

Our veterans deserve better. That is why the bipartisan MISSION Act is so vitally important. It helps fix many of the problems our veterans still face as they try to access the healthcare services they need.

Rural veterans will get greater, easier, and quicker access to healthcare. Telemedicine services will be strengthened. The oversight of opioid prescriptions will be increased. There will be greater accountability in how companies like Health Net manage this new program. Finally, it will help the VA's medical professional shortage through scholarship and loan repayment programs for medical and dental students who commit to serving in the VA.

The problems plaguing the VA aren't just occasional news stories; they are the daily reality for Montana veterans. Enough is enough.

Our Nation has a lot of work to do to fulfill the promises we have made to our veterans. The MISSION Act is an important step forward. I am proud I have helped get this bill across the finish line and on to President Trump's desk.

I look forward to honoring our veterans' service by standing with President Trump today as he signs this important bill into law.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SENATE SCHEDULE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday I announced that the Senate's regularly scheduled August recess will not occur this year. Members will be able to meet with our constituents during a standard 1-week State work period at the beginning of the month, and then we will come right back here and get back to work.

The reason is simple: We have too much left to do for the American people.

Sixteen months into the Trump administration, Senate Democrats persist in their unprecedented campaign to obstruct the President's nominees for a wide array of executive and judicial positions.

It is time for a little historic perspective.

During President Obama's first 2 years, the Senate needed only 12 cloture votes on nominations. In President George W. Bush's first 2 years, there were four cloture votes on nominations and for President Clinton, just eight. But less than a year and a half into this administration, the Democratic minority has stalled progress through—listen to this—101 cloture votes, and counting, on nominations—101 cloture votes.

This used to be a rare tool of last resort, used only in a tiny handful of cases. Well, not these days. In many cases, the nominees in question are completely without controversy. Not a single Senator in either party voted

against confirming Robert Wier or Fernando Rodriguez to serve as district court judges just yesterday. They were both confirmed unanimously. So were Walter Counts and Karen Scholer, two more district judges we considered back in January. But Senate Democrats forced us to invoke cloture on each of these nominees and then made sure they soaked up Senate floor time, even though literally no Senator opposed them.

This isn't due diligence. It certainly isn't good government. It is what happens when our friends across the aisle put political slogans about "the resistance" ahead of the country's needs.

We have gotten a great deal done this Congress. We have bolstered our economy with historic tax reform and regulatory reform. We have delivered critical resources to communities afflicted by the opioid crisis, with more on the way. We have undone harmful spending caps to fully equip our military. We have taken action to combat human trafficking and school violence. We have repealed ObamaCare's individual mandate tax and its Independent Payment Advisory Board and delayed several other healthcare taxes.

Republicans are still working to do more. We need to confirm more of the President's team and judicial nominees. We need to take up regular appropriations bills. We need to tackle legislative priorities like the water infrastructure bill, the farm bill, the Defense bill, and many others.

So the Senate will remain in session in August. We will work on legislation. We will confirm more nominees.

We will keep delivering on the agenda that has already done so much to make America stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

On another matter, Mr. President, I was honored to meet a number of Kentucky veterans at the World War II Memorial and welcome them to Washington.

My father fought in World War II, so I was particularly grateful to hear these veterans' stories and share their special moments of remembrance. One man I talked to is 100 years old. He was in the initial invasion when we finally got on offense in North Africa. He fought in every theater in Europe and was there when the Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945. He landed at Omaha Beach, but he said it was 2 days after the invasion, so there was a second wave of soldiers coming in after the invasion, and there are stories and stories of people like that.

I had a chance to thank each of them, as well as the Honor Flight Bluegrass organization, which takes on the logistical and financial burdens so that veterans can travel to their monuments at no personal cost.

I was especially glad this opportunity came today, on the 74th anniversary of the D-day invasion. On June 6, 1944, the free world embarked on a daring mission of historic proportions. With con-

viction, bravery, and patriotism, the "greatest generation" ran into the breach.

Many paid the ultimate price on D-day, but their bravery paved the road to victory in Europe. Allied troops stared down the most pernicious evil the modern world had ever seen—and prevailed.

The world has changed in the years since D-day, but some things haven't changed at all. We still honor the sacrifices of those who ran into the breach.

Today, the President will sign into law the VA MISSION Act that Congress passed last month. It is a set of major improvements in the way we care for American veterans—increasing their choices and expanding access to care for those who sacrificed to serve.

Here is something else that hasn't changed: We still call on brave men and women to take on a wide array of difficult missions.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, soon the Senate will take up the John S. McCain 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. It is the result of months of serious bipartisan work by the Armed Services Committee, and it is a major step toward delivering the resources our men and women in uniform need to tackle the challenges of today—challenges like an emboldened Iran, the destabilizing force it abets in the Middle East; challenges like the expanding capabilities of Russia and China in this era of renewed great power competition.

This moment requires that we support our All-Volunteer Armed Forces with the tools, training, equipment, and resources they need to support our allies, to defend the homeland, and secure the peace. Secretary Mattis's new national defense strategy spells out what our Nation must do.

Our landmark budget agreement this year set aside the funds to put that plan into action, and now, with this NDAA, Congress will take the next step toward getting those resources where they need to be. Its authorizations include quality-of-life improvements for servicemembers and their families, land, sea, and air weapons systems, and reforms to the acquisitions process to keep America's military on the cutting edge.

