

are actually not supporting our troops at all. We are keeping funding away from them because we are trying to leverage the desire to support our military and a Defense appropriations bill for other political goals. This has happened nine times.

There is no other bill since I have been elected to the Senate that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle filibuster more. When they want leverage on a nonmilitary issue, they filibuster spending for the troops. I would welcome some of my colleagues to come and explain why they do that. That is one issue.

Another issue is not my colleagues in the Senate, but it is certainly the Democrats on the other side of Capitol Hill. We are now debating the National Defense Authorization Act—the NDAA, as we call it. This is the heartbeat of the Congress. Why? It has passed this body 58 years in a row. That is the closest thing we have to a guarantee in this body. Members—Democrats and Republicans—come together, and we set forward—coming out of the Armed Services Committee, on which I sit—the NDAA, which oversees, reforms, and authorizes important programs for our national defense and sets spending authorization for the entire military. Again, this process is normally very bipartisan, and it has been and continues to be in the Senate.

I give Chairman INHOFE, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, my good friend from Oklahoma, and Senator REED from Rhode Island, the ranking member, enormous credit for getting a bill that came out of committee 25 to 2. That is very bipartisan. Then, when it came to the Senate floor, it was 86 to 8. OK. That is the Senate saying: Hey, this is really important. We are going to take care of our military. We are going to lay out the policies and the topline numbers for rebuilding our military after the massive cuts from 2010 to 2015. So that is positive.

Why am I complaining about it? Well, that bill right now on the House side, as we have gone into conference, is stuck. It is stuck. Many of the more extreme Members on the House side, who really aren't big supporters of the military—let's call a spade a spade—are now not allowing us to move forward on any kind of compromise in the broader NDAA as we move into conference.

There are provisions that are very important to the military that this body strongly supported in a bipartisan way, but right now, because of what is going on in the House—the leadership in the House, which seems to be a lot more focused on other issues and not the national security of our Nation, is not moving forward on any compromise. Who does this benefit? Well, it certainly doesn't help our troops. It certainly doesn't help our military. It certainly doesn't help their families. I can guarantee you, whether it is our adversaries or potential adversaries—

Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran—as they are watching the stalemate on the NDAA, they are very pleased.

This is something we need to come together and address. I am asking the chairman of the Armed Services Committee over on the House side, Chairman ADAM SMITH, and others to work with the Senate, work with Chairman INHOFE, work with Senator REED on getting to the compromises we all know we need to move this bill for the fifth year in a row to support our military. We think that should be based on the Senate bill.

When you have 86 Senators vote for something—a superbipartisan majority—that should be the basis for compromise. But it is stalled. The chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Chairman INHOFE, has done a great job. He is a very patient man. He and Senator REED, the ranking member on the Armed Services Committee, are frustrated. We are frustrated. The troops are frustrated. We don't have much time to waste.

Again, I would like to conclude by saying that there is a lot of rhetoric here. There is a lot of rhetoric about supporting our troops. But what we need is action. By the way, I think a lot of times my colleagues are like, well, you know the men and women in the military are not really watching this. They don't really know that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have filibustered the funding for what they need nine times in the last 4½ years—nine times. It is disgraceful, in my view. People think, well, they are not really watching what is going on with the NDAA, how the extreme elements of the Democratic Party and the House side are making sure there is no compromise so that we can't move this bill. Guess what. They are watching. They know this.

When they don't get support from the Congress of the United States, it is a problem for our military, not just in terms of the resources they need but in terms of morale. I am going to ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: The next time you go home and give speeches about supporting our troops, supporting our families, do me a favor. Don't come back to this body and filibuster their spending or, for the Members of the House, don't stake out such obstinate positions that you know there is going to be no compromise on an NDAA bill that is really important to our military and has strong bipartisan support in this body.

I know some of my other colleagues are going to be on the floor talking about this NDAA issue, talking about the Defense appropriations issue. Again, let's match the rhetoric we all talked about with regard to Veterans Day—about supporting our troops—with action on the floor, not just hot air and words.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am here to speak about the topic of

healthcare, but while my friend from Alaska is on the floor, I hope we can bridge the policy disagreements we have right now over the Defense appropriations bill, the appropriations process and the authorization bill.

