question. The conflict in Syria is largely to blame for the resurgence of Al Qaeda in Iraq, which has grown into the even more dangerous and lethal Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, commonly referred to by the acronym ISIS or ISIL.

Top officials testified in last week's Foreign Relations Committee hearing that ISIS represents a threat that is "worse than Al-Qaeda."

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq and Iran Brett McGurk stated that ISIS is no longer simply a terrorist organization but "a full blown army seeking to establish a self-governing state through the Tigris and Euphrates Valley in what is now Syria and Iraq."

The Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the FBI, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Attorney General have all warned repeatedly about the threat posed by ISIS's state-like sanctuary in Syria and Iraq and the largest safe haven for global terrorism in the world.

If the September 11 attack should have taught us anything, it is that global terrorists who occupy ungoverned spaces and seek to plot and plan attacks against us can pose a direct threat to our national security. That was Afghanistan on September 10, 2001. That is what these top officials are now warning us that Syria is becoming today.

Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson said, "Syria is now a matter of homeland security." FBI Director James Comey recently warned Congress that the terrorist threat from Syria against the United States is "metastasizing." Their assessments were confirmed earlier this month by Attorney General Eric Holder, who said that recent intelligence reports of terrorists from Syria partnering with

Yemeni bombmakers are "more frightening than anything I think I've seen as attorney general. It's something that gives us really extreme, extreme concern."

He added:

If they—

Meaning ISIS—

are able to consolidate their gains in that area, Iraq and Syria, I think it's just a matter of time before they start looking outward and start looking at the West and at the United States in particular. So this is something that we have to get on top of and get on top of now.

It is clear President Assad's strategy is to convince the administration that we only have two options, him or Al Qaeda-linked terrorists. It is a sad testament to the administration's leadership on Syria that Assad's strategy seems to be working. According to a report by the Daily Beast, administration officials are debating whether to abandon the President's goal of toppling Assad and enter into a de facto alliance with the Assad regime to fight ISIS or other Sunni extremists in the region.

Such a decision would represent the height of folly. Nobody—nobody—should believe Assad is an ally in the fight against terrorism. Former Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, who resigned in May after asserting that he could no longer defend American policy in Syria, made it clear how foolish such thinking is. He said:

The people who think Bashar Assad's regime is the answer to containing and eventually eliminating the Islamic-based threat do not understand the historic relationship between the regime and ISIS. They do not understand the current relationship between Assad and ISIS and how they are working on the ground together directly and indirectly inside Syria.

He added,

If this administration wants to contain the Islamic State on the ground, they are going to have to help the Free Syrian Army.

After more than 3 years of horror and suffering and devastation and growing threats to our national security, the conflict in Syria continues to get worse and worse, both for Syria and for the world, but the United States has no effective policy to bring this conflict to a responsible end. The outcome of the administration's disengagement has been a consistent failure to support more responsible forces in Syria when that support would have mattered.

The descent of Syria into chaos and growing regional instability, the use of Syria as a training ground for Al Qaeda affiliates and other terrorist organizations, the ceding of regional leadership to our adversaries, and the shameful tolerance of war crimes and crimes against humanity—in short, all of the horrible things the critics said would happen if we got more involved in Syria—have happened because we have not gotten more involved. Now President Obama finds himself in a position where the United States will have to do far more today to stave off disaster in

Syria than we would have needed to do in 2012. The administration seems to have finally come around to the idea that we must arm, train, and equip the moderate opposition in Syria. But arming moderate FSA units is only one element of what must be done for a much broader strategy that includes both Syria and Iraq.

I will be the first to admit there are no good options left, if good options ever existed to begin with. But as bad as our options are, we still have options to do something meaningful in Syria.

The conflict in Syria is reaching a critical point. Government forces are advancing on Aleppo, effectively cutting off routes into and out of the city from the south and west, exercising a stranglehold on the people of Aleppo. More than 6 months of punishing daily air strikes have killed thousands of residents and forced tens of thousands more to flee. But at least 500,000 residents remain in Aleppo, and they are being slowly asphyxiated by Assad's forces as they brace for Aleppo's upcoming siege.

Meanwhile, disillusioned fighters, starved of the resources and equipment they need, have been drifting from the front lines and, in some cases, joining the better funded and equipped extremist groups.

It is a moral outrage to watch the destruction of what remains of Aleppo and refuse to do more to help those fight against our enemies in the region. Worse still, the government's campaign has been aided and abetted by ISIS, which is attacking the Free Syrian Army from the northeast in an attempt to take control of two vital supply lines from Turkey and forcing the moderate opposition to fight simultaneously on two fronts.

Such activists are suggesting that the fall of Aleppo could be the nail in the coffin for the modern opposition, and the situation for civilians still living in Aleppo has become so disastrous that the United States recently authorized the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid without prior approval from the Assad regime.

These efforts are a bandaid on a bullet wound. It will not be enough to mitigate the dire crisis unfolding in the city, and we must offer quick support to the moderate opposition as they battle the Assad regime and extremists from the Islamic state before it is too late.

The rise of ISIS, combined with the events in Gaza and Ukraine, has placed Assad's assault on Aleppo safely outside of the headlines. With the international community distracted by these disturbing events in other parts of the world, Assad will again manipulate time and terror in his favor.

President Obama, who spent much of his time in recent weeks at fundraising events, said nothing about Syria or Iraq during recent appearances to discuss Gaza and Ukraine.

Worse still, details of the sole initiative proposed by the administration on

Syria since the collapse of the Geneva peace talks reveals a plan that would train less than a battalion-sized unit of 2,300 individuals and wouldn't begin until the middle of next year. By that time Aleppo may be lost and there may be no more units left in Syria to support.

The conflict in Syria is a threat to our national interests, but it is more than that. It is an affront to our conscience. Images such as these should not just be a source of heartbreak and sympathy, they should be a call to action. For the sake of our national security we must move quickly to help the moderate opposition now before it is too late. For the sake of our national conscience, we must do more to help the 150,000 political prisoners who remain in Assad's prisons and put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

It is with great sadness that I met with Caesar yesterday and had to tell him the truth: that although our great Nation could have done more to stop the suffering of others, that we could have used the power we possess—limited and imperfect as it may be—to prevent massive atrocities and the killing of innocents, it is with everlasting shame that we have not.

Shame on all of us for our current failure. If there ever was a case that should remind us that our interests are indivisible from our values, it is Syria, and we cannot afford to go numb to this human tragedy.

I have seen my fair share of suffering and death in the world, but the images and stories coming out of Syria haunt me most. But it is not too late. The United States is still the most powerful Nation in the world today, and we have the power and capabilities to act when brutal tyrants slaughter their people with impunity. No one should believe that we are without options even now. I pray that we will finally recognize the costs of inaction and take the necessary actions to end Assad's mass atrocities and to help the Syrian people write a better ending to this sad chapter in world affairs.

I note the presence of our distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee. I urge my colleagues—among many reasons—to support him in his effort to bring the National Defense Authorization Act before this body. Part of that act also authorizes for the training and equipping of the Free Syrian forces.

I thank my friend and colleague the Senator from Michigan and the chairman of our committee, whose unstinting effort has made this National Defense Authorization Act something that deserves the attention, debate, amending, and passage from the Senate.

I thank my colleague from Michigan.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD my statement on the National Defense Authorization Act following the remarks of Senator LEVIN and Senator INHOFE.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. LEVIN. Would the Senator from Pennsylvania yield for a unanimous consent request?

Mr. CASEY. I yield to the Senator from Michigan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. May I inquire of the Senator from Pennsylvania how long he intends to speak?

Mr. CASEY. About 10 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. After the Senator from Pennsylvania concludes, I would ask that the Senator from Oklahoma and I be recognized for 20 minutes, evenly divided, to talk about the need to get the Defense authorization bill to the floor, and each one of us would control 10 minutes under this unanimous consent request.

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

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. CASEY. I rise to speak about a topic that we don't talk about enough, which is what is happening in Afghanistan with regard to women and girls.

I know the senior Senator from Arizona was speaking about Syria before I had recognition, and I am grateful to him for the work we have done together. He is working with me and others on the best way forward for us to have a constructive impact on what is happening, working to get more dollars and more efforts in the direction of supporting the well-vetted Syrian opposition. I am grateful to him for his compassion and his commitment on this issue, and we look forward to working with him going forward.

I rise today to talk about an issue that we don't focus on enough here and that is the outlook for Afghan women and the children who have grown up during the past 13 years of war in Afghanistan. Children all too often are the innocent victims of the conflict.

According to a recent report by the U.N. Secretary General to the Security Council in Afghanistan, child casualties increased by 30 percent between 2012 and 2013.

While reporting was limited by the security environment, there were at least 790 documented incidents in which 545 children were killed and 1,149 were injured. That is just a snapshot of the horror that so many children have suffered in Afghanistan. Armed opposition groups such as the Taliban are responsible for a majority of the recorded child casualties.

I have spoken on the floor a number of times about the substantial improvements that have been made in Afghanistan, with significant United States support. Our tax dollars, our people, and our government have helped enormously to get greater numbers of Afghan children, especially girls, into school. Where there were once only a few educational opportunities, now more than 8.3 million children are in school, boys and girls. By

one assessment, up to 40 percent of those 8.3 million children are girls.

