

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING
BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert L. King, of Kentucky, to be Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, Department of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business.

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

CHINA

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I call to the Senators' attention today a disturbing article in the June 29, 2019, issue of *The Economist*, on pages 36 and 37. It is about the military buildup in China and the way it affects the United States. It says:

Xi Jinping wants China's armed forces to be "world class" by 2050. He has done more to achieve this than any of his predecessors.

I will quote from the lead of this article in *The Economist*.

Over the past decade, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been lavished with money and arms. China's military spending rose by 83 percent in real terms between 2009 and 2018, by far the largest growth spurt in any big country. The splurge has enabled China to deploy precision missiles and anti-satellite weapons that challenge American supremacy in the western Pacific. China's leader, Xi Jinping, says his "Chinese dream" includes a "dream of a strong armed forces". That, he says, involves "modernising" the PLA by 2035 and making it "world-class"—in other words, America-beating—by mid-century. He has been making a lot of progress.

In the second column of this article, it goes on to say:

He has done more in the past three years to reform the PLA than any leader since Deng Xiaoping.

This quote is not from some advocate of defense spending but is from one of the leading publications, *The Economist*.

I say to my colleagues, we need to be mindful of the threat that is arising to the United States from around the globe—not only from China, as I have just read, but also from Vladimir Putin's Russia, from Iran, and from international terrorism. There is a deteriorating security situation in almost every sector of the globe. The fact that the United States has always been super supreme and able to defend

the free peoples of this world is being challenged. We can no longer assume that any war would never be a fair fight. That has been the goal of the United States if we have to go to war. And we want to avoid war. But the best way, in our judgment, as a national strategy down through the decades, to avoid conflict of any kind is to make sure that if America ever gets in a fight, it will not be a fair fight; it will be a fight where we have overwhelming superiority, so no one will dare challenge the sea lanes and the freedom that we stand for in the United States of America. That is being challenged today.

I would submit to you that it is a good time for the United States to point out that we passed the National Defense Authorization Act—the NDAA—on a huge bipartisan basis. It was 80-something votes to 8. It is just unbelievable, the way we came together under the leadership of Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED, his Democratic counterpart, working together as professionals, as legislators, and as Americans to send a strong statement that we need to go from the \$700 billion that was spent last fiscal year to \$750 billion to give our troops the pay raise they need, to recognize the sacrifice they have made, and to give our military—the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines—the tools they need, the equipment they need, and the innovation and manufacturing they need to get us where we need to go.

We went through a 7- or 8-year period when—we ought to all be ashamed because our fingerprints are all on it, those of us who were in office at the time. The distinguished Presiding Officer was not a Member of the Senate at that time, but those of us who were, we got our fingerprints on it, Republicans and Democrats. Somehow, try though we might, say what we might, we were unable to prevent sequestration from happening—an unthinkable result. The military branches couldn't believe this was happening and couldn't believe Congress would be so irresponsible, but somehow we were.

We have righted the ship over the past 2 years. It would be unthinkable to me, my fellow Americans, after making the progress to get back on the right track and return to responsible defense spending and responsible stewardship of our national security, if somehow we heeded some voices we have been hearing in Washington, DC, and around the country during the past few days about a continuing resolution, perhaps—maybe a continuing resolution of an entire year. The thinking there is, well, we just do a continuing resolution, and that will amount to level spending, and we can live with that.

I just left a hearing on the confirmation of GEN Mark Milley as the next, I hope, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I asked him about that. Would a continuing resolution simply

be level spending, and might we be able to live with that? And he absolutely made the point which we all know if we study the law. It is way more than level spending. It stops innovation. It stops the new starts. It stops everything that we planned in the NDAA, which we passed with an overwhelming bipartisan vote, and it makes it against the law for the shipbuilders to do anything new and for the people working on our next-generation aircraft to do anything new. It stops them in their tracks. It creates uncertainty in every branch of the military. And then we have to pay millions and billions to get back going again. It is an unthinkable result. Surely we can avoid that as Republicans and Democrats.

Let me quote now-retired Secretary Mattis. When he was asked about this very subject on a recent occasion, Secretary Mattis said this:

I cannot overstate the impact to our troops' morale from all this uncertainty. The combination of rapidly changing technology, the negative impact on military readiness resulting from the longest continuous stretch of combat in our Nation's history, and insufficient funding have created an overstretched and under-resourced military.

According to Secretary Mattis, "Under continuing resolutions, we actually lose ground."

We need a budget deal. We need a 2-year budget deal, as we have had in the past. Give our defense leaders, the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries, as well as the ones who put on the uniform and agreed, for a career, to put themselves in harm's way—give them the certainty they need in order to defend against the threats *The Economist* talked about and the threats General Mattis talked about. Give them that certainty.

A new CR—a continuing resolution—would prevent us from having that certainty. It would delay maintenance for the *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier. It would prevent a guided missile frigate program we already authorized from even starting. This would happen September 30 if we go to a continuing resolution. It would cripple research and development, and it would prevent the Pentagon from aligning its funding with upcoming priorities.

We need to realize a fact of life around here. I didn't exactly get my way in the election last November. If I had my druthers, the House of Representatives would have remained in Republican hands, with a Republican Speaker and a Republican Chair. The voters, in their wisdom, decided to vote for divided government last November.

Our team was elected to continue leadership in the U.S. Senate. The Democratic team was elected to leadership in the House of Representatives. And I can assure you, if I were writing a defense appropriations bill, which is half of discretionary spending, and all of the other appropriations bills, which is so-called nondefense discretionary, it would look far different from the bill

Speaker NANCY PELOSI proposes to write. I can assure you that it would look different and that we would have less domestic spending. But the fact of life is that MITCH MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, is the one who guides legislation here in the Senate, and NANCY PELOSI, a Democrat from California, is the one who guides legislation on the floor of the House of Representatives, and if we get a bill passed, we are going to have to get a compromise bill passed. If anybody within the sound of my voice doesn't realize this, they don't understand government. They don't understand the dynamics that have taken place since Philadelphia in 1776 and Philadelphia again in 1787, where give-and-take had to occur, but we moved things along for the greater good.

