

It also includes authority for service Secretaries to extend by an additional year the time that the recruits may remain in the Delayed Entry Program to ensure that background checks are completed, so that they are not unnecessarily separated due to the fault of government. These are individuals who are here illegally. Their status is a result of their joining the MAVNI Program. If this program were terminated, we would lose their service to our military forces and they would be forced to leave the country.

Additionally, the bill permanently extends the special survivor indemnity allowance under the Survivor Benefit Plan, which was due to expire early next year. This ensures that widows of our veterans and servicemembers who die of service-connected causes will continue to receive their monthly benefit and authorizes annual cost-of-living adjustments to this benefit going forward.

With regard to military family care, the report authorizes \$50 million for impact aid, including \$40 million in supplemental impact aid and \$10 million—twice the usual amount—for military children with severe disabilities. For military families and for local school systems all across this country, this impact aid is absolutely essential. Furthermore, it requires the Department to improve pediatric care and related services for children of members of the military.

This bill will also improve military family readiness by addressing the shortage of qualified childcare workers, requiring that the realities of military life be considered in setting the operating hours of childcare centers, and by increasing flexibility for families when the military requires them to move.

Let me conclude by stating the obvious. The reason this bill passed was because of the extraordinary bipartisan leadership of Senator JOHN MCCAIN and also because of the extraordinary bipartisan leadership of Chairman MAC THORNBERRY of the House Armed Services Committee and Ranking Member ADAM SMITH. I look forward to working with them in the future.

Finally, the conference agreement would not have been possible without the hard work of the entire committee staff, who worked diligently to help finalize this agreement. I thank Chris Brose, Eric Swabb, and all the majority committee staff for their hard work this past year. On the minority side, I thank my staff director, Elizabeth King. I also thank Gary Leeling, Creighton Greene, Carolyn Chuhta, Maggie McNamara, Jonathan Clark, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Ozge Guzelsu, Jody Bennett, Kirk McConnell, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Arun Seraphin, and Jon Green.

Let me state the obvious: They do the work. Sometimes we get the credit, but the work is theirs. I am deeply appreciative of all of their efforts.

Again, let me indicate what is obvious to all our colleagues. Without the

inspirational, practical, dynamic, and unrelenting leadership of Chairman MCCAIN, we would not be at this moment today—the 56th consecutive passage of the National Defense Authorization Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, before addressing the topic that I want to take up—and I know it is one that is near and dear to the Presiding Officer's heart—which is rural healthcare, I want to express my admiration and thanks to Senator REED, the Senator from Rhode Island, and Senator MCCAIN for their incredible leadership of the Armed Services Committee. They show us what it is like to lead. They show us what it is like to take on difficult issues and to work out difficult problems, and I would like to express my appreciation to them for that.

I see the Senator—

Mr. SASSE. Will the Senator from Maine yield for 30 seconds?

Mr. KING. Absolutely.

Mr. SASSE. I would just like to associate myself with your comments, sir, in praising the ranking member.

Senator REED went through a long list of people who have gotten the NDAA across the finish line for more than half a century in a row.

As a newbie rookie in this body, I have to say that serving with the two of you on the Armed Services Committee is a real privilege and honor. Much of the body doesn't work very well right now, but that committee works incredibly well.

So I want to agree with the Senator from Maine that the ranking member is a huge part of why the Armed Services Committee works so well.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. KING. I thank the Senator.

I say to Senator REED, I appreciate your leadership.

Mr. REED. I thank the Senator from Maine and the Senator from the great State of Nebraska.

Mr. SASSE. I thought you were buying time.

Mr. REED. No. Once again, we have been following Senator MCCAIN, and he took us all the way. Thank you.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I did a mathematic calculation a couple of years ago, and it resulted in an interesting conclusion. The Senate is a rural body. Eighteen Members of the U.S. Senate represent a majority of Americans. That means 82 percent—or 82 out of 100 Senators—represent smaller States, more rural communities.

Today, I want to talk about a disastrous development that is headed for our rural communities that we have the capability to fix, and it is one we should fix sooner rather than later. I am talking about Federal funding for federally qualified health centers, which expired on October 1. Seventy percent of the funding for the FQHCs expired on October 1. One hundred per-

cent of the National Health Service Corps funding expired on October 1.

These are vital programs that serve rural America and provide incredibly important healthcare services. They are an overlooked part of our national healthcare system, in part because they are traditionally in rural and out-back locations.

In Maine, we have 20 centers and 70 facilities scattered all over our State, and they are providing services every day to over 200,000 people. This is a vital part of our healthcare system. Yet the funding expired at the end of September, and so far nothing has been done.

How important is it? In Maine, there are 1,700 employees at these facilities; a total economic impact of over \$300 million a year; \$8 million in State and local tax revenue and \$32 million in Federal tax revenue. They provide \$16 million worth of uncompensated care that goes to Maine people who need the help. They are efficient. In Maine, they have saved Medicaid over \$100 million, and \$257 million is the estimate for what they have saved the overall healthcare system. Again, FQHCs provide 1,700 jobs and support another 1,000 jobs in their communities.