The security situation and persistent Taliban aggression in Afghanistan continue to threaten this progress. According to the same U.N. report, there were at least 73 reported attacks on schools. In some especially horrifying incidents, improvised explosive devices—we know them as IEDs—were planted inside school premises. The American people should be proud of the sacrifices that have already been made by our fighting men and women and our diplomats who have served in Afghanistan and the progress—which I have just mentioned—that has been made. As the political transition approaches and we prepare for a full security transition, this issue merits continued focus.

In 2013 and 2014, I led a bipartisan effort with Senator AYOTTE to include language in the National Defense Authorization Act that highlights the security issues Afghan women and girls face and promotes the recruitment and retention of women in the Afghan National Security Forces.

I focused on the issue because I believe the future of women and girls is critical, essential, to the stability of Afghanistan going forward and consequently our own national security interests in the region. According to the Institute for Inclusive Security: “There is evidence that women in uniform are more likely than their male colleagues to de-escalate tensions and less likely to use excessive force.”

Some improvements have been made to recruit and retain women in the Afghan National Security Forces. For example, earlier this month, 51 women graduated from the Afghan National Police Academy. These women defy the Taliban’s threats by serving as police officers.

During the elections earlier this year, female police officers and searchers helped secure polling stations for women, and their effect was tangible: significant turnout by female voters despite serious security threats.

Although significant progress has been made in women’s rights and security, there are still far too many horrific incidents of violence against women and children.

I was particularly disturbed, as I know many women were, by an article that ran in the New York Times on July 19 entitled: “Struggling to Keep Afghan Girl Safe After a Mullah is Accused of Rape.” That is the name of the article dated July 19.

The article describes how a 10-year-old Afghan girl was raped by a mullah in a mosque. A local women’s shelter took in the young girl after the attack to protect her from her own family, who were planning to carry out an honor killing. The activists at the shelter received death threats in addition to the threats to the girl.

Once the young girl recovered, she was returned to her family. However, as the article concludes: “Those caring

for the girl said she had been terribly homesick and wanted to return to her family, but no one had the heart to tell her they had been conspiring to kill her.”

To say that this story is heart-breaking doesn’t begin to translate the horror of what some young girls have to face in Afghanistan and other parts of the world as well. Extremists will no doubt continue to threaten women leaders and target innocent children in an effort to terrorize the Afghan people during this transition. We should send an unequivocal message that the United States continues to stand with Afghan women and children and that we see them as an important part of building a stable and secure Afghanistan.

In an effort to honor the sacrifices of the American people and our service men and women, and to make sure those sacrifices are remembered, we have to make sure that we take steps in the Senate. I filed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, and I am grateful again for the work Senator AYOTTE has done with me. We were joined most recently by several cosponsors, Senator SHAHEEN, Senator WARNER, and Senator BOXER.

This amendment will address three main issues:

No. 1, continue to prioritize recruitment and retention of women in the Afghan National Security Forces.

No. 2, Support police units that are specially trained to work with female or adolescent victims and increase the number of female security officers specifically trained to address cases of gender-based violence. This would include ensuring Afghan National Police’s Family Response Units have the necessary resources and are available to women across Afghanistan.

No. 3, Finally, emphasize the need to maintain the female searcher capabilities that were established in the April 2014 Presidential elections and for the 2015 parliamentary elections.

We must ensure that the gains made by Afghan women in every sector of society are preserved in a post-2014 Afghanistan. It is in our national security interests to help prevent Afghanistan from ever again becoming a safe haven and training ground for international terrorism.

We have seen from the recent events in Iraq what happens after a security transition if some groups are marginalized. As we approach transition in Afghanistan, women and young people should not just be the target of Taliban violence; they should be full partners in building a stable Afghanistan.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, along with Senator INHOFE—Senator MCCAIN was here before—to express the hope that the Senate will be able to take up the National

Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 during our September work period.

In June Senator INHOFE and I came here to urge Senators to begin the process to file amendments to our bill, and many amendments have been filed. We have been working to clear as many amendments as possible in preparation for Senate consideration of our bill. The amendment described just a few moments ago by the Senator from Pennsylvania is the type of amendment that we believe we can clear and would strengthen our bill and strengthen the position of our Nation.

When the Defense authorization bill is brought to the floor, our goal is first to be in a position to offer a package of cleared amendments. Our second goal—probably as important, perhaps more important than our first—is to see if we can identify specific relevant amendments that could be included in an unanimous consent agreement ready to be debated and voted on or, in the alternative, to craft the unanimous consent agreement with a limited number of relevant amendments, leaving it to the managers and the leaders to identify which relevant amendments would be brought to a vote.

Given the small number of days that are left for legislative action in this Congress, we must all—all of us individually and as a body—pull together if we are going to get our Defense bill completed. In my judgment, the course I have outlined will facilitate that conclusion.

I know there is a backlog of important nominations the Senate must still address, and these nominations have been taking up much of the Senate’s time. But we have enacted a national defense authorization act every year for 52 years.

The bill this year—S. 2410—was reported out of the Senate Armed Services Committee on the 2nd day of June with a strong bipartisan vote of 25 to 1. It provides critical authorities, funding, assistance, and guidance for our military, for our men and women in uniform and their families, at a time when they face a wide array of threats around the world.

In our national defense authorization bill, we enact authorities and programs that would create important initiatives that would be unnecessarily delayed if we do not adopt this bill.

If we fail to enact this bill, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines will not receive many important special pays and bonuses. These include the critical skills retention bonus; enlistment and reenlistment bonuses; bonus and special pays for health professions, including those in critically short wartime specialties; and many other bonus and special pays that enable the military services to shape the force as we draw down that force.

If we fail to enact this bill, we will not be able to slow the growth of military personnel costs and the Department will not be able to use the savings, as planned, to make up for readiness shortfalls that undermine our military's ability to respond to emerging national security crises. The committee-reported bill includes over \$1.8 billion in savings in 2015 and over \$20 billion in savings over the Future Years Defense Program. If this bill doesn't pass, those savings will not be achieved and the readiness and modernization accounts will be even further depleted.

If we fail to enact this bill, we will risk delaying the implementation of programs to address the mental health of our Armed Forces by developing a standard method for collecting, reporting, and assessing suicide and attempted suicide data for members of the National Guard and Reserves. Our Presiding Officer is very active in that particular area, in trying to address the suicide problems we have in our Armed Forces.

If we fail to enact this bill, we will delay a much needed reorganization of the Department's prisoner of war/missing in action community to enable the Department to more effectively accomplish its mission of accounting for POWs and MIAs.

If we fail to enact this bill, school districts all over the United States that rely on our supplemental impact aid to help them educate military children will no longer receive that money.

If we fail to enact this bill, we are unlikely to authorize the National Commission on the Future of the Army—a critical step to enable the Army to ensure that its forces—including its Active-Duty, Reserves, and Army National Guard components—are properly structured and supported to meet current and future threats.

If we fail to enact this bill, no new military construction projects will be authorized for fiscal year 2015 and our Armed Forces will too often continue to live, train, and work in substandard facilities.

Previous years' national defense authorization acts have been strengthened and enhanced through a debate on the Senate floor, and that includes the opportunity for Members to offer amendments. Debating and enacting those authorizations are critical not only to our national security but to ensure that our Nation keeps its sacred vow to provide for our armed servicemembers and their families.

Senator INHOFE and I will do our part, but we urge our colleagues to continue to file amendments colleagues would like to see in the bill, and we will do our best to clear them. We will also do our utmost to draft a unanimous consent agreement for consideration by our leadership that would provide for some contested relevant amendments so that we can show our leaders we can deal with this bill in a day or two.

We will do all that we can, but we need 98 other Senators to help us. So we urge our colleagues, please continue to bring amendments to us. Please help us craft a unanimous consent agreement that would allow for a reasonable number of contested relevant amendments to be debated and voted on. This is the best way we are going to be able to persuade our leaders and our colleagues that we can bring the bill to the floor, have a reasonable period for debate, dispose of at least some relevant amendments, and pass the critically needed National Defense Authorization Act.

Our troops and their families deserve maximum effort on the part of all of us. I hope that that will be forthcoming so we will not miss in the 53rd year a passage of a bill that is so critical to our national security.

Before I yield, I wish to thank my good friend from Oklahoma, our ranking member, who has worked so closely with me. Our staffs worked so hard on this bill. Together, as partners, we have been able to bring this bill to the floor. I thank him for the very strong leadership he has shown in the security area and on this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, first, I thank my good friend, the chairman of the committee, Senator LEVIN.

It is true that we have worked so closely together—not just the two of us but our staffs directly, the minority and majority staff. It is rare that we have a difference of opinion. When we do, we sit down and work things out, debate, and get things done. So there is a reason, as Senator LEVIN said, that we have passed this bill for 52 consecutive years.

There are a lot of bills that hit the floor, and some are important, some are not. Some are more important to different Members than others. This is important to everybody. There is not one Senator here who doesn't want to pass a defense authorization bill. When Senator LEVIN mentioned that it passed by 25 to 1—we have been ready to go since that time. That is why we are encouraging people and have been encouraging people to bring amendments down.

Let me mention that I personally went—as did Senator LEVIN—to both the majority and the minority leader.

They said: Well, go ahead. You have our go-ahead to get these people to bring down their amendments.

This is very important. And I have to say that one of the problems we had last year was there are a lot of Republicans—and I am on the Republican side. A lot of Republicans had amendments that they didn't think were going to be able to get heard. Well, this is their chance to do that right now.

