

Thom Tillis, John Hoeven, Kelly Ayotte, John McCain, Rob Portman, John Barrasso, Lamar Alexander, Richard Burr, John Thune, Orrin G. Hatch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the conference report to accompany S. 524, a bill to authorize the Attorney General to award grants to address the national epidemics of prescription opioid abuse and heroin abuse, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SHELBY), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 90, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 126 Leg.]

YEAS—90

Alexander	Ernst	Mikulski
Ayotte	Feinstein	Moran
Baldwin	Fischer	Murkowski
Barrasso	Flake	Murphy
Bennet	Franken	Murray
Blumenthal	Gardner	Nelson
Blunt	Gillibrand	Paul
Booker	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Peters
Boxer	Hatch	Portman
Brown	Heinrich	Reed
Burr	Heitkamp	Reid
Cantwell	Heller	Risch
Capito	Hirono	Rubio
Cardin	Hoeven	Sanders
Carper	Isakson	Schatz
Casey	Johnson	Schumer
Cassidy	Kaine	Scott
Coats	King	Shaheen
Collins	Kirk	Stabenow
Coons	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Corker	Lankford	Tester
Cornyn	Leahy	Thune
Cotton	Manchin	Tillis
Crapo	Markey	Toomey
Cruz	McCain	Udall
Daines	McCaskill	Warner
Donnelly	McConnell	Warren
Durbin	Menendez	Whitehouse
Enzi	Merkley	Wyden

NAYS—2

Lee Sasse

NOT VOTING—8

Cochran	Rounds	Vitter
Inhofe	Sessions	Wicker
Roberts	Shelby	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 90, the nays are 2.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair lays be-

fore the Senate the House message to accompany H.R. 636, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the text of the bill (H.R. 636) entitled "An Act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permanently extend increased expensing limitations, and for other purposes," with House amendments to Senate amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

MOTION TO CONCUR

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I move to concur in the House amendments to the Senate amendments to H.R. 636.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 1:45 p.m. will be equally divided between the leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, before I give my speech, I ask unanimous consent for Senator PORTMAN to have 1 minute.

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

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and, in less than a minute, I want to acknowledge something historic that just happened on this floor—a 90-to-2 vote for the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. This is the Senate agreeing with the House to do something important to address this epidemic of heroin and prescription drug abuse, and I congratulate my colleague SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, my coauthor, and encourage all my colleagues to now get this signed as soon as possible so we can get it out to our communities to help.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

REFORMING THE BUDGET PROCESS

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise to discuss America's broken budget process and the Senate Budget Committee's continuing effort to provide solutions to place our Nation's budget on a better, sustainable path.

Last year, on May 5, the Senate passed its first balanced 10-year budget since 2001. This was a big deal. It was thoroughly considered and amended to the tune of 71 rollcall votes, and 146 amendments adopted overall, and it provided an enforceable plan to get the Nation's exploding debt under control.

On May 22, just 17 days later, we enacted legislation that violated the budget. Congress didn't even abide by the budget for a whole month. This trend has continued throughout the 114th Congress. Since passing its fiscal year 2016 budget plan, Congress has been unable to achieve any reduction in overspending called for in the balanced budget. Instead, Congress enacted legislation increasing spending by nearly \$150 billion and reducing revenue by \$478 billion over the 10-year window. Much of these violations were enacted as part of the end-of-the-year omnibus spending bill, which was draft-

ed behind closed doors and passed under threat of government shutdown, completely outside of regular order.

The truth is, America's budget process is broken, and it is preventing Congress from tackling the pressing fiscal challenges facing our country. The current budget process is designed only to spend and fails hard-working taxpayers. Each year, nearly \$3 trillion is spent by Washington without any meaningful congressional review or consideration. What America really needs is a budget process built to save.

The last time Congress reformed the budget process was in 1974. Times have changed, and the 40-year-old process has only grown more dysfunctional and antiquated. Until 1998, Congress had never failed to pass a budget, but in the last 15 years, Congress failed to pass a budget resolution more than half the time. Today, budgets from Congress and the President are increasingly tossed aside, leaving the country with no long-term fiscal plan.

Our appropriations process is broken. Spending bills are nearly always late, creating crippling uncertainty for agencies, businesses, and the American people. We have completed all appropriations bills on time in only 4 of the last 45 years. In 15 of those years, we did not pass one appropriations bill on time. Instead of well-considered funding decisions, the government operates on short-term spending bills or continuing resolutions. We have had to use 173 short-term spending bills since 1977, and that is just 3 years after the Budget Act was passed.

That is just the portion of the budget Congress has control over. Today, a growing portion of our budget is devoted to entitlements and other automatic spending. When Congress last reformed the budget process in 1974, this type of spending constituted only one-third of what was spent and two-thirds of the spending provided annually.

This chart points that out: 1966, 33 percent on automatic pilot, 67 percent, annual review. Now, 70 percent automatic spending, 30 percent under annual review. And this is growing automatically. These don't have guaranteed revenue sources. Whenever the revenue source doesn't meet up with what we have already said would automatically be paid, it cuts into this 30 percent that we get for annual review—automatically—and reduces the amount we get to actually make decisions on.

I have talked about what could happen if the interest rates go up—\$19 trillion in debt. So \$20 trillion at a 1-percent interest rate would cost us \$200 billion a year. The norm, 5 percent, would cost us 1,000 billion, or \$1 trillion, and we only get to make decisions—this part of it—on \$1,070 billion. So how would we fund everything the government does on \$70 billion?

This crisis is coming. In 2016, 70 percent of Federal spending is provided automatically, essentially on autopay year after year without congressional review or approval. In 15 years, this

runaway spending and interest will consume all of the taxes and revenues the Federal Government collects crowding out the functions we normally associate with good government.

What would those be? Some really important ones would be national defense and border security, maybe transportation, maybe education.

This mandatory spending operates with no connection between funding decisions and program performance. Given that this spending often continues in perpetuity, the least we can do is ensure that it is spent effectively.

