

they have the best idea of the reality of care at their facilities.

I appreciate the work of my colleagues, Senator JAMES LANKFORD, Congressman MARKWAYNE MULLIN, and Congressman STEVE RUSSELL. It turned out to be a real good team, and we are able to get these things done. We are already starting to see real progress in improving the veterans' care in Oklahoma and across the country because as we are improving the system we had in Oklahoma, that same system can be improved in Nebraska or any other State.

We need to get our VA facilities from their current ratings to the highest standard. The highest standard rating is five stars. We are now up to three stars in Oklahoma. We were at one star when we first discovered this problem on that fateful day 2 years ago today in an article in USA TODAY.

President Trump will continue to be an important partner for Oklahoma as we continue to improve our veterans care.

#### SUPPORTING OUR MILITARY

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, President Trump's commitment to our veterans is only matched by his commitment to our servicemembers and our national security. You can't really segregate it out and say, well, we are going to take care of our veterans' activities and then still say we are not going to allow our country to have the national security they fought so hard for.

We saw that earlier this week when the President outlined his national security strategy, charting a new course for American foreign policy, leaving behind the failed policies of the Obama administration. With his national security strategy, President Trump has been clear that he is committed to protecting the homeland, promoting American prosperity, and advancing peace through strength. Have you ever heard that before, peace through strength? I am one of the few who is old enough around here who remember our great President we had who talked about peace through strength when he had to rebuild the military after the Carter administration. It was actually as bad—or as downgraded as our military has become from the last administration.

Now he is asserting America's leadership in the free world. We saw how under President Obama the military was forced to divert resources for priorities that weren't even about defending America. He used the military to advance his liberal agenda, which led to the wasteful spending on what they call the green Navy and the green bullets. The idea that climate change was the largest threat to our national security, all of that has changed and not a moment too soon.

President Trump is focused on what matters, rightfully taking out things like just worrying about climate

change as opposed to rebuilding our military, and he is building it at a very rapid rate right now.

We passed the bill, the Defense authorization bill, and we have made a great start on this.

Now, when the President came into office, our military was facing a readiness crisis, and Americans didn't really understand this. They didn't know. They had not been told this. We had a biased media that didn't allow this information to get out. As an example, our Air Force today, right now, is short 1,500 pilots, and 1,300 of those are actually fighter pilots. Only 50 percent of the Air Force squadrons are trained and ready to conduct all of their assigned missions. I have to repeat that. Only 50 percent of our Air Force squadrons are trained and ready to defend America.

The Navy is the smallest and least ready it has been in years. It currently can only meet 40 percent of the demand for regional combat. The commanders in the field include only enough personnel to man six and a half of our nine carrier air wing.

A carrier air wing is something a lot of people are not familiar with. A carrier air wing has approximately 75 combat aircraft. Currently, we have manned only 6½ wings and are 8,000 sailors short.

This is an air wing. They have F-18s, they have EA-18s, they have F-35s, they have C-2As. Again, just a little over half of ours are actually ready. Well, that is the problem we are faced with right now. More than half of the Navy's F-18s are grounded because they are awaiting maintenance or lack of necessary parts. If you look at our Marines, our Marines are using F-18s, and 62 percent of F-18s will not fly. People are just shocked when they find out about it. It is because we don't have the spare parts. Well, we are getting busy on that. We are going to make sure we correct those problems.

The Army has said that only about one-third of their brigade combat teams, one-fourth of their air aviation brigades, and one-half of their division headquarters are currently ready.

A brigade combat team consists of 7 battalions, approximately 4,500 students. I wish I had time to come up with a chart on this, but the carrier wing is one that is absolutely necessary to get folks straight, and we plan on doing that.

Faced with the most dangerous threats I have seen in my lifetime, these are critical gaps in our military we simply cannot accept.

I often say, when I look back at the good old days of the Cold War, where we had two superpowers—and the superpowers, we knew what they had, they knew what we had. It is totally different now.

You have a country like North Korea, which has demonstrated that they have the capacity now to reach an American city. We learned that on November 28, when they actually dem-

onstrated a range that would reach one of our continental U.S. cities.

