

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

a part of it, but other countries from around the world that wanted to be there and testify—the Prime Minister of Japan, the President of South Korea, the Prime Minister of Australia. None of those countries are members of that alliance, but they wanted to be physically present to make it clear that they stood in support of the alliance and its goals and its values. I salute President Biden for his leadership in bringing us to that moment.

Unfortunately, some lawmakers on the other side of the Capitol seem ready to capitulate to Putin and other autocrats. Last week, the MAGA majority in the House of Representatives voted to inject politics into this Defense appropriations process. Thankfully, their amendment to block U.S. support for Ukraine amid Putin's war of choice failed, even though 89 House Republicans voted for it.

Think of that. Putin is killing innocent people in Ukraine every day. They are begging us to stand with them, to defend their own country, to defend democracy, and to give them a future that is aligned with NATO and the West, and these 89 Republicans said: Cut them off. Don't give them another nickel. That is the end of it.

What were they thinking? Where are their values?

Ultimately, the House passed a bill that would abandon our servicemembers in other ways, along with our allies, and jeopardize our national security in a new age of threats. The bill passed by the House of Representatives would eliminate access to reproductive healthcare for men and women in the military, politicize schoolbooks, and undermine progress addressing the climate crisis and recordbreaking heat.

If you paid any attention at all to weather forecasts across the Nation over the last 2 weeks, how can you question that we are in a real climate crisis? The city of Phoenix, AZ, last week had 3 days with temperatures in excess of 115 degrees. The temperature of the globe measured in scientific terms is the highest ever recorded. Extreme weather events in New England and other places are fair warning to us that if we don't take this seriously, the next generation, our children and grandchildren, will face a world much more difficult to live in.

So MAGA Republicans in the House nevertheless want to rip away not only the addressing of the climate crisis but also the basic freedoms of every American, particularly those who defend our freedom every day. They have hijacked a bipartisan process to pursue an extremist agenda.

The best explanation I can give for this irresponsible conduct is "Don't worry, the Senate will clean it up." Well, we will clean up their mess. We have to. We need to do it on a bipartisan basis. But the MAGA Republicans cannot prevail when we talk about our Nation's defense.

Here in the Senate, one Republican, for instance, is blocking hundreds of

military promotions to advance that same extremist agenda. Think about that. The men and women in service in our military, who have risked their lives and seen their comrades and friends fall beside them, who have been given combat awards for their bravery, are being denied promotions because of one Senator, one Republican Senator from Alabama, who has decided to stop the promotions for over 200 of these deserving individuals. Is that our gratitude to the military for their service to our country and their bravery?

I think it is awful that we are in this situation—indefensible. I hope more and more Republican Senators will speak out against their colleague and what he is doing to our military. It endangers our national security, and it shows great disrespect to men and women who deserve our highest level of respect.

As my colleague from Illinois, Senator DUCKWORTH—and she being a national hero herself for her service to our Nation—has pointed out, this partisan charade by one Senator from Alabama has already had a direct impact on our military readiness. For the first time, for example, in over 100 years, the U.S. Marine Corps is without a Senate-confirmed Commandant. Everyone should take note of how extreme that situation is. Very soon, the Army, Navy, and Joint Chiefs will be in a similar position if the Senator from Alabama does not lift his hold.

So to my Republican colleagues who come to the floor and question President Biden and the Democratic Party's commitment to national security, I say: Take a look in the political mirror.

The National Defense Authorization Act we have before us is a serious proposal, which, of course, means there are compromises included. And while it will make important progress, this bill is far from perfect. For instance, this bill once again, in my estimation, extends unnecessary restrictions on transferring detainees from Guantanamo. This will make it even harder to close this shameful facility once and for all. The amount of money we ask taxpayers to spend on Guantanamo is indefensible—millions and millions of dollars for each person who is being held there after we have agreement that more than half of them should be released. It is time to close Guantanamo, and this Senator would like to see that done as part of this bill.

This bill also includes questionable provisions based on false concerns regarding diversity and inclusion in our Armed Forces—provisions that ultimately impair, not improve, military readiness.

I would like to see several of my amendments be considered, including those that would hold accountable perpetrators of heinous atrocities in Ukraine and elsewhere by criminalizing crimes against humanity; strengthening public transparency on the impact of lethal strikes; push the

Pentagon toward technologies of the future, such as EVs; address the troubling human rights record of countries such as Egypt which claim to be our allies and friends in one breath and yet jail peaceful activists in the next—and more. I am heartened that negotiations on a second managers' package continue, and I look forward to seeing these issues considered.

Lastly, I hope any increase in defense spending is matched by a similar increase in nondefense discretionary spending to keep parity between the two accounts. The reality is this: While it is important to provide robust spending for national security, it is equally important to invest in America—schools, roads, hospitals, and beyond. Simply put, our strength at home projects strength abroad.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on these issues before we leave for the August recess.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Carolina.

TRIBUTE TO DR. NIDO QUBEIN

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a distinguished North Carolinian and a dear friend, High Point University President Dr. Nido Qubein.

Dr. Qubein immigrated to the United States from the Middle East when he was 17 years old. He came to our country to pursue his education and attend college. Needless to say, his academic achievements were impressive, and they were an early indication of the success he would build in North Carolina.

He received his associate's degree in business from Mount Olive College, a bachelor's degree in human relations from High Point University, and a master's in business education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

My family and I have had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Qubein and his family and his wife Mariana for decades. We have been inspired by their dedication to education and their service to others.

During his career in business, philanthropy, and education, Dr. Qubein has been widely recognized for his work. He received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, the Horatio Alger Association for Distinguished Americans designation, the Daughters of the American Revolution Americanism Award, and has been inducted into the National Speakers Hall of Fame.

But of all of his accomplishments, what he has been able to achieve for his hometown of High Point, NC, is perhaps his most indelible legacy. In 2005, High Point University trustees asked him to become its seventh President. Dr. Qubein decided to scale back his business career and to accept their offer to lead his alma mater. That decision launched a huge golden age.

What has happened under Dr. Qubein's tenure is nothing short of a complete transformation of High Point