

veterans. I appreciate the good work of many people who work at the VA. Still, no matter the growth in need, it is never in order to violate Federal law. This kind of reckless spending cannot and must not be tolerated.

Each year, Congress sends billions of dollars to the VA to care for our veterans. With those funds, comes an obligation to use every dollar of those funds properly. By simply requiring the VA to comply with Federal law, we can save \$6 billion. This is a simple fix with large results and we should take it.

Today, I am adding an additional \$6 billion to our ever-increasing gauge of taxpayer money that comes to Washington and is spent for improper and unnecessary purposes. We are now two-thirds of the way to our goal of \$100 billion. We are going to be doing this every week as long as the Senate is in session this year. I hope we have to add an additional attachment to this gauge because, folks, there is no end to discovering the kind of waste of taxpayers' money for unnecessary programs, violating the law, violating regulations, mismanaging the spending at the Federal level. We are going to continue to point out these issues week after week. Hopefully, we can get the attention of our colleagues and the American people, and they will demand that we do something about this.

While we have not been able—to no thanks to the administration—to come up with a sensible, long-term fix to our deficit spending and continuing plunge into debt, we can at least look at these programs that have been identified by the inspector generals, by the Government Accountability Office, and by the Office of Management and Budget as wasting taxpayer dollars.

So there is much we can do while we are trying to get to the point where we have an administration that allows us to address the larger issue; that is, a government out of control, spending taxpayers' money and wasting money, which we will point out every week. Tune in again next week for the next "Waste of the Week."

I thank my colleague from Nebraska for generously yielding me the time to do this. I have somewhat of a schedule hitch. She was gracious enough to allow me the time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA. The brave men and women who serve in our Armed Forces have protected our Nation for generations. Because of their selflessness, we are able to enjoy many freedoms here at home, but it is important to remember that these liberties are not free.

The sacrifices made by our servicemembers are extraordinary, and we must ensure that they have the re-

sources necessary and needed to defend the United States. That is why the NDAA has been passed each of the last 53 years. I was proud to continue this tradition by working with my colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee to pass the fiscal year 2016 NDAA only a few weeks ago.

While this bill is not perfect, it is the result of a bipartisan compromise to perform the most important function of the Federal Government, providing for the national defense. This bill's importance is widely known, but the details are not often given enough attention.

For this reason, I would like to take a moment to discuss some of the key provisions that play such a critical role in preserving the security of our Nation and the effectiveness of our military. Included in this bill are several commonsense proposals to cut inefficiencies and use the savings that are generated to better meet the needs of our warfighters.

For example, the Air Force's next-generation bomber and new tanker program have both suffered delays and they cannot spend the full amount requested when the budget was submitted in February. So this bill reduces funding for these programs accordingly and moves about \$660 million in savings to meet unfunded requirements of our military.

Across a large number of budget lines, unjustified increases were reduced, troubled programs were cut, and again the difference was used to meet high-priority requirements of our men and women in uniform.

The bill also combats the continued growth in headquarters staff at the Pentagon and major commands, an issue I discussed with Secretary Carter at his confirmation hearing. Two years ago, the Department announced its intention to reduce 20 percent of its headquarters staff by 2019. However, it has yet to provide the Armed Services Committee with a plan to accomplish these reductions.

This legislation takes action. It reduces funding for headquarters and management staff by 7.5 percent. This goes beyond even the Department's stated goal. It results in \$1.7 billion in savings that are reprioritized to support more important needs. In all, the bill moves about \$10 billion from unnecessary spending to increase the capabilities of our warfighters. One such area is the development of the advanced technologies.

This bill sets aside \$400 million for the offset initiative announced by the Department in November of last year. The technological superiority of our forces has come under increasing threat in recent years. This is an issue that the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, which I chair, has followed closely.

The new funding devoted to this initiative is targeted toward the development of the next-generation technology, such as lasers and railguns that

will enable our military's continued advantage on the battlefield of the future.

