

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, this week, the Senate will be resuming consideration and, hopefully, completing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. This is not the end. This is not the completion. All this does is get it out of the Senate. Hopefully, we can do that this week, and then we have quite a few confirmations we have to do in the Senate that are very timely. We have them all lined up, and I think it is all going to work.

This National Defense Authorization Act is the one that is going to get our attention for quite a while after today. The House has to do theirs, and then we go into conference and we have a conference between the House and the Senate, which we will do and participate in.

Then, as normally is the case, it goes to the Big Four. The Big Four are the two leaders from the House and two leaders from the Senate. I have been in the Big Four, I think, for 4 years in the past. It ends up getting done.

Anytime a bill is passed for 59 years, you know it is going to pass, which is one of the problems. Everybody says: That is going to pass; therefore, let's go ahead and load on anything that I have not been able to get passed before, because you know that bill is going to get passed.

We have a lot of that going on. We have been through that. We had many, many amendments on this.

I think that we all are reflecting on the true meaning of Independence Day, and no bill is more important to protecting our freedoms than the National Defense Authorization Act. How do I know that? There is a document that not many people read any more. It is called the Constitution. It tells us what we are supposed to be doing here, and what we are supposed to be doing is, primarily, defending America.

I want to highlight the work and the bipartisan, comprehensive nature of the legislation. We have already adopted over 140 bipartisan amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act. One of the reasons for this is that we had the experience last year, and we have had it in the past, where one Member wants to get his or her amendment adopted, but they will use the leverage they have, which is to object to any other amendments coming up.

We thought, in the event that happened again, that we will put every amendment we could put in there. We solicited amendments to come from Members, and they came. The number is now 140 bipartisan amendments. That is equally divided. I have to say that the group—John Bonsell and Liz—did a great job in making this a bipartisan bill. We actually had the same number of amendments on each side. Those numbers don't include the hundreds of amendments considered in markup or Member interest provisions that were included in the base text. That was about 90 amendments. This bill was truly written by the Members,

the Democrats and Republicans in both the House and the Senate. It is my hope, and Senator REED agrees with me, that we clear another managers' package, if possible.

Speaking of Senator REED, I have to say there is not a committee out there that enjoys more bipartisan support in the Senate than this committee does. Senator REED and I have disagreed on some things, but we always resolved our problems.

This week, we are also going to vote on six amendments. Some of those amendments I support and some I don't. These are the amendments we agreed to when we departed here right before the Fourth of July.

Regardless of my feelings on specific amendments, I want to thank my colleagues for coming together. We were able to have these amendment votes. It has been at least a few years since we have been able to vote on this many amendments on the floor. What we need to have right now—and I know Members aren't in here now, but their staff is watching. Their staff needs to know that we need Members to come down and present their amendments and to speak on amendments.

We have six amendments all lined up. There are a lot of Members of the Senate who want to be heard. If you are not down here, you are not going to be heard because we are planning on doing six. Of those, we will probably do four of those tomorrow and then a couple the next day. Then, that is going to essentially be the end of it. I don't want them to come and complain to us saying that they want to be heard on amendments. This is your opportunity to do that.

The important thing is we are doing it now. We are coming together to get this must-pass bill done. Things can get pretty divisive around here sometimes, but the National Defense Authorization Act simply always comes together because it has to be done. It has been happening for 59 years. It is going to be 60 years in just a few days.

Senator REED, the Armed Services Committee, and I worked hard to make this a bipartisan bill—in the base text, in the committee mark, with amendments, and with the votes. We listened to what our colleagues asked for in their Member interest letters. We requested letters. This goes all the way back to January. We were requesting letters from individuals as to what their interests were going to be as the year pressed on.

We had a bipartisan markup where we adopted over 200 amendments from both Republicans and Democrats. On its own, this is a good, bipartisan bill. We are trying to make it better on the floor, as we adopt or reject additional amendments, which we are going to be doing tomorrow and the next day.

We are about to make it 60 straight years of passing it. We don't want to jeopardize that.

We saw what happened in the House last year when they tried to write a

partisan bill. It didn't go anywhere. Everything they wanted had nothing to do with the military. They had every liberal program in it and nothing happened. We remember some of those items. They wanted to restrict arms sales. They wanted to block our nuclear modernization, block funds for the border wall, and several other things.

I commend Chairman SMITH for returning to the bipartisanship that has long been the tradition of the Armed Services Committees on both sides of the Capitol. The House is taking up their bill on the floor this week. I wish them well. I hope they do block some of the worst amendments and the ones that would cut funding for our troops and hamstringing the ability to defend our Nation.

I am glad they are prioritizing getting this done. I am also glad that they returned to regular order; that is, considering the authorization bill before the appropriations bill. That is the order that is supposed to be done, and that is what is going to be done this time. That is the way things should work around here. We authorize first, and then we appropriate.

What we will do is what we have done every year for the last 59 years. We will come together—the Senate and the House, Republicans and Democrats—and conference our bills this week. Our votes are the next step to this goal, and that is going to happen.

There is nothing else around here that has the 60-year success streak the NDAA has. That is it. This is our sacred and profound responsibility to the 2.1 million men and women who volunteered to serve and their families.

