

we should do it here. History will judge my Republican colleagues harshly if they fail that, and the voters will judge them even more immediately equally harshly.

The NRA is imploding. Its vice-like grip should be crumbling in this body. They may have the ear of the President, but they should not have the ear of my Republican colleagues.

To the President, I say: The NRA is telling the American public they own you and that all they have to do is snap their fingers, and you fall into line. Prove them wrong. All you need to do is take the final steps on this legislation. Give us a green light. Tell us that we can move forward and that you will sign this bill.

To the majority leader I say, whether or not the President gives us that green light, we need to do our job. Please do your job. Let us have this vote.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

DIRECTING THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE TO MAKE A CORRECTION IN THE ENROLLMENT OF H.R. 2423

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H. Con. Res. 72, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the concurrent resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 72) directing the Clerk of the House to make a correction in the enrollment of H.R. 2423.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to proceeding to the measure?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 72) was agreed to.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, unfortunately, this Congress has been defined by previously unprecedented political antics. Things that used to be far above the political fray are now getting roiled in controversy.

One example is yesterday, when the minority leader blocked the bipartisan bill that I introduced to reduce drug prices—a bill that received unanimous support in the Judiciary Committee. I recognize my friend from Connecticut Senator BLUMENTHAL, who is the chief Democratic cosponsor of that bill.

I think the most egregious example of politicalization of things that used

to be nonpartisan has to be the politicalization of the Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA. For 25 years, this program has supported survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault through a range of critical programs and resources.

As a longtime victims' rights advocate myself, I am a proud supporter of the Violence Against Women Act, and I have consistently fought not only to continue it but to strengthen it as well.

I think there is more we can and should do to support victims, and I know folks on the other side of the aisle feel the same way. It is safe to say, though, that we have had our fair share of disagreements on how exactly to accomplish that.

Earlier this year, our Democratic colleagues allowed VAWA to get caught in the crosshairs of a funding debate when they insisted we should not fund this vital program because it is overdue for updates. This is a rash move, to be sure. It lines up with the “my way or the highway” legislative strategy sometimes deployed by our friends on the other side, but that hasn’t stopped my Republican colleagues, led by Senator JONI ERNST from Iowa, from pursuing a compromise.

For many months now, Senator ERNST has been working with DIANNE FEINSTEIN, the Senator from California, to find ways to make improvements that both sides can agree on. That is the way things get done around here: You try to build consensus, and maybe you don’t get everything you want, but if you can get 80 percent of what you want, you ought to take it and run.

Last week, unfortunately, Democrats walked away from the negotiating table when it came to the Violence Against Women Act. Rather than continuing the discussions with people of opposing views, they took the easy way out and simply walked away and introduced their own partisan reauthorization—one they know has no chance of passing.

Just like the version that passed the House earlier this year, this is a messaging document, worth no more than the paper it is written on. It is not going to reauthorize VAWA or make the program better, and it is not going to support victims because it stands no chance of becoming law.

I am truly disappointed that our Democratic colleagues, once again, have chosen to play politics rather than deliver real results, this time for the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Despite the games being played here, my Republican colleagues and I are working to put in the hard work it takes to actually accomplish something and legislate.

Senator ERNST said she will soon be introducing a good-faith proposal that actually has the chance to become law. It is not a partisan document. It really

is a return to where we used to be, where the Violence Against Women Act enjoyed broad support on both sides of the aisle and was truly not just bipartisan but nonpartisan. It is a shame that something as urgent and undeniably important as combating domestic violence and sexual assault has somehow fallen prey to Washington, DC, politics.

I hope our colleagues will reconsider and return to the negotiating table so we can reach a compromise and finally reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.

E-CIGARETTES

Mr. President, on another matter, in recent months, there has been a lot of coverage in the news and in social media about the health consequences of e-cigarette use. The “e” stands for electronic—electronic cigarette use.

We have seen alarming headlines about vaping-related illnesses that have led to severe health consequences and dozens of deaths. I find it particularly concerning that an increased number of children in middle school and in high school are using these products, even though it is inconsistent with the law. It is against the law.

The National Youth Tobacco Survey estimates that more than 5 million middle and high school students currently use e-cigarettes, up from 3.6 million last year. Five million middle and high school children are using this product that the law says they should not be using.

Folks at home are certainly dealing with the fallout. Last year, 19 percent of Texas high school students had used an e-cigarette in the last 30 days, and news reports lead me to believe the number has done nothing but go up.

Certainly, there are negative health consequences associated with it. A teen in Michigan was recently hospitalized, as my colleague from Michigan well knows. He was recently hospitalized after vaping and then had to have an incredibly rare double lung transplant because of the damage done to the lungs.

This is causing alarm for parents, for educators, for health professionals, and just about everybody else who has heard about it. It certainly caught my attention.

Yesterday the HELP Committee—the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee—in the Senate held a hearing to look into the government’s lackluster response to these public health concerns. I am seriously concerned with how, compared to traditional cigarettes, this industry is able to evade countless government regulations, especially through online sales.

Consumers are able to purchase traditional cigarettes online, but there are clear guardrails in place to prevent minors from using online purchases to skirt the age restrictions.

At the time of delivery, if you buy cigarettes online, you have to sign and show an ID proving your age. That just

makes sense to me. You have to show ID when you purchase cigarettes at a gas station or convenience store, and buying them online should be no different, but in the case of e-cigarettes, it is different. Anyone, no matter how old or how young, could go online and buy e-cigarettes and have them delivered to your front door, no questions asked.

You better believe underage kids are taking advantage of that loophole. A recent survey found that about one-third of underage e-cigarette users bought them online.

What people need to understand is that e-cigarettes are essentially a nicotine delivery device. Nicotine, of course, is an addictive drug, so it is not as if there aren't negative health consequences. Even if they are not smoking tobacco, if they use e-cigarettes, there are true risks to the health of these young people.

Now, while an adult, I believe, ought to be able to do things that maybe negatively impact their health, I think we have an obligation to protect children, particularly those who are making bad decisions, before they are prepared to understand what the consequences really are.

So while it is important for us to understand the health impact of these devices and have serious conversations with our own children about the risks, we should do something to prevent children from getting their hands on e-cigarettes in the first place.

I have introduced a bill with Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator VAN HOLLEN that prevents the online sale of e-cigarettes to minors using the same safeguards that stop them from being able to use regular cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products on the internet. The law is the same with regard to who can legally purchase them, so we ought to have the procedures in place that prevent underage smokers from buying cigarettes online without a signature and without an identification card proving their age. We ought to have the same procedures in place for e-cigarettes.

This bill, thankfully, has broad bipartisan support, with one-quarter of all Senators serving as cosponsors, and it has recently passed the House by a voice vote.

When we talk about passing consensus legislation in the Senate, this is about as easy as it comes. I hope we can bring this legislation to the Senate floor soon so we can prevent the next generation from using legal loopholes to get their hands on e-cigarettes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

VA MISSION ACT

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, this week, America is paying tribute to more than 19 million people in our country and a half million people in Michigan who show us every day what service is all about.

America's veterans have served in many ways and on many different

fronts. However, I think they all have a couple of things in common.

The first is that they love our Nation so much that they are willing to put their lives on the line for our Constitution, our democracy, our values, and our ideals for our country. The second is that they understand that patriotism is a lot more than a feeling of pride. Instead, it is a way of life.

Veterans don't finish their military service, hang up their uniforms, go home, never to be heard from again. Instead, these are the people around us who take a good look at their community, their State, our country, see what needs to be done, and step up.

