

tradition of expressing Congress's bipartisan commitment to our national defense, but with the Senate's final vote later today, we will finally put this vital legislation on the President's desk. I look forward to voting to pass the NDAA today by another overwhelming bipartisan vote for our servicemembers and the critical missions they carry out.

Of course, the Senate needs to follow up the Defense authorization bill with appropriations measures and funding our national defense and domestic priorities. Ensuring the Federal Government makes careful use of taxpayer dollars is an uphill battle by definition. So it is critical that we plan in advance and deliver clarity for the full year ahead, rather than careen from one short-term stopgap to another. This point is especially crucial for our Armed Forces. Underwriting the commitments we make to the security of America's interests and our allies are the investments we make in a 21st century fighting force.

Our Nation's top military commanders have been crystal clear: This requires stable and predictable annual funding. It is as simple as that. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, put it recently, continuing resolutions are "a very ineffective and inefficient use of the taxpayers' dollars."

The Secretary of Defense hasn't minced words either: "Every day that a CR continues is one less day that we can invest in future capabilities and future technologies."

As a simple matter of good governance, avoiding another stopgap CR is an important step. So I am encouraged that the House is preparing to advance full-year appropriations bills this week. Obviously, what is actually in these bills certainly matters. So I am glad to say the efforts of Chairman SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and their counterparts in the House and White House negotiators have produced a bipartisan package of full-year funding measures that will make needed investments in our Nation's top priorities.

First is a topline increase in funding that our national defense requires. For the third consecutive year, President Trump and Republicans in Congress will deliver on our commitment to continue rebuilding America's military after nearly a decade of forced belt-tightening.

As threats to the United States, our allies, and our interests continue to emerge and evolve, this work is more important than ever. America no longer stands unchallenged in the international system.

As Russia tests the reach of its meddling influence in Europe and the Middle East, as China invests heavily in reshaping the order of the Asia-Pacific region in its image, a new era of great power competition demands our attention and our action.

The defense funding measure the House will consider today answers

these realities with a significant increase in defense funding. Our commanders will have more resources to modernize force structure, develop cutting-edge weapon capabilities, and ensure that American servicemembers receive the best training, equipment, and support available. It includes much needed upgrades to the nuclear force that backs up America's strategic posture, investments in hypersonic technologies to keep pace with our biggest adversaries, and renewed commitments to our servicemembers and their families here at home.

But our efforts are about more than equipping the U.S. military to win a fight. The funding bill takes a comprehensive approach to the security of the United States and our allies. It will unlock targeted resources for countering the creeping influence of authoritarian powers so military engagements become less likely in the first place.

I am particularly proud that, thanks to my own efforts, the legislation modernizes the reporting requirements of the Hong Kong Policy Act I sponsored back in 1992. It expands our support for democracy in Hong Kong, including legal support to Hong Kong activists, and increases the Countering Russian Influence Fund.

Of course, our work goes beyond defense and foreign affairs. We are talking about full-year funding for the Federal Government's domestic work as well, for example, big wins for the President's agenda to bring more security to the southern border. This year's funding bills provide another \$1.4 billion for the border wall system plus more flexibility on location than last year's funding. Despite the efforts of some House Democrats during this process, Presidential authorities to transfer necessary funds remain intact.

The bills also fund critical transportation infrastructure grants and inland waterways projects. They provide for our Nation's continuing fight against the opioid epidemic and help equip local authorities and first responders combating the scourge of addiction nationwide.

I am very proud and pleased that this legislation also includes Tobacco 21 legislation that I introduced with my friend from Virginia, Senator Kaine, this year. Raising the age of purchasing vaping devices and other tobacco products to 21 years old nationwide will take bold, direct action to stem the tide of early nicotine addiction upon our Nation's youth.

In another provision I fought to include in this legislation, we will secure the pension benefits of nearly 100,000 coal miners and their dependents in Kentucky and across the country.

Another key section provides hundreds of millions of dollars more for election security, another step in the work by Congress and this administration to make sure the lapses that took place on the Obama administration's watch in 2016 are not repeated.

The list goes on and on. All manner of important priorities will benefit this bipartisan legislation. It is not just about what these bills will continue, it is also about what this legislation will end.

It will take several more big bites out of the failures of ObamaCare by repealing more of its burdensome taxes. Already Republicans have repealed the board that ObamaCare set up to micro-manage healthcare and zeroed out the individual mandate penalty. We have already done that. Now this legislation the House will pass today will repeal even more of ObamaCare's misguided measures such as the medical device tax and the Cadillac tax.

So there are two timeless truths about the appropriations process in divided government. First, neither side will ever get what they would consider to be perfect bills, but, second, full-year funding definitely beats drifting endlessly from CR to CR. This legislation we expect the House to send us today satisfies the important priorities for the White House, for each of my colleagues, and for the American people. I look forward to supporting it, and I hope Senators on both sides of the aisle will do the same.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020—CONFERENCE REPORT—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany S. 1790, which will be stated by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the bill (S. 1790) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2020 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the Senate recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the House and agree to the same with an amendment and the House agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come here today to address the current status of the National Labor Relations Board and, in particular, how the rights of workers are being undermined by Republican obstructionism. You see, for decades, Presidents have nominated—and Democrats and Republicans in the Senate have confirmed—NLRB nominees from both parties in order to ensure the agency can enforce laws necessary to protect workers' rights.

Yet, for the first time in the history of the Board, we are now left with zero Democratic members on the Board because of Republican inactions. To say this is highly problematic is an understatement. We will be left with zero Democrats, because, yesterday, Lauren McFerran's term expired. Now, Lauren McFerran is a dedicated, highly-qualified, and well-respected public servant.

Despite the repeated requests my colleagues and I have sent to the White House, President Trump refuses to renominate Ms. McFerran. Last year, Republicans in the Senate stalled the renomination of another exceptionally qualified nominee to the NLRB, Mark Gaston Pearce. How? Just by simply refusing to hold the vote—instead, allowing that seat to remain empty. Now, workers are confronted with a Board made up solely of three Republicans and zero Democrats to serve on this historically bipartisan agency.

That is simply unacceptable. I get it—Board members, nominations, Washington infighting—to many folks, this may seem like “inside baseball,” but let me explain what this will mean for everyday people. When workers stand together to form a union, the NLRB ensures that the election is fair. If a worker is fired or unfairly punished because they want to join a former union, the NLRB is there and tasked with protecting their rights. If a company refuses to negotiate fairly with unions who are fighting for higher rates or better benefits or safer working conditions, it is the NLRB that safeguards those rights that have helped build our country’s middle class.

Quite frankly, the NLRB is a critical worker protections agency, and workers across the country will suffer because of the Republicans’ dereliction of duty, especially as the Republican NLRB members are now mired in allegations of ethics issues. They are pursuing an aggressive rulemaking agenda that will gut workers’ rights and are undermining efforts that will enforce protections for workers. It is clear that workers in this country today cannot afford, now, an imbalanced and increasingly partisan NLRB.

By the way, that is just the latest example of Republicans standing in the

way of Democratic nominees. I am still waiting for a Democratic nominee to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission after Republicans blocked the renomination of Chai Feldblum last year.

