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Senate

(Legislative day of Monday, December 16, 2024)

The Senate met at 10 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Lisa Wink Schultz of the Senate Chaplain's Office here in Washington, DC.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord, we come to You today full of gratefulness. We thank You for the staff who work in this Chamber, for the Capitol Police who keep us safe, for the pages who are eager to help, and for the doorkeepers who love this institution.

May we not take for granted the craftsmen and women who are building the inaugural platform, for the food service workers and the appointment desk employees and the staff at Capitol facilities.

Most of all, we praise You for the life of Chaplain Black. We pray for him and his continued recovery and for Dr. Monahan and the Attending Physicians Office who cared for him so well.

We are all members of Your body with different gifts and roles. As we work, please remind us that it is better to serve than to be served. We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WILDLIFE INNOVATION AND LONGEVITY DRIVER REAUTHORIZATION ACT—Continued

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the pending business.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany H.R. 5009, a bill to reauthorize wildlife habitat and conservation programs and for other purposes.

Pending:

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill.

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill, with Schumer amendment No. 3317 (to the House amendment to the Senate amendment to the bill), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 3318 (to amendment No. 3317), to add an effective date.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, negotiations continue between both parties on a temporary extension of government funding. There continues to be good progress, but appropriators are still working on finalizing an agreement. Obviously, we are getting closer to the December 20 deadline. So time is of the essence for Republicans to reach an agreement with us that we can act on quickly. Democrats will continue working in good faith with our Republican counterparts on a strong CR that will prevent a shutdown, while also delivering critical disaster relief for the American people.

On the NDAA, last night, the Senate voted to advance the NDAA by a strong margin of 83 to 12. The NDAA is now on a glide path to final passage. Everyone

knows this NDAA is not perfect, but it still takes a strong stand against the Chinese Communist Party. These are things that I have pushed very hard for. It boosts the use of AI for our national defense—another thing I care a lot about—and expands tech innovation programs for communities across the country—a third thing that is very, very important and good.

It has many good things Democrats fought hard for. I am gratified it has all these: the Chinese Communist Party, the use of AI for national defense, and expanding tech innovation. Of course, it has some bad provisions that we Democrats would not have added and other provisions that we would want left out entirely.

I am particularly glad that this year's NDAA expands the Tech Hubs Program I created with Senators YOUNG, CANTWELL, and others in the bipartisan Chips and Science Act. These funds will transform communities in Upstate New York, the Midwest, and across the country into the next epicenters of innovation.

It also includes bipartisan measures on AI to expand our AI infrastructure and strengthen America's edge against the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, in this critical technology—so important to our national security and to the United States' technological leadership.

I thank my colleagues from both sides for their good work on the NDAA, especially Chairman REED and Ranking Member WICKER. We hope to send the NDAA on the way to the President's desk as soon as possible.

DRONES

Mr. President, on drones, this afternoon, I will come to the Senate floor to stand with Senator PETERS to pass legislation I have cosponsored to respond to the recent reports of unusual drone activity. The FBI, DHS, and DOD—the

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Defense—support this bill. Our legislation will explicitly authorize State and local authorities to conduct drone detention and help them better coordinate with Federal law enforcement. With the multiplicity of drone sightings and so many drones in the area—many harmless, for recreational use, but many that there are still many questions about—Federal authorities agree that they can't respond to these incidents alone, and they need help from local authorities. But, unfortunately, the local authorities do not have the authority right now. It is only in the domain of the Federal Government.

For all we know, the recent drone incidents are, for the most part—or maybe all part—benign. But even so, in some cases, they can be disruptive, like when they impact airport operations or approach bases, and people are understandably anxious about seeing things in the night sky without clear answers to what is going on. The people in New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and still haven't gotten answers from the Feds.

The worst part is that, right now, local officials have very little in terms of resources and oversight authority to do anything about these incidents. So this afternoon, I will join Senator PETERS to try and fix that, and I thank my friend from Michigan for his good work on this bill.

