

boxes for unused drugs, including but not limited to opioids, at VA medical centers to anybody who wants to go get rid of these unused drugs at any time. You don't have to wait until Take Back Day. This would be a permanent program.

The name of the bill is the Dispose Unused Medications and Prescription Opioids Act. And before I offer this bill up, let me just give one more plug. I would remind everyone that this Saturday, April 24, is Take Back Day. If you have unused medications, including opioids, that you want to get rid of, it will have been publicized in your community by the DEA. You can go drop them off, and I hope people will do that.

Mr. President, toward that end, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of my bill, S. 957, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 957) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that certain medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs have physical locations for the disposal of controlled substances medications.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I further ask that the Kennedy substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to, that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The amendment (No. 1459) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to, as follows:

[Purpose: In the nature of a substitute]

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. DESIGNATION OF PERIODS DURING WHICH ANY INDIVIDUAL MAY DISPOSE OF CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES MEDICATIONS AT FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Section 3009 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-315; 38 U.S.C. 8110 note) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (b) and (c) as subsections (c) and (d), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after subsection (a) the following new subsection (b):

“(b) DESIGNATION OF PERIODS FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL TO DISPOSE OF MEDICATION.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall designate periods during which any individual may dispose of controlled substances medications at a covered Department medical facility.

“(2) PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS.—The Secretary may carry out public information campaigns regarding the periods designated under paragraph (1).”.

The bill (S. 957), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. KENNEDY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DRINKING WATER AND WASTE-WATER INFRASTRUCTURE ACT OF 2021—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

SEACOR POWER LIFT BOAT

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, the year 2020 was a year filled with sadness and grief for me, but, unfortunately, that sadness and grief struck again in the year 2021.

Last Tuesday, 100-mile-per-hour winds capsized a lift boat with a crew of 19 off the coast of Grand Isle, LA, just south of Port Fourchon. The U.S. Coast Guard and a group of Good Samaritan boats rescued six crew members as winds continued between 80 to 90 miles per hour and waves were 7 to 9 feet high.

The Coast Guard credits those Good Samaritans with saving four of the six rescued crew members. So, fortunately, in the midst of a terrible tragedy, it turns out a crew of Coast Guard men and women were on a boat doing a trial run when the SOS went out. And although technically not Coast Guard, they were coastguardsmen, and they went out and aided in the rescue. We are eternally grateful for their efforts, their hard work, and for the risk they took to themselves to bring those crew members back to shore safely, who returned safely.

In this tragedy, which affects us in Louisiana but, in a sense, affects us all, any loss of life is heartbreaking. But there are some who may not be found, and we pray their families find closure. To date, six have been confirmed dead, including Anthony Hartford of New Orleans, James “Tracy” Wallingsford of Gilbert, Captain David Ledet of Thibodaux, Ernest Williams of Arnaudville, Lawrence Warren of Terrytown, and Quinon Pitre of Franklin.

Seven are still missing. Each day that passes, the prognosis—the chance of finding them—obviously decreases. I would like to take a moment to recognize those still missing:

Jay Guevara, Dylan Dasput, Gregory Walcott, Chaz Morales, Jason Krell, Darren Encalade, and Chris Rozands.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the crew members of the capsized vessel, their loved ones, and their communities.

While we mourn this loss, we also rise to recognize the heroic efforts of the Coast Guard, the Good Samaritans, and all involved in the search-and-rescue efforts that continued for 6 straight days.

In just 40 hours, the Coast Guard covered more than 1,440 square miles of the Gulf of Mexico, searching for missing crew members. To put that in perspective, that is an area larger than the State of Rhode Island. By Friday, this area grew to a size larger than Hawaii, searching through sea and air.

Late last week, the National Transportation Safety Board announced they will open an investigation. The team arrived in New Orleans on Thursday, and a preliminary report will be released within the next 2 weeks.

We deeply appreciate the volunteers who assisted the men and women from the Coast Guard and many others in the search and rescue, particularly during the terrible weather. In the light of this tragedy, this team effort demonstrates the best of humanity.

We grieve with the families. We shall always remember the lives of those we lost.

May God watch over their souls. May they find eternal peace.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I bring news back from Oklahoma to this body and a request for dialogue. The COVID bill that was passed a little over a month ago—that bill provided all kinds of relief. As this body knows, we were deeply divided on that bill and some of the issues within it.

One of the issues stretched out the debate all the way to the last moment, and it was the additional unemployment assistance. The conversation about the additional unemployment assistance is this: The economy is reopening. Is this the time to extend additional money above and beyond State unemployment assistance, what we normally do? With unemployment rates going down, should we add more money on top of it?

No one really knew what would happen when that occurred, but we had some suspicions. The 2 weeks I spent traveling around the State, the week before Easter and after Easter, in town after town after town after town after town, I heard the same thing from employees and employers.

Employees would tell me that somebody who used to work next to them is now at home because they are making as much money at home on unemployment assistance as they would when working. So the person standing there working at the factory, the person standing there working at the restaurant is ticked off at the person who is at home watching TV, making as much money as they are.

The employer is just as frustrated or more because they have all kinds of orders coming into their business, saying: Can you send us more of this? And they could, except they don't have enough labor.

An additional \$300 a week was added on top of the unemployment assistance and extended out all the way to the first week of September. At the same time, checks were sent out to every individual. Then they were told they would get a \$10,000 tax break. The combination of those three things together has caused some folks to do what people do in a free market: They look to see where they are going to work based on where they can make the most money at that moment. That is what a free market is like. That is why employers continue to pay a little more to get good employees. But the problem is, in Oklahoma, where there is a low cost of living, many of our employers are struggling to find workers because they are competing against this body.

The employees are ticked because they are at work working, paying taxes, and the person who used to work next to them and probably will return this October got several months off and is making the same, except for the person working is paying for the person not working, and they are a little ticked off about it.

I bring this to you because this is not hypothetical. In Oklahoma, our unemployment rate dropped again to 4.2, but we still have 100,000 people. Our rates continue to rise for people filing first-time claims, but I promise there is not a town you can go to in Oklahoma that doesn't have "help wanted" signs all over town. I heard it from every single town that I went to, from employers in every single place that they cannot compete with what the government is just mailing to people for staying at home.

The very first day I was out a couple of weeks ago, I was in Tulsa at a business there that does manufacturing. He told me that for the first time ever—and he has owned the business a long time—for the first time ever, one of his managers came to him and said: You are not going to believe what just happened.

They had an employee who came up to them and said: I would like for you to fire me.

He said: Well, why in the world would I do that?

He said: Well, I just figured out, with the tax break and what I would get on unemployment assistance, I could make as much staying at home as I could working. But I need you to fire me so I can go file for unemployment.

He literally said to him: I am not going to do that. Go back to work.