I am deeply disappointed by the inaction of the Republicans. I deplore them to return to the normal process. The NLRB must not become a playing field for partisan politics. We need to end this obstructionism and fill these seats without any further delay.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic Leader is recognized.

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just listened to Leader McCONNELL’s lengthy response to my letter proposing the outlines of a fair impeachment trial in the Senate. Leader McCONNELL was apparently upset that I sent him the letter on Sunday, saying the first step was for the two leaders to meet and then discuss a resolution. Well, if we were allowed to show a video here on the Senate floor of a Republican leader’s appearance on Sean Hannity’s program last week, it would expose the fallacy of his argument.

Leader McCONNELL, unfortunately, skipped his first step when he began publicly talking about the rules of a Senate trial, telling Hannity that he would be taking cues from the White House and his idea for how to conduct a trial long before any conversation—which he still hasn’t had—with me. My letter was intended as a good-faith proposal to kick-start the discussions that Leader McCONNELL has so far delayed in scheduling. I still expect we will sit down and discuss trial parameters despite his public appearances on FOX News, but let me say this: I listened to the leader’s speech. I did not hear a single argument as to why the witnesses I suggested should not give testimony. Impeachment trials, like most trials, have witnesses. To have none would be an aberration.

Why is the President so afraid of having these witnesses come testify? What are they afraid the witnesses would say? I would like to hear Leader McCONNELL come to the floor and give specific reasons why the four witnesses we have asked for should not testify. I do not know what they will say. They are President Trump appointees. They might have something exculpatory to say about President Trump, or they might not, but they are certainly the four key people who saw exactly what was going on.

What is Leader McCONNELL afraid of? What is President Trump afraid of? The truth? But the American people want the truth, and that is why we have asked for witnesses and documents to get at the whole truth and nothing but.

This week, the House of Representatives will vote on Articles of Impeachment against the President of the United States. If these articles pass the House, the Constitution dictates that the Senate serve as a court of impeachment. Conducting an impeachment trial is a tremendously weighty and solemn responsibility entrusted to us by our Founders. If such a trial is to happen, Democrats strongly believe it must be fair, and the American people must regard it as fair. A fair trial is one that allows Senators to get all the relevant facts and adjudicate the case impartially.

In the letter I sent to Leader McCONNELL, I proposed a very reasonable structure for a fair trial. I have sent that same letter to every one of my colleagues, Democrat and Republican. There is a grand tradition in America, speedy and fair trials. We want both. The leader seems obsessed with speedy and wants to throw fair out the window.

To simply repeat the arguments that were made in the House and Senate, when there are witnesses and documents that could shed light on what actually happened, why not have them? Let’s hear a single word of answer to that. We have heard none. In fact, the American people want it as well. A poll today in the Washington Post/ABC says 72 percent of Americans want to hear these witnesses; 64 percent of Republicans do. The American people are fair. They don’t want a coverup. They don’t want concealment. This is weighty stuff.

The House has put together a very, very strong case that the President abused his power and wanted to let a foreign power interfere in our elections. That goes to the heart of what our democracy is and what the Founding Fathers warned against. Now, to not allow witnesses to come forward who would be able to discuss what actually happened—if we don’t have them, the trial won’t be fair. The four witnesses we proposed have direct knowledge of why aid to Ukraine was delayed, and the administration’s request for Ukraine to conduct two investigations for political reasons, they have direct knowledge of those facts.

We don’t know, as I said, what kind of evidence they will present. It may be incriminating. It may be exculpatory. It may influence how Senators vote. It may not. But they certainly ought to be heard. By virtue of their senior positions in the White House, each witness we named was directly involved in the events that led to the charges made by the House.

We have also proposed subpoenaing certain records, including emails by certain key officials that are directly related to the charges brought by the

House. I believe these documents are also of great importance to making Senators have the information necessary to make a fully informed decision, this terribly weighty decision.

The House has built a very strong case against the President. Maybe that is why Leader McCONNELL doesn't seem to want witnesses—at least not to agree to them now. Maybe that is why the President is afraid, because the House case is so strong that they don't want witnesses who might corroborate it.

The evidence the House put together includes public testimony given under oath by numerous senior officials appointed by President Trump. These are Trump appointees we are calling, not some partisan Democrat.

Some Republican Senators have said that while the charges are serious, they haven't seen enough evidence to make a decision. That is one of the reasons I proposed subpoenas for these witnesses and documents—all directly relevant—from officials who have yet to testify under oath during any stage of the House process.

Senators who oppose this plan will have to explain why less evidence is better than more evidence. Let me say that again to every Senator in this room, Democrat and Republican: Senators who oppose this plan will have to explain why less evidence is better than more evidence, and they are going to have to explain that position to a public that is understandably skeptical when they see an administration suppressing evidence and blocking senior officials from telling the truth about what they know.

Let me repeat this Washington Post/ABC poll I read about in the paper just this morning. Seventy-one percent of Americans believe the President should allow his top aides to testify in a potential Senate trial. Seventy-two percent of Independents and 64 percent of Republicans—64 percent of Republicans—think President Trump should allow his top aides to testify in a potential Senate trial—7 out of 10 Americans.

The American people have a wisdom, which seems to be lacking with some of my colleagues, that a trial without witnesses is not a trial. It is a rush to judgment. It is a sham trial.

The American people understand that a trial without relevant documents is not a fair trial. Again, it is a desire not for sunlight but for darkness to conceal facts that may well be very relevant.

The American people understand that if you are trying to conceal evidence and block testimony, it is probably not because the evidence is going to help your case. It is because you are trying to cover something up.

President Trump: Are you worried about what these witnesses would say? If you are not worried, let them come forward. And if you are worried, we ought to hear from them.

Again, the Republican leader went on for 15, 20 minutes without giving a sin-

gle argument for why these witness shouldn't testify or these documents shouldn't be produced—unless the President has something to hide.

In the coming weeks, every Senator will have a choice: Do they want a fair, honest trial that examines all the facts or do they want a trial that doesn't let all of the facts come out?

We will have votes during this proceeding, should the House send it to us—when they send it to us. After voting for it, we will have votes on whether these people should testify and whether these documents should be made public and part of the trial.

The American people will be watching. They will be watching. Who is for an open and fair trial? Who is for hiding facts—relevant facts, immediate facts? Who is for covering up?

I expect to discuss this proposal for a fair trial with Leader McCONNELL, but each individual Senator will have both the power and the responsibility to help shape what an impeachment trial looks like.

In Federalist 65, Alexander Hamilton wondered:

Where else than in the Senate could have been found a tribunal sufficiently dignified, or sufficiently independent [to serve as a court of impeachment]? What other body would be likely to feel CONFIDENCE ENOUGH . . . to preserve unawed and uninfluenced, the necessary impartiality?

My colleagues, Leader McCONNELL: Are you, in Alexander Hamilton's words, unawed and uninfluenced to produce the necessary impartiality or will you participate in a coverup?

Can we live up to Hamilton's fine words with dignity, independence, and confidence to preserve the necessary impartiality to conduct a fair trial? That question should weigh heavily upon every single Senator.

APPROPRIATIONS

Before the week concludes, we must pass legislation to keep the government open and provide appropriations for the following year. Luckily, over the weekend, an agreement was reached between appropriators—House and Senate, Democrat and Republican—that would see us achieve that goal.