I am also pleased that this bill will fully support the modernization of our nuclear forces, and it includes additional funding requested by the Department to address critical needs in our nuclear forces identified in reviews last year.

The bill reauthorizes key assistance and training programs, and it also provides the Secretary of Defense new authority to partner with nations in the Middle East, the South Pacific, and Eastern Europe to support U.S. interests in these key regions. It also codifies the Department of Defense's role in defending the Nation in cyber space, and it requires the Department to regularly conduct training exercises with other governmental agencies to meet this responsibility.

The importance of the last two issues I mentioned, cyber security and security assistance programs, was reinforced during a recent trip that I led to Eastern Europe.

Our allies there are deeply concerned by Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and their increasingly provocative behavior. They are all calling for more cooperation with the United States in both of these key areas.

These are just a few of the reasons why the NDAA is such an important piece of legislation. While I strongly support many of its provisions, it is important to repeat that this is the product of bipartisan compromise, not consensus.

One of the most hotly debated topics during the committee's markup process was the use of overseas contingency operations funds to meet basic defense requirements. In a world where ISIL continues to expand its reach, Russia has seized Crimea and pours fighters into eastern Ukraine, and China is intimidating its neighbors and building islands in the South China Sea, we must fund our national defense. To not do so would be unacceptable. We cannot hold our military hostage to a political controversy.

Despite disagreements, the committee has again produced a compromise product—as it has year after year—that supports our national defense and the needs of our men and women in uniform. I am inspired by their service, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to protect our great Nation as the full Senate considers the NDAA.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I understand that we are now in a period of morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator is correct.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Therefore, it is not in order for me to call up an amendment to the Defense bill. I will come back and get this amendment pending at the appropriate time on the floor.

CITIZENS UNITED DECISION

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I wish to take a few minutes now to speak about my amendment No. 1693, which responds to the very unfortunate Citizens United decision. January 2015 was that decision's fifth anniversary, and it has had a pretty nefarious effect on our democracy.

The premise of the decision was that unlimited corporate expenditures would not corrupt or exert improper influence in our American democratic process because there would be a regime of—to quote the decision—“effective disclosure” that would “provide shareholders and citizens with the information needed to hold corporations and elected officials accountable for their positions and supporters.”

Well, here we are. Everybody in this room knows that there has been no effective disclosure whatsoever. We live in a world of dark money in which special interests spend tens and even hundreds of millions of dollars in elections to buy influence and to try to make sure that people get their way. There is neither public knowledge nor accountability about that dark money spending.

The Louisville Courier-Journal, in an editorial in June 2012, described the problem very well:

Money. Buckets of it. Tidal waves that one pundit has dubbed the “tsunami of slime.”

Well, we who are in this political world have experienced firsthand that tsunami of slime that the Citizens United decision unleashed. In the 2014 midterm elections, the Washington Post has reported that at least 31 percent of all independent spending in those elections was spent by groups that don't disclose who their donors are. You don't know who is behind their money.

You know the candidates know who is behind the money. For sure they are going to be told, but the public doesn't know who is behind that money.

And that 31 percent doesn't even count what are called issue ads, where somebody says the Presiding Officer, for instance, has a terrible position on this issue and you need to call her and tell her that her position is terrible, anti-American, wicked, no good, and that she is awful—and on and on they go. That is an issue ad, and so it doesn't even count. So that whole extra bit—also dark—is not even part of the 31 percent.

And the big, obvious thing that the Citizens United decision completely overlooked is that if you give big corporations and hugely wealthy special interests the ability to spend on elections, guess what else you give them. You give them the ability to threaten to spend or to promise to spend, and you know that those threats and promises are never going to be in any regime of effective disclosure. That is the ultimate private exercise of political influence. We have no idea how big the effect is of those silent threats and

promises—silent, at least, to the public.

