

something that is obviously created by human beings and that can be solved by human beings are wrong. It is his place. He challenges us to put on the books of the laws of this country the kinds of standards that unleash the green energy revolution, that create jobs by the millions, while ensuring that we reduce the greenhouse gases going up and endangering the planet.

I thank the Chair for the opportunity to be recognized, and I say in conclusion that it is just an incredible moment when the Pope speaks on an issue of this importance. I am not saying action will be easy, but if we harness the ambition of the Moon landing, the scope of the Clean Air Act, and the moral imperative of Pope Francis's encyclical, we can leave the world a better place than we found it. We have the tools to do it. Now we need to forge the political will.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from South Dakota.

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#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this week the Senate will complete its work on the National Defense Authorization Act by holding a final vote. The National Defense Authorization Act is one of the most important bills Congress considers each and every year. I think this will mark the 54th consecutive year in which Congress has passed a Defense authorization bill, recognizing its importance to America's national security interests.

The bill authorizes funding for our Nation's military and our national defense, ensuring that our soldiers get paid, their equipment and training is funded, and that our commanders have the resources they need to confront the threats that are facing our Nation.

In particular, this bill ensures our air men and women maintain readiness levels and receive the training they need to safely return home after protecting our national security abroad.

In my State of South Dakota, we are proud to host the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base, one of our Nation's two B-1 bomber bases. The B-1s are a critical part of the U.S. bomber fleet, providing our military with critical long-range strike capabilities. These bombers have the highest payload capacity, the fastest maximum speed, and the lowest cost per flying hour of any bomber in our fleet.

Bombers from the 28th Bomb Wing have played a key role in the armed conflicts the United States has engaged in over the past 20 years. Whatever the mission, from supporting NATO operations in Kosovo to conducting operations in Afghanistan, B-1s from Ellsworth have been in the thick of the action.

During Operation Odyssey Dawn, B-1s from Ellsworth launched from South Dakota flew halfway around the world

to Libya, dropped their bombs, and returned home all in a single mission. This marked the first time in history that B-1s launched combat missions from the United States to strike targets overseas.

After 8 years of review, the Air Force and the Federal Aviation Administration recently finalized the expansion of the Powder River Training Complex, an airspace training range that serves as the primary training space for Ellsworth B-1s, as well as the B-52 bombers based at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota.

The expanded training range will be the largest training airspace over the continental United States. It will save Ellsworth up to \$23 million a year by reducing the need for the B-1 bombers to commute for training to other States, such as Nevada and Utah. In an era of tighter budgets, measures such as this, which increase readiness while saving costs, are essential.

I was pleased to work with the Air Force and the FAA on this critical expansion, and I am hopeful our air men and women will be able to start using this range for large-force training exercises in the near future.

In addition to ensuring our military has the resources necessary to maintain our B-1 bombers, the bill authorizes full funding for one of the Air Force's top acquisition priorities—the Long Range Strike Bomber, which represents the future of our bomber fleet. This aircraft is scheduled to come on line by the mid-2020s and is just one of many acquisition priorities necessary to defend our Nation against future threats.

Our Nation's defense budget must consider not only the enemies we face today but also those we will face tomorrow.

In addition to the critical funding this bill authorizes, this year's bill is particularly important because it contains a number of reforms that will expand the resources available to our military men and women and strengthen our national security.

For starters, this bill tackles waste and inefficiency at the Department of Defense. It targets \$10 billion in unnecessary spending and redirects those funds to military priorities such as funding for aircraft and weapons systems and modernization of Navy vessels.

The bill also implements sweeping reforms to the military's outdated acquisitions process by removing bureaucracy and expediting decision-making, which will significantly improve the military's ability to access the technology and the equipment it needs.

