

unintended consequences on the abilities of financial regulators to effectively oversee our financial system. As chairman of the Banking Committee, I am mindful of the importance of strong regulators examining and supervising our financial institutions. This is particularly important in the case of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the agency that was created in 2010 to police areas of the financial market that previously were not regulated at the federal level, as well as the prudential regulators. A provision in S. 1353 states that information shared with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (known as NIST), may not be used by a government agency to regulate the activity of any entity. However, other existing statutes and regulations provide government agencies with the authority to require entities they regulate to provide them with information.

Moreover, a regulatory agency may discover such information on its own, through the entity, or through other sources. For example, a bank regulatory agency may discover cyberthreat information during a routine examination of a bank and, might want to exercise its existing legal authority to require the bank to adjust its systems to protect against future cyberthreats. I seek clarification from the Senator from West Virginia with respect to the provision in the proposed legislation.

Can my colleague from West Virginia confirm that this provision is not intended to prohibit an agency from taking regulatory action, if the agency independently obtains such information pursuant to other statutory or regulatory authority, even if a regulated entity has shared this information with NIST?

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I thank Senator JOHNSON for his interest and support for this legislation and for his shared interest in strengthening cyber security. I also thank my colleague from South Dakota for drawing attention to the potential impact of this provision on financial regulatory authorities under the Banking Committee's jurisdiction, including those of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the prudential regulators. I would like to assure the Senator that the consensus-based voluntary process for developing cyber security standards established in Title I of this bill is not intended to alter or limit financial regulatory agencies' regulatory authority in any way. Title I, particularly new section (e)(2) of the National Institute of Standards and Technology Act, encourages private entities to participate in NIST's standards development process, but is in no way a "safe harbor" for participants who are subject to the jurisdiction of financial regulatory agencies. An entity that participates in the standards development process established in Title I is still fully subject to the regulations, supervision, and other requirements of its financial reg-

ulatory agency. Sharing information with NIST as part of the process established in Title I is not a valid basis for withholding information from a regulator, including information about cyber threats.

NIST is the Federal government's premier science and standards agency. It is not a regulatory agency, nor is it a national or homeland security agency. NIST's unique role is to bring together knowledgeable players from government and industry and to build consensus around common technical standards. NIST has no authority to require any private entity to follow standards it develops. The cybersecurity standards development process established in Title I is therefore not a rulemaking process. It in no way imposes new or duplicative regulations on entities that are subject to the authority of financial regulatory agencies, and it in no way disturbs or diminishes agencies' authority to exercise their important oversight duties.

It is not intended to prohibit an agency from taking a regulatory action, such as an action to require an individual entity to protect against future cyber threats, if the agency independently obtains such information pursuant to other statutory or regulatory authority—even if an entity has shared this information with NIST. Nothing in this bill is intended to modify, limit, or otherwise affect the authority of the federal financial regulators under any other provision of law.

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota. I thank the Senator from West Virginia for his work on this important matter and for working with me to clarify the scope of this bill.

Mr. KING. I ask unanimous consent that the committee-reported substitute be agreed to, the Rockefeller-Thune substitute be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The committee-reported amendment in the nature of a substitute was agreed to.

The amendment (No. 4097) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The bill (S. 1353), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

PROTECTING VOLUNTEER FIRE-FIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS ACT OF 2014—Continued

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

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

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING SENATORS

TOM COBURN

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I would like to make some remarks about Senator COBURN.

TOM COBURN is one of the more remarkable Senators who have served in this body—certainly since I have been here. He is a man with absolute courage, conviction, and dedication to make this country better. He didn't come here to go through the job and go through the motions; he came here to invest his great skills and his great intellectual ability and to pour his drive and effort into making America a better place. It is very special. It is unusual. I have not seen anything like it, as I said, since I have been here.

I always had great reluctance to disagree or oppose anything Tom offered. They were not always perfect, but basically I opposed them so seldom because I agreed with him time and time again. I always hated to vote no because I knew he had studied the issue, understood it, and was doing what he believed was right.

His whole philosophy and approach to government, had it been more effectively followed by other Members of this body, would have led us to a better country. To support what he said, I think in a way, was supporting high ideals for America.

I want to say I am going to miss him. People have no idea how many times he has stopped or altered bad legislation to make it better and less problematic and more principled. He believes that ours is a constitutionally limited government. He didn't just believe that, he acted on it and has acted on it consistently.

I understand, and I have no doubt of this—we don't need to run a test—but I understand and have no doubt that he has offered more amendments since I have been in the Senate than any other Senator. They have been amendments to stop waste, fraud, and abuse, to make the government more efficient, leaner, to consolidate multiple programs that should be consolidated for efficiency.

He has worked across the aisle on a host of issues. He has sought bipartisan support for matters that are small and large. It is remarkable. I have to say that we are going to lose someone who is of great value. He would easily have been reelected had he run again.

I remember him saying one time—and this is his philosophy—if you want to be reelected, don't worry about being reelected, just do the right thing, and you won't have any difficulties. He never had any difficulties in his election, because people trusted him. They

knew every day, night and day, long hours, whatever, he was working to advance the common interest of our country. They trusted that he was not seduced, bought out, compromised by the powers that be in Washington, DC, and he remained true to those who sent him here.

I would say this: Part of the strength he has—as a matter of fact, maybe the greatest part of his strength he has is his faith. He is intelligent, sophisticated, knowledgeable, a scientist, a doctor, but a man of simple Christian faith which impacts his life as much as anybody in this body. He understands the true meaning of life, and he gives himself to others in a most remarkable way.

Thank you and colleagues for the opportunity for me to share these remarks. We are going to miss our friend TOM COBURN, who is going to object to those bills that require a lot of effort to make them better or stop some that are so bad they cannot be passed. A lot of us are going to have to pick up the slack.

Maybe TOM would say, “What are you doing down here, JEFF, wasting time talking about me when you ought to be studying this bill and finding some of the bogus spending that is in it? You should be spending your time fixing it.”

But every now and then I think we should stop and recognize an extraordinary life and an extraordinary Senator.

I wanted to share these remarks.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CLAY HUNT SAV ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, Mr. Clay Hunt is a marine veteran who committed suicide in March of 2011 at the age of 28. Clay enlisted in the Marine Corps in May of 2005 and deployed to the Al Anbar Province near Fallujah in January of 2007. He was shot in the wrist by a sniper's bullet that barely missed his head, and it earned him the Purple Heart.

Clay recuperated at Twentynine Palms, CA, and then graduated from Marine Corps scout sniper school in March of 2008, and he was redeployed in southern Afghanistan a few weeks later. His unit returned to the United States in late October 2008 and he was honorably discharged from the marines in April 2009.

After he returned home, Clay suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. He struggled for many years and he struggled with inadequate care from his local VA hospital before taking his own life.

The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act passed the House of Representa-

tives a little while ago this week. I believe this is an important piece of legislation. I serve on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and we had testimony related to suicide prevention, suicide among our veterans, a few weeks back, and it is so clear in Kansas and across the country that many veterans and their families deserve something much more than we are able to provide—than we are providing now—and this legislation which will help in that regard deserves swift passage by the U.S. Senate.

This bill, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act, would be instrumental in developing a VA system capable of offering first-class, first-rate mental health care services as well as utilizing the expertise of outside organizations to provide support for those struggling with the invisible wounds of service.

The legislation would require third parties to conduct an annual evaluation of suicide prevention programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs and within the Department of Defense. It would also provide for a new Web site that would offer veterans information regarding available mental health care services, and it would create a joint pilot loan repayment program for VA psychiatrists. There is a tremendous shortage of VA professionals that this would help alleviate, and it will improve the exchange of training, best practices, and other resources among the VA veterans service organizations and not-for-profit mental health organizations to enhance the cooperation of their efforts in suicide prevention.

During that Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on November 19, last month, we were honored to hear Clay's story from his mom, Susan Selke. Susan shared her son's story of reliving the traumatic experiences of war and his disappointment when the VA failed to offer him the care he needed to treat his stress disorder.

In fact, it was one of the most compelling—again, I have served on the Veterans' Affairs Committee since I came to Congress, and this mother's testimony was one of the most important pieces of information I have heard from a witness during the committee hearing. What she indicated was that in her belief—and she indicated that she believed her son thought this as well—that it was the VA bureaucracy, the inability, the unwillingness, the falling through the cracks, the culture that we have heard described in the Department of Veterans Affairs that was the straw that broke the camel's back and that caused her son to commit suicide.

We have ranted, we have raved, we highlighted, we pointed out, we have discussed the VA and its problems, its bureaucracy, its culture, its failure of leadership, its service to the VA as compared to its service to veterans many times over many years. We often bemoan bureaucracy among all Federal agencies, but it is especially important

at the Department of Veterans Affairs, because while it is easy to talk about the bureaucracy, the paperwork, the shuffling, the falling through the cracks, this mother's testimony about the death of her son indicated that it is not just about bureaucracy, it is not just about paperwork, it is not just about a culture. Those circumstances contributed to the death of a human being. In this case it contributed to the death of one who served our country nobly.

So we can bemoan the bureaucracy, but we need to remember that it is that circumstance that causes the loss of life. Suicide is something that needs to be addressed. We need to have a concerted effort, and legislation that is now pending before the Senate that needs to be passed before this Senate concludes is one step we can take to make certain there are less circumstances in which a soldier or a veteran commits suicide.

