

of the ground-based interceptors. The bill also contains the GAO's annual review of MDA's acquisition programs.

Moving on to space programs, the bill addresses several key aspects of space system acquisition. It includes important provisions aimed at maintaining fair competition among space launch providers through fiscal year 2017. It does not, however, solve a potential 2- to 3-year gap after that, as launch providers work to develop and certify a new American-made rocket engine to replace the Russian RD-180. I hope that gap does not occur, but if it does, I am sure this committee will revisit and correct the issue so we can maintain a competitive and healthy launch industrial base that both ensures DOD's access to space and saves taxpayer dollars. The bill also makes important contributions to ensuring that we address the threats we may face in space by requiring an interagency policy and a principal DOD position to address these threats.

We have authorized the President's requested level of funding for the nuclear modernization programs at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA. We also create a program that enables the scientists and engineers at the NNSA to work on new concepts and methods that shorten the time and the cost for future life extensions of our warheads.

Let me close noting that we fully fund the President's request for non-proliferation at both the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Department of Defense. At the NNSA, these programs collect loose nuclear material around the world, which could be used as terrorist devices against us. The NNSA also maintains a network of radiation detectors at borders across the world to detect the illegal transfer of nuclear material before it can cross our borders here in America.

Finally, the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program at the Department of Defense will continue to secure weapons of mass destruction all around the world, as it did with Syria's chemical weapons and dangerous pathogens at Ebola clinics in West Africa. The relatively small sum of money in this program has made a noticeable difference in reducing dangerous threats to our country.

I take particular pride in this program as the enduring legacy of my fellow Hoosier, Senator Richard Lugar, who has done our Nation and the world a great service as a champion for nuclear nonproliferation. He and Senator Sam Nunn were extraordinary leaders, and we are proud to try to follow in their tradition.

I again thank Senator SESSIONS for the productive and bipartisan relationship we have had on the subcommittee and also all members on the subcommittee for taking part in our hearings and in crafting the provisions under this subcommittee's jurisdiction.

I look forward to working with our colleagues to pass this important legislation.

I yield back any remaining time that has been allotted.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WYDEN. 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. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, we have had a number of our colleagues come to the floor to talk about the importance of the Export-Import Bank, and I want to see if I can put in context the exceptionally important work done by our colleagues Senator CANTWELL and Senator HEITKAMP on this issue.

We have been talking in this body for weeks now about the importance of trade and particularly tapping global markets, given the fact that there are going to be 1 billion middle-class people in the developing world in 2025. This is an exceptional opportunity for us to be able to sell the products we make here, whether they are computers or wine or helicopters or planes, you name it.

We had a big debate about trade promotion authority. What I want to spend just a few minutes talking about is whether a Senator was for trade promotion authority or not, they ought to support the Export-Import Bank because the Export-Import Bank provides key financing tools to promote products that are made in my home State, in the States of our colleagues, and all across the land. It has supported tens of thousands of American jobs—even hundreds of thousands—for decades. It doesn't cost American taxpayers a single dime. In fact, the Export-Import Bank covers its own costs and then some. It actually generates revenue for taxpayers—\$7 billion over the last two decades and \$675 million in fiscal year 2014 alone.

So what I would submit is the Export-Import Bank is a way to ensure that in this country we get trade done right. I happen to believe it makes sense to support the trade promotion act because that is going to ensure that we are going to have a chance to drive down some of those tariffs that are barriers to American products. Whether you are for it or not, you ought to support the Export-Import Bank because it provides key tools so we can reduce barriers to our exports, take on modern challenges that threaten American workers, and fight to create more high-wage jobs in the United

States because it provides the financing you need in order to actually secure one of these deals. The Export-Import Bank is a core part of getting trade done right.

Countries, including Germany, Japan, Mexico, and Canada, all have agencies that are up and running and do it in a fashion that make their exports more competitive. How are they doing it? They are using financing tools, including supporting their manufacturers and pushing their products into the global marketplace.

