

Act, BCA, and \$31 billion above the administration's budget request. If the authorized funding level were to be appropriated, without changing the caps, it would trigger a 12-percent across-the-board sequester of Defense programs to bring spending levels back to the Fiscal Year 2018 levels contained in the Budget Control Act. A sequester of this size would hit us in readiness. It would hamper our day-to-day operations and maintenance. It would hurt our troops. Our military leaders do not support such a sequester.

If we really want to support our military and the men and women in uniform, we must immediately reach a bipartisan budget deal to lift the artificial and unrealistically low budget caps that were set in law in 2011. It is hard to get every Member of this Chamber to agree on anything, but on this, we can agree: Sequester has had a negative impact on our country that will impact a generation. We need to have an honest conversation about what the needs of our country are, both in military and domestic spending, and draft our spending bills accordingly.

I do appreciate the work that Senator McCAIN and Senator REED have put into this massive legislation. While my concerns with the funding levels authorized in this bill prevent me from supporting it, I do believe it reflects a strong commitment to the programs and policies that support our service members and their families. That must always be our goal.

I am pleased that the conferenced bill maintains support for medical research that matter so much to our servicemembers and to all Americans who benefit from the lifesaving results made possible through these programs. I am also grateful for the inclusion of language I authored that would pave the way for piloting a preventative mental health program for our National Guard and Reserve. Like physical health, we know that, with particular training and mental preparation, a person can be more resilient mentally when faced with challenges, and building that readiness is necessary to maintain the all-volunteer force. Progress is already being made with shifting to a preventative model in the Special Forces community. I hope to soon see similar progress in developing models for the members of our Guard and Reserve.

This final bill also includes several amendments I proposed to make sure U.S. efforts, especially in Afghanistan, are consistent with U.S. values. These include a provision aimed at improving the way the Departments of Defense and State provide human rights training to partner forces, and a requirement to establish a plan on how to improve our ability to help foreign governments protect civilians. The final bill also authorizes establishment of a position in the Department of Defense to oversee its implementation of and coordination with the Department of State on the Leahy law for human

rights vetting for Afghan security forces.

In 3 weeks and 1 day, the current resolution funding our government will expire; yet, instead of sitting down with Democrats to work together, just as we did earlier this year to enact the fiscal year 2017 omnibus spending bill, to find a path forward to raise the budget caps and fund our government for the rest of the fiscal year, Republicans are focused on a tax cut bill that will add \$1.5 trillion to the debt. Instead of acting responsibly and in the greatest traditions of the Senate, the majority is marching towards another partisan fight on the floor on a deeply flawed tax bill that will impact every corner of our economy.

Let's get to work for the American people. For months, have been calling for a bipartisan budget deal to lift the caps on both sides for both defense and nondefense programs based on parity. It is time to complete those negotiations. We owe it to the men and women who serve. We owe it to the American people.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be considered yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is on agreeing to the conference report.

The conference report was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume executive session.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time on the Coggins and Friedrich nominations is yielded back.

VOTE ON COGGINS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Coggins nomination?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. McCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN), and the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 96, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 280 Ex.]

YEAS—96

Alexander	Flake	Nelson
Baldwin	Gardner	Paul
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Perdue
Bennet	Graham	Peters
Blumenthal	Grassley	Portman
Blunt	Harris	Reed
Boozman	Hassan	Risch
Brown	Hatch	Roberts
Burr	Heinrich	Rounds
Cantwell	Heitkamp	Rubio
Capito	Heller	Sanders
Cardin	Hirono	Sasse
Carper	Hoeben	Schatz
Casey	Inhofe	Schumer
Cassidy	Isakson	Scott
Cochran	Johnson	Shaheen
Collins	Kaine	Shelby
Coons	Kennedy	Stabenow
Corker	King	Strange
Cornyn	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Lankford	Tester
Cotton	Leahy	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Cruz	Manchin	Toomey
Daines	Markey	Udall
Donnelly	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Duckworth	McConnell	Warner
Durbin	Merkley	Warren
Enzi	Moran	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murkowski	Wicker
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden
Fischer	Murray	Young

NOT VOTING—4

Booker
Franken

McCain
Menendez

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 481, Gregory Katsas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Gregory G. Katsas, of Virginia, to be United States Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The 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 Gregory G. Katsas, of Virginia, to be United States Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Mitch McConnell, Mike Rounds, Chuck Grassley, Richard Burr, Thom Tillis, John Hoeven, Ben Sasse, Roy Blunt, Johnny Isakson, Tom Cotton, Ron Johnson, Mike Lee, James Lankford, Jerry Moran, Lindsey Graham, Roger F. Wicker, Bob Corker.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, just a moment ago, the Senate acted to send the President one of the most important policy bills we consider each year—the National Defense Authorization Act.

Not only will this legislation authorize the resources, capabilities, pay, and benefits our men and women in uniform need to perform their missions, but this year's bill also goes further. It takes a notable step toward authorizing the resources needed to start rebuilding our military and restoring combat readiness.