TRIBUTE TO SHERROD BROWN

Mr. President, finally, on Senator BROWN's retirement, this afternoon, a beloved colleague of ours will deliver his farewell address, my dear friend Senator SHERROD BROWN of Ohio.

If there is one statement that captures SHERROD BROWN best, it is this: Workers look at SHERROD and say, "He is one of us." Workers look at SHERROD and say, "He is one of us."

Now, elected office wasn't part of the Brown family tradition, but fighting for justice certainly was. SHERROD says, and he has said it many times—I have seen that smile on his face when he says it. He says he inherited his activist bent from his mother, a Georgia native who marched on the frontlines of the early civil rights movement. SHERROD's mom taught him and his brother Charlie the power of political activism and the moral duty we all have to serve our neighbors.

SHERROD got the message early. His first taste of politics came in high school, when he was elected president of the student council. Right away, he became a proud thorn in the side of the principal, organizing anti-Vietnam war protests and pushing for racial equality in the educational system.

During his senior year in college, SHERROD was recruited to run for State rep. Admittedly, his parents weren't thrilled about his decision. In fact, his dad told him, with a little tough love: I will not be voting for you; you are too young.

Do you think SHERROD listened? Would anyone who knows SHERROD today think he listened? Of course not. He didn't listen. He won in a stunning upset, also typical of SHERROD. So at 21, he became a State rep.

During those years, he would spend his Fridays not at home but at the local union hall in Mansfield, OH, of United Steelworkers 169. He did nothing but listen. He listened to the workers who dropped by before their shift. He listened to them talk about their jobs, their families, their kids, about the union. They would keep him abreast of the latest news about strikes and reminisce about heroes in the labor movement. They would talk literature together—"The Grapes of Wrath," Joe Hill—that depicted the struggle of American workers and the relentless drive to achieve the American Dream.

Those Fridays at the union reshaped Sherrod's world view forever. They taught SHERROD one of the great truths about America: Our country was built up from the middle class, and the middle class was built by unions and union workers. My family knows the same thing. Everything SHERROD did in politics from then onward was in service to this truth.

So when he came to Congress many years later, it is no surprise that one of his very first votes was opposing NAFTA, fearful of the devastating consequence it would have for Ohioans. Decades later, he has brought back jobs to Ohio, helping break ground on some of the largest manufacturing projects in the State's history, through the Chips and Science Act. And we made sure—SHERROD and I and some others together—that it will be done through union labor. I insisted on that in the Chips and Science Act, and SHERROD was in my ear, making sure that happened all the time.

Years before, we passed the ACA. Sherrod was also one of the leading proponents for healthcare reform and expanding access. He famously refused to get health insurance on his own as a Congressman and a Senator until the day we passed the ACA.

On infrastructure, SHERROD was the relentless force behind the "Buy America" provisions in the bipartisan infrastructure bill, ensuring that America's roads and bridges and highways were built from American-made steel and iron and concrete.

On pension reform—this is something we so much cared about—SHERROD was the author and champion of the Butch Lewis Act, putting money back in the pockets of retirees who faced the unthinkable prospect of seeing the benefits dry up. It was so typical of SHERROD. It wasn't an abstract idea for him; he knew the Lewis family. They came here and lobbied. It was all about people, and then, working out from people, how you could make their lives better and America better.

The record goes on. SHERROD is a leader for Wall Street reform, saving U.S. auto jobs, lowering prescription

drug prices, protecting the right to organize at work, investing in apprenticeship programs, expanding the child tax credit, protecting workers on the job, and so much more.

It is amazing—amazing what he did. He was here 18 years, and it is amazing what he accomplished for working people. It is a record that anyone would be very, very proud of, and we are also proud of SHERROD's record.

The common theme to all this is a phrase SHERROD has embraced his entire life: the dignity of work. It is something he repeats again and again. He has even named his bus tours on it.

And he also talks about the canary in the coal mine—that when there are some bad signs coming from certain places about working people, we had better all listen because it is the canary in the coal mine. I think he wore a canary in the coal mine on his blazer every so often.