So the next day, the guy showed up 30 minutes late to work, and at lunchtime, he took an hour and a half off. He did the same thing the next day. The third day, according to protocol in their company, they called him in, talked to him, and wrote it all up. The

fourth day, they did the same thing again—called him in, wrote it up. By the fifth day, they fired him.

His exact words to his manager on the floor: What took you so long?

There is a restaurant in Oklahoma City that told us they were preparing to reopen. Finally, the pandemic is over. We have a very high percentage of folks in Oklahoma who have received the vaccine. We are one of the top 10 States in the country for distributing the vaccines.

Our State, our county, our local offices, our hospitals, and our Tribal areas have done a fantastic job getting the vaccine out. We are open.

One of the restaurants trying to reopen in the Plaza District of Oklahoma City, a beautiful cultural district, couldn't reopen because they couldn't hire people because they got larger unemployment benefits, and they remain closed.

The mayor of Muskogee told me that most employers in their town are struggling to be able to get employees to get back to work.

In Northern Oklahoma, in Perry, there is a restaurant that was talking to one of my staff this week that said they are having to close early because they can't get enough business.

I would tell you, a couple of Sundays ago, my wife and I drove to go eat lunch after church, and we went to two restaurants before we had to go to a third to find a restaurant that was open. The second restaurant literally had a sign on their door: "Closed Due to Labor Shortage."

This is a real issue that was created in this room that is impacting my State trying to reopen. I have no idea if my Democratic colleagues will acknowledge this as a real problem or will just say: That is a hypothetical issue; it is not real. But this is going to continue all the way through September, and my State is not going to be able to reopen. This will get even worse in the days ahead when additional money will start being shipped out to families in the change in the child tax credit, when people will literally start getting checks in August on top of the other checks they are receiving.

I bring this to this body because I would like for us to have a conversation about it and for somebody in this body to acknowledge that a mistake was made and we need to fix this.

We all agreed last year to be able to help during the time of the pandemic. People needed help. Everyone was out of work, and there were no options for work. That is not true anymore; yet these larger benefits are still coming out.

This needs to be addressed. For the sake of getting our economy going again, this needs to be addressed. I would hope we could have a reasonable, rational, fact-based conversation about it.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Madam President, for most of the history of the United States, we have

had nine Supreme Court Justices—nine. Now, we started out originally with six, and then it dropped for just a little while to five and then went right back to six again.

When we added a seventh circuit court in 1807, it popped from six to seven, and there was some discussion about whether it would just continue based on the number of circuit courts. It was determined that, no, that was a bad idea.

Then it went to nine in 1837. Lincoln actually added 1 to make it 10, and they determined that was really too many and brought it back down to 7, actually.

In 1869, we went back to nine again, where we were most of the time before that and where we have remained, nine Supreme Court Justices. That is not just a random number; it seems to be a pretty good number—nine—to be able to open up debate.

I don't just think it is a pretty good number. There is a rather famous and some would say "notorious" Justice named Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She made this statement in 2019 when asked about Court-packing and asked about increasing the size of the Court. In 2019, Ruth Bader Ginsburg said:

Nine seems to be a good number. It's been that way for a long time. . . . I think it was a bad idea when President Franklin Roosevelt tried to pack the court. . . . If anything [it] would make the court look partisan.

That is not just one Justice. Early in April this year, Justice Breyer was speaking at the Harvard Law School, and he addressed this issue of Court-packing while this body is in the middle of a conversation about Court-packing—extremely rare for that to occur. Justice Breyer stated:

I'm an optimist. The rule of law has weathered many threats, but it remains sturdy. I hope and expect that the Court will retain its authority, an authority that my stories have shown was hard-won. But that authority, like the rule of law, depends on trust, a trust that the Court is guided by legal principle, not politics. . . . Structural alteration motivated by the perception of political influence can only feed that latter perception, further eroding that trust. . . . There is no shortcut. Trust in the courts, without which our system cannot function, requires knowledge, it requires understanding, it requires engagement. In a word, it requires work. Work on the part of all citizens. And we must undertake that work together. . . . What I'm trying to do is to make those whose initial instincts may favor important structural change or other similar institutional changes—such as forms of court-packing—think long and hard before they embody those changes in law.

That was so well received, by Justice Breyer, that progressive activists started calling for him to take early retirement.

Court-packing is not a new conversation in this body, but it has not been well received in the past.

The Court has always ebbed and flowed in its liberal or conservative bents. President Obama spoke openly when he was President about the Court

in the 1960s. That was a very progressive Court in the 1960s that drove conservatives crazy with some of the decisions they made, but there was no packing of the Court to try to change the direction of the Court in the 1960s and 1970s. There was a frustration but a realization that nine was the right number.

Over time, the Court, as it does, as it ebbs and flows over the decades, has flowed to be more conservative. In the days ahead, at some point, it will flow to be more liberal. It just will. But the rule of law is important. It is not a new concept that is being addressed, but it is one this body should think long and hard about.

Quite frankly, I agree with Joe Biden on this concept, but not the President Joe Biden, the Senator Joe Biden.

With this body's permission, let me read Joe Biden's speeches when he was in the U.S. Senate and he stood right over there and spoke on this floor or spoke in committee hearings when he was in the Judiciary Committee, speaking often about this issue.

Joe Biden, once speaking, made this statement. He said:

President Roosevelt clearly had the right to send to the U.S. Senate and the U.S. Congress a proposal to pack the Court. It was totally within his right to do that. He violated no law; he was legally absolutely correct. But it was a bonehead idea. It was a terrible, terrible mistake to make. And it put in question, for an entire decade, the independence of the most significant body—including the Congress, in my view—

The most significant body in this country—

—the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

The President had the right to do that. He was totally within his power, and his objective was seen clearly.

Well, the President clearly has the right to do what he is doing, in my view.

But he also called it “bonehead.”

Joe Biden, as Senator, also continued with this statement. He was discussing the same issue. He said: “The Senate again stood”—by the way, this was two decades later, after Joe Biden made that statement I just read. Two decades later, Joe Biden still has the same passion. He stated this:

The Senate again stood firm in the 1937 court-packing plan by President Franklin Roosevelt. This particular example of Senate resolve is instructive for today's debates, so let me describe it in some detail. It was the summer of 1937. President Roosevelt had just come off a landslide victory over Alf Landon, and he had a Congress made up of solid New Dealers. But the “nine old men” of the Supreme Court were thwarting his economic agenda, overturning law after law overwhelmingly passed by the Congress and from statehouses across the country.

In this environment, President Roosevelt unveiled his court-packing plan—he wanted to increase the number of Justices on the Court to 15, allowing himself to nominate these additional judges. In an act of great courage, Roosevelt's own party stood up against his institutional power grab. They did not agree with the judicial activism of the Supreme Court, but they believed that Roosevelt was wrong to seek to defy estab-

lished traditions as a way of stopping that activism.

