

bring us closer to a cure. As Tom himself always says, “Blue skies always.” I think that is a mantra everyone in the Senate and Arkansas could adopt, too. It is my honor to recognize Thomas Galyon as this week’s Arkansan of the Week.

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.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I rise to speak in support of the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, a bill upon which we have fortunately invoked cloture today and which I hope will allow us to proceed to finish this vitally important legislation.

I wish to commend both Chairman McCAIN and Ranking Member REED for their leadership as they worked together. Their bill puts us on a path toward addressing the myriad threats we face today. In fact, in my years in the Senate, it is difficult to think of a time in which we have faced more threats from more different adversaries around the world. These national security challenges include the challenges posed by ISIS, as it continues to control territory and key cities in Syria and Iraq and spreads to other countries, such as Libya and Nigeria; Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist terrorist groups determined to attack our country and our allies; Russia’s aggressive operations in Ukraine, the Baltics, and Syria; and China’s aggressive military activities in the South China Sea.

This bill funds programs that ensure our Nation’s continued presence and deterrence missions, including \$271 million to help complete the construction of two DDG-1000 Destroyers. These ships provide capabilities including stealth technology, electric propulsion, and a smaller crew size. The Navy recently accepted delivery of the first DDG-1000, the Zumwalt—a major milestone for this revolutionary program. Given the ship’s cutting-edge technology, unique hull, and advanced combat systems, the shipbuilders at Bath Iron Works in my State should be commended for their exceptional work and dedication in building the largest naval destroyer and the most advanced naval destroyer in history.

The bill before us also includes \$3.2 billion for the procurement of two Arleigh Burke-Class Destroyers as part of a multiyear procurement contract, as well as incremental funding for a third fiscal year 2016 Flight Three Destroyer. This much needed additional destroyer, which ranks No. 2 on the

Navy’s unfunded priorities list, will be built at Bath Iron Works. As the workhorses of the Navy, these destroyers help ensure that our Navy’s capabilities remain unrivaled in delivering power and presence across the globe. From freedom of navigation missions in the South China Sea to addressing Iranian aggression in the Strait of Hormuz, these ships signal to enemies and allies alike that the U.S. Navy is ready to respond wherever and whenever it is needed.

After years of advocacy, I am pleased this legislation also includes an important provision that requires the Department of Defense to finally comply with the Berry amendment by outfitting new recruits with high-quality athletic shoes made in America by skilled American workers. This amendment, sponsored by my colleague Senator KING, is based upon stand-alone legislation that I introduced with my colleague from Maine. It is good not only for our troops but also for American manufacturing. It is time to stop relying on goods manufactured in foreign countries to outfit those who wear the uniform of our Nation. It is past time for the Department’s circumvention of the Berry amendment to be ended when it comes to athletic footwear.

This bill also provides for investments in our public shipyards, which are strategic assets for our national security. For Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, ME, almost \$75 million is authorized for necessary upgrades, including \$18 million for unaccompanied housing, \$30 million for utility improvements for nuclear platforms, and \$27 million to construct a replacement for a medical and dental unit that is in a building that is 100 years old and does not meet current safety standards.

As the senior member of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, I am pleased these authorizations match the funding included in our Military Construction and VA spending bill that passed the Senate overwhelmingly a few weeks ago. These investments at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard will result in the high-quality facilities that shipyard personnel deserve as they maintain, repair, and modernize our nuclear submarine fleet.

The bill also provides the resources necessary to help our allies and partners around the world. I am pleased it would authorize \$50 million for the U.S.-Israel Anti-Tunneling Cooperation Program. The terrorist organization Hamas continues to construct tunnels from Gaza to Israel, which have been used by terrorists to sneak across the border and carry out attacks on Israeli citizens.

Meanwhile, we have the problem of Iran, which has continued to defy a U.N. Security Council resolution on its ballistic missile program by conducting flight testing of missiles that

are inherently capable of delivering nuclear weapons that could someday reach the United States. They already are capable of reaching Israel, which is why this bill’s continued support for the U.S.-Israeli cooperative missile defense programs is so important.

I am pleased to note that the National Defense Authorization Act contains several measures supporting our servicemembers, who perform the important missions we assign them. These provisions include a 1.6-percent pay raise and reauthorization of bonuses and special pay to help encourage retention. I know this has been a real problem, for example, for the Air Force in retaining the pilots it needs, who oftentimes can make so much more money and have far easier missions and hours in the private sector.

I filed an amendment, as I did last year, to strike a provision in this bill that would unfairly discriminate against women servicemembers. The provision mandates that if two or more servicemembers live in the same house, the amount of the basic allowance for housing payable to each member would be divided by the total number of members in the house. That means, in cases where a servicemember resides with his or her Active-Duty spouse or if a member resides with military roommates, each would proportionately lose his or her stipend for housing under this bill. This disproportionately affects female servicemembers because 20 percent of them are married to another servicemember. In contrast, less than 4 percent of Active-Duty men are married to Active-Duty women servicemembers. I hope we can change this provision.

Other provisions of this bill would provide additional protections for survivors of sexual assault to move closer to the goal of translating the military’s stated policy of zero tolerance into reality. Specifically, the bill would create a new punitive article in the Uniform Code of Military Justice that criminalizes acts of retaliation. The article would hold servicemembers accountable if they threaten or take adverse personnel action against those who report or plan to report retaliation.

Finally, this bill would direct the Pentagon to rein in unnecessary and wasteful spending by reducing the number of general and flag officers by 25 percent. This is an issue that I have been working on with Chairman McCAIN since 2012, and I am pleased to see the continued focus on ending the practice of rank inflation.