The count as of today is that 94 amendments have been filed. Of that, 73 are Democratic amendments and only 21 are Republican amendments. So

I appeal now to the Republicans because what I don't want to happen is for us to come back and maybe go into some type of lameduck session and find ourselves in the same position we were in last year. Now is the time to preclude that from happening by getting their amendments down. I think we can do it. We have 4 or 5 weeks during this August recess for our staff to work on these. As the chairman said, a lot of these are going to be put together and are going to be accepted and be in the manager's amendment—but not unless Members get them down right now.

We know that right now we are probably in the most perilous situation we have ever been in as a country. I sometimes say that I look wistfully back to the days of the Cold War when we had two superpowers and we knew what they had and they knew what we had and we assured certain destruction if they did anything to us. Now there are places led by people with certainly questionable character and abilities. We have North Korea, Iran, and all these countries developing nuclear weapons. Our intelligence is good but not good enough to be able to know when it is going to come our way. So we have to be ready. That is the primary function of this committee.

We rely on all the people making our Nation safe right now, and they are looking at what we are doing. We need to take care of them in training, readiness, pay, benefits. These are things that are going to happen.

The other day the President came out with the OCO request for \$59 billion. In there, he mentioned two programs that—frankly, I have never heard of—either one of them. One was \$4 billion to go to the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund, and the other was \$1 billion for the European Reassurance Fund. I don't know what these are.

This is the forum we will use when we start debating the NDAA. It is going to be to get to all these programs that are new on the horizon, to see whether we really want to devote any of our scarce resources to some of these programs. We don't know. When we get the bill on the floor, we will know.

It is too important to our troops to do what we did last year. Not passing it will send a terrible signal to them. But I think it is more important to realize how close we came last year to not having the bill by December 31. If we didn't have it by December 31, just think of what would have happened. If we could not have corrected the situation, we would have had combat pay stopping. We would have had incentive pay for some of the doctors and all that come to a conclusion.

We also would have reenlistment bonuses. Looking at the some of our airmen who are flying sophisticated equipment, people don't realize that to train a new person to get to the level of an F-22 costs about \$15 million. However, a reenlistment bonus is about \$250,000.

So we look at what we can do by doing the right thing and passing the bill.

We have a lot of serious questions we need to debate on problems in Syria, as Senator McCAIN was talking about a few minutes ago, and Iraq and Ukraine and Afghanistan. That is why we need to have the NDAA tended to, hopefully as soon as we get back from this recess. The later we put it into the year to act, the more likely many of these provisions could be rolled into one massive Omnibus appropriations bill. We all know how that would play out. It would be rammed through the Senate without amendments and open debate. We want transparency. We want people to have an opportunity to bring their amendments out, and the more we can get between now and when we go into this recess, the more it can be worked out by the staff because they are going to be working all during the recess to get this done. We have all these people risking their lives on our behalf. They certainly deserve to have this bill in a well-thought-out manner.

Right before we came on, Senator CASEY was talking about the Afghan women and girls, some of the real tragedies that are taking place right now over there. These are things, the language of which we can correct in this bill. So there is no reason to put it off. We don't want to go through what we went through last time, and now is the time to prepare for that, and all we have to do is get the amendments in. No one should complain later on in November or December about not being able to have their amendments heard if they are not out there right now, bringing their amendments now.

With that, it is my understanding that Senator McCAIN was going to participate in this plea we are making, but he has a statement he will be submitting for the RECORD.

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

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I join my colleagues today to urge the majority leader to bring to the floor for debate one of the most important pieces of legislation that comes before this body each year—the National Defense Authorization Act.

The Senate Armed Services Committee version of the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act provides \$514 billion for national defense in Fiscal Year 2015. This includes \$496 billion for the Department of Defense, DOD, base budget and \$17.7 billion for national security programs.

This bill contains several important provisions. It includes a provision to keep the A-10, a vital close air support combat aircraft. This provision would strictly prohibit the U.S. Air Force from retiring A-10 airplanes for 1 year and fully fund the flight hours, pilot training, fuel, maintenance, and operations for all A-10 pilots and crew through 2015.

Additionally, this bill contains three different provisions that would im-

prove the prospects of competition for military space launch and help move the Pentagon away from using taxpayer dollars to purchase rocket engines from Russia.

Finally, this bill includes a provision that would eliminate wasteful spending in Department of Defense, DOD, IT systems. Before DOD is allowed to spend millions of dollars on new IT projects, the department must identify and eliminate old IT systems first.

These are just a few of the important provisions that have been included in this year's NDAA.

The Senate Armed Services Committee began consideration of the defense authorization bill immediately after the President submitted his fiscal year 2015 budget request. Over the course of 4 months, the committee conducted several hearings, held countless briefings, and then met for 3 solid days in markup to produce this legislation. The bill was approved by the committee on May 22 and is ready to be debated, amended, and passed so that we may conference with the House on their version of the bill.

I strongly urge the majority leader to bring this important bill to the Senate floor for debate. A failure to move to the defense authorization bill as soon as possible is a failure to recognize the critical national security importance signified through the strong bipartisan support this bill has enjoyed in this Chamber over the past five decades.

Mr. INHOFE. I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

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

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

HIGHWAY TRUST FUND

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about an amendment that I filed with the Highway and Transportation Funding Act. While my amendment did not get a vote, the issue it addresses is very important to my home State so I want to take a minute today to talk about the issue and the need to address a situation that was created when we passed the MAP-21 conference report in 2012.

The conference report undid a carefully constructed compromise on the Abandoned Mine Land Program that was put together in 2006. It took apart the work that we had done by limiting the total annual payments of AML funds to \$15 million per year. That is a change that only affected the State of Wyoming. We usually don't do legislation that only affects one State when a number of them receive funds.

What was worse, the provision was not in the House or Senate highway bill. It was added in the dead of night

without consulting anyone from the Wyoming congressional delegation. I was extremely disappointed that the provision was included in the conference report because Senators from other coal-producing States and I spent years working on this issue.

When the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act was passed in 1977, a tax was levied on each ton of coal that was produced. The purpose of that tax was to reclaim the coal mines that had been abandoned before the enactment of the reclamation laws. Half of that tax was promised to the States where the coal was mined. That was known as the State share. The other half went to the Federal Government to administer the reclamation program and to provide additional funding to the States with the most abandoned coal mines.

It was a simple enough concept. Unfortunately, like many things in Washington, while the concept was good, clear, and well-intentioned, its implementation was a nightmare and the program did not work as Congress intended. For years States were short-changed and the reclamation work was not done or the States did it themselves at their own expense, expecting to get reimbursed. That is the case in Wyoming. At one point the Federal Government owed the States more than \$1.2 billion, while more than \$3 billion in reclamation programs remained incomplete and unfinished.

The issue pitted the East against the West and the debate was always the same. When Members from the East would argue that we should send more money to the States to support reclamation efforts, my colleagues from the West were just as certain that we needed to keep the Federal Government's promise to the States to provide the revenue they were entitled to under the provisions of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

In 2006, a bipartisan coalition of Senators—including me—fixed the broken AML structure. It started with Senator Santorum approaching me with a proposal that had the support of a number of local coal companies, also the United Mine Workers of America, several environmental groups, and other businesses. After listening to the proposal, I laid out a set of principles that had to be included in their proposal if they were going to gain my support.

First I wanted to see the return of the money owed to the States, which included \$550 million owed to my State. Because Wyoming is a certified State, I also wanted to see the money that came from the Federal Government with no strings attached. The legislation accomplished that goal by guaranteeing that Wyoming was to receive the money owed from the Federal Government over a 7-year period.

This is money in a trust fund. Trust funds are kind of interesting to the Federal Government. We put money in the drawer and then we take money out and put bonds in the drawer. Think

about that in Social Security. It is another one of our trust funds, and I am one of the protectors.

This was a trust fund but there were only bonds in there, so it was difficult for us to get any money. I wanted to guarantee that future moneys would be paid to States such as Wyoming where significant amounts of coal were produced. We are where most of the Federal half of the tax comes from.

Third, it was important that more money be directed toward reclamation in the States where it was needed. More money was needed.

And fourth, there had to be a provision for orphan miners' health. Sometimes that is kind of overlooked, but Senator Byrd and Senator ROCKEFELLER were very adamant on that.

What is an orphan miner? That was a miner who was promised health care and then their mine went out of business. So there is no company to pay in anymore so they can get their health care, and we made a provision to take care of that.

The legislation that we put together accomplished all four of those goals. We continued our efforts as a bipartisan group, and in December 2006 we passed the AML reauthorization as part of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006. The coal industry and the United Mine Workers of America supported the bill. Members from certified States less Wyoming supported the compromise, as did members from uncertified States such as Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

As a Senator, President Obama voted in favor of the legislation that included this compromise. From all signs it appeared we had finally fixed our problem and helped strengthen our State economies at the same time. Unfortunately, appearances are often deceiving.

By limited AML payments in the MAP-21 conference report, Congress once again made clear that taxpayers could not count on a Federal trust fund to meet its obligations to administer the tax dollars it collected each year in a proper and legislatively mandated manner. This has been contested and successfully defended year after year to preserve this money, and it was supported by a supermajority from this body until—until—it was included in this highway bill and included in the highway bill in the conference report, not when we had an amendment on the floor that we could once again successfully defeat with a supermajority. It came in the middle of the night, and the next day we had an opportunity to vote for the highway bill.

The highway bill is probably one of the most crucial bills to any State in the Nation, and if all you get to do is vote yes or no, you are not going to take a look at a little portion of the bill where we steal a trust fund from one State—Wyoming—and that is exactly what happened, and it passed.