I want to repeat that part. The mandatory spending operates with no connection between funding decisions and program performance. There are a whole bunch of programs out here in the 70 percent that we never have to look at because they are going to get their money anyway. Nobody lobbies us on it because they get their money, anyway. So we don't have any program performance. How many of those do we suppose are not doing what they were originally intended to do? I am willing to bet a lot of them. In fact, I have looked at them and know it is a lot of them.

The good news is there are bipartisan steps Congress can take now to fix America's broken budget process. The Senate Budget Committee has held a series of hearings and meetings to discuss bipartisan solutions that would, No. 1, improve the way Congress considers budget legislation, No. 2, update the antiquated accounting rules that would affect the information Congress uses to make tax and spending decisions, and, No. 3, set the country's finances on a sustainable path by establishing enforceable long-term fiscal targets.

Congress can begin to regain control of the Nation's finances by reforming the procedures it uses to consider budget legislation. Based on conversations with Democratic and Republican members of my committee, I am pursuing the following reforms with the understanding that they will receive bipartisan support:

First, the Senate's rules governing consideration of budget resolutions are overly burdensome and discourage passage of this important planning document. We can fix this by reforming what we call the vote-arama, the disgraceful ritual that has turned into a string of meaningless gotcha votes. The Senate should bring order to this chaotic process by establishing filing deadlines and limits on the number of amendments that can be offered.

Second, the Senate should be required to devote floor time to consideration of annual appropriations measures—the annual spending measures. In Wyoming, the State legislature encourages full consideration of their spending bills by holding a budget session—that is, a session of the regular legislature—and it requires a two-thirds vote to consider any nonbudget legislation. We should have similar rules in the

Senate to make sure we get our work done.

Third, budget points of order should be meaningful. Today, they are routinely ignored or waived by Members of this body. The Senate should tie the waiver vote threshold to the size of the budget violation. De minimis violations—that would be under half a million dollars, probably—should be automatically waived, while large violations should be subject to up to a two-thirds vote threshold. It has to be a little more difficult for us to violate what we set out to do.

Fourth, Congress needs to rethink the way it allocates Federal resources. Our fragmented budget process makes it nearly impossible to know how much of the government's resources are devoted to a particular policy goal. There is a different budget for the Budget Committee, a different one for the spending committees which are the appropriators, and a different one for the White House. I think it is intentional, so that we can't follow what it is. Our fragmented budget process makes it impossible to know how much of the government's resources are devoted to a particular policy goal. We should establish subcommittees within the Budget Committee to review entire portfolios of government spending and tax policy to ensure the programs and funding are actually accomplishing certain policy objectives. This would help identify both effective and ineffective programs, reducing waste, and focusing on results.

We should also consider moving to a 2-year funding cycle. Funding uncertainty creates wasteful spending, disrupts government operations and planning, and reduces productive investment and hiring in the private sector. A biennial process would lock in 2 years of spending in law, providing Federal agencies, businesses, and the American people with certainty and predictability. That is why this commonsense solution has been supported by Presidents, legislators, and good-governance think tanks from both parties for decades.

Once the Senate passes legislation to improve our internal budget procedures, we should move on to the more fundamental problems of the current budget process; that is, the antiquated accounting rules and our growing debt burden. The private sector applies modern advances in economics, accounting, and finance to accurately reflect a business's financial condition and the potential impact of new policies, but the Federal Government's budget rules haven't undergone comprehensive reviews since 1967. That was 50 years ago. This issue may seem dry and boring, but as an accountant, I can tell you that it is extremely important and exciting. Antiquated accounting techniques mislead Congress and the public, and they misstate the true cost of government activities. Updating these budget rules will provide Congress with the honest, accurate information nec-

essary to allocate taxpayer dollars effectively and efficiently.

Finally, Congress should get serious about addressing America's long-term debt crisis, which today totals more than \$19 trillion and is expected to grow over \$29 trillion by 2026—and that is just based on this 70 percent on automatic pilot. We need long-term, enforceable fiscal targets with guideposts along the way that ensure revenues and spending are moving in the right direction.

Fiscal targets alone will not fix the Federal budget. Congress will need to enact substantial policy reforms if it wants to get our Nation's debt under control. Former Budget Chairmen Judd Gregg and Kent Conrad—one Republican, one Democrat—recommended establishing a bipartisan commission to submit a legislative proposal that would achieve long-term revenue, spending, and debt targets. Congress would then be required to consider and vote on the commission's recommendations without amendment. This is a creative, bipartisan approach to addressing politically difficult decisions that must be made to ensure this country's future prosperity.

The Budget Committee has been working diligently on these reforms and stands ready to offer bipartisan legislation should the Senate choose to fix our broken budget process. The time to act is now. We are currently spending over \$230 billion in interest on our debt every year, even with historically low interest rates that I talked about. The Congressional Budget Office tells us that every one percentage point our interest rates rise will increase America's overspending by \$1.6 trillion over the next 10 years, or about \$160 billion a year. That is a 1-percent rise in the interest rate—\$230 billion—up another \$160 billion, up another \$160 billion. Interest on the debt will soon put America out of the business of protecting its citizens from foreign threats, educating our youth, and building national infrastructure like highways and roads.

These bipartisan reforms wouldn't solve all of our budget problems, but they are a promising first step toward unsticking the budget gridlock that has gripped Washington in recent years. This would begin to put our Nation on not just another path but a better path.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following article, which appears in the Washington Times today, be printed in the RECORD: "Government not close to paying for promises, CBO says." The subtitle is "Tax increases, cuts needed to return to normal debt load," by Stephen Dinan.

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

[From the Washington Times, July 13, 2016]
GOVERNMENT NOT CLOSE TO PAYING FOR PROMISES, CBO SAYS: TAX INCREASES, CUTS NEEDED TO RETURN TO NORMAL DEBT LOAD
 (By Stephen Dinan)

The economy simply cannot grow fast enough to cover the federal government's generous promises to Americans, the Congressional Budget Office said Tuesday, laying out grim options of massive tax increases or withering cuts to spending that loom ahead.

After a few years of post-recession relief, deficits are roaring back, the CBO said, sounding a call to action for a Congress and White House that have instead been arguing over how much to increase spending.

But with health care costs rising, and an aging population already promised very generous Social Security and Medicare benefits, the government cannot come close to paying for its current promises, the CBO said.

