

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

as chairman of our local Mid-America Council of the Boy Scouts but also became national president of Boy Scouts of America. He served as chairman of the Board of Governors of the USO, cared about our veterans and wanted to make sure we were serving them, cared about our military people. He also cared about the arts and was chairman of Omaha Performing Arts.

He and his wife Carmen cared about people. Together, they fostered more than 100 infants awaiting adoption.

John was an outdoorsman and a conservationist. He really was one of those people we would describe as a renaissance man—running a fantastic business, giving back to the community. He was the kind of American that built this country.

John passed away last month, leaving a legacy that is having a lasting imprint on our community of Omaha, the State of Nebraska, and indeed our entire country.

I greatly admire John Gottschalk for the kind of man he was, the example he set for the rest of us. He will be greatly missed, and I will miss him greatly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. HICKENLOOPER).

The majority whip.

H.R. 5009

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I would like to take a minute to note the fiscal year 2025 NDAA conference agreement the Senate is voting on this week.

Congress has passed a bipartisan Defense authorization bill every year without fail since 1961, a remarkable feat. And in an increasingly partisan Senate, it is even more remarkable.

Every year, when the final text comes, there are inevitably Members on both sides of the aisle who like some provisions and dislike others. That is what compromise is all about.

This year's text is no different. It includes a historic pay raise for junior enlisted troops. It provides continued support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and Baltic security cooperation.

This bill authorizes important military construction projects. It reauthorizes my READ Act to continue quality basic education programs for vulnerable children around the world.

At the same time, it also continues troubling restrictions that make it unnecessarily difficult to finally close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay. And it fails to include important provisions I sponsored that would have accelerated PFAS remediation and enabled the skilled DACA holders to enlist in the military to address our recruitment challenges.

But there is one provision in this conference agreement that troubles me, a provision that would ban certain medical treatments for transgender children of servicemembers. It eliminates the ability of military families to work with medical professionals and make their own decisions about the healthcare needs of their own children.

That is why I am a cosponsor of Senator TAMMY BALDWIN's amendment to remove this language from the bill.

SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST STEP ACT

Mr. President, I would like now to highlight an important milestone. This coming Saturday, December 21, will mark the sixth anniversary of the First Step Act becoming law. That moment resulted from overwhelming bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate coming together to pass landmark criminal justice reform.

I was honored to be the lead Democrat sponsor of this legislation, along with the lead Republican sponsor, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY. Senators CORY BOOKER and MIKE LEE joined us.

The First Step Act acknowledges the obvious: The vast majority of people who are incarcerated will someday be released. So we must prepare them to successfully return to their communities.

In the last 6 years, this law has safely and effectively reduced populations in overcrowded Federal prisons, reuniting families and revitalizing communities.

The First Step Act looked toward the future by providing opportunities for the incarcerated people to reenter society successfully. It helped to reform harsh drug sentencing laws of the past and remedy their effects.

I authored bipartisan legislation, the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, that reduced the unjust 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses.

Under the First Step Act, the Fair Sentencing Act's reforms were made retroactive, allowing those who still serve sentences imposed before the change in law to be resentenced. I am thankful for the tireless efforts of many dedicated advocates and families who never gave up hope that this bill would become the law.

Since the passage of the First Step Act, 6 years ago, I have met with many Americans who successfully returned home because of this historic legislation.

The First Step Act has been a tremendous success. Of more than 40,000 people released under this law through January of this year, only 9.7 percent have been rearrested or returned to custody. Compare that to the Bureau of Prisons' overall recidivism rate of 45 percent—5 times that number. Unfortunately, some elected officials are calling now for a return to the punitive policies of the past, despite the success of the First Step Act.

Here is the reality: We all deserve to live free from crime, but the War on Drugs, with its inflexible mandatory minimums, did not make communities safer. Instead, the so-called War on Drugs filled the prisons with young, mostly African-American men, and, at the same time, the price of illegal drugs went down, and the use of illegal drugs went up. The strategy didn't work.

The First Step Act shows that we can do more than be just tough on crime.

We can be, once and for all, smart on crime and achieve accountability without excessive punishment and incarceration.

It is our job in Congress to thoughtfully respond to the enduring crisis of substance abuse in America. We should provide more opportunities for those who are incarcerated to reenter society successfully, reunite with their families, and contribute to their communities.

And, we need to build on the bipartisan success of the First Step Act and work together to craft new policies to reduce crime in America.

Six years ago, the First Step Act was signed into law by President Donald Trump, during his first term in office, while my lead Republican sponsor, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, was chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. With Donald Trump returning to the White House and Senator GRASSLEY returning as chairman of the Judiciary Committee, we have the opportunity to build on the success of the First Step Act.

Six years ago, we wrote the blueprint for reimagining rehabilitation and protecting public safety. We know that it works.

We must remember that passing this law was just the first step in a long journey toward rethinking rehab and reversing failed reaches. Today, as I reflect on what we achieved by correcting our past wrongs and investing in the power of second chances, I also recognize that more must be done to make our justice system fair and to keep America safe.

We should learn from the experiences of individuals who have been incarcerated under misguided policies and are now seeking to reform the criminal justice system for the future.

As we celebrate this anniversary, I will continue to work with my colleagues to reform outdated sentencing laws and improve conditions of confinement and rehabilitation within our Federal system.

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

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:33 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. LUJÁN).