

Stabenow  
Udall

Van Hollen  
Warren

Whitehouse  
Wyden

The nomination was confirmed.

Udall  
Van Hollen

Warner  
Whitehouse

Wicker  
Young

NAYS—10

Booker  
Cortez Masto  
Gillibrand  
Harris

Heller  
Markey  
Merkley  
Sanders

Warren  
Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Alexander

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 89, the nays are 10.

The motion is agreed to.

lies in South Korea and Japan. These threats are not just hollow words any longer. North Korea's capabilities are rapidly improving to meet their long-stated intent.

We thought that Kim Jong Il was bad, but in 6 years, his son Kim Jong Un has conducted as many as 75 ballistic missile tests. In comparison, over a 17-year period, his father conducted about 30. In other words, he has done over twice as many in a fraction of the time.

Additionally, Kim Jong Un has sped up North Korea's nuclear program since taking power in 2011. North Korea's nuclear technology is advancing at an alarming rate. For example, the bomb North Korea tested in its most recent test last September was 10 times more powerful than what the regime could have produced in 2006—10 times more.

At the same time, North Korea has actively worked on miniaturizing nuclear weapons so that they can deliver by way of a ballistic missile. Earlier this year, analysts detected activity at a North Korean nuclear test site, indicating another nuclear test may be imminent.

Intelligence and military experts have repeatedly argued that it is prudent to assume that North Korea has successfully miniaturized their nuclear weapons. That means the only technology they need to conduct a nuclear strike on the U.S. mainland—that is us; that is right here—would be a functional intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM.

In January, Kim Jong Un said North Korea is in the “final stage in preparations.”

Let's make sure we understand what we are talking about. We know that their capability is getting very close to it, and they have already said that they would send something over to the mainland United States.

Unfortunately, when you talk to people in the real world, they can't believe this could be true—that one guy who is mentally deranged could be heading up a country that has the capability of blowing up an American city. Yet we know this is going on right now.

Recently, in the Armed Services Committee—and I was in attendance at that time—the Defense Intelligence Agency Director, Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, told the Armed Services Committee: “If left on its current trajectory the [North Korean] regime will ultimately succeed in fielding a nuclear-armed missile capable of threatening the United States homeland.”

That is a direct quote by the guy who knows more about this than anybody else. Lieutenant General Stewart added that “the North Korean regime is committed and is on a pathway where this capability is inevitable.”

I will say that again. Our intelligence experts assessed that, unchecked, North Korea will inevitably achieve the capability to strike the U.S. homeland with a nuclear missile.

### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Kristine L. Svinicki, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the term of five years expiring June 30, 2022.

Mitch McConnell, Orrin G. Hatch, John Hoeven, John Cornyn, John Barrasso, John Boozman, Mike Rounds, Thom Tillis, Chuck Grassley, John Thune, Mike Crapo, Bill Cassidy, James M. Inhofe, Thad Cochran, Steve Daines, Tom Cotton, Roger F. Wicker.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Kristine L. Svinicki, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted “yea.”

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 89, nays 10, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 153 Ex.]

### YEAS—89

Baldwin	Feinstein	Moran
Barrasso	Fischer	Murkowski
Bennet	Flake	Murphy
Blumenthal	Franken	Murray
Blunt	Gardner	Nelson
Boozman	Graham	Paul
Brown	Grassley	Perdue
Burr	Hassan	Peters
Cantwell	Hatch	Portman
Capito	Heinrich	Reed
Cardin	Heitkamp	Risch
Carper	Hirono	Roberts
Casey	Hoeven	Rounds
Cassidy	Inhofe	Rubio
Cochran	Isakson	Sasse
Collins	Johnson	Schatz
Coons	Kaine	Schumer
Corker	Kennedy	Scott
Cornyn	King	Shaheen
Cotton	Klobuchar	Shelby
Crapo	Lankford	Stabenow
Cruz	Leahy	Strange
Daines	Lee	Sullivan
Donnelly	Manchin	Tester
Duckworth	McCain	Thune
Durbin	McCaskill	Tillis
Enzi	McConnell	Toomey
Ernst	Menendez	

### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Kristine L. Svinicki, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the term of five years expiring June 30, 2022.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for as much time as I may consume.

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

### NORTH KOREA

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, as we begin the markup—that is what we are going to be starting on right away. We have already had an initial meeting with the Senate Armed Services Committee on the National Defense Authorization Act. I want to express my deep concern over the continued malign behavior by the overtly hostile nation of North Korea.

