

a simple matter of routine maintenance on equipment. If we would like the U.S. military of the future to remain the world's preeminent fighting force, then, the stakes are much higher. As Russia rattles its saber and develops weapons such as hypersonic cruise missiles and quiet submarines, we need to continue funding for research and development of our own cutting-edge capabilities.

We have to provide for the modernization of infrastructure and update defenses against cyber threats so that China's ever-bolder meddling in this domain cannot bring about the cyber hegemony it craves. We cannot turn our back on our interests and partners in the broader Middle East. In Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and beyond, we face ongoing terrorist threats. Iran's violent aggression certainly highlights the need for vigilance and for strength. All of this is needlessly more difficult if we don't fund the military's modernization and readiness. The stakes are too high for us to fail.

We cannot afford to abdicate our responsibility to deliver timely funding to the critical priorities of the Federal Government, least of all to the men and women in uniform who keep us safe. So I would urge each of my colleagues to engage in this process, honor our agreement that we made just 1 month ago—just a month ago—and keep us on track to deliver for our country.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

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 to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of John Rakolta, Jr., of Michigan, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, as negotiations continue on a continuing resolution to keep the government open past next week, we should be laying the groundwork to process the 12 appropriations bills for fiscal year 2020.

In an ideal world, the Republicans on the Appropriations Committee would be negotiating in good faith with the Democrats on the Appropriations Committee to determine the allocations and the content of those bills, but the Republicans, unfortunately, have not chosen to do this. They are acting in a totally partisan way. The Republicans have chosen to back the President's demand for an additional \$12 billion in funding for his border wall, taken from other sources, including medical research, opioid treatment, and funding intended for our military, their families, and their kids. Mexico, oddly, isn't chipping in a penny.

This was all done totally on the Republican side with there having been no consultation of the Democrats and, certainly, no buy-in. So, of course, the Democrats oppose taking funds from Congress to use on the President's border wall that have been intended for our military. Everyone knows that. In fact, 12 Senate Republicans opposed the very same thing this year, but in typical Washington, blame-game fashion, Republican leader MITCH McCONNELL has been accusing the Democrats of threatening to block military funding because we don't want to pass a bill that steals money from the military. That is right. The Democrats are the ones threatening not to vote for this bill because we oppose a Republican bill that would shortchange the military.

I have heard some howlers in my day, but that is pretty rich, what McCONNELL is saying.

Leader McCONNELL constantly talks about stunts. He doesn't like stunts because they won't be signed or passed into law. This is a stunt if I have ever seen one, that of putting this bill—\$12 billion more for the wall and with no buy-in by the Democrats—to a vote. It will lose. We know it will lose.

What is the point, Leader McCONNELL? You say you don't like stunts. You say you don't want to bring bills to the floor that won't become law. Well, this one certainly won't.

The fact is the Republican leader knows well that the Democrats oppose taking funding away from our troops to use on the President's wall. He knows that Members of his own caucus oppose taking money out of their States to spend on the President's border wall. Some have been quite vocal; yet Leader McCONNELL is moving forward with the bill all the same, knowing that it lacks votes.

For him to say the Democrats are the ones threatening to block military

funding when, in fact, we oppose a Republican bill that would shortchange the military is the height of double talk by the Republican leader.

Again, the Republican leader is fond of reminding the press that he doesn't like to engage in stunts—that the Senate is for making laws and is not a forum for political theater. Yet putting this bill on the floor of the Senate that everyone knows lacks the votes is the definition of a stunt.

Leader McCONNELL—and I mean this with all due respect—it is time to negotiate. Both sides must sit down and have a serious negotiation—no stunts, no blame game. The Democrats want to work with our Republican colleagues, but we need a willing partner, and time is quickly running out to get a bipartisan appropriations process back on track.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Madam President, now, on guns, a week and a half after our return from the August work period, Senators from both sides of the aisle are still waiting to hear what the President proposes in order to combat the epidemic of gun violence. According to reports, the President's yet-to-be-released plan will likely not include universal background checks or even a significant expansion of background checks. If those reports are true, it will be a profound shame.

Without closing the loopholes in our background check system, most other gun safety measures, like emergency risk protection orders, would be severely compromised. Background checks must be the base, the foundation, of gun safety legislation. If background checks aren't included, we will still be allowing guns to fall into the wrong hands—those of convicted criminals, domestic abusers, the adjudicated mentally ill.

You can have one of these emergency risk protection orders issued to someone—let's say to Mr. John Smith. Yet, if we don't close these loopholes, John Smith, the next day, will be able to go online and get a new gun because there will be no background check, and the seller of the gun will have no way of knowing there will have been a protection order against him. Without having background checks, a lot of this other stuff isn't going to do the job. It isn't going to save the most lives that we can.

I hope the President thinks long and hard before releasing a proposal that falls short of making meaningful progress, particularly on background checks.

In the past, Republican Senators, Congressmen, and candidates promised action after mass shootings, only to have announced support for legislation that was specifically designed not to offend the NRA. We have seen that before.

This is a chance for the President to do something different and, frankly, something courageous. It would be a terrible shame if he were to squander that very much needed opportunity. If

whatever the President announces this week falls short of what the American people are demanding, the Democrats will continue to press the issue.

Later tonight, I will join several of my Democratic colleagues on the floor for an extended debate on the issue of gun violence. Many of my colleagues have seen their communities torn apart by gun violence—some by horrific mass shootings, others by a relentless, daily stream. Many of them have worked for years to put common-sense gun safety measures before the Senate. Tonight, the Democrats will hold a forum to bring those stories to the Senate floor—the stories of families who have been shattered by gun violence and the stories of our constituents who demand that we take action.