I cannot imagine the heartache, the difficulty, the challenge, that comes from a mom who comes to DC to testify about the suicide death of her son. I don't know how to put myself in that position, but I know it has to be a tremendously difficult, traumatic experience. The reason she must do that is because she wants to make certain that other sons of other parents of other mothers have a different experience than the one she, her family, and her son, experienced.

It is clear we have a problem. It is critical that the VA follow through on its commitment and its responsibilities to our Nation's veterans. It is critical that they must follow through to those veterans who are just returning home, those who have been home a long time, and to their families who need to have the love and support and care of the VA and the American people. We have to keep working to find solutions to the issues of mental health our service men and women and veterans now face, and we must hold the VA accountable for their responsibilities when it comes to providing for the needs of those veterans. And that care and treatment must be provided in a timely, high quality, and in a specialized way that meets the needs of each individual veteran and their family.

My presence on the Senate floor this evening is to highlight the importance of the message of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act, to pay honor and tribute to Clay Hunt and to his family, and to the hundreds of individuals and families across the country who have faced similar circumstances, and call us to the point that we recognize that steps taken today can make certain there are no more Clay Hunts, no more mothers who face the circumstance of the loss of their son, and that America lives up to its commitment to those we have called to duty.

I urge my colleagues to make certain that this legislation passes the U.S. Senate before we recess for this holiday period.

Mr. President, thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING SENATORS

JAY ROCKEFELLER

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to share a few remarks as we mark the end of the long tenure of Senator JAY ROCKEFELLER and his service to his country and to the Senate. He has served in the Senate for 30 years. He served two terms as Governor of West Virginia, and served as Secretary of State, and in the House of Delegates.

He came to the State of West Virginia as a young VISTA volunteer. I have heard him tell the story about that, how he really wanted to participate and reach out and help others. He came to West Virginia as a young man and stayed. He worked with people in a small mining community. His heart was right to try to be helpful. He came from a prestigious family, but he wanted to help others.

He has been a remarkable Member of the Senate for now 30 years. He has a brilliant mind, capable of grasping all sorts of thoughts, but he also has the ability to delight in little things. One of those is sports. He has a tremendous capacity to have in that brain of his sports trivia. He likes the Atlanta Braves. He knows Southeastern Conference football. I have been pleased to be able to chat with him on occasion on the floor.

It just goes to show a lot of times people don't realize that we get along pretty well in this body personally. We may disagree on issues, but we care about one another. JAY ROCKEFELLER has always been nice to me. He has always been a friend. He has always been courteous. He has always been collegial to me, and I have appreciated that over the years. So I wish to thank him for his service to his country, his commitment to others, and I wish him Godspeed in his further endeavors.

I thank the Chair, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SAXBY CHAMBLISS

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to share a few thoughts about the service in the Senate of our good friend and colleague SAXBY CHAMBLISS.

SAXBY is one of the best liked and most respected Senators in this body.

Every Member knows him. Every Member likes him. Every Member respects him. I truly share that view. And on matters particularly related to national security, intelligence issues, and terrorism, I consistently want to know what SAXBY has to say about it.

He has done a whole lot of things in this Senate. He has been a participant and a contributor on many issues. He worked really hard to try to create a bipartisan solution to our debt crisis. That didn't quite develop, but it was a positive part of the discussion this Senate went through.

What I really want to say is that as Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and having been a longtime Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and here in the Senate, he has become the go-to person with regard to the sensitive issues relating to the security of our country. I consistently have looked to him because I trust his judgment, trust his integrity, and trust his wisdom to help sort through all the political news articles and debates and hot issues, and to distill down to the bottom of what is important, what we should be focused on, and what the right thing is for America.

Truly, he has been a remarkable Senator. We are going to miss SAXBY. I am going to miss SAXBY, as so many of us will. He is the son of an Episcopalian minister. He is a man of faith.

He has a delightful wife, Julianne. My wife is a good judge of character and she thinks Julianne hung the Moon, and that is so true. They are a great family and great partners.

SAXBY has given so much to the Senate. Georgia has produced some great Senators, particularly Senators known for their commitment to national security and the defense of America: Richard Russell, for whom the Russell Senate Office Building is named; Sam Nunn, who was so long a leader in the Congress with regard to national defense.

SAXBY CHAMBLISS is in that category. That is the kind of Senator he has been—from defending America to helping his colleagues sift through difficult issues and make good, wise decisions. It has been a great pleasure for me to serve with him. I wish him every success in his future endeavors and look forward to seeing him back in this area many times.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MARK BEGICH

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I would also just say that we will be losing a good friend, MARK BEGICH. MARK and I served on the Armed Services

Committee together for a number of years. We were very active. I was Ranking Member and he was Chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, dealing with missile defense, which Alaska was deeply involved with as a state.

MARK was an expert on those issues. We dealt with nuclear issues and outer space and satellite issues. That was a particularly good time together. I believe every committee—every decision we reached—was a bipartisan decision that came out of committee. We supported the Subcommittee report that was made a part of the Armed Services bill and then became law. For the most part I think not too many changes were made in it.

I think a lot of people may not appreciate that Senators do get along. We do work together on issues important to the country, such as space and military space necessities that are so valuable to our men and women as they are in harm's way, to be able to produce a missile defense system that ensures that this country is not vulnerable to attack by a missile from an adversary.

That system is up, standing, and operating today. It was great to work with MARK in establishing it. He is a delightful person to work with, always with a positive attitude. I know he will be successful in whatever future endeavors he undertakes. He was mayor of Anchorage. Anybody who has been a mayor has learned some things and has had to deal with constituents face-to-face. He loved actually meeting his constituents and talking with them.

I wish MARK every success in his future endeavors and would like to express my appreciation to him for the courtesies he has shown me and the effort we made together to improve the defense of the United States.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HOURS OF SERVICE REGULATIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, at this time of year, Thanksgiving and the holidays that are upcoming, a lot of Americans are on our roads. A lot of us know that Americans are on the roads because my colleagues and I travel using the highways of our States so frequently.

We know as parents, as family members, that in the back of our minds when a son or daughter is driving, there is a tiny bit of apprehension and anxiety about safety. It is safety not only concerning people on our roads but also on our railways. As a member of the commerce committee, where the Presiding Officer served, I know he has young children and he probably has the same apprehensions and anxieties that

all of us share when our family members are driving, particularly late at night, early in the morning, hours when weariness, fatigue, and tiredness are one of the main enemies—particularly when the weather is bad.

The omnibus funding measure, soon to be under debate, has many good provisions, but it also has a provision that is antithetical and deeply destructive to the principle of road safety because it affects truck drivers who are on the roads for long periods of time. I am referring to section 133 of division K, one paragraph. I am here to talk about it, to ask that my colleagues oppose it. If there is any way to strip it from the bill, I urge that it be done. It is a provision that is virtually incomprehensible to the average American on the roads or in their homes as to what it means and what its ramifications are and what its consequences may be to their safety and the safety of others in their families on the road.

The fact is that nearly 4,000 people who are killed each year in truck crashes and the nearly 100,000 each year who are injured show the toll of fatigue and weariness of our truck drivers.

According to NHTSA, truck crash injuries in fact increased by 40 percent between 2009 to 2012. We all have seen the consequences of fatigue on the roads when we drive—the truck driver who may pull his rig in front of us or slide over into our side of the road, not because he is not well trained, experienced, able. In fact, the vast majority of truck drivers are experienced and able and well trained and extraordinarily prudent in the way they drive.

But fatigue is an enemy to them as it is to all of us who drive. Many of the headlines we have seen recently have concerned hours of service regulations governing truck drivers, as many truck crashes involve tired truck drivers. There are rules that have been enacted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, rules that have been implemented to curb the number of fatigued truck drivers on our roads, implemented after years of rulemaking and analysis and study and even litigation. They are fact-based rules. They are supported by science. They are rules that move American roads and drivers in the right direction, truly, literally on the right path.

I am not the only one who supports these rules. They are supported by the Secretary of Transportation. Secretary Foxx is to be commended for his steadfast, strong, courageous defense of these rules. His integrity and intellect in support of these rules I greatly appreciate. But he is not alone any more than I am alone. The folks who are most adamant and passionate about it are the truck drivers themselves.

The Teamsters and the United Transportation Union, they have inspired me to be as passionate and steadfast as I am on these rules. They are not alone either. Law enforcement, the International Association of Chiefs of Po-

lice, the National Troopers Coalition, the National Sheriffs' Association, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, and the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association all support these rules.

They are also supported by consumer and public health groups and safety groups such as Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways, the Consumer Federation of America, the American Public Health Association, the John Lindsay Foundation, the Truck Safety Coalition, KidsAndCars.org, the Trauma Foundation, and Public Citizen. These are the preeminent public and safety consumer advocacy groups in this country. They all support these rules.

Tragically and unfortunately, there are organizations representing victims such as Parents Against Tired Truckers and Roadsafe America which also have been inspired to support these rules. I say tragically and unfortunately, because none of us welcome the fact that there are victims of crashes resulting from tired truckers. Most regretful are the truckers themselves, which is why they are supporting these rules. But the families and loved ones of victims of these crashes support the rules, and even many trucking companies like those represented by the Trucking Alliance support these rules.