My amendment to the highway bill this time will address the problem and put things back together the way they

were meant to be. Simply put, it will ensure that when a State has been promised it will receive AML funds, it will receive them. Fortunately, I have the intent of Congress and the support of many colleagues on this matter of such great concern to Wyoming and to all the coal-producing States.

I want to particularly thank Senators HATCH and WYDEN for their commitment to address this issue created by the MAP-21 conference report. This isn't just a problem for Wyoming, because the next time a conference committee goes looking for some money, they can steal it from another AML State.

My amendment also encouraged the production of energy right here at home by opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling. The Congressional Budget Office estimates such an effort will increase gross Federal receipts by \$5 billion over 10 years. That is more than we need to make this payment. There are other possibilities for offsets as well, but that is one that is rather meaty, and that is more than enough to pay the funds that were stolen from Wyoming over 10 years and to pay for 2 years' worth of transportation projects, not just a short-term fix on transportation.

I know my colleagues will see the importance of this matter for Wyoming and to all the coal-producing States. It is important we take a look at this and protect the validity of trust funds that we set up and not redo them without adequate debate or an actual vote on the trust fund that we are violating. We have done that on a couple of other trust funds as well.

One of the ones that we also did was to impose an additional tax on those companies that have private pension funds, because we have a Pension Benefit Guaranty trust fund that is designed so that if a company goes out of business a worker who works for one of those businesses will get at least 60 percent of what they were supposed to get in their retirement. That is why it is called the Pension Benefit Guaranty trust fund. We increased the amount that had to be put in by \$80 per employee for each of the companies involved, and that was going to the trust fund to make sure those funds would be available. But we diverted those funds before they got to the trust fund because the actual money could be replaced by bonds in the drawer of the trust fund. That money went to highways, and that is just another example of how we are taking money from 10 years' worth of trust funds and using it for 2-year projects. We have to change that, and my amendment will be one of the ways of making that change.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Does the distinguished Senator from Utah seek recognition?

Mr. HATCH. I was told 6 p.m.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. The Senator from Utah may proceed, if he wishes.

Mr. HATCH. How long will the Senator from Rhode Island take?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I will take approximately 20 minutes.

I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized after the Senator from Utah, Mr. HATCH.

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

The Senator from Utah is recognized.

Mr. HATCH. I thank my gracious colleague. He is one of the better people here, and I have a great friendship with him as well. I appreciate it.

PATENT TROLLS

Mr. President, I rise to speak about the importance of our patent system and how it continues to be abused by patent trolls.

Most Members in this body are fully aware of the crippling effect patent trolls are having on innovation and growth upon all areas of our economy—ranging from Main Street businesses to America's largest technology companies. Through abusive and meritless litigation, patent trolls—often shell companies that do not make or sell anything—extort settlements from innovators throughout the country.

How do they do it? Take, for example, the small coffee shop down the street that provides Wi-Fi service to its customers. The shop owners are using a technology exactly as it is intended to be used, but thousands of miles away a patent troll purchases broad patents previously issued to someone else. Next, the patent troll sends vague and hostile demand letters to the coffee shop, and thousands of similar businesses, accusing them, often improperly, of infringing their questionable patents.

Many trolls target small businesses that they hope will agree to settle even though they have done nothing wrong simply because they do not have the resources to defend themselves in court. These settlements divert capital that could otherwise be used for research and development or to create jobs. In many cases, it costs around \$2 million to fight one of these cases. So they are forced into settling with whatever they can pay rather than doing what they would hope to do; that is, prove that there was an unmeritorious claim.

The sad reality is that many businesses often have little choice other than to settle rather than to expend the far greater resources required to fight them in court. Those who do fight back are forced to spend millions in litigation costs, often with no chance of enforcing a court-ordered award against a judgment-proof plaintiff.

How big of a problem is this? Mr. James Bessen, writing in the Harvard Business Review, confirms that “the economic burden of today's patent lawsuits is, in fact, historically unprecedented. Research shows that patent trolls cost defendant firms \$29 billion per year in direct out-of-pocket costs; in aggregate, patent litigation destroys over \$60 billion in firm wealth each year.”

Mr. Bessen further cites three studies on patent lawsuits currently in the works by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rutgers, Harvard, and the University of Texas. Based upon preliminary findings, Mr. Bessen states:

A consistent picture is emerging about the effects of patent litigation: it costs innovators money; many innovators and venture capitalists report that it significantly impacts their businesses; innovators respond by investing less in R&D; and venture capitalists respond by investing less in startups.

I agree with Mr. Bessen. The evidence from these studies cannot be ignored. Patent trolls do hurt innovation, and it is past time for Congress to do something about it.

For the better part of a year, Congress worked toward a legislative solution to combat patent trolls. In December we overcame the first legislative hurdle when the House of Representatives passed the Innovation Act by a vote of 325 to 91. The White House endorsed the bipartisan legislation by stating: "The bill would improve incentives for future innovation while protecting the overall integrity of the patent system."

Here in the Senate, I worked closely with a bipartisan group of Senators to craft a compromise bill that could pass the Senate. Countless hours of negotiation yielded encouraging results on key litigation reform provisions, including fee shifting, heightened pleading and discovery standards, and a mechanism to ensure that recovery of fees will be possible against shell companies.

In the spirit of bipartisanship, my Republican colleagues and I were willing—albeit very reluctantly—to lower the bar on fee shifting if we maintained strong litigation reforms elsewhere. I continue to believe mandatory fee shifting is the best way to discourage patent litigation in cases where a plaintiff's or defendant's case is so weak it should never have been brought or defended in the first instance. That is why I included mandatory fee shifting in the Hatch-Leahy Patent Reform Act of 2006 and why I will insist on its inclusion in future legislation.

Fee shifting alone gives a prevailing party little relief against patent trolls who litigate in the name of shell companies while their financial backers or interested parties purposefully remain beyond the court's jurisdiction.

Thus, there must be a mechanism to ensure that recovery of fees will be possible even against judgment-proof shell companies. The recovery of award provision I drafted is intended to ensure that shell companies primarily in the business of asserting and enforcing patents and litigation cannot escape potential liability for attorneys fees if they are found to have pursued an unreasonable case. Those deemed interested parties may either voluntarily submit to the court's jurisdiction and become liable for any unsatisfied fees awarded in the case or opt out by re-

nouncing sufficient interest related to the litigation or do nothing.

In my view fee shifting without such a recovery provision is akin to writing a check on an empty account. You are purporting to convey something that is not there. Fee shifting, coupled with this recovery provision, would stop patent trolls from litigating and dashing—dashing away, I might say.

There is no question that America's ingenuity fuels our economy. We must ensure that our patent system is as strong and vibrant as possible, not only to protect our country's premier position as a world leader in innovation but also to secure our own economic future. Patents encourage technological advancement by providing incentives to invent, invest in, and of course develop new technology.

It bears repeating that the governance of patents and copyrights is one of the essential, specifically enumerated powers given to the Federal Government and our Nation's founding. In my view it is one of the most visionary, forward-looking provisions in the entire U.S. Constitution. Unfortunately, at least in the 113th Congress, it is unlikely that this body will act to end the abuses by patent trolls.

It is shameful that even intellectual property bills are now among the latest casualties of our current partisan gridlock.

As Senators prepare to return to their home States for the August recess, I hope they will hear from people who represent the hotel, restaurant, retail, real estate, financial services, and high-tech industries—just to mention a few—about the urgent need to pass patent troll legislation.

I hope Senators will be reminded about the opportunity the Senate abandoned to pass important bipartisan, bicameral legislation that was supported by the White House but pulled from the Senate's agenda by the majority leader.

I hope Senators will recognize we must end the multibillion-dollar assault on American businesses and workers—because that is what it is.

Through commonsense reforms to our patent laws, we can ensure that American resources are used to innovate and create jobs and not wasted to settle or litigate frivolous claims.

I am disappointed that during the 113th Congress the Senate has failed to act to address this critical challenge. Legislation to combat abusive patent litigation will be among my top priorities in the next Congress. I intend to do everything in my power to get such legislation passed for the good of the economy and the good of this country.

ISRAEL

Mr. President, I rise to speak out in strong support of Israel's right to self-defense. This is not a partisan issue. Whether Republican or Democrat, we should all stand behind America's loyal ally as it faces Hamas's cowardly terrorism. In this time of frequent domestic political division, it is encouraging

to witness the remarkable degree of unanimity among my colleagues on this issue.

The wide support for Israel's self-defense here in Congress reflects the unique bond between the United States and Israel. It is an interest we share for many reasons, including our kinship with Israel as a free society and a democracy, our close economic and cultural ties, especially for those of us who consider support for Israel a deeply spiritual matter, our respect for the many virtues of the Israeli society—from its industriousness to its tolerance—our appreciation for Israel's unique stability in an unstable region full of failed and stressed states, and our recognition that Israel wants nothing more than to live in peace with its neighbors.

When Hamas fires constant rocket barrages indiscriminately at Israel's cities and seeks to infiltrate Israel with teams of murderers and kidnapers, Israel has every right to defend itself against this terrorist threat.

In the realities of urban warfare against a guerrilla opponent, some civilian casualties are unavoidable. But in its military actions, Israel has acted with admirable and unprecedented concern for Palestinian civilians—making phone calls, sending text messages, dropping leaflets to warn of impending attacks against military targets, aborting critical airstrips to avoid civilian casualties, and undertaking numerous other measures to protect Palestinian civilians, even at the expense of Israeli military objectives.