In May 1937, the Senate Judiciary Committee—a committee controlled by the Democrats and supportive of his political ends—issued a stinging rebuke. They put out a report condemning Roosevelt's plan, arguing it was an effort “to punish the Justices” and that executive branch attempts to dominate the Judiciary lead inevitably to an autocratic dominance, “the very thing against which the American Colonies revolted, and to prevent which the Constitution was in every particular framed.”

Our predecessors in the Senate showed courage that day and stood up to their President as a coequal institution. And they did so not to thwart the agenda of the President, which in fact many agreed with; they did it to preserve our system's checks and balances; they did it to ensure the integrity of the system. When the Founders created a “different kind of legislative body” in the Senate, they envisioned a bulwark against unilateral power—it worked back then and I hope it works now.

Said Joe Biden during that time.

The noted historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.—

Joe Biden, continuing as Senator—

has argued that in a parliamentary system President Roosevelt's efforts to pack the Court would have succeeded. Schlesinger writes: “The Court bill couldn't have failed if we had a parliamentary system in 1937.” A parliamentary legislature would have gone ahead with their President, that's what they do, but the Founders envisioned a different kind of legislature, an independent institution that would think for itself. In the end, Roosevelt's plan failed because Democrats in Congress thought court-packing was dangerous, even if they would have supported the newly-constituted Court rulings. The institution acted as an institution.

In summary, then, what do the Senate's action of 1795, 1805, and 1937 share in common? I believe they are examples of this body acting at its finest, demonstrating its constitutional role as an independent check on the President, even popularly elected Presidents of the same party.

That was from Senator Joe Biden. His challenge to this body was to think long and hard before they destroyed an institution of our government. It was right then; it is right now.

In a final statement from Joe Biden, he spoke about the filibuster—often, actually, about the filibuster. Senator Biden stated this:

The Framers created the Senate as a unique legislative body designed to protect against the excesses of temporary majority, including with respect to judicial nominations; and they left us all the responsibility of guaranteeing an independent Federal judiciary, one price of which is that it sometimes reaches results Senators don't like.

It is up to us to preserve these precious guarantees. Our history, our American sense of fair play, and our Constitution demand it.

Joe Biden continued. As Senator, he said:

I would ask my colleagues who are considering supporting the “nuclear option”—those who propose to “jump off the precipice”—whether they believe that history will judge them favorably. In so many instances throughout this esteemed body's past, our forefathers . . . stepped back from the cliff. In each case, the actions of those statesmen preserved and strengthened the Senate, to the betterment of the health of our constitutional republic and to all of our advantage.

Our careers in the Senate will one day end—as we are only the Senate's temporary officeholders—but the Senate itself will go on. Will historians studying the actions taken in the spring of 2005—

When Joe Biden stated this in the Senate—

[Will they] look upon the current Members of this Senate as statesmen who placed the institution of the United States Senate above party and politics? Or will historians see us as politicians bending to the will of the Executive and to political expediency? I, for one, am comfortable with the role I will play in this upcoming historic moment.

Then he stated this, from Senator Joe Biden:

I hope . . . my colleagues [will] feel the same.

So do I. Less than the days ahead, history will look at the unwinding of the judiciary based on a season in the Supreme Court, as we have had seasons and cycles before. Don't unwind the judiciary for a season.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I appreciate the thoughtful comments from my colleague from Oklahoma of the need for us to have an independent judiciary.

I am on the floor to talk about a different issue, and it is the latest, very troubling information that we are receiving regarding the addiction epidemic and specifically drug overdose deaths in the United States. I am also going to talk about some of the steps we can take right now to address that reality.

One of the top priorities I have had in this body and in the House has been this drug addiction issue. Frankly, this is a moment of frustration because we were making progress, and then COVID-19 hit. Unfortunately, the drug epidemic has hit my State of Ohio particularly hard. The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, show that it is a pretty grim picture right now, and it should be a wake-up call to all of us. Overdose deaths rose nearly 30 percent nationwide from September 2019 to September 2020. During this time period, you can see the overdose deaths numbers going up dramatically.

This is heartbreaking for me because we were making progress. After literally decades of increases in drug overdose deaths every single year—decades—going back to the 1990s, we finally here in the 2017, 2018, 2019 periods began to make progress in reducing overdose deaths. In fact, in Ohio, we had a 24-percent decrease in overdose deaths during 1 year, 2018, but, right now, the numbers are getting higher and higher, and it is everywhere.

As you can see from this chart, if something is in any of these colors, this means that there is an increase in overdose deaths. If it is in blue, it means there is a decrease, and this was just during this period of September

2019 to September 2020, the latest data for which we have good information. It doesn't even include all of 2020, and as we know, the pandemic, unfortunately, went all the way through 2020 and into 2021. All of the data show that, as you got further into the pandemic, we had higher rates, so we expect, when the final data come out for 2020, it will be even higher.

Here is where we are now. Look at this. Other than the State of South Dakota, every single State has seen an increase—and a substantial increase in many cases—in overdose deaths. This is in 49 of 50 States. In my own State of Ohio, there has been about a 25-percent increase in overdose deaths during this period.

Only a few years ago, again, we were making progress. One reason that we had begun to turn the tide was because of work that had been done here in the U.S. Congress. Right around this time period, we passed legislation called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. We also passed legislation called the 21st Century Cures Act. Both were signed into law in 2016. So it would have been in this period. It became effective in this period and actually helped to reduce overdose deaths for the first time in decades.

I commend my colleagues for that legislation. It was the first time we had ever funded recovery, as an example. We also funded prevention and treatment and provided our law enforcement with more naloxone, this miracle drug that reverses the effects of an overdose. Many of my colleagues have had the opportunity to speak with their local addiction boards or have been with law enforcement or other first responders—firefighters—who have used this naloxone effectively to save lives.

So things were getting better until we saw this big increase in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. The stresses of this unprecedented time, clearly, have contributed to the spike in drug abuse. People have felt lonelier. People have felt more isolated. Specifically, people have not been able to get access to recovery programs. Being in person with a recovery coach is a whole lot different than being on a Zoom call. That is what I hear from recovering addicts, and it makes sense.

I will say that people have turned to drugs to cope during this tough period, but also, many of those who are in recovery have been stalled in their progress because of their inability to be with other recovering addicts. So part of the best practices and best scientific evidence we have is that an effective way to help people overcome their addictions is to be with other people who also have those addictions. We have known this for years in terms of alcohol treatment programs—AA and so on—but this has been one of the problems.