Not all of us have what it takes to serve in our Armed Forces. Yet all of us do have the ability to follow the example of those who have served us, see a need, and raise our hands. Imagine how much better off our Nation would be if we all had that same dedication to give something back.

As we have been celebrating Veterans Day this week, we should all remember that when American men and women sign up to serve in our armed services, they really sign a blank check to our country—a check that could include everything, including losing their life. When our Nation accepts that check, we need to make sure we are holding up our end of the bargain.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration is failing to provide veterans with the benefits they have earned, especially when it comes to healthcare.

Congress passed the VA MISSION Act last year to improve veterans' access to healthcare and to expand benefits to caregivers, which is so important. Yet the VA missed the October deadline—missed the October deadline—to include Vietnam and Korean war veterans in the expansion.

The VA has kicked eligible veterans out of the caregiver program without explaining why. Meanwhile, more than 60,000 veterans who received emergency care at non-VA facilities in 2017 are still waiting for the VA to pay their medical bills.

Perhaps worst of all, this administration turned their backs on more than 80,000 Vietnam-era veterans who developed illnesses because of toxic exposure to Agent Orange. We have known for a long time that Agent Orange exposure has caused many serious health issues.

In fact, I first started working on this issue regarding Agent Orange and fighting for our veterans when I was in the Michigan State legislature, trying to get the Federal Government to recognize and provide VA health coverage for these illnesses. Over the years, some things have changed and improved, but it has been way, way too slow.

Veterans who have been suffering for years were offered hope in 2017 when then-Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin added bladder cancer, underactive thyroid, high blood pressure, and Parkinson's-like symptoms to the list of diseases eligible for Agent Or-

ange benefits without going through a lot of bureaucracy in order to get their healthcare coverage. He did so at the urging of the National Academy of Medicine based on the science—medical science—of the connection.

Unfortunately, veterans with these conditions are still waiting. This was back in 2017. They are still waiting to get that healthcare, and that is because the Office of Management and Budget Director, Mick Mulvaney, quietly ignored the science and rejected the coverage expansion. Why? We now know, through emails that have been made public, that he thought it was too costly.

Really? Let me remind you that these veterans each signed a blank check to our Nation. For veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange, the check they signed is in the amount of their health and well-being.

A number of colleagues in this Chamber, led by Senator TESTER and Senator BROWN, whom I see on the floor, have repeatedly asked the VA to explain the delay in coverage. Their questions, over and over again, have gone unanswered.

We only now know what really happened when a veteran trying to get help, trying to get treatment, finally filed a FOIA request—Freedom of Information Act request—to get information about who was holding it up and what was going on. Just recently, we have found out that the Office of Management and Budget—that Mick Mulvaney blocked the care because he thought it was going to cost too much.

It is now November of 2019, and Vietnam veterans are still not getting treatment for these diseases. Yesterday, my friend Senator BROWN from Ohio requested unanimous consent on his resolution, which I am pleased to be a cosponsor of, that expands the diseases covered by the VA for Agent Orange exposure. It would fix this and say to the OMB Director: We want to make sure we are keeping our end of the bargain for our Vietnam vets who were exposed to Agent Orange.

Once again, Leader McCONNELL and Republicans chose to stand with the Trump administration and Mick Mulvaney to stop veterans from getting this critical healthcare coverage. I was amazed to actually hear the objection include the words, "It costs too much."

It is not enough to praise our veterans with words. We do that all the time, especially around the 11th of November. Praise doesn't pay the medical bills. Praise doesn't give a veteran a healthy life, a job, a home, or opportunities.

This administration, Congress, and our country must keep each and every promise our country has made to those who have served, period. Each and every one of them signed that blank check to our country.

Leader McCONNELL, it is time to hold up our country's end of the bargain.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

MR. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Senator STABENOW. She is exactly right. A couple of times, she used the term “blank check.” When people join the Army, people become marines, people go off to a service academy, and people enlist in the National Guard, essentially they sign a blank check cashed by all of us who care so much about protecting our country.

Senator STABENOW has been, with Senator TESTER, one of the real leaders on this. You know, it used to be, many years ago, when it became clearer that veteran after veteran after veteran—young veterans in those days, 20 years ago, not that far removed from Vietnam—were coming down with these illnesses, Congress decided bipartisanly, almost unanimously, that rather than make every single veteran, every soldier, every marine, and every sailor prove to the government, prove to the VA that they should be eligible for healthcare coverage based on the illness they got because of Agent Orange—Congress decided that we shouldn’t make every single person go through proving this—through that process. So what did we do? We made a list of illnesses that typically come from exposure to Agent Orange, and any veteran who was sick from one of these illnesses, no questions asked, got healthcare. That is what we did. That was then.

Today, in this time when I hear my colleagues who sit over here—I don’t want to make this partisan, but it has become that because it is President Trump, Vice President PENCE, and Senator McCANNELL who say no to this. We have the Secretary of the VA, appointed by the President of the United States, President Trump—the Secretary of the VA came up with these four additional illnesses around which there is scientific consensus saying that these illnesses are caused by Agent Orange, and individual veterans shouldn’t have to, one at a time, prove that they got sick, that they got this kind of Parkinson’s or they had bladder cancer based on Agent Orange. We ought to just accept that. That is how we serve those who served us.

But do you know what Senator McCANNELL does? You know, his office is down the hall, as my colleagues know. Senator McCANNELL apparently says that we should do tax cuts for rich people, but we can’t afford to spend a few billion dollars. It is a lot of money, but these are our people, and these are people who served in Southeast Asia mostly in the 1960s and 1970s.

Senator McCANNELL wants to turn his back on them. President Trump turns his back on them. The new Secretary of the VA, appointed by President Trump, turns his back on these soldiers. There are 80,000 of them. Does President Trump just want to wait till all 80,000 are dead, and then we will not have to worry about this anymore? Or do we serve those who served us?

Every time I think about this, I just can’t believe that the President of the United States, who didn’t serve—I didn’t either. I understand that. But you know, because I didn’t serve in Vietnam and I am just slightly on the young side of this generation, because I didn’t serve, maybe I should work a little harder, as a member of the Veterans’ Committee, to make sure the people who did serve are taken care of.

This President, who didn’t serve—I don’t judge him for that. No matter what he said, I don’t judge him for that. But maybe he ought to work a little harder, not just making speeches about how much he loves veterans but actually coming to the table and telling Senator McCANNELL: Quit blocking our attempts to take care of these 80,000 veterans. It is just outrageous.

MR. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the remainder of my remarks be placed at a different point in the RECORD.

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

HONORING DETECTIVE JORGE “GEORGE” DEL RIO

MR. PRESIDENT, I rise to honor a dedicated Ohio public servant, Detective George Del Rio. For three decades, Detective Del Rio served his community in Dayton with honor and integrity.

On November 4, a few days ago, he was working as part of a local DEA drug task force, and he made the ultimate sacrifice to keep his fellow Ohioans safe. He laid down his life while doing his job. He was working with fellow Dayton officers to protect the people he was sworn to serve in Miami Valley.

In the days since his passing, we have heard story after story after story of Detective Del Rio’s service to his community and to his family.

As he was hospitalized, officers from around Miami Valley packed the hospital hallways and parking lots to show their support and their respect for Detective Del Rio and his wife Kathy and their children and grandchildren.

Detective Del Rio was beloved by friends and colleagues. He was devoted to his family. He was kind. He was funny. He was fair. He was a good cop even while spending his days undertaking dangerous work, often undercover.

Detective Del Rio’s career is a reminder of the contributions that immigrants make to our great country and to my State. He came to this country as a child from Mexico. His decades of teamwork as part of the Dayton Police Department and the DEA saved lives and changed lives. He embodied the Dayton PD’s motto of “Honor through service and service with honor.”