"Revenues are projected to increase, but much more slowly than spending, leading to larger budget deficits and rising debt," the analysts said in their long-term budget outlook.

The picture is substantially worse than just a year ago, when the CBO said debt held by the public would reach 107 percent of gross domestic product by 2040. Now, the CBO says, that figure will be 122 percent—a 15-point turn for the worse.

Analysts said Congress keeps cutting taxes and boosting spending, at a time when the budget hole calls for the exact opposite approach.

To get back to normal—which means a debt rate of about 40 percent of the economy—the government would have to cut \$560 billion out of next year's budget, and growing every year thereafter. Even to maintain the current level of already excessive debt, which is 75 percent of the economy, would require cuts of \$330 billion in 2017.

"The longer lawmakers waited to act, the larger the necessary policy changes would become," the CBO said.

Budget watchdog groups demanded Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the presumptive presidential nominees for Democrats and the GOP, begin to talk about the massive fiscal problems looming ahead.

"The presidential candidates should step up and address our dangerous long-term debt trajectory with constructive solutions and real leadership, not continuing to duck these challenges as they have so far," said Maya MacGuineas, head of Fix the Debt.

Robert L. Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, said the presidential hopefuls need to take the issue to voters so the public gets invested in the debate, and so the elections produce a mandate for the kinds of solutions needed to fix things.

The deficit was a dominant issue in 2010, as President Obama's health law, the Wall Street bailout and the stimulus package were all making a major dent in the government's finances. Deficits soared beyond the \$1 trillion mark for the first time in history.

The deficit has dropped dramatically over the last few years as spending limits, imposed by Congress, have kicked in, and as some of the post-recession tax breaks have expired.

But the CBO said things are about to get worse.

Revenue will remain low—at between 18 and 19 percent of GDP, which is about the average of the last 40 years. But spending will explode, rising from 21 percent today to more than 27 percent by 2040.

That means that 30 years from now, the government will regularly run deficits totaling \$5 trillion a year—more than the size of the entire federal budget right now.

Social Security, which eats up 4.9 percent of GDP today, will average 6.3 percent in 25 years. Medicare, which stands at 3.8 percent today, will balloon to 6.6 percent surpassing Social Security to become the biggest entitlement program.

Meanwhile discretionary spending—the nuts and bolts government operations such as education, defense and homeland security—will drop to just 5.2 percent of GDP.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, there is another article that the Washington Times did called "Budget chairman to propose bipartisan overhaul of congressional budget process." It has bipartisan quotes from members of the committee. I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Washington Times, July 12, 2016]
BUDGET CHAIRMAN TO PROPOSE BIPARTISAN OVERHAUL OF CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PROCESS

(By Tom Howell, Jr.)

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi on Wednesday will propose the first bipartisan overhaul of Congress' budget process in four decades, saying lawmakers should outline two years of spending at a time and then stick to their plans.

The Wyoming Republican hopes to put an end to the last-minute deadline showdowns that have plagued Capitol Hill over the last six years by forcing the Senate to debate spending bills soon after the annual budget is finished.

"Instead of a functioning appropriations process, Congress has resorted to massive omnibus appropriations bills and continuing resolutions that carry over spending from the previous year," he says in a summary of his plan obtained by The Washington Times.

He said it needs to be easier to write the budget and harder to break it once it's finished. And he said Congress should be forced to spend more time working on the spending bills to carry out the budget, as a way of making the document matter.

Under current rules, Congress is supposed to complete a budget by April 15 each year, and the spending committees then use that broad blueprint to write 12 appropriations bills doling out the money by Sept. 30.

In reality, Congress never meets either deadline.

Lawmakers instead regularly pass short-term stopgap bills to keep the government open, limping along until they can agree on massive year-end spending packages that please neither side. Over the last 40 years, Congress approved some 173 stopgap bills.

Other times Congress has failed altogether, sending the government into partial shutdowns.

Mr. Enzi believes changing the process can produce better results, and will formally outline his ideas in a speech early Wednesday on the Senate floor.

In his outline, he says the government is already operating on two-year budgets after massive debt agreements in 2011, 2013 and 2015. But he'd make it even easier to write a budget by limiting the number of amendments that can be considered on the Senate floor.

It's also relatively easy to break the budget caps, with a 60-vote threshold. Mr. Enzi says small breaches should be easy, but the bigger the spending, the tougher it should be.

Really big budget breaches should require a two-thirds vote, he says—the equivalent of overturning a presidential veto.

Also, Mr. Enzi says the Senate should focus on the regular appropriations bills from the moment the budget resolution is adopted until Congress breaks for its August recess.

Any attempt to consider a non-appropriations measure during that period would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate.

Mr. Enzi also wants a new budget commission to update government accounting practices.

For instance, the commission could explore whether "dynamic scoring," in which the economic impact of federal policies is taken into account by congressional scorekeepers, should be used to enforce budget agreements.

Committee aides expect Democrats to support rules that would limit the number of floor amendments allowed to budgets, though other aspects of the plan might be a tougher sell, for instance Democrats have balked at Republican demands to use dynamic scoring to count the economic ripple effect of tax cuts.

Sen. Angus King, Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats, said he's already on board with Mr. Enzi's plan to budget for two years instead of just one.

"It gives you more time for oversight, and it's ridiculous to do a one-year budget on an enterprise this big," he said.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President at 1:45 p.m. today, we are going to vote on the FAA bill. It is coming back, in essence, as a conference report, although it was negotiated directly with the House. So we will take up the House message.

I thank Senator THUNE, the chairman of the committee, because the two of us, of course, get along, and we have worked together to achieve an agreement with our counterparts in the House. So I thank Senator THUNE. There were parts of this bill that he basically said for me to work them out with the Republican chairman in the House, and the work product is the proof in the pudding that we are going to take up today.

This is a little more than a 14-month extension, but don't let that fool you because it is going to put into permanent law bolstering security at our airports in order to help better protect us. Of course, in these times, the safety of our traveling public is a top priority. In fact, it contains some of the most significant aviation security reforms that Congress has ever considered, and we have considered, as the Presiding Officer can remember, a lot since September 11, 2001. It also contains a number of consumer protection and drone safety provisions. So let me just enumerate a couple of those.

