

while. The Senate has already done important preliminary work to bring ourselves up to speed on this issue, but the NDAA will be the Senate's first opportunity this year to pass real AI legislation.

My AI amendment includes provisions that will boost AI oversight within the national security space, including an increase in data sharing within the DOD, new risk studies to examine explainability and similar issues, and it provides for "bug bounty programs" that will help sniff out vulnerability in AI systems used by the DOD.

This year, our first managers' package also makes a critical down payment on the Senate's efforts to outcompete the Chinese Government. We have over a dozen amendments related to our ongoing competition with the Chinese Government, including measures that make progress on the AUKUS defense cooperation agreement between the United States, the UK, and Australia. Senator MENENDEZ and I wanted more, but we have a good compromise in the bill, and I hope we can add more in the amendment process.

We have provisions to strengthen our partnership with Taiwan, boost the development of quantum information technologies, and strengthen the United States' position in the Indo-Pacific region, to name a few.

As you know, we are working on a bipartisan China competition package that will deal with the excesses and wrongs of the Chinese Government. But this, in the DOD bill, is a good first start.

And I also want to praise my colleagues TIM SCOTT and SHERRON BROWN for their work to combat our Nation's fentanyl crisis. This is one of the most devastating health crises happening in our country.

In 2021, the DEA, the Drug Enforcement Agency, seized enough fentanyl to give every single American a lethal dose—every single American. A lot of blame for this crisis lies at the feet of the chemical suppliers located in China that operate with little or no accountability, which represent the bedrock of the international fentanyl supply chain.

I felt this is very important that we do more to stop the scourge of fentanyl from coming into our country. So I pushed very hard to get this amendment in the managers' package, and I am glad it was—championed, as I said, and passed in the Banking Committee, by Chairman BROWN and Ranking Member SCOTT. It declares the international trafficking of fentanyl a national emergency and adds teeth and potential sanctions to the administration's ability to hold wrongdoers accountable. The ability to declare this a national emergency gives the President broader powers and allows him to do more to stop the flow of these precursor chemicals coming from China and other countries. The bill was passed unanimously, I am proud to say, by the Banking Committee—another

great example of regular order here in the Senate.

Finally, I am pleased the NDAA will include my amendment on increasing transparency on UAPs, Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena. UAPs generate a lot of curiosity from many Americans, and with that curiosity, sometimes comes misinformation. My amendment will require the National Archives and Records Administration to create a collection of records from across government Agencies that can be declassified for the public's use, similar to the approach used in 1992 with the J.F.K. Assassination Records Collection Act. These records will carry a presumption of immediate disclosure, which means they can only be made classified with good reason.

I thank my colleagues who worked with me on this legislation—Senators ROUNDS, RUBIO, HEINRICH, GILLIBRAND, and YOUNG—for their partnership on this amendment. And as many know, my mentor and dear friend whom I miss so much, Harry Reid, was passionate about this issue, and so were Senators Stevens and Inouye. So I am glad we could get this into the managers' amendment.

For these and many other reasons, I look forward to beginning floor consideration of the NDAA bill today. The four things I mentioned—dealing with fentanyl, dealing with competition with China, dealing with AI, and making public the UAP phenomena and what we know about them in an unclassified way—are all important additions to the Defense bill. I am glad we added them in.

I thank both sides for their good work, and I hope we can pass this important bill without needless delay or controversy.

#### FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Mr. President, on the Freedom to Vote Act, in just a few minutes, I will be joining a group of my Democratic colleagues to mark the reintroduction of the Freedom to Vote Act.

The Freedom to Vote Act rests on a simple yet fundamental principle: All Americans, no matter where they live, should have the freedom to vote without fear of discrimination.

Our bill will set basic standards for Americans to vote safely and securely and help instill confidence that our Nation's elections are free and fair.

I want to thank Senators KLOBUCHAR, KAINE, and WARNOCK for their good work on putting this bill together, as well as my House colleagues, led by Leader JEFFRIES.