Finally, let me end at the beginning, with a quick and humorous moment from SHERROD's youth. As a high school senior, SHERROD, one day, got together with his friends Paul and John to organize a rally in Mansfield to honor the very first Earth Day, in 1970. This is what he did; he organized rallies. Some people went to ball games. Some people watched TV. Some people went out to restaurants. SHERROD organized rallies.

They expected a good turnout at this rally, but they didn't expect 1,000 people to descend on downtown Mansfield, which wasn't that big a city.

As SHERROD described: We did this really cool march, and we had really big crowds. But we got down to the square, and none of us had thought about what to do when you get down there. We didn't have any speakers. And so we said, "Oh, shoot," and we just disbanded.

Now, he wouldn't—only in SHERROD's account he didn't use the word "shoot."

Isn't that a vintage Sherrod story? He never made that mistake again. He was the speaker at so many of the rallies.

You know, I recruited—I knew he would be a great Senator. And when, at first, he decided not run—he was a House Member in 2006. I spent a lot of time in the House gym, and we spent time on the bikes next to each other, panting and sweating, but also my convincing him that, with his great talent and his great passion for workers, he was so needed in the Senate.

I am so glad he decided to run because he has done so much and left such an amazing imprint on this body.

So the story SHERROD accounts for, with his rally in Mansfield, has always been who he has been—direct, unflinching, passionate; a man who is warm and welcoming down to his very core, yet rough around the edges in just the right way; a man who will shun an Italian-made suit in favor of the Cleveland shop just a few miles from his home; a man who can penetrate the

dense language of public policy but will always prefer to ponder a line from the Scripture, from Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, or a worker from whom he heard something; a man with a gifted mind but an even—and he has such a gifted mind, but this is a true compliment—an even more gifted heart.

Thank you, SHERROD, for everything. We wish you, Connie, and your entire family our very best.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO STEFANIE MUCHOW

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for many years running, a familiar morning ritual has played out just a few steps from my desk here in the Capitol. A lamp turns on, illuminating a shelf where an embroidered pillow reads “Not my circus, not my monkeys.” Invariably, a cold Diet Coke is cracked open. Perhaps a moment of reflection on Peggy Noonan’s timeless observation that “the constant possibility of quiet revenge keeps one peppy.” Then my deputy chief of staff for operations, Stef Muchow, opens her office for business.

Stef works at a busy crossroads. Just about everything time-sensitive, confidential, or otherwise important that is headed my way stops at her desk first, and that is by design. There is no one else who can spend and accumulate institutional capital in my name with Stef’s confidence; no one else who commands such a comprehensive awareness of my interests and priorities; no one else who embraces “other duties as assigned” with her unwavering devotion.

Now, this might sound like the sort of high praise any one of our colleagues would hope to give to a close adviser of two decades. I am sure it is what each of them would want to say about a bright, instinctive, effusively patriotic staffer who finished college a year and a half early and poured herself into public service at the highest level. I don’t doubt that each of our colleagues is fortunate to enjoy the fierce loyalty to their staff, but I am quite certain that I am the only one in the Senate who has been blessed by the furious loyalty of Stef.

There is no portfolio—or more accurately, no collection of portfolios—anywhere in Washington quite like the one I have handed to Stef. And that makes sense because there is no one else who could handle it quite like her.

Around my office, the bench in Stef’s office is where colleagues come for guidance and gut checks. Across the entire Senate, any number of people can think of times when it was Stef’s

wisdom, discretion, candor, loyalty, diplomacy, tact, or political savvy that made all the difference. I can think of hundreds.

No one else sees the whole board—from policy objectives, to political considerations, to protocol sensitivities, to personal circumstances—like Stef does. That may have something to do with the fact that she has seen my Senate office operations from just about every vantage point over the years.

For Stef, there has been no task too small, no job that wasn’t worth doing right. As it turns out, this approach has been contagious. Stef’s role so often demands uncompromising efficiency and the utmost discretion, and yet she still seems to seize every opportunity to bring the McTeam closer together as family.