I am proud to report that the final appropriations agreements includes several important Democratic priorities to help American families.

Democrats have secured more than \$425 million in election security grants, nearly double the amount Senate Republicans reluctantly supported in earlier legislation.

Democrats have secured an increase of \$550 million in grants to help offset the cost of childcare for low-income families.

Democrats have made progress on a number of fronts to combat climate change: Record-level funding for clean energy and energy efficiency programs; record-level funding to provide clean, electric buses; and increased funding for climate change science and research.

For the first time in decades, Democrats have secured \$25 million in gun violence research at the CDC and NIH, breaking through what had been a ridiculous ban on gun violence research.

Medical research, scientific research, environmental protection, education, and housing programs will all see significant increases in federal support.

Of course, we did not achieve everything we wanted. I am sorely disappointed that we were unable to reach an agreement on more resources to clean up PFAS contamination, a toxic chemical that has plagued too many communities in my home State of New York and communities across the country.

Senate Democrats have done a lot of hard work on this issue. Our disappointment today will in no way diminish our resolve to force Congress to take action on PFAS next year.

NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

Yesterday, the term of National Labor Relations Board member Lauren McFerran expired. For the first time in over 35 years, the Nation's most important labor protection agency is now without a single Democratic board member to defend labor rights.

For nearly eight decades, the NLRB has been the Nation's top agency fighting for the protection of workers' rights, including the right to form a union and collectively bargain for better wages, benefits, and safer conditions. Over the past three years, as President Trump has sought to undermine these protections, Democratic members of the Board have been crucial in pushing back. The NLRB was designed to be bipartisan, but I fear that with Ms. McFerran's departure, an all-Republican NLRB—without a strong pro-worker, pro-labor voice—will not stand in the way of President Trump's dismantling of worker protections, and may even help accelerate it.

The President has claimed to be a champion for working Americans, but over the last 3 years, he has shown that he is anything but. From opposing minimum wage increases to reversing rules that protect workers on the job . . . to nominating people like Eugene Scalia to the Department of Labor and Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, the President has put powerful corporate interests before workers' interests. Meanwhile, Senate Republicans have stonewalled Democratic nominees to the NLRB. Working Americans will remember the record as 2020 fast approaches.

CHINA

Last Friday, President Trump announced a temporary, partial trade agreement with China. After 8 months of negotiations, it is stunning how little this deal achieved for the United States at such a high cost to American workers and businesses.

In exchange for a drastic reduction in our leverage, China has made some short-term assurances to buy more agricultural products from us without real commitments to end its most rapacious trade practices. It appears that

President Trump has ordered a retreat while declaring victory.

I have been very open about praising President Trump's tough stance on negotiating with China. To succeed in these high-stakes negotiations, I have urged the President to stay tough and not settle for photo ops or weak deals. I have said that he must be prepared to walk away if China refuses to make significant, credible, and enforceable concessions.

But under this new, temporary deal, President Trump is selling the farm for a few magic soybeans. By USTR Lighthizer's admission, last week's deal fails to make significant progress on ending China's worst trade abuses, like intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers, illegal dumping, and more. That is not nearly good enough. And I worry that President Trump, by cutting this small, insubstantial deal, has made the success of future, more difficult negotiations much more doubtful.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from Kentucky.

S. 1790

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, we have before us today the National Defense Authorization Act to authorize the programs and policies of the Department of Defense. We will be taking a vote to finalize this bill shortly.

Our national defense is incredibly important. It is mandated in the Constitution. Our national defense is arguably Congress's primary constitutional responsibility.

I have great respect and honor for those in uniform who serve. In fact, I recently introduced a bill to give each soldier who served in the War on Terror a \$2,500 bonus and, at the same time, officially end the war in Afghanistan. Ending the Afghan war would save us about \$50 billion a year.

Unfortunately, the bill before us does not end any of our multitude of wars. The bill before us simply continues the status quo and throws more money around the world at conflicts we can't even begin to fathom.

Before rubberstamping more money, it is worth a moment for us to take a step back and consider two things. First, we need to ask ourselves whether borrowing millions of dollars year after year to fuel our appetite for more military spending is a wise policy in the years ahead.

Second, we need to look at how this bill has been loaded up to carry things only somewhat related or not related at all to national defense.

As I have reminded my colleagues often, Admiral Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the national debt was our greatest national security threat. His exact wording was "the most significant threat to our national security is our debt." That was in 2010.

When he made that remark, our debt was only \$13 trillion. Our debt is now

over \$23 trillion. We just keep borrowing and borrowing, and there is no end in sight.

Under the new budget deal passed by Republicans and Democrats, we are borrowing \$2.75 billion every day. In fact, we are borrowing nearly \$2 million every minute.

We spend more on our military than the next seven largest militaries combined. Our Defense Department is so large that it took them a decade to even figure out how to audit themselves. Then they said that the audit itself would cost over half a billion dollars. But then, last year, they arrived back at square one. After all that effort, they said: Well, we just can't figure it out. It is too big. We can't audit the Army, the Navy, the Marines, or the Air Force.

We spend so much money that the Department of Defense literally can't keep track of all of it. We don't have a great idea of exactly how much we are wasting because no one can get a grip on how much is being spent.

A few years ago, the Defense Business Board, which is a defense advisory panel of corporate executives who report to the Secretary of Defense, recommended that the Department of Defense can save \$125 billion in administrative expenses.

According to news accounts, that report scared everyone at the Pentagon, so they buried the report. They even tried to keep it away from Congress for fear that Congress might actually do something with it, although I wouldn't be holding my breath or too worried. I am not familiar with Congress ever cutting anything.

We are set to spend \$738 billion on the military this year. That is up \$22 billion from last year. Over the past 6 years, military spending has risen over \$120 billion. We say that we are for accountability, efficiency, and savings. Yet we keep piling good money after bad. How can we demand better accounting and efficiency when we budget increases every year?

To be clear, I support our national defense. Supporting our servicemembers is a worthy cause. There are things in this bill that I do support. I am a cosponsor of the bill to eliminate the so-called widow's tax, and I have argued that it is the right thing to do. We should find the money to pay for it. That is in this bill.

I support returning the 101st Airborne at Fort Campbell to its full air assault capacity with the return of a combat aviation brigade. That is in this bill.

I support giving our servicemembers a pay increase. That is in the bill. But I take issue when Congress adds other things to this bill that don't have anything to do with our military.

This bill would sanction NATO allies and potentially American energy companies if they have any involvement with Nord Stream 2 pipeline. This is a pipeline between Russia and Germany. The pipeline is basically done. It may

well be completed in the next few months. The pipeline will be completed. Yet we want to jeopardize our relationship with our allies and with businesses both in Europe and America.

This bill would also drop more sanctions into the middle of the Syrian civil war, as well as funding for so-called "vetted" Syrian rebel groups. All this would do is prolong the Syrian civil war and, with it, the humanitarian suffering and displacement we have seen in the region. The Syrian civil war is largely over. I agree with President Trump that it is time to come home.

Another problem with our insatiable appetite for more military spending is that it requires conservatives to make bad compromises. If you want \$40 billion in new defense spending, then you have to give the liberals \$40 billion new domestic spending. If anything, that is the real nature of today's bipartisanship: You can have your money as long as we get our money.

