

bipartisan process in both Chambers. This bill reflects the input, expertise, and tireless efforts of many of our colleagues, and I am especially grateful for the work of our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee and for the leadership of Chairman WICKER on this year's bill.

This annual Defense bill is critical to ensuring the U.S. military is prepared for any threat we face—and not just the threats that may come in the next year. It is about putting us on a path that will ensure our military can deter and, if necessary, defeat any threat that may arise in the future.

Unfortunately, this long view has not always prevailed, and we have continued to see the consequences of underinvestment in our military. In the last few years, we have had repeated reminders that the world remains a dangerous place, that there are evil people in the world bent on aggression, and that there are those who wish America and our allies harm.

Sadly, that was clear this weekend. My prayers today are with the families of the three Americans—two soldiers and an interpreter—who were killed in Syria on Saturday in an apparent ISIS attack.

The surest way of securing peace and keeping it is through restraint. It is a long-held tenet of American national security, and it is a view that the American people widely share.

Republicans have made it a priority to restore peace through strength, and we know we have no time to waste. That is why we made a generational investment in our Armed Forces in the One Big Beautiful Bill this summer. The NDAA before us this week builds on that important work.

It aims to grow our Navy fleet to deliver more ships capable of deploying American power anywhere in the world and help narrow the gap between China's shipbuilding and our own.

It supports the construction of the Golden Dome missile defense system to keep our country safe from missile, drone, or other airborne attacks.

It proposes to ramp up munitions production and to ensure that we have sufficient munitions for whatever may come our way—with the added benefit of helping to revitalize the industrial base and support industries in South Dakota and across the country.

Then there is our airpower. The National Defense Authorization Act supports delivery of next-generation aircraft. That includes the B-21 Raider, the sixth-generation stealth bomber that will soon be making its home at South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base.

I am proud that this bill fully authorizes the B-21 Program and procurement of these aircraft, which will be the backbone of our future bomber force, as well as the military construction efforts underway at Ellsworth to support this new mission.

Investing in weapons and technology is important, but strengthening our

military also means supporting the men and women who wear the uniform, and this bill has their back. For one, it authorizes the first increase in Active-Duty end strength in several years. It will help ensure that we can sustain the record recruitment levels that we have seen this year. It also supports critical investments in servicemember quality of life. That includes a 3.8-percent pay raise for our troops. It includes investments in on-base housing, education opportunities, childcare, and other support for military members and their families.

This bill will help rebuild our military, but what makes this year's National Defense Authorization Act exceptional is not how it rebuilds but how it reforms.

Thanks to Chairman WICKER's leadership, this NDAA will make the most significant reforms to the way the Pentagon does business in a generation. It takes dozens of burdensome rules and laws off the books, streamlines the buying and innovation processes, and ensures more American businesses will be able to contribute to America's arsenal, including small businesses and startups.

This bill will harness the full strength of American innovation to get American's men and women in uniform the very best capabilities our country has to offer—and not just get it to them but get it to them faster and at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

These reforms will make our military stronger, more agile, and more ready for whatever the mission may be. And that needs to be our mission here, to do whatever it takes to support American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and guardians.

We ask a lot of the brave Americans serving in uniform and they give a lot and I am proud that this year's National Defense Authorization Act will help ensure that they have what they need to keep America safe in a dangerous world.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

MR. SCHUMER. 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 Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

MR. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning, the American people got more proof that Donald Trump's policies are a disaster to them. This morning's jobs report shows the unemployment rate rose to 4.6 percent in November. That is the highest level since 2021, the highest level in 4 years under Donald Trump's leadership—or lack thereof, more appropriately.

This is what Donald Trump's so-called golden age looks like in all its

ugly glory: higher costs, more tariffs, and the highest unemployment rate since COVID. And make no mistake, this unemployment number didn't just come out of the blue. It didn't just come because of external forces. This high, awful unemployment number—the highest since COVID—is a consequence of Donald Trump's failures, his reckless tariff agenda, his draconian cuts to basic services like healthcare, and his refusal to listen to Americans who are already struggling to pay for what they need.

Donald Trump can try and spin these job numbers all he wants. That is his nature. That is what he does. He doesn't care about the truth. He just cares about his own ego. But Americans aren't buying his fantasy. They are fed up with his agenda, and the damage is beginning to set in.

#### JEFFREY EPSTEIN

MR. President, now on Epstein, 27 days ago, every single Senator and all but one Member of Congress sent Donald Trump a simple message. They said: Mr. President, release the Epstein files.

The American people have waited long enough for the truth about Jeffrey Epstein. Who knew about his crimes? Who stood by and said nothing? The Epstein files may have some very real answers on that. And it is time—it is time—for the truth to come out.

Donald Trump promised to release the files and, to date, he has failed to deliver. Well, no more. Congress has spoken, and Donald Trump must comply.

Now, I want to be clear that the "Epstein files" is not a fight between Democrats and Republicans; it is a fight between those who want the truth and those who keep lying to the public, between those who want the truth and those who want to cover it up. And if Donald Trump won't come clean, if he keeps hiding the truth, the American people are going to be asking a very simple question: What the hell is President Trump trying to hide? Why won't he release those files?