Of course, Stef’s other duties as assigned include covering much larger groups than the professionals I am proud to call my staff. In every corner of the building, her name is synonymous with mastery of the ceremonial protocols that transform the Capitol into a national stage. This is the place where America inaugurates our Presidents, bids farewell to fallen heroes, and bestows our highest honors, and very little of it takes place without Stef’s knowledge, input, orchestration, or blessing. When you think about it, this diplomatic grace and eye for detail make sense coming from someone who probably hasn’t missed a British royal wedding or an Olympic opening ceremony in her entire life. Don’t worry—Stef cheers for Team USA, loud and proud.

But I would be remiss in talking about grace without mentioning the ways she has shown it in the face of the most demanding challenges we have seen together.

When the pandemic arrived, Stef’s ability to balance sensitive considerations and competing interests was invaluable—not just to me but to the entire Senate. Her approach to big, thorny questions about protecting Senators and staff while upholding our duties helped us make the right calls when there were any number of ways to make the wrong ones. In truly uncharted territory, Stef’s poise was decisive. As leaders across the institution faced a blank page and a daunting, once-in-a-century task, she took action—not because it would be easy but because it had to be done.

For years, this has been something of a theme: If it had to be done, it had to be Stef. If it had to be airtight and discreet, it had to be Stef. If it had to navigate political and personal sensitivities just right, it had to be Stef.

In this job, it is important to have a few people around you who really do know every aspect of your life, who you can trust without question, who will guard your confidences, and who will give you honest feedback. I am tremendously fortunate and proud of the countless ways Stef rises to these responsibilities over and over again.

But I am hardly the only one who gets to take pride in what Stef has accomplished. I share that distinction with the family who makes Stef who she is today—with her parents Gary and Dianne, her sisters Abbey and Leslie, and with the ones she rushes home to when the immense demands of the Senate grant a brief respite: her husband Scott and their beloved daughter Lily.

I am not sure my words here can ever begin to capture the significance of the first and last person I speak to every day, but there is perhaps no better illustration of Stef’s love for our country and for the Senate than her sacrifice of time with the ones she loves the most.

So, to Stef, I am so grateful to you for everything you have done both for the Senate and for me.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

SENATE CALENDAR 2025

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, my office recently released the 2025 Senate Calendar. As everyone now knows, our schedule next year will be aggressive: Friday votes will be the norm, and we are not going to be having much in the way of recess in the first 100 days. That is because we have a lot of work to do, and we are not going to get it done on the kind of abbreviated schedule that we have had in 2024.

One of our first priorities, of course, will be confirming President Trump’s nominees. The American people handed President Trump and Vice President-elect VANCE a decisive mandate in November. We are going to honor that mandate by making sure that President Trump has the people he needs in place as soon as possible, starting with the heads of the Cabinet Departments.

Democrats can certainly make the schedule a little less painful if they accord the President some of the deference the Republicans accorded to Cabinet nominees under President Obama. But one way or another, we are going to get the job done, and if that means some nights and weekends, so be it.

Our other early priority—and another reason the schedule will be particularly aggressive in the first 100 days—is to pass a reconciliation package with a once-in-a-generation investment in border security and immigration enforcement. The border and enforcement crisis under President Biden has left a gaping hole in our national security and undermined respect for the rule of law. And that ends in January. Enforcing the law and protecting the integrity of our borders will become administration policy on day one, and the Senate will move quickly to back up the President’s efforts.

The package we will be taking up will, among other things, include substantial resources to increase the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and Border Patrol agents, increase detention space, and provide the barriers and technology we need to fully secure the border.

It will also focus on other key national security priorities, like addressing our lagging military readiness.

Other priorities for the first 100 days include kicking off our efforts to use the Congressional Review Act to undo some of the Biden administration regulations that are weighing down our economy and, of course, continuing work on our reconciliation package to extend the tax relief Republicans delivered for Americans during the first Trump administration.

I mentioned our national security priorities, and let me just say that national security is going to be a priority for Republicans throughout the year. We are finally now considering the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 here in the Senate this week—almost 3 months into the new fiscal year. Under Republican leadership, the NDAA will not be put on the back burner.