The dirty little secret in Washington is that there is actually too much compromise. Republicans want more military spending; Democrats want more welfare money. And with each new Congress, Congress always chooses to spend and borrow more money.

For example, this bill provides a new mandatory benefit program: paid parental leave for all Federal employees, starting next year. The program will cost over \$3 billion forever—and most of these programs continue to expand forever. The program will cost \$3 billion a year, and, of course, there is nothing in the bill that tells how we are going to pay for it. So we are going to have paid leave, everybody, but we are going to borrow the money from China to give this great benefit.

In essence, today, Congress is simply saying: Add it to my tab; the deficit be damned. Regardless of how you feel about the issue, this represents a better benefit than many working Americans enjoy, and it has nothing to do with national defense.

Conservatism is more than supporting military spending at any cost. We have to do more and make tough decisions that enable a strong national defense and a balanced budget.

Many so-called conservatives will hail this bloated military spending, but, in truth, there is nothing fiscally conservative about borrowing money from China to pay for our military. In fact, I would argue that borrowing money to buy more tanks or planes or to police the far corners of the Earth actually damages our national security.

Some have argued that our military is hollowed out, exhausted from so many far-flung conflicts—probably true. They will argue that we must expand military spending to meet the mission.

Perhaps we should entertain the opposite argument. Perhaps it is not that our military budget is too small but

that our military mission is too large. I, for one, hope for a day when Congress rediscovers that our constitutional mandate is to defend America first and only to become involved in war as a last resort and, even then, America should only become involved in war when Congress has debated and done its constitutional duty to declare war.

Until that day, I will continue to argue that the only fiscally conservative, fiscally responsible action is to vote against expanding the military budget. I encourage my fellow Senators to consider that.

I yield back.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

MR. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank my colleague for his words. I will add to that, I hope.

As we approach the end of the first session of Congress, I think it may be prudent to look back at some of the news surrounding the current state of the Nation's budgetary affairs. Unfortunately, none of the news is good.

This past summer, Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019, which increased the last 2 years of the Budget Control Act's discretionary funding caps. The Congressional Budget Office tells us that the bill has increased their forecast of the Nation's projected deficits by \$1.7 trillion over the next 10 years.

I will be the first to admit that it is largely due to mandatory programs, which already have inadequate revenues.

In the fall, we received final tax and spending data for fiscal year 2019. The report showed the deficit for the last fiscal year was \$984 billion, even though revenues were greater than ever before. Relative to the size of the economy, that deficit—an estimated 4.6 percent of GDP—was the highest since 2012. This also marked the fourth consecutive year the deficit increased as a share of the economy. These growing deficits at a time of economic strength should be a warning sign to all. Yet hardly a whimper was heard.

In October, our national debt hit the \$23 trillion mark. It was in the papers for a while, but interest quickly waned. We simply cannot continue down this path.

I know the bill before us is well-intentioned, and it contains many proposals that I support. Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED and our Armed Services colleagues have worked hard to deliver the Defense authorization bill, and I commend them for the work they put into trying to reach agreement with the House. Unfortunately, CBO tells us this bill will significantly add to our debt both in the near and long term. This is much different than the budgetary impact of the bill the Senate approved earlier this year.

Ultimately, this bill furthers the practice of passing legislation while ignoring the budget rules of the Senate

and our overspending problem. All of this borrowing will continue to cost us increased interest payments and will hamstring future generations of Americans. Congress has the power to correct course now, and I look forward to working in good faith with the proponents of this legislation. Until that work can be completed, I have to oppose it.

Mr. President, the conference report accompanying S. 1790 would cause a deficit increase of more than \$5 billion in each of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in fiscal year 2030. A benefit that isn't funded, once put in place, will never be taken away or even reduced. This increase violates section 3101 of the 2016 budget resolution. Therefore, I raise a point of order under section 3101(b) of S. Con. Res. 11, the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2016. Finally, I ask unanimous consent that this point of order be debatable until the postclosure time on the conference report to accompany S. 1790 expires.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

MR. REED. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. After several weeks of debate and negotiation, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have completed the conference report, which addresses critical issues facing our military and our country's national security.

I would like to thank Senator INHOFE, Chairman SMITH, and Ranking Member THORNBERRY for their thoughtfulness, hard work, and cooperation throughout the process.

This was not an easy conference. There were many difficult issues and differences of opinion that had to be worked through. I think it is safe to say that many have misgivings about one provision or another, but there are so many other positive provisions that many will consider a legislative success, in my view. That is the art of compromise. Overall, it is a very good conference report that helps the military and the American people. Last week, this conference report passed by a vote of 379 to 48 in the House, and I hope it will have the same strong support in the Senate.

As we consider the conference report, I would like to highlight several areas that I am particularly pleased with and address several items that have been of concern to some Members.

In accordance with the budget agreement, the NDAA conference report authorizes \$658.4 billion for the Department of Defense and national security programs of the Department of Energy, \$71.5 billion for overseas contingency operations, and \$5.3 billion in emergency funding to restore installations that were damaged by extreme weather and natural disasters.

The conference report includes a number of important provisions to sup-

port our servicemembers, their families, and the civilian employees of the Department of Defense who support them, including a 3.1-percent pay raise for troops and the authorization of a number of bonus, special, and incentive pays to encourage enlistment and reenlistment in the Armed Forces.

We continue our efforts to eliminate sexual harassment and assault in our military. Over the last 12 years, we have legislated nearly 200 changes in law to combat sexual assault. In this conference report, we direct the Comptroller General to assess the implementation and effectiveness of these requirements.

We also include a number of new provisions to continue our fight against this scourge, including increasing investigative resources to expedite investigations, increasing access to Victims' Legal Counsel and Victim Witness Program liaisons to support survivors of sexual assault, requiring additional training for commanders, and requiring more transparency with sexual assault survivors about the progress of court-martial and administrative processes. We also include new provisions to more effectively address domestic violence and child exploitation. We cannot rest. We must continue to insist that we do all we can to prevent this scourge from permeating our military forces.

The conference report also includes the Fair Chance Act, which ensures that applicants for positions in the Federal Government and with Federal contractors are treated fairly by restricting requests for criminal background information until the conditional offer stage.

As everyone is aware, the conference report includes 12 weeks of paid parental leave for the Federal civilian workforce, an important benefit that will help the Federal Government recruit and retain the very best civilian talent.

The conference report authorizes a number of important Army and Air Force programs. The final bill supports funding for 73 UH-6M Blackhawks and 48 AH-64 Apache helicopters in the Army.

In addition, the conference bill authorizes an additional \$75.6 million to accelerate the Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft Program, which is a top modernization priority for the U.S. Army. The agreement also fully supports upgrading 165 Abrams tanks and includes an additional \$249.2 million to integrate a medium caliber weapon system onto the Stryker platform. This was an unfunded armor requirement which we were able to meet.

With regard to the Air Force, the conference report includes \$1 billion for 12 additional F-35A aircraft, which was an unfunded requirement for the Air Force, as well as \$392 million for 4 additional C-130J aircraft to support increased inter-theater airlift capability. The bill also includes language that extends the Department's authority to protect critical facilities and assets from unauthorized operation of unmanned aircraft.