Now, because of the law that Congress passed just 1 month ago, the Department of Justice has until Friday to release the documents.

I will be blunt. We fully expect that Donald Trump and Pam Bondi will try every trick they can think of to weasel out of fully releasing the Epstein files. After all, we are dealing with Donald Trump here, a notorious liar, someone who tried desperately to make Americans move on from Jeffrey Epstein. Why? Why is Donald Trump so afraid of these files? Well, as they say, where there is smoke, there is fire. Mark my words, if Donald Trump and Pam Bondi try to hide the truth this Friday, the legal and political public backlash will be ferocious. After all, it was the public who demanded these files be released. Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives—people wanted the truth and continue to demand the truth.

If Donald Trump releases just some of the Epstein files while unlawfully trying to hide others, the American people are going to see right through it. They are going to know he is hiding something.

Over the past few weeks, I have worked with Senate Democrats to partner with attorneys for the victims of Jeffrey Epstein and with outside legal experts to explore every possibility, prepare for every eventuality, and to take every available step to ensure the administration fully complies with the law.

If Donald Trump and Pam Bondi unlawfully withhold Epstein documents that they don't want the public to see, we will know about it. And if the administration tries to weaponize the narrow and careful statutory exemptions Congress provided to hide the truth, we will know about it. If the administration provides anything less than a full and comprehensive release of the Epstein files, legal and political consequences will almost certainly follow.

In a year when Democrats and Republicans have disagreed so fiercely on just about everything, on this issue, both parties are practically on the same page. It is how the Epstein File Transparency Act passed with near unanimity. The American people want the truth: Democrats, Independents, MAGA Republicans, and everyone in between.

So, President Trump, it is time to release the Epstein files—all of them. It is time to stop hiding the truth, Donald Trump. It is time, Donald Trump, for you to keep your promise to the American people, a promise you campaigned on. And, Mr. President—Mr. Trump—if you fail to come clean, the American people will demand to know: What the hell are you trying to hide?

#### HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, now, on healthcare costs, because of the Republicans' colossal mismanagement, damage to American healthcare has now been done. At this point, the toothpaste is out of the tube. And once January 1 comes and people are locked into their new, more expensive plans or frozen out of all their plans because they can't afford it, there is no putting the toothpaste back in.

Because of Republicans, millions of Americans will now pay hundreds, if not thousands, more a month for health insurance. Even if something can get done later, it won't help those who pay more on their premiums starting in January.

It is tragic. It is infuriating. It is shameful.

Republicans can make whatever policy agreement arguments they want about the ACA, but it is insanity for them to act like the right answer is to do nothing about the expiring tax credits. It is insanity for the Republicans to let people's premiums explode. Yet that is the path they are taking.

Even now, House Republican leaders are on a warpath to let these tax cred-

its expire, pushing a hard-right bill that doesn't lower premium, doesn't extend tax credits, and doesn't lower people's costs.

Asked why the House won't vote on the ACA tax credits, Speaker JOHNSON this morning said:

It was just not to be.

"It was just not to be"? Mr. Speaker, tell that to the people back home who will go bankrupt paying for healthcare. "It was just not to be" is an unacceptable answer as the American people are suffering.

Republicans are the ones in charge. Republicans have the majority. There is only one reason in the world why these ACA tax credits are expiring, and it is because Republicans have chosen to let it happen. It is not that this choice was "just not meant to be." This is a choice Republicans have made, Speaker JOHNSON, and people back home will suffer the consequences.

Republicans can pretend this healthcare crisis is not their fault. They can give all the speeches they want about how much they hate ObamaCare, but Republicans are the ones in charge. The healthcare crisis is squarely on Republican shoulders.

Democrats warned Republicans months ago that this crisis was coming. We gave Republicans 13 chances to avoid the calamity this year, and each time they said no.

The consequences, unfortunately, will be very severe back home. When these tax credits expire, premiums will spike, and people will lose insurance; people will get sick; some people will die; and many of them will go broke along the way.

When it comes to healthcare, the damage has been done, and Americans know it is all thanks to the Republicans.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I came to the floor today to talk about the National Defense Authorization Act, which is going to be addressed and voted on today.

As I was coming to the floor, I heard the minority leader talking about healthcare, and his phrase was "the damage has been done."

The damage was done the day the Democrats passed ObamaCare. Fifteen years ago, every Democrat voted for and every Republican voted against the Obama healthcare law, which Republicans said is going to lead to a rise in costs for healthcare, fewer choices for Americans, and hassles and headaches when it comes to healthcare, in terms of the paperwork and the denials and

all the issues that come when the government tries to run healthcare. That is when the damage was done.

I should point out to the minority leader: He has no solutions. The Democrats have no solutions for the disaster that they have brought onto the American people, other than to say: Hey, let's go extend these bonus subsidies for another 3 years—\$85 billion directly from the Federal Government's Treasury to the insurance companies' pockets.

That is the only solution the Democrats have come up with, nothing to address the needs of the American people, nothing to address the high copays, nothing to address the high deductibles—no, not a thing; and no reforms—certainly, nothing to deal with the waste, the fraud, and the abuse, and the corruption that has come with the Obama healthcare law and the added-on subsidies and bonus subsidies brought on by Joe Biden during COVID.