I am also committed to ensuring that we return to the regular-order consideration of appropriations bills. I will devote extensive time to the floor consideration of appropriations bills when they are ready in order to avoid an end-of-the-year pileup and problematic continuing resolutions, something with which, right now, we are very familiar.

Deciding how taxpayer money is spent is a serious responsibility, and it deserves serious floor time. Members should plan to take a lot of amendment votes during this process and throughout the year. That will mean taking tough votes at times, but that, folks, is what we were sent here to do.

Finally, Members should expect to take up a farm bill in 2025. We are now more than a year overdue on the next bill, and farmers and ranchers in my State and around the country are waiting for Washington to update farm programs to reflect current agriculture needs, and I am committed to bringing a bill to the floor in the coming year.

There are no two ways about it—2025 will be intense, but we have a real opportunity here to deliver for the American people on continued tax relief, on border security, on national security, and beyond. We are going to seize the day.

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.

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

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

H.R. 5009

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the National Defense Authorization Act—a position I do not take lightly.

I have supported the final passage of each NDAA that has come before me in the Senate up until now. From my tenure in this body and well before me,

there has been a productive bipartisan tradition when it comes to this bill that authorizes funding for our military, supporting those in uniform, and keeping our country safe. Most years, we come together on a very quintessential country-over-party deal—one that I would argue is all too uncommon; but, still, this was an important annual ritual that carried serious consequences.

This is not to say that we do not have our differences. Of course, we do. But we know our commitment is bigger than those differences. This year, that commitment to our servicemembers, to the people we all represent, and to our security and safety was broken. It has been broken because some Republicans decided that gutting the rights of our servicemembers to score cheap political points was more worthy.

Let's be clear. We are talking about parents who are serving our country in uniform having the right to consult with their family's doctor and get the healthcare they want and need for their transgender children. That is it. They want the right to get whatever healthcare is best for their child—something I imagine all parents want.

The healthcare we are talking about here can sometimes be lifesaving. Some folks estimate that this will impact between 6,000 and 7,000 families in the military. I, for one, trust these servicemembers and their families to make their own decisions about healthcare without politicians butting in. It is flatout wrong to put this provision in this bill and take away a servicemember's freedom to make that decision for their families.

Look, this problem has a solution—a simple one, at that. My amendment would strike this provision that guts our servicemembers' rights. And I was glad to have 20 colleagues join me in supporting it. We should pass it.

It is unfortunate that some of our colleagues decided to force this harmful provision in this National Defense Authorization Act because, otherwise, I would have been proud to support it.

This bill has some great things for our servicemembers, my home State of Wisconsin, and measures that I have long pushed for. This bill invests in our most valuable asset: our people. I am thrilled to see that we are giving our junior enlisted troops a well-deserved pay raise—more than 14 percent—and boosting pay for all others by nearly 5 percent.

This legislation invests in the health and well-being of our troops and their families, eliminating copays for contraception for our troops and their families on TRICARE, making telemental health care services available regardless of where the patient is, and so much more.

A longstanding priority of mine in this bill and beyond is ensuring that when we use taxpayer dollars, we are supporting American companies and American workers and the American economy. When it comes to our na-

tional defense, this notion is essential for our safety and security. That is why I am glad to see steps forward in supporting the made-in-America economy.

The NDAA puts strategies in place to make sure that we are sourcing things domestically, from high-tech batteries to Navy warships. These suppliers are not only providing the highest quality products but are also creating and supporting good-paying jobs across the country—and Wisconsin is home to many of them. Whether it be the iconic companies like Fairbanks Morse or Oshkosh Defense or military installations like Fort McCoy, Wisconsin is crucial in our country's defense, and I am excited to see that this bill recognizes our contribution, making sound investments in the Wisconsin Rapids Army National Guard Readiness Center to support the training our troops need to stay ahead of tomorrow's threats.

Despite all of the common ground we have found and all of the smart investments we are making in our troops, their families, and our security, some folks poisoned this bill and turned their backs on those in service and the people we represent.