I often talk to people, and they shake their heads in disbelief about a country that is run by a mentally deranged individual who is rapidly developing the capability of hitting the mainland United States with a missile. I think it is important that we immediately get to our Defense authorization bill, so we can start addressing this and many other problems that we have.

It is important to us in the Senate to communicate to the American people the incredibly grave situation we are facing right now in North Korea. The Kim Jong Un regime has expressed a desire to destroy the United States of America. Normally that wouldn't be a concern because he wouldn't have the credibility, but right now we are seeing progress being made in their technology and their ability to actually hit major areas.

In April, North Korea's official newspaper relayed the threat of a preemptive strike to “completely and immediately wipe out not only U.S. imperialists' invasion forces in South Korea and its surrounding areas but the U.S. mainland and reduce them to ashes.”

That is a threat—a threat that has come directly from the leader of North Korea. This is the most recent in a long line of threats by that individual.

In addition, North Korean leaders constantly threaten our friends and al-

Even without the ICBM capability, the missiles we know they already have can range U.S.—that means it can reach the United States—military personnel and other citizens in South Korea, Japan, Guam, and many other areas.

North Korea's known missile inventory now includes a missile that North Korea successfully tested for the first time on May 14. That missile represented a major breakthrough in North Korean ballistic missile technology. The reports indicate the missile traveled over 1,300 miles at an altitude and successfully exited and then reentered the Earth's atmosphere—a key requirement for nuclear capable ICBMs.

If fired at its maximum range, the missile could reach Guam. Though the missile itself was not an ICBM, the technological breakthrough demonstrates a significant advancement that North Korea has made in their ballistic missile capability. This is actual. This is happening. This is today. This is reality.

Another significant advancement that occurs to me is the solid-fueled, road-mobile missiles the regime is developing. Kim Jong Un has successfully tested two such missiles already this year—one in February and another last month on May 21.

Solid-fueled missiles mounted on mobile launch vehicles can be prepared ahead of time. They can build up an inventory and come back and use that inventory whenever they desire to do so.

What can we do? It is clear that North Korea does not respond to international pressure. All of these ballistic missile tests violate multiple U.N. resolutions. Yet North Korea carries them out, despite sanctions and international condemnation. The normal type of negotiation doesn't work with those guys. Furthermore, conventional wisdom has led us to believe that China—North Korea's main trade partner in that region—holds significant sway over the regime. That conventional wisdom has been called into question recently. I commend the Trump administration for recognizing this and for working with China on this issue, but we can't assume that China will be able to help us close the deal in a diplomatic way.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to take all appropriate steps to defend ourselves from this threat that exists today. We have to keep in mind that as we formulate this year's National Defense Authorization Act—that is what I am talking about now—we have to do it. For 53 consecutive years, we have passed the Defense authorization bill, and right now there is some doubt as to whether we will get enough cooperation from those in this Chamber to make that happen again.

I remember 4 years ago, when I was ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, we didn't get this done until the latter part of December. If you wait around until the latter part

of December and it passes midyear, we will have our soldiers over there not getting what they need to be getting in the way of hazard pay and other things. It would be an absolute disaster. Right now, they are watching us. Our kids are over there watching us now to see what we will do with the most important bill we pass every year.

We are going to get started. I applaud the President for the fiscal year 2018 budget request that calls for increases to defense spending and aims to fill critical readiness gaps. Right now, in Congress, we need to build on that even further.

First, we need to bolster our national ballistic defense capabilities to address the threats we face from North Korea. That is a no-brainer. We all understand that. Since 2006, the Missile Defense Agency budget has fallen 23 percent when adjusted for inflation. While we have taken positive steps in recent years, we need to ensure our last-resort defenses are airtight.

We should heed the recommendations of defense experts like Gen. Lori Robinson, commander of the U.S. Northern Command, who testified in April before our committee. I am quoting her now, Lori Robinson: "As adversaries continue to pursue credible and advanced capabilities, we, too, must evolve our missile defense capabilities to outpace increasingly complex threats." I think that is a recognition by her—the one who probably knows more about it than anyone else—that we are not keeping pace right now.

Simultaneously, we have to boost our military. Our forces are smaller than the days of the hollow force. I chaired a committee not too long ago that had the Vices of all four services. They all came in. The conclusion was—even though some of them were not old enough to remember, as I remember, the 1980s at the end of the Carter administration, but they made the statement that we are in a situation now that we have never been in before and that we are, in fact, a hollow force, just as hollow as we were back in 1989 after the Carter administration.

