

unfortunately, the people in this administration who remain are willing to do just that. And that said, as I said, it is a very sad state of affairs and one of the reasons this administration has such a difficult relationship with the truth.

The President conjures fictions, buys into baseless conspiracy theories told by known buyers on FOX News or somewhere else, and then anyone who contradicts him earns his scorn. Contradict him enough, if you are in the administration, you lose your job.

Now, more worry. Amazingly, this afternoon, the President and Secretary of State Pompeo will meet in secret with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. It shows a blinding disregard with what is going on in Congress and the world right now. Russian intelligence has been pushing the baseless theory that Ukraine interfered in the 2016 elections, not just Putin, as a way to divide the West and defend Putin.

Certain Republican Senators have stunningly repeated that falsehood around these corridors, and now, President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo are meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister in secret. What new conspiracies are they cooking up with Lavrov today? I worry. The President has been so unable to articulate a defense of the facts uncovered in the House impeachment inquiry that he has resorted to one conspiracy after the next to explain his conduct. His allies, including Members of the Senate Republican Caucus, have elevated several of these theories.

Here in the Senate, certain members of the Grand Old Party are forming their own conspiracy caucus. Any crazy conspiracy, whether launched by Putin or some wild-eyed crazy conspiracy theorist, who manages, of course, all the time to get on FOX News and have his story or her story repeated, it is something that my colleagues just repeat even though it is clear they are false, and they know they are false.

ANGUS KING had a great op-ed last week in USA Today, which I commend to every one of my colleagues. It basically said, if what the impeachment proceeding has found is false, then where are the Trump people to refute it? Not to come up with some irrelevant conspiracy theory and bring this one and that one into it that has nothing to do with it, but actually refute the facts, where is that?

President Trump has not refuted a single fact that the impeachment inquiry has found. None of his people have been willing to come forward who would have knowledge to refute those facts if those facts were false. And so they try to create a shiny object, a diversion, and, unfortunately, too many of the news media on the right will spend time on that diversion and repeat Trump's claim that the actual facts are false.

This is the beginning of the end of the democracy, when we can't have

truth—we can disagree on the outcome of those facts, but we can't have truth of the fact—and everything is fake news, particularly those from the right who don't like the truth. When conspiracy theories that have no basis in fact govern, our democracy is at risk. It is one of the main reasons I think so many Americans believe, whatever their ideology, that President Trump should not be President.

The conspiracy theories are not harmless. They are sinister. They are insidious. They erode the democratic fabric of this country. They erode our fidelity of truth which is at the basis of democracy, and they help Putin sow discord in our country. Conspiracies need to stop. If the White House would like to submit evidence or offer witnesses to make the President's case, please do so. They haven't done it once. Instead, the White House is blocking documents and withholding witnesses who could potentially defend the President's action, a surefire sign, as ANGUS KING said in his op-ed, that the President has something to hide.

Given that the House announced it would write two Articles of Impeachment this morning, the White House's refusal to rebut the evidence under oath is something not lost on the Members of the U.S. Senate who could soon be judges and jurors in a Senate trial.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Madam President, on another happier subject, over the weekend, negotiations on the annual defense bill concluded. There are lots of things missing in that bill, things that should have been included but were blocked by the Republican majority in the Senate. But there is one very good thing, among a few others. I am proud that the bill will now provide all Federal employees with 12 weeks of paid parental leave, something Democrats have pursued for a long time.

Once the NDAA is passed—hopefully in the coming week—1 million Federal employees will no longer have to choose between caring for a newborn and putting food on the table. This is huge, huge news. It will make the lives of millions of families better if you have a newborn baby that needs care, he or she. I just had a grandson who turned 1. I know just exactly what it is like. If both mom and dad work or it is a single-parent family, what is that family going to do?

It is one of the nerve-racking decisions that impedes on the joy of the new birth. Well, in many other countries, there is something called paid family leave where you can take off 3 months and raise the child in those early days when he or she is helpless. In the United States, some private companies are progressively doing it, but not enough. Well, now all Federal employees will get that opportunity with parental leave. It recognizes the changes in the world.