I am pleased the conference agreement includes key provisions and authorizes critical funding that will strengthen naval readiness and submarine production. This conference report reaffirms that we must maintain a minimum of 11 aircraft carriers to protect our national interests around the world and authorizes the first year appropriations for the midlife refueling of the *USS Harry S. Truman*.

It continues the construction of two Virginia-class submarines per year and supports the nine-boat multiyear contract, with an option for a tenth boat, that the Navy and Electric Boat signed earlier this month.

The report also supports full funding for the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine.

I am particularly pleased that the conference agreement also authorizes additional funding to continue to support the expansion of the submarine industrial business, as well as workforce development.

The conference report further bolsters maritime sealift and mobilization by reauthorizing the Maritime Administration, including authorizing a new cable security fleet program and requiring the Secretary of the Navy to seek to enter into a contract for additional sealift vessels.

Finally, in order to keep our existing ships ready for deployment, the conference agreement authorizes additional funding for Navy ship and submarine depot maintenance to ensure key shipyard availabilities are not further delayed due to the existing maintenance backlog.

The conference agreement authorizes full funding for the President's request to continue modernizing our nuclear deterrence and its triad of delivery platforms, which are rapidly aging out. This modernization effort began in 2010 and will continue for the next 15 to 20 years. Our ballistic submarines will begin to age out in the 2030s. Our heavy bombers will be replaced in the 2040s, after having served for over 80 years. And our ICBMs will start to be replaced in the 2030s, after having been on alert 24/7, 365-days a year, for over 60 years.

On the issue of low-yield nuclear weapons, while I opposed the deployment of the low-yield submarine ballistic missile in last year's bill and supported the provision in this year's House bill, which again would have prohibited deployment, that provision was not included in this year's conference report. I maintain that this is one weapon that will not add to our national security but would only increase the risk of miscalculation with dire consequences, and regret the House provision was not included in the House report.

Perhaps the most bipartisan topic in the fiscal year 2020 NDAA was privatized housing reform. Over 30 provisions were included to help the Defense Department reinvigorate its oversight of housing companies. Over the

last year, the Armed Service Committee received hundreds of calls for help directly from military families. Their stories of hardship, photos of substandard home conditions, and reports of nonresponsive customer service by the housing companies spurred this comprehensive package of reforms.

While this will likely not be the last NDAA to address housing problems, the fiscal year 2020 bill makes a significant first step in several key areas. For example, we begin by requiring several standards in the "tenant bill of rights."

We ensure that DOD has a single individual in charge of privatized housing and, in the event housing companies are found to be responsible for causing medical problems, there will be a way for families to be compensated appropriately. Families will now be guaranteed access to work order systems and see what kind of home they are inhabiting prior to moving in, much like consumers get a Carfax report before they buy a used car. Companies must now disclose their bonus structures, document a complaint database made by families online, and are prohibited from forcing families to sign nondisclosure agreements.

The DOD must also create and implement a standardized formal dispute resolution process and a uniform lease across all installations.

We still have a long way to go as a Congress to ensure military families are getting the kinds of quality homes and living conditions they deserve, but the fiscal year 2020 NDAA sets everyone on the right path, and we will continue to be watching both DOD and the housing companies.

In another area of importance to the safety of all families, after too many years of status quo, the NDAA includes a number of new authorities and requirements for the DOD to confront its use of toxic PFAS chemicals. While we were ultimately unable to reach an agreement with the House establishing new regulations through the Safe Drinking Water Act and other substantial improvements, like cleanup via CERCLA and declarations of hazardous substances, the NDAA does make a number of new changes. For example, the Department of Defense must phase out the use of PFAS in firefighting foams on its installations. The bill restores the National Guard's access to defense environmental restoration accounts, presses DOD to enter cooperative agreements with local entities contaminated by PFAS chemicals, and extends the ongoing CDC human health study of PFAS in drinking water.

With respect to countering the continued threat by ISIS, the bill extends the train-and-equip programs that underpin our partnerships with the Syrian defense forces and Iraqi security forces, while ensuring appropriate congressional oversight of the use of such funds.

Specific to Iraq, the bill also begins to normalize security assistance to

Iraq by transitioning funding to enduring authorities.

The conference report also includes the bipartisan Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which is intended to help facilitate an end to the conflict in Syria and hold responsible those who have perpetrated war crimes. Specifically, the bill sanctions foreign persons who knowingly provide significant financial, material, or technological support to or knowingly engage in a significant transaction with the Syrian Government and authorizes the Secretary of State to provide support to entities conducting criminal investigations, supporting prosecutions, or collecting evidence against those who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity in Syria.

With regard to Afghanistan, the bill extends several authorities to train and equip the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces. It also authorizes the Department of Defense to provide support for bottom-up, Governor of Afghanistan-led reconciliation activities and mandates that the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, advocate for the inclusion of Afghan women in ongoing future negotiations to end the conflict in Afghanistan. It is in the interest of all parties to forge a negotiated settlement that brings this conflict to a close while also protecting U.S. security interests and basic human rights.

The bill also includes 4,000 additional special immigrant visas and the extension of the SIV Program so we can continue to honor commitments made to our wartime allies in Afghanistan.

As recent press reports indicate, after almost 18 years of combat and capacity building, Afghan military and political institutions are fragile, and the Taliban remains a serious threat. Moreover, terrorist groups like al-Qaida and ISIS continue to pose a potential threat to the region and beyond. The Armed Services Committee and other committees of jurisdiction must undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the causes of the current situation and help facilitate a thoughtful way ahead.

The conference report also contains a number of provisions to address the continuing threat of foreign malign influence from Russia and others countries. Deterring and countering this threat to our democracy is critical ahead of the 2020 Presidential elections.

The bill requires an update to our strategy for countering Russian malign influence, which needs to be better coordinated across U.S. Government Departments and Agencies, and expands that strategy to cover China, Iran, and other malign actors.

To guard against malign foreign actors seeking to gain access to sensitive information through DOD contractors, the conference report includes a provision that I sponsored to enhance requirements for DOD contractors and

subcontractors to disclose beneficial ownership information, including whether companies are subject to foreign ownership, control, or influence.

The Intelligence authorization bill, which is part of the conference report, also includes key provisions to counter foreign malign influence that have been of particular interest to me.

First, it authorizes establishing a Foreign Malign Influence Response Center, which would bring together all elements of the intelligence community and serve as a primary organization for analyzing and integrating intelligence on foreign malign influence to provide a common operating picture across the government.

The Intelligence authorization bill also authorizes the Director of National Intelligence to facilitate the establishment of an independent, nonprofit, Social Media Data and Threat Analysis Center to bring tech companies and researchers together to analyze indicators of foreign adversary threat networks across social media platforms.

Finally, the conference report authorizes funds for research on foreign malign influence trends and indicators, including on foreign weaponization of “deepfakes”—that is, videos or other media that is digitally manipulated by foreign governments to spread disinformation.

Turning to Ukraine, the conference report authorizes an increase in funding for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative to provide critical aid, including lethal assistance, to this strategic partner to defend itself against Russian aggression against its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

With respect to Turkey, the conference report prohibits Turkey’s participation in the F-35 aircraft program as long as it possesses the Russian S-400 air defense system. It expresses the sense of Congress that Turkey’s purchase of the S-400 system triggers congressionally mandated sanctions and urges the administration to impose those sanctions, which are long overdue.