We really owe our brave service men and women better. We owe them an obligation. It is our obligation to let them know what we are doing. Our forces are smaller than the days of the hollow force in the 1980s. Our equipment is aging, and our base infrastructure requires critical maintenance and upgrades. We went through 8 years of the Obama administration. We paid our price in not really giving our brave young warriors the equipment they needed. Through this year's NDAA, we ought to prioritize across the board end-strength increases and additional investments in maintenance to fill gaps in existing formations and to get our existing equipment back to par. The first thing that happens when you are on a starvation diet is you let your maintenance and modernization go. We have done that.

I hear people say defense spending is out of control. The truth is, defense

spending, as a proportion of total government spending, has steadily decreased since World War II. How many people are aware that in 1964, we spent 52 percent of our total resources on defending America? Today, it is 15 percent. No one seems to care about it because they don't know about it. Nonetheless, that is where we are today.

In the recent years, despite waging multiple wars and facing unparalleled global threats, our spending has decreased to about 15 percent of our total spending. The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Milley, said it best when it comes to funding our military. This is really significant now when people are talking about spending too much. He said:

The only thing more expensive than deterrence, is actually fighting a war. And the only thing more expensive than fighting a war, is fighting one and losing one . . . We're expensive. We recognize that. But the bottom line is, it's an investment that is worth every nickel.

So we have to immediately make up for the damage done by the years of the dangerous defense cuts and recognize what the government is really supposed to be doing. I refer to that old document nobody reads anymore called the Constitution. You read that, and it tells us what we are supposed to be doing here; No. 1, defending America; No. 2, they called it post roads back then but infrastructure. That is what we are actually supposed to be doing.

The good news is, under the leadership of President Trump, we have already started that process working. The appropriations bill last month stopped the decline in Army strength. Instead of the planned 460,000 Active soldiers, we now have 475,000. We added 1,000 marines, a few hundred airmen. In total, we currently have 24,000 more servicemembers than we would have had under the previous administration.

More good news is that we have exceptional patriots like the airmen at Tinker, Vance, and Altus Air Force Bases and those who are protecting the skies with F-16s out of my city of Tulsa. Soldiers like those in Fort Sill and in Oklahoma's 45th Infantry Brigade, who are right now in Ukraine training our allies there.

People don't know that the policy we are following under this new administration is, we are using our resources to help others train themselves. In the case of Ukraine—what happened in Ukraine should never have happened. Ukraine had this great parliamentary election. I happened to be there at the time, about 4 years ago. For the first time in 96 years, Ukraine doesn't have one Communist in its Parliament. They did that because they love us. They love the West. Consequently, when Putin came in right after that—this is back during the Obama administration—he started killing the Ukrainians, who were seeking their freedom—our best friends over there—and our administration refused to let us even send defensive weapons over there.

We are correcting that. In fact, the bill we are talking about right now, the Defense authorization bill, is one where we are going to be addressing that problem.

I am optimistic we will rise to the occasion and meet the challenge presented by the agnostic North Korean regime and confident President Trump has taken the appropriate steps to address this threat diplomatically. We, in Congress, need to follow his lead to ensure that our men and women in uniform have the resources required to answer the call quickly and effectively. We don't have the luxury of time. Just think of the statement I read a minute ago, where Gen. Vincent Stewart told the Armed Services Committee a week ago: "If left on its current trajectory the regime will ultimately succeed in fielding a nuclear-armed missile capable of threatening the United States homeland."

While we have a lot of problems right now on this floor—and we are trying to address these problems—the No. 1 problem is what is happening to our military and the absolute necessity of getting a defense authorization passed very rapidly. We are starting today.

#### CARBON TAX

Mr. President, let me just mention one more thing because I think I do have a little bit more time. Earlier this year, several major oil and gas companies announced their support for a carbon tax plan. This is kind of interesting because we have been fighting this battle for a long period of time. You have to keep in mind there are some very large corporations that would inure to benefit from a carbon tax.

The plan they are backing is one put forth by the Climate Leadership Council. This group's plan is labeled as a conservative climate solution that would tax greenhouse gas emissions and return money to the taxpayers as a climate dividend.

It ain't going to happen, folks. You pass a tax, and it is going to cost everyone—at least everyone who uses energy. I don't know of anyone right now in America who doesn't. The heart of the plan is to make energy from fossil fuels more expensive.

