

Maybe the whole idea of a low-water bridge that you and I would be used to was something they hadn't thought about.

We had three interstate highways close—Interstate 55, Interstate 70, and Interstate 44. They were not all closed at exactly the same time but within somewhere between a 24- to 36-hour timeframe. We will have to look at that to be sure people don't lose access to where their kids are, where their jobs are, and where their health care is. The economic impact of that Interstate System that comes together in so many ways in Missouri shutting down is something that clearly, once we get beyond the immediacy of dealing with the flood itself, we need to look at and see how we can prevent that problem from happening again. I don't know of a time when any two of those highways were closed at the same time before, but I know Interstate 70 and Interstate 44 were closed at the same time, and it had a real impact economically on people traveling east to west or economic things happening east to west anywhere in the country.

HEALTH CARE RESEARCH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I was also able to talk about some good news. I am not sure how much good news we are going to hear over the next few days, but certainly there is the good news of stepping up and looking at health care research and the impact it can have in the country. There are things that are beginning to happen in mental health and things that we are trying to do to respond to prescription drug abuse and opioid abuse in all areas.

In health care research, the National Institutes of Health hadn't received an increase in their research funding since 2003. There was an effort made right before that to make a substantial increase. The fact that the Congress and the administration stopped research funding had always been frustrating, but we were able to see an increase this year for the first time in 12 years. That meant we had to create a priority. For too many people in government, when there is a discussion about funding priorities, a lot of our colleagues hear that and think that means we have to fund anything anybody has ever convinced the government we are interested in. Being interested in something doesn't make it a priority; it just makes it something that, if everything was going along the right way, maybe this is something to look at. But in funding NIH at a new level, we totally eliminated 18 programs, zeroed them out. We didn't eliminate the authorization for them, but we eliminated the money to run those 18 programs. Congress and eventually the President accepted the argument that for the greater good, these 18 programs did not need to continue. The President asked for 23

new programs that also did not receive funding, but that allowed us to make a commitment and to set priorities.

Why set a priority? The first funding increase in 12 years was 6.6 percent. We went from spending \$30 billion on health care research last year to \$32 billion this year. Hopefully this is a first step toward trying to solve health care problems.

There are many changing developments in health care, from smartphone technology, to individual medicine, to knowing more about the human genome. How did we find out about the human genome? We found that out through NIH research. If we hadn't had NIH research, it is likely that the human genome would still be a mystery to us. It had been a mystery on the planet until just a few years ago. The reason that happened was the National Institutes of Health and the Congress decided it would be helpful to figure out how all of us are different from each other, which also means trying to figure out a different approach to curing diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's, and heart disease.

What difference does it make? Why is it a priority to spend taxpayers' money in this way? One reason is the clear impact health care research is having every day on individuals and families who no longer are dealing with problems they would have been dealing with 10 years ago. Moving forward, let's see if we can find ways to meet the challenges for families and caregivers. Let's see what we can do there.

Generally, for taxpayers, even if you aren't the individual beneficiary, estimates are that the Medicare system will be absolutely overwhelmed between now and 2050 by things such as Alzheimer's and cancer. If we can figure out a cure or delay onset of Alzheimer's by 5 or 7 years on average, the impact on the cost of that devastating disease—both the real cost to taxpayers and the emotional and psychological costs to everybody involved—will be overwhelming.

The Medicare system won't be able to withstand the projections of how much money will be spent if we don't find ways to deal with these new challenges. As people get older, Alzheimer's and cancer are more likely to end life than heart disease and stroke. That doesn't mean we don't need to be focused on neurological research or on heart research. All of those things are important, and a relatively small investment by the Federal Government on health care to try to do something about that matters.

It is generally understood that health care will dramatically change in the next 10 or 20 years. Where the research is done is likely to be where the jobs and economic impact of that research occurs.