To address the insider threat posed by terrorists, we increase the vetting requirements and random physical screenings of airport employees. What we found was, especially with the Atlanta airport situation 2 years ago, that they were not really checking their airport employees. There was a gunrunning scheme over a 3-month period in which an Atlanta airport employee would bring in guns. He wasn't

checked, he wasn't screened, and they didn't know what was in his backpack. Then he would go into the sterile TSA area where passengers are, into the men's room, and he would trade his backpack to a passenger that had already come through TSA screening. For 3 months they carried on this scheme of running guns from Atlanta to New York. Thank goodness, they weren't terrorists. They were criminals. But we can imagine that something like 150 guns were transported over that 3-month period. Well, that is what we addressed in this FAA bill. We have increased the screening required at the airports, even though that is their responsibility. The most effective thing for TSA in screening anybody or baggage is the nose of a dog. We have doubled VIPR dog teams, and that is a substantive change.

What about the international flights? We are always concerned about the point of last departure in an international designation coming into the United States. Have they been sufficiently checked, since we in effect are relying on the host government of that airport for a U.S.-inbound flight? This will authorize TSA to donate unneeded security equipment to foreign airports with service to the United States. We are calling for increased cooperation between us and partner nations on routes flown by Americans. We are now in this bill requiring a new assessment of foreign cargo security programs.

We also are setting up new screening systems and security checkpoint configurations to try to expedite passengers getting through. But at the same time, recognizing what happened in the terrorist attacks in Belgium and Istanbul makes it clear that we have to reduce the vulnerability of all those passengers amassing as a soft target before they ever go through the TSA checkpoint. That is what they did in Istanbul and in Belgium. So we put stuff to address that in this bill.

Now, as to cyber security, we have heard a lot about it. Certainly, the cyber security risk for the FAA is a definite one, and we have done stuff in this bill to reduce the cyber security risk to the national airspace system and civil aviation. That includes reducing the vulnerability of the in-flight entertainment systems. We have all seen that video where someone with a laptop can take over a car through the in-car entertainment systems. We are concerned about that with regard to airlines, airplanes as well. This legislation supports the FAA efforts to develop a threat model to strengthen against that cyber security threat.

What about consumers? This is substantive law that will last far beyond the extension of this bill that extends the FAA authorization through September 30 of next year. Don't you get irritated when you pay a baggage fee? Say you pay 50 bucks for an extra bag or a heavy bag and all of a sudden it is lost or significantly delayed? In this bill, those baggage fees are going to be returned.

We are also going to require the airlines to have policies that are family-friendly. What about the child who desperately needs to sit next to a parent? Save for the goodness of the passengers—and the passengers usually respond because they are good people and realize that a child ought to sit close to a parent. We have enshrined that in this bill, and that will become a permanent law.

For air travel with people with disabilities, we call for a review of the training and practices by airports and airlines and require the Department of Transportation to accelerate the rule-making.

Finally, I want to talk about the potential—and it is an accident waiting to happen—of an unmanned aerial vehicle—in other words, a drone—colliding with an airliner. We had a report a few months ago about an inbound American Airlines flight into Miami. They sighted a drone off the left wing. It is absolutely essential that we keep drones out of the airspace for takeoffs and landings in a busy airfield, so we have set up in the legislation a pilot program to develop and test technologies to intercept that drone or to shut it down when it is near an airport in order that we don't have what we know would be a catastrophic crash. It requires the FAA to work with NASA to test and develop a drone traffic management system.

I thank all of our Senate colleagues. I thank the ranking member and the chairman in the House, as we negotiated these provisions in this bill. That is what we are going to vote on at 1:45 p.m. I commend the FAA bill, and I hope the Senate considers it favorably.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Republican whip.

(The remarks of Mr. CORNYN pertaining to the introduction of S. 3184 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as we take up extension of the FAA reauthorization this week, I want to voice my frustration that an extension of the section 48 energy investment tax credit was not included. More importantly, I want to make clear my continued commitment to securing the credit's extension before the end of the year. This is an issue of immediate urgency.

The tax package agreed to at the end of last year extended the section 48 energy investment tax credit for 5 years, beginning on January 1, 2017, phased down to 26 percent in 2020 and 22 percent in 2021. However, through a drafting error, some technologies in section 48 were left out of that long-term extension. As a result, those technologies—including fuel cells, geothermal, hydropower, and biomass, among others—are set to expire at the end of this year.

Picking winners and losers was not our intention. The majority leader

agreed with that sentiment and made a commitment to address the discrepancy early this year. Unfortunately, we have yet to place it on a moving legislative vehicle. The lack of certainty for these technologies is creating market distortions that will drive capital out of these technologies and toward those with longer-term incentives.

I think it is important that we support an all-of-the-above energy strategy and ensuring new clean energy technologies have a seat at the table is a key component. Therefore, although I had hoped to see us put the section 48 fix on the FAA extension, I remain committed to securing this change before the end of the year. This is a non-controversial, already-agreed to modification and it should be processed expeditiously.

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

● Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today I wish to support the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016. The FAA extension provides the aviation community with necessary stability over the next year and sets into motion important reforms to improve safety and security for air travelers. This legislation includes provisions that support the general aviation community, as well as job creators in Oklahoma. First, this bill includes third class medical reform, the foundation to my Pilot's Bill of Rights 2, which will cut burdensome red tape and encourage pilots to disclose and treat medical conditions that could impact their ability to fly. It also includes a provision allowing critical infrastructure operators to use drones to support their needs for meeting existing regulations or in response to natural disasters. This provision will make way for innovative technology to be used with large-scale infrastructure, such as bridges or pipelines, so that businesses can safely and efficiently provide services to their consumers.

