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Senate

The Senate met at 10:01 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, You continue to reveal Your truth to those who will listen. Increase the devotion of our Senators to You as they strive to faithfully follow Your precepts. May love provide the motivation for their service to You and country.

Lord, inspire them to patiently wait for the unfolding of Your wise, loving, and powerful providence, refusing to become weary in doing what is right. Let Your peace be within their hearts as You calm their fears. Soothe their minds with the knowledge of Your providential care. May they encourage one another and build each other up.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 13, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COTTON thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the National Defense Authorization Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation to come before the Senate each and every year. It is, after all, the measure that authorizes the resources, the capabilities, and the pay and benefits that our men and women in uniform need to perform their mission. It is always worth remembering that our country fields an all-volunteer force. We owe a special obligation to all those who volunteer to fight on behalf of each and every one of us.

This year the bill, thanks to the good work of the Armed Services Committee under the leadership of Chairman McCAIN and Ranking Member REED, passed out of committee with unanimous bipartisan support. It recommends a national defense level of authorization that will allow the Department of Defense to begin to rebuild our military and deliver a well-deserved pay raise to our men and women in uniform. That is especially important today. Our Nation faces a myriad of challenges around the world from both state actors and terror organizations that threaten American national security. These growing pressures require that our forces have the training and resources they need to combat those challenges and win.

Yet, due to a combination of the last administration's actions and the harmful consequences of sequestration, our military does not have the resources it needs to address the many global challenges before us in either a comprehensive or responsible way. We have to keep faith with the force. So we have to correct this situation, and doing so means equipping our servicemembers with the weapons and the training they need to sufficiently defeat these threats.

As I said yesterday, this spring's government funding bill made an important down payment toward rebuilding our forces, and the NDAA bill before us can build upon that progress further. As we consider the NDAA, I remain firmly committed to the men and women in the Armed Forces, including to those stationed in my home State.

I am proud to represent three Army installations and the Kentucky Air and Army National Guard. One of these installations, Fort Campbell in Christian County, is home to the 101st Airborne Division, the 5th Special Forces Group, and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

Since World War II, the 101st Airborne Division has responded to threats around the globe, including, most recently, during multiple deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. This highly decorated unit, known as the Screaming Eagles, is contributing to keeping our Nation and national interests secure.

The NDAA will authorize the resources and capabilities to ensure that the troops at Fort Campbell, as part of the joint force, are prepared to continue responding to threats against our Nation.

Another Kentucky military installation is Fort Knox. With a distinguished history during both World Wars, Fort Knox has remained an essential Army facility with numerous responsibilities. Home to the Army's Cadet Command, Fort Knox hosts about 10,000 ROTC cadets every summer for Cadet Summer

- This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Training. Fort Knox is also home to the Army's Recruiting Command—a critical mission for increasing readiness—and in 2009, the Army Human Resources Command center relocated to Fort Knox, bringing with it an entirely new mission. Responsible for career management and development, the Human Resources Command represents a fundamental part of the Army.

The NDAA will reform the Pentagon to streamline administration, and it will also take action to improve troop morale and restructure the benefits that servicemembers and their families, like the many stationed in Kentucky, rely upon.

Kentucky is also home to the Blue Grass Army Depot, located in Madison County. As a munitions storage and disposal site, the Blue Grass Army Depot is responsible for the maintenance, storage, and demilitarization of both conventional and legacy chemical weapons. For decades I have fought to ensure that Congress allocated necessary funds to this installation to support the continuation of safe demilitarization efforts.

The NDAA will help us prepare for a wide range of threats, and munitions depots like the one in my State play an integral role in supporting our Nation's efforts to rebuild our military.

I am also proud to represent the Kentucky Air and Army National Guard, including the 123rd Airlift Wing, which deployed to assist in the relief efforts of Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma.

Last week, I had the privilege of welcoming the National Guard Association of the United States to Louisville for their annual conference. These citizen soldiers and airmen have proved time and again that during a crisis at home or abroad, the National Guard is always ready.

The NDAA legislation will authorize funds for military construction for National Guard units across the country, including in Kentucky to help the Guard carry out its critical missions.