Chief Richard Biehl—whom I have gotten to know on a number of occasions because of the tragedies of the shooting and the tornado and the KKK’s attempted rally in Dayton—said that Detective Del Rio had an impact regionally, nationally, and internationally. His legacy will live on through the many lives he touched, and, not

surprisingly, he continues to serve through his wishes to be an organ donor.

In times of tragedy, Ohioans always rise to the occasion. We have witnessed an outpouring of community support in the days since Detective Del Rio was taken from us. While no gesture, of course, can ever repay him or Kathy and his children and grandchildren for their sacrifice, today we honor this hero’s memory, and we lift up the entire Dayton community.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

MR. CARDIN. “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Most Americans believe that the Equal Rights Amendment is part of our Constitution today, but it is not.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stated:

Every Constitution written since the end of World War II includes a provision that men and women are citizens of equal stature. Ours does not.

The State of Maryland has a provision very similar to that in its State constitution. Many of our States have acted on the Equal Rights Amendment, but, as Justice Scalia said, “Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn’t.”

We need to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in the Constitution of the United States for many reasons. The most basic reason is that it provides additional protection against discrimination against women. It has a higher standard to prevent discrimination. It shows America’s leadership globally on human rights.

In 1972, Congress started the process by passing the Equal Rights Amendment. We passed it in 1972. Now, of course, it requires 38 States to ratify it before it can become law. To date, 37 States have ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. We are one short of accomplishing our objective of putting the Equal Rights Amendment at long last in the Constitution of the United States. But there is an additional potential hurdle; that is, when Congress passed the resolution in 1972, it put a 7-year time limit for the States to act. They extended that to 10 years. This is strictly a provision that is discretionary to Congress. Article V of the Constitution puts no limit on the time for ratification of a constitutional amendment proposed by Congress for the States to ratify. In fact, the 27th Amendment was ratified in 1992. That

deals with congressional pay raises. It was first proposed in 1789 to be part of the Bill of Rights, and over 200 years later, it was ratified. So there is no time limit in the Constitution for the ratification of a constitutional amendment.

To remove any doubt, Congress should extend the time, as it did once before. In order to accomplish that, I joined with Senator MURKOWSKI, the Senator from Alaska, in a bipartisan effort on S. Res. 6 that removes the deadline, the time limit on the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an op-ed piece written by Senator MURKOWSKI and myself in regard to why we need to get that resolution passed.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 25, 2019]

IT'S TIME TO FINALLY PASS THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

(By Lisa Murkowski and Ben Cardin)

Lisa Murkowski, a Republican, represents Alaska in the Senate. Ben Cardin, a Democrat, represents Maryland in the Senate.

Men and women should be treated equally under the law. It seems pretty basic, right?

As we approach the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, it comes as a shock to so many that the U.S. Constitution does not guarantee women the same rights and protections as men.

We come from different ends of the political spectrum, but we agree that this needs to change. Women compose a majority of the American population but continue to be underrepresented in government, elected office, the courts and business world. A level playing field should not be a euphemism but rather a reality for women (and men) from Anchorage to Annapolis and everywhere in between.

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

This is the full substance of the Equal Rights Amendment. It's a little less than a tweet, but it will make a positive difference in the lives of millions of women.

Why is this still necessary? During a 2011 interview, Justice Antonin Scalia summed up the need for an Equal Rights Amendment. He said: "Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn't."

On the other side of the spectrum, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg laid out the rationale for the ERA in simple terms: "Every constitution written since the end of World War II includes a provision that men and women are citizens of equal stature. Ours does not."

Why has it taken this long? Per the Constitution, an amendment must be ratified by three-fourths of the states to be enacted. While most amendments are put forward without a time limit, this one came with a seven-year deadline. The original was extended to 10 years, but still, only 35 states had ratified the ERA by 1982.

While the clock stood frozen at the federal level, today, nearly half of the states—including Maryland and Alaska—have a version of the ERA written into their constitutions. Gender-based equality represents the present-day views of the vast majority of people across the United States, and is the spirit that underpins our bipartisan legislation.

The deadline passed in 1982, so isn't this effort futile? Not at all.

Nationally, momentum began to shift about two years ago, as women across the country began to raise their voices again in calls for solidarity and equality. The ERA had never gone away, but the #MeToo movement gave it a jolt of energy and a new spotlight for inequalities in U.S. law.

In March 2017, 45 years to the day after Congress overwhelmingly approved the ERA, Nevada became the 36th state to ratify the amendment. And then, in May 2018, Illinois became the 37th.

What had for years been referred to as a three-state plan—working to have Congress remove the ratification deadline so that three more states could ratify the ERA, and it would become enshrined in our constitution—had suddenly become a one-state plan.

Earlier this month, Virginia started the ratification process in their state legislature. Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Utah could also become state No. 38. Congress can do its part by explicitly removing the deadline it once set.

Article V of the Constitution contains no time limits for ratification of amendments. The states finally ratified the 27th Amendment in 1992 regarding congressional pay raises more than 200 years after Congress proposed it in 1789 as part of the Bill of Rights.

The original deadline for ERA ratification was not in the amendment itself but only in the text of the joint resolution proposing the amendment. This is to say the amendment itself has no arbitrary deadline attached.

Whether on purpose or not, Congress handcuffed itself at the time it passed the ERA. But this Congress can and should easily amend that language to remove the deadline for ratification.

We are proud to work together on a bipartisan basis to move this essential legislation over the finish line and finally make the ERA part of the Constitution—guaranteeing equality under the law for women.

Women should not be held back or provided less opportunity, respect or protections under the law because of their gender. This is not a partisan issue but one of universal human rights. Gender equality should be an explicit, basic principle of our society.

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, on November 13, the House Judiciary Committee took up a very similar resolution, H.J. Res. 79 by Representative JACKIE SPEIER, and it has now been reported out favorably. So we now have moving through the House of Representatives a resolution that would remove this time limit that was imposed in the 1970s on the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

What I am imploring upon my colleagues is, we are very close to getting this done. We know there was a change in leadership in Virginia. Virginia could very well be the 38th State. But let's remove the ambiguity as to a time limit.

We will celebrate in this Congress the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, the women's suffrage amendment that passed in 1920. Why did it take so long for women to have the right to vote? Well, people are asking: Why is it taking so long to put the Equal Rights Amendment into the Constitution of the United States?

We have a plan to get this done by passing the resolution I talked about, the 38th State to ratify it, and that at long last, the United States will provide the leadership on universal human rights by placing the Equal Rights Amendment in our Constitution.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

HEALTHCARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, as President Trump and the Senate Republicans continue to press forward with their relentless attacks on families' healthcare, the Democrats are going to continue to make clear just what is at stake by lifting up stories of patients and families across the country, starting with Natasha from my home State of Washington.

Because of a diagnosis she received when she was young, Natasha had long believed she could not conceive, so she and her partner were particularly surprised last year to get the news that she was pregnant. With that unexpected news, came all sorts of questions, including whether they could handle the cost of things like maternity care, postpartum care, and newborn care. Fortunately, Natasha's family had coverage through Medicaid, so all of the medical costs she had been so concerned about were completely covered. Instead of worrying about how they would pay for the healthcare she needed, she and her partner were able to focus on getting ready to welcome the newest addition to their family.

Natasha's story shows why families across the country are so worried as the Republicans continue down the damaging path they have been on for years. Since day No. 1 of the Trump administration, the Republicans have been working to raise families' healthcare costs, take away their coverage, and make healthcare lower quality.