I am particularly pleased to note that this bill includes the third class medical reforms from my bipartisan Pilot's Bill of Rights 2, which has passed the Senate three times since last December. This legislation is strongly supported by the entire general aviation community, a number of pilot unions, including the Allied Pilots Association representing the pilots of American Airlines, the Southwest Airlines Pilots' Association, and the NetJets Association of Shared Aircraft Pilots, as well as the National Association of State Aviation Officials. In particular, I want to highlight the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, AOPA, and the Experimental Aircraft Association, EAA, for their leadership and support from the beginning and all their work to educate my colleagues in Congress on issues that affect pilots. I am very grateful for the strong and consistent voice of AOPA and EAA members who have shared why third class medical reform is necessary.

FAA's current medical certification process is bureaucratic, burdensome, and discourages pilots from disclosing and treating medical conditions that could impact their ability to fly. This legislation reforms the medical certification process for general aviation pilots in a way that will increase pilots' knowledge of risk while demanding treatment of identified conditions. The reforms expand the existing exemption for light sport pilots to include more qualified, trained pilots, as long as they complete three requirements. First, pilots must complete an online medical education course; second, pilots must maintain verification that they have been to a doctor at least once every 4 years and certify that they are receiving the care they need as directed by their physician to treat any medical condition that warrants treatment; and third, pilots must complete one comprehensive medical review by the FAA.

The FAA extension legislation also includes a provision that would allow critical infrastructure owners and operators to use unmanned aircraft systems to comply with mandated regulations and to perform emergency response and preparation activities.

This amendment would apply to energy infrastructure, such as oil and gas and renewable electric energy, it would apply to power utilities and telecommunications networks, and it would apply to roads and bridges and water supply system operators. Today critical infrastructure owners and operators are required to comply with significant requirements to monitor facilities and assets, which can stretch thousands of miles, and traverse rural and hard to access areas. Existing Federal safety regulations require periodic patrolling of the rights of way of critical infrastructure such as pipelines or transmission lines to check for encroachment, unauthorized excavation, evidence of leaks, or any other conditions that might jeopardize the safety of the pipeline or transmission line. Currently, Federal regulations allow periodic patrols to be conducted on foot, in vehicles, or with manned aircraft.

This language would ensure that critical infrastructure owners and operators, sponsors or associations who sponsor critical infrastructure, or their agents are able to apply to the Federal Aviation Administration to use unmanned aircraft as well.

This is of particular importance because unmanned aircraft can be quickly deployed to assess dangerous situations as part of a coordinated response to provide immediate feedback and situational awareness and direct resources to locations of highest danger. The use of unmanned aircraft would provide consistent and long-term on-scene information gathering capability in spite of weather or other incident dangers harmful to responding personnel, reduce the threat to response personnel in emergency situations.

This amendment is supported by a wide array of stakeholders including the Small UAV Coalition, the National Rural Electric Cooperatives, the American Public Power Association, Edison Electric Institute, CTIA—the Wireless Association, the American Gas Association, the American Public Gas Association, the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America, the American Petroleum Institute, the Association of Oil Pipelines, the American Fuels and Petrochemical Manufacturers, 3D Robotics, and the American Wind Energy Association. Congress should provide direction to FAA to set up a process for critical infrastructure operators to be able to safely operate unmanned aerial vehicles where there is clear and articulable need, and the provision included in this bill accomplishes that goal.

I strongly support this legislation, and I look forward to ensuring the swift implementation of these provisions by the Federal Aviation Administration in the coming months.●

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on another matter, earlier today this Chamber voted to move the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act conference report forward. This legislation has been the work of bipartisanship from the beginning, and it sailed through the Senate earlier this year.

Now, this bicameral agreement authorizes even more resources to combat the epidemic of heroin and prescription painkiller abuse that is tearing families apart across the country. Over the last few years, we have heard the stories and we have seen a dangerous trend of heroin and prescription drug abuse. In my State alone, it is estimated that these deaths have increased by as much as 80 percent in recent years. There is no doubt this is a serious issue. This is not just a bipartisan issue; this is a nonpartisan issue. Now is our chance to get something done.

I am grateful for the hard work and the leadership of the junior Senator from Ohio, Mr. PORTMAN, who has shepherded this bill from the beginning to where we are today, along with Senator AYOTTE from New Hampshire, Senator BLUNT from Missouri, and Chairman GRASSLEY of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I want to thank all of them for their role in getting this bill across the finish line. Now we need to complete our work and pass it so we can get it to the President's desk.

ZIKA VIRUS FUNDING

Of course, there is a lot more we should be doing for the American people this week, but unfortunately, instead of advancing bills that would help prevent birth defects from the Zika virus and divert a public health crisis, our colleagues want to talk about climate change. I understand many of them feel this is a serious matter and a priority, but what they have been basically doing is beating up on a group of nonprofits and private citizens no one outside the beltway has

even heard of, and for what? For having the temerity to exercise their rights under the Constitution, their rights to free speech and free expression. Heaven forbid someone should utter words that somebody across the aisle might disagree with. The answer, as we know, to speech you disagree with is more speech, not less speech. It should not be used to try to squash, intimidate, coerce the people you disagree with. That is not the America I know, and that is not what the Constitution provides for.

I hope our colleagues will get their priorities straight. This is about preventing devastating birth defects in children infected with the Zika virus. We can have a discussion about climate change—hopefully without the attempt to intimidate and attack people who express opinions our colleagues don't agree with—but I suggest that our priorities ought to be a little bit different.

It is not just that this is a conscience effort to ignore the most pressing issues facing our country, such as fighting the Zika virus or funding our troops; they don't even want to have an honest conversation about the policies they are peddling because they are not interested in a debate, they want to stamp out contrary views.

For all their fanfare about climate change, this is not the most urgent thing we need to do this week. They don't talk about how the policies are advocating what actually stifled free speech and hurt the American economy and cut jobs. We have had debates and votes in this body about some of these sweeping proposals to deal with the problem that may or may not actually come to pass. There have been other challenges we faced in this country that have been overcome due to the inventiveness, innovation, and genius of the American people in coming up with solutions.

I hope our colleagues who have latched on to this as a way to divert attention from the imminent threat of the Zika virus and the need to fund our troops will come back into a zone—not a logic-free zone—where we can talk about these issues. And instead of trying to score political points with outside groups who are happy to raise money off of this issue, we need to get back to reality and back to the work at hand.