Another issue I am going to raise, which apparently is somewhat con-

troversial, but I hear it from the experts—and those are the people on the ground, in the field, who are dealing with this issue—is that, when we here in Congress provided lump sums to all Americans under a certain income—and you will remember the individual payments—they didn't go out right away because our State offices couldn't process them quickly enough, particularly with regard to unemployment insurance, wherein our workers' comp and our unemployment offices could not get the money out the door on a weekly basis but could retroactively provide those funds.

We had individuals getting—instead of \$300 a week or \$600 a week—\$10,000 a week because it was an accumulation of many weeks. People were owed that, but getting these big lump sums was not helpful in the context of many people who were in recovery because it led to their purchasing drugs and it led to what we are finding out—again, back home—in talking to the experts, were some of the reasons you had this spike. So there are a lot of reasons here.

I guess what we need to focus on now is, How do we get beyond this?

These deaths are happening away from the national headlines because the coronavirus is taking the national headlines, understandably. A story just last week, from a news station in Dayton, OH, summed it up perfectly with a quote from Lori Erion, who is the founding president of Families of Addicts.

She said:

During the pandemic, addiction and families struggling with it haven't gone anywhere. We have been here the whole time.

But they have not gotten much notice. There were 87,000 people who died from overdoses in the September 2019 to the September 2020 period we talked about. There were 87,000 Americans who died. If not for the COVID-19 pandemic, I don't think we would have seen this increase—from everything we are hearing if the correlation is almost precise—but also we would be hearing a lot more about the addiction crisis and doing more about it here.

We did put some funding into the CARES Act and into the two most recent COVID-19 packages to help with behavioral health, people's mental health, and also with addiction. That has been helpful, but we need to go much broader and do something much more comprehensive to take this moment to recommit ourselves to fighting addiction and ensuring that more Americans don't continue to lose their lives to overdoses. We have bipartisan legislation that has been introduced that we have been working on with a lot of people on the outside to try to come up with some new ideas, some ways to address this problem.

In the 5 years since this Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery legislation has become law, which was in part the reason we saw this reduction—also, a lot of great work was done at the local level and the State level—the

substantial, several billion-dollar commitment we made here in this Chamber for more prevention, treatment, and longer term recovery with naloxone and so on, made a difference, but it has been 5 years.

During that time, I have visited with literally hundreds of different organizations in my home State. I have also just talked to a lot of experts about this. I have been to a lot of nonprofits, from Cleveland to Cincinnati and from Portsmouth to Toledo. I have talked to literally hundreds of recovering addicts about what works and what doesn't work for them.

There is legislation that we are introducing now, which we call CARA 3.0. We had the first Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, and we had a second one back in 2018, a smaller one. Now we have this new, bipartisan CARA 3.0 legislation. Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE is my coauthor, but we have a number of Members who have joined up to help, and it addresses three major areas.

One is research and education. We still need to find out more, and we still need to get better research and better alternatives to opioids to deal with pain because much of this is being driven, as you know, from opioids—both heroin and prescription drugs but also these new synthetic opioids, which are the deadliest of all.

Second, we focus on education. Getting the prevention message out there is incredibly important to keep people from coming into the funnel of addiction in the first place, which is incredibly powerful and effective.

Third, of course, are treatment programs.

The fourth is recovery. Again, Congress had never funded recovery before; yet all of the best science shows that these recovery programs, when done properly, can be incredibly helpful, and longer term recovery, unfortunately, is needed, which is costly, but the alternative is worse.

Finally, there is criminal justice reform, which I will talk about in a moment.

It will bolster our work to prevent drug abuse before it happens through funding for research and education. A new national drug awareness campaign is part of this legislation, and the research and development of alternative pain treatment methods that don't lead to addiction is part of it.

CARA 3.0 will also take the important step of addressing the disproportionate effect the addiction crisis has had on people in poverty and communities of color. Unfortunately, during this increase, we have seen a higher percentage of overdoses in communities of color. A national commission has been formed to look at this issue to better develop treatments and best practices to avoid overdoses.

Second, our bill will build on what works and how we treat addiction. It will double down on proven, evidence-based addiction treatment methods

while expanding treatment options for groups that are particularly vulnerable to addiction, including young people, new and expecting mothers, rural community residents, and communities of color—individuals who live in those communities. One of the things that we have learned through, again, evidence-based research into what works and what doesn't work is that medication-assisted treatment, when done properly, can be very effective.

It will also make permanent the current expanded telehealth options for addiction treatment that were created temporarily in response to the social distancing required by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is really important. Telehealth is one of the few silver linings in an otherwise very dark cloud of the coronavirus pandemic. Yet, for many individuals, telehealth was effective, particularly with regard to behavioral health and addiction services. So we want to be sure that the temporary ability to pay for those telehealth visits, as an example, through Medicaid as an example or Medicare, can continue past the pandemic.

CARA 3.0 will also bolster the recovery options for individuals who are working to put addiction behind them through funding to support recovery support services and networks. It will enable physicians to provide medication-assisted addiction treatments, like methadone, to a greater number of patients and change the law to allow these drugs to be prescribed via telehealth for a greater ease of access. This will require a change in legislation to allow people to provide these kinds of treatments.

Our bill will also destigmatize addiction recovery in the workplace by ensuring that taking one of these medications—again, medications to get people over their addictions—will not count as a drug-free workplace violation. This may seem like an obvious change, but, unfortunately, it will take a change of law to be able to make that happen.

Finally, CARA 3.0 reforms our criminal justice system to ensure that those who are struggling with addiction, including our veterans, are treated with fairness and compassion by the law, putting them on a path to recovery instead of into a downward spiral of drug abuse.

Importantly, CARA 3.0 funds a Department of Justice grant program to help incarcerated individuals who are struggling with addiction to receive medication-assisted treatment while they are still in the criminal justice system. Again, that may seem like a pretty obvious solution, but there are people who go into the system addicted, and they come out addicted. They are not given the treatment options when they are incarcerated, and they simply go back to lives of addiction. Those people have high rates of recidivism, clearly. Most are rearrested and are back in the system within a relatively short period of time.

So this will reduce recidivism, repeat offenses. It makes sense for the person

addicted, and it certainly makes sense for the community, with fewer crimes being committed. It also makes a lot of sense for the taxpayer because that treatment, although there is an additional expense while in the criminal justice system, will have a much better chance of getting those people back to lives wherein they can go back to work, back to their families, be in recovery, and not be back in the expensive criminal justice system. So it is a win-win-win.

CARA and CARA 2.0 gave States and local communities new resources and authorities to make a real difference in my State and others. CARA 3.0 renews and strengthens those programs, and given the recent spike in addiction we see here, it provides a significant boost in funding as well. When added with the existing CARA programs that were authorized through 2023, we will be investing well over \$1 billion per year to address this longstanding epidemic, putting us on the path toward a brighter future free from addiction.

