Arctic, and the different exercises. We know that it is an important place—transportation, natural resources. This is a critical area.

Our leaders are taking notice, our military leaders. ADM Bill Gortney with the U.S. Northern Command stated: ''Russian heavy bombers flew more out-of-area patrols in 2014 than in any year since the Cold War.''

Secretary of Defense Carter just 2 months ago said: ''The Arctic is going to be a major area of importance to the United States, both strategically and economically in the future—it's fair to say that we're late to the recognition of that.''

This is why the NDAA is so important. Congress heard this testimony. The Senate Armed Services Committee heard this testimony. We have been following what has been happening in the Arctic, and we have acted. The NDAA has provisions to start to address the challenges we see in the Arctic. It certainly is focused on making sure the Arctic remains a peaceful and stable place, but it also starts to focus the leadership of our military on the Arctic, and that is important.

There is language in the NDAA which was unanimously voted on in the committee—it is very bipartisan—that requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a report that updates the U.S. military strategy in the Arctic and requires a military operations plan to be described for the protection and security of our interest in the Arctic. It lays out what the issues are, what the threats are, and what the Russians are doing in the Arctic.

President Putin is certainly going to be watching, and maybe he is taking notice that we are noticing, and that is one reason why this is an important bill.

As we can see here, today's Wall Street Journal article talked about President Putin moving forward and possibly having the ability to send airborne troops and airborne brigades to the Arctic. Yet, right now, our own U.S. Army is thinking about removing the only airborne brigade in the Arctic. That is not good strategy.

That is why we need this bill. We need to set the direction in terms of strategy and to make sure we are not making strategic mistakes as the Russians move forward in the Arctic and we start looking at reducing our capabilities there. Weakness is provocative, and if anyone knows that, it is President Putin. We need to show strength, and that is why we need to pass this bill.

Finally, I want to talk briefly about an amendment I wanted to offer. I am still trying to get it offered as part of the NDAA. As I mentioned, there is a lineup of hundreds of amendments. Unfortunately, the leader on the other side of the aisle doesn't want to move them. This is one of those amendments. It is a very bipartisan amendment. If it were allowed to come to the floor, it would probably pass overwhelmingly. It is a simple amendment. All it does is ask the President to follow the law when it comes to raising the pay of members of our military. It is a simple amendment.

The law States that our servicemembers are entitled to get a larger pay increase—not much, but when there is a pay increase, they should get a slightly larger pay increase than their civilian counterparts. That is the current law. My amendment expresses the sense of the Senate that when giving a pay increase to members of the Department of Defense, military and civilian, that the President simply needs to follow the law.

I want to emphasize something as somebody who has served in the military and is still serving in the Reserves. Our civilian DOD employees and members do a superb job. They are patriotic, they work hard, and they deeply respect the members of the military with whom they serve. I have seen this throughout my entire career.

The current law, however, recognizes the unique sacrifices our servicemembers make wearing the uniform of our country and mandates a half-a-percent greater pay increase when there is a pay increase for our men and women in uniform. Right now, the President is not abiding by that law. It is simple. He needs to do it. My amendment would request and focus on this issue, and I think we could probably get 100 Senators to vote for it.

What is the origin of this law and the intent behind it? It is simple. It recognizes the unique sacrifices our men and women in the military make. These sacrifices are well known to the American people. They include long hours and serious, difficult separations from family. Of course, they include the risk of combat when our troops are deployed overseas in combat zones. It includes hardship to families. When our troops are deployed, they miss weddings, birthdays, first communions. It even takes training into account because the members of the military don't work on a 9-to-5 basis.

I will give one example. I had the great opportunity to head out to the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, CA. It is one of the great training bases in our country—one of the great training places in the world. I was there to watch the training of the 1st Stryker Brigade, which is based in Fairbanks, AK. They were out there for a month deployment and training hard. They were not punching a clock 9 to 5; they were training around the clock every day.