As Senators CANTWELL and HEITKAMP have said, we need this tool to make sure our country doesn't fall behind. We shouldn't let the Export-Import Bank become some kind of ideological pinata that you keep bashing on, not recognizing it will hurt our competitiveness. I think it would be legislative malpractice to let the Bank expire because it would needlessly endanger the thousands of businesses and tens of thousands of jobs supported by Ex-Im, including many in my home State.

In particular, in Oregon, one can see that Ex-Im is a very substantial help to small- and medium-sized companies. In fact, 86 percent of the funds disbursed in fiscal year 2014 went to small businesses. Thanks to the Export-Import Bank, companies in Albany could find markets abroad and hire new workers. They manufacture important things such as titanium casting.

Selmet is a perfect example, a company that got its start in my home State years ago. Today, it employs hundreds of people in Oregon and across the United States, and 40 percent of its revenue comes from overseas. They got off the ground with help from Ex-Im Bank, and it has customers in France, Germany, and Asia, and it is looking to expand further.

These kinds of success stories are ones you see in every single State because these startups got help when it was essential to have that added boost to be able to seize the opportunities around the world and create high-skilled, high-wage jobs.

To me, when we debate the future of the Export-Import Bank, colleagues, this is about red, white, and blue jobs. Keeping the Export-Import Bank up and running with the important financing tools it offers is part of getting trade done right.

I commend our colleagues Senators CANTWELL, HEITKAMP, MURRAY, and GRAHAM, who have come together in a bipartisan way to work to extend the Bank as quickly as possible, and they have my support.

NATIONAL HEMP HISTORY WEEK

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I asked for an extra few minutes. I want to spend another few minutes just talking about another part of our economy that I think can grow in the days ahead, and I would ask unanimous consent, Mr. President, to bring a basket of Oregon products onto the floor at this time.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, this week is National Hemp History Week, and to help celebrate I thought I would show a few Oregon-made hemp products to highlight the many uses and opportunities for industrial hemp in my State and across the country.

In the basket I brought, I have food, soap, clothes, and even deck sealant, all made in Oregon, bought and sold in American stores and used by Americans. Oregon companies such as Bob's Red Mill, Fiddlebumps, and Hemp Shield contribute to our economy in unique ways. Industrial hemp supports a \$620 million industry in America, and our companies have found innovative ways of incorporating it into everyday products.

However, the full growth potential of this industry is being cut down before it can fully bloom because a single ingredient that links all of these products—the hemp itself—cannot be grown in America. The unfortunate reality is that current Federal rules prohibit our farmers from growing industrial hemp on American soil. This means 100 percent of the hemp used in these products is imported from other nations. The Federal ban on hemp amounts, in my view, to a restriction on free enterprise, and it doesn't accomplish anything but stifles job creation and economic growth.

We are the world's largest consumers of hemp products, but we are the only major industrialized nation to ban hemp farming. This hasn't always been the case, and it doesn't have to continue to be the case. It was once a booming crop in America and it can and should be again.

American farmers were growing this product as early as the 1600s, before our Nation was even founded. The Declaration of Independence, colleagues, was written on paper made from hemp. In the 1800s and early 1900s, it was used to make rope, heating oil, and textiles. During World War II we used it as part of the Hemp for Victory Program to support our soldiers. But everything got changed when hemp got wrapped up with marijuana in Federal regulations, and it has been banned ever since. Are they related? Maybe industrial hemp and marijuana are related species, but one should not be confused with the other, much like a Chihuahua and a St. Bernard. Mixing hemp in with a ban on growing marijuana is based on a lot of misconception. No matter where Members of this body come down on medical or recreational marijuana, industrial hemp and marijuana might be related plant species, but there are big differences between them, such as their chemical makeup.

Because they are not the same plant, they should not be treated with the same regulation and prohibitions. In my view, keeping the ban on growing hemp makes about as much sense as instituting a ban on Portobello mushrooms. There is no reason to outlaw a

product that is perfectly safe because of what it is related to.

That is why the majority leader Senator MCCONNELL and I came together, with our colleague from Kentucky RAND PAUL and my colleague from Oregon JEFF MERKLEY—we came together on a bipartisan basis to introduce the Industrial Hemp Farming Act. Our bill would make sure hemp does not get lumped into the definition of marijuana in the Controlled Substances Act.