I remember when the idea of a full volunteer force was something that was not really something that really could be done. When I was in the military, we didn't have that. It was the days of the draft. Frankly, I think there is a lot of merit to that.

It means a lot right now to the more than 700,000 civilian employees in the Department of Defense and thousands more who support our nuclear enterprise, and to all Americans that we protect them, their families, and their livelihood.

I thank my colleagues for their contributions and look forward to our continued debate on this important bill. This is the most important bill of the year.

Keep in mind that this is something we are going to get done and the next important step is this week. I appreciate all the help and remind all the Members that this is your time to speak on amendments.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I oppose the confirmation of Russell Vought to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Mr. Vought's tenure as Acting Director of OMB has been characterized by mismanagement, political corruption, and lawbreaking. He is unfit to lead OMB.

Mr. Vought played an active role in President Trump's corrupt scheme to

pressure Ukraine to interfere on President Trump's behalf in the 2020 election. In furtherance of that scheme, OMB illegally withheld security assistance for Ukraine under Mr. Vought's leadership, which violated the Impoundment Control Act according to the independent and nonpartisan Government Accountability Office. GAO even stated that OMB's stonewalling of their inquiry had "constitutional significance" due to the undermining of legislative branch oversight. During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Vought could not even explain why OMB stonewalled GAO's inquiry by refusing to turn over relevant documents requested by GAO and then failed to provide a reason for withholding these documents in response to my questions following the hearing.

Mr. Vought is among those responsible for the Trump administration's disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic. OMB dragged its feet on requesting urgently needed resources to respond to the pandemic, which led to deadly shortages of key supplies. Due to insufficient guidance from OMB and the Office of Personnel Management, Federal agencies are moving forward with haphazard plans to bring teleworking employees back into offices in ways that needlessly risk spreading COVID-19 among Federal workers, their families, and surrounding communities.

OMB is responsible for preparing the President's budget, and Mr. Vought has advanced budgets that would pay for tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations by slashing support for healthcare, education, and nutrition assistance. The Trump administration would have been even less prepared for COVID-19 if Congress enacted the cuts in these budgets to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mr. Vought personally called for cutting the CDC budget as recently as March 10, 2020, when the pandemic was sweeping the country. At that time, Mr. Vought insisted that he would not send a budget amendment to reverse these cuts. The administration was forced by circumstances to submit such a budget amendment shortly thereafter.

The Senate should not reward this record of failure and lawbreaking by confirming Mr. Vought's nomination.

Mr. INHOFE. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Under the previous order, the question is, Shall the Senate advise and consent to the Vought nomination?

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BRAUN) and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY) and the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 131 Ex.]

YEAS—51

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

NAYS—45

Baldwin	Harris	Reed
Bennet	Hassan	Rosen
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schumer
Brown	Jones	Shaheen
Cantwell	Kaine	Sinema
Cardin	King	Smith
Carper	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Udall
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Menendez	Warner
Durbin	Merkley	Warren
Feinstein	Murphy	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Braun	Murray
Burr	Schatz

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. ROMNEY. 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.

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Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I rise to address the administration's plan to

withdraw some 10,000 troops from Germany, and I rise to advance a bipartisan amendment to slow that process down and potentially even to stop it.

The administration explains that Germany needs to get to 2 percent of its spending on military matters, a direction I support. Germany is already at 1.5 percent and is on track to get to get to 2 percent.

By all appearances, the withdrawal of 10,000 troops in Germany is a very bad idea. First of all, it is a slap in the face at a key ally, a friend, and a great country. This country is an economic powerhouse. It is dynamic and productive people who have created that economic vitality. It has been driven to global leadership not by virtue of having cheap labor or polluting the air with pollutants or CO₂.

China buys more from Germany than Germany buys from China. Why? Not because Germany threatens China but because Germany is making products that China wants. It is a democracy noted for its strong, steady, and firm leader. Germany pays an equal share to the United States into NATO, and NATO, of course, has preserved peace in Europe for over 70 years.

Now is also a time to draw our friends closer and to link arms with our allies, in part because of China's ambition to become the dominant player on the Earth, to displace the West, to displace the United States, and to supplant democracy with authoritarian despotism. China brutally represses its minorities. The Uighurs, we read, even today are being forced into labor. China invades sovereign lands and nations of its neighbors. It is propagandizing our children here through Confucius Institutes. It steals technology in our country and other countries in the West, and it attacks our cyber bases relentlessly day in and day out.

Its military procurement is equal to that—or nearly so—of the United States. Even though we spend far more money than they do on military, as reported, our procurement budgets procure about the same amount of military hardware.

Of course, the tip of its spear is its economic predation. China has attacked one industry after another, and through subsidy and predatory pricing techniques, it has driven western businesses out of business. In my view, to divert China from that dangerous path, we need allies—allies like Germany.

Now, there is a second reason that I am opposed to this idea of withdrawing troops from Germany, and that is, it is a heck of a time to give a gift to Russia. We just learned about Russia's support of the Taliban—even reports that they may have been paying bounties for killing Americans. Russia has stepped in to support some of the world's worst actors, like Assad and Maduro. It has invaded Georgia and Ukraine, and it violates nearly every arms agreement it enters into.