My Republican colleagues, I hope, will listen closely and, more importantly, will join the Democrats in working to pass meaningful legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I spent a lot of time talking to South Dakota farmers over the August break, and I can tell you that if there is one thing on farmers' minds right now, it is trade; it is markets; it is having a place to sell the things that we raise and grow. Farmers and ranchers have had a rough few years. Low commodity prices and low livestock prices, natural disasters, and protracted trade disputes have left our agricultural economy trailing behind our economy as a whole.

As farmers emphasized to me during August, one of the biggest things we can do to help our agricultural economy is to implement trade agreements that benefit American farmers and ranchers. The United States is currently involved in trade negotiations on multiple fronts—with the European Union, with China, with Japan, and with other Asian-Pacific countries.

Like many farmers and ranchers, I support the President's goal of addressing trade imbalances and securing more favorable conditions for American products abroad, but we need to conclude these agreements as soon as possible. The longer negotiations drag on, the tougher the situation for farmers, who face retaliatory tariffs as well as a lot of uncertainty about what markets are going to look like.

We have had some recent successes. In August, the administration announced a deal to increase U.S. beef sales to Europe. In May, the administration announced a deal with Japan to remove all remaining age restrictions on U.S. beef, giving American ranchers full access to the Japanese market for the first time in more than a decade. Yet that is just a tiny fraction of what needs to get done on the trade front when it comes to agriculture.

Every time I speak with the President and his administration, I empha-

size what South Dakota farmers have told me: We need to conclude negotiations on the various trade deals that we are working on, and we need to do it now. We need to open new markets, expand existing ones, and give farmers and ranchers certainty about what those markets are going to look like.

While we are still in negotiations on a number of agreements, one deal that we don't need to wait for is the United States-Mexico-Canada Free Trade Agreement. This agreement has already been fully negotiated by our three countries, and Congress can take it up at any point.

The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement is a clear and significant win for our farmers and ranchers. Canada and Mexico are the No. 1 and No. 2 export markets for American food and agricultural products. This agreement will preserve and expand farmers' access to these critical markets and will give farmers certainty about what these markets will look like in the long term.

I am particularly pleased with the improvements the agreement makes for U.S. dairy producers. South Dakota has experienced a massive dairy expansion over the past few years, and this agreement will benefit U.S. dairy producers by substantially expanding market access in Canada, which is where U.S. dairy sales have been restricted. The U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that the agreement will boost U.S. dairy exports by more than \$277 million. The agreement will also expand market access for U.S. poultry and egg producers, and it will make it easier for U.S. producers to export wheat to Canada.

Of course, while I have been talking a lot about farmers, the benefits of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement will not be limited to the agricultural industry. Virtually every sector of our economy will benefit from this agreement—from manufacturing to digital services, to the automotive industry. It will create 176,000 new U.S. jobs, will grow our economy, and will raise wages for workers.

The Republicans in the Senate are ready to consider the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. We are just waiting for the House Democrats to stop threatening to oppose the agreement and to show a willingness to put it to an up-or-down vote in the House of Representatives.

The administration has made addressing the Democrats' concerns a priority throughout the negotiation process, and it seems to me that if you are a Democrat who is unhappy with the status quo, voting for the USMCA is the best way to fix it.

I am encouraged by the fact that the Democrats appear to be working with the administration to reach a resolution on this agreement, and I hope they will continue to work with the White House to bring this agreement to a vote as soon as possible in the House of Representatives. America's farmers

and ranchers need the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. While it won't be a cure-all for all of the problems that are facing farm country, it will be a significant step forward.

Congress should pass this agreement as soon as possible and allow farmers and ranchers and the rest of the American economy to start realizing the benefits.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

REMEMBERING MARCA BRISTO

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the disability rights movement is one of the great civil rights achievements of our time, and Chicago's Marca Bristo was that movement's Rosa Parks.

Marca was a visionary and inspiring leader, who helped change Chicago and change the world when it came to the rights of the disabled, and she was my friend.

Sadly, Marca died last week in her adopted hometown of Chicago at 66 years of age.

In typical Marca style, she worked right on up to the few days before her death, trying to bend the arc of history just a little more toward justice before she drew her last breath.

I was happy to join my colleague Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH this week in sponsoring a resolution honoring Marca's life and work.

I would like to take a few moments on the floor today to remember this amazing woman.

While most Americans have never heard of Marca Bristo, few lives went untouched by her lifelong quest on behalf of people with disabilities. She was a nationally and internationally acclaimed leader in the disability rights movement.

She helped to write and to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which outlawed discrimination against the estimated one in four Americans with disabilities, and she spent the rest of her life making sure the ADA was faithfully implemented.

Along with leaders like Justin Dart, Marca changed the way Americans thought about disabilities. She persuaded us to view the disability experience as a civil rights issue, not just a medical issue.

To Marca's mind, what kept many people with disabilities from leading full lives was not their disability but the barriers they faced. What needed to change, she said, was not the person with disabilities but those obstacles that blocked their path. The problem was not that her wheelchair was too wide for certain doors; the problem was the doors were too narrow for her wheelchair. Remove the barriers, and people with disabilities can lead rich and full lives and make enormous contributions. That is part of what Marca taught me.

She was tough, smart, funny, determined, and fearless. She knew how to motivate others and how to build coalitions.