I have been in Congress long enough to have heard this argument be trotted out over and over again that if you vote against a defense bill, then you aren't supporting the troops, even if you have a legitimate policy disagreement you are trying to work out. I have heard that enough to know that it just doesn't match up with reality.

I was told that because I opposed the Iraq war, I didn't support the troops. People in the 1970s were told that if they didn't support the Vietnam war, they were opposing the troops. The fact is, we have a legitimate policy disagreement that we are trying to figure out. Democrats don't think we should be taking money from defense construction projects that are housing and protecting our troops to be used to build a border wall with Mexico that doesn't do anything, in our opinion, to protect the United States compared to the benefit of the spending on military construction projects. We think that, ultimately, we are serving our troops by making sure those military construction projects get funded instead of this wall that doesn't make sense if not for the President's campaign speeches.

So we have some policy disagreements over the budget. I would hope that my colleagues wouldn't try to use this tired argument that if anyone here ever votes against a defense budget, then they somehow are opposing the troops. That is just irresponsible and disingenuous rhetoric.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, I am here to talk about a few patients from Connecticut. We on the Democratic side are trying to put a face to this campaign that the President is engaged in to try to weaken and ultimately eliminate the Affordable Care Act. Right now there is a court case proceeding through the appellate courts that, if successful, would immediately end the Affordable Care Act, which provides insurance to 20 million Americans and makes sure that everybody in this country with a pre-existing condition doesn't get charged more. The President has weighed in on behalf of that lawsuit. He hopes it will succeed.

If it does succeed, we are going to have a humanitarian catastrophe in this country if 20 million people lose their insurance and, once again, insurance companies are allowed to charge you more if you have a sickness or a sick child. We want to make sure we put a face on who is going to be affected if President Trump's sabotage campaign against the Affordable Care Act succeeds.

I know my colleagues have remarks and are lined up to speak, so let me be as brief as I can. I want to tell you the story of just a couple of patients from Connecticut. I am going to cheat and

make this “Patients of the Day.” These are folks who reached out to my office to tell me their story.

Jason is from South Windsor, CT. He says:

I am 54 years old and I have been purchasing insurance since I entered the workforce at 22 years old. I have arthritis that is manageable with medication. Without that medication and care from my physician, I would not be able to function. I would have difficulty with simple tasks like walking and shaking hands.

There is no question that I rely on my insurance. If I were denied coverage because of my preexisting condition, it would be devastating.

Jason is one of the tens of millions of Americans who, without the protections from the Affordable Care Act, would likely not be able to get insurance. He is perhaps months away from that reality.

Lisa, from New Britain, writes on behalf of her grandkids. Because some young kids can't speak for themselves, their parents and grandparents speak for them. Lisa is the proud grandmother of two little girls who were born with cystic fibrosis. She worried that if her son ever had to switch jobs and change insurance plans or if the preexisting condition clause was struck down by the courts, he would be denied coverage because of their preexisting condition. She says:

The girls are doing so well and thriving with the current treatment and medicine they are on. People with cystic fibrosis are now living longer than ever because of medicine available to them. We've worked so hard in keeping them healthy. If this policy of allowing insurance companies to deny people with preexisting conditions or capping lifetime maximums is allowed, you would be taking the lives of our family members.

Finally, Giuseppina, who is a concerned sister in Bridgeport writes:

My youngest brother was born 2.5 months premature in 1977. He spent two months in the hospital and reached his lifetime limit from my father's employer-provided insurance before he left the hospital! In January of 1978, he was diagnosed with hydrocephalus due to underdevelopment or birth trauma.

Due to the massive medical debt accrued from his multiple surgeries and hospital stays, my family had to receive public assistance. . . . My father used to cry when he went food shopping.

I want you to remember that reality. Remember the reality of millions of families who went bankrupt, who lost all their savings, who went on public assistance because they had massive medical debt due to the fact that they lost coverage because of a preexisting condition or lifetime or annual caps.