They tried to give us a little bit of comfort in saying, well, we don't know that they would be able to carry a warhead. We don't think they would have the capacity to do that. Well, we don't know that. That is not much comfort.

When they say: We don't have the capacity to be accurate on a reentry because of what a missile has to go through on a reentry, well, that is not very comforting that this would happen.

Anyway, the NDAA—the bill we passed, that the President signed into law—would be a good step in correcting the readiness shortfalls. I look forward to continuing to work with him on this critical process.

We have a committee that already is having hearings about the problems we are having. We had one, actually, in the subcommittee hearing I chaired just this week. We are busy correcting these problems.

Meanwhile, back to our VA problems in Oklahoma, we put two new great directors in the VA clinics. We have a level of veterans' care Oklahomans are proud of. Only yesterday, President Trump signed the Enhancing Veteran Care Act to ensure that we continue to give our veterans the best care. They deserve it, and they are going to get it.

At the same time, we are going to restore and rebuild the military as our Nation's No. 1 priority. Our troops deserve it, and they are going to get it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from South Carolina.

#### TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. President.

This week, we took a major step toward helping the middle- and working-class family by passing the first significant tax reform package in a generation.

I wanted to take a few minutes to thank a lot of folks for their efforts, hard work, and dedication to this process. At the Member level, both Leader McCONNELL and Chairman HATCH did amazing work leading us through this process.

I also had the privilege of working as part of the Core 4, with PAT TOOMEY, JOHN THUNE, and ROB PORTMAN, over the past year developing this bill. Those three guys are some of the hardest working Members we have.

I also thank MARCO RUBIO for his dedication to improving the child tax credit, as well as MIKE LEE and Ivanka Trump.

We were also able to include my Investing in Opportunity Act as a part of the legislation. This is legislation that will help distressed communities throughout the country. More than 50 million Americans today live in those distressed communities, and the Investing in Opportunity Act can usher

in trillions of dollars of investment to improve the quality of life and create a spark in some of the most challenging areas of our country economically.

I thank my House sponsor of the bill, PAT TIBERI, and my Democratic co-sponsors, Corey Booker and RON KIND.

We could not have gotten this far without the hard work and dedication of the Finance Committee staff. I thank, in particular, Jay, Mark, Jeff, Jenn, as well as the entire Finance team for their amazing work.

I also want to take a few minutes to thank my staff. I have been blessed with an amazing staff here on Capitol Hill, one of the hardest working staffs I have ever seen. I want to start off by thanking my tax guru, Shay Hawkins, who has done a tremendous job of leading us through this process—fielding thousands of calls and responding to tens of thousands of emails. I would also like to thank my LD, Charles Cogar, for his dedication and his leadership through this time. My chief of staff, Jennifer DeCasper, has done an amazing job of making sure we stayed focused on the objective. The objective was not to simply pass legislation; the objective was, in fact, to change lives where we live, to help the average American experience a little more hope, a little more opportunity by keeping a little more of their money. I also thank my commerce director who has done a fabulous job, Sean Smith, in making sure we communicated effectively the message of hope and opportunity, and my scheduler, Brie Kelly. Thank God for someone who could keep me moving in the right direction. One of the hardest jobs in Washington is being a scheduler for a Member, and being a scheduler for this Member is perhaps the hardest job of scheduling.

My entire team worked diligently, long hours, but that is why we are here. We are here to work long hours, but to produce results—unparalleled results—that will make the American people have just a little more confidence in their elected officials.

Finally, I have to thank the good people of South Carolina. I was first elected to Congress in 2010, and one of my first pieces of legislation was the Tax Reform Act of 2011—February of 2011—to lower the corporate tax rate and to work on restructuring our Tax Code.

Since my first days in Congress, I have been working on this issue. The good people of South Carolina allowed me to serve as a Senator. I was elected in 2014 and reelected in 2016. I will continue to make sure my focus is back at home, where the good South Carolinians who elected me have given me a great privilege.

I will focus on the fact that our work, our dedication should be focused on those folks. The good news is, during this holiday season, we believe this tax reform package will be an early Christmas present.