Our bill is all about stopping the unfair punishment of entrepreneurs and farmers who want to be part of a growing ag industry here in America. Companies in our Nation that are importing hemp to use in food, cosmetics, soap, clothing, and auto parts, they ought to be buying that hemp from American farmers and contributing to our agricultural sector.

I will close by way of saying there are also big environmental benefits to industrial hemp. It takes less water to grow hemp than it does to grow cotton, and hemp generally requires fewer pesticides than other crops. I will put it this way, colleagues: If you can buy it at your local supermarket—and I got involved in this because I saw it at Costco when my wife was pregnant with our third child—if you can buy it at the local supermarket, American farmers ought to be able to grow it.

I urge my colleagues to join me, the distinguished majority leader Senator MCCONNELL, his colleague Senator RAND PAUL, and my colleague Senator MERKLEY in our legislation to address this gap in American law and today join me in celebrating National Hemp History Week by learning more about this safe and versatile crop and the potential it holds to bolster American agriculture and the domestic economy.

These products are products that are sold all across America. We ought to have a chance for our farmers—farmers in Nebraska, farmers in Arkansas, farmers in Indiana—to be able to grow this product and reap the benefits of the private economy associated with it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, it is "Waste of the Week" time again, and the waste of the Federal Government's spending just keeps piling up. Today, I am taking a look at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We all have a stake in this. I am a veteran, but even those of us who are not veterans have a stake in making sure our veterans are getting the use of taxpayer dollars for their benefit for the sacrifices they made.

Over the past year, we have been hearing on the floor and continue to see story after story of mismanagement that is plaguing the VA. Many of these news articles tell the story of our Nation's heroes not receiving the care

or the resources they have earned and that they deserve. Last month—just last month—I read yet another frightening headline, frustrating. "Veterans Affairs improperly spent \$6 Billion annually, senior VA official says"—improperly spent \$6 billion annually.

According to an internal memo written by the VA's senior official for procurement, the VA has been wasting taxpayer money by violating Federal contracting rules to pay for medical care and expenses. Under law, VA purchases require competitive bidding and proper contracts, but testimony from Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisition and Logistics Jan Frye, before Congress last month revealed that just the opposite is occurring.

So the medical care and supplies our veterans need for their medical needs are being compromised at a cost of \$6 billion a year. Mr. Frye wrote:

Over the past five years, some senior VA acquisition and finance officials have willfully violated the public trust while Federal procurement and financial laws were debased. Their overt actions and dereliction of duties combined have resulted in billions of taxpayer dollars being spent without regard to Federal laws and regulations, making a mockery of Federal statutes.

An example of this violation is found with VA purchase cards. Typically, VA uses these cards for smaller purchases of up to \$3,000, according to the rules and regulations. But they were inappropriately used to buy billions of dollars' worth of medical supplies without contracts or oversight. Mr. Frye continued:

In addition, doors are flung wide open for fraud, waste and abuse when contracts are not executed. For example, by law, prices paid for goods or services subject to contract can only be determined to be fair and reasonable by duly appointed contracting officers. I can state without reservation that VA has and continues to waste millions of dollars by paying excessive prices for goods and services due to breaches of Federal procurement laws.

According to reports, the VA has failed to engage in a competitive bidding or signing contract process ensuring a good deal for the services they are unable to provide in house, such as specialized tests and surgeries and other procedures. In fact, the VA has paid at least \$5 billion in such fees in violation of Federal rules.

This is yet but another example of what the White House has recognized—as—and I quote—"corrosive culture" at the Veterans' Administration. I think we all agree our 8.7 million American veterans and our more than 130 million taxpayers deserve a lot better. Given the large scale of purchases made by the VA, proper procurement procedures ensure the best products for veterans and the best value for taxpayers.

Aside from higher prices, a lack of contracts can result in a lack of oversight. The VA, just like Congress, is accountable and must be accountable for what it spends. Now, I understand the incredible pressure the VA has been under with the recent influx of new