While the Israeli Defense Forces act with great courage not only to protect Israeli civilians but also to avoid harming Palestinian civilians, what does Hamas do?

Similar to all terrorists, they hide behind civilians—building bunkers and tunnels to protect its fighters but refusing to shelter civilians; using civilian buildings, including schools, hospitals, and places of worship, to launch rockets and hide other weapons; and even ordering civilians to ignore Israeli warnings and instead turning them into human shields.

In the face of this barbarism, Israel deserves our strongest support as it seeks to root out the infrastructure of terror Hamas has built in and around Gaza. The Israeli people have a right to live free from fear of constant rocket attack. While we should applaud the success of the Iron Dome system in protecting Israeli citizens from the Hamas rocket threat, Israel is acting responsibly by seeking to eliminate the means by which Hamas perpetuates that threat.

Above all else, we must recognize that supporting Israel is truly about supporting peace in the Middle East. Israel wants peace—not peace at any price but a just, secure, and enduring peace. As long as Hamas terrorists hate Israel more than they love their own children—to paraphrase Golda Meir—Israel must occasionally resort to force

of arms in self-defense. In this endeavor our ally deserves our strongest support.

I thank my dear colleague from Rhode Island for allowing me to proceed on these two short but very important sets of remarks. I appreciate that and wish him well in every way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. The distinguished Senator from Utah is one of the most distinguished and ablest lawyers ever to serve in this Senate, and his comments about the patent trolls and patent litigation are entitled to great weight.

I thoroughly agree with him that the use of these shell corporations is something we could and should act quickly to get rid of. I think the protection of an end user, such as a coffee shop or a florist or somebody who is not a competitor with a manufacturer or the patent holder, is something we could and should address. I think policing these often extortionate demand letters is something we could and should address. I look forward to working with the distinguished Senator in those areas.

I think when it comes to fee-shifting, that is a very significant step. The principle in the American system of justice that a party pays his or her own lawyer is so deeply engrained in our system of justice that it is actually known as the American rule. To depart from that is something that I think we should do only with a very—let's put it this way. It is a very grave step and I am not sure it is justified in this case. But certainly we could move on the bill that got rid of shell corporations, that protected end users, and that went after these demand letters, and get into conference and, with any luck, something could be done there. But I very much appreciate Senator HATCH's long and sincere interest in this issue.

Mr. HATCH. I wish to thank my colleague for those comments.

GLOBAL WARMING

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I rise today for the 76th time to urge my colleagues that it is time for us to wake up to the growing threats of climate change. Not a single State remains unaffected by the unprecedented changes we are already seeing, driven by the excessive carbon pollution we continue to dump into our oceans and atmosphere.

Yet in Washington, our Republican colleagues either parrot the polluter line that climate change is just a hoax, or stay silent. No one will step forward.

It was not always this way. Environmental protection was once a top priority of the Republican Party. It seems remarkable now, but it is true. In the early 1970s, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act were all passed with broad bipartisan support and signed by a Republican President. In the 1980s and 1990s, bipartisan majorities voted to

strengthen those laws, led by Rhode Island's Republican Senator, John Chafee, who served as chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee and whose seat I now have the honor to hold.

Conservation and stewardship were once fundamental principles of American conservatism. From seminal thinkers of the conservative movement to great Republican leaders of the 20th century, the conservative ideal included a commitment to the interests of future generations. Today, under a relentless barrage of unlimited corporate spending in our elections, much and perhaps most of it by polluters, the interests of future generations have taken a backseat to the interests of the oil companies and coal barons.

The disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision let polluters cast their dark shadow over Republicans in Congress who might otherwise work with Democrats on curbing their carbon pollution.

Edmund Burke, an Irish-born member of the British Parliament, is considered by many the father of modern conservatism. Sir Winston Churchill called him "a foremost apostle of liberty." Burke was a staunch defender of our American Colonies and his statue stands here in Washington today. His 1790 conservative manifesto, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," cautioned that we are but "temporary possessors" of our society. If individuals are "unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors or of what is due to their posterity," he wrote, "no one generation could link with another. Men would become little better than flies of summer."

In our case, flies of a carbon-fueled summer.

Russell Kirk was a distinguished scholar at the Heritage Foundation who none other than President Ronald Reagan dubbed "the prophet of American conservatism." He wrote a 1970 piece for the Baltimore Sun: "Conservation Activism Is a Healthy Sign." Kirk wrote: "Nothing is more conservative than conservation."

The noted essayist and Kentucky farmer Wendell Berry, known for what the American Conservative magazine called his "unshakeable devotion to the land, to localism, and to the dignity of traditional life," wrote in 1993:

Our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy.

Berry would also remind us in this Chamber that "[w]hether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is a party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes."

No figure in American history embodied the conservative value of conservation more than President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt resented the "malefactors of wealth," as he called them, the timber and mining interests whose "selfish and shortsighted greed seeks to exploit our natural resources

in such fashion as to ruin them and thereby to leave our children and our children's children heirs only to an exhausted and impoverished inheritance." To Roosevelt, this great land of ours was the birthright of all Americans—past, present, and future—to be used, to be sure, in achieving our destiny, but not wasted.

He wrote to Congress in 1907:

To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them.

That is a sentiment echoed by Republican Presidents throughout our history, including President Dwight Eisenhower, whose 1961 farewell address invoked this national legacy. Here is what he said:

As we peer into society's future, we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage.

Republican President Gerald Ford, who once worked actually as a National Park ranger, said this in 1975:

We have too long treated the natural world as an adversary rather than as a life-sustaining gift from the Almighty. If man has the genius to build, which he has, he must also have the ability and the responsibility to preserve.

And, of course, no one is more revered by today's Republican Party than Ronald Reagan. His conservative credentials are unassailable and GOP candidates for elected office strive mightily to out-Reagan each other at every turn. In 1984, Reagan put this question to his fellow Republicans:

What is a conservative after all but one who conserves, one who is committed to protecting and holding close the things by which we live? . . . And we want to protect and conserve the land on which we live—our countryside, our rivers and mountains, our planes and meadows and forests. That is our patrimony. That is what we leave to our children. And our great moral responsibility is to leave it to them either as we found it or better than we found it.

President Ronald Reagan's words would make him a fringe liberal candidate in today's extremist Republican Party.

In Congress, we have been boxed in by a barricade of special interest propaganda and we refuse to admit the plain evidence piling up before our eyes. We know with ever greater certainty what our carbon pollution is doing to the climate, what it is doing to our atmosphere, what it is doing to our oceans. And we know with ever greater certainty what that means for the planet and future generations. What do Republicans in Congress today have to say to our heirs, to our children and grandchildren?

"Catastrophic global warming is a hoax," says one of my Republican colleagues.

"It's not proven by any stretch of the imagination," says another.

A third dismisses the issue altogether, saying, "A lot of this is condescending elitism." That is the voice of today's Republican Party.

But what does the next generation have to say back to these Republican voices of denial? More than half of young Republican voters said they would describe a politician who denies climate change is happening as ignorant, out of touch, or crazy—not my words, their words in the poll: ignorant, out of touch, or crazy. That is what the next generation says back to the Republican voices of denial.

Unfortunately, if one is a Republican in Congress today, it is more likely than not that one either holds that view or is afraid to say otherwise. According to one analysis, 58 percent of congressional Republicans in the 113th Congress have denied or questioned the overwhelming scientific consensus that the Earth's oceans and atmosphere are changing in unprecedented ways, driven by our carbon pollution. This includes, I am sad to report, every single Republican member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. And where there is not denial, there is silence.

Outside these barricaded walls, it is different. Outside Congress, more and more Republicans acknowledge the threat of climate change and call for responsible solutions. Former Members of Congress, free now from the polluters' thrall, implore their colleagues to return to their conservative principles. Former Representative Bob Inglis, for example, invokes the tenets of conservative economics. Here is his quote:

If you're a conservative, it is time to step forward and engage in the climate and energy debate because we have the answer—free enterprise. . . . Conservatives understand that we must set the correct incentives, and this should include internalizing pollution and other environmental costs in our market system. We tax income but we don't tax emissions. It makes sense to conservatives to take the tax off something we want more of, income, and shift the tax to something we want less of, emissions.

Sherwood Boehlert and Wayne Gilchrest, former Republican representatives from New York and Maryland, also argue for a market-based approach to reducing carbon pollution. Here is what they said:

We could slash our debt by making powerplants and oil refineries pay for the carbon emissions that endanger our health and environment. This policy would strengthen our economy, lessen our dependence on foreign oil, keep our skies clean, and raise a lot of revenue.

Top advisors to former Republican Presidents have joined the chorus. William D. Ruckelshaus, Lee M. Thomas, William K. Reilly, Christine Todd Whitman all headed the Environmental Protection Agency during Republican administrations. They all recently testified before the Environment and Public Works Committee that it is time to get serious about climate change. Here is how they put it in a New York Times op-ed. They wrote:

As administrators of the EPA under Presidents Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and George W. Bush, we held fast to common-sense conservative principles—protecting the health of the American people, working with the best technology available and trusting in the innovation of American business and in the market to find the best solutions for the least cost.

