

and dedication of our first responders, who have devoted their lives to saving others. It is at times like these, when they rise to the occasion, that I am particularly grateful for their service.

As you might expect, my staff and I are in close contact with local officials across the State of Texas in the more than 30 counties where Governor Abbott has declared a disaster. We will be working with the Governor as they prepare to assess the damage on the ground and determine what sort of Federal resources are necessary to help people rebuild. Should Governor Abbott request a formal Federal declaration of disaster for the affected counties, I intend to do everything I can to help get such a request granted and to make sure these Texans have what they need to recover as quickly as possible.

MEMORIAL DAY, NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL, AND FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, on a happier note, during this last week, we had the occasion to celebrate Memorial Day, a day of remembrance. I know many of us had a chance to spend time with true American heroes—the veterans, the Active-Duty military members and their families—to remember the fallen on Memorial Day.

I had a particularly delightful occasion this Memorial Day to spend time with about 115 high school graduates from across Texas as part of a sendoff ceremony as they prepare to head to our Nation's military academies. We have been doing this every year for 10 years. As I always tell people: If you are a little down, if you are in a bad mood or feeling a little depressed, all you need to do is be around these wonderful young men and women who are really mature beyond their years and who aspire not only to attend our Nation's service academies but to be the next generation of military leaders. They truly are the best and the brightest.

It was also great to provide an occasion for these young people and their families to be there and hear from inspirational leaders such as COL Bruce Crandall, a Medal of Honor winner from the Vietnam war.

So in remembering this last week the service of so many people in defense of our Nation and these young people who I just mentioned on Memorial Day and our academy sendoff, it is appropriate that we return to the Senate this week to finish the national defense authorization bill, legislation that will provide our military men and women with the resources they need in order to protect and defend our country.

This is an absolutely critical piece of legislation and one that Congress has passed each year for some 50 years-plus. If anyone doubts that, all they need to do is ask Chairman MCCAIN because he will remind us every chance he gets that this is must-pass-every-

year legislation and something that has become a tradition—a good tradition—for the Senate.

This bill was passed out of the Armed Services Committee with overwhelming bipartisan support. Not a single Democrat voted against the legislation, and before Memorial Day, the Senate voted unanimously to move this legislation forward—98 yes and 0 no votes.

Despite this being a clear bipartisan priority, we have been stuck and mired down for no real reason, frankly, because of objections from the other side of the aisle. The minority leader has chosen to use every tactic and every tool available to him to slow this down. Frankly, this is not acceptable. The Defense authorization bill provides critical resources to our military. It will give our men and women in uniform a modest pay raise and support critical training and equipment modernization efforts. And it ensures that future generations of military leaders have the support they need.

I don't know what happened at Fort Hood when these nine soldiers drowned, but I hope it doesn't have anything to do with their lack of adequate training under these circumstances. What we need to do as part of our duty in the Senate is to get our work done and to pass the Defense authorization bill so there is not even a suspicion or hint of lack of adequate training or preparation by our military members that leads to tragedy.

At a time when we face instability at every turn and our military is confronting evolving and constant threats, political posturing is not appropriate. In fact, it is dangerous. Unfortunately, this is a product of misguided foreign policy choices made by this administration over the last 8 years. It has put our country and our military at greater risk. Our enemies have become emboldened and our allies' confidence has been shaken.

Instead of recognizing the growing threats our military men and women face every day, the President tries to diminish them, calling ISIS the "JV team." This is a terrorist group that continues its reign of violence across Iraq and Syria and continues to grow in strength across North Africa.

Words matter. When President Obama and former Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton, refused to attribute terrorism to radical Islam, it sent a message. And when the Obama administration and its allies ignore the reality of the enemy we are facing, our men and women in uniform are at greater risk of not having the full resources they need in order to defend U.S. interests at home and abroad.

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to visit with U.S. soldiers in the Middle East and to get a good glimpse of the reality on the ground that the administration seems to be lacking. I heard firsthand about the threats they face every day from ISIS-affiliated groups. That danger is growing, not receding.

