

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber wishing to vote or to change their vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 64, nays 31, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 5 Ex.]

#### YEAS—64

Baldwin	Graham	Reed
Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Bennet	Hassan	Roberts
Blackburn	Hawley	Romney
Blunt	Hoeben	Rosen
Boozman	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Braun	Inhofe	Rubio
Burr	Johnson	Sasse
Capito	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Cardin	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Leahy	Shaheen
Collins	Lee	Shelby
Cornyn	Loeffler	Sullivan
Cotton	Manchin	Thune
Cramer	McConnell	Tillis
Crapo	McSally	Toomey
Cruz	Menendez	Udall
Daines	Moran	Whitehouse
Enzi	Murkowski	Wicker
Ernst	Paul	Young
Fischer	Peters	
Gardner	Portman	

#### NAYS—31

Blumenthal	Harris	Schatz
Brown	Heinrich	Schumer
Cantwell	Hirono	Sinema
Carper	Jones	Smith
Casey	Kaine	Stabenow
Coons	King	Tester
Cortez Masto	Klobuchar	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Markey	Warner
Durbin	Merkley	Wyden
Feinstein	Murphy	
Gillibrand	Murray	

#### NOT VOTING—5

Alexander	Perdue	Warren
Booker	Sanders	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 64, the nays are 31.

The motion is agreed to.

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michael George DeSombre, of Illinois, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Thailand.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

#### IRAN

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, yesterday evening, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles against military bases in Iraq, which house U.S. troops.

After General Qasem Soleimani was killed in a targeted drone strike late last week in an act of self-defense and to deter further aggression against America and our allies, our forces were on high alert for an Iranian attack. President Trump and our military leaders emphasized that we would be prepared for whatever response Iran chose to deliver, and by all accounts we were.

If the present circumstances hold, it appears that no U.S. servicemembers were harmed during this attack last night by Iran, which is the best outcome we could have hoped for. In addition,

I am glad no Iraqi troops appear to have been injured or killed in this strike as well.

While the result of this provocation by Iran could have been a lot worse, it does not diminish the fact that the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism has a sophisticated and capable ballistic program. We know that those capabilities only accelerated under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—the so-called nuclear deal during the previous administration—as has the regime's pursuit of their nuclear aspirations.

I am confident that this administration's maximum-pressure campaign, combined with our unparalleled military capabilities, as well as the President's decisive actions that have culminated in the airstrike last week, have prevented a much worse outcome from this attack by Iran.

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit Strategic Command, STRATCOM, in Omaha, NE, where their motto is "strategic deterrence." I think that is an important goal to keep in mind; that is, having the means and capabilities not only of hitting back but a message of deterrence to our adversaries to dissuade them from initiating hostilities in the first place.

President Ronald Reagan had his own notion of strategic deterrence. He called it "peace through strength." I believe that is something the President's actions last week have begun to restore, no less a luminary than former GEN David Petraeus, who said, after the Soleimani attack, that perhaps—just perhaps—this would reestablish deterrence. Indeed, based on the response by the Iranian regime last night, where they obviously targeted uninhabited areas, and they wanted to save face by showing that they were doing something to retaliate but not wanting to escalate, I think General Petraeus is right on. What has happened, to this point, is reestablishing some level of deterrence.

I applaud the President for speaking to the American people this morning and making it clear that, under his watch, Iran will never ever have a nuclear weapon. In my view, this is the single most important policy objective for the United States and our allies in the Middle East.

Deterrence through strength, combined with additional economic sanctions, are designed to encourage and persuade the Iranian regime to rejoin the community of nations, which will help pave the way for a better way of life for the Iranian people and to give up these tools of terror which have characterized the Iranian regime since 1979, since the revolution—exporting that terror to other countries. There was no one more responsible for doing that than General Soleimani, who was taken out in an airstrike last week.

As we move forward, the United States and our allies can't turn back. We can't relieve this maximum-pressure campaign, and we also must re-

main cognizant of the dangers of creating power vacuums in the Middle East.

I also hope our allies in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom will work with us to persuade the U.N. to invoke the snapback provisions under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to restore international sanctions and restrictions on the Iranian regime to further persuade them to join us in negotiations, which will lead to a better outcome for all. It will be helpful if our friends and allies in the UK, France, and Germany will join us in that effort.

While the United States has not purposely sought out further conflict that could lead to an unnecessary loss of life, we need to defend—we must always defend American personnel and our interests in the Middle East.