The American people are pretty fed up. The New York Times this week reported on a poll, and I will just quote a little bit from the story:

The findings reveal deep support among Republicans and Democrats alike for new measures to restrict the influence of wealthy givers, including limiting the amount of money that can be spent by “super PACs” and forcing more public disclosure on organizations now permitted to intervene in elections without disclosing the names of their donors.

And the story continues:

And by a significant margin, they reject the argument that underpins close to four decades of Supreme Court jurisprudence on campaign finance: that political money is a form of speech protected by the First Amendment.

Clearly, money facilitates speech, but it also facilitates bribery. It also facilitates simply bludgeoning political actors and political parties with pressure.

Now, the results here:

More than four in five Americans [more than 80 percent of Americans] say money plays too great a role in political campaigns . . . while two-thirds say that the wealthy have more of a chance to influence the elections process than other Americans.

That is not healthy when 80 percent of Americans think that money plays too great a part and two-thirds of Americans think that they don't have an equal shot in elections compared to the wealthy.

And it is not only Democrats and independents who feel this way. I will continue to read:

Those concerns—and the divide between Washington elites and the rest of the country—extend to Republicans. Three-quarters of self-identified Republicans support requiring more disclosure by outside spending organizations. . . . Republicans in the poll were almost as likely as Democrats to favor further restrictions on campaign donations.

So if three-quarters of self-identified Republicans support requiring more disclosure by outside political spending organizations, I would hope that I could get support for this amendment which would require some disclosure.

It would require any company that contracts with the Department of Defense—and they get big contracts with billions, hundreds of billions of dollars—to disclose all of its campaign spending over \$10,000. It is a requirement that would apply to all the corporate officers, the board members, and to anyone who owns 5 percent or more of the company.

When there is that much money sloshing around in the defense budget, and when political actors are making the decisions about where that goes, we ought to be able to connect the dots between those corporations and whom they are giving big money to.

So this is a very simple disclosure provision. Again, 75 percent of Republicans support increased disclosure, and, in fact, a considerable number of Republicans in the Senate used to sup-

port disclosure. Over and over, you see Members who are still here, including the majority leader, who were ardent supporters of disclosure—ardent supporters of disclosure, that is, until it turned out that after Citizens United, the big, dark money tended to come in on behalf of—guess what—Republicans.

So the disclosure principle evaporated, but I think it has to come back. The public is sick of it. It is time we cleaned up the political process from all this dark money. It is totally consistent with the premise of the Citizens United decision.

So when the time comes for me to call up this amendment and get it pending, I will do so with the hope that we can find some Republican support for the American people being allowed to know who is spending big bucks to influence elections. We are entitled to know that.

AMENDMENT NO. 1521

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, one other thing I wish to speak in favor of is the amendment of Senator REED, my senior Senator—Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island—to cut the so-called OCO budget gimmick from the Defense bill.

I am on the Budget Committee, and I have heard very passionate protestations from my colleagues on the Budget Committee about the importance of reducing the deficit, not dealing with the national debt, reducing borrowing, deficit spending, and all of that. Well, when it comes to this particular bill, suddenly all of those concerns have gone completely out the window. They are funding a significant portion of this Defense authorization with imaginary money, with an account that is not intended to support ongoing, continuing, baseline defense expenditures, and that is reserved for overseas contingencies and that, therefore, doesn't have to be paid for. So it would be a clear increase to the debt and the deficit to go down this road, and we would very much prefer that instead of using the so-called OCO gimmick to fund this authorization with deficit spending, we sit down and have a mature and consequential discussion between the White House and the Senate and the House on where our spending is going to go and with what accounts we are going to be able to do it. Before we start going account by account through the appropriations process, we have a plan in mind so that we don't find that certain favored accounts get dealt with first and then the rug gets pulled out from under the others.

I think that is a reasonable way, and I support Senator REED's amendment and his notion that we should have a bipartisan plan to replace the arbitrary sequester cuts with a balanced deficit-reduction strategy that includes, among other things, closing some wasteful tax loopholes.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.