While Democrats are actively working to expand access to the ballot box, MAGA Republicans in the House, unfortunately, are doing exactly the opposite. Last week, House Republicans introduced and advanced through committee the most restrictive voting rights package we have seen in decades. The Republican package would make voting harder for millions of Americans by creating more barriers to the ballot box, including new obstacles

to voter registration and mail-in voting.

The Republican package would allow the scourge of dark money to fester in our politics by loosening campaign finance safeguards and empowering wealthy, wealthy donors.

Let me be clear. Let me be very clear. Democrats will never allow this Republican package to become law and, instead, will focus our efforts on commonsense, real voting rights legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, later today, the Senate will confirm Rachel Bloomekatz to serve as circuit court judge for the Sixth Circuit. A graduate of Harvard and UCLA Law, Ms. Bloomekatz is an accomplished litigator who has dedicated her career to the pursuit of equal justice for all.

I want to note, Mr. President, that with the Bloomekatz confirmation, the Senate will have confirmed 36 circuit court judges to lifetime appointments under President Biden, including 27 women. These appointments are significant because the lion's share of all Federal cases never actually make it to the Supreme Court and are, instead, resolved at the circuit court level. Senate Democrats have prioritized filling these vacancies with highly qualified nominees who reflect the diversity and dynamism of our country. That is the best way to restore trust in our courts, so sorely needed today.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will vote to begin consideration of this year's National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA is our most significant opportunity to set priorities for competition with adversaries like China and Russia.

It is our chance to keep the Biden administration focused on critical missions, like rebuilding America's defense industrial base, instead of the woke partisan agenda of political appointees. It is our time to lay the groundwork of robust investments in hard power.

For 62 straight years, from the thick of the Cold War through the Global War on Terror, the Senate has used the NDAA to match tailored solutions to evolving national security challenges.

This year is no different. Ranking Member WICKER, Chairman REED, and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee considered 445 amendments

and adopted 286 of them. Here on the floor, the full Senate should do the same. Senate Republicans are committed to exceeding the President's woefully inadequate defense budget request and delivering the resources our Armed Forces actually require. So I expect the Democratic leader to allow thorough consideration for a range of important amendments as we begin that work with the NDAA.

First and foremost, I would like to remind all of our colleagues that the No. 1 piece of business on the Senate's agenda is actually already overdue. So it is especially important that we begin this process without further delay.

#### APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, on a related matter, the sooner we pass the NDAA, the sooner we can deliver on full-year appropriations for defense and each of the other areas Senator COLLINS, Senator MURRAY, and our colleagues are working to finish in committee.

I am grateful for our colleagues' commitment to a regular order appropriations process. Funding the government on schedule means fulfilling one of the Senate's most basic responsibilities. But just as important as the must-pass measures that are kept in are the radical ideas that are actually kept out.

Here is an example: Last week, the Appropriations Committee adopted an amendment to prevent unelected administration bureaucrats from abandoning the use of affordable and efficient gas appliances in American homes and small businesses.

The Biden Energy Department's proposed rule regulating gas stoves into extinction is just one of the many ways Washington Democrats want to let elite coastal liberals impose their preferences on all 50 States and spend truckloads of taxpayer dollars accordingly.

DOE's latest rule would effectively ban 96 percent of the gas stoves currently in use in America, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission has begun work on a potential gas stove ban of their own.

Unelected bureaucrats are preparing to pounce, and working families and small businesses across the country are rightly worried. One hospitality industry expert in West Virginia called the cost of switching a kitchen to electric from cheaper and more efficient gas as a multithousand dollar thing.

"A multi-thousand dollar thing," that would mean lower quality and longer wait times.

Well, as with any number of other radical climate ideas, some of our Democratic colleagues don't seem to care about these real-world impacts. And in this case, some have been downright oblivious to the threat.