As the President has pointed out this morning, one of the things that, historically, has given Presidents like Jimmy Carter the determination to declare the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz as an act of war during his administration was our overdependence on energy from the Middle East. As the President pointed out this morning, thanks to the creativity and innovation in places like Oklahoma, Texas, North Dakota, and elsewhere, we are now largely energy independent and self-sufficient. We can now use this as a tool to engage other countries that are completely dependent on countries like Russia, Iran, and others in the Middle East for their energy needs. So this is changing the geopolitics of the world. This is not just the President taking a divisive action against the leading master of terrorism in the Middle East; the geopolitics of the world have shifted, and I hope we will all work together to take advantage of that.

As I said, I appreciate the President's courage and leadership. This must have been no easy decision, to be sure. I continue to be proud of our military leadership and the rank-and-file servicemembers who have worked so hard to protect the United States and our national interests in the Middle East and around the world.

#### SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. President, on another matter, I spoke last week on the Senate floor about some of the great things that have been accomplished this last year for our country, including my home State of Texas.

I pointed out that we notched a number of wins for the American military as well as our veterans. We sent much needed assistance to communities devastated by natural disasters, like Hurricane Harvey and others. We confirmed more qualified judges to the Federal bench. We invested heavily in securing America's elections from the sort of interference we saw occur in the last Presidential election, and I am proud to say we strengthened our fight to end the rape kit backlog.

We made strides, big and small, to improve the lives of the American people, and I am eager to add more wins to that list this year.

Unfortunately, Congress is starting this year in a rather inauspicious way, not designed to regain the confidence of the American people and our ability to do what benefits them as opposed to satisfying some partisan political interest.

High on that list of pretty embarrassing developments are the Articles of Impeachment that the House passed. Three weeks after the House said this urgent matter must be pushed through to protect the country and defend the Constitution, Speaker PELOSI is still refusing to send those Articles of Impeachment to the Senate, and we are waiting. Now, I would be happy if she never sent the Articles of Impeachment here and realizes the error of the House's ways, but I don't expect that to happen.

In the meantime, we are going to continue to confirm well-qualified nominees, as we are today, and hopefully we will be able to do work on the USMCA—the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement—which, as the Presiding Officer knows, we voted out of the Senate Finance Committee yesterday but which has to clear six other committees before it is ready for floor action. Hopefully, we will be able to get that done sooner rather than later.

With an impending impeachment trial consuming most of the oxygen here in Washington, there is not a lot of opportunity, let alone political will, to get actual legislating done.

There is a laundry list of bills we could add to our accomplishments in 2020, but there is an opportunity cost when we are squandering our time on this ill-considered impeachment mania. The time and effort we are spending on that could well be used to pass these other pieces of legislation, but these pieces of legislation wait in impeachment purgatory.

At the top of my list this year is legislation to bring down healthcare costs to the American people, particularly out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs—something I thought was a high priority for Members on both sides of the aisle as well as the White House.

Over the summer, the Senate Judiciary, Finance, and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committees passed bipartisan bills which deal with everything from high prescription drug prices to surprise medical billing. While we knew there was still additional work that needed to be done, everyone was somewhat optimistic that we could pass some combination of these bills by the end of last year. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

Negotiations are continuing, but I had hoped we could make progress on some noncontroversial bills in the meantime, like the one I introduced to stop drugmakers from gaming the patent system.

I just read this morning that the manufacturer of HUMIRA, which is an

incredible drug and the most widely prescribed drug in America, is raising their list price by 7 percent. This is a drug that has generic competitors overseas, but they are not approved here in the United States because HUMIRA has gamed the patent system by acquiring more than 120 different patents on this drug, the same one that is being sold cheaper and more widely available in Europe.

The bill I introduced with Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the Senator from Connecticut, to deal with that is called the Affordable Prescriptions for Patients Act. It strikes a delicate balance of protecting innovation while increasing competition. It would be a win for every American who has felt the sticker shock at the pharmacy. This bill is a modest bill, but it represents real progress. Bipartisan support—check that box. I introduced this bill with Senator BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut, as I mentioned, and I am proud to have the support of the minority whip as well as the ranking member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. This passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously.

Well, does it increase the deficit? No, it actually helps the deficit, so we can check that box. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the bill would save the government more than half a billion dollars over the next decade, not to mention what it might do to private insurance costs.

During simpler times, this bill would have been quickly approved by the Senate and sent to the House for their consideration and the President's signature. If we have learned anything these last few years, it is that nothing is simple here in Congress or in Washington.