These former officials recognize both the wisdom of properly pricing carbon and the truculence of the opponents who stand in the way of progress. "A market-based approach, like a carbon tax, would be the best path to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions," they say—"the best path"—"but that is unachievable in the current political gridlock in Washington. . . ." I would interject that political gridlock is the product of big-spending polluters who profit from the gridlock that they create. But let me continue with what the EPA Administrators said: "But we must continue efforts to reduce the climate-altering pollutants that threaten our planet. The only uncertainty about our warming world," they wrote, "is how bad the changes will get, and how soon. What is most clear is that there is no time to waste." Four Republican EPA Administrators.

One day folks are going to look back at this time and we are all going to be judged very harshly with all the dread power that history has to inflict on wrong. The polluters and their instruments will be judged harshly, and the Republican Party will be judged harshly for letting itself be led astray by polluters from its most basic conservative values. Unless they step up, Republicans will leave—to borrow language from Russell Kirk—"the principle of real leadership ignored, the immortal objects of society forgotten, practical conservatism degenerated into mere laudation of private enterprise, economic policy almost wholly surrendered to special interests." That is about as good a description of where they are right now as I could muster, and it comes from the conservative Russell Kirk.

We cannot do this alone, not with the numbers that we have. Republicans and Democrats alike must approach this climate problem head on with the full conviction of our ideals, but working together, working in good faith, and working on a common platform of fact and common sense to protect the American people and our American economy from the looming effects of carbon pollution.

We must rise to our duty here and place our own natural resources, our own American international reputation, and our legacy to future American generations first, ahead of the poisonous influence of the polluters that so dominates this debate now.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, thank you very much for recognizing me.

I also wish to thank the Presiding Officer for his leadership on environmental issues which are so immensely pressing and important for our country, and I am proud and honored to join with him in that cause, which he has helped to lead so often on the floor, but also privately amongst our colleagues and in so many ways across the country. I hope to continue our work together on that issue, and I thank him for presiding now and for continuing that leadership.

Mr. President, I am speaking today, after listening to the people of my State, on an issue that perplexes and challenges us in so many ways. The situation on our southern border perplexes us because it is a problem without easy or ready solutions. It is a challenge to America in the resources that it requires and the spirit that it evokes. Our resources are scarce. Our spirit and our inner strength are boundless. Many have expressed to me in my State of Connecticut concerns about those resources, about the limits on those resources, in facing a seemingly endless challenge, as children come to our borders and stretch the capacity of this Nation to accept them. I am sympathetic with the folks who wonder whether we are capable, very simply, of caring for these children—but I know we can—the children who are coming here because of the humanitarian crisis they face in their countries.

Our supplemental legislation, so ably guided by Senator MIKULSKI, provides a path for providing the resources that are necessary. This supplemental is a thoughtful and significant document that addresses this situation without either breaking the bank or sacrificing American values.

I am immensely impressed and inspired by the spirit that has been evoked, again, among citizens of Connecticut in saying: We must care for those individual children who need asylum because returning them to the countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala would be a death sentence for many of them. And we must respect our law which provides for individual consideration and assessment of those children in whether they deserve and need asylum and that status of fleeing persecution and death that many of them, in fact, have faced in those lands.

We must place those individuals, according to law, with their families, if possible. Many of them have parents here, and the vast majority have some family, moms and dads, aunts and uncles. They need to be screened under the law. Their placement has to be in a

safe and secure home with people, in my view, who are here legally. That screening has to be, as the law requires, to assure their safety and security as children. The United States has a responsibility to follow the law, and so do we as citizens and as lawmakers. As torn as we may be, as conflicted as we may feel, as vehement as those conflicting feelings may be felt and expressed by fellow citizens, let us uphold the law and afford due process and individual consideration to those children who, under the law, deserve that individual assessment, individual treatment, individual consideration for the status of asylum in this Nation.

People speak about these children as if they were a mass, indistinguishable, a single societal challenge or problem. A Member of the House of Representatives even referred to them as an "invasion." What I saw at the border when I visited there with two of my colleagues, Senator HIRONO and Senator MURKOWSKI, joined by a third, Senator CORNYN, all friends and distinguished colleagues, hammered home for me that these children are individuals and they should be treated as such.

The vast outpouring of spirit and generosity in this country is mirrored by countless organizations—we heard about them during our visit—that want to help these children, want to volunteer and give of themselves, their time, money, goods and services, everything from blankets, to furniture, to pizza, to you name it. America is pouring out its heart for these children.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter to Secretary Johnson and Commissioner Kerlikowske from Save the Children, a Connecticut organization that has offered, very generously, its help and support in very specific and concrete ways, along with a briefing note that outlines what it perceives the children's needs at the border to be.

Let's end one doubt: the need for and the urgent justification for individual due process consideration and the full and adequate screening of these children and a fair judicial proceeding. I would describe just a few stories.

Girls are fleeing sexual violence at the hands of gangs in Honduras and El Salvador. I will give just a few examples.

Ms. L was raped by more than a dozen gang members in Honduras. After reporting the gang rape to police, her family began to receive death threats.

There are only three shelters in Honduras for rape survivors, and two of them actually operate as brothels. The one remaining shelter declined to take Ms. L because it could not protect her or the other shelter residents from gang violence. She had no choice but to flee Honduras.

Carlita is a 13-year-old who fled gang violence in El Salvador. She was kidnapped by the Zetas in Mexico, used for sex, and forced to be a drug mule for them before escaping and ultimately reaching the United States.

Ms. H survived multiple rapes in Honduras. After she fled she was kidnapped by a Mexican gang and raped and tortured. She eventually reached the United States.

Ms. N and Ms. O, ages 15 and 8, fled El Salvador. Their older female cousins had been forced to work as sex slaves for gang leaders. The gangs threatened to kill Ms. N and were placed in removal proceedings.

Ms. E fled El Salvador when she was 8 years old. Gang members had kidnapped her and two older sisters. The girl's mother did not want her 8-year-old daughter to suffer the same fate, so she arranged for her daughter to be brought to the United States.

Many gangs use sexual violence as a part of the price or rent demanded of girls.

Ms. X fled an area of El Salvador controlled by gangs. Her brother was killed for refusing to join a gang that forcibly tried to recruit him. She was raped by two men, became pregnant as a result, and then was required to pay "renta" to the rapists, which increased over time. She fled El Salvador and was attacked by Mexican robbers during her journey, before arriving in the United States.

Many of these girls are victims of forced prostitution and human trafficking. I have other stories that will be printed in the RECORD. These stories come from personal experiences of advocates and others who have interviewed them at length as well as our own officials. Many of these girls are sexually assaulted during the treacherous journey northward. Those stories are not imagined or fictionalize; they are graphic and dramatic. Rape is so prevalent that many girls begin the journey by taking birth control injections before they leave home from Central America as a precaution against pregnancy.

I refer to these stories because they illustrate and illuminate the need for a thoughtful humanitarian approach, especially to these young girls whose stories are so real and so inspiring, not just in the treacherous journey they overcome, not just in the torture and abuse they suffer, but in the dignity and self-worth and strength and resoluteness they continue to have. A thoughtful humanitarian approach is what is required. It is the approach that this supplemental exemplifies in providing resources.

There is an oath that doctors take: "First do no harm." Let that be the approach of this body in approving basic amounts of money, reduced by the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, so that it meets appropriately and frugally the needs of these children to be placed in humane circumstances with families who are screened for their safety and security and their being here legally.

I will close with one last experience. In one interview I watched at the border, I saw a 7-year-old girl crying quietly as she tried to answer the ques-

tions of an armed border guard. The border guard did his best. He was obviously caring in his approach. But neither his training nor the experience of any border guard equips them really to play this role with a 7-year-old-girl. They are in uniform, a police uniform, which for this girl's whole life has meant fear, potential rape, bodily harm. These children have learned from hard experience that that fear is often justified. They are distrustful of adults generally and authority figures in particular.

Nobody could watch this scene without feeling a sense of compassion for those guards and, of course, most especially the girl, separated from her family, sitting on a bench, her legs swinging free because she was not big enough to reach the floor. The look on her face revealed not just terror but a fervent desire to please, inspired by fear. She could not communicate openly with the border guard.

What she needed was someone trained and equipped to elicit the facts of her background, the reason she had fled, the motivation for her escape, the facts and her feelings about it. That kind of individual assessment is the reason we have the law passed by Congress in 2008, unanimously. This Trafficking Victims Protection Act was designed for these girls and boys coming from noncontiguous countries facing those fears, those threatening conditions if they were to be returned. They face a near certain death, many of them, if they are returned without the individual assessment and consideration. Call it due process, call it judicial, call it humane questioning—the title matters less than what happens.

I know this Nation cannot be expected to rescue all of the children of the world from all of the harsh and inhumane conditions they may face. We are not limitless in our capacity to do good. But I know and I believe we have the resources to do what is just and right under the law considering every one of those children and every one of the potential threats they face if they are returned to their countries.

It is an American value that we follow the rule of law, that we grant asylum under the law to people who deserve it and need it. That much we can do. I know we have the resources to do it. I believe we have the will to do it. The heart of America and its citizens is big. We are a big country. We are not limitless in our resources, but we are boundless in our capacity for generosity and doing what is right.

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

SAVE THE CHILDREN,
JULY 22, 2014.

DEAR SECRETARY JOHNSON AND COMMISSIONER KERLIKOWSKE: Like you and your team, we are deeply concerned about the thousands of unaccompanied minor children crossing our southern border. To address the humanitarian crisis, I am writing to offer our support and propose ways that Save the Children can be of immediate assistance to improve the conditions for children.