When I was growing up, my mom stayed at home while my dad went to work, who was an exterminator. That

is not the norm anymore. Most families have two working parents, and we have lots of single parents who bear the load of raising a family. All it takes is one serious illness, complication, or accident to wreak financial havoc on that family.

It is no surprise that paid family leave ranks near the top of voters' concerns. The United States is the only developed nation in the world that does not guarantee paid leave for parents of newborns or newly adopted. I hope that, after we pass parental leave for Federal employees, employees in the private sector will take notice and they will act as well. If this spreads throughout America, as often Federal policies do, it will be a great thing for our parents and our children.

Today, only 16 percent of workers in the private sector have access to paid leave. Studies overwhelmingly show that, when working parents can take care of their families without the fear of losing jobs, families are better off, and the economy is better off as well. So I am glad that the long push we have made on this side of the aisle for parental leave has been secured for all family workers. I hope it will become a reality soon for all workers, and I want to thank my colleagues who helped make this a reality.

#### NET NEUTRALITY

Madam President, on net neutrality, this Saturday marks the second anniversary of the FCC's party-line decision to repeal the net neutrality rules. To restore the safeguards of a free and open net that those rules protected, today my colleagues Senators MARKEY, CANTWELL, and WYDEN will ask the Senate's consent to pass the Save the Internet Act, which codifies net neutrality in a similar manner to last year's Congressional Review Act, which passed the Senate with strong bipartisan support.

I thank those Senators and so many others for their leadership on this important and sometimes overlooked issue. Net neutrality is based on a very simple idea, that the internet, just like our phones, our highways, our power sources, is a public good that all Americans should have access to without discrimination, whether you are a big company or a startup, a rural school or an individual consumer just like water companies can't discriminate if they come to their customers and say, oh, I am going to charge you \$10 for a day's use of water, but I am going to charge your neighbor down the street \$100. That would be unfair. We would not allow it. The same thing should be true with the internet.

Under the Obama administration, net neutrality rules prevented moneyed groups from getting preferential treatment. We should return to it. The administration has, unfortunately, sided with big special interests and repealed it. Senator MARKEY's legislation would restore the rules of the world that protect a free and open internet.

I thank my colleagues for bringing this to the Senate's attention today.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, it should come as no surprise that I might have a different point of view than the Democrat leader when it comes to the issue of net neutrality. If you look at what has happened since the FCC ruled on this, there were all these terrible apocalyptic predictions that were made about how speeds were going to slow down, the internet was going to slow to a crawl, and you wouldn't be able to do basic applications anymore, none of which have happened.

Obviously, we all believe—I certainly do, and I think most of my colleagues on this side believe—that if you want to have an open and free internet, that is a good thing, and if there are concerns about blocking or throttling or slowing speeds in some way, the Congress should be heard from on that because what we have had now for several years is this ping-pong effect. When one party is in power, they change the rules to suit their desires, and then the other party comes to power and changes it. Then you have all this litigation that goes on in the courts, which doesn't help anybody. All that does is bog things down and generates a tremendous amount of cost, and nobody's interests are served by that.

So if there is a concern, and I have articulated this on many occasions to my colleagues on the other side, to work with us on a legislative solution where Congress can step in and put clear rules of the road in place when it comes to the internet—making sure we have an open and free internet—we are prepared to do that, but that is not something the Democrats have been interested in doing.

They would rather have this heavy hand of government that slows this innovation down, all these wonderful things that are happening in our economy right now—the race to 5G, which obviously is critically important to so many sectors of our economy—could be dramatically impeded if you had the heavy hand of government, the heavy hand of regulation, which has been advocated by our colleagues on the Democratic side for some time, if that became the norm.