The act also implements a number of reforms to the Pentagon's administrative functions. Over the past decade, Army Headquarters staff has increased by 60 percent. Yet, in recent years, the Army has been cutting brigade combat teams. From 2001 to 2012, the Department of Defense's civilian workforce

grew at five times the rate of our Active-Duty military personnel. There is something wrong with that picture. Prioritizing bureaucracy at the expense of our preparedness and our Active-Duty personnel is not an acceptable use of resources.

The Defense authorization bill we are considering changes the emphasis at the Department of Defense from administration to operations, which will help ensure that our military personnel receive the training they need and that they are ready to meet any threats that arise.

The bill also overhauls our military retirement system. The current military retirement system limits retirement benefits to soldiers who serve for 20 years or more—which doesn't apply, by the way, to 83 percent of those who have served, including many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Defense bill replaces this system with a modern retirement system that would extend retirement benefits to 75 percent of our servicemembers.

This bill is the product of a bipartisan process, and it received bipartisan support in committee. I believe it came out of the Armed Services Committee by a vote of 20 to 6. This makes it particularly disappointing that the President is attempting to hijack this bill for political purposes.

Despite the fact that this legislation authorizes spending at the President's budget request—his budget request—of \$612 billion, the President is threatening to veto this legislation if Republicans don't agree to provide more funding for agencies such as the IRS and EPA, and he has tried to convince Democrats here in the Senate to abandon bipartisan efforts on this bill and back up a Presidential veto.

Holding up funding authorization for our troops is reckless, and it is irresponsible. And it is flat wrong for the President of the United States to attempt to hijack this bill not because he disagrees with the bill itself but because he wants to make sure his pet projects receive the funding he wants.

At this very moment, threats are multiplying around the world. Russian aggression is on the rise. ISIS fighters are carving a trail of slaughter across the Middle East. Iran is working to acquire a nuclear weapon. Now more than ever, we cannot afford to be holding up funding for our military, especially for partisan political purposes.

Democrats and Republicans have had a chance to make their voices heard on this bill, and our joint efforts have resulted in strong, bipartisan legislation that will ensure that our military is prepared to meet the threats of the 21st century. The Senate should pass this bill this week and the President should sign it to make sure our troops have the equipment and the resources they need to do the most important thing we can do as a nation, and that is defend our country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

## ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes and that Senator DURBIN be recognized following my remarks.

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

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SENIOR HUNGER AND GAO REPORT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I want to touch on an issue that I think does not get the attention it deserves. My view is that a nation is judged not by how many billionaires and millionaires it has but by how it treats the most vulnerable people among us. If we look at the greatness of a nation in that respect, the sad truth is that the United States today does not get particularly high marks. That is true not only in the way we treat our children, but it is also true in the way we treat our seniors.

Yesterday, at my request, the Government Accountability Office—the GAO—released a new report that found that nearly 4 million seniors in our country are what they call food insecure. That means these seniors do not know where their next meal is coming from. What that means is that nearly 4 million American seniors may skip dinner tonight because they do not have enough money to buy food today.

Every day in my State of Vermont and around this country, millions of seniors have to juggle with their limited budgets their ability to buy food, their ability to buy medicine, or, in the wintertime, their ability to keep themselves warm in their homes. Those are not the choices seniors in this country should be forced to make.

There is a myth out there pushed by corporate and moneyed interests suggesting that seniors in this country are doing just great, that all seniors are comfortably middle class. But those people who hold those views have not looked at the reality of life for many seniors in this country. The truth is—and this is really a shocking truth—that 20 percent of seniors in America live on an average income of \$7,600 a year. Between us, I don't know how anybody can live on \$7,600 a year, let alone older people who need more medicine and more health care.

The GAO recently found that more than half of all older American households have absolutely no retirement savings. So we are looking at families where people 55 or 60 have zero saved for retirement because for many years they have been working for wages that have been totally inadequate, preventing them from putting money into the bank.