The fact is there is good reason for the rules and there is good reason to strip the bill of a provision that negates, in effect, undercuts, and eviscerates these rules, section 133 of Division K. There is good reason. The 2005 study conducted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration demonstrated that before the current rules were implemented, 65 percent of drivers reported feeling drowsy while driving and 48 percent admitted to falling asleep while driving at some point the previous year.

But under the current rules, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says that it will save 19 lives, prevent about 1,400 crashes, 560 injuries each year, see an estimated \$280 million in savings from fewer large truck crashes, and see \$470 million in savings from improved driver health.

These are dry, abstract statistics, but they measure compelling losses in human lives and in dollars.

Unfortunately, the folks who want to stop these rules have found a home in the omnibus appropriations bill that may be coming over from the House later today. In addition, while the rules are blocked, the language in the House bill would also require that this issue be studied further.

The rules have been studied a lot. If there is a need for further study, fine. I am completely on board with study and factfinding. But in the meantime, let's keep the rules as they are, as prescribed by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. They are in the business of safety. They have said these rules are necessary. Let's keep the rules implemented, but we can

study them. If we are going to make any changes, it should be done with proper analysis and debate—not in a spending bill. It ought to be in the committee with jurisdiction, the commerce committee, where I serve.

That is why in late July my subcommittee held a hearing on truck safety and this issue featured prominently. We gave everyone a chance to testify, to debate all points of view. Until then, the only discussion was in the context of appropriations and spending bills, not in the context of real policy.

The hearing I held highlighted some real issues. First, with these changes, drivers will be able to drive nearly 80 hours a week. In other words, if this provision is adopted, if the rules are rolled back, drivers will be able to drive nearly 80 hours a week and hundreds more a year.

It is more likely that trucking companies will push their drivers to drive the maximum limit, which is about twice the average American workweek. That is exactly what the rules are designed to prevent, truck drivers being forced to work too many hours, getting exhausted, and then endangering themselves and other drivers on the road.

All we are trying to do with the rules is take tired truckers off the roads—not tell them when they must sleep or what they must do while they are off the roads. It is about taking tired trucker drivers off the road. The changes in the omnibus would enable drivers to drive nearly 80 hours a week and hundreds more hours a year and would really impede truck drivers' resting, which they should be doing instead of driving more.

The rules implemented by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration were the result of compromise. To roll them back further undermines that compromise. If anything, we ought to be instituting greater safeguards.

If there is factfinding that justifies stronger precaution and protection, we welcome that study. But in the meantime, allow the rules to work and protect drivers, truck drivers and other drivers on the road. Americans are in favor of these rules. They are in favor of truck safety.

Polling data released in October shows why so many Americans are concerned about allowing drivers to be on the roads while they are fatigued. Americans simply don't want these large trucks, which in many respects operate like missiles zooming down the road. A missile out of control can do huge, humongous, enduring damage to life and limb and to the futures of people whose lives may be transformed by a fatal or serious crash.

Let's make sure we have a real conversation about this issue in the commerce committee. Let's make sure we do the factfinding and have the rules in place while that factfinding takes place. Let's make sure that Americans are protected against weary and tired

truckdrivers. Let's give them the same attention and care as we would want for our families during this season, on the roads, while they are driving late at night, maybe in bad weather, because there are going to be storms as there are, inevitably, in December, January, and February.

But every day, every season, these rules deserve to be in place. That is why this provision, which would roll back those rules—making changes endangering the lives of ordinary Americans on the road—is so antithetical to safety and such an anathema to the values of saving and preserving life and increasing the safety of our drivers on the road.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DONNELLY). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CLAY HUNT SAV ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I wish to inform my colleagues, although the hour is late, that the Clay Hunt bill, H.R. 5059, has been cleared on the Democratic side and I hope we will have unanimous consent to move it tomorrow in the session that we have on Friday.

This bill is of tremendous importance to not only me as a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and my colleagues—many of them including, I believe, Senator MCCAIN, who introduced an updated and improved version of the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, but also to the families who have been affected, I want to say in particular to Susan Selke, who testified before the Veterans' Affairs Committee—and I was there for her testimony, speaking on behalf of herself and her husband, Richard, as the mother of Clay Hunt, a marine combat victim who died by suicide in March of 2011 at the age of 28.

I am not going to speak at length about the reasons of why we need more assistance and support to prevent more wonderful young men and women like Clay Hunt, who served and sacrificed for our Nation, the kind of resources and support that are necessary to prevent them from becoming victims at this time of tragic circumstances.

We owe it to Susan Selke, Clay Hunt's mom, and all the families who lose loved ones to suicide, to do better, to do more, and do it now.

The reforms and programs directed by this legislation hopefully will enable the VA to better serve and treat veterans suffering from the hidden or invisible injuries of war, and the mental health and other conditions that ought to be addressed to save young men and women such as Clay Hunt.

I will seek to move this bill tomorrow by unanimous consent, and I hope my colleagues will enable me to do so.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I wish to speak on the bill we are on—the National Defense Authorization Act—by taking a look at the condition of the world today. This is an important time to do it, as we enter the end of this year and begin to look forward to the new year. We should take a moment to take a snapshot of the world and the threats that exist around us and the complexities in the world because I think they are directly on point as to what our military capabilities are going to need to be in the 21st century.

I note that the tendencies have often been on a number of occasions, even in my lifetime, where we have tried to take, for lack of a better term, what is known as a peace dividend—the end of the Cold War, for example, and then again after the events of 9/11—it is the idea that somehow the threats around the world and the challenges we face have somehow ebbed and it is time to nation build at home. I am always in favor of nation building at home. The problem is that today, now, in the 21st century more than ever, there is no such thing as a remote problem. There is no such thing as any issue that is of major importance abroad that doesn't somehow impact us here at home. This has always been true, but it has never been more true than it is today because of the global nature of our economy.

As we look around the world—and I want to take a brief moment to go over some of the parts of the world—we start to see what the need for American leadership is and the need for a strong national defense capability on the part of the United States and how important it is in this new global economy.

Let's begin by looking at the Middle East, the most troubled region of the world, and that has been true for a very long time. We begin by talking about the negotiations that are going on with Iran. Look, I would hope—we all do, I think—to wake up one day to the news that Iran has decided to walk away from sponsoring terrorism, that Iran has walked away from its desire to blow up Israel, that Iran has rejected the human rights violations it commits against its own people, and that they have abandoned their nuclear ambitions. We would all love to see that happen. That is the ideal outcome. It is also, frankly, the least likely.

The truth is, while we shouldn't root against the negotiations that are going on with Iran, we shouldn't be naive enough to believe they have a serious chance at success, and I say this for a couple of very different but simple reasons.

The first is because I think Iran looks at what has happened with North Korea—a country that barely has an economy; it is not even a country in the sense we think of, having a government. It is really an area of land run by a criminal syndicate. Iran has seen how North Korea, because it has a nuclear weapon, has been able to be immune to international pressures, up to a certain point. Then Iran looks to Libya and it looks to Iraq and it says: Look what happens to people who don't have nuclear weapons. So I am convinced the Supreme Leader wants that nuclear capability. Whether he will ever actually build the weapon—it may not be something they have decided yet, but the ability to build that weapon—I have no doubt that is what they want.

I have no doubt—and I believe the administration knows this to be true—that they have gone into these negotiations with a very clear objective; that is, we want you, negotiator, to get rid of as many sanctions as possible without agreeing to any irreversible concessions.

It is an interesting plan because their idea is to get rid of the sanctions, thinking they will do what they need to do in the short term—whatever that may be, as long as they are not irreversible—and at some point in the future they will restart the weapons program. It is going to be easier for Iran to restart the weapons program than it is going to be for the United States and the nations of the world to reimpose sanctions. So I think they have figured that out, and that is what their mandate has been. But even that has its limits because when we look to these negotiators—and there is a history of this, when we look to these negotiators—there have been times in the past when Iranian negotiators might have agreed to something at the table, but then they have to come back and pull the offer because when they take it to the Supreme Leader, he says no.

We have to understand that the Supreme Leader is an isolated individual. This is not a person who travels the world or interacts with other national leaders of other nations. This is a person who is an ideologue, a religious fanatic. And I don't care what the negotiators agree to or what the President of Iran agrees to, ultimately it is the Supreme Leader's decision. I hate to say this, but they are not going to agree to any sort of deal that is good for the national security of the United States. I believe that to be true, and we need to be prepared for that.

I hope one of the first items we take up in this Chamber in the new year, in the new Congress, will be a bill to require congressional authorization for any deal, and I think we should also consider putting in place sanctions for the day when that deal fails.

In the meantime, as we talk about those negotiations that are going on—and Iran has already acquired a concession on the part of the West that they

can leave in place some level of the infrastructure they need to enrich uranium and reprocess plutonium—they are still expanding their missile capability, they are still sponsoring terrorism all over the world, they are still deeply embedded and aligned with Shia militias in Iraq who pose a danger to the United States—and I will touch more upon that in a moment—and they still have plans to one day destroy Israel. So we should not be naive about the situation with Iran, and I hope in the new year more clarity will come to that.

The second issue that directly touches upon our national security is the conflict between Iraq and Syria with regard to ISIL and the speed by which they have spread throughout two countries. Their goals are very simple. The goal of ISIL is to establish an Islamic caliphate that stretches from Europe—literally from Spain all the way through the Middle East, into India and Afghanistan, and in through north Africa. That is their very clear goal. They have said so. That is their plan, and it began in Syria, and it is spreading to Iraq. They made some pretty impressive gains before they started getting hit from the air. But even with that, they are the best funded and the best armed terrorist organization in modern history.