All of that can come back if the Affordable Care Act is struck down. It is important for us to come down to the floor and remind folks about the human face of healthcare repeal and the consequences if we don't stand together and at least try to make a plan for what will happen if the lawsuit is successful and the Affordable Care Act is struck down by the court system.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, on that topic, of course, all Members of the Senate have said they are preserving the coverage of preexisting conditions. It is sort of like the same speech our friend from Connecticut said he was tired of hearing about supporting the troops when you don't do everything you can to pass the Defense bill. It is at least as old as that—maybe older—and often as tiring.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, in the shadow of Veterans Day, we are here on our side of the aisle to talk about why we are not doing what we need to be doing to fund the military. In my following Senator SULLIVAN, there are multiple DAN SULLIVANS who are in politics in Alaska. The first time Senator DAN SULLIVAN was on my radar, how could I tell them apart? This one is Afghan Dan. There is Afghan Dan because he was willing to serve just like the Presiding Officer was willing to leave law school and not go to the JAG Corps but to go to the Active, fighting forces of the country. We are grateful for that. Both of them speak with authority on these issues, but the whole Senate and the whole Congress would have a chance to speak with authority on these issues if we would just decide to do our jobs.

The way communities decide they are going to honor Veterans Day, I think, is unique among them. I had a couple of events scheduled on Monday. One was in Hartville, MO. Those in Hartville were creating a wall of people over the history of the country who died in service. If you are in elementary school in Hartville today and you look at that wall, I am confident you will see some of the same last names of the kids in your school.

I was at a high school event in Camdenton at which we had about 20 World War II veterans on the stage. I represent 500,000 veterans. My guess is the chances of finding 20 in 1 county in 1 State is fairly hard to do these days, but they were all there. We were also talking about the beginning of a new Junior ROTC Program at that high school that will start in January. There are 82 high school students who are signed up to be part of that Junior ROTC Program, which they have spent 10 years trying to put in place.

For those who have served and for those who are willing to serve, the one thing we can do in Congress is to pass the two pieces of legislation that are necessary to support that service. Unlike in World War II and unlike in many past conflicts, fewer than one-half of 1 percent of the population today serves in the military. The other 99.5 percent needs to stand up and do what it can to be sure our military is the best supported military in the world. We never want an American soldier, sailor, airman, marine, or a person in the Coast Guard, in the National Guard, or in the Reserves to be in a fair fight. We always want them to be in an unfair fight, wherein they have advantages in that fight.

The only way you can be sure they will have those advantages is to have the training dollars, to have the equipment dollars, and to have the command structure that allows that to happen. For 59 straight years, the Senate has passed the National Defense Authorization Act. This is the act that defines what Congress believes should be the guiding principles for the military for that year—the places in which money should be invested, the equipment that should be bought, and the other changes that need to be made.

The other bill we passed is the appropriations bill that takes that authorization bill and really puts the money by it that allows it to happen. For 59 straight years, it is the only authorization act we have passed every year. I think we could have a really good debate as to why it is the most important of what we do and is the most important thing the Federal Government does. We have done it, but we can't seem to get it done this year. The bill that will have the biggest pay raise in a decade for the people in the military has somehow been negotiated since, roughly, June 27 of this year. It should have been a 1-week effort, not a weeks' and months' effort. When somebody is assigned to a new base, this bill will have the money in it to encourage spouses to go to work and do what they do as quickly as they can possibly do it by the bill's facilitating and expediting State certification.

In January, we had our first military spouse sworn in as a member of the Missouri bar. Her husband had come to take a command position at Fort Leonard Wood. During the first week she was in Missouri, she was able to be sworn in to the Missouri bar and go to work. Whether as a therapist, a teacher, a truckdriver, an electrician, an engineer, or a welder, if you have those skills and if you have followed your spouse to a new assignment, we should make that a top priority.

That is what happens in this bill. It supports the readiness center in Springfield, MO. It supports the vehicle maintenance facility at Whiteman Air Force Base and the C-130 flight simulator facility at the Rosecrans Air National Guard Base. As a Senate, we decided all of those things needed to happen. Now we need to decide as a Senate and a Congress how to make them happen. Whether they be 24 F/A-18 Super Hornets that the Navy wants that will be built in St. Louis, MO, or 15 F-15s for the Air Force, these things will not happen unless they are authorized. Let's get them authorized. Let's appropriate the money. We are already weeks late. We don't need to be months late. It is better to have the money the day you are supposed to have it if you are going to spend it as wisely as we would hope you would be able to spend it.

I join my colleagues and, I know, the Presiding Officer in saying we need to get this work done. It is critical. It is