Another important part of CARA 3.0 is our bipartisan legislation to build on this expanded telehealth option for addiction services.

It was necessary during the pandemic to have it because of social distancing. We found out that, although there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction, telehealth has kept patients in touch with their doctors and allowed physicians to prescribe medication-assisted treatment remotely.

It doesn't make sense to get rid of these options once the pandemic goes away, so again, CARA 3.0 included legislation we had previously introduced separately called the Telehealth Response for E-Prescribing Addiction Therapy, or the TREATS Act, to make permanent a number of temporary waivers for telehealth services and bolster telehealth options for addiction treatment services.

Specifically, it does a couple things. First, it allows for a patient to be prescribed these lower scheduled drugs, like SUBOXONE, through telehealth on their first visit. You can't do that now. Current law requires you to go in person for a visit when needing an initial prescription for controlled substances, but this has been a deterrent to patients in crisis and in urgent need of treatments from schedule III or schedule IV drugs, like SUBOXONE or certain other drugs for a co-occurring mental health condition.

It also limits abusive practices by both audio and visual capabilities to be able to interact with the treatment providers to reduce fraud and abuse when it is your first visit, and it would also keep the existing requirements for in-person visits when prescribing schedule II drugs—these are the harder drugs, like opioids and stimulants—which are much more prone to being abused through these telehealth visits.

So we have a provision in there to avoid abuse, but it is also important to continue this telehealth when other op-

tions aren't there. I think it is a balanced approach that makes sense.

Second, our bill will allow for Medicare to bill for audio only or telephone telehealth visits for mental health and substance abuse if it is not the patient's first visit. Due to access to the broadband or distance, in-person or even video appointments aren't always possible, particularly for our seniors.

We need to focus on safety and robust treatment options, but in order to balance the needs of patients, we have proposed to allow our Nation's seniors under Medicare to use phones for subsequent mental health or behavioral health visits when they don't have access to the internet and where fact-to-face interaction isn't possible and isn't as necessary.

I believe the TREATS Act will make a difference in the addiction treatment space and will help us prevent more untimely overdoses.

So the legislation I have laid out so far—CARA 3.0 and the TREATS Act—cover an important aspect of the addiction crisis: the addiction treatment efforts that help lessen the demand for drugs, which is the single most important thing, reducing that demand.

But there is also more we have to do on the supply side because as drugs are pouring into our country, they are at a lower price on the streets of Cincinnati or Columbus or Cleveland or Dayton or Toledo. So we do need to do more to curb the supply of these dangerous substances. This is especially true right now because there is such a critical crisis ongoing, and there is a looming deadline to keep one class of very dangerous drugs illegal and off the streets.

I am talking about the kinds of opioids that are—like fentanyl, that are synthetic opioids but have a slight molecular change. So unless we act here in Congress, they will no longer be scheduled, no longer be illegal.

Data from the CDC, again, shows that the biggest driver to this surge in overdose deaths that we see here comes from fentanyl, comes from these synthetic opioids. They are often far more deadly than traditional opioids, like heroin. In fact, fentanyl is 50 times more powerful than heroin. A pound of fentanyl is lethal enough to kill a half a million people. And fentanyl, as you will find out talking to your law enforcement folks and others in the treatment space, it is often now being laced with other drugs, like cocaine, like crystal meth or heroin.

Most of this synthetic opioid is being illegally manufactured in China and then smuggled across our borders, either coming in through the mail system or going to Mexico and then being smuggled across.

There is also evidence now that it is also being produced in Mexico, which is a change and a major concern.

In order to avoid prosecution, prior to 2018, scientists in China—evil scientists in China—and drug traffickers started making slight modifications to fentanyl, sometimes adjusting a single

molecule and creating what are essentially fentanyl copycats.

While these fentanyl-related substances have the same narcotic properties as fentanyl, their tiny variations allowed them to evade prosecution. But oftentimes, these similar substances, like carfentanil, which some of you are aware of, are even deadlier than fentanyl itself.

To address this, the Drug Enforcement Agency in 2018 used its authority to temporarily classify all fentanyl-related drugs as schedule I substances, which allows law enforcement to aggressively intercept and destroy these substances. Unfortunately, this designation was only temporary. That is all DEA could do.

So, in 2019, Congress extended that designation until May 6, 2021, so a 2-year extension until 14 days from now.

If that deadline lapses 14 days from now, criminals who run labs in China and Mexico will be able to avoid law enforcement as they flood the United States with unlimited slight variants of fentanyl that are just as deadly. We can't let that happen.

Let me say that again. At a time when we are experiencing an alarming rise in overdose deaths that we see here, and fentanyl is the major culprit, the No. 1 killer, we may face a situation where law enforcement will lose the ability to aggressively stop these fentanyl copycats in the United States unless Congress acts in the next 14 days.

Fortunately, we have legislation to do that. Our bipartisan FIGHT Fentanyl Act, which I introduced with Senator JOE MANCHIN, will fix this problem by permanently classifying fentanyl-related drugs as schedule I drugs. It would give our law enforcement certainty to go after synthetic opioids in all their forms and show we are committed to addressing the threat posed by this dangerous class of drugs.

Our proposal is the one bipartisan approach to this in the Senate. We structured it to address concerns from the criminal justice community and made sure it does not impose mandatory minimum sentencing under criminal charges brought under our bill. That has been one of the concerns expressed, particularly by some on the other side of the aisle. So we took that out.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to come to the table and support this urgent legislation.

The House just passed a 5-month extension this week. That is, to me, very sad. Let's make this permanent. There is no reason to do a short-term extension and to create the uncertainty with law enforcement, and, frankly, to tell these evil scientists in places like China, in 5 months, you are going to be able, potentially—to be able to sell this substance again without worrying about the law. This makes no sense. Let's make it permanent. Let's give the DEA the authority to do what they need to do. And by doing so, let's reduce the amount coming in, which in-

creases the cost on the street, which is an important step toward rededicating our efforts to stop these drugs from stealing thousands of lives and causing so much pain.

In conclusion, I urge my colleagues—our Nation faces a crisis. It is the coronavirus pandemic that is finally winding down, but it is also the addiction crisis. It has been happening underneath the coronavirus. As was said by my constituent—this woman who unfortunately has faced addiction in her own family—we have been here the whole time, and it hasn't gotten better; it has gotten worse.

Many of its victims are suffering in silence. We know a lot about what is going on with COVID. We don't know a lot about what is going on with this pandemic, this epidemic of drugs.

So let's act now, without delay. We have 14 days until DEA loses the authority to go after dangerous fentanyl copycats, but we can do something about it. We can pass legislation right now that will help people at their point of pain, as well as provide law enforcement the tools to cut off the source of their suffering—both the CARA 3.0 legislation to deal with the demand side and the legislation to be sure this poison can't come into our communities freely.