I should mention that I have the greatest respect for the high-ranking officials as well as for all who serve in our military. But this is an issue that we do need to deal with, and I believe this bill strikes the appropriate balance. We owe it to taxpayers to assess every efficiency and use every cost-saving measure while also ensuring the security of our Nation.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her patience. I know the Senate is soon to

adjourn. I urge support of this important bill.

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

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION AND FEMALE VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION BILLS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it was encouraging to see the Senate vote to advance the National Defense Authorization Act this morning. It reflects a recognition by this body of the importance of the bill and the moment. The defense authorization act will promote defense innovation and research, it will modernize retirement benefits for our men and women in uniform, and authorize the pay raises they deserve. It will help prepare our country for the threats of today and the challenges of tomorrow, and it will better enable the next Commander in Chief, regardless of party, to deal with them as well. That is critical given that the next President is about to inherit an array of threats and troubling instability in the Middle East.

Yesterday Senators laid out many ways in which President Obama's foreign policy has fallen short. One was lack of strategic vision. Take for instance his unnecessary threat to veto this very bill. He doesn't like bipartisan prohibitions on transferring hardcore terrorists from Guantanamo's secure facilities to American communities or unstable countries. We include similar bipartisan provisions year after year after year. He makes similar threats year after year after year, but he signs the bill year after year, so it is time to quit that.

This bill just advanced in the Senate by a bipartisan vote of 68 to 23. The funding levels this bill authorizes is exactly the same as what President Obama requested in his budget, and unless the President is actually more concerned about a campaign slogan from back in 2008 than he is about grave threats we face in 2016, he will sign it.

I thank colleagues on both sides for their hard work on this legislation, particularly Chairman McCAIN. He is always on guard for our men and women in uniform, and he is always standing up for our national security. This bill is a reflection of his commitment. It is an important step for the American people, but it is not the only one we took this past week.

It has been reported that we lose over 20 veterans each day to suicide, and one study has revealed that suicide rates among female veterans grew by 40 percent between 2000 and 2010. This is heartbreaking, and it underlines the

importance of the Female Veterans Suicide Prevention Act that the Senate passed earlier this week. This legislation will require the VA to take a closer look at this issue and assess which mental health care and veteran suicide prevention programs are most successful for our female veterans. It builds upon the progress of the Clay Hunt Act, an important law we passed last year that provides more of the suicide prevention and mental health support our veterans deserve.

As Senator ERNST recently reminded us, our servicemembers have selflessly sacrificed in defense of our freedoms, and we should help ensure that they are prepared to transition back to civilian life, which includes access to quality and timely mental health care they deserve. Senator ERNST knows what it means to serve. I thank her for her continued leadership for Iowa and for her work on this bill with Senators BOXER, BLUMENTHAL, and BROWN.

This veterans mental health legislation is another example of what we can accomplish when we work together to find solutions for the American people, and it is another example of a Senate that is back to work.

SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNERSHIP BILL

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I am pleased to be a cosponsor of S. 1089, a bill to encourage and support partnerships between the public and private sectors to improve our Nation's social programs, and for other purposes, known as the Social Impact Partnership Act, SIPA. This legislation would facilitate the creation of public-private partnerships that have the goal of improving the outcomes from our Nation's social services spending in order to benefit both the people intended to be helped by those programs and the U.S. taxpayer. It would do so by creating the Federal Interagency Council on Social Impact Partnerships, which would recommend to the Treasury Secretary that the Federal Government enter into agreements with State and local governments and private investors to pay for successful social improvement programs funded by private investors out of savings those programs create for the Federal Government.

The bill appropriates \$300 million for this purpose and aims to ensure that the savings to the Federal Government from the projects selected will exceed that \$300 million. If a social services program is not successful, the Federal Government will not pay for it. In this way, SIPA helps to reorient Federal social spending towards measurable improvements in the lives of those served.

While I am supportive of the bill, I do want to note for the record that this bill could benefit from further assurances at a committee markup that the funded projects will result in governmental savings.

The appropriations for the legislation should be offset with spending reduc-

tions in other areas, as has been done in the companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

There should be a specified role in the legislation for CBO and OMB to certify for taxpayers that the Federal performance payments authorized in the bill for successful projects do not exceed actual programmatic savings and that this bill provides better social outcomes for equal or less total money spent.

Finally, the bill should ensure that there is no way for any program stakeholder, government official, or member of the Federal Interagency Council on Social Impact Partnerships to unduly influence the measured outcome of these funded projects, which is required to receive federal payments. As part of these protections, there should be strict conflict of interest rules in place to prohibit those involved in selecting and measuring the projects from having a financial interest in their outcome.

The purpose of the Social Impact Partnership Act is to establish funding for innovative social service projects that work and ending funding for those that do not. If there is any evidence that such innovation is not occurring and SIPA is becoming yet another wasteful and politically influenced government program, I will work to end it.

I thank Senators HATCH and BENNET for their great work on this bill, and I look forward to its markup in the Finance Committee and passage in the full Senate.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO BILLY COX

- Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to Baxter County Sheriff's Deputy Billy Cox, the American Legion Department of Arkansas Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award recipient.

Deputy Cox has dedicated 13 years to law enforcement and currently serves as the Norfork school resource officer. He provides a law enforcement presence, but also uses his skills and experiences to help students learn and grow in a safe environment through D.A.R.E. and other youth safety programs. Having worked as a paramedic for two decades, he also teaches CPR to high school students.

Known as Officer Billy to the students and educators around the Norfork School District, Deputy Cox is a positive role model for the students. Students rely on him to listen to their problems, and he is always patient and willing to listen. Norfork High School Principal Bobby Hulse says Deputy Cox means a lot to the students and staff.

His dedication to law enforcement has earned Deputy Cox certifications in drug abuse education and gang resistance education. He is a State-certified drug recognition expert.

The American Legion Department of Arkansas Law Enforcement Officer of