In the Senate, the Republicans have stood with President Trump as he has tried to implement draconian caps on Medicaid through his Trumpcare bill and has proposed budgets that slash funding for Medicaid. They have also stood by as President Trump has implemented a gag rule on title X-funded clinics—jeopardizing reproductive healthcare for millions of patients. The Republicans are also opposing the Democrats' efforts to lower skyrocketing prescription drug prices by

allowing Medicare to negotiate on behalf of patients and to reverse President Trump's steps to promote junk insurance plans that do not protect patients with preexisting conditions and do increase families' healthcare costs.

The Republicans are even cheerleading a partisan lawsuit that will be catastrophic to families across the country. We could get a ruling on this lawsuit any day now. If the Republicans get their way, protections for the over 100 million people in this country with preexisting conditions could be thrown out the window. Millions of families who are covered through the exchanges and Medicaid expansion could be thrown off of their healthcare, and young adults could be kicked off of their parents' plans before they turn 26. Patients could also be stuck paying tens of thousands of dollars for their care as caps on their out-of-pocket costs are eliminated, as caps on their lifetime and annual benefits come back—even for those, by the way, who are covered through their employers' plans—and as essential benefits that make sure their coverage includes things like prescription drugs and emergency care go away.

For patients like Natasha, the Republicans' healthcare agenda would be a disaster. Not only would it gut Medicaid, which helped her to get the help she needed, but if the Republicans succeed in this lawsuit, insurance companies could discriminate against patients like her for having preexisting conditions, including, by the way, being pregnant, and insurance companies could choose not to cover essential health benefits like maternity care.

The junk plans President Trump is already promoting leave patients facing similar problems today. In fact, as part of their application process, many of those junk plans ask patients whether they are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant. That is because these junk plans are already allowed to deny coverage, exclude benefits, or charge higher premiums for patients with preexisting conditions.

The Republicans' approach to patients' healthcare—making it more expensive, harder to get, and lower quality—is clearly designed to work for big insurance companies, not for people like Natasha. Her story is one of many. In fact, it is one of tens of millions. There are so many other families across the country who are seeing their well-being being put at risk by the Republicans' harmful healthcare agenda. Yet we have seen before what can happen when people share their stories, when we lift those stories up, and when we put faces or names to the people the Republicans could hurt with their policies. When the Republicans tried to jam through their Trumpcare bill, we stopped it because people across the country fought back, and they spoke up.

As President Trump and the Republicans continue using every tool they can to try and undermine families

healthcare, the Democrats are going to be here to continue to remind our colleagues on the other side of the aisle that everything we do and don't do in the Capitol has real consequences for real families, especially when it comes to issues like healthcare, which every family has to deal with.

Whether it is losing coverage right as you finally have the chance to start a family or whether it is being rejected because you have a preexisting condition, we are going to continue lifting up those voices who aren't on the Senate floor, and we are going to continue making clear what the GOP's healthcare plan would actually mean to people's lives. This isn't a matter of politics for families; it is a matter of life and death, and we aren't going to let the Republicans forget it.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NOMINATION OF STEVEN J. MENASHI

MR. REED. Madam President, I have serious philosophical disagreements with many of the judicial nominees put forth by this administration, but I believe Mr. Menashi is especially unfit to serve on the Federal bench. His record indicates an inability to serve as a fair and impartial judge. And so I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reject his nomination to a lifetime appointment on the bench.

Steven Menashi's public record demonstrates a deep contempt for a wide spectrum of Americans, and particularly some of the most vulnerable amongst us. In his own writings and as editor in chief of the Dartmouth Review, he has directly expressed or condoned disturbing views on issues such as LGBT rights, racism, and student aid.

Even if we were to cast these sentiments aside, Mr. Menashi's recent work in the Trump administration provides ample evidence that he is unfit for a lifetime appointment to the bench. Consider his performance as acting general counsel at the Department of Education. Mr. Menashi oversaw the rollback of regulations designed to protect students and taxpayers from predatory for-profit institutions of higher education.

More egregiously, Mr. Menashi wrote the memo outlining the administration's scheme to provide only partial debt relief to students defrauded by for-profit colleges—a scheme that a Federal judge ruled violated Federal privacy laws. Under this scheme, the Department of Education used data that was collected to hold institutions accountable for providing education leading to gainful employment to further punish their victims. The Department has still failed to comply with the court's orders, resulting in the Secretary of Education being held in contempt.

Mr. Menashi supervised the legal work on the administration's proposal to rewrite the rules dealing with sexual assault and sexual harassment on col-

lege campuses. The administration's own analysis concluded that the new rules would dramatically reduce the number of sexual assault investigations.

Mr. Menashi worked on the rule rolling back efforts to address disparities in the discipline of students of color and those with disabilities. In March, a Federal court ruled that the Department had engaged in an illegal delay and had acted arbitrarily and capriciously.

During Mr. Menashi's time at the Department of Education, the administration argued that it was appropriate to use Federal education funds to purchase guns for schools.

Also consider Mr. Menashi's time as a White House counsel where he helped Stephen Miller in crafting some of the administration's most draconian immigration policies. While he was an advisor, the White House cut refugee admissions to a historic low, effectively banned asylum for refugees traveling through Mexico, and threatened to end birthright citizenship.

His views and work experience call into question how his personal biases would color his rulings, and whether he has the judicial temperament and political independence necessary to serve on the Federal bench. This is not the kind of legal judgment that deserves a lifetime appointment to the Federal judiciary.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

While the Senate has spent considerable time and hours on Mr. Menashi's nomination, one can't help but notice the fact that the majority leader seems to scrupulously avoid calling up votes on legislation that would help working Americans and working families.

I hear from my Rhode Island constituents every day about countless pressing issues that the Senate should be debating and voting on. We could be considering an infrastructure bill that would provide robust investment to enable the rebuilding of our crumbling roads, bridges, schools, and other critical infrastructure. We could be working to increase Pell grants and lower the cost of college.

I think every Member of this body would agree that another vital issue that we hear often from our constituents about is the need to address skyrocketing prescription drug costs. According to Families USA, nearly 3 in 10 American adults—nearly 80 million people—have not taken required medicine due to its costs. In fact, addressing prescription drug costs alone would go a long way toward bringing down healthcare costs overall.

There are dozens of proposals from Senators on both sides of the aisle that would help to address this issue. Yet Republican leadership has refused to allow any debate on prescription drug prices or on healthcare costs more broadly this year. Something I, and many of my colleagues, have proposed numerous times would be to require Medicare to negotiate drug prices with

the drug companies to ensure seniors and taxpayers get the best price. The Department of Veterans Affairs already does this. While there is no silver bullet in solving rising drug costs, this would be a commonsense first step in the right direction.

There are also more than 250 bills passed by the House that Majority Leader MCCONNELL refuses to bring up and that have been left in the legislative graveyard. Let me repeat that. More than 250 bills are awaiting action here in the Senate. The House is doing its part to look out for the people's business, and the Senate should follow suit.

These include the Enhanced Background Checks Act, which would expand the national firearms background check system to include virtually all gun transfers, and block the illegal sales that currently happen through gun shows and private transfers. They include the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which is the primary law to provide services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. They include the American Dream and Promise Act, which would provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, TPS holders, and those with DED. That's Deferred Enforced Departure.

Furthermore, Republicans continue to block Democratic-led efforts to pass commonsense election security legislation. This is despite warning after warning from our intelligence and national security agencies that Russia undertook an unprecedented effort to interfere in our 2016 elections and that the Russians are actively working to do it again in 2020.