Quite frankly, it is hard to believe this is where we are, with our Democratic friends arguing against bills that would help prevent birth defects in our children and support our troops. Instead, they want to grandstand on climate change. I hope they get a reality check soon and stop quibbling over bicameral, bipartisan pieces of legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I wish to address two issues which the Senate Finance Committee has spent a considerable amount of time on, and both of

them are examples of how the Senate is leaving important work undone on its way out the door. I am going to begin by discussing the opioid bill.

If ever there were an issue that ought to be unifying the Congress and bringing Democrats and Republicans together to surmount an important challenge, it ought to be opioid addiction in America. This is a crisis indiscriminate of geography and politics. The reality is that opioid addiction is ripping through our communities like wildfire. A recent editorial in one of my home State newspapers captured the extreme urgency of the opioid struggle, the addiction, with this statement: "Opioids are winning."

After months of work, the Senate and House have come up with an opioid bill. I can give my assessment in a sentence: It is a half-measure. The job is far from complete, and certainly nobody ought to be taking victory laps. The reality is that this opioid bill leaves many opportunities to fight and successfully win the battle against opioid addiction on the negotiating table.

A landmark study dealing with opioids came out a few months ago and found that 80 percent of those who were addicted to painkillers or heroin weren't getting treatment.

I want everybody to understand that under this bill, those waiting lines are not going to get much shorter. The thousands of babies born each year with an addiction to narcotics—this bill won't be enough to bring that number down to zero, where everybody knows it should be. And there is a moral imperative to actually get it to zero. That is why there are headlines stating that opioids are winning the war.

The package before the Senate certainly has the kernels of a meaningful game plan, but, in my view, there is just not enough there. There are programs being established that could be a big help to those who are struggling to get their lives back on track, but there aren't the tools to deliver on that promise.

Senators should know that doing only half the job now means that Members are going to be leading with their chins when the appropriations process returns later this year. The reason I say that is there are some programs that are going to be bumping up against the uncertainty of the appropriations process.

There is a program for pregnant women and new mothers suffering from an opioid-use disorder.

There is a program to help States take important strides when it comes to monitoring prescription drugs.

There is better tracking within the VA.

There is a plan to strengthen the network of support in American communities that is best equipped to reach out to those who need support in fighting addiction, which includes physicians, employers, the criminal justice system, and more.

The bill green-lights the National Institutes of Health putting new energy into the development of safe, non-addictive, effective, and affordable drugs and treatments for chronic pain.

The bill establishes a task force and grants for States to construct what I believe could be a fresh approach to pain management and opioids, including education programs, treatment, recovery efforts, prescription monitoring, and strategies to prevent overdose.

Getting those proposals off the ground is a first step, but with the Senate on its way out the door, it seems to me that you also have to do more than just leave the strategy for actually winning against opioid addiction to the uncertainty of the appropriations process in the fall.

There are other questions about this bill. I am very concerned about the provision that gives \$75 million in special kickbacks to the manufacturers of opioids that are considered under the bill "abuse deterrents." I believe it is wrong for the bill, which only does half the job for Americans struggling with addiction, to then turn around and give an unjustified windfall to big drug companies. I offered an amendment to get rid of the windfall, and it was very simple. I said: Let's give that money to pregnant women who are enrolled in Medicaid, women of limited means who are struggling to fight addiction. But the choice was made to give the windfall to the drug companies rather than to help those vulnerable women who are trying to get their lives back on track. We shouldn't be giving funding to programs that really help women and others who are trying to overcome addiction and then turn around and give a \$75 million windfall to drug companies. That, in my view, is an imbalance that does not pass the smell test.

The bottom line on the opioid legislation is that there is an awful lot of heavy lifting to do before anybody ought to think about taking a victory lap. My State—and it pains me to say this—is the fourth worst State in the country when it comes to opioid abuse. I hear from Oregonians who have gone from pills, to heroin, to a tragic ending. I hear accounts that nobody could have ever dreamed of.

I was blessed to go to school on a basketball scholarship. Nobody heard about basketball players who had an injury getting hooked on opioids and having tragic, premature endings and opportunities choked off. We didn't hear those stories then, but we hear them now.

I have heard from doctors and pharmacists about the dangers drugs pose and the difficulty of treating pain safely. I hear from community leaders who are trying fresh approaches to reach out to young people. My sense is that every single Member of the Senate is hearing these kinds of stories.

I want it understood that the opioid addiction crisis is going to keep raging unabated. Lives are going to continue

to be lost and families are going to continue to be torn apart until the Senate finishes the rest of the job, and the rest of the job is still ahead of us.

NOMINATION OF MARY WAKEFIELD

Mr. President, I have unfinished business that needs to be addressed, and that is the yearlong obstruction in front of the Senate Finance Committee on a supremely qualified nominee, Dr. Mary Wakefield, who is the President's choice to be the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services. Her nomination has been sitting in purgatory longer than any other such choice in history, and it is for reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with her qualifications.

I am going to talk about what is causing the holdup, but I want to spend a little bit of time talking about Dr. Wakefield and the important role she has been nominated to fill. She is up for the No. 2 spot at Health and Human Services, which would make her the chief operating officer of a Department that is taking on some of our most important health challenges, including opioid addiction. They manage the most important health programs in the country. This Department is on the frontlines in the battle against Zika. They run the Centers for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, child welfare programs, family support programs, and it goes on and on.

I felt from the outset that she was the right person for this job. She is somebody who has seen the American health care system from all sides. She comes from rural America. She hails from North Dakota and sought out more opportunities to help individuals by working in policy and managing programs. She was a nurse, and she said: I want to do more, and I am going to be able to do it by learning more about these health policies. So she earned a master's degree, a Ph.D., and then she served as a legislative assistant and chief of staff in the Senate. She has proven herself most able as the head of the Health Resources and Services Administration. This is almost a textbook case of somebody qualified to do this job.

When the Finance Committee met in February to discuss her nomination, she was winning plaudits from both sides of the aisle. My friend, Chairman HATCH, said Dr. Wakefield has an "impressive background and a reputation for being a problem solver." Those are not my words. They are the words of Chairman HATCH.

