

the 118th Congress, but we have work to do before the end of the 117th Congress, and I, for one, am ready to get to work.

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.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TENNESSEE NATIONAL GUARD'S 268TH MILITARY
POLICE COMPANY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, I want to begin by welcoming the Tennessee National Guard's 268th Military Police Company home after a 305-day deployment to Africa.

We are so incredibly grateful for their service and for the service and sacrifice that their families make during these times of deployment, and I know I speak for every Tennessean when I say to them: Welcome home. Job well done.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Madam President, well, the Senate is back in session and all anyone back in Tennessee wants to know is: What will this Chamber get done next? What is it that the Democrats are going to push next?

And they are not feeling very optimistic right now. One thing is clear, and that is that my Democratic colleagues have completely ignored the stress that they are causing Tennessee servicemembers and their families by dangling the NDAA in front of them and then snatching it away.

Inaction sends a very powerful message, and right now, all they are hearing is that the military has become a political football, and that does not inspire confidence.

We have passed the Defense Authorization Act 61 years in a row, and I am confident that there will be bipartisan support for No. 62, which makes this tight timeline even more unnecessary.

The American people don't have all the details on what this authorization will do, but they don't need them to know that it is the only thing standing between us and getting steamrolled by the CCP—the Chinese Communist Party—and the new axis of evil, which is Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Our servicemembers might not know every line item in the 2,000 pages of the bill, but they know that its contents will determine the course of their lives for the next 5, 10, or 25 years. Passing this bill is the bare minimum as far as the Senate is concerned, but it means a lot to our men and women in uniform.

We are ready to get this thing done. I know that the Presiding Officer, as a Member of the Armed Services Committee who has worked so hard on this, joins me in being ready to get it done. We finished our committee work back in June on this bill. We considered

more than 400 amendments. We adopted about 200 of those amendments, and it passed out of Armed Services Committee 23 to 3. So when I say we are ready to go, we are. There is bipartisan support for getting this finished.

As we prepare to move forward on this legislation, I want to highlight two of my own proposed amendments that, unfortunately, fell victim to partisanship. But, first, here's a little background.

The Tennessee National Guard has a reputation for answering a cry for help no matter where it comes from. Last month, they deployed to Warren County, TN, to help first responders gain control of a wildfire. In September, members of the 194th Engineer Brigade, the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 230th Sustainment Brigade and the 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion deployed to Florida to help with the cleanup in the wake of Hurricane Ian.

In July, members of Nashville's 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion pulled people to safety after flash floods destroyed communities in Kentucky.

This year, the Guard has rescued multiple hikers who got into trouble on or near the Appalachian Trail. And last September, members of the 269th Military Police Company, the 913th Engineer Company, and the C Company, 2d Battalion, 151st Aviation Regiment made it home after spending more than a year helping law enforcement officials in Texas try to contain the border catastrophe.

The sight of that National Guard uniform makes people in this country feel safe when things are going wrong. But the continued enforcement of the COVID-19 vaccination order will inevitably jeopardize that sense of security.

I introduced two amendments to the 2023 NDAA that would have injected sanity into these vaccination requirements. The first would have prohibited involuntary separation of any servicemember for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine until each service achieves its end strength authorized by last year's NDAA.

The second amendment would have made sure that members of the National Guard or Reserve maintain access to pay and benefits while their request for a religious or health accommodation was pending. This is about as noncontroversial as you can get on the issue of vaccine mandates. These amendments would create a simple rule to stop this Biden Department of Defense from railroading their own troops.

There is nothing political about preserving readiness and a basic sense of fairness, which has been completely absent in this process.

I am going to use the Army as a case study to show you how destructive this mandate has been for the military. Now, the Army has not achieved the end strength authorized in the 2022 NDAA. What does that mean? It means that we don't have enough men and

women doing the job, filling the slots that the Army has.

The data backs this up. If you head over to Fort Campbell and ask anyone in uniform if this is true, they will tell you that I am 100-percent correct. They do not have enough people. Members of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment have been consistently deployed for more than 2 years. And we thank them for that service.

I would encourage my Democratic colleagues to ask them what this Democrat-led administration's lack of attention to readiness and force strength could mean for our national security. What kind of impact does this have? This mandate has already separated 1,796 active duty soldiers from their service. What is worse, the Army has only approved less than 4 percent of medical exemption requests and just over 1 percent of religious exemption requests.

The Guard is still in a holding pattern on the issue of separation, but their exemption denial statistics are just as troubling: 15 percent of medical exemptions have been approved but only 0.0047 percent of religious exemptions.

The Reserves are not faring much better. The Army has only approved a little more than 5 percent of the medical exemptions and 0.004 percent of their religious exemptions.

Prospects are looking bleak for guardsmen with legitimate exemption claims, and it is pretty bleak for the military as a whole. The National Guard is already missing recruitment goals, and they are set to lose 9,000 members in fiscal year 2023 and 5,000 in fiscal year 2024.

In the United States, the number of new servicemembers joining the military has reached a record low. The Army alone fell 15,000 soldiers short of its goal for 2022 and is projecting a deficit of 21,000 soldiers for 2023. This administration knew manpower was a problem, but still they chose to fire servicemembers who were perfectly healthy and ready to defend this great country. And so we shouldn't be surprised that 18-year-olds in this country don't feel that they can trust this Democrat-led administration at the Pentagon with full control of their young lives.

The fact is, the Democrats have a perfect record of making decisions that end in a disaster. They spent trillions of dollars, provoked recordbreaking inflation, and hired 87,000 new IRS agents to squeeze small businesses who are struggling to survive in communities all across the wonderful State of Tennessee.

They have abandoned the southern border and caused the worst illegal immigration crisis we have ever seen, the worst humanitarian crisis we have ever seen. And, remember, it would be even worse if the Tennessee National Guard hadn't come to the rescue.

They latched on to the Green New Deal and replaced American energy

independence. They backed shutdowns and mandates that destroyed the American workforce. They shuttered American businesses and sent our supply chains into a shambles. And let's be clear—they didn't make these decisions blindly. They have the same data that each Member of this Chamber has. They watch the news. They knew what they were doing. They knew it was wrong. They did it anyway. It was intentional. They are focused on an outcome, and now they are applying that same destructive strategy to the members of the U.S. military.

Every year, we come into this Chamber and fight as hard as we can to make our military the most lethal fighting force in the world. We authorize billions of dollars for aircraft, for equipment, for weaponry. The NDAA represents an incredible investment in the future of this country. But it also represents the trust the American people put in this Congress to keep them safe and to keep the enemy at bay.

I join my Republican colleagues in asking Leader SCHUMER to bring the NDAA to the floor so that we can get this very important piece of legislation to the President's desk. There is no reason for delay.

And I also implore all my colleagues to remember that the greatest military in the world is nothing without the brave men and women and their families who have volunteered to be a part of this. We ask so much of them. They are already busy enough putting out fires, fighting wars. The least we can do is spare them the pain of fighting our political battles.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE ACT— Motion to Proceed

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 449, H.R. 8404.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 449, H.R. 8404, a bill to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and ensure respect for State regulation of marriage, and for other purposes.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, let me say a few words about the cloture motion we will file.

In a few moments, I am going to set up the first procedural vote on legislation that will codify marriage equality into law. Members should expect the first vote on Wednesday.

The Respect for Marriage Act, which my colleagues Senators BALDWIN, SINEMA, COLLINS, and others have done a great job working on, is an extremely important and much needed bill. No American should ever, ever be discriminated against because of whom they love, and passing this bill would secure these much needed safeguards into Federal law.

I want to make clear that passing this bill is not a theoretical exercise, but it is as real as it gets. When the Supreme Court overturned Roe, Justice Thomas argued that other rights, like the right to marriage equality enshrined in Obergefell, could come next.

Now, the Senate had a chance to bring marriage protection to the floor for a vote back in September, but at the urging of colleagues from both sides of the aisle, I agreed to wait because we were given an assurance that enough votes would materialize after the election. Because my top priority is to get things done in a bipartisan way whenever we can, we determined that this legislation was too important to risk failure, so we waited to give bipartisanism a chance.

I hope, for the sake of tens of millions of Americans, that at least 10 Republicans will vote with us to protect marriage equality into law soon. The rights and dignity of millions of Americans depend on it.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 449, H.R. 8404, a bill to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and ensure respect for State regulation of marriage, and for other purposes.

Charles E. Schumer, Tammy Baldwin, Brian Schatz, Margaret Wood Hassan, Patty Murray, Tammy Duckworth, Jeff Merkley, Jacky Rosen, Richard J. Durbin, Debbie Stabenow, Elizabeth Warren, Mazie Hirono, Alex Padilla, Gary C. Peters, Jeanne Shaheen, Catherine Cortez Masto, Benjamin L. Cardin, Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call for the cloture motion filed today, November 14, be waived.

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

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

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

The Senator from Indiana.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. YOUNG. Madam President, panel 2E, row 71. Not long ago, a young lady visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial during a visit to Washington, DC. She walked along the wall searching the black granite panels, and she saw the name right there in front of her. She stopped and pressed her hand against it. It was panel 2E, row 71, Alvin C. Forney.

Across our country, not just on our National Mall but on the boulevards of our State capitals and in the squares of our small towns, there are names of brave Americans etched in memorials, the names of those who never came home. And there are those who did come home, whose names may not be on monuments but whose example of service and sacrifice for their country is no less inspiring.

For two and a half centuries, they have answered the calls. They have protected our freedoms. They placed their lives in the line of fire oceans away so that their countrymen can live lives in peace here at home. They are the citizen soldiers who defeated the King's army, who ended the scourge of slavery, who saved Western civilization and liberated concentration camps, who stood down communism and stand vigil against terrorism. They are more than just names, though. They are the spirit of this country: strong but merciful, forever guarding our freedoms, and devoted to our fellow citizen.

Cpl Alvin Forney lived this example out in his all-too-brief life. He seemed destined, no matter his path, to make a difference. And he did. Tall, handsome, with a bright smile and infectious optimism, he was an ace athlete, a football, track, and basketball star at Shortridge and Washington High Schools in Indianapolis.

A member of a military family, Corporal Forney enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1961, and he went west. He graduated from Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, and then trained in the mountains near Camp Pendleton. He endured the forced marches and step hikes in the tarantula- and rattlesnake-filled scrub.

San Diego-trained marines are sometimes derisively called Hollywood marines by their Paris Island peers. You see, Tinseltown is just up the Pacific Coast Highway. But if Hollywood did ever try to create the ideal marine, Corporal Forney could be its muse.

You can see it in the old photos, the focus, the confident air, the spotless uniform. He looked like a gentleman marine, a hero. And he wasn't just courageous or strong. He was patient and decent. Slow to anger, he seldom swore—a rarity, of course, for a U.S.