

Now, one might ask, fair enough: If Medicare for All is so good, if it has so many advantages, if it is what the American people want, why hasn't it been enacted by now? Why hasn't the United States joined every other major country in guaranteeing healthcare for all?

That takes us to our corrupt political system and the outrageous way we fund campaigns. So I would suggest if you want to know why we are stuck with a dysfunctional healthcare system that fails the American people but that makes the drug companies and the insurance companies wildly profitable, follow the money. Follow the money.

Since 1998, in our corrupt political system, the private healthcare sector has spent more than \$10 billion on lobbying. Got that? More than \$10 billion on lobbying since 1998. Over the last 30 years, it has spent more than \$1.7 billion on campaign contributions to maintain the status quo.

In terms of their lobbying efforts, let's be clear. They are very, very bipartisan. There are former Democratic Party leaders and former Republican Party leaders who are working together to represent the insurance companies and the drug companies.

And, by the way, of course, in terms of the campaign contributions, the insurance companies and the drug companies are also very bipartisan. In fact, their contributions go to many Members of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. It doesn't really matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican; what matters is you protect the interests of the drug companies and the insurance companies.

But, you know, what I believe is that maybe, just maybe, now is the time for Congress to do what the American people want—not what the lobbyists want, not what the drug companies want, not what the insurance companies want. And maybe, just maybe, we should have the courage to take on the powerful special interests that dominate healthcare in the United States. And maybe, just maybe, now is the time to provide healthcare to every man, woman, and child as a human right by passing a Medicare for All, single-payer program.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, agriculture is a critical part of Nebraska's economy. It accounts for, roughly, \$25.7 billion of Nebraska's gross State product. That is a little less than a quarter of our State's overall GDP. Nearly one in four jobs in the State is tied to agriculture.

That economic output is important because, thanks to States like Nebraska, hard-working family farmers and ranchers produce a wide variety of products that keep our grocery stores stocked and help to feed the world. But our Nation's agricultural bounty doesn't do anyone much good if it can't

get to market, and that is where our complex transportation and infrastructure system comes into play.

The railroad industry, in particular, has a big role in bringing agricultural products to locations across the United States. That includes ports, where they can then be shipped to locations around the world. Whether it is grain or soybeans, railroads provide the means to affordably move thousands of tons of goods where they need to go. It is estimated that rail delivers 1.6 million carloads of agricultural products a year. That is why I am deeply concerned about the potential for a rail shutdown later this week.

I think it is very important that people understand what kind of economic impact such as a shutdown would have and how it would upend our Nation's agricultural sector. The consequences would be devastating. When agricultural products can't be transported, there will be price hikes, and there will be shortages. Our international exports of commodities like corn, soy, wheat, of which a large share moves by rail, will fall dramatically.

Fertilizer prices—an already expensive input due to inflation—will further skyrocket. The mere prospect of a shutdown on Friday means fertilizer and other hazardous materials have already started being removed from the rail networks on September 12. Biofuel plants could be forced to scale down operations or completely shut down.

I would also point out that we have harvest coming up in Nebraska. Family farmers in my State, many of whom are grappling with rapidly rising input costs, need a good harvest season. And if rail service isn't feasible, that possibility could go out the window.

Grain elevators, for example, could run out of storage and be unable to accept additional commodities. Family farmers and ranchers will lose critical revenue streams.

The bottom line is, if rail shuts down, our entire agricultural system shuts down. It is that simple.

All of this economic chaos would come on top of extreme inflation. Today's numbers put grocery prices up 13.5 percent over last year. Think about the toll this out-of-control inflation is taking on our working-class families.

Then there is the international turmoil. Russia's horrific invasion of Ukraine has dramatically curtailed the flow of grain, which, in turn, has exacerbated food insecurity in Africa and the Middle East. And the war has also further strained the fertilizer supply chain. All of this is to say that the stakes of these rail negotiations couldn't be higher.

Nine of the twelve labor unions in the rail sector have been able to utilize the Presidential Emergency Board recommendations to come to an agreement. I note that the Board is composed of neutral, impartial individuals appointed by President Biden. Their recommendations are widely seen as

benefiting all parties. It is critical that the remaining labor unions and the rail industry use those recommendations to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

Our entire agricultural system is at stake here, the economic welfare of the American people is at stake here, and the global food security is also at stake here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, there are a lot of important things that we do here in the U.S. Senate, hopefully, every day; certainly, every week, month, and over the year. But there are a couple of pieces of legislation which are literally must-pass pieces of legislation. They deserve an even higher priority than our day-to-day work here. These must-pass pieces of legislation are critical to the function of our government.