I don't want to be going to the Chinese 10 years from now saying: Will you tell us how your investment in research has paid off? We are better at this than anybody else in the world,

and we need to continue to be better. There are reasons for us to be better.

I do visit some of the places where this research is being done. I was at the Siteman Cancer Center on the campus of Washington University, one of the premier cancer focus centers in the country. Washington University is where one-third of all research was done to understand the human genome.

I have met with the Alzheimer's Association and the American Cancer Association.

I met with the family of a young man who lost his fight with cancer before he was 10 years old. His mom and dad formed the Super Sam Foundation to encourage other families and to encourage research. They were there with his sister representing the Super Sam Foundation.

The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Disorders at the University of Missouri is another place where we are looking to see what we can do to intervene earlier and help solve problems. The new chancellor at the university, Hank Foley, was with me, as was the director of that center, Dr. Stephen Kanne. They are doing good work and will continue to do so.

In Kansas City, I met with an organization, MRIGlobal, that is doing incredible work in the field of environmental and cancer research and is making a big difference. The head of that company, Thomas Sack, was there as we were talking about what they were doing and what they hoped to do.

My hometown of Springfield is also the home location of the Alzheimer's Association Missouri Chapter. I had a chance to talk with them.

I also met with the people from the Alzheimer's Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, and I then went on to Southeast Missouri State University, another autism center that is working to figure out how we can deal with autism disorders, including early detection.

I visited Truman State University in Kirksville, where I had the opportunity to learn more about the university's efforts to create an interprofessional autism clinic. I was able to hear stories about how frustrated young researchers have been with just a 6.6-percent increase—the first increase in 12 years. During that 12 years, the buying power of the research dollar went down by 20 percent. We restored a little of that 20 percent.

The Federal Government has been involved in research at least since the founding of the Department of Agriculture in 1862. Whether it is health care research or ag research or environmental research or energy research, there is a level of that research which should and will be done by the private sector, but there is another level of research by the Federal Government that benefits everybody by sharing the results of that research.

In mental health, there is a lot of excitement in Missouri and around the

country about the potential of being one of the pilot States in excellence of mental health. Senator STABENOW from Michigan and I introduced legislation a few years ago that would combine—that would treat behavioral health, treat mental health just like all other health. This is another way to save money, because of that mental health situation.

By the way, the National Institutes of Health says that one out of four adult Americans has a diagnosable and almost always treatable mental health issue. If that mental health issue is being treated, whatever your other health issues are, they are likely to be treated in a much more effective way.

We are looking for more choices to deal with the issues suffered by our Vietnam veterans to our youngest veterans, giving them more options and more choices.

Eight States are going to be doing that and 24 States have applied. Senator STABENOW and I will be talking more about what happens and what we might do to encourage those other 16 States.

The President says he wants to spend more money on mental health. It really doesn't matter how you share your mental health information or what your provider last told you or how many mental health care providers you have if there is no place to go and if there are no access points to treat behavioral health like all other health issues, and that is what excellence in mental health does for patients.

I will close with one final area. I think there has been a lot of response to understanding and addressing the opioid epidemic and the drug issue. Deaths from prescription opioids and other pain-related drugs quadrupled between 1999 and 2013, claiming more than 145,000 lives over the past 10 years, but a substantial portion of those deaths occurred over the last couple of years. These overdoses cost the economy an estimated \$20 billion in medical costs and lost work productivity. Some people die from overdosing, and many other people have to be treated by their health care provider. There is a personal loss to those individuals who become addicted to prescription drugs.

I mentioned that I had a chance to talk to the Missouri General Assembly last week, and I talked about how our veterans are often the victims just because of the serious injuries they sustain and the painkilling drugs they are given to help deal with the pain of those injuries. But that then leads to an addiction to that drug and other drugs.

Approximately three out of four new heroin users abused prescription drugs before switching to heroin. We have made a new commitment to this issue with new programs that are targeted to combat opioid abuse at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration with

almost three times the investment that the country made before. This is truly becoming an epidemic, and we need to deal with that epidemic sooner rather than later.