Many seniors obviously have worked their whole lives. They have raised kids. But, sadly, many of them do not have the resources they need to live a secure retirement.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we have seniors in this country who are

going hungry. The GAO report found that fewer than 10 percent of low-income seniors who needed a home-delivered meal in 2013 received one. In other words, what we have created here in Congress over the years are good and effective programs, such as the Meals on Wheels program, that provide nutritious food to the most vulnerable people in this country—seniors who cannot leave their homes; yet, what the GAO report discovered is that fewer than 10 percent of low-income seniors who needed a home-delivered meal in 2013 received one.

I have gone to many senior citizen locations around this country, and I know that many senior citizens enjoy coming out and getting a congregate meal. They go to senior centers, and they are able to socialize with their friends. They get a good and nutritious meal at a reasonable price. Unfortunately, fewer than 10 percent of low-income seniors who need a congregate meal receive one.

The need, in fact, is growing amongst seniors. GAO found that a higher percentage of low-income seniors are food insecure now—24 percent in 2013—than were in 2008, when the number was 19 percent. So the problem is becoming more acute. One in three low-income seniors aged 60 to 69 is food insecure; yet, fewer than 5 percent receive a meal at home and fewer than 5 percent receive a congregate meal in a senior center.

GAO found that seniors with a disability, minorities, and older adults living on less than \$10,000 a year were even more likely to be hungry. Overwhelmingly, those seniors are not getting the help they need.

The report also found that 16 million older adults from all income levels report difficulties with one or more daily activity, such as shopping, bathing, or getting dressed. More than two-thirds of these seniors do not get the help they need.

Many of the programs designed to provide support to seniors—in terms of Meals on Wheels, in terms of the Congregate Meal Program, and in terms of a variety of other programs—are funded by the Older Americans Act. The Older Americans Act was first passed by Congress in 1965, which is the same year Medicare and Medicaid were passed. This year, all three programs are celebrating their 50th anniversary.

I requested this study to see how seniors have been faring in recent years. GAO reported that while the number of older adults in America has increased from 56 to 63 million Americans, the Older Americans Act funding provided to States has gone down since 2009. In other words, the need has gone up, but the funding has gone down. At current funding levels, less than two-tenths percent of Federal discretionary spending is going to achieve its original purpose.

Common sense tells us that putting money into prevention and keeping seniors healthy in the end run not only

prevents human suffering, but it also saves us money. If a senior is malnourished, that senior is more likely to fall, break a hip, end up in the hospital, at huge expense for Medicaid and Medicare. It makes sense to me, it seems, that if we fund adequately this important program which keeps seniors healthy, independent, and out of hospitals and nursing homes—that is what we should be doing. That is why I sent a letter to my colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee calling for a 12-percent increase in funding for the Older Americans Act programs, such as the nutrition programs. Thirty-two colleagues joined me on that letter. I hope that when we receive the funding level for the Older Americans Act this year, we will see an increase on these important programs. We should not be giving more tax breaks to those who don't need them. Instead, we should be expanding nutrition programs and other services for seniors.

I also encourage my colleagues to support the bill reauthorizing the Older Americans Act, S. 192, and I look forward to working with the Presiding Officer to reauthorize and expand these critical programs for seniors.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

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

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RECOGNIZING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF HOLY GHOST UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I wish to recognize Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Church as it celebrates its 100th anniversary. Holy Ghost Ukrainian Church was founded in Akron, OH by a small group of faithful and passionate Ukrainian Christians.

In 1915, the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Church began when two organizations came together to create a place where Ukrainian immigrants could practice the beliefs and traditions they cherished in the new country they called home. The parish has grown and prospered over the years, and continues to flourish at its original location at 1866 Brown Street, offering a center for spiritual and cultural life to Akron and surrounding northeast Ohio communities.

On June 21, 2015, Father Vsevolod Schevchuk, "Father Sal", and parishioners will welcome honored guests His Beatitude Sviatoslav Sherchuk, Patriarch, and The Most Reverend Bohdan J. Danylo, Bishop, of the Ukrainian Catholic Church to their Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and celebration dinner. The congregation will join together on this day to celebrate the anniversary of the church, their Ukrainian cultural