I happened to be out there on Super Bowl Sunday. The vast majority of Americans were enjoying the Super Bowl, as they should have been. They were having fun, going to parties, watching the game, drinking Coke, Pepsi, and a little beer. But there were some Americans who were out in the middle of Fort Irwin in the desert training. They were not watching the Super Bowl; they were training to make sure that when their country next called them up, they would be ready to protect our Nation. That is the reason this law states that we treat our military members a little bit different than other members of the Department of Defense.

That is all my amendment would do, but unfortunately, this one, like dozens, if not hundreds, is not going to be heard—at least for the time being—because the minority leader on the other side is trying to bring back the way they used to run the Senate last year and the year before and the year before that.

We know. We heard the stories. Last year, again, there were 14 amendments that were brought to the floor for a rollcall vote in 2014. They essentially shut down the greatest deliberative body in the world. We have heard the stories of how the previous majority leader used his position to block consideration of amendments more than twice as often as the previous six majority leaders combined, and now we are doing it on a bill that relates to the national security of our Nation and the critical issue of taking care of the men and women in uniform.

I hope we can move through this. I hope we can get to regular order. I hope this body can take up amendments such as mine—commonsense, bipartisan amendments that are going to keep our Nation safer, take care of our troops and their families, and give the American people faith that we are doing the job they sent us here to do. That is my hope.

We are already doing it under the new majority leader. We voted on almost 200 amendments already this year, but right now we are stuck on one of the most important bills this body will consider for the entire year. It is a shame. We need to get unstuck.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

SECTION 3112 OF S. CON. RES. 11

Mr. HATCH. On March 27, 2015, the Senate functioned properly by adopting S. Con. Res. 11 on the congressional budget for the U.S. Government for fiscal year 2016.

Section 3112 of that budget resolution contains a specification of procedures governing cost estimates for what is defined to be ''major legislation'' as defined in section 3112(c)(1).

I wish to provide a few comments to clarify that section of the budget resolution, and I understand that my distinguished colleague from Oregon, Finance Committee Ranking Member

WYDEN, also wishes to provide separate and related comments.

In setting out what is to be taken as ''major legislation,'' the budget resolution specifies that legislation may be designated to be ''major'' if the Senator or House Member who is chairman or vice chairman of the Joint Committee on Taxation, or JCT, designates the legislation as such ''for revenue legislation.'' Of course, such language is entirely consistent with existing laws and practice, under which the responsibility and control over revenue estimates in the congressional budget process lies squarely with the chair and vice chair of the JCT.

The budget resolution also specifies that legislation may be designated to be ''major'' if the chair of the Committee on the Budget in the Senate or the House designates the legislation as such ''for all direct spending and revenue legislation.'' Of course, existing laws and practice assigns responsibility and control over spending estimates with the Budget Committees. However, the budget resolution includes ''revenue legislation'' as part of what the Budget Committee chairs may use for designating legislation as being ''major.''

As I understand the intent of the language, when major legislation is to be considered, there can be cases in which the legislation may require estimates both from the JCT and from the Congressional Budget Office, or CBO. In such cases, there is nothing to prohibit use of longstanding practice in which the Budget Committees consult with the chair and vice chair of the JCT to ensure that any necessary revenue estimates are arrived at by the JCT, for use in scoring major legislation. To be clear, however, nothing in the budget resolution should be taken to mean that the chairs of the Budget Committees have authority to interfere with the responsibility and control over revenue estimates in any part of the congressional budget process which, as I identified earlier, lies squarely with the chair and vice chair of the JCT.

It is my understanding that the budget resolution does not direct or allow for any possibility of such interference, and my purpose in the remarks I am making today is to make that understanding clear. As I have mentioned, longstanding practice has been that if a need arises for the CBO to obtain information on major legislation from the JCT in terms of revenue estimates or effects of legislative proposals on marginal effective tax rates, Budget Committee members can ensure that those estimates and effects are obtained by consulting with the chair and vice chair of the JCT. This longstanding practice ensures smooth processing of the JCT's workload, and prevents any direct control or intervention in JCT's workload from other committees with other jurisdictions.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I share the concern of my colleague, the Finance Committee chairman, and I support his interpretation of this provision. In accordance with longstanding historical practice, and because of important practical considerations, the chair and vice chair of the Joint Committee on Taxation should exercise principal control over the revenue estimating process, and section 3112 should not be interpreted to authorize the chairs of the Budget Committees to interfere with JCT's responsibility for and control over revenue estimates in any part of the congressional budget process.