As everyone is aware, this conference report does create a sixth service within the Air Force for a Space Force. Its mission will be to deter hostile actions in space against the United States and its allies.

I would note that the organization created in this conference report is far more robust than was originally passed in the Senate bill. I believe this bill may be trying to do too much, too fast, and will require significant oversight. That being said, I do believe the attention we have paid to space and protecting our national security assets in space is vitally important. I will continue to work on this issue in the coming years.

Finally, with respect to substantive provisions, I would like to touch on an issue I find very problematic. I am deeply disappointed that, despite my strong support, provisions intended to

prohibit U.S. involvement in the civil war in Yemen, including arms transfers to the Saudi-led coalition, are not included in the conference report. The civil war in Yemen is the world’s worst ongoing humanitarian crisis, and the administration should be playing a more active and constructive role in ending the conflict and achieving a sustainable peace.

I strongly support a prohibition on offensive arms transfers and other offensive support for the Saudi-led coalition and will continue working to stop the bloodshed and suffering in Yemen.

We must redouble our efforts in support of the Yemeni people and increase humanitarian assistance. Iran, al-Qaida, ISIS, and others continue to benefit from the chaos of this protracted conflict, and ending the war is in the long-term security interests of both the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Stronger U.S. support for peace talks can and should set the conditions for Yemenis to negotiate a durable peace and for the international community to begin the difficult but critical work of restoring stability and basic services to the people of Yemen. These objectives will remain significant priorities going forward.

Let me conclude by again thanking Senator INHOFE for his superb leadership and Chairman SMITH for his superb leadership of the conference, which is a very challenging responsibility. They discharged it with great skill. I also thank Ranking Member MAC THORNBERRY, who was extraordinarily thoughtful and professional in his department, and all the conferees for their bipartisan support throughout the process. This process has been collegial and has been an example of a strong piece of legislation that addresses concerns of Members on both sides of the aisle.

I would also like to thank the staffs of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the House Armed Services Committee for all their fine work on drafting a thoughtful and comprehensive bill. Their diligent work throughout the NDAA process has been integral in producing the strong bill before us today.

Let me say this: They are not identified enough, in my view. The work they did and continue to do has been superb—absolutely superb. I want to personally thank them. Let me thank John Bonsell, Elizabeth King, Jen Stewart, and Paul Arcangeli for their help. They are the staff directors of the committees in both the House and the Senate.

If my colleagues would bear with me, I want to recognize all of our staff members because they don’t get the credit they deserve. Beginning alphabetically, Adam Barker, Stephanie Barna, Jody Bennett, Rick Berger, Augusta Binns-Berkey, Leah Brewer, John Bryant, Debbie Chiarello, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Maggie Cooper, Allen Edwards, Jonathan Epstein,

Jorie Feldman, Patty-Jane Geller, Tom Goffus, Creighton Greene, Ozge Guzelso, Marta Hernandez, Gary Howard, Baher Iskander, Jackie Kerber, Gary Leeling, Greg Lilly, Katie Magnus, Kirk McConnell, Keri Lyn Michalke, Jackie Modesett, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, Sean O’Keefe, Tony Pankuch, Brad Patou, Jason Potter, John Quirk, John Riordan, Arun Seraphin, Katherine Sutton, Soleil Sykes, Arthur Tellis, Fiona Tomlin, Eric Trager, Dustin Walker, John Wason, Tyler Wilkinson, Bob Winkler, Gwyneth Woolwine, and Jennie Wright.

Thank you.

I strongly support this conference agreement and hope that it will receive the support of my colleagues in the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to conclude their remarks before the vote begins: Senator JONES, Senator COLLINS, Senator THUNE, and Senator INHOFE.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. JONES. Mr. President, I want to first thank Senator INHOFE and Senator REED and their staff for their amazing work on this National Defense Authorization Act. What we are about to accomplish is truly remarkable, not only for America but for individuals and families.

I am rising today as grateful and as humbled as I could ever imagine being in this Senate Chamber, but I am also just the opposite—I am excited like a kid at Christmas waiting to have the final passage of this because it means so much. We are at the finish line, about to run through the tape in a race, a marathon that so many folks thought we could never finish. I am talking about this momentous and historic National Defense Authorization Act upon which we are about to vote and pass in just a few moments.

The NDAA includes so many of our collective priorities to bolster the defense of our Nation, to modernize our military, and to take care of our servicemembers and their families. But included very deep within this incredibly thick piece of legislation is a provision that has been repeatedly introduced over the past 18 years, but it has never gotten across that finish line. I am speaking about the Military Widow’s Tax Elimination Act.

For the past four decades, the military widow’s tax has prevented surviving military spouses from receiving the full benefits they are owed by the U.S. Government. Legislation to repeal this unfair law has been repeatedly introduced in Congress for the last 18 years, but money and budgets and points of order have always won out over the commitment we have made to these families.

When I introduced it with my friend and colleague Senator COLLINS earlier this year, we knew it was going to be an uphill battle. We knew that the fight had been going on for so long and that we faced a steep climb, but we took a great deal of strength and motivation from the impacted widows themselves who have fought and advocated for this bill for nearly two decades. They have been a regular presence on Capitol Hill, asking year after year for Members of Congress to lend an ear to their cause. I was heartbroken when one of them told me they felt like they were easy to brush off because they were “just a bunch of little old ladies.”

I was heartbroken when Cathy Milford said every time she came up here it was like digging up her husband and burying him all over again.

After 18 years without success, yet all the while being told how supportive Members of Congress are for their service and sacrifice, time and time again, you could see how disheartening that might be when they would go home emptyhanded.

So when I told them this was the year—Senator COLLINS and I had made it our mission that this was going to be the year we were finally going to get this done—there were more than a few of them who were skeptical, but they were, of course, always optimistic.

We knew we had to fight harder than ever before if we were going to be successful. We had to make our case that this injustice could no longer stand. As we did, one by one, Senators and Members of the House joined this cause with us. By summertime, in this body, we had earned an unprecedented number of Senators’ support for this bill.

Today, as we are about to vote, there are over three-fourths of the U.S. Senate who have cosponsored this legislation. Think of that. In such a partisan time as we live in right now, in this moment, three-fourths of the U.S. Senate has voiced their support.

Because of the momentum we built, this is the year, this is the day, we will finally honor the commitment we made to these families who have given everything to our country. This is the year, this is the day, we will let our actions speak louder than words, the year we finally put our money where our mouth is when it comes to honoring our servicemembers and their families. This is the year, this is the day, we finally repeal the widow’s tax once and for all.

It is, to be candid, difficult to articulate what it means to me to be able to help bring this legislation across the finish line for these surviving spouses.

Their strength, their devotion, and their grit have made this all possible. Their loved ones gave what Abraham Lincoln called “the last full measure of devotion” to our country, and the continued commitment to that devotion by their surviving spouses is a daily reminder of why I am here, why we are all here.

In their own way, these widows have also fought to advance the ideals and values of the Nation we all love so much. Instead of becoming bitter or jaded when learning of this injustice, these incredible women worked to make things right. Year after year, they would gather in Washington to meet with Members of the House and the Senate to beg Congress to right this wrong, only to be told that as unfair as this may be, eliminating the widow’s tax would just cost us too much. For 18 years, they were told it could never get done, but they never ever gave up.