As the CDC data shows, this is an issue that affects every single one of us. Forty-nine States have seen a big increase. We know we need to do it. Let's not wait any longer to get to work once again turning the tide on our addiction crisis.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

TRIBUTE TO BETH TROWBRIDGE

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, it is Thursday, and by now many know—particularly our members of our press corps—that it is time for what I feel is probably one of the best moments in the Senate each week. It is time for the “Alaskan of the Week.”

We get to talk about Alaska, talk about somebody who is doing extraordinary things for our State, for our country a lot of times, and I like to give an update when I do my “Alaskan of the Week” speech on what is going on in Alaska.

It is spring, of course. The Sun is high in most parts of the State—actually, in all parts of the State. Spring—we call it breakup, actually, relating to the ice on the rivers—it is upon us.

Now, of course, it can still snow, and it still gets pretty cold in a lot of places in Alaska, but winter is on the run. The promise of summer is in the air, and what a glorious summer it is going to be.

We aren't out of the woods yet on the pandemic in Alaska, but we have managed—we are proud of it, I am proud of my fellow Alaskans—the pandemic, the virus, as well as possible.

One of the things that is happening right now, our vaccination rates have been, almost from the beginning when

we got the vaccine, the highest per capita in the country. Despite our huge challenges in terms of size, limited population, it is really kind of a minimiracle—No. 1 vaccination rates in America in Alaska. We did it by dog sled, snow machine, small airplanes to make that happen.

So if you are watching, America, please come on up to Alaska. It is safe. It is open for tourism. This summer we want you to come on up.

By the way, not only will you have an amazing experience, our State just announced a few days ago you will get a vaccine if you come to Alaska. If your State is too inefficient or bureaucratic to actually get a vaccine, come on up to Alaska. You can have the trip of a lifetime, and you and your family can get vaccinated. We want you up there. We are open for business. We want to see Americans come on up and enjoy our great State as we are getting through this pandemic.

It is a naturally beautiful place, you will see, but the people in my State work hard to keep it pristine and are really what makes it such a great place.

So, today, in honor of Earth Day, I wanted to honor Homer, AK, resident Beth Trowbridge, who has spent her career—about 40 years, four decades—working to keep our waters in Alaska and our beaches clean and pristine.

So let me tell you a little bit about Beth. Originally from St. Louis, Beth first came to Alaska in 1981 as a college student to work on the Youth Conservation Corps in Fairbanks, AK, the interior.

She only intended to stay a year or so—by the way, this is a very common story—only intended to stay a year or so, but as so many do, she got to Alaska and fell in love with the State so she transferred to the University of Alaska in Fairbanks where she got her degree in Northern and Alaska Native studies.

Now, Beth loves the wilderness. She loves living off the land, studying the plants, studying the animals. She said: “There are beautiful and amazing people and amazing resources” in Alaska. She said she always loved the sense that, while we can all live there, nature in Alaska is always in control—the earthquakes, the volcanoes, the extreme weather, the coldness. They are a constant reminder that, in her words, in Alaska “there are the bigger forces out there”—a lot bigger, and she wants to keep it that way.

So she became a steward of her environment and dedicated her life to educating others so that they, too, could become stewards.

With all the talk about climate change, I fear that not nearly enough attention is given to those outside of politics, like in this town, who work day in and day out to care for the environment in the place they call home—in their communities, in their States, every day on the ground at home, making a difference.

That is what Beth has done. After college, she got a job as the education coordinator for the Prince William Sound Science Center, where she authored the "Alaska Oil Spill Curriculum."

Then, in 2000, she began her work—in many ways, her life's work—for the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, or CACS, in the drop-dead gorgeous community of Homer, AK, surrounded by the beautiful Kachemak Bay. Some people call Homer "the place where the land ends and the sea begins"; others, "the cosmic hamlet by the sea"; and others, "the halibut capital of the world."

If you haven't visited Homer, America, you have got to go to Homer. My goodness, it is beautiful. In Alaska, we just call it awesome, in part because of people like Beth and organizations like hers that keep it that way.

In 2012, Beth became the organization's executive director and helped expand the good work that CACS has been doing since 1982.

Now, this organization is primarily an educational organization and offers people of all ages, really from across the globe—not just Alaska, not just America, everywhere—opportunities to connect with the outdoors, learn about coastal environments through guided walks, tours, educational programs, overnight school programs, and so much more.

So think about this impact. Homer, where CACS is located, is a town of about 6,000 people. CACS educates roughly 16,000 people through these science-based programs every year. That is a big impact. They have camps for everyone, and I would encourage anyone who is listening who is going to go to Homer to sign up for one of these camps to explore the unique marine ecology, the tidal pools, and the abundant sea life; to watch whales, seals, and sea lions; to swim against the backdrop of the Kenai Mountains; and to go into the forest and learn about the forest, wildlife, and adaptation in the forest. There is so much to do.

One of the big initiatives of this important organization is to deal with marine debris. So today, on Earth Day, let me put a plug in for the marine debris programs in my State and across the country. This is an issue that I have been very focused on since my time as a U.S. Senator, working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. We have gotten a lot done.

We passed the Save Our Seas Act a couple of Congresses ago, and we passed the Save Our Seas Act 2.0, which the Congressional Research Service called the most comprehensive ocean cleanup legislation ever in the history of the Senate. It was just passed and signed into law in December. So we are making progress.

I do want to give a shout-out to one of my good friends, Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE. You know, some of us miss his weekly "Wake Up" speeches. I think mine is the only weekly speech

anymore. Senator WHITEHOUSE, I am not sure what happened. But Senator WHITEHOUSE and I have worked closely on this kind of legislation—ocean debris, ocean cleanup, and to help organizations like CACS with marine debris cleanup and to call attention to this issue that is solvable. We can solve this—marine debris, ocean plastics—and it is bringing a lot of people in America and across the world together.

One of CACS's biggest annual events is the annual Kachemak Bay Coast Walk. It involves more than 200 volunteers who adopt a section of Kachemak Bay shoreline. And, again, you have got to visit Kachemak Bay, one of the most beautiful places on the planet Earth. Trust me. Surveying changes, collecting data on marine life and human impact and cleaning up beach litter and marine debris is what people do every year with the Kachemak Bay Coast Walk. It is the kind of great local work that really makes a difference. It brings people from all across Alaska together—people who know how special and beautiful Kachemak Bay is—and it creates community. It creates community, and that is so important, not just for our State but for our oceans and the coastline.

So that is one of the many things Beth has done.

Beth and her husband, Charlie, who is a retired shellfish biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have four children. The youngest is finishing eighth grade, and the oldest is 33.