But this isn't only about economics and economic development and jobs; it is about healthcare. One in six people in Maine gets their healthcare from FQHCs—210,000 people. They accept everybody who comes to their door. I have been to them all over the State. They use a sliding-fee scale for people who are low income, who don't have insurance, and they provide all manner of services. It depends on the center; different centers have different services. They have medical, behavioral health, dental, substance abuse treatment and support, case management, optometry, podiatry, OB/GYN, prescription assistance, outreach and enrollment, pharmacy, radiology, and school-based healthcare services. These are the healthcare providers for rural America. And it is not only Maine; it is across the country. There are 10,000 sites across the United States. Some 26 million patients are at risk.

Well, what is the big deal? The big deal is that people are going to lose their healthcare services. We estimate that in Maine, we are going to lose about 400 clinicians and administrative and support staff who will have to be laid off at the beginning of the year unless we solve this problem in the immediate future. At least 25 of these sites will be forced to close, and we believe there will be almost 30,000 Maine residents who will lose access to their healthcare system.

Most of the FQHCs—federally qualified health centers—are getting by on their funding from last year, so the expiration of the funding hasn't hit them yet, but it will begin to hit them on January 1. That is what we have to respond to.

It is also already having an effect just by creating uncertainty. I got an

impassioned letter from the leader of one of our centers in Maine about the fact that they have been very diligently recruiting a dentist to come to their community. Dentists are very hard to come by in rural America. They had one who was ready to come, and then suddenly they heard about the uncertainty surrounding the funding—that it may or may not come through—and that dentist is now reconsidering their decision to go to this Maine community. That is a tragedy. That is a tragedy for the people of that town, where these services are literally not available.

So what does it matter? It matters because we are talking about people losing their healthcare services.

This has never been a partisan issue. I don't think there is a heck of a lot of debate around here about the importance of FQHCs and that we need to get them refunded. In fact, the Presiding Officer and Senator STABENOW have sponsored a bill, the CHIME Act, that would resolve this issue. We just need to get it on the floor and get it done.

We have proved today by the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act that we can take major issues, bring them to the floor, and move them forward, especially those that aren't particularly controversial. But my concern is that even though there doesn't seem to be controversy, it is just not happening, and now our centers are having to make plans for layoffs, for closures, and for closing their doors to the people who need the care.

This is something we can do. This is something we can resolve. It is within our power. The legislation is ready to go, and we should get this done.

We are leaving today for the Thanksgiving holiday, but if we leave at the end of the year and haven't done this, it will be a tragedy for rural America. It will be a betrayal of rural America. It will be a betrayal of our constituents.

All of us have been to these centers and seen the care that they provide, the caring that they provide, the passion that the people bring to the services in their communities, and how much they mean to their communities. This is one of the best Federal programs ever created, and it has always been supported on a bipartisan basis.

I urge my colleagues today to prepare ourselves to get this done as soon as we possibly can when we get back after Thanksgiving. We have so much to be thankful for, and I want my people in Maine to realize that they can be thankful for those health centers that are literally lifelines in their communities and mean so much to them. I believe this is something we can and should and will do.

Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for being a leader on this issue.

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.

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

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 461, 462, 464, 478, 479, 480, 488, and 490.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Joseph Kernan, of Florida, to be Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; Guy B. Roberts, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; Robert L. Wilkie, of North Carolina, to be Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; Robert Behler, of Pennsylvania, to be Director of Operational Test and Evaluation, Department of Defense; Thomas B. Modly, of Maryland, to be Under Secretary of the Navy; James F. Geurts, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Navy; Robert H. McMahon, of Georgia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; and Shon J. Manasco, of Texas, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Air Force.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Kernan, Roberts, Wilkie, Behler, Modly, Geurts, McMahon, and Manasco nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 491, 492, 493, 494, and all nominations placed on the Secretary's desk.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Rebecca Eliza Gonzales, of Texas, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-

Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Lesotho; Lisa A. Johnson, of Washington, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Namibia; Irwin Steven Goldstein, of New York, to be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy; Sean P. Lawler, of Maryland, to be Chief of Protocol, and to have the rank of Ambassador during his tenure of service; PN1199 FOREIGN SERVICE nominations (169) beginning Lisa-Felicia Afi Akorli, and ending Stephanie P. Wilson, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD of November 1, 2017; and PN1200 FOREIGN SERVICE nominations (4) beginning John R. Bass, II, and ending Sung Y. Kim, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD of November 1, 2017.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Gonzales, Johnson, Goldstein, and Lawler nominations and all nominations placed on the Secretary's desk in the Foreign Service en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 475, 476, and 477.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of James Thomas Abbott, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority for a term of five years expiring July 1, 2020; Colleen Kiko, of North Dakota, to be a Member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority for a term of five years expiring July 29, 2022; and Ernest W. Dubester, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority for a term of five years expiring July 1, 2019.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.