We can come to an agreement, or we can show ourselves to Vladimir Putin's Russia as unable to govern adequately, and we can show ourselves to Xi Jinping's China as unable to make the tough decisions to protect Americans. We have that choice, and we have a willingness on this side of the aisle and on the other side of the aisle. I was with some of my Democratic and Republican friends from the other body just yesterday. I think there is the willingness there. We are going to have to have an agreement that the administration will sign on to because the President's signature has to be affixed to this.

Now is the time—July 11, 2019—to get this decision made, before we leave for August. I would hope we wouldn't leave for August until we get that number agreed to. We come back after Labor Day, and then it is brinksmanship, and then suddenly it is shutdown city, and that is being threatened. Russia knows this, the Iranian leadership knows this, and China knows this. Let's do it now.

So I call on the Democratic and Republican leadership in the House, I call on our leadership, and I call on our President to get down to business in the next few days. Let's go ahead and make this decision that we know will eventually have to be made, make a responsible decision and send a message to the rest of the world that we intend to take care of our security.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, first of all, let me say that I couldn't agree more with the Senator from Mississippi, Mr. WICKER, than I do. His points are exactly right. A democracy is finding a way forward. It is not finding your way forward necessarily. It is obviously finding as much of your way forward as you can find. But it is finding a way forward.

Clearly, a top priority of the Federal Government is to defend the country. It is my top priority. I think I would be safe in suggesting it is Senator WICKER's top priority. And it is an important priority for our friends on the other side, but it may not be quite the same priority on the other side.

For this to work, the House and the Senate have to work together and the White House has to work together to come up with just that spending number. Once we have the number that we are going to spend, having the debate on the floor is suddenly possible.

I am fully in agreement with that, but I want to talk for a few minutes today about a program that we need to extend for a short period of time to get it extended to the end of this spending year.

MENTAL HEALTH

Madam President, I know the minority leader, the Democratic leader, just arrived, and he has heard a lot about this program from my friend Senator STABENOW. The excellence in mental health program—something we started 2 years ago. We passed legislation in 2014. We have come to the end of the first 2 years of that trial program. I want to talk more about why we need a longer term expansion of that trial, but first of all, we need to get a 3-month extension to get us to the end of this spending year.

I am always glad to talk about this program because what it does is it really begins to close the gap between how we talk about physical health and how we talk about mental health. Somewhere between one in four and one in five adult Americans, according to the National Institutes of Health, has a mental health problem that is diagnosable and almost always treatable, but less than half of the people who have that problem actually receive the care they need. These are people who are our neighbors, our family members, and our colleagues.

There is no stigma to seeking care, and society needs to do a better job—as I believe this program is helping us to do—talking about mental health like all other health.

On the last day of October 2013, on the 50th anniversary of the Community Mental Health Act, which was the last bill President Kennedy signed into law in 1963, Senator STABENOW and I came to the floor to talk about that 1963 bill and how many things have been closed down because of that bill and how many things have not been opened to replace them when that happened.

In the decades that followed, about half of the proposed community health centers that bill anticipated just simply were never built, and the facilities used for people who had substantial mental health challenges were closed.

What really happened over these 50 years is that the emergency room and local law enforcement became the de facto mental health system for the country, and nobody has been well served by that, including law enforcement, emergency rooms, and most importantly, people with mental health challenges and their families.

The Excellence in Mental Health Act was signed into law in 2014 to try to begin to address that problem. What the bill did was it created a 2-year, eight-State pilot program that would

provide mental health care at locations that met the standards, just like any other help would be provided. These would be certified community behavioral health clinics that would have, among other things, 24/7 crisis services available, outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment, immediate screenings, risk assessments, and diagnoses available, and care coordination, including partnerships with emergency rooms, the law enforcement community, and veterans groups. All of that would have to be done in order to be part of that eight-State pilot. Twenty-four States initially applied. Nineteen States went through the entire process. Eight States were chosen, including Missouri.

Among other things, our State participated in the Emergency Room Enhancement Project. This is a project that is designed to identify people who present themselves at the emergency room as people who really need treatment for addiction issues and mental health issues, not other health issues, and then get them to a place where that treatment is going to be much more appropriate than it is likely to be at the emergency room.

In just 6 months of working with the emergency room, law enforcement, and mental health services in our State, we think there has been a reduction in homelessness of people who came to the emergency room of about 72 percent and a reduction in emergency room visits of 72 percent. Unemployment was reduced by 14 percent among the people who have gone to the emergency room with a mental health concern, and law enforcement contact was reduced by 59 percent.

So we have 2 years of study that indicates where we have gotten in our State, and I think other States are seeing similar kinds of numbers. I have been to clinics all over our State and have talked with those who have dealt with this. I talked particularly to law enforcement people all over our State, who have seen the change in the people they are dealing with and the options they have available. Suddenly, the option is not just to go to somebody's house at a crisis moment in the middle of the night and be taken to the emergency room for one night to have that problem solved; the option is actually to go somewhere where your mental health challenge is being dealt with, just like if you had a heart attack or a kidney problem or some other problem.

That is why we have introduced legislation to extend this for another 2 years and, if money is available in the pay-for we have proposed, to see whether we can add more States to the program.

When we announced this new legislation, Laura Heebner, who is with Compass Health systems in Missouri, was one of the people who joined us. She said that in the past, before this program was able to help in our State, roughly half of the people who sought an appointment from their mental