Beth develops environmental curriculums for schools. She is a Rotarian, a Girl Scout leader, and keeps CACS running seamlessly. She says she does all of this because she has a passion for sharing the outdoors with people—Alaskans, Americans, people from all over the world, but especially the next generation—and she hopes that her work not only will have an immediate impact on the environment but helps people to understand the challenges of our oceans and to focus more on cleanup, because who doesn't want to clean up our oceans?

Local businesses, she is noticing, are using more recyclable material. People are leaving less trash behind. People are talking more about cleanup and ownership, and that is how you make a difference at the local level, and it spreads out all over the State and the country.

Beth said:

I hope that, through my work, we can provide the opportunities to understand and appreciate nature. I am proud of where I live. I love Homer. I want to take care of it. I hope that others [in the community] feel that way too.

Beth, that is a great sentiment, and it is also one of the many reasons we are proud to honor you today with this very prestigious award, being our Alaskan of the Week. Congratulations.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

(The remarks of Mr. CORNYN, pertaining to the introduction of S. 1358, are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. CORNYN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 1345 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EARTH DAY

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, today is a special day. It is Earth Day. I had the privilege of actually being at the first Earth Day, at Golden Gate Park, a million years ago. The speaker there that day was Ralph Nader, and there was a huge crowd. Hundreds of thousands of people were there.

Ralph Nader made a lot of fame and fortune writing a book called "Unsafe at Any Speed," about the Corvair Monza. That was my first car, a Corvair Monza. And as he was there speaking that day, I couldn't help but think about how much I loved my Corvair Monza and couldn't believe he wrote that book about it.

He actually made a lot of sense and, certainly, it was a rallying point for people in this country who realized that we were going the wrong way in terms of the cleanliness of our air and the cleanliness of our water.

I had gone to Ohio State and was a Navy ROTC midshipman there, and I ended up in Southeast Asia. I remember being over in Southeast Asia on one of our deployments, and the Cuyahoga River, up the road from Ohio State, in Cleveland, OH, caught on fire. They had too many people drinking the dirty water.

I liked to run outside. I know our Presiding Officer is a big athlete as well. I know there were days that I would run outside, in the 1960s and 1970s—and in some places, even now, around the world—and I was doing more damage than good by breathing the air in those places.

But some amazing things happened in 1970, right around 1970. We saw the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. I don't think it was done initially as a bill. I think it was actually done sort of as an Executive order. Richard Nixon was the President then.

I think the Congress came along a few years later and sort of passed legislation to implement the Executive order. The Clean Air Act was signed into law. The Clean Water Act was passed. I think Richard Nixon initially

vetoed the Clean Water Act. But they had huge support—overwhelming support, Democrat and Republican—for both measures.

We didn't give a whole lot of concern in those days to climate change. Nobody really talked, in the 1960s and the 1970s or the 1980s, about climate change. But something started happening on our planet. People said: I think it is getting warmer. The weather seems to be a bit more extreme as time goes by.

Then scientists reported that a hole was being formed in the ozone layer over the North Pole, and it started off small and got bigger and bigger and bigger. And people a lot smarter than me said: This is not good. We have to figure out what is going on here.

They finally figured out that it was something called CFCs, or chlorofluorocarbons, which were actually found in our air-conditioners, our freezers, and refrigerators. They did a really good job in keeping things cool, including us, but, unfortunately, it led to the hole in the ozone.

So some really smart scientists got to work, and they came up with something called HFCs, hydrofluorocarbons. HFCs did a really good job keeping us cool. They also did a good job in terms of the hole in the ozone going away. But the bad thing about HFCs, or hydrofluorocarbons, is that they are a thousand times worse for climate change, the warming of our climate, than carbon, carbon dioxide. So some good but some bad as well.

We passed the legislation, and it was signed—I think unbeknownst to him—last December, by the President. It is legislation that phases down HFCs, or hydrofluorocarbons. So now we are going to have American-made products that will keep us cool and will be good and positive with respect to climate change, and will create a lot of jobs—tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of jobs, American jobs with American technology—and strengthen our economy in a variety of different ways.

So on this Earth Day, there is a lot to be concerned about, but the HFC phase-down that I just talked about was signed into law and was part of a much bigger package in December, that is worth a half a degree Celsius.

Scientists will tell you that what we want is to be careful to not see the Earth temperature go up by more than 2 or 3 degrees Celsius, and if we do, it becomes sort of irreversible and we are in real trouble then on this planet.

But this one thing that we did, voted on here in this Chamber, phasing down HFCs, is worth about a half a degree Celsius. There is still more to do, but that is a good start.

The greatest source of carbon dioxide on our planet is not HFCs, but it is the emissions from our cars, trucks, and vans—our mobile fleet. About 28 percent of carbon emissions come from our cars, trucks, and vans. About another 25 percent comes from utilities,

powerplants that provide electricity for us, a lot of them powered by coal or natural gas—mostly coal. And another large source of carbon emissions is from industries. Think of cement plants, if you will. If you add those three together, it is about 75 percent of the carbon emissions in our country—just those three sources.

There used to be a guy, a bank robber, whose name was Willie Sutton. You may or may not have heard of him. He lived during the Depression, before either of us. But he robbed a lot of banks. He finally got caught and ended up in trial before the judge.

And the judge said: Mr. Sutton, why do you rob all those banks?

And Willie Sutton replied, famously: That is where the money is, your Honor. That is where the money is.

Well, one of the reasons why we focus on carbon emissions and global warming emissions coming from mobile sources is that that is 28 percent of the emissions. That is not where the money is, but that is where the emissions are, where a lot of them are coming from.

And we are getting really exciting announcements from American companies, auto companies. GM has announced this year that starting in 2035, they will not be manufacturing cars, trucks, or vans that are burning gasoline or diesel fuel. They are just going to be electric. They will be using hydrogen and fuel cells. That is huge—by 2035. That is only like 14 years away.

Ford has made similar kinds of pledges. I think Volkswagen and a number of other companies have made similar pledges. And they are not pledges for things that will take place in like 40 or 50 years. We are talking about right down the road, right down the road. That is great news because the threat of climate change is imminent, and we don't have a lot of time to meet it.

I was in a hearing this morning. One of the committees I serve on is Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. One of the issues that we have that we are responsible for is the Postal Service. I think, maybe for reasons that go back to my time in the Vietnam war, of being overseas in the war and how, every week, when we would get the mail over there, it was the best part of the week. You would hear from your families, loved ones, friends, newspapers, magazines, care packages. It was a great day.

So I have great affection for the Postal Service, even today. I love the idea of mail-in voting, and I know my friend from Georgia has some affection for people being able to participate and exercise their constitutional rights through the mail. And, hopefully, we will do more of that in smart ways like that in the future.

