

FLOOR STATEMENT OF
SENATOR SUSAN M. COLLINS
21ST CENTURY CURES ACT
DECEMBER 5, 2016

Ms. Collins: Thank you, Mr. President. I rise in strong support of the 21st Century Cures Act, and I commend the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Help, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Senator Lamar Alexander and Senator Patty Murray, for their unwavering commitment to this very significant bipartisan legislation. The Senate HELP Committee, on which I'm privileged to serve, has devoted considerable time and effort to this comprehensive legislation. It includes many reforms and priorities that will benefit so many families across our great country.

Mr. President, the 21st Century Cures Act will support the research and development of treatments and cures for millions of Americans and their families who are coping with devastating diseases. It will improve the process of moving new discoveries from laboratory benches to patient bedsides. I doubt, Mr. President, that there is a family in America who will not be touched by this important legislation in some way.

All of us have a family member, a coworker or friend who has courageously faced the struggles of living with a debilitating chronic illness or a rare disease or who have received a devastating diagnosis and have passed away far too soon, leaving a hole in our hearts. Imagine how this could change with the passage of the 21st Century Cures Act and the strong support of the research and development that will lead to new treatments and therapies that can help us achieve our dream of conquering so many devastating diseases.

Simply put, Mr. President, this legislation matters. It matters to the children who know firsthand the burden of living with type 1 diabetes and who beg their parents for just one day off -- their birthday or Christmas -- from having to deal with the consequences of their juvenile diabetes. It matters to the family members who know the agonizing experience of looking into the eyes of a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's disease only to receive a confused look in return. It matters to the parents of young boys who have Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, who know what it is like to give their all in an effort to help their sons achieve their dreams, whether it's finishing college or driving a car, even as their children every day battle the progression of this debilitating and ultimately terminal illness. The 21st Century Cures Act will drive progress and medical innovation so that we can prevail against these diseases and many more that cause so much pain and suffering, so much fear and uncertainty and so much heartbreak.

Mr. President, there simply is no investment that we can make that provides greater returns for Americans than our investment in biomedical research. It not only yields new discoveries in the development of better treatments and even cures, but also can have a dramatic effect on the budgets of families, states, and the federal government.

The bill before us will help direct \$4.8 billion to the National Institutes of Health, including \$1.6 billion for the BRAIN initiative, to improve our understanding of diseases like ALS, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, our nation's most costly disease. Mr. President, we spend

\$263 billion a year caring for people with Alzheimer's disease. Of that amount, approximately \$160 billion comes from the Medicare and Medicaid programs. If the current trajectory continues as our population is growing older, this disease will bankrupt the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

And that's why I'm so pleased to see the BRAIN initiative funded in this bill, and also the work that we're doing in the Appropriations Committee to boost funding for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, so that we can finally find effective treatments, a means of prevention or perhaps even a cure for this disease that brings so much heartache not only to those suffering from it, but their families as well.

Our bill will also help provide \$1.8 billion for the Vice President's Cancer Moonshot. We all know that Vice President Biden has taken on this cause, a very personal one for him, because he lost his beloved son Beau to cancer.

Another exciting field that will be funded by this bill is \$30 million for regenerative medicine using adult stem cells. How exciting it was to have an individual come before our policy lunch whose sight had been restored due to an innovative stem cell therapy. This individual lives in Tennessee but he happens to be from Presque Isle, Maine, 13 miles from where I was born and grew up. And how I wish so many older people in this country who are losing their vision to macular degeneration and glaucoma and in some cases a combination of both or injuries to their eyes could benefit from this exciting development of stem cells that could restore the sight of someone who was legally blind. He now can drive. That is so exciting, and that is the promise of researching regenerative medicine.

In addition to support for N.I.H., the 21st Century Cures Act will help direct \$1 billion in much-needed funding to address the horrendous heroin and opioid abuse problem in this country. Maine has been particularly hard hit by this epidemic. In just the first nine months of this year, Maine experienced a record 286 offender -- 286 overdose deaths. That's more than one a day, Mr. President. Tragically that number already exceeds the 272 overdose deaths in Maine during all of 2015. I'm distressed when I hear about the lack of treatment options for Mainers who are struggling with drug addiction, particularly in rural areas. As a result of the shortage of treatment alternatives, this epidemic is playing out in emergency rooms, county jails, and on the main streets of my state. I can't tell you how many sheriffs have come to me pleading for help, telling me that their intake area of their jails looks like a detox center or an emergency room of a hospital. They are overwhelmed by these cases.

We can and must do more to support access to treatment and to alert people of all ages to the risks of opioid abuse and heroin use. The 21st Century Cures Act will provide a vital infusion of \$1 billion over two years to support grants to states to supplement treatment and prevention efforts. Mr. President, I was talking with one of my colleagues earlier today, and both of us remember when we were in school hearing lectures from recovering heroin addicts who came into the schools. And I'll tell you that was highly effective. We would no more have tried heroin than -- I can't even think of a proper analogy. We know, unfortunately, that many of the people who are using heroin started with prescription opioids, and that's why I am encouraged by movements across our country and by actions taken at my request and the request of other

senators by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to make sure that we are not putting pressure on providers to overprescribe opioids. Surely they are appropriate in certain cases, but the number of prescriptions has soared in this country and is twice the number prescribed on a per capita basis as in our neighboring country of Canada.