This bill should embody the best of us as elected officials, coming together without partisan agendas to keep our country safe and support those in uniform. Sadly, that is not what happened. In turn, if we pass this bill as is, we are going to rip away the rights of our servicemembers to get the healthcare they want for themselves and their children. It is wrong, and I encourage my colleagues to vote no.

I am delighted this morning to be joined by colleagues who share these concerns and would yield to Senator KIM for his remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues to call for section 708 of the NDAA to be removed from the final bill.

As you know, I am new to the U.S. Senate. I come to the floor today with great humility but also great urgency because, while I am new to the U.S. Senate, I have had the honor of serving the past 6 years as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, just on the other side of this building.

During my time as a Member of the House, one of the things I have been most proud to work on is issues involving our military servicemembers and their families. As a House Member, I represented Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, the only triservice joint base in the country. Because of that, I represented tens of thousands of military families who signed up to serve our country.

When you talk to military families, the last thing you hear about is politics. In fact, the last thing they want to talk about is politics. Military families often struggle with sufficient housing or putting food on the table. They

face inadequacies in healthcare. Military spouses often face barriers to finding work. While it is only the servicemember who swears the oath, it is the whole family that serves.

I come to the floor with great urgency because Speaker JOHNSON sought to politicize this important National Defense Authorization Act by inserting a dangerous provision after the Armed Services Committees in both the House and the Senate came to bipartisan agreement. This kind of action undermines trust in negotiations and sets a dangerous precedent for what is widely considered the last true space of traditional bipartisan legislation.

Let's be clear. Section 708 would harm those who serve by denying healthcare for military families. By banning TRICARE from covering gender-affirming care for minors, we are standing in the way of military families and the healthcare their doctors have prescribed. We are putting politics into a bill where it simply does not belong. We are sending a signal to our military families that if your loved ones are transgender, we don't have your backs or theirs.

As the former ranking member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee on the House Armed Services Committee, there is a lot about this National Defense Authorization Act to support. Our junior enlisted servicemembers will receive a 14.5-percent pay raise, and all others will receive a 4.5-percent pay raise. Our servicemembers will have greater access to meal support so we can address hunger in our ranks. They will have additional funding to improve military construction of housing so they will have better roofs over their heads. And we have made real progress in improving access to healthcare.

These are all wins we should be proud of. They are bipartisan. They build a stronger national defense. That is all the more reason to strip this harmful provision, section 708, from the bill.

We shouldn't play politics with our national security. We shouldn't target transgender youth and further spread fear into a community that has seen so much hate directed toward it. We should pass an NDAA that supports our servicemembers and their families—all of them—without politics or prejudice. I hope my colleagues join me to that end.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge the work we have done on a bipartisan basis to draft this year's National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA. At more than 1,800 pages, this bill contains wins for our country, our military, and our servicemembers. It provides a raise to all servicemembers, with an even bigger raise for junior enlisted troops. It invests billions in needed military infrastructure in Hawaii and throughout the Indo-Pacific region—investments that are critical as we work to counter Chi-

na's influence and support our allies and partners in the region.

I am proud that it contains a provision I fought for to create a new "major mishaps" classification to ensure better oversight and accountability of major incidents like the 2021 fuel spills at the Red Hill fuel storage facility on Oahu, which impacted over 93,000 people.

All of these provisions and many more will support our military, our servicemembers, and their families. In fact, our priority should be supporting the men and women of our Armed Forces and their families, and that includes making sure they have access to quality healthcare.

But instead of focusing on the things that matter, such as healthcare, Republicans demanded the inclusion of a provision prohibiting TRICARE from covering gender-affirming care for minors. Despite efforts to stop this provision, to strip this provision from this bill during conference, it is in there.

By many estimates, there are thousands of transgender children of servicemembers who are currently receiving gender-affirming care from TRICARE. Under this bill, those children would not be able to access the healthcare they need despite their parents approving the care. We know what happens when transgender and non-binary children are refused gender-affirming care. According to the Journal of Adolescent Health, rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide all increase.