But the Postal Service still provides a valuable service. We were reminded of that during the election last year. But the Postal Service, the men and women who drive around and deliver

our mail, they drive around in vehicles that are, on average, 25 years and older. Almost all of them are diesel or gasoline powered.

The Postal Service realizes that they need to upgrade their fleet, and they need to do that sooner than later. It is not cheap. It is not a cheap thing to do—165,000 mail trucks that need to be replaced in the next several years.

There is a 10-year plan that the Postal Service has put out—how they plan to, sort of, and return to, if not to profitability, at least to improve over time to a break-even situation. One of the things that is in their plan is to buy and replace their existing fleet of cars, trucks, and vans—mostly trucks and vans.

They are apparently in a contract with a company up in Oshkosh, WI, called Oshkosh, and the idea is to build a bunch of vehicles, tens of thousands of them, over the next decade or so.

We had three nominees today before us who have been nominated to be members of the Board of Governors of the Postal Service. In all, there are nine members of the Board of Governors, nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate. They have three vacancies, and we had three nominees to fill those vacancies before us.

I wished them all a happy Earth Day, and then I talked to them about what lies ahead in terms of replacing 165,000 vehicles. And, apparently, originally, the first couple of thousand vehicles that will be produced will be gas and diesel, and then, after that, the vehicles could be gas, diesel, or electric—or hydrogen, for that matter.

There is an extra cost when we switch to electric, extra costs when we switch over to, say, hydrogen, if that is the technology that is chosen, because you need electric charging stations and you need the hydrogen fueling stations.

It is easy to take your gasoline-powered vehicle or your diesel-powered vehicle to a gas station. It is on the corner. It is in your town. But if you need to get the electric charger for your battery or you need the hydrogen for your fuel cell vehicle, then that costs some money. And it can't all be on the Postal Service. It can't all be on the Postal Service.

As we put together this next infrastructure package for our country—and we are going to be debating here legislation that Senator CAPITO and I on the Environment and Public Works Committee have been working on with our bipartisan team next week, a big package on wastewater treatment and on drinking water, clean drinking water. That will be the first big infrastructure bill that we pass, I think, in the Senate—hopefully, next week. But there will be, hopefully, a lot more. And part of that will be roads, highways, and bridges coming down the road. And part of that will be charging stations in densely populated corridors all over the country—charging stations for electric vehicles and fueling stations

for hydrogen vehicles, which have a lot of potential, too.

I just want us to keep in mind, when that day comes—I want the Postal Service to keep in mind that we need for them to set an example—for the Postal Service to set an example. If they go out and two-thirds of the new vehicles they buy are gasoline- and diesel-powered, shame on them, and, frankly, shame on us in this body for allowing that to happen.

But we have to remember that the Postal Service is fighting for its life, and we need to be there and be helpful in terms of helping to pay for the infrastructure that they will need when they buy these new vehicles.

I will close with this. Mr. President, I am not sure where Home Depot is headquartered. Are they not headquartered in Georgia? If they are, nod your head. I think they are. I love to talk about Home Depot.

Whenever I go down to Central America, to places like Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—we call them the Northern Triangle countries—we have something in place called the Alliance for Prosperity program. It is designed to help fight corruption, their crime, their violence, and their lack of economic opportunity there.

And we provide money—taxpayer money—to help these countries down there, so people will stop feeling like they have to come up here to escape the violence, the corruption, the crime, and the lack of economic opportunity. So we provide some money, and then we expect them, for every dollar we provide, to provide four or five dollars on their own. We want foundations to put up money. We want businesses to put up money to help produce this as well.

I say to the people of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, who live in some really terrible situations, when I talk to them about the Alliance for Prosperity, which has been in place now for several years: You can do it. You, those three countries—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—you can do it. We can help, and I think we have a moral obligation to help.

I think at the Postal Service, they can do it. They can update their fleet. They can do so in a way that is sustainable and is actually good for this planet. This is the only planet we are going to have. We have to take care of it or, otherwise, face huge, huge challenges.

So I would, on this Earth Day, say to my colleagues that the anniversary provides opportunity. The Postal Service is going through its share of adversity, as well, but there is real opportunity, as well, to help the Postal Service and the men and women who work there to do a better and a more reliable job of delivering the mail to all of us but, also, to do so in a way that is good for our planet.

That would be a very, very good thing and make this Earth Day especially memorable.

Mr. President, with that, I am going to bid you adieu. Great weekend to you and the staff. God bless you. Thank you so much.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Wisconsin.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 59, Deanne Bennett Criswell, of New York, to be Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security; that the cloture motion be withdrawn, the nomination be confirmed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, as if in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture motions presented earlier be considered to have been presented in the following order: Miller, McCabe, and Kahl.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

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

COVID-19 HATE CRIMES ACT

• Mr. LEE. Mr. President, over the past 13 months, Americans have endured extraordinary constraints on one

of the most precious rights guaranteed by our Constitution: the right to freely exercise their religion. There is, perhaps, no freedom more intertwined with our nation's history. It was religious freedom that drove persecuted settlers from England to America just over 400 years ago. And they were not the last. Over the centuries, countless religious minorities from across the world have come to America, seeking refuge from religious warfare and bigotry.

To be clear, we haven't always lived up to this ideal. Members of the church to which I belong were forced to flee across the country due to religious persecution, to name just one example. Despite these aberrations, however, no nation in the history of the world has protected and preserved the rights of religion and conscience like the United States. And that's not an accident. The First Congress recognized the profound importance of religious freedom by protecting it in the very first sentence of the Bill of Rights. That provision—called the First Amendment—states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The Supreme Court has applied this prohibition to State and local governments through the 14th Amendment.

So what does this mean, practically? First, governments cannot discriminate against religion or single it out for worse treatment than similar non-religious activities. But, second, if a government does treat religion differently than other similar activities, it must “pass” the “strict scrutiny” test. That means that the government must show that there was absolutely no other way to achieve an extremely important goal than restricting the religious activity in question.

The First Amendment is clear. Religious exercise must be protected. Nevertheless, over the course of the pandemic, governments throughout the country have placed heavy-handed restrictions on this fundamental freedom, restricting Americans' freedom to gather for worship, to meet in smaller groups for religious purposes, or even to sing.

At first, Americans accepted these restrictions. We understood the extraordinary difficulties facing our leaders as they struggled to grapple with a new and deadly virus. And we were assured that these restrictions would be temporary, lasting no longer than necessary. But as the weeks and months dragged on and the prohibitions on religious exercise continued, we began to see a startling trend. As restrictions on restaurants, casinos, and museums began to thaw, in many states, synagogues, churches, temples, mosques, and other religious gatherings were left out in the cold.

In May 2020, the Governor of California allowed some restaurants and retail businesses to operate indoors with up to 50 Percent capacity. Meanwhile, all indoor religious services—of