Senator HOEVEN, who introduced Dr. Wakefield at that hearing, said, "She is a dedicated public servant and a hard-working health care advocate."

And Senator HOEVEN, whom we all respect, like Senator HATCH, made the important point that Dr. Wakefield is an advocate especially for rural America. She believes Americans deserve access to high-quality health care, regardless of their ZIP Code, and she has certainly walked the walk as a nurse and as a practitioner.

Senator HOEVEN encouraged the Finance Committee to support Dr. Wakefield's nomination and "send her to the full Senate for confirmation."

Unfortunately, this process of moving this highly qualified nominee has ground to a halt. There have been kind of two stages of this process. First, in February, Senator GRASSLEY indicated he would put a hold on the nomination on the ground that he and other Republican Senators had not received adequate responses to the questions they had raised about Planned Parenthood. Now, these questions had absolutely nothing to do with what Dr. Wakefield had been involved in. Senator GRASSLEY's questions were answered months ago, but as soon as that was accomplished, there was another objection.

In March, the Republican members of the Finance Committee sent a letter to the inspector general raising questions about a complaint against the State of California regarding what is the so-called Weldon amendment. The amendment prohibits recipients of appropriated funds from discriminating against health care providers who do not cover abortion services. We were told the Wakefield nomination could not be considered until those issues with respect to California and the Weldon amendment were resolved.

Once again, we are seeing issues raised that have absolutely nothing to do with Dr. Wakefield, a nurse, someone who hails from rural America, who Republican Senators say is eminently qualified, to be held up for matters that had nothing to do with her nomination. She wasn't the subject of the investigation. She didn't work in California. There has been no allegation she has been involved in any way in the matters being investigated.

Several weeks ago, the Office of Civil Rights concluded their investigation of California and the Weldon amendment. It concluded the Weldon amendment had not been violated, really not even implicated, because none of the parties bringing the complaint were even covered by the amendment. So as a matter of law, there was no violation.

Now, one would normally think that would finally clear the decks; no issues left related to Dr. Wakefield's nomination. Even the issues unrelated to her nomination had been resolved. So one would think we would be ready to go, ready to forward the nomination. That has not been the case. My understanding is, on the other side of the aisle, Republican members of the Finance Committee are still unwilling to favorably report the nomination.

So a highly qualified nominee is being needlessly blocked for reasons that—and I have spent a lot of time digging into this—are completely unrelated to her qualifications and the position she has been nominated to.

It just seems to me the people we represent deserve more when it comes to the consideration of vital nominees—vital nominees like Dr. Wakefield—and legislation that ought to

really shorten those waiting lines for opioid treatment and respond fully to the challenge of opioid addiction. The Congress ought to be doing its job. It ought to be doing more than making political points and passing half measures.

I will close by way of saying that I think as much as any Member of this body, I have made a commitment to working in a bipartisan way. It is what I want to be the hallmark of my time in public service. I will just close by way of saying that I think both fighting opioid addiction and making sure that qualified people who have been recommended by senior Republicans can actually be considered here in both instances. The Congress and the Senate owe more to the American people.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS AND PELL GRANTS

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I was interested to hear my good friend talk about the uncertainty of the appropriations process. Frankly, I think we could debate no issue that would change the Congress more totally than the issue of getting back to the certainty of the appropriations process.

For 200 years, the principal work of the Congress—the House and the Senate—was to set our national priorities based on how we spend our national trust of the money given to this government by the people who pay taxes, the revenue of the government. We have gotten out of the habit of doing that. Frankly, one of the reasons we have an authorizing process—and have always had that—and an appropriating process is because that gave the Congress the annual ability to look at those programs, see how they were working, see if they were still working, and gave the Congress the ability to reach out to a program and have that program answer every question because there was an annual review of how we spent the money. If there is an incredible indictment over the last 7 years, it is that the Senate has stopped doing that work.

The Republican-led Appropriations Committees over the last 2 years have had all the bills ready for the first time in a long time—ready to do the work and ready to talk about the priorities of the country and, maybe more importantly, ready for the 30 people who serve on the Appropriations Committee to not be the only people who get to offer amendments, to not be the only people who ask and answer questions, and to not be the only people who get a say in this process. That is why these bills need to be on the floor.

What a tragedy this week and last week that the Defense appropriations bill—the primary responsibility of the Federal Government to defend the country—that bill isn't even allowed to be debated by the minority because they say: We want to see what the final bill will say before we are ready to de-

bate the Senate version. There is no government—bicameral, two legislative body chart in the world—that shows how one group decides what the final bill looks like before the other body of the Congress is allowed to pass a bill. That is just not the way this works. There is a Senate bill, there is a House bill, and those two bills come together.

The country, for good reasons, has forgotten the basic civics of how our democracy works because the Senate particularly has been such an obstacle to that democracy working for 7 years now. For 5 years, we were not able to amend the bills, and that was a reason not to go forward, and by the way it was a good reason not to go forward. Then, for 2 years, we didn't want to debate the bills because apparently we didn't know what they were going to say before they got to the President's desk. That is not how this process is supposed to work.

Last month, for the first time in 7 years, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education passed a bipartisan bill. It came out of the full committee 29 to 1. That is a good vote, but that still means 70 of the Senators haven't gotten to weigh in on what that bill should look like. If that was the case, it could be that other Senators who are concerned about opioid abuse—which I want to talk about in a minute—the Senators who are concerned about whether that is going to be funded would be less concerned if they knew we were back to the constitutional way of running the government.

As chairman of the Labor and Health and Human Services Committee, I was pleased we were able to write that bipartisan bill. Certainly, Senator MURRAY, the leading Democrat, didn't get everything she wanted in this bill, and I didn't get everything I wanted in this bill, but we were willing to set priorities. One of the priorities I want to talk about for a few minutes, before we all go home and have a chance to talk about the good things that could happen in the country if we will just do our job—one of those priorities will be returning to year-round Pell grants.

Pell grants are the grants available to people who, because of their family income or their personal income, qualify for not a student loan but actually a student grant. Until 2008, we had several years where you could go to school, and you could go to school year-round, and still have access to those Pell grant funds.