Instead of elevating someone with an extreme record like Mr. Menashi to one of the highest courts in the land, we should be debating and voting on legislation that will protect healthcare, expand educational opportunity, secure our elections, fully fund the census, and prevent gun and domestic violence—in addition to many, many other important priorities.

The majority has refused to allow the Senate to vote on and address the pressing issues that Americans care about. And this body is failing to get its appropriations work done on time. So I urge the majority leader to end this partisan paralysis and let the Senate get to work on issues that can improve the lives of Rhode Islanders and all Americans.

I yield the floor.

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.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1573

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Madam President, as in legislative session, I ask unani-

mous consent that the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1573 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, reserving the right to object, while we very much appreciate what Senator DUCKWORTH is trying to accomplish, I must object to the request for unanimous consent.

The bill has only one cosponsor and has not gone through regular order, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee has not considered the policy implications of the legislation, and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs that I chair has not been given an opportunity to understand the budgetary impacts the bill would have.

This legislation would be a significant policy change for VA and would reduce revenue to VA medical centers by eliminating certain copayments. Policy changes such as this should be thoughtfully considered through full committees before being considered by the full Senate.

I look forward to working with Senator DUCKWORTH to see if we can get this resolved, but based on these facts, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Madam President, I am disappointed that the majority has objected to passing our bipartisan legislation.

Every Senator should support a simple fix to assure veterans enrolled in the VA system can obtain preventive medications without out-of-pocket costs.

All Americans deserve access to the best healthcare possible, especially the veterans who signed up to defend our Nation. Yet, because of this objection, our veterans will continue to pay more for essential preventive medications compared to every other insured American.

One of the Affordable Care Act's critical patient protections was prohibiting insurance companies and other health systems, including the Department of Defense's own TRICARE, from charging copayments for drugs that are designated as preventive by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

The ACA recognized that preventing serious illness, such as heart disease and breast cancer, may help avoid complex and costly medical treatments down the line.

Most importantly, preventive medicine may also increase patient survival odds. That is why the ACA required every insurer to cover preventive medications at no additional cost to enrollees.

The time has come to expand this vital patient protection to cover veterans enrolled in VA healthcare. Congress has the power to stop veterans from being the only ensured Americans who are charged copays and out-of-pocket fees for essential drugs and potentially lifesaving preventive health medication. This includes everything from critical vaccinations to common medications such as aspirin to lower the risk of heart disease and more advanced drugs such as tamoxifen inhibitors to lower the risk of breast cancer.

The question is simply, Does the Senate majority in this Congress have the will to exercise this power to swiftly fix the problem?

Unfortunately, today's objection provided a disappointing answer. I hope the majority will reconsider its opposition to passing the bipartisan Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act by unanimous consent.

I am confident that a Democratic House majority would act swiftly to pass S. 1573 if we can get this commonsense bill to that Chamber. After all, I am confident that if asked, the majority of Americans—if not all Americans—would agree it is simply wrong to force veterans to pay more for essential preventive medications that are critically important to heart disease and building bone density.

This should not be controversial. It is certainly viewed as a commonsense legislative update by the veterans community.

That is why my bipartisan bill has been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Making sure veterans enrolled in the VA system can obtain preventive medications without paying out of pocket should be something every Senator can agree on.

Senate Democrats certainly share this conviction. That is why every Member of the Democratic caucus agreed to pass the bipartisan Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act right now.

Unfortunately, today's objection proves that not every Member of the Republican conference shares this conviction.

With deep disappointment, I yield the floor.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

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

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, this week across this country, we celebrated Veterans Day. Veterans Day in

Colorado and across the country means a lot of different things to so many people across our Nation, but one thing it has always stood for is a day of thanks to share and celebrate the men and women in our families and our communities who have done so much for our country so that it continues to be the greatest Nation on the face of this Earth.

In Colorado, we celebrated with parades, parties, charity fundraisers, races and marathons, and events all over the Centennial State to recognize the work of our veterans and the sacrifice of our veterans and their families. Admission to all of our State parks was free so veterans and their families could enjoy the land they have defended.

In Colorado Springs, where we have a number of veterans and Active-Duty military members, three of the largest school districts didn't take the day off for Veterans Day but, instead, they held veteran appreciation events, breakfasts and lunches with local veterans, invited special speakers, wrote letters to men and women who have served, and had other opportunities for students to learn about the sacrifices our veterans have made for our country.

We in Colorado—we in this country take great pride in our veterans and our veteran community. In Colorado, our six military bases, including the U.S. Air Force Academy, all play a critical role in defending our Nation and keeping the world a safer place. Colorado is home to more than 400,000 veterans who have bravely served our country.

Earlier this year, I was fortunate enough to meet more than 100 Colorado heroes as part of the High Plains Honor Flight, a tradition that has been carried on for a number of years. It is an incredible tradition every year—bringing Colorado veterans to our Nation's Capital, touring the war memorials, and taking the opportunity to meet these veterans, look them in the eye, shake their hands, and say thank you.

I could spend all week talking on the floor about Colorado's veterans and their incredible acts of service, but if you get the chance, I hope you will visit Pueblo, CO. The Home of Heroes Medal of Honor Memorial is in Pueblo, CO. The memorial pays tribute to more than 3,400 people who have received our country's highest award for military valor.

Outside the memorial, there are four statues, one for each of Pueblo's Medal of Honor recipients.

One of these men, Lt. Raymond G. Murphy, was a U.S. marine who was serving in Korea in 1953. After a failed raid with heavy casualties, Lieutenant Murphy organized and led his platoon in a heroic rescue effort to save his fellow marines. Providing cover and driving back the enemy, he rescued his fellow men who were under intense enemy fire. He sustained numerous wounds but refused treatment until everyone

else had been treated. Lieutenant Murphy stayed on the battlefield until every marine was accounted for.

When President Eisenhower presented Murphy with the Medal of Honor, he was quoted as saying:

“What is it about the water out there in Pueblo? All you guys turn out to be heroes!”

That is our Pueblo, CO. Whatever it is, there must be a lot of it in Colorado's water.

U.S. Army CPT Florent Groberg—another Coloradan—was based out of Fort Carson. He received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions in Afghanistan. In 2012, his patrol was ambushed by an individual wearing a suicide vest. Captain Groberg rushed to the individual and grabbed him, driving him away from his fellow troops and down to the ground. The bomber's vest exploded, severely wounding Captain Groberg. He miraculously survived the blast, and his heroic actions and selflessness saved many of his patrol members' lives. His actions were certainly extraordinary, and they showed the character of the men and women who serve. They would do anything to protect those they love.

I am also reminded of a Coloradan I have had the honor of working with and meeting over the last several years. Two years ago, in fact, I had a Veterans Day experience I will never forget with another veteran who refused to give up on his fellow brothers and sisters in arms. I was visiting Donald Stratton, who was a seaman 1st class on the USS *Arizona* when the Japanese launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Stratton was one of the last five remaining survivors stationed on the USS *Arizona*. Since that time 2 years ago, we have lost Lauren Bruner. There are even fewer today than there were.

He told me how a young sailor named Joseph George disregarded the orders to abandon ship in order to save his life and the other sailors. Joseph George never received a medal for his actions, and Donald Stratton didn't think that was fair. It didn't sit well. Mr. Stratton and I and his family worked together to finally convince the Navy to honor Joe George, to give this hero the recognition he deserves.

Donald Stratton's story sticks with me because he had already fought one war for his country, and then he had to spend another 16 years fighting government bureaucracy in order to honor the man who saved his life and the lives of others. It is a reminder that our veterans need our help and our support to receive the recognition and the care they continue to deserve.