We already are beginning to see the spread of ISIL. One place to keep an eye on is Libya. They control an entire province in Libya. An affiliate of theirs, a group who has pledged allegiance to them, now controls an entire province in Libya, and here is what is dangerous about that. For a group such as this to prosper and grow, they need an ungoverned space. They need a piece of territory where no one is shooting at them, where no one is protesting their presence and they have no one to fight against them. That is why al Qaeda was able to grow so fast in Afghanistan—because the Taliban gave them that ungoverned space. That is why ISIL was able to grow so quickly out of Syria and into Iraq—because they were able to carve out an ungoverned space where the Syrian Government wasn't.

In Libya they have no one to fight. There is no functional government right now. There are no rival rebel groups to shoot at them. And they are going to use that ungoverned space to grow their capability. In fact, it would not surprise me, unfortunately, if in a few months, maybe a year, the hub of ISIL's activities is located largely in that province of Libya and beyond.

By the way, ISIL's presence isn't just a threat to Iraq and Syria; their immediate threat as well is to the Kingdom of Jordan, a critical U.S. ally. And if they are a threat to Jordan, they are a threat to Israel and, ultimately, to Saudi Arabia. They are a threat to Turkey already. They are a threat to Lebanon, and, as I said, they are present in north Africa as we speak. This is a very dangerous development, and it must be dealt with seriously.

We also can't anticipate the alliances that ISIL might make. We have to understand what is happening. As they make these gains—or supposed gains—they have also become very good at propaganda. They are convincing young, radicalized individuals—including here in the United States—that they are the preeminent jihadist group on the planet, that they are the most successful jihadist group on the planet, that they will inevitably succeed, and that they are an unsurmountable force. They are convincing people to abandon other groups and join them. They are convincing donors to stop giving money to other groups and give to them. We don't know what this is going to develop into, but we can foresee in the very near future where other groups begin to align themselves with them just to remain relevant.

By the way, as a side note, there is an additional danger to ISIL's spread, and that is that the other jihadist groups in the world, who are now losing donors and losing recruits, are now feeling an urgency to go out and carry out some spectacular attack, such as here in the homeland against American interests or air travel somewhere. They now have an interest in carrying out a spectacular attack because they need to do something to reattract donors and reattract members.

But back to my original point. The danger is that these new groups, in order to remain relevant and not lose their fighters, may decide they are going to pledge their allegiance to ISIL. The host of groups already exploring that are dangerous—the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Taliban in Pakistan, the Haqqani Network that is in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and there are other groups in north Africa as well that at least nominally have pledged some level of allegiance and support for what ISIL is doing. We need to keep an eye on this threat because a year ago, if I had stood on this floor and said we need to take ISIL seriously, no one would have known what I was talking about. That is how quickly this threat has spread, and we have no idea what it can morph into in the next few years, not to mention the next few months.

There is one additional point I wish to make. The city of Mosul has a university with a significant research capability, and one thing for us to be very cautious about is that ISIL is not using that university and its research capabilities to develop rockets or, God forbid, chemical weapons or even a dirty bomb. That is something to keep an eye on in the months and weeks to come. That is another example of the complex national security threats our Nation faces.

Our ally Israel—their struggles and their challenges are well documented. It begins with Iran. We have talked about the fact that single greatest threat facing Israel today is the prospect of a nuclear Iran and what it would mean to Israel's security in the

long term. They face a very difficult challenge with the Palestinian Authority.

There was a poll I read about this morning that talked about a large majority of people—Palestinians—who believe it is morally right to kill Israelis, to kill Jews. I am not saying that I believe all Palestinians think that, but it bears noting what that poll found. It should not surprise us when the educational institutions of the Palestinian Authority—not to mention what is being taught in Gaza—teaches people that not only is it right, it is heroic to kill Jews and to be an anti-Semite.

Then they are being pressured, including by this administration—Israel is—to enter into a peace agreement with these individuals, with those so-called leaders. How can you enter into a peace agreement with people who want to destroy you? How could you possibly enter into a peace agreement with an organization that wants to eradicate you? What are you going to negotiate—the terms of your destruction?

I don't know of any nation on Earth that wants peace more than Israel does. What do they have to gain from this constant conflict? How can you have peace with an organization, with a group that is committed to their destruction?

Instead of saying: Israel, your No. 1 problem right now is—we know what it is—the threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon, this administration and some political leaders even in this Chamber believe we should be pressuring them that their No. 1 objective should be entering into some sort of peace agreement with an organization that wants to destroy them, that in some quarters won't even recognize their right to exist, an organization that harbors individuals who deny that Jews were ever present on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which is absurd. Of course, I would just encourage them to do a little archeological research to confirm the longstanding Jewish presence in the region.

Suffice it to say that Israel is our strongest ally in the region. It is everything we wish the Middle East was—a prosperous, free enterprise economy, a stable democracy with a vibrant political process, and a loyal friend to the United States in international forums. I wish there were more countries in the world like that. We should do everything we can to support Israel and stop putting pressure on them because every time we put pressure on them on these things, we create daylight between the United States and Israel, we imperil their security, and we encourage their enemies to become even more aggressive.

The last point I will make about Israel: Let there be no doubt that there is a global effort to delegitimize their right to exist as a Jewish state. It has infiltrated throughout Europe, and we are starting to see it rear its ugly head in academia here in the United States.

We should not let that stand. We should speak out against it and condemn it for what it is.

As if the Middle East were not complicated enough, we turn our focus to Europe and the threat Russia now poses. Interestingly enough, a year and a half ago, Mitt Romney, the former Governor of Massachusetts, the Republican Presidential nominee, said that Russia was our most serious geopolitical threat in the short term. He was universally mocked by elitists and the press, even by some here in Washington—many here in Washington. It turns out he was right, as were many of us who were saying the same thing.

The truth is that Vladimir Putin many years ago concluded that the United States was a threat to Russia, many years ago concluded that he wanted Russia to be reestablished as a world power and that the only way he could achieve that was by confronting the United States and being seen as a counterbalance to the United States on the global stage, and we see that in place after place. In international forums, when it comes to Syria, on issue after issue Russia is against us because Putin believes it gives them relevancy on the global stage.

But there is a second issue and do not take this lightly. We don't spend all day obsessed about Russia. We don't spend all night thinking the Russians are going to invade us. But they do. There are leaders in the Russian Government who believe the United States wants to get into a military conflict with them, and they increasingly believe that now more than ever. We can see it in the military moves they are making. These are not just provocations. This is an all-out change to their defense posturing, to their defense theory, a defense theory that is increasingly looking like a Cold War one, a defense theory that is increasingly looking like they need to have the ability to prevent a U.S. first strike or to somehow be able to react to a U.S. first strike.

I know for us it sounds absurd that the United States would ever launch a nuclear attack against Russia. But there are Russian leaders at very high levels that believe that is plausible, and we are seeing it rear its head in every part of the world. Not a day goes by that there is not a report of a Russian intrusion here or a submarine appearing somewhere or an airplane—Russian bombers that have been intercepted by NATO or even the United States. These are not just provocations. They are muscle flexing.

This is a change in their defense theory, and it is a very dangerous change, not to mention the fact that I believe evidence now exists that Russia is in violation of multiple treaties they have signed with the United States, and there needs to be consequences for that.

Then, of course, as part of that strategy they believe they need strategic depth, which means they need all the

countries that border them, especially the former Soviet Republics, to be in their camp. They don't want anyone near them turning toward the West. The best example of that is what is happening in Ukraine.

What is happening in Ukraine is easy to understand. As Ukraine turned westward, Russia said that was unacceptable; they invaded Crimea and took it, and they are now engaged openly in a conflict with Ukraine that is, by the way, an outrageous one.

First of all, Russian troops have entered Ukrainian territory. Maybe they were disguised as something else, but Russian troops have made incursions into Ukraine territory and carried out combat operations against the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

The Russians are supplying the Ukrainians with weapons and armored vehicles.

They will claim: No; these armored vehicles are armored vehicles we seized, and they are clever about the armored vehicles they supply them with. They are only supplying them with armored vehicles that look like the ones the Ukrainians already have in their current stockpiles. But they are arming, equipping, and training Ukrainian separatists, and their goal is to achieve one of two things:

Their first objective, plan A, is to force Ukraine, because of the pressure they are putting on them through these separatists, because of the economic levers they hold on a very fragile Ukrainian economy through energy and exports and so forth—their first objective is to force Ukraine into a federation system of government; basically, a system of government that gives those eastern provinces and areas more autonomy because that would keep the country sufficiently divided so it can never turn toward Europe and the West.

If that doesn't work, however, then plan B that they are perfectly comfortable with is to freeze the status quo, to basically freeze the current conflict as the status quo for the long term. After the next 15 or 20 years, there will be armed and trained separatists, supported by Russia, carrying out combat operations against the Ukrainian Government in the eastern parts of the country.

Plan A is the federation; plan B is to freeze the status of the current conflict. That is the reality we are facing.

What is interesting is here is what Russia is banking on. They are banking on the sanctions which have been imposed will not be sustained; that eventually, after a couple of years, Europe will say: OK. It is time to accept what has happened and move on and that sanctions will be lifted. In fact, that is what Putin is probably telling his inner circle and the people around him: Don't worry. We are going to get through this. These sanctions will eventually be lifted off of us, and everything will be back to normal.