Back in 2021, Senator BARRASSO proposed an amendment to ensure that Democrats' radical climate regulations couldn't restrict the use of gas appliances. But the senior Senator from West Virginia led the vote against the amendment in the Energy and Natural

Resources Committee, and Senate Democrats blocked it again on the floor for good measure.

In response to Senator BARRASSO's concerns on behalf of working families and small businesses, Senator MANCHIN said:

I don't see that happening.

"I don't see that happening." Even as Senator MANCHIN offered the reckless taxing and spending spree that gave \$840 in special rebates for folks to swap their gas stoves for the electric ranges that activists prefer.

Well, it appears our colleague has since changed his tune. This time around, he sponsored the amendment blocking the sort of radical regulation he couldn't imagine just 2 years ago.

As our colleagues continue to make headway on the regular order appropriations, I am glad this commonsense measure has earned bipartisan support.

But it really begs the question: Wouldn't working families and small businesses be better off if Washington Democrats would just stand up to the radical climate regulations in the first place?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The majority whip.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, with Vladimir Putin's ruthless invasion of Ukraine—and a new generation of threats on the horizon with AI and emerging technologies—America's military readiness has never been more important. That is why, today, I am pleased to speak in support of the National Defense Authorization Act for the fiscal year 2024.

I want to thank Chairman JACK REED of Rhode Island and Ranking Member ROGER WICKER of Mississippi for their leadership as well as their staff work. And because of that, the Senate will soon vote on a national defense package that will protect the men and women in uniform, defend our Nation's interests, and support our allies.

For the 63rd year in a row, this bipartisan agreement will authorize necessary funding for our Nation's security. I hope we will pass it without delay.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act authorizes a topline of nearly \$886 billion, including \$844 billion for the Pentagon. This is a \$28 billion increase compared to our current fiscal year, and a more than \$100 billion increase compared to the last year.

Now, that may come as a surprise if you listen to the political speeches, given that some voices on the right

have cried that our defense spending is falling so far behind.

The fact is this: This is the largest defense budget in the history of the United States ever—the largest defense budget ever. Importantly, it provides a more than 5-percent pay increase for our troops and our Pentagon's civilian workforce. That is the largest increase in decades—the largest increase in decades—and it is well-deserved.

This bill also expands employment opportunities for military spouses, funding for childcare, improved military housing, the quality of life elements that we absolutely owe the men and women in uniform.

It will ensure that our Nation can ward off threats from China and North Korea, with strong investments in the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. It addresses shortfalls in recruitment and improves our cyber defense capabilities. This year's NDAA also includes a number of provisions that I helped to author, including proposals that will support the administration's AUKUS agreement, boost Impact Aid funding for school districts that serve military families, strengthen digital manufacturing for future technologies, and authorize key Illinois military construction projects.

In addition to funding our Nation's long-term priorities, this package also will provide military aid to our friends in Ukraine and our allies throughout Europe, including the Baltics. Nearly 18 months after Putin began his full-scale invasion, Ukraine remains on the frontlines of democracy. And as I saw recently in Vilnius last week, during this year's NATO summit, the Ukrainian people's heroism and determination continues to rally the western alliance in their support.

Today's NATO is larger and stronger than ever. It is more united than ever. And the United States must continue to do everything in our power to maintain the strength and unity of this alliance.

I want to give special recognition to President Biden. When he was elected to the Presidency, he told me this story and shared it with others, that in the first meeting of the NATO alliance, there was a fundamental question that was asked: Is the United States still committed to the NATO alliance?

It was an unthinkable question years ago, but not so when President Biden came in office. The previous President, Donald Trump, raised serious questions as to whether we viewed the NATO alliance as part of our future and the future well-being of the world. President Joe Biden made it clear from the start that he was committed to NATO. Even before the Putin invasion of Ukraine, he made it clear that the alliance had a future under his administration, and he has proven it.

I saw it last week in Vilnius. His arrival and commitment to future support for Ukraine made a difference. It really mobilized not just the members of the alliance, the 31 nations that are