All of the stories I have shared and the individuals I have talked about are extraordinary, but there are so many other—countless acts of heroism. Every single person in our armed services today is extraordinary. Every day, they perform heroic acts of service and make sacrifices that may not make the national news or the front page of newspapers, but we shouldn't lose sight

of the fact that they sacrifice for our country every day. They have put their bodies and their minds through vigorous training, boot camps, and deployments. They have given up valuable time with their loved ones. They are away from home for months at a time, if not longer. There are the holidays they will never get back and the important milestones they have missed with their families as they placed their civilian lives on hold to serve our country. And too many people return with wounds of war, both physical and mental. All of these sacrifices and their willingness to place their lives on the line for the country they love add up to a debt we can never repay—never pay back.

I hope that the Veterans Day celebration this week serves as a reminder that it is our responsibility to take care of those who have taken care of us. We owe it to our Nation's veterans to ensure that they can receive the best possible care and that they have the tools and support necessary to navigate civilian life.

The Senate and the House have taken great steps to improve the lives of veterans and the care they receive, but we can always do more, and we must do more. We must do more and never give up. We can do better than the status quo.

For veterans living in rural areas like the Western Slope or Eastern Plains of Colorado, long drive times and a shortage of doctors and nurses at the VA facilities make it difficult to receive the care we promised. There has never been a fight too dangerous or a task too difficult for these men and women who have served our country, and that is the approach we need to take. We have to be in this fight to make sure we approach veterans' care with the same commitment and find creative solutions to ease the transition to civilian life, to make sure they have the care they need, and to make sure we have enough physicians and nurses and doctors in these places to provide the best possible care.

Earlier this year, I introduced my VA Readiness Initiative, which is a comprehensive package of improvements and reforms to ensure we are following through on every one of these promises to veterans. The VA Readiness Initiative focuses on four pillars to support veterans: expanding access to services, encouraging innovation, VA accountability, and empowering transitioning servicemembers.

It introduces more oversight and more transparency and accountability at VA facilities to eliminate fraud and increase the quality of care.

In order to ease the transition to civilian life, it enhances programs that help veterans start small businesses and train for future careers in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields.

It promotes innovative approaches to suicide prevention, which is a heart-breaking problem in the veteran community.

In Colorado, we are losing one of our own nearly every 7 hours to suicide. In recent years, we have lost more veterans to suicide than we lost in combat. Think about that. We have lost more veterans to suicide than we have lost in combat. In Colorado, we lose roughly 200 veterans a year to suicide.

I am working with my colleague Senator TAMMY BALDWIN from Wisconsin to designate 9-8-8 as a national suicide hotline that veterans and anyone else in crisis can call when they need help. Veterans answered our call when we needed them; we need to answer their call when they need us.

When somebody is suffering from a heart attack or a medical emergency, a crisis, we all know to call 9-1-1, but how many people know a number to call if they find themselves in a time of mental health crisis? Is there a 10-digit hotline? Yes, there is. How many people can know that and know that now off the top of their heads? How many people can tell a friend in need what that hotline number is? Let's simplify it. Let's make it a three-digit number like 9-1-1 for health crisis emergencies. Let's make sure we have 9-8-8 for mental health needs.

The current suicide hotline number is 10 digits long. This is an easy-to-remember hotline—9-8-8—to connect people in crisis with professional help. When a veteran is in need, a phone call is made, and they will receive specialized care for veterans. Press 1 to be directed to the veterans support line, where they can receive mental health support specific to the unique needs of our veterans.

I also hope every veteran in Colorado will look to our offices—my office in Colorado and my colleagues' offices—Senator BENNET and others—if there is anything we can do to help. Often times, too many people don't know about the services that can help them.

Thanks to the outpouring of veterans who contact my office each and every year, we were able to help open the VA Medical Center in Aurora, CO, last year. It was long overdue but essential to their care and to making sure we have the finest medical care for Coloradans.

Senator JOHNNY ISAKSON from Georgia, chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee—somebody who is stepping down from this Chamber at the end of the year, and we will miss him greatly—was instrumental in making this happen and will be greatly missed when he leaves. JOHNNY is a true statesman and a champion for our veterans. We in Colorado are grateful for his work to make sure that the VA hospital in Aurora is the crown jewel of our support system in our State for veterans.

November is also Military Family Appreciation Month. I certainly want to express my gratitude to the military families who share the burden of service. This is not just an individual effort; it is indeed a family effort. When one member of the family serves, the entire family serves.

We all know this can be a difficult time of the year. The holidays are coming up for troops and their families. As all of us celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, and other traditions in our families, I hope each one of our prayers will go to a military family in need, heroes who are placing their dreams on hold to protect the American dream.

To everyone who has served this country, thank you for the sacrifice you have all made, and know that our Nation is grateful. It is because of the commitment you bring that we can continue to live in a nation with unlimited opportunities, a nation founded in liberty and rooted in the principles that inspire hope and optimism around the world.

To every veteran, thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done in service to our beloved country. May God bless you, and may God bless this great United States of America as you continue to serve and as we continue to serve you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, Monday was Veterans Day, and it gave us all the opportunity to come together as Republicans and Democrats and Independents alike to express our immense gratitude to our veterans for putting on the uniform of the United States on behalf of our great country and on behalf of all of us.

I just listened to my colleague from Colorado talk about our cherished veterans and their service. He is a champion for our veterans. He is absolutely right—our veterans need to be at the front of the line for healthcare and getting access to the best care possible. That hasn't always been the case. We have made some improvements in the last few years, and those are now being implemented. They are not perfect, but thankfully it is much better. I heard that over Veterans Day.

He also talked about our families. The families of veterans also make sacrifices, and sometimes we forget that. In the last several years, as the up-tempo has been a little higher and families have had to sacrifice even more, we are particularly grateful for those families.

The Presiding Officer today is one of our veterans in the Chamber. As a marine, he has served our country with distinction, and we appreciate him and all the other veterans here in the Senate.

In my home State of Ohio, we have 850,000 veterans, roughly. It makes us a State that is particularly proud. We are a State that has produced some of the great American fighting men and women heroes, from Ulysses S. Grant to Neil Armstrong.

When I go to veterans' events, I am just inspired and overwhelmed by the families and the veterans I get to meet.

On Veterans Day, I was in Blue Ash, OH, at a memorial that has been set

aside for our veterans. It was a wonderful day in Blue Ash, but every day of the year this memorial park is there, and it is beautiful. It commemorates veterans from every single war. There are 11 soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen who are representing each of the conflicts America has been engaged in, all the way from the American Revolution to the heroes of the Global War on Terror. Behind a description of each of those conflicts is a separate statue of a fighting man or woman. Most importantly to me, on Monday, on the other side of those statues, were the veterans. They were there from every conflict—from World War II and right up to those soldiers who have recently come back from Afghanistan.

Today, as we are here on the floor talking about our great veterans, there are soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen on Active Duty in places all around the world, including in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

After this event in Blue Ash, OH, I then went to Columbus, OH, and had the opportunity to go to the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. This is a new, spectacular museum outside of Columbus, OH. It is something we are very proud of in Ohio. I took the lead in the Senate to try to be sure that we had the national designation. We have that now. It is the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. It was funded almost entirely with private sector dollars. Over \$75 million was raised just from the private sector in the Columbus-Central Ohio area. President Trump signed the legislation into law last year to designate it as the national memorial.

It is a beautiful way to pay tribute to our veterans, mostly by stories. You walk in, and there are story boards about different veterans' experiences. The facility itself is inspiring—one of the finest architectural designs, we are told, in the country the year it was built.