But those sanctions are hurting right now. I would hope those sanctions

don't fall apart. I would hope the European nations understand what a direct threat this poses to them if Russia could just invade a country and take it over. But time will tell.

I think a strong American leadership is critical. I think a reinvigoration of NATO is critical. That is why it is so important that we focus on our defense capability.

But that is Putin telling everyone around him: Don't worry about these sanctions. They are going to be gone in a while. We will get through this.

Interestingly, to give some insight into Putin, the inner circle around him, the elites who are closest to him, they are being shielded from the impact of these sanctions to a certain point. In fact, one of the people, Igor Sechin, who was specifically sanctioned by the sanctions that were passed here and in Europe—he actually convinced Putin to indict an energy rival of his, take his property and his assets, and give it to Igor Sechin as compensation. That is how cynical this has become.

So the elites that surround and are closest to Putin, they are being protected by the impact of the sanctions. Everybody else is paying a terrible price, not the least of which are the people.

I also think there is clear evidence that Putin is increasingly isolated in terms of whom he listens to, whom he takes advice from, and whom he consults with, and it is going to have a devastating impact on Russia. Next year their economy is predicted to contract. Yet despite this—just to give a true indication of where Russia is headed and to give insight as to where we should be headed—contraction of their economy, despite the collapse of oil prices which has been devastating to their economy, Putin just announced budget cuts throughout every part of their government except for one—the one part of the budget they are holding harmless—military spending. I hope that gives some insight as to where they are heading.

My last point on Russia is they are increasingly present in the Western Hemisphere. They are actively seeking lease agreements in Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba to be able to have naval assets and aircraft stationed in our own backyard, in the Western Hemisphere.

Let's talk about Asia for a moment, another place that poses some very significant national security and military implications for the United States.

I talked about North Korea earlier. I think it bears repeating. North Korea doesn't have a government. It is a nation or is a territory governed by a criminal syndicate run by an insane and erratic leader—but an insane and erratic leader with nuclear weapons, an insane and erratic leader who is developing long-range missile capabilities, and an insane and erratic leader that may end up overestimating his military capabilities, miscalculating, and

trigger a dispute with South Korea that could quickly escalate and implicate the United States, which has a very strong and important military and defense agreement arrangement with South Korea and our allies in the south. It bears watching.

Let's focus for a moment on China. First of all, we cannot ignore their aggressive territorial claims against both the Philippines and Japan. Interestingly, they picked on the Philippines first, a nation that doesn't have much of a military to speak of. This is the first nation they have gotten into a sort of conflict with, but they have them also with Japan and with Vietnam, and they have been pretty aggressive about it. To understand that, we have to understand a little bit about history.

For thousands of years, China was the dominant nation in that region. For them, the last 200 years is an aberration, and their increasing assertiveness is an indication that they believe it is time to go back to normal, which is their dominance of the region. Their dominance, by the way, doesn't mean they are going to invade these countries and take them over. They are not going to invade the Philippines. They are not going to invade Japan.

What they believe is that all these countries should be tributary states, that all these countries should fold underneath China's leadership, that all these countries should recognize China is big and they are small, and they should listen to China's directives and orders.

So we see the silk road initiative. We see them trying to come up with an alternative to the other global institutions that have served the world so well since the end of World War II. They want to displace the United States and the global order that existed since the end of World War II with their own order, run by China to China's advantages, and that begins with territorial claims.

The next time you have a chance to see in some Chinese passports, they have a map that indicates the nine-dash line. The nine-dash line is what they think the world looks like in terms of territories. If we look at what that means, they basically believe the entire South China Sea is their territory. That is why they have made these aggressive moves against these islands. Let me tell you how the strategy works.

They send fishermen to these areas to fish or others to exploit resources. The other countries send out their coast guard to defend it. They send out their coast guard or navy to push back. They basically show you: Even if you wanted to fight against us, there is nothing you can do about it.

Eventually what they want these nations to conclude is: There is no point in fighting China because we can't win. The United States is not going to come to our defense. So we might as well cut a deal with them and accept their dominance.

That is their plan, slowly but surely to change the facts on the ground, to assert themselves, to convince these other countries there is nothing they can do about it. They can't count on the United States anymore, and eventually these countries will say: Fine, China. We will do whatever you want and cave. That is their plan and they are carrying it out.

They have also shown their true colors in Hong Kong. When the agreement was signed to turn Hong Kong over from the United Kingdom to the Chinese, one of the things that was important in that agreement was autonomy; that Hong Kong couldn't have its own foreign policy, but it could have its own domestic system of government autonomous from the Chinese system.

But now things have changed. Now the Chinese basically want to have veto power over who can run for office and who can lead Hong Kong. In fact, the criteria they have established is: You have to love the nation. But I will translate what that means: You have to love the Chinese Communist Party and do what they want you to do. So this is an important development that we need to keep an eye on.

Beyond that, going back to military affairs for a moment—because we are on the NDAA—just look at what China is doing in its military expenditures: dramatic increases in military expenditures, the true nature of which we don't know because China doesn't pass a budget like ours for public knowledge. We know what they have spent, but we don't know how much more they have spent than what they have declared. But we can tell you they are developing anti-access/anti-area denial weapons, anti-access weapons. They have tested supersonic missiles fired off their ships designed to penetrate U.S. missile defense.

Here is why they develop these: They want us to know that if we were to somehow encroach upon these territories, if there was a conflict in Asia and the United States responded militarily, the Chinese can destroy one of our aircraft carriers. The Chinese could destroy one of our expensive naval capabilities. That is what they want to be able to prove to us. What they hope the calculation will be is that the United States goes: Look. If one day China invades Taiwan, there is nothing we can do about it because we are not going to lose two aircraft carriers over a conflict.

So that is why they are investing so much in these denial capabilities.

They are also investing in space warfare, the ability to blow up our satellites because they know how dependent American national security is on having technological advantage. So China is racing to militarize space. It is a very serious threat to keep an eye on.

A couple more points on the military. I will close by talking about the Western Hemisphere. The Western Hemisphere poses its own set of challenges as outlined earlier.

Let's start with Venezuela. We took up a bill this week on Venezuela. It was an important bill and I am glad we passed it. It is on the way to the President's desk. It sanctions human rights violations.

The Government of Venezuela is not an ally of the United States. They vote against this country in every international forum they can. They actively undermine U.S. national security interests. They are serial human rights violators at home, and we passed a bill that is going to sanction the human rights violators. The President has indicated he is going to sign it, and I think they are going to have a real impact.

But Venezuela is headed for catastrophe. This is a rich country, by the way, headed toward economic catastrophe. Basic goods such as toothpaste and toilet paper are unavailable in Venezuela. The Venezuelan economy today resembles the Cuban economy. By the way, there is no embargo against Venezuela. It just shows socialism doesn't work. They have run out of things to give away.

It is not a democracy. Venezuela is no longer a democracy. They have something called the National Electoral Commission, and they are actively, as we speak, trying to replace people not loyal to the government on that commission with people loyal to the governing party.

The second thing I predict you are going to see is that the current President of Venezuela, Maduro, is going to move up the elections to July or June of this year because he knows the longer this crisis goes on, the less and less popular the government party is going to be. So I predict that the Venezuelan elections are going to be moved up, but I also predict financial disaster.

In fact, here is a curious thing that we received calls about in the last few days. Venezuela is now begging the Petrocaribe nations, the Mercosur nations, and the Alba nations to buy Venezuelan products. In fact, they are going to the Petrocaribe nations and saying: Instead of paying us back in cash, you can pay us by buying our products.

There is going to be a financial disaster in Venezuela. The price of oil and its collapse is not helping them.

What I predict is not just financial disaster but severe depression, and I predict that in the year 2015 we are going to see severe human rights violations, severe repression on the part of the Maduro Government and everything that goes with it, all the impact that it is going to have on the region. It is something we need to be beginning to think about because that will lead to mass migration into Colombia and into the United States. That is going to lead to instability in the region that could potentially lead to armed conflict between the professional armed services of Venezuela and the Cuban agents who now for all intents and purposes run the Cuban Government.

Talking about Cuba—a nation I talk a lot about because my parents came from there—I live in a community of people who came from there and had to leave for a free economy.

Let me begin by saying that Alan Gross is still a hostage. Alan Gross committed no crime. He did nothing wrong. He is a hostage in a Cuban prison, a hostage the Cubans are holding because they want to exchange him for five Cuban spies convicted in the courts of the United States. Alan Gross is not a spy. All he wanted to do was help a small Jewish community in Cuba, and for that he was jailed. It is outrageous. It shows the true nature of this government.

We shouldn't be surprised. They still detain as a matter of course innocent people who disagree. Every Sunday they beat up and harass the Ladies in White, which is a group of mothers who have sons in jail or fathers who have been killed or husbands who have been killed or jailed, who every Sunday march and dress in white to protest the government, and every Sunday the government thugs come after them. It is shameful that the people know this and look the other way, but that is the reality that is happening every single day in Cuba. It is still going on. It is the most repressive government in the Western Hemisphere and one of the most repressive governments in the world.

They are also a violator of international agreements. We know for a fact that a ship going through the Panama Canal from Cuba to North Korea was carrying equipment and material in violation of the U.N. sanctions on North Korea. The U.N., which is not an easy place to get to condemn Cuba, found the exact same thing. And our response to that has been nothing—absolutely nothing. The Cuban Government assisted North Korea in evading U.N. sanctions, and we have done nothing about it.