Save the Children has nearly a century of experience working with displaced children around the world and has responded to serve children in the face of every natural disaster in the US for the past decade. In the US, we have been a leading partner of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), supporting the needs of children. We have been operating for the past month in McAllen, TX serving children and mothers after their release from Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) custody and have trained more than 80 FEMA Corps members to begin offering basic child programming within the CBP detention and overflow sites. However, we know we can do more to improve the conditions and outcomes for these children.

Your Rio Grande Valley CBP Team, under the leadership of Chief Kevin Oaks, has been a great ally to us as we try to support and assist in this unprecedented situation, offering us tours and being open to dialogue about the needs of children in their custody. However, he has been unable to grant us permission to provide technical assistance and professional child programming onsite without higher authority—it is to you we appeal for this permission.

The conditions in which the children and mothers are being detained are designed for accused criminals, not mothers and children. Save the Children would like to work with you and your team to be a part of the solution. We have the expertise needed to give the children the unique support needed under the current difficult circumstances.

I am writing to propose that Save the Children work with you to immediately help improve conditions for children and address children's urgent needs for care and mental health supports. This would support the safety, protection and wellbeing of the children—and it would relieve stress on the CBP agents. All of these programs could be established at no cost to you—or, if required through DHS/CBP policies and procedures, Save the Children could be reimbursed for this support.

Here is what Save the Children is proposing:

1. Save the Children is offering to immediately provide care for the young children at the CBP detention sites, including the new McAllen overflow site, while their cases are being processed.

Save the Children would provide our Child-Friendly Spaces program, a signature program that we use to support children's mental health and safety in crisis in the U.S. and around the world. This care would be customized to fit the CBP space availability in each border detention site. We would be able to provide basic programs directly in the holding cells or in whatever space may be available. Our teams are trained to provide this program in the U.S. and in challenging, high-risk environments all over the world. For example, we are currently providing this program in Iraq, South Sudan, and the countries bordering Syria.

2. Save the Children is requesting your permission to provide professional staff at each site that has FEMA Corps members, whom we are now supporting to provide urgently needed programming for children in custody. Our professional staff would lead the work with children and provide ongoing support and guidance to the FEMA Corps members while they are in the CBP stations. This will help ensure that there is consistent quality and safety for the children while they participate in the program activities.

Through our partnership with FEMA, the Corporation for National and Community Service and FEMA Corps, this week, Save the Children is training the FEMA Corps teams who are deployed to serve in the CBP stations. Until now, the FEMA Corps mem-

bers were not trained to work with children and have not been supplied with materials or program activities, specifically activities that support children's emotional wellbeing. We know that many of the children had arduous journeys at the hands of smugglers and traffickers. The children need to receive psychosocial support from the moment of their arrival to ensure their wellbeing. Save the Children will be training and providing ongoing technical support to the FEMA Corps members to help them in their mission assignment to support the children in CBP custody.

3. Save the Children is also offering to provide psychosocial support programs to the CBP agents and their families to help relieve their stress and support their emotional wellbeing during this crisis. We know that many of the border agents are heavily stressed by this crisis. By supporting the psychosocial and mental health needs, and the needs of their families, you will help ensure their longer-term wellbeing. I am attaching a fact sheet about our Journey of Hope program.

4. Save the Children is offering to distribute comfort kits to the mothers and children. We have customized the kits to be age appropriate for mothers, infants and toddlers, young children and school-aged children. They include items such as pacifiers, wipes, baby blankets, plush toys, and bilingual storybooks. We would be happy to work with CBP to ensure that the items provided meet with CBP security regulations. We are ready to immediately provide 5,000 comfort kits for the children, 1,000 infant and toddler kits, and 2,000 kits for the mothers.

5. Save the Children is offering to conduct a multi-sector assessment of needs and provide ongoing monitoring to ensure the programs for children support CBP's mission and the children's needs.

Save the Children is uniquely qualified to address the needs of these children in collaboration with CBP and the U.S. government during this crisis. We are reaching out across all relevant federal and state agencies to both advocate for the needs of these children and to offer our support. Thank you again for your attention to this humanitarian crisis and I appreciate your review of our request to work with you and your team for the benefit of all.

I look forward to working together,
CAROLYN MILES,
President & CEO, Save the Children USA.

BRIEFING NOTE: MEETING THE NEEDS OF
CHILDREN ON THE U.S. BORDER
THE CRISIS

For years, children and minors from Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and other Central American nations have sought refuge in the United States. However, their numbers have increased dramatically since late 2013 because of violence, extreme poverty and other factors that make their and their families' lives untenable. Between October 2013 and May of this year, nearly 50,000 children, many unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, arrived at the U.S. border. This is a 92 percent increase from the prior year, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Projections suggest that the number of children arriving will increase to between 60,000 and 90,000 by the end of 2014.

THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children are always among the most vulnerable in any emergency. Many of the children arriving at the border are suffering from physical illnesses, diarrhea and dehydration, and some have been victimized during their long and arduous journey. They are in urgent need of protective adult care, supportive supervision, medical and hygiene care, and nutritious meals.

With intensive overcrowding at the border stations, reports about sanitation and living conditions for children are extremely disturbing. We have heard stories that children as young as age six are being separated from their mothers for days and kept in border detention sites that are ill-equipped to meet the basic needs of children. Our staff in Texas has also heard first-hand from women that they are fleeing communities because of threats that have been made by gangs to harm their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The large influx of migrants poses huge challenges for local communities and Border Patrol agents charged with protecting the border. Despite these challenges, it is critical for local communities and U.S. government agencies to:

Provide adequate sanitary conditions, and basic needs such as food, water, blankets and places to sleep in the shelters, detention centers and transit centers housing children;

Prevent traumatic separation of mothers from young children where at all possible; and

Facilitate basic health services and mental health support for children who are in need of psychosocial support.

NGOs like Save the Children have decades of experience in addressing the needs of fleeing children in some of the hardest hit areas of the world. In order to ensure that children are receiving treatment and care that is up to international standards, we urge the U.S. government to:

Allow NGOs with expertise in child protection issues to gain access to border detention sites; and

Permit NGOs with expertise in child protection issues to assess the needs of children and their families to devise strategies that will ensure their well-being.

It is both important and obligatory under current U.S. and international law to uphold the legal rights of children, especially those with a possible claim to refugee status. To this end, we ask the U.S. government to:

Provide unaccompanied children with adequate screenings and a fair judicial process to ensure that they are not being returned to life-threatening situations;

Uphold provisions in existing laws that provide due process for unaccompanied children so that those with the right to stay are not short-changed and lost in the shuffle; and

Ensure children and their families are made aware of their legal protections and options.

Finally, any viable long term strategy must include a robust effort to address the root causes for the surge and not focus only on its symptoms. To this end, we request that the U.S. government:

Dedicate funding to address issues of violence and poverty that drive migration from the countries of origin and not only on border security and deterrence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH.) The Senator from Pennsylvania.

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

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

CHILDREN IN NEED

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I am especially grateful to the senior Senator from Connecticut for his words tonight and the challenge those words present to us. We are grateful for his efforts to stand for children.

I rise tonight to speak about children here in the United States. I spoke earlier about issues that related to women

and girls and children generally in Afghanistan. But I wanted to highlight a report that came out recently by one of the leading organizations in the country that charts the well-being of children over time and advocates on their behalf. The name of the organization that many here have heard of, I am sure, is the Annie E. Casey Foundation—no relation to me—a foundation that has made it its mission to advocate on behalf of children. We cannot be an effective advocate—none of us—unless we chart their progress and find out what is working. So I am going to briefly summarize tonight the findings of the 2014 Kids County Report by the Casey Foundation.

I have here at the lectern kind of a color-coded chart which I will not hold up because I do not have an enlarged version of it. I will not be able to have it printed in the RECORD.

I want to summarize it. Basically, what is in front of me is a summary of various categories that the Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed to chart the well-being of children. They separate the comparisons into four sections, and then they determine whether over time—whether it is over 4 or 5 years or over a longer period of time—whether for children the indicators have worsened or improved. It is a very basic set of metrics.

The categories they track for children are the following four categories: first, economic well-being, and I will talk about some of the indicators there; second, education; third, health; and fourth, a category they call family and community.

The basic indicators for the entire United States—of course, they have a breakdown for how the children in every State are doing on those indicators. For example, in terms of what is getting better, we should highlight and note when there are improvements made. I think the fact that we have improvements on these indicators for children over time indicates that public policy matters, what happens here in the Congress matters, what happens across the country in nonprofit organizations and advocacy organizations that fight every day for children and say over and over again, as the advocates tell us, that children are not small adults—we need specific strategies for children, whether it is for health care or for early education or to make sure they get enough to eat or to protect them from predators. Whatever the issue, we have to have specific strategies for children.

Let's go through a couple of areas where there has been improvement—not dramatic improvement, not enough improvement for us to say we have achieved a measure of success on one metric and we can move on.

In the area of education, just by way of example, eighth grade children—eighth graders not proficient in math, so it is kind of almost a negative indicator the way it is phrased. In 2005, across the United States, 72 percent of

eighth graders were not proficient in math—a very high number, 72 percent. When they looked at it again in 2013, it was down to 66. So it has improved by 6 percentage points, but thankfully it is moving in the right direction. But we can't be satisfied with 66 percent of eighth graders not—not—proficient in math, but it is good news it is moving in the right direction.

Another bit of good news and maybe a more urgent issue in terms of what happens to very young children—in this case, low birth weight babies—there is an improvement there from 2005 to 2012. So over 7 years, the percentage of low birth weight babies, according to this data, has gotten better, but the unfortunate part is it only went from 8.2 percent to 8 percent—not much of an improvement but an improvement.