When I went around and thanked veterans at this memorial, I heard the same thing I heard in Blue Ash and that I hear every time I thank a veteran, which is more or less this: Thank you for your service. The response being: I was just doing my job. I was just doing my duty.

Duty. I am the son of a World War II veteran and the grandson of a World War I veteran. "Duty" is a word I heard a lot growing up and "service" and "honor." For our country today, those words are very important to remember.

Our veterans have played a key role in ensuring we have the freedoms we too often take for granted, but also there is a culture around veterans that we need to hear more and more of today, and we need to be sure more of our young people are hearing, which is this notion that service beyond self is important; that duty, honor, and sacrifice are part of the fundamental values of our country.

The fact that we have had such support for our veterans, to me, ought also

to be translated into support for those who are on Active Duty, because when I talk to our veterans about their concerns—yes, they talk about healthcare or disability and other issues that my office helps veterans with every day, and we are proud to do that—what they also tell me is that they want to be sure we are taking care of the troops. They want to be sure we are honoring our veterans by ensuring that the men and women in uniform today, who are out on the frontlines for all of us, are getting the support they need from the U.S. Congress.

Unfortunately, we are letting them down right now, whether it is with the National Defense Authorization Act—which is still in conference, which normally is a bipartisan bill that gets done quickly and that establishes the framework for how we provide readiness and how we provide the right weapons, being sure our soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors have the very best—but, secondly, we are not even providing the funding bill this year.

We have tried. We have brought it to the floor of the Senate, and we have asked for a vote on it. We have not been able to get that vote. So right now we are operating on what is called a continuing resolution, which is not good for the military.

I was at the Youngstown Air Reserve Station last week, which is a reserve unit in Ohio that provides airlift capability and a spray mission for our military. They have about 1,500 airmen support people and pilots there. They are very worried about the continuing resolution and its impact. They can't plan for training exercises. They can't plan for upgrades in their equipment to keep the cutting-edge technology they want to have for the safety of their pilots and the crews.

I also heard, of course, a lot about the possibility of a government shutdown and how devastating that would be for our military. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is in Ohio. That is their top concern.

Unfortunately, I will tell you that although our highest priority here in the Senate ought to be ensuring that at a minimum our troops have what they need, we haven't done that this year.

I would urge my colleagues on both sides: Let's figure out how to do what we typically do here, which is, if we can't agree on everything in the spending bills, let's at least agree on providing this funding for our troops.

By the way, it is particularly important this year because in that funding is a pay raise for the troops that they need badly. It is very important for Ohio.

I said earlier that we are one of those States that is proud of all the veterans who live there and all of the people from Ohio who have stood up and served their country, but we are also proud of our military facilities. Defense spending now accounts for 66,000 direct jobs in Ohio, more than \$4 billion in salaries, and more than \$14 bil-

lion of positive economic impact spread out over our 88 counties in Ohio.

We have some great facilities. I mentioned Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the Youngstown Air Reserve Station. We also have the Joint Systems Manufacturing Center in Lima, OH, which is the place where we make our tanks. During the Obama administration, that facility was nearly shut down. A bunch of us led the fight, and I led the fight here in the Senate to keep it open. Thank goodness we did. Today, we need it. We need to be producing these tanks. We need to push back against the threats that we see. Our Army wants these vehicles—armored vehicles—including Strykers and tanks. We are very proud of that facility in Ohio. We want to be sure that we have the funding for it so we can move forward. In this appropriations bill there is funding for new tanks and new Stryker vehicles.

At the spray facility I talked about at the Youngstown Air Reserve Station, they need new airplanes. They need to have upgrades. Right now they need to be sure that the funding we have in this appropriations bill goes through because it actually enables them to construct a gate for the facility that is safe. The homeland security folks have told them that their current gate does not protect the base properly. So we have funding in this legislation to be able to do that.

I remain concerned that we are not coming together, as we do for our veterans, for our Active Duty.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle have repeatedly blocked these procedural motions to move the bill forward, but their disagreements seem to be more with broader issues—how we are going to fund other issues, maybe including the wall on the southwest border—from what they say. Let's deal with that bill separately, but let's not take it out on our troops. Let's not make our troops a pawn in these political fights.

The funding bill we have was drafted on a bipartisan basis. It also is bicameral, in the sense that the House bill for Defense appropriations this year is very similar to the Senate bill.

The United States and the defense framework we have built over the years with our allies is under siege in places like Iran, China, North Korea, Turkey, and Russia. While we fight over funding our defense this year, their arsenals—those countries' arsenals—continue to grow.

I have heard from every branch of the military on this. Again, they all say the same thing: Failing to pass this funding agreement and defaulting to a continuing resolution—God forbid we go to a government shutdown, but even a continuing resolution where the funding wouldn't increase—negatively affects their ability to carry out their missions.

For the Army, by the way, that means delaying procurement of critical equipment, like their Next Generation

Combat Vehicle and land-based hypersonic missiles. But it also means more than 4,000 military family and single-soldier dwellings would not be awarded to servicemembers, and that nearly 300 military housing units in desperate need of repair will not get the upkeep they need.

For the Navy, they tell me failing to pass the appropriations bill will mean delaying the start of 3 dozen new critical military construction projects, and it creates a nearly \$2 billion shortfall for research and development, among other things. By the way, that includes holding research into artificial intelligence development, or AI development, which is critical right now. China is making great strides in that area. We have to be sure we are more than keeping up.

For the Air Force, they tell me this funding is necessary to field the new F-15EX fighter plane, to maintain and improve, of course, the F-35 fleet, and to help recruit and train new pilots to operate these state-of-the-art aircraft.

In Ohio, a CR would negatively impact our operations at Wright-Patterson and the critical work we do for our Nation at NASIC, which is a counter-intelligence operation, among other things.

Again, failing to pass the agreement will also keep us from moving forward with the across-the-board 3.1-percent pay increase for our troops, which is key to ensuring they are fairly compensated for their hard work and the sacrifices we have talked about today. It would be the largest pay raise in a decade, and they shouldn't be prevented from getting it because of our political differences here on other issues.

Anyone who has read the Constitution will tell you that the very first stated purpose of the Federal Government is to “provide for the common defense.” That is our fundamental responsibility here. If we can't put aside these partisan disagreements and reach an agreement to fund our Armed Forces, we are failing to carry out those duties.

I hope it doesn't come to that. I hope politics can be put aside, and we can agree soon to give our men and women in uniform the comprehensive support they need, because when you meet veterans, as I did on Veterans Day across our State, you can't help but wonder where they would be if they didn't have the funding they needed when they were out there putting their lives on the line for all of us.

Again, to honor our veterans, we also have to honor our Active Duty. It is critical to our men and women in uniform, and it is critical to our national security.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

REMEMBERING KAY HAGAN

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to recount the life of a colleague who recently passed away, Senator Kay Hagan from the State of North Carolina. I wish I didn't have to stand here to talk about her in the past tense. So many people who have served in the Senate with Kay Hagan, so many staff people across the Senate—and, in the context of both Members and staff, I would say both parties—recall serving with her fondly and also were very saddened by her passing.

It is very difficult to encapsulate someone's personality or their life in a few short remarks, but you could not have met Kay Hagan even for a short period of time or worked with her even for a short period of time without being captivated by her spirit, her energy, and her optimism, not only about her life but about work. You could also be captivated by her ability to connect with people and to demonstrate the kind of uncommon decency that we don't see enough of in politics and even public service. We are going to miss that energy, that optimism, and that decency. We are also going to miss her commitment to public service, even when she was not an elected public official.

My remarks today will not in any way encapsulate her whole life or her life of service, but I will try to provide some reflections.