On the contrary, we have people who are saying: Let's lift the embargo and normalize relations—which leads me to a point directly related to this, which is the nomination of Tony Blinken that is before this Senate. I would use every procedural method available to me to ensure that this Senate will have to take as long as possible to confirm him, and I will tell you why. On three separate occasions I asked Mr. Blinken: Is your government going to ignore U.S. law and unilaterally change policy toward Cuba? And he would not answer my question. So until I get a clear answer on that, I intend to hold his nomination as long as the rules allow me to.

I would like to make one more point about Cuba. In addition to being the ally to every tyrant on the planet—from Assad, to Iran, to Qadhafi before he fell and died—by the way, Cuba is the home of a significant number of Medicare fugitives, people who have come to the United States and stolen money from Medicare. That is a subject for another day, but Medicare

fraud in South Florida is rampant. It is out of control. In fact, law enforcement officials in South Florida will tell you that if you are only willing to steal \$200,000 a month, they will never catch you. An inordinate number of people are coming from Cuba, stealing from Medicare, and then when they are about to get caught, they go back to Cuba with all that money. There are numerous Medicare fugitives in Cuba. It is hard to believe that they came here and were able to mount such operations so quickly without assistance from somebody.

Now we see signals from the White House that we are going to invite Cuba—that we are open to them being invited to the Summit of the Americas—the Summit of the Americas is a forum for democracy, not for 20th-century relics such as the Cuban Government. And now there is talk of unilateral policy changes. I want us to change policy toward Cuba, but the first step that has to happen is from the Cuban Government. They have to change first.

Let me tell you what would happen if we lifted the embargo on Cuba tomorrow. What would happen is what is happening now with China. We passed a bill today out of Foreign Relations on the issue of Hong Kong, and I am getting phone calls in my office from American companies that do business in China that are saying: Hey, why don't you guys drop that? What they are really saying is: Hey, why don't you guys drop that? It is bad for the deal we have going with the Chinese.

That is the same thing that will happen. If we lift the embargo, American companies will become invested in whatever deal the regime gives them, and they will come to DC and lobby on behalf of the interests of that regime without any interest of the freedom and liberty of the Cuban people.

I will fight with all the marrow in my bones against any sort of unilateral change in U.S. policy toward Cuba.

From a military perspective, Cuba is not a benign country, although they don't have the military they once had. In fact, there have been open source reports that Cuba is looking to restart, with Russian cooperation, an intelligence-gathering station in the city of Lourdes in Cuba whose sole purpose is to collect intelligence against the United States, particularly Southern Command in South Florida. So as we look at the NDAA, that is something to keep in mind.

I would close with four points that we should think about as we get into the new year and we debate this bill on national security and national defense.

The first is this: We should stop confusing tactics with strategy. We had a debate today in the Foreign Relations Committee about authorizing the use of military force. Everyone wants to debate tactics: Should it be 3 years or 1 year? Should we have ground troops or no ground troops? Should we define the geography of where it is and where it isn't?

Tactics are not the same thing as strategy, and time and again around the world with many of these problems, this administration has not articulated a strategy. They are telling us what we are tactically doing. We are doing airstrikes, imposing sanctions. But they don't tell us what the strategy is. What is the strategy behind all these things? The strategy should be clear.

We are in favor of a world that is free and a world that is prosperous, where more people than ever live in a prosperous middle class so they can buy the things we sell and invent and innovate and make and the services we offer. We want there to be peace and prosperity throughout the world, and we believe the best system for that is an international order that respects human rights and democracy and freedom and the dignity of every individual. That is our overlying aim, and of course the security of the United States is deeply tied to all of this.

In each region of the world, we would have a strategy—a strategy that, because it is backed up by strong national defense, tells our partners in Asia that we are here for the long haul. And not only are we here to pivot to Asia, we have something to pivot with through our military capability that tells NATO: You still do have a purpose, and that purpose is to ensure the territorial integrity of the nations of Europe; a military strategy that tells our partners in the Middle East: We stand with you, and we will do what we need to do to defeat radical jihadists and prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon. So that is important.

The second thing is that we have to spend money on these things. The sequester cuts to the military are unsustainable. At a time when the world has gotten more complicated, where the threats that this Nation faces have gotten more complicated and more difficult to deal with than ever before, we are severely cutting back our military spending in an unsustainable way. In fact, no one believed that the budget cuts we are facing in the military now were realistic or sane, for that matter. That is why they put them in that bill I voted against—because they thought these budget cuts were so bad, they would force them to actually do something about the debt. They underestimated the willingness of this Congress to do bad things, because those cuts are here to stay, and we have the smallest Air Force and Navy at least since the end of World War II, while our potential adversaries are ramping up military spending and their military capabilities.

My third point is directly related to national defense and national security. We cannot continue to try to erode our intelligence-gathering capabilities. The threats we face around the world are real and they are significant. They are threats from nation states such as Russia and China. They are threats from rogue states such as Iran and North

Korea. They are threats from nonstate actors such as al Qaeda and ISIL. They are threats from transnational criminal groups who steal the personal data of Americans and who could potentially conduct other cyber attacks against our infrastructure.

These threats are real, and I hope the day will never come, but if it does and if another major attack occurs here in the homeland—perhaps one even worse than 9/11—the first question people are going to ask will be, Why didn't we know about it and why weren't we able to stop it? And the answer cannot be because we took apart our intelligence-gathering capabilities, because we took down our ability to identify these threats, and we took them down because of conspiracy theories, because we have people running around telling people that all their phone calls are being listened to, that all their cell phone calls are being tracked. That is false. That is categorically and patently false. That is not true. Yet we are prepared to dismantle our ability to acquire information that could prevent those sorts of attacks.

By the way, these are intelligence capabilities that also give us a strategic advantage over potential adversaries and intelligence-gathering abilities that also inform our diplomacy. Yet there are people advocating taking that apart. In fact, just today we had someone come to the floor of the Senate and divulge classified information on the floor of the Senate. Unprecedented, outrageous, irresponsible, and unacceptable.

Last but not least, we have to truly believe with all our hearts that the world is a safer and better place when America is the strongest military power in the world. No nation is perfect. Ours never has claimed to be. But I know of no nation that has used its power more benevolently than we have. It is Americans who have sent their sons and daughters abroad to fight for the freedom and liberty of other people. It is America that has gone abroad to fight against communism and radical Islam and nazism and Imperial Japan and other threats to human dignity and the survival of mankind, and we did so without taking a single inch of territory. We didn't turn Iraq into the 51st State. We didn't turn Afghanistan into a U.S. territory.

This is a nation that, after we defeated Japan and Germany in World War II, helped to rebuild those countries. Today they are among our strongest allies. This is the country that, even after a ceasefire in the Korean war, still stands so many years later on the frontlines of South Korea protecting her freedom and territorial integrity to a point where South Korea—a nation that just two decades ago was a beneficiary of global aid—is now a donor; a country that has gone from having an economy smaller than North Korea's to now having one of the top 10 economies in the world. This is the Nation that did that.

We are not perfect, but I challenge you to find another nation in human history that has used its military power for the good of mankind more than we have. The world knows that too. When you talk about national defense, it is not just about bombs and bullets.

Let me close with a story I picked up earlier this year when I traveled to Asia. I went to the Philippines, an area badly hit by the storm last year. This area was devastated. These people were already poor to begin with, and the typhoon made things even worse.

I got to speak to some of the people. I asked them: When did you finally know there was hope? Was it when the humanitarian aid groups showed up or when the U.N. got here? When was it that you finally thought that there is hope here?

A gentleman turned to me and said: Do you know when I knew there was actually some hope? When I woke up one morning and looked to the horizon and there was a U.S. aircraft carrier. That is when I started to believe that maybe we are going to make it, maybe things are going to be OK.

That aircraft carrier didn't stay long, but it stayed long enough to make a difference in those early days after that storm, and it stayed long enough to give people hope. It is the same aircraft carrier they saw off the coast of Haiti after the terrible earthquake. It is the same aircraft carrier they saw off the coast of Japan after they had a nuclear accident. That is also America's military power. That is also what we have done with our national defense capabilities.

We have not been perfect, but America has been a source for good in the world. No nation in the history of mankind has ever done more good for the planet and for the people of this Earth than we have, and we should be proud of that. Now is not the time to dismantle that capability. The world needs a strong America today and now more than it ever has.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, we are going to pass, sometime tonight, before 12 o'clock, a resolution that will ensure that the government does not shut down. The House passed the omnibus. It was by a nice margin—not overwhelmingly, but a nice margin. As a result of that, we will take up the long-term spending bill tomorrow.

Senators who want to debate this legislation will have that opportunity. The Senate will vote on the long-term funding bill as soon as possible. In the

Senate, “as soon as possible” could be tomorrow, it could be 2 days after cloture is filed on it, it could be a lot of different times.

But we are going to work as hard as we can to expedite things around here. But if we are going to do this tomorrow, we need cooperation from everyone. As I indicated, we had a number of things we had to do. We had to keep the government functioning. We are going to do that tonight. We are going to do a short-term extension, as I have indicated, until we finish this bill. I think the extension will be for 2 days. That means we have to finish this bill in the next 2 days.

We have to finish the defense bill that is now before the body. That time runs out tomorrow afternoon. No one can stop us from the time running out tomorrow afternoon. We hope to be able to expedite that. There are conversations going on now to make that so we can finish that sometime early tomorrow afternoon.