We have a long way to go in the greatest country in the world when we say that there has been an improvement but still 8 percent of babies are low birth weight. So there is an improvement, but there is a lot more work to do.

Maybe the best area indicator of improvement—and then I will move on to areas where there has been a worsening—children without health insurance. We hear a lot of discussion about health insurance, health care, and the Affordable Care Act in Congress, but in 2008 when that measurement was taken, 18 percent of children did not have health care. So in 2008 it was 10 percent, and as of 2012 it is down to 7 percent. So there is a substantial diminution or reduction in the number of children without health insurance. But if we do the math, 7 percent of the children of the country don't have health insurance. That is a big number. So it is getting better, substantially better, better than almost any other metric in terms of growth or progress, but we have to do a lot more to make sure that it is not 7 percent—that number should be zero—make sure that every child has health insurance. That has to be the goal, and that has to be what we are determined to achieve in the Senate.

I will go through a couple of areas that have worsened, but thankfully, of what is 16 categories, there are more improvement categories than worsening categories. Unfortunately, we have to go through some of the areas where it is worse.

One that is particularly disturbing is children in poverty. That has worsened between the years 2005 and 2012—19 percent in 2005 was the percentage of children in poverty. As of 2012 that went up to 23 percent. So prior to the great recession and then some time after the recession ended, the 2012 number was 23 percent. So that is a worsening number, and it should give us not just pause, but it should be an impetus to action to reduce that number—23 percent of the children in the country in poverty as of 2012. Children whose parents lack secure employment—that

number got worse. Children living in households with high-housing-cost burden—that number got worse, unfortunately.

I will give two more, and then I will conclude my remarks. Children in single-parent families—that number got worse between 2005 and 2012. Finally, children living in high-poverty areas—that was measured over a different time period—2000 versus a time period between 2008 and 2012. That number got worse as well.

What this report indicates—and I won't go through the State numbers—is that first and foremost we have to keep records and we have to track progress. But it also indicates that even when there is an improving metric, when the numbers are getting better, say, for example, on low birth weight babies, that improvement is in many cases very slight and not nearly adequate or acceptable.

I think both on the worsening numbers and on the improvement numbers, it should be a call to action. I believe that if we are doing the right thing for our children, if we are living up to what the Scriptures tell us about justice, where the Scriptures talk about “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied,” if we think of how we treat children as a measure or as an indicator of justice and our commitment to justice, we cannot say that these numbers are in any way acceptable, that our hunger and our thirst for that kind of justice cannot be satisfied with these numbers.

We should be committed to not just tracking and making marginal or incremental progress, we should be committed to the full measure of justice for our children.

Hubert Humphrey said—and he may have said it on this floor when he represented Minnesota—“It was once said that the moral test of a government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.” He said that was the moral test of a government.

So if we are talking about what Humphrey said about children in the dawn of their life, we have to reflect upon and be motivated by the findings of the Annie E. Casey Foundation report. It is one of those reports that remind us how we can improve when it comes to the well-being of our children, but it also reminds us and I think alarms us about areas where we have not improved and we have a ways to go.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of the President's emergency supplemental request of \$615 million to fight wildfires throughout the United States.

We have witnessed increasingly large and devastating wildfires over the last few decades.

Nationwide, the costs of fighting wildfires has increased from \$200 million in 1986 to \$1.7 billion in 2013. In

that same time, the amount of acres burned has increased from 2.7 million acres in 1986 to 4.3 million acres in 2013.

In many parts of the U.S., fire seasons are now 60 to 80 days longer compared to three decades ago and in some places like Southern California, the fire season never ends.

This is leading to seasonal firefighters being hired several months earlier than normal and federal agencies spending more to make sure our firefighters are prepared and have the necessary resources available for the entire year.

So far this year, California has experienced a 35 percent increase in fire activity and a 16 percent increase in acres burned over an average year. These alarming statistics translate to more than 4,000 wildfires in my State already that have burned more than 52,000 acres since the beginning of the year.

Right now, brave firefighters in California are battling five different large fires. The largest is the Sand Fire, which has burned over 4,000 acres east of Sacramento. This fire has already destroyed 19 homes.

Although it has already been an unprecedented fire season in California, we are not at all out of danger yet as the significant wildland fire potential remains above normal for most of the State through October of this year. It is also above normal in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, and parts of Arizona.

Adding to the difficulty of battling these enormous fires is the constrained fire suppression budget we are currently operating under.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior announced that wildfire-fighting costs this summer are projected to run about \$400 million over budget.

In fact, since 2002, the United States has overspent its wildfire suppression budget every year except one—and in three of those years, went over the suppression budget by nearly \$1 billion. This chronic underfunding of our fire-fighting accounts cannot continue.

When we fail to budget for fire suppression, the Forest Service and the Department of Interior are forced to transfer money from fire prevention accounts to make up the difference. That makes no sense!

We are taking money from the very programs that help reduce the threat of wildfires—such as hazardous fuel removal programs.

In my State, plans to remove dry brush and dead trees in the Tahoe National Forest and the Plumas National Forest have been delayed because wildfire prevention funding is not available.

The President's supplemental request not only adds funding for fire suppression during this fiscal year, it solves the problem in the future by creating a Wildfire Suppression Cap Adjustment so that extraordinary fire costs are

treated in the same way as destructive hurricanes, tornadoes, or earthquakes are funded.

This means that money to fight the largest fires would not be subject to discretionary budget caps much like FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund.

As our fire seasons become longer, hotter, and endanger more communities, we must act now to change how wildfire suppression is funded so that we can reduce fire risk and increase the resiliency of the Nation's public lands, forests, and the surrounding communities.

I urge my colleagues to support this emergency supplemental funding and address the growing crisis of wildfires.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

KELLOGG-HUBBARD LIBRARY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, every time I go by the children's library at Kellogg-Hubbard Library in my hometown of Montpelier, VT, it brings back happy memories. I would like to have printed in the RECORD an article I wrote about the library and its wonderful librarian, Miss Holbrook.

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

[From the Times Argus, June 13, 1996]

MONTPELIER BOY REALIZES MISS HOLBROOK WAS RIGHT

(By Patrick Leahy)

The 100th anniversary of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library triggers memories for all of us who have lived in Montpelier. And they are great memories.

While I was growing up, Montpelier did not have television. We children did not have the advantage of cable TV with 10 channels giving us the opportunity to buy things we didn't need and would never use or another 10 offering blessings or redemptions for an adequate contribution.

Deprived as we were, we made do with the Lone Ranger and Inner Sanctum on the radio and Saturday's serials at the Strand Theater on Main Street. For a few minutes on Saturday afternoon, we could watch Hopalong Cassidy, Tarzan, Flash Gordon, Jungle Jim or Batman face death-defying predicaments that would guarantee you would be back the next Saturday, 14 cents in hand, to see how they survived (and I recall they always did).

Having exhausted radio, Saturday matinees, the latest comic books (I had a favor-

ite) and childhood games and chores, we were left to our own imagination.

That was the best part.

We were a generation who let the genies of our imagination out of the bottle by reading. Then, as now, reading was one of my greatest pleasures.

My parents had owned the Waterbury Record Weekly newspaper and then started the Leahy Press in Montpelier, which they ran until selling it at their retirement. The Leahy family was at home with the printed word and I learned to read early in life.

At 5 years old I went down the stairs of the Kellogg-Hubbard Children's Library, and the years that followed provided some of the most important experiences of my life.

In the '40s and '50s, the Kellogg-Hubbard was blessed with a white-haired children's librarian named Miss Holbrook. Her vocation in life had to be to help children read and to make reading enjoyable. She succeeded more than even she might have dreamed.

She had the key to unlocking our imagination.

With my parents' encouragement, the Kellogg-Hubbard was a regular stop every afternoon as I left school. On any day I had two or three books checked out. My sister Mary, brother John and I read constantly.

In my years as U.S. senator, it seems I never traveled so far or experienced so much as I did as a child in Montpelier with daily visits to the library. With Miss Holbrook's encouragement I had read most of Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson in the early part of grade school.

To this day, I remember sitting in our home at 136 State St. reading Treasure Island on a Saturday afternoon filled with summer storms. I knew I heard the tap, tap, tap of the blind man's stick coming down State Street and I remember the great relief of seeing my mother and father returning from visiting my grandparents in South Ryegate.

Miss Holbrook was right. A good and an active imagination creates its own reality.

In my profession, I read computer messages, briefing papers, constituent letters, legislation and briefings, the Congressional Record—and an occasional book for pleasure—in all, the equivalent of a full-length book each day.

Interesting as all this is, and owing much of my life to those earlier experiences at the library, the truest reading pleasure was then. I worry that so many children today miss what our libraries offer.

During the past few years I have had many of my photographs published. DC Comics and Warner Brothers have also asked me to write for Batman or do voice-overs on their TV series. In each case, I have asked them to send my payment to the Kellogg-Hubbard Library to buy books for the Children's Library.

It is my way of saying: "Thank you, Miss Holbrook."

RECOGNIZING RONALD McDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to commemorate the 30th anniversary for two excellent charities in my home State of Kentucky, the Ronald McDonald House Charities. The Ronald McDonald House Charities of Kentuckiana in Louisville and the Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Bluegrass in Lexington both first opened their doors to needy families in 1984.

Since then, each house has served more than 25,000 families. In the last