First, for example, government funding is critical so we can keep the lights on and keep the government working on behalf of the American people. If Congress fails to pass an appropriations bill, the government will literally shut down and millions of government workers will be left without a paycheck and the American people will be left without the services that those government employees would otherwise provide.

The good news is, at this moment, there appears to be little appetite for a funding fiasco at the end of this fiscal year at the end of this month. In a couple of weeks, I expect we will vote on a stopgap funding bill to keep the lights on and the trains moving until the end of the year.

Continuing resolutions like this, leading up to an end-of-the-year omnibus appropriations bill, are never my first choice. My hope would be that we would take up and pass each of the individual appropriations bills on a timely basis and then bring them across the floor of the U.S. Senate, pass them, and get them to the President for his signature. But, unfortunately, that hasn't happened under the current management.

There are other bills that receive the "must-pass" label. These could be anything from farm bills to disaster relief. Each of these are important. But, in my view, the ultimate must-pass piece of legislation is the National Defense Authorization Act.

Each year, this is how we make sure that our men and women in uniform have the support and the tools and the training they need and the pay to compensate them for their service as well as the support their families deserve, which is particularly important in an All-Volunteer military. This is how we maintain our military bases, modernize our weapons systems, and invest in the next generation of weapons.

It is how we take stock of the global threat landscape, which always seems

like it is getting more and more ominous, and we make sure that our country is prepared to counter even our most aggressive adversaries.

That is why Congress has passed a consolidated defense authorization bill for each of the past 61 years. For 61 years in a row, we passed a national defense authorization bill. But, apparently, the majority leader, Senator SCHUMER, is contemplating not doing that this year.

A strong and ontime defense authorization act has always been crucial, but this particular moment in history demands even greater attention.

As we know, on February 24—nearly 7 months ago—Russia launched an unprovoked war against Ukraine. Thankfully, the civilized world has rallied around Ukraine, supplying it with the tools and weapons they need not only to fight but to win this war.

At the same time, we know thousands of miles away, the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China have become increasingly hostile to the West and desperate to project its military power. It continues, at the same time, to commit genocide against the Uighurs and other ethnic minorities, and it is likely preparing an invasion of Taiwan.

North Korea has declared itself to be a nuclear weapons state. Iran is pursuing its own nuclear ambitions and a breakout for those nuclear weapons, which is the point when they actually acquire one. It is getting closer every day.

We know after the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan that the Taliban, which once gave nurture to al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden, attacked the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

And, of course, the political instability from the disastrous means or method by which we withdrew from Afghanistan, literally turning over billions of dollars to the Taliban and weapons that they never would have otherwise been able to acquire, has created a tremendous amount of instability in the region, where already Pakistan and India warily eye each other, both of whom are nuclear powers.

So given the walk around the globe and the identification of these multitude of threats, you would think that passing a defense authorization act would be the highest priority for the U.S. Congress and particularly the Senate.

If you think about it, all of the freedoms and the standard of living, the quality of life we enjoy in this country, our prosperity, are all directly related to our ability to keep our country safe and keep the American people safe. That should be our No. 1 priority.

But the truth is, we can't match these stakes. We can't rise to this demand and this need with continuing resolutions and past-due authorizations.

Our men and women in uniform need to prepare and train every day, 365 days

a year. And if we don't pass a defense authorization act now, we will be stealing time that we already don't have.

General MacArthur, who became famous in the Korean war, said the history of failure in war can be summed up in two words: "too late"—too late.

Now, our colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee, on a bipartisan basis, under the leadership of Senator REED, a Democrat, and Senator INHOFE, a Republican, have compiled a strong bill that would strengthen and modernize our national defense. But the Senate Armed Services Committee completed its work on July 18. Here we are, September 13.

Senator SCHUMER, the one who sets the agenda for the U.S. Senate, has yet to bring that bill to the floor. Of all of the must-pass bills that I hear discussed in the media and among our colleagues, rarely are people talking about the Defense authorization bill.

The Presiding Officer succeeded John McCain in the U.S. Senate. John McCain was, of course, not only a war hero; he was a proud patriot. And he was a bear of a man to deal with. But I dare say, if John McCain were alive today, we would be on a defense authorization bill before we break for the midterm elections because he would not let anyone rest if we broke or threatened to break that 61-year consistent threat of meeting that No. 1 priority obligation.