There is no doubt in my mind that this growing ISIS presence correlates with gaps in our foreign policy under the Obama administration. This is particularly clear in Libya, where the Obama administration's failure in 2011 left a gaping hole of power—another failed state in the Middle East, which, as we have seen before, becomes a power vacuum that attracts foreign fighters and other people who want to use that to leap into Europe and commit acts of terror, either there or in the United States.

After Secretary Clinton pushed to remove Muammar Qadhafi, she prematurely heralded this intervention as her signature achievement as Secretary of State. This is something President Obama now admits was a mistake. She calls it her signature achievement as Secretary of State.

Yet the vacuum created by the United States' retreating in the region has only led to more chaos, and the ISIS fighters and recruiters have quickly filled the space, as I said a moment ago. The Financial Times even called it "a mess no one should think will be resolved by the current UN-backed peace process." This chaos doesn't just give terrorism a foothold; it provides a strategic launch point for terrorist attacks, directly across the Mediterranean from Europe.

In 2011, when the Obama administration, lacking any coherent, long-term strategy, decided to lead from behind in Libya, I strongly opposed that decision. While I can't say the same for others I have served with in the Senate, I have been proud to vote against premature troop withdrawals from volatile regions, as in Iraq, following the surge, which the chairman of the Armed Services Committee and so many others said was our one last chance in Iraq. To see us now fighting even as trainers and advisers in places such as Fallujah and Ramadi and other places where we have lost young lives to liberate—to see those now squandered by a premature exit from Iraq due to the administration's failure to get a security Status of Forces Agreement is just heartbreaking.

We know so many did oppose the surge, including then-candidate Obama, but the fact is, it paid off. Now we see all too clearly the consequences of precipitous withdrawal—the squandering of hard-earned progress achieved by the surge.

Of course, Secretary Clinton defended President Obama's decision to remove U.S. troops before the region could be stabilized. In fact, when asked about the potential threat of civil war in Iraq by exiting too early, Secretary Clinton simply said, "Well, let's find out." Well, we found out, after all. Foreign policy isn't something we just find out about or make up as we go along. It requires thoughtful planning and purposeful, intentional action.

Of course, Syria is another case study of what can happen when the White House refuses to act decisively

and proactively against our adversaries. Unfortunately, when red lines are crossed with no consequences and when groups like ISIS aren't treated as the serious threat they are, terrorism can make its way onto U.S. soil. Just consider the attacks in San Bernardino or the multiple attacks on our allies in Europe.

Unfortunately, as groups such as ISIS are getting stronger, our friends around the world are increasingly getting concerned that the United States doesn't have their backs. The White House prioritized its courtship with Iran, the No. 1 state sponsor of global terrorism, while choosing to ignore our friends and allies in the region. Turning its back on Israel to give Iran billions of dollars in sanctions relief was a hallmark of President Obama's tenure in the Oval Office, and Secretary Clinton said that she was proud to play a part in crafting that terrible nuclear deal. This simply is not good foreign policy. Why should we choose to reward those who have harmed us or threatened us while ignoring our oldest and strongest relationships? The result is what we would pretty much expect: an Iran that is ascendant in the Middle East and growing in belligerence with a nuclear program largely intact.

Our actions do speak louder than words, and right now our friends in the Middle East and around the world are losing faith in their relationship with the United States. This is simply a product of failed foreign policy under the Obama-Clinton leadership. I think it is telling that when former President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, was asked about President Obama's policies on the world stage, he said, "I can't think of many nations in the world where we have a better relationship now than we did when he took over." This is President Carter on President Obama's foreign relations. He went on to go through a list of countries as examples of where, in his words, "the United States' influence and prestige and respect in the world is probably lower now than it was six or seven years ago." On that point, I agree with President Carter. The foreign policy of this administration is nothing to be proud of.

Our job now in the Senate is to reassure our allies that the military might of the United States has not fallen by the wayside. One way we can do that is by ensuring our military has the resources and funding necessary to remain a strong emblem of American strength for the rest of the watching world. After delays and obstruction from our friends on the other side of the aisle, I hope we can finally complete our work this week on the Defense authorization bill under the able leadership of Chairman McCain.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Texas for his very compelling statement.