There is no question that this provision will cause concern for servicemembers worrying about their children not getting the healthcare they need, and of course this will cause trauma to servicemembers, their children, and the entire family.

We didn't have to do this, Mr. President. We didn't have to impose this cruelty on our servicemembers and their families. I thank Senator BALDWIN for introducing an amendment to stop this unnecessary, cruel provision, to strip this provision from this bill—an amendment I and others are proud to cosponsor. We know this fight is not over.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator BALDWIN for her leadership on this issue, for helping us to focus on this threat to the rights of Americans that is being propounded in this Defense bill. I want to thank Senator MERKLEY.

I want to thank everyone who is joining with Senator BALDWIN in this fight because today we are considering the National Defense Authorization Act, and embedded within its language would be a ban on TRICARE coverage of gender-affirming care for children of servicemembers in our country. If passed into law, it would be the first anti-LGBTQ law passed by Congress in decades. Since the 1990s, there has been no anti-LGBTQ law which has passed.

If passed into law, it would force thousands of members of the military to decide between service to their country and guaranteeing their child can get the healthcare they need.

This language was the product of a nationwide campaign against trans rights—a campaign that has facilitated the harassment of teachers, bomb threats to children's hospitals, and attacks on transgender people. This is the same campaign that drives legislators from State capitals to Capitol Hill to insist on dictating Americans' healthcare decisions.

We have seen this playbook before. For decades, Republicans attacked the right to abortion. They slowly chipped away, State by State, law by law, and today there is no constitutional right to abortion. Now they have turned their attention to servicemembers' families.

We must fight off efforts by politicians to force themselves into exam rooms. They think they know better than trained healthcare providers and patients. They do not. The only expertise they are exhibiting is an expertise in the oppression, suppression, and repression of healthcare freedom. And their attacks will not stop there.

Freedom isn't lost all at once; it happens 1 inch at a time. As the Senate author of the Transgender Bill of Rights, this is an inch that I insist that we cannot give.

At its best, this institution has affirmed the rights of every American. On this floor, we have expanded access to healthcare, guaranteed Americans' civil rights, and protected same-sex marriage. Today, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to fight discriminatory attacks on servicemembers, their families, and their healthcare providers.

We must strike this language. If we do not, we must vote no on the entire bill.

To every trans American, every servicemember, and their families, friends, and communities: I will not turn my back on you. I am with you. Together, we will keep fighting.

So, again, I thank Senator BALDWIN for her leadership on this issue.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues—Senator KIM, Senator HIRONO, and Senator MARKEY—for participating in this debate today and for standing firm.

As I said earlier, historically, the NDAA has embodied the idea that there is more that brings us together than separates us, that our servicemembers and national defense are not to be politicized, and that we put our country over party when the chips are on the table.

Unfortunately this year, that was ignored, all to gut the rights of our servicemembers to get the healthcare that they need for their children.

With that, I encourage a “no” vote on the NDAA.

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. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Texas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2082

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it seems hard to imagine that it was 23 years ago when 3,000 Americans were killed in a terrorist attack in New York City and here in Washington, DC, at the Pentagon.

The families who lost loved ones that day have been seeking access to justice, just like any other victim could and should be able to here in the United States.

To that end, we introduced the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, or JASTA, which was a monumental step to allowing those families who lost loved ones to achieve long-overdue closure in a court of law.

It did not put our thumb on the scale, it didn't say they were entitled to anything; it just said they were entitled to present their arguments and the facts to a court of law just like any other American citizen should be able to do so here in our country.

These terrorist attacks on 9/11 were a tragedy for our entire Nation; but for some, that day was a personal tragedy as well. Men and women who lost loved ones during the terrorist attacks deserve to have their day in court. Thanks to JASTA, as it is called, the Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, that is now possible.

This legislation, the Ensuring Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act, provides important updates and technical edits to the original bill.