I was hoping that the Senate would consider the Defense authorization bill this month and give our planners at the Pentagon and our commanders the predictability they need, as well as our military families the support that they deserve and need, not to mention our men and women who are on the frontlines fighting to protect our country, the tools and the training they need in order to do their job. I was optimistic that given the clear and present danger of the situation we are living through now, the threat landscape, and the desire to show our bipartisan support for our military, that we would, naturally, make this the 62nd year consecutively to pass the Defense authorization bill.

The only other must-pass item on the Senate's to-do list this month is to keep the government funded, and the Democratic majority has already committed to the short-term extension until the middle of December. So there is just no excuse for putting off the annual Defense bill. But for some reason, to this point, Senator SCHUMER, the Senate majority leader who sets the agenda in the Senate, does not seem to agree that is an urgent, must-pass piece of legislation.

I know there is bipartisan support to encourage him to bring this bill up, but so far he hasn't been swayed. The Defense authorization bill seems to be at the bottom of his priority list, below judicial nominations and a bill to codify a right to marry that is not even in jeopardy.

Given everything that is going on in the world, there is simply no reason to

delay consideration of the Defense authorization bill. In fact, there is every reason to do it on time and for the 62nd consecutive year.

We all know that American strength and leadership are vital to global security and equally vital to protecting our homeland. The Senate simply should not ignore its responsibility when it comes to our readiness.

Now, one of the things that concerns me the most, because he is not talking about this being a priority, is that he will try to stick this Defense authorization bill on an appropriations bill at the end of the year, sort of as a clean-up, but if he does that, he will effectively deny Senators floor time to offer debate and to actually have votes on the bill and how to improve it.

One amendment I intend to offer if given the opportunity is a bill I introduced with Senator SHAHEEN from New Hampshire which would help replenish our defense stockpiles.

As we all know by now, the United States has provided Ukraine unprecedented defense aid—Stingers, Javelins, grenade launchers, small arms, ammunition, and so much more. This assistance is not a handout. This is not a charity project. As much as we want to see Ukraine prevail, our material support for Ukraine is not entirely altruistic. The United States isn't just investing in a Ukrainian victory; we are also putting our resources toward a Russian defeat. We are trying to help snuff out the fire before it spreads even further west. We know what Mr. Putin's aspirations are; it is to restore the great Russian Empire that existed when the Soviet Union existed.

We know that there is a delicate balance to strike here. Our support for Ukraine cannot come, should not come at the cost of our own military readiness. And we have requirements way beyond just Ukraine, as I mentioned earlier—the People's Republic of China, North Korea, Iran.

The United States is a global power, and we have to be ready whenever and wherever the threat arises. We have to be able to replenish our weapons stockpiles quickly so we are ready whatever may come our way. Unfortunately, there are a lot of bureaucratic hurdles in the way.

I was shocked when I saw that the Pentagon is not in a position to replace the Javelins and Stinger missiles that we provided Ukraine because they don't have an operating production line, and they said it may take a couple of years. I know that our friends and allies in Europe that are providing weapons to the Ukrainians have every expectation that the United States will replenish those stockpiles of weapons so that they can defend their country and meet their NATO obligations.

So the level of unreadiness at the Pentagon to meet the current need is shocking. The Defense Department can't place an order for more Javelins and then have them show up at the Pentagon 5 to 7 business days later. It

simply doesn't work like that. The process of purchasing, manufacturing, and deploying this lethal aid takes a lot of time, which, to be frank, we do not have.

Senator SHAHEEN and I have recently introduced a bipartisan bill called the Securing American ARMS Act to remove some of the hurdles and the bureaucratic delay in replenishing those stockpiles. It will give the Department of Defense the ability to fast-track the procurement process. That includes times like these when the United States is providing defense articles to an ally or a partner that is under armed attack by a U.S. adversary.

Our bill would also give the Defense Department the ability to expedite the delivery of defense articles to our allies and partners in need. This will allow us to continue to provide critical support to Ukraine—but not just limited to Ukraine—all without compromising our national defense or our ability to meet other obligations around the world.

I appreciate Senator SHAHEEN working with me on this bill, which now has more than a dozen bipartisan cosponsors.

When the Senate finally begins consideration of the Defense Authorization Act, I hope this legislation will be a part of it. At the same time, as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, I am hopeful we can also reauthorize the U.S. intelligence community, which usually takes a ride on the Defense Authorization Act.

The hard-working men and women of the intelligence community carry out missions day in and day out that inform key policy decisions and the work of the U.S. military. Of course, being intelligence operators, their work is not acknowledged necessarily like a member of our uniformed services, but their service is vital to our missions and our interests around the world.

One great example of the role the intelligence community played in the runup to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was that our intelligence community was able to provide skeptical allies with irrefutable proof of Russia's intentions and showed exactly what Russia was planning before February 24. I have no doubt that this intelligence contributed to the unified response in the days and weeks following. And we engaged in enhanced information and intelligence sharing on a real-time basis that I think has helped facilitate Ukraine's strong national defense and now counteroffensive that they are currently engaged in, trying to recapture some of their territory that Russia has previously occupied.

I want to particularly recognize the chairman and the ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Committee—Senator WARNER, a Democrat from Virginia, and Senator RUBIO, a Republican from Florida—for their leadership in helping us pass the Intelligence Authorization Act unanimously in July. Like other authorization bills, this

outlines funding levels for the intelligence community, but it also contains legislative oversight of America's intelligence apparatus.

Strong oversight is crucial to ensuring accountability, while enabling our intelligence professionals to accomplish the complex and difficult missions the American people demand of them. With the ongoing war in Ukraine and threats from China continuing to grow, we need intelligence at the speed of relevance. This is how we help assure everyone, from our policymakers to our warfighters, that we will have the tools to maintain America's preeminent global position and ensure the defense of our homeland.

I appreciate the hard work of Senator RUBIO and Senator WARNER to advance this reauthorization, and again, I hope, when we take up the Defense Authorization Act at some point, that it will be included.

So, Madam President, let me just conclude where I started. The National Defense Authorization Act is a must-pass piece of legislation. We have passed it for 61 years in a row. Yet, when I hear Senator SCHUMER, the majority leader, talk about things we need to do before the midterm elections, I don't hear a peep out of him on his intention to move that Defense Authorization Act.

Providing for the common defense is one of Congress's most basic responsibilities. If we can't keep the American people and our democracy safe, we will have failed in our first and most urgent duty. There is far too much at stake to let the NDAA linger on the Senate calendar for more months. So my hope is that the majority leader will bring this bill to the floor this month and provide Senators who are not on the Armed Services Committee an opportunity to participate in the process by debating and offering amendments like the one I described earlier so we can strengthen our national defense at this critical moment in our Nation's history.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, what a great time of the year—county fairs, State fairs. The weather is changing. People are getting outside more. It is not quite as hot in most places. Parents have smiles on their faces because their kids are going back to school. College is starting up.

That is what I want to talk about today. Our college campuses are ramping up. There are a lot of good things going on with that. A lot of young people are for the first time going to college, going out for the first time in their lives and making their own decisions, away from home for the first time, putting their budgets together, having to go by their own time with nobody to wake them up, having to wash their own clothes, having to do things they have never had to do be-

fore. For the first time in their lives, they are responsible for themselves 24 hours a day.

I did that for 40 years coaching college football, coaching high school football. It was amazing how many young men and women whom I worked with never saw the Sun come up in their lives. If they played for me, they got to see the Sun come up. We got up early and stayed late.

So it is an important time for all of our young adults in college, K-12—very important—for our high school, elementary, and junior high school kids. For many, many years, it has been an important part of all of our lives in the United States of America, and it has been one point that has made us better than everybody across the world in terms of education. We educate our young people from K-12. Everybody has an opportunity to go to college for an extended education. It is a great opportunity. It is fun to watch. I had a chance to watch a lot of young people have some great opportunities and make a lot of things out of themselves.

I used to tell my players when I coached that you are living in the greatest country on the face of the Earth. If you are born in this country, you hit the lottery. A lot of people don't understand that. If you go to some of these other countries, you will figure it out real quick. But the United States of America, this country, really owes you nothing other than one thing: It owes you an opportunity—an opportunity to do what the heck you want to do or be who you want to be. If you work hard, you might have a chance. A lot of times, you are going to get knocked down. Do you know what this country does? It gives you a chance to get back on your feet and go again. It doesn't owe you one thing other than that. If you take advantage of it, you can achieve it.

For many years, institutions of higher education were great examples of the great American experiment. They were places where free speech was not only allowed but encouraged, and innovation and problem-solving were required for success. Success created some of America's favorite pastimes.

College sports, which have become a piece of our national identity, started a couple of weeks ago. They have immense benefits for young men and women who get involved in sports. But higher education became the envy of the world, as I said earlier. Our colleges and universities produced new research, technologies, and medicines and molded the talent and the talented minds to use these new developments that make our country a better place and make our country No. 1.

But this trend, I hate to say, is changing. Activists have fundamentally shifted higher education to become a vehicle to further their political agenda, and now they are set on forcing American taxpayers to pay for the overpriced indoctrination and taking athletic opportunities away from