Recently, I was at Harris-Stowe State University in St. Louis. I was at Mineral Area College, I was at Ozarks Technical College, Missouri State University in Springfield, and I was at Three Rivers Community College in Poplar Bluff talking about what happens if people are able to stay in school once they get in school.

One of the students I talked to at Harris-Stowe is Tierra Wilson, a 21-

year-old senior who was about to graduate. She was going to school pretty much on her own resources, her own part-time job. She needed to get done as soon as she could so she decided to take summer classes, but since she didn't have the opportunity for a year-round Pell—she could only get the Pell grant for two semesters instead of the way it was until 2008—she could only get that money for two semesters so she had to borrow the \$3,000 it took her to finish her degree sooner. The good news is, she is going to finish her degree. The bad news for her is, she has an additional \$3,000 debt that she wouldn't have had.

The newspaper the Joplin Globe recently shared a story about another student who also recently has gone to school on Pell grants, Andy Hamon. He is a senior. His mom and dad run a small business. According to that story, he has always depended on financial aid because his family didn't have the resources to pay tuition. He said it hasn't been easy. He said he had to take classes in the summer, and when he did take classes in the summer, he had to borrow or out-of-pocket come up with the \$800 to \$10,000 the Pell grant will not cover.

When I was at Mineral Area Community College, the president of Mineral Area Community College, Dr. Steve Kurtz, said, when you talk about affordability and accessibility, you are right in the middle of this discussion on what happens if you have access to help year-round as opposed to just two semesters a year.

Jean Merrill-Doss, who serves as the dean of student services at that college, says approximately 60 percent of their student body is dependent on Pell grants to attend school.

As a college student, I went to school as quickly as I could. Nobody in my family had graduated from college before. I went three years, three summers. It took 124 credit hours to graduate with a bachelor's degree. I had 124 credit hours. I didn't have an extra hour. I couldn't pay for an extra hour, in my view, and I needed to get college behind me or I might not be the first person in my family to graduate from college.

In fact, the first teaching job I took at Marshfield High School—my grandfather was the janitor. He had been the janitor, when I was growing up, at the school where I took my first job as a college graduate.

Students like Tierra, students like Andy need to have the opportunity we can give them to go to school and finish school.

Pell grants benefit about 7.5 million students annually. The maximum two-semester Pell grant will be \$5,815 in the school year that begins next fall. The \$5,815 pays for tuition, fees, books at every community college in Missouri, and we have a big community college system. So for people who have the most economic need, we already have free 2 years of college in our State, and

in a couple of our universities you can still get all your tuition, all your books, all the fees paid for with a Pell grant.

What is the advantage of being able to stay in school once you get started in school? The Presiding Officer and I are two of the three university presidents here in the Senate. So we have talked to many students who had to have financial aid and had to have help to go. If you are the first person in your family to graduate from college or you are going back to school—maybe you are taking a break, you didn't go to college, or college didn't work out—and you are an adult and totally responsible for all of your college expenses if you are going to go, staying in school makes a big difference. If you decide you can't go that summer semester because you can't afford the tuition and you get the full-time summer job, it is real easy for the full-time summer job to turn into this: Well, I will do this job one more semester, and I will get into school in January. In January it is easy to think: Well, I will go ahead and finish my job and save a little more money, and I will get back into school at the regular time next fall. Before you know it, life gets in the way, things happen, and you intend to continue to go to school, finish, and get your degree, but it somehow doesn't happen.

Those students who want to continue their class work year-round should have access to the Pell grant help that you would have if you were a little more flexible and had a little more ability to take a part-time job in the summer, live at home with your mom and dad, and do whatever you are doing there and start back in the fall. Year-round Pell is not for everybody, but it is expected that an estimated 1 million students of the 7.7 million students that get Pell would take advantage of year-round Pell, and that includes 20,000 Missouri students who would take advantage of year-round Pell. They would get an average of \$1,650 each to take advantage of that other semester—another semester to catch up, another semester to get ahead, or another semester to just graduate faster. This is something we need to do and should do.

OPPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. President, I want to speak for a couple of minutes about the other topic that was just discussed—opioids. Clearly, this is a problem. About 1,000 Missourians every year die from opioid overdoses. In St. Louis alone, deaths related to opioid abuse have increased three times since 2007. An estimated 5.9 million American adults have an opioid use disorder. This is truly a public health crisis in every corner of the nation, from our major cities to our rural communities. There is some evidence that rural communities even have a bigger problem with opioid abuse than in the city.

I was visiting over the Fourth of July weekend with some St. Louis fire-

fighters who were also in the first responder team, and it is clear that this is something where 10 or 15 times a day, and even more on weekends, they are responding to opioid overdoses. If you are in a fire department in America today that also has a first responder unit, you are three times more likely to go to an overdose than you are to go to a fire.

The good news is there is treatment. Seventy-two percent of the Missourians who went through the State's opioid treatment program, having been tested, were found to be negative afterward with any random test. So there is a solution here. The problem is that only about 10 percent of the people who have the problem get into the program to solve the problem.

That is why yesterday the bill was passed that I co-sponsored that dealt with the idea of opioid abuse. This agreement expands access to evidence-based treatment and recovery services and focuses on proven strategies that strengthen people's ability not to get addicted and, if they are addicted, to figure out how to no longer be addicted.

In this appropriation, we recommended a 93-percent increase in the money available. One of the issues that Senator WYDEN was concerned about was whether there would be enough money. Between last year and this year, we increased the money by 542 percent. It takes an unbelievably effective government agency to deal with a more than 542-percent increase. We are going to continue to watch the bill, to watch the need, to see and do everything possible to see that the money is available.

The House has ideas here. We do too. First responders are not the people who need to be primarily focused on this job. They need to be there when they need to be there, but we have to do something that solves this problem.

People need a place to go. That is why the Excellence in Mental Health Act will have at least 6 States, and as many as 24 States, on January 1, treating mental health like all other health, providing an important access point for mental health issues of all kinds and opioid issues that can only be dealt with in that context of overall health involving mental health.

I hope we will begin to work more openly, more transparently, and more committed to solving problems than we are committed to just complaining about problems.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DENTAL INSURANCE RE-AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2016

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 3055 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.