It will help improve our missile defense capabilities and better prepare us to deal with cyber threats. It will authorize a well-deserved pay raise for our men and women in uniform while providing for continued reform of the benefits they and their families rely upon, and it will support the thousands of military servicemembers and families serving at military installations in Kentucky and in the Kentucky National Guard.

Further, this bill strives to bring reform to the Pentagon. As Senator MCCAIN said of the NDAA a few months ago, it will “[build] upon the sweeping reforms that Congress has passed in recent years.” He is right, and none of this would have been possible without him, without his leadership.

I think I can speak for everyone in this Chamber when I say that our friend Senator MCCAIN has served with distinction as chairman of the Armed Services Committee. I know the ranking member on his committee, Senator REED, thinks so as well. I know a lot of Members on both sides of the aisle do too.

Senator MCCAIN's commitment to our men and women in uniform is obvious, and it is unwavering. He respects these brave Americans immensely; he cares about them deeply; and he understands better than just about anyone how important a bill like this is to them, not only on a policy level but on a personal level as well.

The NDAA he worked so hard to pass has now cleared both Chambers. It is headed to the President's desk. Soon, it will become law. When it does, it will stand as yet another testament to the hard work, dedication, and unflappable determination of our colleague and friend Senator JOHN MCCAIN—truly, an American hero.

TRIBUTE TO BRIAN FOREST

Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, I would like to say a few words today about Brian Forest, a key member of my legislative office team, who is leaving the Senate after several years of outstanding work in the Senate.

Throughout his time in my office, Brian has been an invaluable asset, taking on the daily challenges and countless responsibilities which come with the territory for my staff, but Brian did not just handle it all—he excelled. Regardless of the pressures, the deadlines, or the obstacles—and, believe me, there were many—Brian always came through.

Now, regretfully, he has decided to take on a whole new set of challenges. I am confident he will continue to show the same skill, friendship, and good humor that endeared him to many in the Senate because that is who Brian is.

I know I speak for all of those on my staff when I say I am really sorry to see him go. I wish Brian well in his new adventures, and I thank him for his service to our Nation, to the Senate, and to me.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized as in morning business for such time as I shall consume.

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

MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, this week, after 3 years of planning and construction, we now will be dedicating tomorrow and officially opening the Museum of the Bible.

This is led by Steve Green of Hobby Lobby. We all remember Hobby Lobby of Oklahoma. Steve has been a friend of mine and his parents have been friends of mine for a long period of time. He is the chairman of the board of directors for this long-awaited museum that will allow visitors from not just this country but from all over the world—they will be coming here to see what it is all about and how this plays a pivotal role in our country's history. There is no better place than Washington, DC, in our Nation's Capitol, to remind us of the scope of the Bible's impact on our history and our narrative. It has been long-awaited.

Indeed, one of our Founding Fathers, Patrick Henry, was renowned for his readings of the Bible. He said at the end of his life: “This book is worth all the books that ever were printed, and it has been my misfortune that I never found time to read it with the proper attention and feeling till lately.”

He is the one—and not many people are aware that historians are relooking at the history of this country, and they are saying we could not have won that war. I mean you have to sometimes close your eyes and envision the greatest army on the face of this Earth com-

ing down with thundering marches, going through Boston, and going up to Lexington and Concord. There is no way in this world that a handful of trappers and hunters could have won that thing. Yet we know why, and he knew why, when you talk about Patrick Henry. They said: We are not strong enough. It can't be done.

There is one thing they overlooked, and that is the strength that comes from God that we had, and they didn't have. He said:

We are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. . . . armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who [reigns] over the destinies of nations; and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us.

And he did, and they fired that shot heard around the world.

I think that is really important today to think about because people come to this country and they want to know what makes America work.

I have been privileged to sponsor the African dinner every February, and people come in from all over Africa. They are always surprised when they come and they find out walking through the Capitol what real significance God and the Bible has to the history of this country. We are the largest Christian community in the world. We cannot and should not deny the role our Judeo-Christian values played in the formation of this country.

Our first President, George Washington, was steadfast in his belief of God, His law, and that liberty is God's gift. Washington's leadership was based on the conviction that Americans are entrusted by God to preserve basic freedoms established in the Constitution.

In a letter, Washington wrote, “We should be very cautious of violating the rights of conscience in others, ever considering that God alone is the judge of the hearts of men and to Him only in this case they are answerable.”

It is clear our Founding Fathers recognized and enshrined the importance of religious liberty, one of our most precious and foundational religious freedoms that allowed them to live their lives according to the teaching of the Bible.

The Bible's role in the founding of America is just one remarkable example of how the Bible has profoundly shaped world history. It has influenced cultures in every corner of the globe, and the Museum of the Bible, which is going to be opening tomorrow, pays tribute to its impact and intersectionality with the world religions.

Whether considering the Bible through a secular or faith-based lens, it is impossible to deny its impact on individuals, countries, and, indeed, all world history. The Museum of the