Many of our Members and their States have talked effectively about fighting heroin and drug addiction but also about dealing with the transition from taking drugs that they were prescribed to drugs that they shouldn't have. We are looking at new opportunities there. The new Republican-led Senate is looking at how to deal with these opportunities in new ways. I hope we haven't made those successes for the spending year we are in now a one-time only event but a new commitment to try to solve the problems early so that society and the programs which taxpayers fund aren't overwhelmed by those problems later.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

THE STATE OF THE UNION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I appreciate the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BLUNT, addressing some of the issues that the Republican majority has attempted to accomplish, including the advances made over the last year, which I think will lay a foundation for the future and for further successes in the coming year.

Tonight President Obama will come to Congress to deliver his final State of the Union Address, which raises this question: What is the state of our Union? The truth is that while the strength and spirit of the American people remain a beacon of hope for our future, our country is facing a number of serious challenges. Global unrest has grown over the course of the President's administration, most notably with the rise of ISIS, one of the most brutal terrorist groups in existence.

On President Obama's watch, we have experienced the worst economic recovery since the Eisenhower administration, with stagnant wages and millions dropping out of the labor force. American families are seeing their dreams for the future erode as they struggle under ever-increasing government burdens and a lack of economic opportunity.

Any serious discussion of the state of our Union needs to address these challenges and offer solutions. That is the kind of speech that I wish we were going to hear tonight, but unfortunately all indicators suggest that is not the kind of speech the President plans to give. Instead, the President apparently intends to take a victory lap despite the fact that the American people clearly don't think there is much to celebrate. A recent New York Times/CBS News poll found that 68 percent of the American people think our country is on the wrong track, and most Americans believe the next generation will be worse off, not better off.

In a preview of the President's speech, the White House notes: "We

have made extraordinary progress on the path to a stronger country and a brighter future." That is not how the American people are feeling, and it doesn't reflect the reality of the President's administration.

The President plans to talk about his supposed economic successes tonight. While our economy has recovered to a certain extent since the recession, it has never fully rebounded. Wage growth continues to lag. December marked the 77th straight month in which year-over-year hourly wage growth was at or below 2½ percent. Underemployment also continues to be a problem with millions of Americans continuing to work part-time jobs because they can't find full-time work. Almost 5 years after the recession ended, the percentage of Americans working full time has still not returned to prerecession levels.

While the most commonly mentioned unemployment rate is 5 percent, the U-6 unemployment rate, which measures the number of both unemployed workers and underemployed workers, is 9.9 percent. Of the unemployed, those who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, or those considered long-term unemployed, make up 26 percent. Labor force participation remains near record lows. In short, stagnation has become the new normal for the economy under the Obama administration and economic opportunities for families have been few and far between.

In addition to the lack of economic opportunity, families have had to shoulder new burdens thanks to the Obama administration. Chief among those burdens, of course, is ObamaCare, the President's disastrous health care law, which has failed to reduce the cost of health care, ripped away millions of Americans' preferred health care plans, forced families onto insurance plans they don't want and can't afford, reduced patients' access to doctors and hospitals, increased taxes, and wasted literally billions of taxpayer dollars.

Then there are the burdensome regulations the Obama administration has imposed, which have made it more challenging for businesses, large and small, to grow and create jobs.

The Obama Environmental Protection Agency, in particular, has done more than its fair share to make things difficult for Americans. During the course of the Obama administration, this Agency has implemented one damaging rule after another, from a massive national backdoor energy tax that would hurt poor and working families the most to a new rule that would subject ponds and puddles in Americans' backyards to a complex array of expensive and burdensome regulatory requirements.

Again and again, I have heard from South Dakota farm and ranch families, homeowners and small businesses about the difficulties they are facing thanks to the Obama EPA's massive regulations.

If the President's record on the economy and middle-class opportunity is