When President Trump was elected, and Chairman Pai was made Chairman of the FCC, and we had a Republican FCC which did away with the heavy-handed regulations of the previous administration, we heard all these apocalyptic predictions coming from the Democrats about all of the horrible things that were going to happen to the internet. I can tell you that my experience, I think, is like most Americans. I can continue to download applications. I can continue to scroll and to see the things I want to see and to toggle back and forth between different websites in a way that I did before. It just flat hasn't happened. So they are trying to come up with a solution for a problem that does not exist.

That said, we would be happy to work with them. We want to put clear rules of the road in place, but that is not what they want. They want the heavy hand of government and the heavy hand of regulation strangling what has been one of the most remarkable economic miracles of the last half century, if you look at what the internet has done in terms of productivity in this country.

#### APPROPRIATIONS

Madam President, I am very pleased to hear that a deal has been reached to finally advance the 2020 fiscal year National Defense Authorization Act.

Every year, Congress takes up the National Defense Authorization Act to authorize funding for our military and our national defense. Like last year's NDAA, this year's bill focuses on rebuilding our military and ensuring that we are prepared to meet 21st century threats.

While many take it for granted that we have the strongest military in the world, in recent years, our military advantage over near-peer adversaries has eroded. Budgetary impasses, combined with increased operational demands, left our military undermanned, under-equipped, and ill-prepared for the conflicts of the 21st century.

In November of 2018, the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission released a report warning that our readiness had eroded to the point where we might struggle to win a war against a major power like Russia or China, and the Commission noted that we would be especially vulnerable if we were ever called on to fight a war on two fronts. That is not a good position to be in. Restoring our readiness has been and must continue to be our top priority.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act continues our efforts to rebuild our military. It invests in the planes, the combat vehicles, and the ships of the future, including the Joint Strike Fighter and the future B-21 bomber, which will be based at Ellsworth Air Force Base in my home State of South Dakota. It authorizes funding for research and development and advanced technology. It also focuses on ensuring that we are equipped to meet new threats on new fronts, including in the space and cyber domains. Of course, this bill invests in our most valuable resource—our men and women in uniform.

The National Defense Authorization Act authorizes a 3.1-percent pay increase for our troops, which is the largest increase in a decade. This is not only something our troops have earned, it is also an important way to increase retention in an All-Volunteer Force.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act also focuses on addressing the recent significant health and safety issues with private on-base housing. It contains measures to support military spouses seeking employment and increased access to childcare on military installations.

I am glad we are finally on track to get this important legislation done. The final bill, of course, like most legislation, is not perfect, but it will help ensure that our military receives the resources it needs to meet current threats and to prepare for the threats of the future.

I am also encouraged by the fact that it looks like Democrats have decided to work with us to get fiscal year 2020 Defense appropriations passed before Christmas.

Needless to say, the 2020 Defense appropriations bill, like the authorization bill which I just referenced, is critical legislation that authorizes the funding for current and future military priorities. It provides funding to support that pay increase for the men and women who keep us safe. It provides the funding for the weapons and equipment our troops need right now to carry out their missions, and it provides funding for the equipment and technology our military would need to defeat the threats of the future.

It provides funding for missile defense, for research and development, for ships, for planes, and for combat vehicles to update our aging fleets. It also provides funding for our allies, including \$250 million in military assistance for Ukraine. This is a critical national security bill, and it needs to be enacted as soon as possible.

It is unfortunate that we couldn't get this legislation done sooner, before the start of the new fiscal year in October. Delaying defense funding has left our military short of the resources it needs and unable to start important new projects. So I am glad that, at long last, the Democrats are finally willing to work with us on this important legislation. It is time to get this bill done so we can get our men and women in uniform the resources they need without further delay, as well as uphold our national security commitments to our friends and to our allies.

I hope negotiations will continue to move forward and that we can get this legislation to the President's desk within the next 2 weeks, before the Christmas holiday.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### WYOMING WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DAY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor as we celebrate today, in Wyoming, the 150th anniversary of Wyoming's women's right to vote—150 years. Before we even became a State, women were voting in Wyoming. Today, at our State capital building in Cheyenne, there is a huge celebration of people from around the