The 21st Century Cures Act also includes a bill that I introduced with several of my colleagues: Senators Warren, Kirk, Baldwin, Alexander and Murray, that is called the advancing N.I.H. Strategic planning and improving representation and medical research act. Despite its extremely cumbersome name, it is an important bill that's been incorporated into this legislation. It will require the N.I.H. to release periodically a strategic plan outlining how the agencies will meet, its mission statement, and it will provide us with important guidance and metrics as we continue to work together to increase this vital funding.

It will also help to ensure that study populations in clinical research are more representative of the diverse population in our country. For example, women face many of the same health threats as men, such as heart disease and cancer, but they react differently to various treatments. I remember, Mr. President, years ago an infamous study that was called Mr. Fit, it had only men enrolled in it. I believe, if memory serves me correctly, it was to look at heart disease. Well, women often have different symptoms of heart disease than do men, and they respond differently to different medications, therapies and treatment. We also know that women are at higher risk for certain chronic health conditions like Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis. They suffer from those diseases in far greater numbers than do men. I'm wondering with Alzheimer's disease, whether it's simply a matter that the biggest risk factor is the age and women live longer than men, but perhaps there are other factors at play. My point is that by helping to ensure that women, African-Americans, Latinos, and other demographic groups are appropriately represented in clinical research, we can increase our scientific understanding of the causes, risk factors, prevention strategies, and effects of treatment for diseases that commonly or disproportionately affect these populations.

The bill before us also includes legislation that I introduced with my colleague from Wisconsin, Senator Baldwin, to help address the educational debt burden that many young researchers face. This is so important to help ensure that America's finest up and coming young researchers continue to help lead the world in biomedical discovery right here in this country. I don't want to lose these talented young people to other countries. I want them to stay right here. And if they come to work for N.I.H. Or the C.D.C. Or other federally funded institutions and agencies and we can get them help with their medical school or college, their advanced degrees, their debt, that's a really good agreement for us to be making. It is also of tremendous importance that we were able to add mental health legislation to the 21st Century Cures Act.

The reforms in this bill will enhance coordination, address a lack of resources and develop real solutions to improve outcomes for individuals with serious mental illness and to help their families who are often desperate to get them the help that they need. I'm pleased that the bill also includes the Mental Health on Campus Act, which I offered as an amendment when we considered the mental health legislation in committee. My colleague, Senator Dick Durbin, and I introduced this legislation for the first time in 2009, and I want to commend him for his leadership.

College students in Maine and across the country must have access to critical and often lifesaving mental health services. Despite growing demand for these critical services, far too many students still lack access. Without these services students may experience detrimental effects that range from declining academic performance to drug dependence to being at greater risk of suicide. While millions of Americans suffer from mental illness, only a statistical few engage in unspeakable acts of violence against themselves or others.

Suicide, however, is the leading cause of death among Americans between the age of 15 and 34. In addition recent tragedies on college campuses like the shooting at a community college in Roseburg, Oregon, or Northern Illinois University highlight the dire need for mental health outreach and counseling services on college campuses. Perhaps, Mr. President, some of the tragedies that we have witnessed might have been prevented had the resources been in place to support timely diagnosis, early intervention, and effective treatment for those struggling with severe mental illness.

One of the saddest meetings I've had in the last year, Mr. President, was with a group of families from Maine who had adult children who were suffering from severe mental illness, and yet these families felt powerless in getting them the help that they needed. These adult children were not compliant with the medication that they had been prescribed, and in many cases their families felt powerless to be able to get them the help that they needed. In one terrible case, a man's son was released from a hospital for people with mental illness in the state of Maine, and he killed his mother thinking that she was Al Qaeda. Only then could his father get his son the institutionalized help that his son so desperately needed. It was just such a painful, painful story to hear from this anguished father and husband. I believe that the language in this bill will help to change that.

Mr. President, the 21st Century Cures Act passed the House last week by an overwhelming vote of 392-26. Think how few bills pass with that kind of strong bipartisan support. It is supported by President Obama who had an op-ed in Maine newspapers this weekend endorsing the bill. It is the product of years of bipartisan work on the Senate HELP Committee and it has earned the support of more than 300 organizations. So, Mr. President, I'm frankly surprised that we're having a roll call vote, a cloture vote on this bill. I'm surprised because while this bill may not be perfect and no bill is, there is so much that is worthwhile and good and significant in it that will make such a difference to so many American families.

I urge all of our colleagues to vote in support of this bill so that we can quickly send it to the President's desk where he is eager to sign it into law. It may well be the most important, far-reaching legislation that we pass this year in terms of its benefits for families across this great nation. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I would suggest the absence of a quorum.