So, after waiting for months, I came to the Senate floor to ask that the bill be passed. After all, it sailed through the process, and I hadn't heard a single Senator with any substantive objection to the bill. That is when the Democratic leader, the Senator from New York, came down here to block it, and he did it not once but twice. He didn't object on substance. In fact, he admitted it was a good bill. As I said, it checks every box when it comes to good legislation, so it certainly wasn't because it fell short there.

The only reason the Democratic leader objected to this legislation on two separate occasions is because of politics. He has chosen to participate in political games with a bill that is noncontroversial and straightforward, which would stop Big Pharma from abusing the patent system to increase their profits and increase prices to consumers.

At a time when he views his most critical priority as minority leader to oppose the President and, in turn, Senate Republicans, he couldn't stand to see a bill introduced by a Republican actually advance and become law. I am sure his constituents in New York

can't be too happy about that because they are paying the high price of patent gamesmanship too. I can guarantee you that Big Pharma is rejoicing over his obstruction.

Well, as I said just this last week, big drug companies have already begun to announce their price increases. According to their analysis, 445 different drugs have had their prices raised already by an average of 5 percent, and we are only 1 week into the new year.

It is particularly maddening that even consensus legislation is getting caught up in this hyperpartisan environment. But I am hoping that, once this looming impeachment trial is behind us, we can find a way to work together and make some progress.

Another bill that I am anxious to see pass this year is a reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which again has gotten caught up in partisan gamesmanship. Last year the House passed an ultrapartisan bill, which both parties knew would be dead on arrival in the Senate. Our friends, the House Democrats, chose to include a variety of poison pills in order to prove a point and perhaps gain some political advantage rather than to actually get a bill to the President's desk.

Well, that is where Senator FEINSTEIN, the Senator from California, and Senator ERNST, the Senator from Iowa, to their credit, tried long and hard to try to come up with a bill that we could take up here on the Senate floor, but all of a sudden, late in the game, our friends across the aisle walked away from the negotiating table and chose to introduce a near replica of the House's partisan piece of legislation.

Unfortunately, they succumbed to the politics of the moment rather than solving the problem that would actually help support victims of violence and reauthorize that legislation. Despite our Democratic colleagues leaving those negotiations, though, our colleague from Iowa, Senator ERNST, continued to work in good faith on a bill to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, and I am proud to be a cosponsor.

I urge the majority leader to put that piece of legislation on the floor and to do it at the earliest possible moment so that we can have a vote, we can have a debate, we can offer amendments, but we can actually get the job done rather than continuing to use this as a political football. It sends more funding and resources than the bill that the Democrats have proposed, and it authorizes the program for twice as long.

It is not just an alternative; it is a better choice for victims of sexual assault and violence. It includes a whole lot more than funding, though. It addresses a number of horrific crimes that are being committed against women and girls around the country, which are not included in our Democrat colleagues' version.

I regret that we were unable to pass a reauthorization for the Violence

Against Women Act, and I hope our colleagues across the aisle will reconsider and come back to the negotiating table and work with us so that we can finally reauthorize this program.

UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA TRADE  
AGREEMENT

Mr. President, finally, another priority that I alluded to a moment ago that I hope we can get to soon is to pass the USMCA, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which will succeed NAFTA and guide our trading relationships with Mexico and Canada into the future.

NAFTA has been a boon for our economy—especially in my State, in Texas—but it is time to bring this more than quarter-century-old agreement into the 21st century. That is precisely what the USMCA will do. It modernizes trade with our northern and southern neighbors and lays the foundation for better economies, more jobs, and greater prosperity for each of our countries.

The process of getting that bill across the Senate floor has been more than a year in the making, but we are making some progress, as I indicated, starting yesterday in the Senate Finance Committee. It was reported out with a bipartisan vote of 25 for and 3 against.

I haven't been shy about expressing my concerns about how this process has played out, especially cutting the Senate out of its negotiating position under trade promotion authority, but I do believe, on net, that this agreement is beneficial and will support it.

So I look forward to getting an opportunity, presumably once Speaker PELOSI sends the Articles of Impeachment over here and it meets its expected fate. Nobody I know expects 67 Senators to vote to convict and to remove President Trump based on the thin gruel presented by the two Articles of Impeachment that were voted on by the House in an ultrapartisan manner.

Once we get past all of that, I hope we can continue along the series of wins for our country in 2020, and I, for one, am eager to work on that. I hope we will be able to chart a path forward on an impeachment trial in the near future so that we can begin focusing on this legislation that will help the American people over the next 12 months and not squander a minute more than absolutely necessary.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the comments by my colleague from Texas, Senator CORNYN, when he talked about impeachment purgatory and the fact that the Senate is unable to act on critical legislation—many bills that have already passed the House of Representatives—because of the impeachment proceedings.