With bipartisan action on the NDAA, the Senate will ensure that the next generation of American warfighters is every bit as ready as the "greatest generation" to write a new chapter of courageous service.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING BOBBY KENNEDY

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise to honor the life and legacy of an American treasure, Bobby Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy lived his life with courage and conviction, never afraid to challenge a divided nation to face its moral failings. Bobby challenged us all to take a step back from the stale, cheap politics of the moment and to do better by each other. His service to this Nation will never be forgotten.

Today, 50 years after he was brutally assassinated, we pause to acknowledge the brilliance and beauty that rested in his vision of America—a vision that led him to seek the highest office in this land, a vision of love, wisdom, compassion, and justice. Bobby believed we all have a shared responsibility to leave this world just a little bit better off than when we came.

“Few will have the greatness to bend history itself,” he once said, “but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total; of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.”

History may not repeat, but it often rhymes. Conditions are different now, but a lot of the anxiety and tension that swept through this country in 1968, at the height of Bobby’s political career, echoes the anxiety of today, especially the economic anxiety felt by millions of Americans who are working harder than ever but feel opportunity slipping away from themselves and their children.

Too often our political and business leaders refuse to see this. Instead, they hide behind macroeconomic statistics, using them as a shield to dismiss the concerns of the American people as faulty, wrongheaded, or even nonexistent. Robert Kennedy understood that America’s national economy is not the same as the economic well-being of its people. In a 1968 speech at the University of Kansas, he spoke eloquently about the differences between them, and here is what he said:

[Our] Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman’s rifle and Speck’s knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country.

It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans.

Consider three statistics: corporate profits, the stock market, and unem-

ployment. Today, corporate profits are up—corporate profits that count gun sales from manufacturers whose weapons are used to massacre children in our schools and our streets, corporate profits that count revenues from drug companies when they quadruple prices for the sick and the desperate, corporate profits that count revenues of banks like Wells Fargo as they rip off millions of American consumers.

The stock market is up as giant companies pocket trillions in taxpayer money stolen from middle-class families. The market is up as CEOs shut down plants and factories in the United States and move them overseas. The market is up as business leaders, flush with cash, turn their backs on workers while they plow millions and even billions into stock buybacks to goose investors’ returns and CEOs’ bonuses.

Unemployment is down, but wages have barely budged in a generation. Unemployment is down, but for millions of people, the exploding costs for housing, for healthcare, for childcare mean that it now takes two jobs to do what one job covered a generation ago. Unemployment is down, but the numbers fail to count the millions living in rural and urban American communities alike that have given up the search for a job.

Corporate profits, the stock market, unemployment—these statistics tell us everything about the American economy, but they tell us very little about the lived experiences of today’s Americans. They do not speak to the citizen who fears police violence or the police officer who fears gang violence or the immigrant who cannot speak out about sexual assault at the hands of her boss or the toxic rhetoric flowing through our politics and seeking to turn neighbor against neighbor. They do not account for our devotion to our communities, to our churches, to our children. They tell us virtually nothing about our trials, our challenges, our hopes, or our principles.

Robert Kennedy understood this. He knew we cannot simply run our economy for those at the top and assume it will solve America’s problems. In the intervening years since his speech, America ran that experiment anyway and watched it fail miserably.

It is time to try something different. It is time to challenge each of us to do better by each other, to see the dignity in one another, to put our values first. I believe together we can make that Robert Kennedy’s legacy, and I am proud to fight for it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I rise today in support of Annemarie Carney Axon to be U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Alabama.

Annemarie Axon is exceptionally qualified to be a U.S. district judge. Her strong, respectful temperament and commitment to impartiality prove that she is well-suited for this esteemed position.

Ms. Axon has spent her entire career devoted to the law. She is presently a

member of Wallace, Jordan, Ratcliff, & Brandt, LLC, in Birmingham, AL, where she focuses on fiduciary and probate litigation. Prior to her current role, she served as assistant vice president at AmSouth Bank. She began her legal career in 2000 as an associate at the firm Edwards & Angell, LLP, in Rhode Island.

Axon is a member of both the Alabama and Rhode Island State Bar Associations and represents a broad range of clients including individual and corporate fiduciaries and financial institutions in both State and Federal court.

In addition to her experience in the courtroom, Axon serves as the president of the YWCA Junior Board, as well as the Girls on the Run board of directors. She is also a member of the Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation Board and a member of the American Cancer Society.

Following her initial nomination in July 2017, Ms. Axon appeared before the Judiciary Committee for consideration. During the hearing, Axon stressed the importance of certain characteristics required to serve as a judge, including the ability to be fair, open-minded, courteous, and respectful to the attorneys and parties in each case. The committee favorably reported her nomination in October 2017.

I believe Annemarie Axon exemplifies all of the characteristics of a proper judge. I am confident that she will base her decisions on the law above all else, despite the outcome of each case.

Confirmation of her nomination is beyond imperative, as the swift confirmation of district judges plays a vital role in the functioning ability of the U.S. judicial system.

By confirming Annemarie Axon to be a U.S. district judge, Congress is allowing the work of the U.S. judicial branch to continue in a manner that will best serve our Nation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Under the previous order, all postcloture time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Axon nomination?

Mr. COTTON. 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 legislative 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 Delaware (Mr. COONS), the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 83, nays 11, as follows: