

national electric vehicle charging networks built with union labor. In Illinois, IBEW is leading work with community colleges and high schools to train the next generation of workers.

Illinois and the entire Nation have been lucky to have had a champion of working families like Lonnie Stephenson. I am going to miss him working in a formal capacity, and I feel fortunate to consider him a friend. Loretta and I wish him a long and joyous retirement with his wife Dawn and their children, Stacey, Katie, Marty, Jacob, and Andrew.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO PATRICK J. LEAHY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Today, I come to the floor to pay tribute to the President pro tempore of the United States Senate. He is the longest serving Senator currently serving in this institution, and he is my friend from Vermont, Senator PAT LEAHY.

As many of you know, the Senator from Vermont also happens to be a talented photographer. His photos have been published in the New York Times, USA TODAY, and elsewhere. Senator LEAHY has also appeared in front of the camera in Batman movies. But this shutterbug was bitten by the political bug, and he certainly made his mark in Vermont politics.

At age 34, he became the youngest and very first Democrat elected to the U.S. Senate from the Green Mountain State, and today, he is Vermont's longest serving Senator, having put his name on the ballot two dozen times during his political career.

A year ago in November, my friend and colleague announced that he would not seek reelection to a ninth term. At the Vermont statehouse, he happened to be there to announce his very first Senate campaign. It was at the Vermont statehouse that he did that, and PAT, at that time, recalled the words of Edmund Burke, the Dubliner who served in the House of Commons during America's Revolutionary War. The words that Burke imparted to the electors of Bristol in 1774 inspired PAT LEAHY's approach to public service.

Burke said:

Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment.

Burke also said a representative ought to have "the most unreserved communication with his constituents."

Now, in my mind, that still is the essence of representative government.

Although we serve on different sides of the aisle, find ourselves on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, and hail from different regions of the country, PAT and I are called to serve our constituents.

PAT LEAHY and I have battled together in the trenches countless times over the years. He is a worthy adversary and, countless times, a trusted legislative ally. It takes grit; it takes grace; it takes gravitas to score victories and stick to the courage of one's convictions.

Indeed, PAT and I have more in common than might meet the eye. He is a dyed-in-the-wool liberal from New England, with a law degree from Georgetown. I am a Midwestern conservative and lifelong family farmer. As Senate colleagues, we share an abiding respect for this institution of the Senate. We value bipartisanship. For decades, we have earned the public trust of the voters of Vermont and Iowa. That tells me that Vermonters and Iowans prioritize hard work and constituent service.

At his announcement last November, PAT shared that he and his wife Marcelle made the decision together and that it was, to quote his words, "time to put down the gavel."

First, I want to say how much Barbara and I cherish our friendships. Barbara and I celebrated 68 years of marriage last August 22. Two days later, Marcelle and PAT celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Barbara and Marcelle are both cancer survivors and have developed a close friendship over these many years. These wives are strong and resilient and use their voices to advocate for early detection and treatment to save lives. Now, I can only speak for myself—and I believe my friend would agree—the unconditional support of Marcelle and Barbara have made us better men and then better Members of the U.S. Senate.

As I mentioned, PAT and Marcelle arrived at their heartfelt decision—made in partnership—to, using his words, "put down the gavel." As you can see here from this photograph, Chairman LEAHY certainly knows how to wield a gavel. He has had plenty of practice. In his nearly half century of service, PAT has chaired all of these committees: the Agriculture Committee, the Judiciary Committee, and the Appropriations Committee. This photo was taken in 2015 when then-Chairman LEAHY presented me with an engraved gavel as I prepared to take the helm of the Judiciary Committee. By the size of this gavel he is firmly holding in his hands, I am awfully glad that Senator LEAHY and I get along so well. Although we don't always see eye to eye on politics, we have found common ground on issues that matter. We respect each other's views and values and build consensus based on mutual trust.

We have served many years together on the Agriculture Committee. Senator LEAHY added tens of thousands of acres to the Green Mountain National Forest and is one of the few people on Earth who can explain Federal milk marketing orders—and, boy, did he go to bat for the Northeast dairy farmers.

Senator LEAHY has cultivated expertise in Foreign Affairs that is recognized here at home and around the

world. He has leveraged his leadership to help ban the export of anti-personnel land mines and secure justice for war victims.

For years, Senator LEAHY and I partnered together to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act and also the very important whistleblower protection laws.

We have worked together to root out fraud and protect national security with reforms to the EB-5 investor visa program.

We share a fierce commitment to securing our States' fair shares as champions of small, rural States in America.

From broadband to infrastructure, to the opioid crisis and pandemic relief, Senator LEAHY and I have rolled up our sleeves and put in the work to ensure the people of Iowa and Vermont don't get short-ended.

For decades, Senator LEAHY and I have served together on the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group to advance bilateral economic and trade issues.

In May of 2000, we held our annual conference on the steamboat Delta Queen along a route from Memphis to New Orleans. I cochaired the committee discussing international trade, and Senator LEAHY cochaired the panel on international affairs.

In May of 2011, our group met with international partners in Belgium and traveled to Russia, where Senator LEAHY gave a very important speech on the judiciary and the rule of law, and then to Ireland to advance in all of these places diplomacy, peace, and prosperity.

I have enjoyed working together to forge fruitful relations around the world.

As I reflect on our years of service together here in the U.S. Senate, some observers might actually suggest times sure are different than when we first came to Washington. PAT was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1974, the same year that Iowans elected me to the U.S. House of Representatives—at that time, the only Republican in the Iowa delegation. Despite the partisanship and polarization that is defining civic life this year and for the last few years, I have great hope for America.

Senator LEAHY and I share an abiding fidelity to uphold the promise of America. I am honored to have served these many years in Senator LEAHY's company.

Vermonters placed their trust in Senator LEAHY's judgment. They counted on his vote, his voice, and his leadership to represent their values, and Senator LEAHY has delivered.

Barbara and I wish PAT and Marcelle joyful days ahead in each other's company on their farm, and we wish them that for many, many years to come.

Godspeed to my friend from Vermont.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DURBIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, after months of waiting, the Senate is finally on track to take up and pass the National Defense Authorization Act, 13 days now before Christmas. The pointless delay in this fundamentally critical legislation has been a major point of frustration, not just for colleagues here in the Senate but for the leadership at the Pentagon and the people who need to make plans for America's defense.

The Senate Armed Services Committee completed its work last summer, but the majority leader apparently had other priorities and refused to put the bill on the floor until now. It simply wasn't a priority.

We spent week after week confirming President Biden's judicial nominees, but the majority leader couldn't seem to find the time to take up and pass a must-pass piece of legislation, the annual Defense bill.

And this is not the first time. It is the second year in a row that the Senate has not passed its own version of the National Defense Authorization Act, and so we find ourselves repeating the same bungled process that played out last year.

Thanks, however, to Senator INHOFE and Senator REED and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, this bill still reflects the hard work of our Senate colleagues.

But I want to underscore how unconventional this year's approach was and make clear why this should not be the norm. We need to return to what we call regular order around here, which is actually to allow all 100 Members of the Senate an opportunity to fully participate in crafting critical legislation like this.

Of course, the Armed Services Committee did its job. The committee held its hearings, worked with Members throughout the Senate, and compiled a strong bill. But the majority leader is going to put a bill on the floor and probably, in all likelihood, not allow any amendments to that bill. In other words, this bill was voted out of the Armed Services Committee, it was preconferenced with the House of Representatives, and it is going to be laid before the American people and this Senate as a *fait accompli* without adequate opportunity for debate or amendment or for other noncommittee Members to have a hand in crafting this important piece of legislation.

This is not how the Senate is supposed to work. Members of the Senate don't run for the Senate and serve their States with the intent of being potted plants when it comes to crafting important legislation, and particularly

this legislation, which is perhaps the single-most important thing we do around here.

So for 2 years, we have skipped these critical steps. But this cannot be the norm, and here is why: The National Defense Authorization Act impacts every servicemember's pay. It pertains to military construction, improvement of barracks, and military modernization. This bill needs to follow regular order. It needs to be completed on time.

This bill should have been signed into law by President Biden last September. We are more than 2 months into the fiscal year, and our military commanders are still waiting for Congress to pass this legislation and provide the certainty they need to plan for the future.

Mr. President, as you know, I am just talking about the authorization bill. The actual appropriations process is similarly broken, where, ordinarily, the 12 appropriation bills would come across the floor as individual bills or as so-called minibuses rather than the anticipated omnibus, which is \$1.7 trillion worth of spending. The top line of that bill has not even been agreed to by the ranking member and the chairman of the Appropriations Committee and the leadership on both sides of the Congress. Yet we are sitting around, again, 13 days before Christmas, wondering: Are we going to be presented with another continuing resolution—it looks like we are—that will take us to the 2 days before Christmas, December 23? And then this bill of \$1.7 trillion, roughly speaking, will then be plopped out in front of us, and the only option we will be given is a chance to vote no or to vote yes.

This is not the way the Senate should be operating. It is really a slap in the face to the American people, who deserve a measure of transparency, and to the Members of the Senate, who deserve at least the courtesy and consideration of being able to participate in the process, rather than being given the ugly choice between voting for a \$1.7 trillion omnibus appropriations bill we had no hand in writing or to shut down the government. That is the decision that Senator SCHUMER has chosen to give Members of this Senate, Republican and Democrat alike. It is really outrageous.

Back to the Defense bill, it includes a significant increase in defense funding—at least the authorization for that funding—coming in at roughly \$45 billion above the White House's most recent budget request. So on a bipartisan basis, Members of the House and Senate—Republicans and Democrats—agreed that President Biden short-handed the Defense bill by about \$45 billion.

Given the far-reaching threats facing our country and the world and the continued impact of inflation, this is a necessary increase, and I am glad House and Senate negotiators agreed that President Biden's request was insufficient.

First and foremost, though, this bill should take care of our brave men and women who serve in our Armed Forces. Thankfully, it includes an authorization for the largest pay raise for our troops in two decades. That is particularly important when inflation is roughly at a 40-year high. Servicemembers and their families are facing the same inflation headwinds as folks all across the country. So, starting next month, they will receive a much-needed and well-deserved 4.6 percent pay increase.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act also includes a range of reforms to better support military families. In an all-volunteer military, it is critical that we not only support the men and women who wear the uniform but also the families who support them and, in effect, serve with them.

This bill will extend reimbursement authority for spouse relicensing. For example, it will ensure that nurses, teachers, and other spouses whose jobs may require State-specific licenses are not saddled with an added expense when they are reassigned to a State where their current license is not valid. They can get a new one in their new home State without additional expense.

This bill also funds programs in Texas independent school districts that help military dependent children with severe disabilities.

And I am glad it includes bipartisan legislation that I introduced to help improve sexual assault and domestic violence prevention policies within the Department of Defense.

In addition to these reforms, the National Defense Authorization Act will repeal the COVID-19 vaccine mandate, which led to the dismissal of 8,500 servicemembers. Recruiting has become a growing challenge across the military, particularly the U.S. Army. Last year, the Army fell 15,000 soldiers short of its benchmark and was only able to recruit 75 percent of its recruitment goal.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth called it "the Army's most challenging recruiting year since the start of the all-volunteer force." Given the threats posed by Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, among other threats, this is not the time to force courageous servicemembers out of the Armed Forces, particularly for a vaccine that doesn't actually prevent COVID. This isn't like a lot of other vaccines that will actually prevent you from contracting the virus.

This year's NDAA also authorizes investments in nuclear modernization and other critical projects. It makes major investments in our military installations, including those in Texas. It will fund military construction projects at Fort Hood, Joint Base San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Fort Bliss, and the Army Reserve Center in Conroe, TX.

It also authorizes 16 new F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, which will be built by