I want to take this time, though, to spread on the RECORD my admiration for the work done by Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, the chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. This good woman came to the Senate when I came. We came together. I was fortunate to be on that Appropriations Committee as a freshman. That was really a big deal for this young Senator. Seniority-wise, there was always one person ahead of me, and that was BARBARA MIKULSKI. She has done a remarkably good job as a Senator. I have said many times, when we came to the Senate together, she was it. There was no other woman here. Look at what she has done as the matriarch of this body. Everybody looks up to her—men and women. She is someone who is admired by everyone. Her taking over this Appropriations Committee was something she had wanted to do for a long time. She has done such a good job.

She is proud of the committee. She is trying to reestablish the committee to what it used to be. We as legislators have to recognize we have three separate branches of government. In terms of the Constitution they are supposed to be equal. We have had a lot of our power taken from us by the executive branch of government. BARBARA MIKULSKI is trying to reestablish that so we have three separate, equal branches of government.

What took place in the House today, a few minutes ago, will help her establish the Appropriations Committee for what it should be. We have an obligation as legislators to have congressionally directed spending. That is in the Constitution. All the decisions as to where the money goes should not be made down at 16th and Pennsylvania Avenue.

So the bill that she and Congressman ROGERS worked on is not a perfect bill. But as the Presiding Officer knows as a legislator, there are no perfect bills. There are some people who are upset about items in this bill. To be candid

with you, I am kind of upset about some items in the bill. But this bill is so much better than a short-term CR. It would have been—when I say “short term” I mean 3 months and do it all over and over again, threatening the government to shut down, especially about the same time we have to raise the debt ceiling again. So I want to end by saying this would never ever have happened but for BARBARA MIKULSKI.

Tomorrow should be a very interesting day. With a little bit of good fortune, we could complete the spending bill for the country for the fiscal year that is fast upon us. We could finish the defense bill and then look to do the tax extenders and completing the work on TRIA, whatever that may be.

From that point forward we would work on nominations. We could be out of here fairly quickly. But everyone is going to have to work together to get this done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

OMNIBUS SPENDING BILL

Ms. MIKULSKI. I rise to speak on the omnibus spending bill for fiscal year 2015.

I wish to thank the Democratic leader, the majority leader, for his kind words. But it is not only about his kind words about me, it has been his advocacy to make sure that as we look at the need for funding for the entire government that there would be no government shutdown and no government on autopilot.

Just a few minutes ago, the House of Representatives did their part. They passed the omnibus spending bill, passing it 219 to 206. It was well debated and the vote speaks for itself. It now comes to the Senate, and I am here tonight to kick off that debate.

For hours after hours after hours in the past several days, I have heard what is wrong with this bill. I don't dispute my colleagues' analysis, I will debate it, but now we have to start talking about what are the good aspects of this bill and why we did this bill in the first place. Tonight I want to remind people what we are doing.

First, we are funding the entire U.S. Government's discretionary spending. We have \$550 billion in the bill for national defense, to stand for America, to make sure our troops have the best weapons, the best support, and the best medical treatment—\$550 billion, for more money for peacekeeping, for money to fight ISIL, to refuel an aircraft carrier. We did our job. You will hear more about that.

We wanted to also fight Ebola, which had the American people near panic this summer. We said we have a plan, working with the administration, and some of the best scientists and thinkers in our own country, and brave and gallant people such as Doctors Without Borders over there. While they make the cover of Time magazine, they are now going to make the Federal checkbook in the United States of America.

We have \$5.4 billion to deal with Ebola, a huge sum of money to fight it

in Africa. It is also to make sure we are ready for any pandemic in the United States.

We also have a Samaritan set of money to deal—that is my word—with the Samaritan communities who were willing to take the Ebola patients, care for them, treat them, and make sure there was security for them and their surrounding communities. Millions of dollars were spent, whether it was in Nebraska, whether it was in Georgia at Emory.

My own home State is home to the National Institutes of Health, where a patient flew in to a small rural airport. They were ready to accept and provide the security down route 270 to get them to the beds at NIH. Those communities need to be recognized. We do that.

We have money in the bill for national security, but we also have money for veterans. Oh, we love our veterans. We love to sing songs, we love to wear yellow ribbons, we love to go to concerts. We even love to vote for an authorizing bill. I did it. But without money in the Federal checkbook, it is a hollow opportunity.

So guess what. Your Appropriations Committee, on a bipartisan basis, said we are going to do something that was never done before. We are going to put in the money not only to meet what we said we would do—to reform health care. No more wait lists, no more backlogs. No more them being a victim of the dysfunctional Congress if there is a shutdown or a gridlock.

We then did something. We, working with the veterans service organizations and the authorizing committee, by Senator SANDERS, we have advanced appropriations. So even if there is a shutdown or delay, our veterans will be taken care of.

There is more money in there for research. There is more money in there for care. There is an extra \$40 million to add to the close to \$2 billion to deal with the backlog. These numbers are mind-numbing, but the results are not.

We have that money and we also increased the DOD defense money for medical research for prosthetic devices, for stunning achievements such as in my own Johns Hopkins where they did a limb transplant. Working with Department of Defense dollars, our gifted and talent surgeon was able to take a veteran and reinstitute limbs, muscle, and nerve endings.

This enables them to also come up with a technique to prevent the rejection that often comes with transplants. It is stunning. That man will be able to have the use of his arms because of this type of work that we do here and what we do to help him will be able to help hundreds, and one day we will be able to help thousands.

That is what we do in appropriations. We take good intentions and make them as big dreams as possible. We are very proud of that.

The other item we are proud of is on a bipartisan basis we passed the child

care and development block grant. Working with Senators RISCH and BURR of North Carolina, I led that. With the superb help of Senators ALEXANDER and HARKIN, we passed it.

But we also wanted to reform our quality standards, regulation without strangulation. We now know that we are going to have fire and safety inspection facilities, better training for providers, and background checks to make sure our vulnerable populations are protected. But for everything that we ask, we put in \$75 million to be able to deal with this. I think that is pretty impressive.

The other issue we worked out was how we worked out the college affordability. In this program that we passed, we will increase the maximum Pell grant by \$100 for a total maximum of \$58,530, \$100 more. That means you will be able to buy a book, you will be able to pay that lab fee if you want to be a nurse or an inhalation therapist, a surgical tech, and so on. But we also reformed the Pell grants, so any student who simultaneously is working on a GED and a college degree would be eligible for Pell grants.

As part of the listening tours that Senator CARDIN and I had, we found out that there were many people who at a certain point in life dropped out of school. They made a particular choice that they now are trying to compensate for. So they are working on their GED, making great progress. They have to show that, but simultaneously they are eligible for that Pell grant so they don't lose time. We have been able to do that.

There are other aspects related to college affordability, but we also wanted to focus on safety issues. We have money now for the 149 air traffic control facilities in rural communities. Those 149 air traffic controllers—we have the Maryland 5: Salisbury, Easton, Frederick, Hagerstown, and Baltimore County. I know the Presiding Officer has them in Wisconsin. That is taken care of.

We also wanted to look at other areas of safety such as food safety. Thanks to what we have done in this bill, we have funded the FDA so they can meet the new food safety standards we are concerned about.

I am also particularly happy and proud of what we did for women. I won't go into all the discussions on ObamaCare, the usual provocative topic such as funding for abortion and very special circumstances. Yes, we will talk about that tomorrow.

Do you know what I am happy about? What we did for victims of violence. This legislation has \$430 million for the Violence Against Women Act. It is at an all-time high. Again, taking what the authorizers wanted—but they all do conference calls in their home State. We actually put money into the Federal checkbook.

We also paid special attention to the situation of what happens to rape victims. Very often—and I know you talk

with the rape victims in your own State or those who are their advocates—they feel doubly victimized. They often feel there was a violent attack on them—so repugnant I don't want even to talk about it on the Senate floor, which is horrible enough. But when they turn to the system, they often find that the very forensics that are needed to go after the perpetrator are either stuck in a crime lab somewhere in a backlog or, even worse, sitting in a police locker instead of being tested. So they wait days, weeks, months, and even years.

We have gotten into this, thanks to our Vice President, JOE BIDEN, who was the originator of the Violence Against Women Act. He asked the Justice Department to go to police departments and say where is this evidence and why isn't it being processed?

They found there were over 400,000 sexual assault kits sitting in police lockers instead of getting tested. Can you imagine? Four hundred thousand.

Thanks again to the advocates, the best ideas come from the people—I think somebody is calling me now about it.

What we have now is we have added a \$40 million grant program, again a bipartisan effort, to go work with local police departments to bring down—where we already know where they have gotten underway with existing funds, they are finding that some of these predators have been serial rapists. Some of their cases go back 5, 10, 15 years because of the DNA things we can do. We can do this. We are going to change it.

There are other issues I can talk about, droughts, forest fires, all of these kinds of things. I will talk about them more tomorrow, but I just wanted to show the American people tonight, as we kick off this debate, while we focus on three items—and I don't minimize their importance, I don't minimize the value to debate them. I want people to know what is in this bill.

When we had to deal with the omnibus, we had to deal with \$1 trillion because we were stiff-armed, and also we couldn't bring up the bills one at a time, so we have to bring all but the Homeland Security up now.