Let me just say to all the folks, no matter what side of the aisle you are

on, no matter where you live in this country, we are blessed—truly blessed—to live in the greatest country on God's green Earth. Merry Christmas, and may the good Lord bless us with an amazing new year.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

#### POWER ACT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as we all know, more and more brave women are speaking out about the abuse that has been reported in the papers—abuse by the powerful, in many cases. I want to say at the outset that the country applauds these women for their courage and for setting an example for others.

Some of the stories we have heard about involve sexual harassment, but some of the other stories also appear to involve even more serious crimes, including domestic violence and sexual assault, which is an incredibly important issue that often gets under-reported all across the country. As a result of these news stories, I am certainly hopeful these kinds of problems—the domestic violence problems we have in America—are going to start to receive the attention they need and deserve.

Just as we are seeing more men fired from jobs because of sexual harassment and assault, we also need to see more get the punishment they deserve, in a court of law, for violent abuse. We also need to make sure victims are protected and that they have an advocate—a lawyer—who is on their side in these cases.

Unfortunately, many who are suffering from domestic abuse and sexual assault can't afford attorneys to file charges or, importantly, to even protect themselves and their families, their kids. Here is the big irony: When someone is charged with a crime—say a sexual assault crime, say an accused rapist—that person gets a Sixth Amendment right to counsel under the U.S. Constitution. So the perpetrator gets the right to a lawyer. What does the victim get? The victim gets nothing—no attorney, no right to an attorney.

Think about that. An accused rapist gets a lawyer under the Constitution and the victim gets nothing. In fact, what they often get, in terms of crimes, are prosecutors, if it is a criminal case. Prosecutors do a good job, but they are often looking to score a win rather than looking out for the victim and the survivor. If it is a civil case, survivors usually go without attorneys.

I believe this is wrong. Fortunately, we have been working on this in this body. We have a bill to change that. Senator HEITKAMP and I introduced a bill in the Senate that was passed unanimously by this body several months ago—and actually passed it last Congress as well—called the Pro

bono Work to Empower and Represent Act, known as the POWER Act. Congressman JOE KENNEDY in the House has introduced a companion bill where it likewise has enjoyed broad bipartisan support. Some of the most conservative Republicans and some of the most liberal Democrats are showing a broad array of support in the House just as it has enjoyed in the Senate.

When it passes through both Chambers, the bill will be a robust first step in making more lawyers available, working on a pro bono basis for victims and survivors who can't afford representation. There are thousands—tens of thousands—who fall into that category, unfortunately.

So what is the problem we are trying to solve? Domestic violence and sexual assault happens every hour, every day, in every part of our country. According to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control, roughly 25 percent of American women will be victims of domestic assault in their lifetimes—one in four—25 percent. That is a horrendous statistic. Every day in the United States, on average, three women are killed by a current or former intimate partner, according to the National Network to End Domestic Violence. That is also a shocking, horrendous statistic.

No place is immune. This kind of violence happens in small towns, in big cities, on college campuses, and in suburban homes. This violence transcends political affiliation, race, and socio-economic status. I know a number of my colleagues have watched as I like to come to the Senate floor and talk about my State—the great State of Alaska—and I like to talk about how many things are so wonderful about Alaska. One thing that isn't wonderful about Alaska is, we have the highest rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the country. So this is certainly happening in my State, and it is one of the reasons I care so much about this issue. It is happening in every State—every State represented in the U.S. Senate.

There are no simple solutions to combat this issue of nationwide domestic violence, but experts do agree that securing a lawyer for victims is one of the best ways, if not the best way, to get victims and survivors out of their difficult situation—out of what often is a cycle of violence—to get them shelter, housing, and medical care, and protective orders.

Studies have shown that when an abused victim is represented by an attorney, their ability to break out of the cycle of violence increases dramatically. One study found that 83 percent of victims represented by a lawyer were able to obtain a protective order compared to just 32 percent in domestic violence situations when they weren't represented by an attorney.

Not only would more legal representation help victims and survivors of abuse, but it would also help protect children. In these situations, children