To show you the sort of bipartisan support that this carve-out in foreign sovereign immunity law received, it passed 97 to 1 back when it originally passed, and it passed over a Presidential veto by President Obama. The bill before us today does not expand JASTA's original scope as intended by Congress, but it does correct certain judicial misinterpretations that fly in the face of the clear text and the history of this legislation.

When President Obama vetoed JASTA, leading to the only veto override during his Presidency, he listed a parade of harmful potential foreign policy outcomes to justify his refusal to stand up for American victims of terrorism.

None—none—of these predicted negative outcomes have come to pass, and JASTA has been the law of the land for nearly a decade. These technical corrections will not change that fact. It will ensure that the families of the victims of these tragic attacks on 9/11 re-

ceive the justice they deserve, and I hope it will advance out of the Senate today.

To that end, I would ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 2082 and, notwithstanding rule XXII, that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid on the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Reserving the right to object. I would first like to begin by joining my colleague from Texas in mourning the loss of the nearly 3,000 innocent Americans who died in the September 11 attack. We must never—and we will never—forget them.

I also want to extend my prayers to families who lost loved ones that day and who bear the weight of their loss in their hearts every single day.

However, I must object to this bill today because it hasn't yet received the careful consideration and deliberation that the subject warrants. First, contrary to some suggestions, the bill would enact more than mere technical corrections to earlier legislation. Rather, the bill's provisions would significantly change how a highly technical area of U.S. law is interpreted.

But the Judiciary Committee hasn't held a hearing or a vote on this bill, not the fault of the Senator from Texas to be sure, but a fact, nonetheless. I also question whether the Foreign Relations Committee should evaluate the bill as well, given its consequences for our foreign policy.

Second—and speaking of foreign policy—the bill could have far-reaching and consequential implications for our policy in the Middle East. Thanks to Israel's artful diplomacy and incredible military, Iran's so-called “axis of resistance” lies in rubble in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, with Iran itself, therefore, exposed on its flanks for the first time in a generation.

I would suggest at this highly promising, yet highly sensitive moment that all our efforts should be focused on uniting our friends and our allies in the region to put an end, once and for all, to the threat of a nuclear-armed, terrorist-sponsoring Iran.

Finally, this bill could have the unintended but unwelcome result of further delaying resolution and recovery for the 9/11 litigants' cases. The courts will likely need to reopen and relitigate past decisions based on the changed law, while a disproportionate amount of any future recovery could go primarily to insurance companies and lawyers instead of the families of the victims—if any recovery comes at all.

For these reasons, I must object today while suggesting that the new Congress revisit the matter with the hearings, regular order, and full consideration that the subject deserves.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

HONORING THE LIFE OF NEBRASKA COMMUNITY LEADER JOHN EDMUND GOTTSCHALK

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to consideration of S. Res. 928, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 928) honoring the life of Nebraska community leader John Edmund Gottschalk.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. RICKETTS. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, that the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 928) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under “Submitted Resolutions.”)

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a great Nebraskan and a great American, John Edmund Gottschalk. John Gottschalk was born in Omaha in 1943 and grew up in a small town in Nebraska called Rushville. He was a Boy Scout, and he went on to attend the University of Nebraska, majoring in political science and journalism.

His father started the Sheridan County Star, and John worked there as well, really getting his break into journalism, the newspaper business. In 1972, John bought the Sidney Telegraph in Sidney, NE, and became mayor of the town of Sidney. In 1975, he joined the Omaha World-Herald as an assistant to the president. He eventually worked his way up to become the publisher and CEO in 1998, and he remained that until 2009. Actually, 1989. I got those numbers flipped around. In 1989, he became CEO and publisher.

John and his wife Carmen were extraordinary people.

John led the Omaha World-Herald into the digital age and also spearheaded a number of the efforts to increase the technology and its spread throughout the State of Nebraska, different communities. He made the Omaha World-Herald a standard for how newspapers should be run.

He himself was known for his integrity and his courage. He was never shy about being direct with a budding politician to let that politician know when he believed that politician might have erred. He was one of those people that cared about the community. As I mentioned, he was a Boy Scout. He served