One thing you knew about Kay Hagan when she got to the Senate was that she was very clear about the people she represented in the State from which she came. If you were in a short conversation with her or a long conversation—even a 30-second conversation—you were likely to hear the two words, "North Carolina," if not once in a short conversation, several times.

She was so proud of her State and so proud of the opportunities she had to represent the people of North Carolina. She, of course, understood her work and was faithful to the basic obligation to represent the Nation as well. She was fiercely loyal to and always concerned about the people of North Carolina.

She was a fierce advocate for working people in North Carolina and around the country. She also happened to serve at a time when the Senate was considering and then, ultimately, took a vote on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. At that time, it was a long debate and a lot of contention, obviously, and there still is on healthcare. But Kay Hagan was very clear about where she stood.

We happened to serve as members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, known by the acronym HELP—one of the two committees in the Senate that considered healthcare. Both the HELP Committee and the Finance Committee had fierce debate about and then, ultimately, votes on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Here is what Senator Kay Hagan said when the HELP Committee approved

similar or, I should say, related legislation, which at that time was called the Affordable Health Choices Act. That was the original healthcare bill that went through that committee, the HELP Committee. It ultimately changed when it was considered by the Finance Committee and then by the whole Senate, and the changes were made in negotiation and deliberation with the House.

But here is what she said. I guess this would have been sometime in 2009. She talked about this one particular healthcare bill as it stood at that moment. She said:

Our bill also ensures that a pre-existing condition will not prevent you from getting coverage. This compromise package focuses on prevention and wellness, which will keep our nation healthier and save taxpayers' money in the long run. I will continue working with my colleagues to get reform legislation to the President that stabilizes costs, expands coverage and improves the quality of care for all Americans.

That is what Senator Kay Hagan said at the time. Of course, we are still wrestling with a lot of those issues. She was predicting, in a sense, some of our future debates.

Kay Hagan wanted to get things done for the people she represented and really for the American people. One of the areas where she demonstrated that commitment to leadership and that commitment to getting things done was in the area of children's issues. In that same committee, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, she was the chair of the Subcommittee on Children and Families. Later, I was able to follow in her footsteps.

That was so emblematic of Kay Hagan's service not to be concerned just about what is right in front of us—the issue of the day or the issue of the moment, as important as those issues are—but always thinking about what comes next, always focusing on the future, thinking about the future, and not just in a compassionate way, as it relates to children, but in a very strategic way. Kay Hagan knew that investing in our children was essential for building the economy of the future and having the kind of country we say we want to have.

So Kay Hagan was ahead of her time in that regard, focusing on America's future, which meant focusing on America's children—whether it was financial literacy and the curriculum for middle and high school students or whether it was from her earliest days in the Senate—to improve the lives of children in any way that she could.

When I think about Kay Hagan, I think of not just a Senator, not just a colleague and a friend, but a public servant, someone who cared very deeply about service. I have often quoted the inscription on a building in which I worked in the State capital of Pennsylvania—Harrisburg. It is called the Finance Building, and I served in that building for 10 years and worked in that building for 10 years. The inscrip-

tion on that building about public service is very simple. It says: "All public service is a trust given in faith and accepted in honor." That is what it says in that inscription. It is a great summation of what public service must be about and what an election must be about, that public service is a trust that is given to one person, given to a group of people, and that trust must be honored by the service that you render.

Here is another way of saying it by a predecessor of Kay Hagan, in a sense, because she was a Member of the Senate and, at the time, a real pioneer for women in the Senate. Margaret Chase Smith once said:

Public service must be more than doing a job efficiently and honestly. It must be a complete dedication to the people and to the nation.

That is what Senator Margaret Chase Smith once said, and I think Kay Hagan's service was totally consistent with that sentiment, that public service is more than just doing a job honestly and efficiently, as Senator Smith said at the time. It must be a complete dedication to the people in the Nation. Kay Hagan demonstrated that in her life and in her work.

I have joined so many Members of the Senate in expressing condolence and also commendation for the good work that she did. I express condolence, of course, to her family. I speak on behalf of my wife Terese and many people here in the Senate who served with Kay to offer condolence to Kay's husband Chip and to her three children—Jeanette, Tilden, and Carrie—and Kay's five grandchildren. We are thinking of them today and all these days since her passing, and we pray that she will rest in peace. I express again how much we will miss Kay Hagan not only in the Senate but also because of the person she was. God bless you, Kay.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that unless there is objection, the 1:45 p.m. vote be held now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

All postclosure time is expired.

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The bill clerk will call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUND).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. JONES), the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 356 Ex.]

YEAS—51

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| Alexander | Fischer | Paul |
| Barrasso | Gardner | Perdue |
| Blackburn | Graham | Portman |
| Blunt | Grassley | Risch |
| Boozman | Hawley | Roberts |
| Braun | Hoeven | Romney |
| Burr | Hyde-Smith | Rubio |
| Capito | Inhofe | Sasse |
| Cassidy | Isakson | Scott (FL) |
| Cornyn | Johnson | Scott (SC) |
| Cotton | Kennedy | Shelby |
| Cramer | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Crapo | Lee | Thune |
| Cruz | McConnell | Tillis |
| Daines | McSally | Toomey |
| Enzi | Moran | Wicker |
| Ernst | Murkowski | Young |

NAYS—41

| | | |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| Baldwin | Hassan | Rosen |
| Blumenthal | Heinrich | Schatz |
| Brown | Hirono | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Kaine | Shaheen |
| Cardin | King | Sinema |
| Carper | Leahy | Smith |
| Casey | Manchin | Stabenow |
| Collins | Markay | Tester |
| Coons | Menendez | Udall |
| Cortez Masto | Merkley | Van Hollen |
| Duckworth | Murphy | Warner |
| Durbin | Murray | Whitehouse |
| Feinstein | Peters | |
| Gillibrand | Reed | Wyden |

NOT VOTING—8

| | | |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Bennet | Jones | Sanders |
| Booker | Klobuchar | Warren |
| Harris | Rounds | |

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 487.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert J. Luck, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Robert J. Luck, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

Rick Scott, Steve Daines, Mike Crapo, Pat Roberts, Marco Rubio, Lindsey Graham, John Hoeven, Roy Blunt, Mike Rounds, John Thune, John Cornyn, Deb Fischer, John Barrasso, James E. Risch, John Boozman, Tim Scott, Mitch McConnell.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 488.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Barbara Lagoa, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Barbara Lagoa, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

Rick Scott, Steve Daines, Mike Crapo, Pat Roberts, Marco Rubio, Lindsey Graham, John Hoeven, Roy Blunt, Mike Rounds, John Thune, John Cornyn, Deb Fischer, John Barrasso, James E. Risch, John Boozman, Tim Scott, Mitch McConnell.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 454.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Adrian Zuckerman, of New Jersey, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Romania.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Adrian Zuckerman, of New Jersey, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Romania.

Mitch McConnell, John Boozman, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Pat Roberts, James M. Inhofe, Chuck Grassley, Richard C. Shelby, Roger F. Wicker, John Cornyn, Cory Gardner, James Lankford, Mike Braun, John Hoeven, Roy Blunt, John Barrasso, James E. Risch, John Thune.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls be waived.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 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.

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

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

AFRICA

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, this past weekend, I was the first Senator in a really long time to fly into Somalia's notoriously dangerous capital city. I will tell you, at first glance, it looks like things in Mogadishu have gotten back to normal. But the situation on the ground, after you fly in and get out of the plane and you get on the ground, you see it is really quite a different story.

There is a reason why our recollection of Somali history focuses on the Black Hawk Down incident—the terrible Battle of Mogadishu—and then-