As we continue to debate this bill, I will be thinking of these men and women at these military installations in Kentucky and of the Kentucky National Guard. I will cast my vote for what will help them receive the equipment, training, and resources they need to address the threats facing our Nation.

I know many colleagues feel the same way about their own States. I know many colleagues are determined to continue the hard work of rebuilding our military and restoring our combat readiness. Passing the bill before us will take us closer to that goal.

Also, Mr. President, later today the Senate will vote to table an amendment that would rescind the authorization for the use of military force, or AUMF, which authorizes the operations of forces currently battling al-Qaida, ISIL, and associated forces. Sixteen years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, our enemies are not

gone and our troops are still in harm's way.

Ayman al-Zawahiri remains hidden somewhere in the tribal areas of Pakistan, and he continues to lead al-Qaida as he plots to kill Americans and strike our homeland. Al-Qaida's affiliates have proved to be resilient and lethal. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has not ceased attempting to kill Americans. Its online magazine, Inspire, created a manual for terrorists and set an early example for what ISIL perfected in the use of social media and propaganda.

ISIL, of course, emerged from al-Qaida in Iraq, which continues to threaten the United States, as does the al-Nusra Front.

To rescind the AUMF that authorizes action against these forces—and to leave nothing but uncertainty for our deployed forces and our allies—is simply irresponsible, and it breaks faith with our volunteer force.

Al-Qaida and its affiliates have not been defeated. The myriad programs and operations that rely upon the AUMF for legal authority have contributed to keeping America safe.

Why would we vote to rescind the authority to defeat al-Qaida and leave our forces in the field questioning whether the elected officials here in Washington have any understanding as to what is occurring in the theaters of active hostilities? All that we do to defeat al-Qaida and ISIL rests on this AUMF.

We honored those killed on September 11 earlier this week. Let's honor those pursuing terrorists by defeating this amendment and ensuring they have the tools they need to keep us safe.

Once again, we have an all-volunteer force that protects all of us and fights for us. We cannot break faith with these brave men and women by removing the authority they rely upon to pursue the enemy and leaving them questioning whether elected officials in Washington understand what they are doing abroad.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks, there be 60 minutes of debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 2810, equally divided between Senator MCCAIN and Senator REED.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, as we continue work on NDAA, Demo-

crats are committed to working with our Republican colleagues in a constructive and productive way to finish the legislation.

The Senator from Arizona, the chairman of the committee, and the ranking member, the Senator from Rhode Island, have an outstanding working relationship that serves the body and the country well.

TAX REFORM

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I would like to spend a minute this morning talking about tax reform.

We Democrats want to actually achieve tax reform in this country, but in a way that gives some relief to middle-class families. We don't want to give big tax breaks to those at the very top while working families are struggling to make ends meet, and we don't want a reform to balloon the debt because we know down the road many Republicans will use the debt as an excuse to come after Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Our caucus is united on that front.

But the President this morning tweeted, "With Irma and Harvey devastation, Tax Cuts and Tax Reform is needed more than ever before." With all due respect to the President, a tax cut—particularly one for the very wealthy—is not going to help Florida or Texas rebuild from these storms. The President has it exactly backward in another way. We are about to add billions to the deficit to rebuild parts of our country, something we absolutely should do because it is an emergency, but that makes it even more important that tax reform be fiscally responsible and deficit neutral—not "Tax Cuts" as the President tweeted.

We would be wise to remember the Bush era when Congress passed a massive tax cut and put two wars on the national credit card. It exploded the deficit and debt. Ever since, many Republicans have been pointing to the size of the debt as a reason to cut back on earned benefits, such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

So, particularly after all of this emergency spending for Harvey and Irma, which we absolutely must do, we should not pile hundreds of billions, maybe trillions more on top of the debt. Tax reform should be deficit neutral.

We are willing to work with our Republican colleagues on tax reform insofar as they are working on tax reform that is deficit neutral and provides middle-class tax relief. I think that point was made by my Democratic colleagues who went to the White House last night. We will not go along with the tax scheme to lavish the wealthy with lower rates or even more carve-outs or a plan that explodes the debt and the deficit. Unfortunately, what we have heard of the Republican plan so far reveals that they are designing a tax plan that does exactly that—helps the wealthy above all. Case in point: