

we have many more recommendations included in the report.

As we turn and look at the world outside of the United States, particularly with regard to Russia and Europe, the conference report enhances our ability to deter Russian aggression, maintains strong support for Ukraine, and reaffirms our commitment to the Transatlantic Partnership by calling for a strong U.S. force posture and capabilities in Germany.

The conference report also expands sanctions on entities engaged in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline and a requirement to impose sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAASTSA, on Turkey for its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system.

Turning to China, our other major adversary—and as the chairman pointed out the two major features in the new national defense strategy authored under the guidance and direction of President Trump—turning to China, the bill established the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, a new authority for the Department of Defense modeled after the European Deterrence Initiative, and authorizes an additional \$150 million in funding. And I give great credit to the chairman because it was his idea, and he asked me to participate with him. But it is a great recognition of the world as it is today—China in an adversarial position—and we responded to it.

I believe this is one of our strongest bills yet on countering the threat that China poses to the United States and our partners and allies, including India, Taiwan, and other countries in the region.

With respect to countering the continued threat posed by ISIS, the conference report extends the Iraq and Syria train-and-equip programs at the requested funding level, while ensuring appropriate congressional oversight of the use of such funds.

Specific to Iraq, the conference report continues efforts to normalize security assistance to Iraq by transitioning funding to enduring authorities and not other temporary authorities we have been using over the last several years—many years, frankly.

For Afghanistan, the bill extends the authority to train and equip Afghan security forces and enhances congressional oversight. It requires an assessment of the progress made on such issues as anti-corruption, recruitment and retention of security forces, and commitments made by the Afghan Government in support of intra-Afghan negotiations. It also includes a restriction on funding to reduce U.S. forces in Afghanistan until the administration submits an assessment of the impact of such actions on U.S. interests.

In addition, the bill includes a provision to enhance congressional oversight of the administration's negotiations with the Taliban to ensure the

Taliban is in compliance with the commitments made on February 29, 2020, and to address current and projected threats to the homeland emanating from Afghanistan.

The key commitment is that we would be able to maintain a counterterrorism presence that would be adequate and sufficient to suppress any threat emanating from Afghanistan, and that has to be confirmed. We are still waiting for that confirmation.

I am also pleased the conference agreement includes several provisions, collectively known as the United States-Israel Security Assistance Act, to extend foreign assistance, cooperative development programs, and other support to Israel. These provisions demonstrate our unwavering commitment to Israel.

Turning to our nuclear triad, the conference report authorized the President's request to continue the modernization of our nuclear deterrent, which is quickly nearing the end of its use life, and the President recognizes that very precisely. The conference report will also ensure the continuation of much needed modernization efforts to continue to rebuild our aging National Nuclear Security Administration infrastructure. The conference report does not support additional testing, as the directors of our weapons labs have assured us and certified that it is not necessary at this time.

The bill before the Senate is bipartisan, with strong support in Congress. This bill is critical to our national security, but more importantly, it provides the resources our troops need in order to do their job and return home safely to their loved ones. Any discussion of vetoing this bill undermines the commitment, I believe, that we have made to our servicemembers and should be off the table. Vetoing this bill would send the wrong signal to our forces, our allies, and our adversaries at exactly the wrong time. It is not necessary, and it should be avoided.

Let me close in the way that I began. Let me commend Senator INHOFE. He has worked this bill tirelessly, and I believe he has been fair and transparent throughout the process. As I said before, the reason we have this bill for the 60th year—assuming our vote is strong tomorrow—is because of the chairman and several others, but it is the chairman principally.

I would also like to take a moment to commend MAC THORNBERRY. The bill is named after Mac. He is an extraordinary gentleman. I had the privilege of serving with him for 2 years in the House of Representatives. He is an individual whose wise counsel, whose integrity, whose decency, and whose dedication to the men and women of the armed services is unparalleled. He is an extraordinary gentleman. I can't think of a more fitting tribute and a more apt tribute than naming this bill after MAC THORNBERRY.

I have to conclude by saying that despite the appearance we have done all

this work, our staff is extraordinary. John Bonsell and Liz King—the staff directors—did superb work. Let me recognize my staff, my Democratic staff: Jody Bennett, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Creighton Greene, Ozge Guzelsu, Gary Leeling, Maggie McNamara Cooper, Kirk McConnell, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Arun Seraphin, Fiona Tomlin, and last but not least, Elizabeth King.

Again, this Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act conference report is the culmination of months of hard work. It is a good bill. I would say, in fact, it is one of the best bills that we have had in many, many years, and it will provide for our national security and our men and women in uniform and their families. I urge my colleagues to support it.

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. 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.

Mr. INHOFE. Let me first of all say that my colleague, ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Senator REED, is absolutely right. I think about the people that he was praising, the staff people.

You don't very often hear people back in the real world really appreciating the time and effort that comes from the staff. In this case, the two individuals that Senator REED talked about, John Bonsell, Liz King—I don't remember one weekend that they have had off during this whole thing.

They are just workaholics. They know how significant this is. They know we had a defense authorization bill for the last 60 years, and the worst thing we could do to our kids in the field who are risking their lives is not send them the resources necessary that are in this bill to defend America.

MORNING BUSINESS

STOP THE WAIT ACT

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, today I rise to discuss the dangerous practice we have in this country that forces people with disabilities to wait for benefits and healthcare coverage. I would first, however, like to congratulate my colleague, the senior Senator from Rhode Island, for his diligence and persistence in working to eliminate the 5-month waiting period for those who have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, known as ALS. His perseverance is admirable, and I congratulate him for eliminating this misguided policy for people with ALS.

My hope is we can expand this victory to eliminate the waiting periods

for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and Medicare coverage to all eligible Americans.

Forcing Americans to wait 5 months to begin cash benefits and then another 24 months for Medicare coverage is a dangerous policy. In many cases, applicants have little or no income while they are waiting for government benefits to begin. We should not be forcing someone with stage-4 breast cancer or Huntington's Disease or any of the disabilities or diseases that qualify a person for Social Security Disability Insurance to wait to receive benefits. Those who have been determined eligible are American workers who have paid into the Social Security system throughout their lives. We have an obligation to assist Americans in their time of need in a timely manner. When a person receives a diagnosis, bills do not wait 5 months to be paid, healthcare costs are not put on hold for 2 years. Their rent, their utilities, their healthcare copayments come due immediately. Therefore, the benefits these American workers have paid for through their Social Security contributions should be made available to them when they are found eligible.

I would again like to congratulate the senior Senator from Rhode Island. His bill is an important step forward for people with ALS and for all people eligible for SSDI benefits. Let's use this moment to move forward and make comprehensive change to the way we administer SSDI benefits to all eligible Americans with disabilities. Every eligible applicant continues to have essential expenses and needs the cash benefits and healthcare coverage provided by Medicare.

My bill, S. 2496, the Stop the Wait Act, would eliminate the waiting periods for those eligible for SSDI benefits, regardless of diagnosis. It would eliminate the 5-month waiting period for SSDI benefits, and it would eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare coverage. It would help keep people from slipping in to poverty and would ensure they have healthcare coverage.

Today, let's celebrate the policy victory and the great work Senator WHITEHOUSE has accomplished to improve the lives of Americans with ALS. Tomorrow and for the days to come, let's work to secure that victory for all Americans who are eligible for SSDI. They cannot wait.

PAID ACT

Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina. Mr. President, yesterday, the Provide Accurate Information Directly, PAID Act took a pivotal step closer to becoming law. Once enacted, this vital legislation, which I had the privilege of co-authoring with Senator Cardin, will save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars through targeted and common-sense updates to the Medicare secondary payer, MSP, statute, which Congress first codified four decades

ago. The PAID Act aims to ensure that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, CMS, in coordinating claims related to Medicare Advantage MA, or Medicare Part D plans, can provide the information needed for settling parties to resolve claims fairly and efficiently.

In short, this bill is a boon for seniors, Main Street job creators, and the American taxpayer.

As this bill approaches the legislative finish line, I would like to thank Chairman GRASSLEY for his invaluable support in working with my office, as well as with our Democratic counterparts and with CMS, to bolster, refine, and identify legislative avenues for our proposal. I would also like to thank Senator CARDIN for his partnership in co-leading this legislation, along with Representatives KIND and BILIRAKIS, who introduced a companion bill in the House, which passed by voice vote yesterday. Together, I feel confident that we can see the PAID Act signed into law by the end of the year.

Congress amended the MSP statute in 2007 to require parties to a dispute—known as primary plans—to report settlements, judgments, and awards to Medicare through so-called section 111 reports. This amendment allowed Medicare to seek recovery from settling parties when Medicare paid for healthcare because other payment was not available or reasonably expected to be available. While this system has functioned well for the Medicare Fee-for-Service program, where CMS has the claims data needed for recovery, it has not worked successfully for the MA Part C and Part D programs, where CMS does not have the requisite Part C and Part D claims data and cannot recover for payments that have been made. To compound the problem, settling parties are often unable to identify the correct Part C or Part D plan to be able to coordinate benefits, should they choose to do so. This legislation closes that critical information by having CMS communicate the Part C and Part D plan identification to settling parties in response to a section 111 report. CMS has that data and can provide it.

Congress recognizes that for the last 8 years, CMS has provided section 111 reports to the Part C and Part D Plans, and Congress expects that CMS will continue to do so after this legislation is enacted. Further, the existing MSP statute and regulations impose specific requirements on CMS, and on Part C and Part D plans, to pay for claims in some situations, to not pay for claims in other situations, and to pursue recovery of claims when appropriate. Nothing in this legislation is intended to change any of those obligations or requirements, and Congress expects Part C and Part D plans to continue to seek recovery of claims by timely notifying settling parties when a payment has been made that should be reimbursed, consistent with the CMS notice procedures. This legislation is only intended to provide more information to

the settling parties so that they have the ability to coordinate with Part C and Part D plans earlier, if they so choose.

Congress has afforded CMS 12 months to implement this law, and we urge the agency to move with all deliberate speed to both implement its own system changes and coordinate with primary plans throughout the implementation process. Regular communication and coordination will prove critical in ensuring that Primary Plans are aware of the data exchange requirements that CMS plans to implement and are prepared as quickly as possible to utilize the data CMS will be providing under this law. By involving all stakeholders throughout the implementation process, CMS can implement our intent that the needed plan identity information be available for parties to coordinate benefits as efficiently as possible.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING BAYSHORE FIT

● Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, each week I recognize a small business that exemplifies the American entrepreneurial spirit at the heart of our country. It is my privilege to recognize a family-owned small business that promotes American health and wellness by operating a gym and fitness business. This week, it is my pleasure to recognize Bayshore Fit of Tampa, FL, as the Senate Small Business of the Week.

In 2012, partners Jeff Fink and Beth Scanlan founded Bayshore Fit in Tampa, FL. Both Jeff and Beth had years of experience training for marathons, bodybuilding, and fitness competitions. Together, they created a gym that met the demand for a personalized alternative to large national gym chains. Jeff and Beth focused on helping every customer meet their health goals, developing a family-friendly, relationship-driven business. As their client base grew, they quickly moved their gym into a larger facility.

Today, Bayshore Fit continues to serve the Tampa area, with members ranging from first-time gym attendees to senior citizens and even professional athletes. The gym has been featured in local media, recognizing their significant membership growth and continued emphasis on personalized programs.

Bayshore Fit's emphasis on healthy living extends to their philanthropic endeavors. They are involved with the South Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Westshore Alliance in Tampa's Westshore business district. For more than 8 years, Bayshore Fit has sponsored local youth sports teams. They regularly support local nonprofit organizations, including Frameworks of Tampa Bay, Inc., which fosters youth social and emotional development.

Like many of Florida's small businesses, Bayshore Fit temporarily