Just one example of what the Senator from Texas has referred to is the whole issue of Qadhafi. I would remind my colleague from Texas that we got rid of Qadhafi without losing a single American and then walked away. We walked away from it, and now we see ISIS establishing a strong beachhead—a direct failure of leadership of the Obama administration and the then-Secretary of State.

There were many of us, including the Senator from Texas, who said: Look, we have to do a lot of things now that you have gotten rid of Qadhafi. This country has never known democracy; it has no institutions. For example, we could have taken care of their wounded. We could have helped them secure their borders. Instead, what did we do? We killed Qadhafi—or his own people killed him. But we set up a scenario that happened and just walked away—just as we walked away from Iraq, just as we are sort of walking away from Afghanistan while the Taliban is starting to show success throughout the country. This administration is very good at walking away. Unfortunately, the consequences are attacks on the United States of America and Europe.

So I thank the Senator from Texas for his very important statement.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, it is my pleasure to rise with my friend and colleague from Rhode Island to speak about the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017.

For 54 consecutive years, Congress has passed this vital piece of legislation, which provides our military servicemembers with the resources, equipment, and training they need to defend the Nation. The NDAA is one of the few bills in Congress that continues to enjoy bipartisan support year after year. That is a testament to this legislation's critical importance to our national security and the high regard with which it is held by the Congress.

Last month, the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 23 to 3—23 to 3—to approve the NDAA, an overwhelming vote that reflects the committee's proud tradition of bipartisan support for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces.

I thank the committee's ranking member, the Senator from Rhode Island, for his months of hard work on the NDAA. It has been a great pleasure to work with him on this legislation, and I remain appreciative of the thoughtfulness and bipartisan spirit with which he approaches our national security. He is a great partner and a great leader.

I also thank the majority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, for his commitment to bring the NDAA to the Senate floor on time and without delay. It is a testimony to his leadership that the Senate will once again consider this bill in regular order with an open amendment process.

I am tremendously proud of the Senate Armed Services Committee's work on this legislation. This year's NDAA is the most significant piece of defense reform legislation in 30 years. It includes major reforms to the Department of Defense that can help our military rise to the challenge of a more dangerous world.

The NDAA contains updates to the Pentagon's organization to prioritize innovation and improve the development and execution of defense strategy. The legislation continues sweeping reforms of the defense acquisition system to harness American innovation and preserve our military's technological edge.

The NDAA modernizes the military health system to provide military servicemembers, retirees, and their families with higher quality care, better access to care, and a better experience of care.

The NDAA authorizes a pay raise for our troops. It invests in the modern equipment and advanced training they need to meet current and future threats. It helps to restore military readiness with \$2 billion for additional training, depot maintenance, and weapons sustainment. And it gives our allies and partners the support they need to deter aggression and fight terrorism.

This is a far-reaching piece of legislation, but there is one challenge it could not address: the dangerous mismatch between growing worldwide threats and arbitrary limits on defense spending that are in current law. This mismatch has very real consequences for the thousands of Americans who serve in uniform and sacrifice on our behalf all around the Nation and the world. Our troops are doing everything we ask of them, but we must ask ourselves: Are we doing everything we can for them? The answer, I say with profound sadness, is we are not.

Since 2011 the Budget Control Act has imposed arbitrary caps on defense spending. Over the last 5 years, as our military has struggled under the threat of sequestration, the world has only grown more complex and far more dangerous. Since 2011 we have seen Russian forces invade Ukraine, the emergence of the so-called Islamic State and its global campaign of terrorism, increased attempts by Iran to destabilize U.S. allies and partners in the Middle East, growing assertive behavior by China and the militarization of the South China Sea, numerous cyber attacks on U.S. industry and government agencies, and further testing by North Korea of nuclear technology and other advanced military capabilities. Indeed, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, testified in February that over the course of his distinguished five-decade career, he could not recall "a more diverse array of challenges and crises" than our Nation confronts today.

Our military is being forced to confront these growing threats with shrinking resources. This year's defense budget is more than \$150 billion