

AI policy. I am happy to report that the Senate is making important progress on drafting AI legislation already.

Just yesterday, under the magnificent leadership of Chair CANTWELL and Chair PETERS, both the Commerce and Homeland Security Committees marked up and approved important bipartisan AI bills. These bills will help American workers to be AI ready, while helping innovation lead the way in new technologies.

Yesterday, Senator KLOBUCHAR also brought two bipartisan bills to the floor to protect our elections from deepfakes in political advertising. Sadly, these bills were blocked, but I hope we can find a path forward.

And, last week, the Senate unanimously passed the DEFIANCE Act, a bill to combat the spread of sexually explicit AI-generated deepfakes, an awful thing that is inflicting so many Americans, particularly, young kids and young girls, in particular.

So in the last 2 weeks, there are at least five very good AI bills that have seen some movement in the Senate. All of them have bipartisan support. Together they represent a good mix of the two approaches. I have always said we need with AI two things: to promote safe innovation, on the one hand, but instill commonsense guardrails, on the other.

This is the recipe for strong AI legislation: safe innovation, strong innovation, balanced with sound guardrails. And I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working together and look forward to more of this in the weeks to come.

#### VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTERS

Mr. President, now let me talk about the VA and Long Island's only VA medical center—the Northport VA. Right now, Long Island's only VA medical center, the Northport VA—and many other VA medical centers across the country—are being threatened by the MAGA Republican plan known as Project 2025.

This is a picture of the Northport VA. It is the only VA on Long Island, serving over 100,000 vets across Nassau and Suffolk Counties. I know how good it is because my father, who passed away 2 years ago, got good treatment at the VA. He was a World War II vet.

And Long Island has so many vets, so many people who served their country who are getting older now. They desperately need that Northport VA for their healthcare. If Republicans take power, the Project 2025 plan is just itching to become law, and it would have a disastrous impact on the VA and create chaos for vets, not just across Long Island but across America, especially those now receiving health benefits that we fought so hard to win.

Project 2025 has a fancy website. It has a fancy book. It has a lot of glitter, but this plan is far from gold—far from gold. It is a pile of corroded ideas that have never become law because of how unpopular they are, including under-

mining the VA. And deep in this plan is a mandate to defund the Northport VA on Long Island. The plan would also slash veterans' benefits.

It seems to repeal the PACT Act, which we just passed overwhelmingly—bipartisan—that said that our veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and were exposed to burn pits and got cancers and other illnesses could get help from the VA. This plan—this Project 2025—is so intent on slashing all government plans so the very rich who represent this plan can pay fewer taxes. It is outrageous—outrageous.

Now, when faced with questions on these proposals, MAGA Republicans are running away, claiming they don't know anything. MAGA Republicans even announced they fired the guy who authored all this dreck. But, sorry, you can fire all the people you want. These are the goals.

It was put together by lots of Donald Trump's former employees and has, as one of its leaders, somebody who wants to slash—slash—all kinds of government programs up and down the line because the very rich people that they seem to represent don't want to pay any taxes. They don't care about the rest of us.

So MAGA Republicans, again, they can fire anyone they want. We know the goals. This revealed it. They were proud of this Project 2025 until it was revealed that it had so many bad things in it.

So I am sounding the alarm on this little-known project for all the Members of this Chamber and pledging that, under my majority, the VA will not be depleted, veterans' benefits will be protected, and the Senate floor will not consider programs and proposals that undo years of bipartisan progress on veterans affairs, healthcare, and on funding our hospitals.

The plan would revive the effort to shut down Long Island's Northport VA. This is what Project 2025 says:

[T]he Senate Veterans Affairs Committee lacked the political will to act on the White House's nominations of commission members, and this ultimately led to termination of the AIR—ASSET AND INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW. The next Administration should seek out agile, creative, and politically acceptable operational solutions.

Those here in this Chamber should know exactly what AIR was: a plan—a hard-right plan—to defund the VA system.

Well, we bipartisanly said no way, and we saved our VA hospitals.

Project 2025 doesn't just want to revive AIR but implement it. Defund the VA hospitals—that is what it says.

Look, over 9 million veterans are enrolled in the VA healthcare system, meaning that these proposed cuts and policy changes will affect a massive amount of people. But for Northport and the vets of Long Island, it would be the end of care as they know it. They would have to travel to New York City for basic care or more complex care. The waiting lines and the waiting

lists—veterans have to wait long enough for healthcare—would get even greater. And, as I said, it is over 100,000 vets—vets I have stood with, vets I launched a petition with. I will not—will not—let this VA close or be defunded.

So for all of you here, look close. Which one of your critical VA hospitals does MAGA want to shutter?

Project 2025, a bunch of bad ideas that hurt working people, veterans, and others who served this country. MAGA fired the guy who ran it, but they still are intent on the plan—still intent on decimating and closing this great hospital. Make no mistake about it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant executive 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.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

#### TAX RELIEF FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES AND WORKERS ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today, as the Senate prepares to leave town for the August State work period, the Democratic leader has decided to squeeze in one more vote that isn't ready for prime time. To our colleagues on the Finance Committee—and to anyone paying attention in recent months—it has been clear that the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act that Chairman WYDEN wrote with the House needed some serious revisions in order to earn 60 votes here in the Senate.

We don't need a vote today to tell us that is still the case. Colleagues on this side of the aisle have serious unresolved concerns. They don't like how more than 90 percent of the supposed benefits of the bill, as written, come as a \$30 billion expansion of cash welfare, instead of relief for working taxpayers.