We faced 98 riders, some of which were highly controversial. We did the best we could with them, and I will have more to say about those tomorrow.

But while everybody talks about one item or this item, I wanted to talk about some of these items. I really hope we pass this omnibus bill, because when we do, our country will be safer because of threats over there. We will be safer because of threats at home.

But I believe the biggest threats we face are gridlock, deadlock, and the way we paralyze ourselves by making the perfect the enemy of the good. No piece of legislation is perfect. I will be the first to say that in this bill.

By the way, people might say: Boy, this is a big bill, Senator MIKULSKI. It

really is. It is discretionary funding for our entire Federal Government, but it is also on the Web site. People can go to our individual subcommittees in Defense, Labor-HHS, Interior, Transportation and Housing, and read about what we did.

I had to summarize here. I was prepared to read them all night, but I know we are anxious to bring this evening to a close. But I wanted to open the debate today to talk about how we tried to govern on a bipartisan basis.

We have reached across the aisle and we have reached across the Capitol dome. The House has done its job. Now I hope we do our job and that within the next 24 hours we pass the omnibus spending bill and show that we can govern, that we will not have a government shutdown, we will not have government on autopilot, and we will be able to fund our responsibilities, protect America, and really prepare America for both today and the rest of the 21st century.

I look forward to working with my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, once again, the Senate has an opportunity to consider the National Defense Authorization Act. This bill is named for the two retiring chairmen of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, Senator CARL LEVIN and Congressman BUCK MCKEON. CARL LEVIN has been a fierce defender of Michigan, strong advocate for the men and women of our armed services, and a friend. When the Senate passes this bill, and the President signs it into law, it will be a fitting tribute to Senator LEVIN's storied legacy of public service.

This compromise—a comprehensive authorization of the Nation's military arm—is far from perfect. No bill is. But this authorization provides support and resources for the men and women who serve in the Armed Forces, who defend our Nation, and whose families sacrifice so much in the name of public service. The bill prepares our country to face future challenges, and promotes the goals and values that have become a hallmark of our national defense.

Of primary importance to me, this defense authorization bill protects the Leahy law, the requirements by which we vet the individuals and units of foreign security forces we train and equip. While one component of the Leahy law, traditionally incorporated annually in the Department of State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill as it relates to the activities of the State Department, was made permanent in 2012 as section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act, this Defense authorization bill makes the component of the law as it relates to Defense Department activities permanent law.

This provision permits human rights training, which is narrowly defined, for individuals who are members of units of foreign security forces that have

been deemed ineligible under the Leahy law. However, those individuals must not have been involved in violations, the training must have the concurrence of the State Department, it may only occur in the individuals' home countries, the State Department must be consulted on the content, methodology, and intended beneficiaries, and the training is not sufficient for meeting the accountability requirement for purposes of the exception in the law.

Some in the Pentagon have suggested that the Leahy law has impeded their ability to engage with foreign security forces. Not only do the facts prove otherwise, that is the same discredited claim of those who have argued that the CIA's torture of prisoners was legal and made us safer.

The United States may have the most powerful military, but that power is immeasurably weakened if we fail to uphold the values and principles this Nation was founded on: due process, respect for the rule of law, and respect for the laws of war.

We should learn from history. When we abandon those values and principles and support or associate ourselves with foreign forces who commit atrocities, we pay a heavy price.

This defense authorization also includes a provision I authored with Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM to establish a commission on the future of the army. The President's fiscal year 2015 budget proposal reflected many tough choices about the future size and shape of each of the services. It also included decisions about the U.S. Army that would irreversibly change the nature of that branch. Most dramatically, the proposal included a plan to eliminate the Nation's reserve of Apache helicopters by consolidating all of them within the active component. Such a move raises serious questions about the ability to sustain long-term operations or be ready for unexpected contingencies. As cochair of the Senate National Guard Caucus, Senator GRAHAM and I, with the support of 47 other Senators, proposed legislation to minimize the budgetary impact of these decisions by providing for additional review while allowing tough, but noncontroversial changes to go forward. I am grateful to Senator LEVIN and our partners in the House for supporting its inclusion in this broader bill.

This authorization bill will provide important support to the men and women of our Armed Forces and their families. While I do not support some of the included changes to benefits, those that are part of this final bill are far less severe than originally proposed. With the Military Compensation and Retirement Commission soon to report, I hope we can finally put an end to what has become an annual effort by the Department of Defense to draw back benefits already earned by our servicemembers. There should be no bait and switch.

Unrelated to defense policy, I am grateful that this legislation includes

an important designation for Vermont. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System recognizes and preserves rivers with remarkable scenic and recreational value. With the passage of this legislation, Vermont will join 40 other States with designated national wild and scenic rivers. This designation of the Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers is the capstone of more than 7 years of work, including intense study and planning by the local communities that want to protect the natural, cultural, and recreational qualities of these rivers.

This defense authorization bill is not perfect; politics as much as policy makes that the case. I am disappointed that this authorization fails to build on important progress made last year to streamline the transfer of detainees from Guantanamo Bay and move closer to finally shuttering the detention facility there. This compromise bill will maintain the status quo by continuing to prohibit the transfer of detainees to the United States for detention or trial. I am disappointed that a provision contained in the Senate Armed Services Committee version of the authorization that would have provided exceptions to this prohibition was removed during negotiations. However, I am pleased that the bill does not contain the statutory ban on detainee transfers to Yemen that also was contained in the Senate bill.

As long as the detention facility at Guantanamo remains open, it serves as a recruitment tool for terrorists, and tarnishes America's historic role as a champion of human rights. The prison facility at Guantanamo remains a tremendous waste of taxpayer dollars—costing this country billions of dollars at a time when budgets are tight and that money is needed elsewhere. Closing Guantanamo is the morally responsible thing to do; my commitment on that has not wavered.

With regard to some of the provisions included in this bill that relate to combatting the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), I expect the Department of Defense to abide by the Leahy law. These terrorists pose a threat to the United States and to our partners; they must be stopped and brought to justice. But we cannot ignore our own laws or permit the United States to be implicated, either directly or indirectly, in gross violations of human rights when we support either governments or irregular forces in the fight against ISIS.

There have been multiple reports that some in the Iraqi Army and the militias they fight alongside engage in reprehensible conduct similar to the barbaric crimes of ISIS. As a matter of law and policy, we must condemn this. I cannot—and will not—support any effort to weaken the application of the Leahy law to the Iraqi Army or to any entity it is aligned with.

As in every defense authorization bill, there are things in here that I support and things I wish were not in here.

Compromise is inherent in this process. But we cannot forsake our principles and ideals when it comes to supporting our national defense and the men and women who serve. I will support this compromise bill and remain committed to ensuring that we preserve the values that make this Nation a beacon of civil and human rights around the globe.

Madam President, I am grateful that the fiscal year 15 National Defense Authorization Act includes an important designation for Vermont. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers system recognizes and preserves rivers with remarkable scenic and recreational value. With the passage of this legislation, Vermont will join 40 other States with designated National Wild and Scenic Rivers. Designation of the Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers is the capstone of more than 7 years of work, including intense study and planning by the local communities who want to protect the natural, cultural and recreational qualities of these rivers.

This has not been a Federal-led initiative; instead it was an occasion for Vermont citizens to work together. The communities along the rivers contacted me in 2006 to request the initial Federal study for this designation. The decision to move ahead was made by local communities that agreed to specific goals and priorities for these two rivers. This designation was put to a vote at the communities' town meetings and was approved by every town that is included in the legislation.

National Wild and Scenic status for these rivers will help the local communities promote recreational use, while also protecting the rights and values of landowners who make their homes and livings on the banks of these rivers. I am proud that this process has been driven by the impacted communities, working to ensure that the Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers will forever be enjoyed by fishermen, hunters, and paddlers and that water quality will be protected. The benefits will extend downstream as far as Lake Champlain and beyond.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MAKING FURTHER CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.J. Res. 130, the short-term, 2-day continuing resolution, which was received from the House and is now at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the joint resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 130) making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2015, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the joint resolution.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the joint resolution be read three times and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the joint resolution.

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

The joint resolution was ordered to a third reading, and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If not, the joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

The joint resolution (H.J. Res. 130) was passed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to consider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

PROTECTING VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS ACT OF 2014—Continued

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Madam President, I now ask unanimous consent that at noon on Friday, December 12, tomorrow, all postcloture time on the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3979 be considered expired; that it be in order, notwithstanding cloture having been invoked, for Senator COBURN to offer a motion to refer the House message; that there be 3 hours of debate, 1 hour each for Senators COBURN and REID, or their designees, and 30 minutes each for Senators MURKOWSKI and INHOFE, or their designees, prior to a vote in relation to the motion to refer; that the Coburn motion to refer be subject to a 60-affirmative vote threshold; that if the Coburn motion to refer is not agreed to, Senator COBURN be recognized for the purposes of making a motion; that following disposition of the Coburn motion, the pending motion to concur with a further amendment be withdrawn; that the Senate proceed to vote on the motion to concur; that no motions other than the Coburn motions, motions to waive or motions to table be in order; that the vote on the motion to concur be subject to a 60-affirmative vote threshold; finally, that if the motion to concur is agreed to, the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following concurrent resolutions en bloc: H. Con. Res. 121, to correct the enrollment of H.R. 3979, providing a new title to the bill; and H. Con. Res. 123, to correct the enrollment of H.R. 3979; that the concurrent resolutions be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.