One of the things I do every week, I go back to my State of Oklahoma where there are logical people. I talk to them about things you don't hear in Washington; things, for example, back there in the Obama administration. It was in Chaddick, OK. A farmer came up to me and said: Explain this to me, Senator. If right now we have a President who is trying to do away with fossil fuels—that is coal, oil and gas—and he also wants to do away with nuclear, and while we are dependent—in order to run this machine called America, for 89 percent of the energy we use, we are dependent upon fossil fuels and nuclear, and if he is successful, how do you run the machine called America? The answer is, you can't. This fight has been going on for a long period of time. If you drive a car, you use electricity, or heat your home, you will see higher

prices at the pump or if you pass one of these carbon taxes. While these are the obvious increases, higher energy costs would be felt across the economy as it becomes more expensive for all industries to operate and transport their wares, raising food prices and the price of consumer goods. In return for paying these higher prices, you get a check or what someone would call free money, but this money isn't really free. The higher costs of energy, food, and goods are paid by the consumer. That is by everyone in America, no exceptions, and then returned to the consumer. Why can't they just avoid the transition and just keep their money in the first place? Well, they can. That is the answer.

Furthermore, if every American gets the same amount of money as this money calls for, is that really equitable? A family who lives in a small apartment, who walks or takes the subway to work or to school and doesn't own a car in New York City would get the same amount of money as the independent long-haul trucker or a farmer in rural Oklahoma who spends a lot of time in his truck and running his tractor and using more energy to run his farm and his home. As unreasonable as it sounds, this is a reality. There are those out there.

The conservative climate solution sounds more like a redistribution from our rural citizens to more urban populations. Usually, we are talking about taxing the rich to pay to the poor. This is something new.

Furthermore, I always find it interesting that the Warren Buffetts of the world want more taxes. They feel comfortable enough in their wealth to ask for more of their money to be taken, knowing that raising taxes is a non-starter for many of us in Congress. As I pointed out to him, and will point out to the companies that have joined the Climate Leadership Council, you are free to write your check, if you want to do it anyway. If you are so wrapped up in this idea, then you need either to go—or if, for some other reason, you want to pay money to the Treasury, they are open for business and would be glad to take your money. If you feel that strongly, why wait for legislation that would be a nonstarter? If you are a citizen and want to pay for your carbon footprint, the Treasury would be very glad to accept that.

Let's face it. I am not going to support a new tax—what could very well end up a tax, maybe even the largest tax we would have in this country that does not accomplish anything.

Let's keep in mind, if there is somebody out there who it inures to their corporate benefit, or otherwise, to increase their taxes, let them go ahead and send their check to the Treasury. They will be glad to get it.

#### BILLINGSLEA NOMINATION

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider with respect to the Billingslea nomination be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

Mr. INHOFE. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. BLUMENTAL. Mr. President, I am here to share the words, the stories, the fears, and some of the faces of people in Connecticut who will be impacted by the bill that was released this morning—the so-called discussion draft, if that is the right term for it. We learned this morning, I think, why that discussion draft has been shrouded in secrecy. The reason is very simply that my Republican colleagues are ashamed and embarrassed about it, and rightly, because it is not only mean, as the House bill was, but it is meaner. It is cruel and costly.

It will be cruel and costly to the people of Connecticut, in human suffering and illness and disease, and it will be costly in failing to prevent and treat disease before it becomes more expensive. That is one of the lessons of public health policy today: Treat earlier; prevent before diseases or illnesses or conditions become even more costly. It is not only a way to save lives; it is a way to save money.

The voices and faces of Connecticut have been heard nowhere in this process because of its secrecy, because it has denied anyone in America, in fact, the opportunity to be heard, to comment, to make their views known. Speed and secrecy have been the watchwords, and they are a toxic recipe, and they should mean this discussion draft is dead on delivery today.

My constituents have actually come in overwhelming numbers to an emergency field hearing on healthcare that I began in Hartford earlier this week, Monday morning at 9 a.m. They came for 2 hours. There were many more than we expected on very short notice, and they were there to make sure their voices and faces were heard and seen. That is what I did earlier in the week when I entered their testimony into the RECORD of the Senate. I was proud to do so.

We are continuing that emergency field hearing, in fact, tomorrow at 1:30 in New Haven at the Aldermanic Chambers, which have even greater capacity. We are expecting many more, judging by the response to the email blast and invitations that we have sent, because people care about healthcare.

They should care because it is the difference between life and death, and this bill will be the difference between life and death for so many people in Connecticut. It will be death. Even though that statement may sound like hyperbole or exaggeration, the public health experts, the docs, and the hospitals that deliver healthcare in Connecticut and around the country know that it is true, and so do the people of Connecticut and our country.