It kind of reminds me of a movie that was one of my favorite movies years ago called “Network,” in which the late actor Peter Finch starred as a somewhat crazed newscaster who was so fed up with the state of affairs in this country that he implored all those watching to go to their windows and throw open the windows and just yell: “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it anymore,” and they did.

That is essentially what these widows did as well. Year after year, they screamed that they were not going to take it anymore, and they built momentum that led to this historic vote today.

I am so glad this fight is finally coming to an end. I am going to miss their regular visits and their friendship. I truly hope they know how much it has meant to me and my staff as well. My staff has been all in. Everybody has been so dedicated and so passionate about getting this across the finish line.

I am deeply grateful to Senators INHOFE and REED, who have been critical to this effort to get this done. Without them, it would not have been possible. For their support, I am truly appreciative.

More important, I am especially grateful to my partner in all of this, Senator COLLINS, whose deeply held commitment was vital to our success.

Today we will celebrate the end to our four-decades-old fight. We will take stock in this great achievement together, but tomorrow we must turn our attention to the next big issue because there are so many others who need our help, our attention, and our courage to do the right thing.

For now—for now we can celebrate because today those military spouses who had once proclaimed they were mad as hell and not going to take it are watching this proceeding with a more joyous feeling. These widows are watching in the quiet of their homes, perhaps in the Gallery, many of them grasping a photograph of their loved ones, their late husbands, but they all have tears in their eyes, saying to each other and to us in this body: Thank you because now I am happy as hell that I don’t have to take it anymore.

I assure my colleagues that right now their spouses, those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for this country, are watching from that heavenly perch

above, standing at full attention, and saluting the Members of this Congress and saying: Thank you. Thank you for recognizing the ultimate sacrifice I made for this country. Thank you because you have demonstrated a commitment to me and my service, and with that final commitment from you, the commitment I made to my loved ones, the commitment to care for them even after I am gone, has finally been fulfilled, and I can truly rest in peace.

To my colleagues in the Senate, by your vote today, you are doing so much more than modernizing our military providing for the Nation’s defense. By your vote today, you are returning their salute—the salute to those brave servicemembers who gave their all in service to this country.

Folks, this is a really, really big deal, and I salute all the Members of this body for their efforts.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I am delighted to join my friend and colleague from Alabama, Senator JONES, to urge support for the final passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, which finally—finally—contains repeal of what is commonly called the military widow’s tax.

I want to commend Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED for including this important provision in the bill and for their excellent job in crafting the legislation overall.

This significant bill contains numerous provisions critical to our national security and important to the great State of Maine, but right now I want to join my colleague Senator JONES in celebrating and highlighting one long-fought-for provision, and that is the repeal of the Survivor Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, commonly referred to as the military widow’s tax.

Let me explain exactly what the problem is. Many military retirees purchase, with their own money, a form of insurance called the Survivor Benefit Plan. If they subsequently die of a military-connected illness, their surviving spouse qualifies for a dependency and indemnity compensation benefit from the VA.

Unfortunately, these two programs are offset dollar for dollar for our military families. This makes no sense. The retirees are paying for this extra insurance with their own money.

The NDAA will finally remedy this inequity, this burdensome unfairness, and it will permit as many as 67,000 surviving spouses, including more than 260 in Maine, to begin collecting the full survivor benefits they are entitled to once it is fully phased in.

The average offset to the SBP amounts to more than \$11,000 per year. That is a significant amount of money that a widow or widower needs to help support their families and themselves.

I would like to again recommend and thank Senator JONES for his strong advocacy and unceasing leadership, as

well as the countless military spouses and veteran advocates, the veteran service organizations that helped push this effort over the finish line this year.

This year, these dedicated advocates helped Senator JONES and I secure a record number of cosponsors to our bill to repeal the widow's tax—78 Senators and 383 House Members.

As Senator JONES was mentioning, that is phenomenal and shows the strong bipartisan support to correct this unfairness.

Often I am reminded by military commanders of the saying that you recruit the soldier, but you retain the family. We have an obligation to make sure we are taking care of our military families who have sacrificed so much.

I urge all of our colleagues to support final passage of the NDAA and to finally put an end to the military widow's tax.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, the vote we are talking about is to waive the budget point of order that was raised by Senator ENZI. If the budget point of order is not waived, the NDAA—which I believe is the most significant vote we pass every year; it has passed for 58 consecutive years—will be referred back to committee. So that is really what is at stake here.

The budget point of order on the NDAA is primarily caused by three provisions: first, repealing the widow's tax phased in over 3 years. We have been talking about that. That is part of this point of order; secondly, giving visas to Afghans who work closely with the U.S. military during the war; and, third, allowing military servicemembers to file claims for medical malpractice.

Now, all three provisions have significant bipartisan support. The widow's tax, as was just stated, has 76 cosponsors in the Senate, 383 in the House.

A vote in this Chamber in late September to instruct conference on the widow's tax passed 94 to 0. You might keep that in mind. Anyone who talks now about opposing it actually voted for it back in September.

Now, as I mentioned in my remarks last night, I started working to repeal the widow's tax after being inspired by one of my personal heroes, a young lady named Jane Horton.

I can remember back in September of 2011, I was in a little town north of Tulsa, OK—Collinsville, OK—and I was up there talking to people, the normal type of thing we do, going around speaking with our constituents, and I recall that is when I first met Jane Horton. She lived in Collinsville.

After I had visited for a while with the group, I commented that I am the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and I am going to be going to Afghanistan in this next week. She said that her husband, Chris Horton, was also right at that moment in

Afghanistan. I made the statement: Well, let's find out where he is, and I did. I checked into it and arranged to go by to see him as I left for Afghanistan, but I didn't see him because on September 9, 2011, Chris Horton was killed in action.

Now, after all of Jane's sacrifices in losing her husband in the line of duty, it seemed unimaginable to me that she should have to deal with the further pain of a dollar-for-dollar offset in her benefits as a Gold Star spouse. So we have worked with Jane and the other Gold Star spouses for a long time to figure out how we can do this in a responsible way. That hasn't been talked about so far, but we did it. So it has happened over a period of time.

Similarly, supporting the Afghan partners who sacrificed so much to help us help their country has long been a bipartisan priority. Everyone involved in this conference, including the Department of Defense, recognized the importance of fixing the medical malpractice issues in a commonsense fashion.

I understand my colleagues' concerns. We have worked hard to make each of these provisions fiscally responsible, and we will continue to do that.

There is a document, which nobody reads anymore, called the Constitution. The Constitution says that our top priorities here should be defending America. That is what we are supposed to be doing. Each of these provisions enables us to better defend America and allows us to take up this bill and actually pass it for the President to sign.

So I urge you to vote to allow this bill to move to final passage so that we can send this legislation to the President's desk, where he said he would sign it immediately, and he will. By doing so, it will send a clear message to our troops and adversaries that this body is serious about America's national security.

VOTE ON MOTION TO WAIVE

Mr. President, pursuant to section 904 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and the waiver provisions of applicable budget resolutions, I move to waive all applicable sections of the act and applicable budget resolutions for the purpose of the conference report to accompany S. 1790, and I ask for the yeas and the nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

All postclosure time has expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

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

KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 82, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 399 Leg.]