Well, the impeachment proceedings have not started in the U.S. Senate. So

what is the excuse? Was it the impeachment proceeding that stopped us from considering one bill in the Senate this week? Was it the impeachment proceeding that stopped us from considering one bill in the Senate last week? No, it was the conscious decision of the Senate majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, with the Republican majority, not to call a single piece of legislation in the last 2 weeks.

There shouldn't be any surprise among the membership that we did nothing in the last 2 weeks other than a few garden-variety nominations. The fact is, we have done nothing for a long time under Senator MCCONNELL's leadership. Do you know, for the record, how many amendments were actually debated on the floor of the U.S. Senate last year in the entire calendar year? Twenty-two. Twenty-two amendments, six offered by the junior Senator from Kentucky. If I am not mistaken, all of them were defeated, but the point I am trying to make is, 22 amendments in 1 year and now the Republican majority is blaming Speaker PELOSI and the impeachment proceedings for the fact that we do nothing. It doesn't make sense, and it doesn't add up.

We are doing nothing because that is the strategy of Senator MCCONNELL. The House of Representatives has passed hundreds—not a dozen, hundreds—of bills for the Senate to consider, on every imaginable topic: issues relating to healthcare, which we heard about from the Senator from Texas; issues relating to immigration. The litany is long. Within that litany, you would think that Senator MCCONNELL could find one bill—just one—from the House of Representatives to debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but we don't do that in the Senate. We no longer debate under Senator MCCONNELL's leadership.

Some people look at this room and call it the Senate Chamber. That is true; it is the Senate Chamber. Now, sadly, it is more the Senate storage facility. We store on the floor of the Senate Chamber the desks of former Senators who actually legislated on the floor of the Senate. It is not a museum because there is still some active business underway, but it is a storage facility.

These desks, if they could only speak, would tell the stories of men and women who stood up on the floor and debated critical issues. I was here for some of it. Issues of war and peace—we don't take those up anymore. If a President wants to go to war in Iran, obviously, his party thinks that we shouldn't interfere with his thought process, though the Constitution states clearly we are supposed to interfere. Congress has the authority, under the Constitution, to declare war.

When issues would come up before us—important issues—in the past, we would debate them at length, whether it was health insurance for Americans, whether we were talking about ques-

tions of the disabled in America being active participants in our society, a time when Senators from both sides of the aisle stood up in this Chamber and, in a lengthy debate, passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. One was Senator Bob Dole, a disabled veteran from World War II and Republican leader; another was Tom Harkin, a Democrat from Iowa. The two of them had a bipartisan measure and a real fulsome debate that doesn't happen on this floor of this Senate Chamber anymore.

For Senators to come here and blame NANCY PELOSI, the Speaker of the House, for our inactivity is laughable. We have failed to move forward because the leadership does not want to call the bill. Senator MCCONNELL has the authority to decide what we will debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate, and he has decided we will debate nothing—nothing.

What a wasted opportunity. If America was just picture-perfect from sea to shining sea, you would say: Well, there is no reason. We don't need a Senate or a House. We know better. There are important issues we should address, issues related to challenges facing families across America; issues of the mounting student debt across this country and what it has meant to hundreds of thousands of young people and their future; the issues involving gun violence in this country, where we still have mass killings yet can't even pass one bill to keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons and people who are mentally unstable; the issue of healthcare.

I certainly agree with the Senator from Texas when it comes to the cost of prescription drugs, the No. 1 concern of families across this country. All Senator SCHUMER has asked for is that we bring this measure to the floor and let Senator CORNYN's good idea be brought to the floor with Senator DURBIN's good idea—and perhaps other Senators' good ideas—and actually have a debate right here on the floor of the Senate. It would be amazing. People would be tuned in all across America saying: You can't imagine; the Senate is alive; it is actually considering measures.

Although, we don't. Twenty-two amendments in one calendar year—it is just amazing that we have reached that point.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Mr. President, I come to the floor to address three specific issues. One of the first is a matter that I didn't know would actually be part of my responsibility as a Senator, but over the years my staff came to me and talked to me about political prisoners in far-flung nations around the world, men and women literally in jail because they are exercising their right to speak, to be journalists, to assemble, to run for political office.

My staff said: They are forgotten. Nobody knows they are there. They languish in prisons for months and