They are concerned about how it would weaken the work requirements tied to those benefits under current law. For a bill with the potential to so seriously impact working Americans, one might expect its proponents to engage seriously on resolving obstacles to bipartisan support.

You might have expected the chairman of the Finance Committee or the Democratic leader to provide regular order, to schedule a markup, to give this bill a shot at actually passing the Senate, but, alas, you would be wrong. Of course, months without progress on

this front aren't for lack of effort from Ranking Member CRAPO, and I am grateful for his dedication to addressing Republican concerns.

Today's vote doesn't seem to be intended to produce a legislative outcome. In fact, the Democratic leader himself admitted this week that even losing the vote would still be a political benefit for vulnerable Senate Democrats running for reelection. Well, I am not so certain the American people are impressed by message votes, and I don't think they give out points for incomplete work.

NDA

Mr. President, on a different matter, today, the Appropriations Committee is considering defense funding for the coming year. From the outset, colleagues who take seriously our obligation to provide for the common defense knew that they had their work cut out for them.

This spring, the President sent down a fourth straight defense request that would cut funding for the national defense after inflation. The request was grossly insufficient when it went to print; it is even more so today.

Then, this summer brought our closest allies and partners here to Washington, underscoring the importance of American leadership by example.

Just a few days ago, a final report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy put an even finer point on the stakes of the growing and interconnected threats to our national security. As I discussed earlier this week, the bipartisan expert panel behind the report delivered a grave warning. Here is more of what they said:

The U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be competent it can deter and prevail in combat.

The American public have been—again, according to the report—“inadequately informed by government leaders of the threats to U.S. interests—including to people's everyday lives—and what will be required to restore American global power and leadership.”

They went on further:

Very little progress will be possible without Congress, where a relatively small number of elected officials have imposed continual political gamesmanship over a thoughtful and responsible legislating and oversight.

Goodness.

It is past time to prioritize our national security. It is totally obvious to all of us that this needs to begin. Just take the pacing threat from China, for example. Plenty of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle like to talk about outcompeting the PRC, but not as many seem to recognize that winning this competition, preserving American primacy, and protecting America's interest are first and foremost about investing in hard power.

As the Commission put it, China has “largely negated the U.S. military advantage in the Western Pacific through two decades of focused military investment. Without significant change by

the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor.”

But the vast majority of supposed counter-China policies that folks in Washington like to talk about won't do much to arrest this shift, and neither will pretending that the pacing threat is the only threat we face. It is naive to believe we can ignore or assume away threats in other regions.

Anyone who believes our security and prosperity don't require urgent investments in hard power, in alliances and partnerships, and in our defense industrial base clearly doesn't know what they are talking about.

So I am grateful to my friend Vice Chair COLLINS and to colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, who recognize the urgency of the task in front of us, for fighting hard to negate as much of the President's real-dollar cut to national defense as they could. The bill in committee right now exceeds the President's request by nearly \$19 billion. This is less than the additional \$25 billion authorized by the Armed Services Committee.

Senate Democrats refused to spend more on defense without adding funding for nondefense discretionary programs. However, thanks to our colleagues' efforts, this bill secures crucial steps forward on a number of urgent priorities.

The bill includes the largest ever appropriation for shipbuilding, with hundreds of millions in new resources for growing and retaining the critical shipbuilding industrial base.

It tackles maintenance backlogs head-on and invests in enough spare components to bring 500 more aircraft to full readiness than the President's request accounts for. It goes \$3 billion beyond his request for overdue investments in expanding the defense industrial base and provides for modernizing ammunition and vehicle production facilities, from Iowa and Missouri to Ohio and Tennessee.

It delivers important downpayments on critical munitions, from the long-range and precision strike capabilities needed in the Indo-Pacific to the naval interceptors required to defend U.S. personnel and global commerce from terrorist attacks in the Red Sea.

But let's be absolutely clear. When it comes to rebuilding our stockpiles and preparing our Armed Forces to deter and defeat threats, there is much, much more work to be done. There is no serious reading of post-World War II history that doesn't trace the preservation of Western peace or the growth of American prosperity to an order underpinned by American strength.

The U.S. military is the reason our neighbors back home sleep in peace. It is the reason our communities reap the benefits of global trade. It is the weight behind our leader's words. We cannot afford to shortchange it, and I cannot make the stakes of the task before us any more clear.

VOTE ON SHEA NOMINATION

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, The

question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Shea nomination?

Mr. DURBIN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN), the Senator from Utah (Mr. ROMNEY), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) would have voted “nay.”

The result was announced—yeas 59, nays 34, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 229 Ex.]

YEAS—59

Baldwin	Heinrich	Rosen
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Blumenthal	Hirono	Sanders
Booker	Kaine	Schatz
Brown	Kelly	Schumer
Budd	King	Shaheen
Butler	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cantwell	Lujan	Smith
Cardin	Manchin	Stabenow
Carper	Markey	Sullivan
Casey	McConnell	Tester
Collins	Merkley	Tillis
Coons	Murkowski	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Murphy	Warnock
Duckworth	Murray	Warren
Durbin	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Graham	Paul	Wyden
Hagerty	Peters	Young
Hassan	Reed	

NAYS—34

Barrasso	Daines	Moran
Blackburn	Ernst	Mullin
Boozman	Fischer	Ricketts
Braun	Grassley	Risch
Britt	Hawley	Rubio
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Thune
Cotton	Lankford	Tuberville
Cramer	Lee	Wicker
Crapo	Lummis	
Cruz	Marshall	

NOT VOTING—7

Fetterman	Romney	Warner
Hoeben	Scott (SC)	
Menendez	Vance	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.