YEAS—82

Alexander	Fischer	Reed
Baldwin	Gardner	Risch
Barrasso	Graham	Roberts
Bennet	Grassley	Rosen
Blackburn	Hassan	Rounds
Blumenthal	Hawley	Rubio
Blunt	Heinrich	Sasse
Boozman	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Hoover	Schumer
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Cantwell	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Capito	Jones	Shaheen
Cardin	Kaine	Shelby
Carper	King	Sinema
Casey	Lankford	Smith
Collins	Leahy	Stabenow
Coons	Manchin	Sullivan
Cornyn	McConnell	Tester
Cortez Masto	McSally	Thune
Cotton	Menendez	Tillis
Cramer	Merkley	Udall
Crapo	Moran	Van Hollen
Cruz	Murkowski	Warner
Daines	Murphy	Whitehouse
Duckworth	Murray	Wicker
Durbin	Perdue	Young
Ernst	Peters	
Feinstein	Portman	

NAYS—12

Braun	Johnson	Paul
Cassidy	Kennedy	Romney
Enzi	Lee	Toomey
Gillibrand	Markey	Wyden

NOT VOTING—6

Booker	Isakson	Sanders
Harris	Klobuchar	Warren

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 82, the nays are 12.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to and the point of order falls.

VOTE ON CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on adoption of the conference report.

Mr. DAINES. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS), 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 86, nays 8, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 400 Leg.]

YEAS—86

Alexander	Fischer	Reed
Baldwin	Gardner	Risch
Barrasso	Graham	Roberts
Bennet	Grassley	Romney
Blackburn	Hassan	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hawley	Rounds
Blunt	Heinrich	Rubio
Boozman	Hirono	Sasse
Brown	Hoeven	Schatz
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Schumer
Cantwell	Inhofe	Scott (FL)
Capito	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Cardin	Jones	Shaheen
Carper	Kaine	Shelby
Casey	Kennedy	Sinema
Cassidy	King	Smith
Collins	Lankford	Stabenow
Coons	Leahy	Sullivan
Cornyn	Manchin	Tester
Cortez Masto	McConnell	Thune
Cotton	McSally	Tillis
Cramer	Menendez	Toomey
Crapo	Moran	Udall
Cruz	Murkowski	Van Hollen
Daines	Murphy	Warner
Duckworth	Murray	Whitehouse
Durbin	Perdue	Wicker
Ernst	Peters	Young
Feinstein	Portman	

NAYS—8

Braun	Lee	Paul
Enzi	Markey	Wyden
Gillibrand	Merkley	

NOT VOTING—6

Booker	Isakson	Sanders
Harris	Klobuchar	Warren

The conference report was agreed to.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for as much time as I need.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, as I have reminded you all many times, this is the 59th straight year we will be passing the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Bill. It has passed for all these years in a row because we all know just how important it is. It is the most important thing we do around here. We are building on nearly six decades of bipartisan support for our troops and national security.

This year, I am glad to say, it is no different. We all came together to produce a conference report that is good for all of America. The House passed it overwhelmingly; the Senate passed it overwhelmingly. We voted for it overwhelmingly yesterday. And the President says he will sign it immediately. I am grateful to the President for understanding the importance of this bill.

This bill means everything for our national security. Every American ben-

efits from a strong national defense. Their lives, their livelihoods, their freedoms are all because we fight to protect them.

When I go around my State of Oklahoma, people think we have the best of everything militarily. We have the best people. We have the best soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. There is no doubt about it. But we can do better when it comes to giving them the best equipment and the best training. That is what this bill does. It does that. The backbone of a strong national defense is the force—the men and women who lay their lives on the line each and every day.

When I travel around, I like to take some time to meet with the enlisted guys in the mess halls. You can learn more from them than you can learn from some of the brass. They are the ones who really know what it is that we can do to effectively build a strong national defense. We get to hear what they are worried about. We get to hear how we can support them.

They need the training and equipment that makes them the most fearsome fighting force in the world. This bill does that. They need a safe roof over their heads and over the heads of their families, and this bill does that. They need to know that they have the full support of the U.S. Government throughout their service. This bill does that. At the end of the day, we have the best military in the world because of our people. We take care of them, and that is what this bill is all about.

We are here today because of the brave men and women who wear and have worn the uniform. We are safe and prosperous and free because of them. That is what this bill is all about.

The Senate just passed the Defense authorization bill for the 59th year in a row. There isn't much left around here that has that kind of longevity. It is a testament to the importance of the bill.

It is also a testament to the hard work of the staff. They worked tirelessly to bring this conference report to the floor. I want to take just a moment to recognize and thank everyone who made this bill possible, starting with the Armed Services Committee staff, especially the staff directors, John Bonsell for the majority and Liz King for the minority. They are the ones who provided the leadership behind the scenes. They did most of the work.

Then there is my partner, Senator JACK REED. We are a real team. We know how to do things and have learned over the years how to do things right. I couldn't praise him more. In fact, we had a lot of obstacles this year that we didn't have before. If it hadn't been for Senator REED and the staff working on it, we wouldn't have pulled this thing off.

A few minutes ago, Senator REED read the names of all of the members of the Armed Services Committee. I want to go ahead and get those in my statement here also.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the names of the Armed Services Committee staff that were listed by Senator REED be placed in the RECORD in my statement.

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

My staff from the Senate Armed Services Committee:

John Wason, Tom Goffus, Stephanie Barna, Greg Lilly, Rick Berger, Marta Hernandez, Jennie Wright, Adam Barker, Augusta Binns-Berkey, Al Edwards, Jackie Kerber.

Sean O'Keefe, Tony Pankuch, Brad Patout, Jason Potter, J.R. Riordan, Katie Sutton, Eric Trager, Dustin Walker, Otis Winkler, Gwyneth Woolwine, Katie Magnus.

Arthur Tellis, Leah Brewer, Debbie Chiarello, Gary Howard, Tyler Wilkinson, John Bryant, Patty-Jane Geller, Baher Iskander, Keri-Lyn Michalke, Jackie Modesett, Soleil Sykes.

From the minority side:

Jody Bennett, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Creighton Greene, Ozge Guzelso, Gary Leeling, Kirk McConnell, Maggie McNamara, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Arun Seraphin, Fiona Tomlin.

Mr. INHOFE. Again, I want to thank my personal staff, office staff, and floor staff.

We need to pivot to our next task at hand: funding the Department of Defense. This puts financial resources behind all of the policies we just approved today.

Our military leaders have told the Armed Services Committee over and over again—and I have repeated this several times—that stable, predictable, on-time funding is the most important way Congress can support our national defense. It is now 2½ months into the new year, and we got it done.

To all of my fellow Members here, I thank you again for your support of the national defense authorization bill.

Merry Christmas.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:04 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. CAPITO).

MORNING BUSINESS—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

SENATOR CRAMER'S MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I rise today because it is my honor to introduce my colleague, who actually needs no introduction, but for this speech today I have the pleasure to introduce KEVIN CRAMER, who will be delivering his official maiden address to the U.S. Senate.

I have known KEVIN for many years and he has always been an incredibly