However, I must note that on the broader point of dynamic estimates, I am opposed, and I was therefore opposed to section 3112 being included in the budget resolution and conference agreement to start with. Dynamic estimates rely on shaky math and convenient assumptions that reward advocates of tax cuts while punishing advocates of long-term investments in people and our Nation's infrastructure.

FAIR ELECTIONS NOW ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it was 8 years ago that I first introduced the Fair Elections Now Act. Former Senator Arlen Specter, our late colleague and former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, was my lead cosponsor. We introduced the bill because we believed that America needs a system that rewards candidates with the best ideas and principles—not just the person who is the most talented in raising special interest money.

I noted that day that our democracy was in trouble because special interests and big-donor money were choking the system and preventing us from facing up to the big challenges of our time. Little did I know that almost a decade later, this problem would have grown much worse.

Through a series of recent cases—including the infamous Citizens United decision—the Supreme Court has allowed wealthy, well-connected campaign donors and special interests to unleash a deluge of cash in an effort to sway Federal, State, and local elections across our Nation. When it comes to understanding the influence of wealthy donors and special interests on Federal elections, the numbers speak for themselves.

In the 2012 election cycle, candidates for both the House and Senate raised the majority of their funds from large donations of $1,000 or more. Forty percent of all contributions to Senate candidates came from donors who maxed out at the $2,500 contribution limit, representing just 0.02 percent of the American population.

We saw this trend continue during the recent midterm elections. The 100 biggest donors gave a combined $323 million during the 2014 election cycle through official campaign contributions and donations to national party committees, PACs, Super PACs, and 527 organizations. In contrast to those 100 donors, an estimated 4.75 million people gave a comparable amount of $356 million through small-dollar donations of $200 or less. Astonishing as these figures are, they don't include the $173 million spent in the 2014 election cycle by tax-exempt ''dark money'' groups that are not required to publicly disclose their donors.

Deep-pocketed special interests are aiming to control the agenda in Congress. It is time to fight back and fundamentally reform the way we finance congressional elections. We need a system that allows candidates to focus on constituents instead of fundraising—a system that encourages ordinary Americans to make their voice heard with small, affordable donations to the candidate of their choice.

That is why I am once again introducing the Fair Elections Now Act. While this bill cannot solve all of the problems facing our Nation's campaign finance system, the Fair Elections Now Act will dramatically change the way campaigns are funded. This bill allows candidates to focus on the people they represent, regardless of whether those people have the wealth to attend a big money fundraiser or donate thousands of dollars.

I would like to thank Sens. BALDWIN, BOXER, BROWN, FRANKEN, GILLIBRAND, HEINRICH, KLOBUCHAR, LEAHY, MARKEY, MCCASKILL, MENENDEZ, MERKLEY, MURPHY, SANDERS, SHAHEEN, UDALL, and WARREN for cosponsoring the Fair Elections Now Act and joining me in this effort to reform our campaign finance system.

The Fair Elections Now Act will help restore public confidence in congressional elections by providing qualified candidates for Congress with grants, matching funds, and vouchers from the Fair Elections Fund to replace campaign fundraising that largely relies on lobbyists, wealthy donors, corporations, and other special interests. In return, participating candidates would agree to limit their campaign spending to amounts raised from small-dollar donors plus the amounts provided from the Fair Elections Fund.

The Fair Elections system would have three stages for Senate candidates. First, candidates would need to prove their viability by raising a minimum number and amount of small-dollar qualifying contributions from in-state donors. Qualified candidates would then be required to limit the amount raised from each donor to $150 per election.

In the primary, participants would receive a base grant that would vary in amount based on the population of the State that the candidate seeks to represent. Participants would also receive a 6 to 1 match for small-dollar donations up to a defined matching cap. After reaching that cap, the candidate could raise an unlimited amount of $150 contributions, as well as contributions from small-donor People PACs.

In the general election, qualified candidates would receive an additional