That is the Democrats' solution, as Republicans continue to work for ways to actually lower the cost of care and bring to the floor, as we have last week, a proposal that all the Republicans here voted for that said: We need to lower the cost of care. We need to get the money to the patients, not to the insurance companies. We need to put choice into the hands of patients—and dollars—to allow them to come forward with a choice.

So when the minority leader comes to the floor and says "the damage has been done"—yes, he did it. The Democrats voted for it. Every one of them voted for that damage, and now the American people are seeing what we have under the Obama healthcare law, which is a program that is much more expensive and has fewer choices, more headaches, and more hassles. That is the Democrats' solution to the needs of the American people.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the National Defense Authorization Act. The bill enacts critical military policy for our Nation and for our troops.

The House of Representatives passed the NDAA last week, and they did it with strong bipartisan support. And now it is time for the Senate to act.

The previous administration failed to keep America safe. It allowed over 10 million illegal immigrants to flood across our border. It was responsible for a deadly and disastrous retreat from Afghanistan, and it undermined America's power around the world.

President Trump and Republicans, in this last year, have been restoring peace through strength. Under Republican leadership, America is becoming safer and more prosperous.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act refocuses our military. It focuses on our core mission of defending the homeland and defending American interests overseas. It deters our enemies and defends our Nation.

Mr. President, in combat, as you know better than any, competence

matters, not political correctness. The NDAA refocuses our military on lethality and readiness, and it rolls back these divisive DEI policies, which the Democrats have given us the last 4 years. Those liberal Democrat policies took time, money, and attention away from the training and preparation and combat effectiveness.

The bill on the Senate floor today restores policies that are merit-based and mission-focused.

Additionally, the NDAA builds on the recruitment surge we have been experiencing in this country. We have seen it during the past year, during the Trump administration. Recruitment numbers went up. They started to go up the day President Trump was elected back to office.

It gives our troops a well-deserved pay raise and increases recruiting bonuses. Better pay improves recruiting and retention and the readiness of our troops.

A stronger military means a stronger America. This bill prioritizes defending our homeland, and it does that because threats at home and abroad are continuing to increase, and they are increasingly connected.

We saw that in the terrorist attack in Australia. We also see at home that a terrorist gunman from Afghanistan attacked our National Guardsmen right here in Washington, DC.

This bill strengthens the tools needed to keep our border secure. At the same time, it invests in the next generation of missile defense, and that includes the Golden Dome initiative. It expands counterdrone authorities to protect military bases, critical infrastructure, and public spaces.

In Wyoming, protecting the homeland is what we do every day. Cheyenne, WY, is home to the F.E. Warren Air Force Base. F.E. Warren is home to Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles. These are critical to our Nation's nuclear deterrence. The NDAA modernizes communications and electrical infrastructure at F.E. Warren for this critical program. Furthermore, it invests \$4.3 billion in the Sentinel missile program. These are the missiles that will replace the Minuteman III missiles. Wyoming will be the first to receive these new missiles.

As China advances hypersonic missiles, modernizing our nuclear deterrent is essential to keeping America safe. The bill we are voting on today modernizes our military across the board. It is going to make our warfighters more lethal and more intimidating.

Investments in shipbuilding and new fighter aircraft will strengthen American dominance in the air, as well as the sea.

At the same time, cutting unnecessary spending will make the Pentagon more efficient, more effective, and more accountable.

The National Defense Authorization Act restores America's "Arsenal of Democracy." For far too long, bureau-

cratic hurdles slowed production. They stifled innovation. And this bill removes those barriers and accelerates the delivery of new technology.

During World War II, American industrial strength was decisive to victory. Industrial strength is the foundation of safety and security and of our liberty. When we innovate, we deter aggression. Weakness invites conflict. That is what happens. Weakness invites conflict. My friend and colleague Senator KENNEDY of Louisiana always says, "Weakness invites the wolves." Strength deters the enemy. It deters and prevents wars.

Under this bill, we are sending a clear message—a message that we will defend our Nation, that we will support our troops, that they will outbuild and outinnovate our adversaries and never apologize for American strength.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### AMENDING THE NATIVE AMERICAN TOURISM AND IMPROVING VISITOR EXPERIENCE ACT TO AUTHORIZE GRANTS TO INDIAN TRIBES, TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, S. 612 is a bipartisan bill that amends the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act, which authorizes grants to Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations and Native Hawaiian organizations to support recreational travel and tourism activities.

This bill just makes it easier and less bureaucratic for both the administration and the recipients of this grant program. I am glad it is passing today as the 15th bill from the Indian Affairs Committee to pass out of the Senate this year.

I am proud of the work we have done on the committee, on a bipartisan basis, with Chair MURKOWSKI and others. There is a lot more work to do to support Native communities across the country in the new year.

Mr. President, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 72, S. 612.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title. The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 612) to amend the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act to authorize grants to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native Hawaiian organizations, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill, which

had been reported from the Committee on Indian Affairs.

Mr. SCHATZ. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (S. 612) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed as follows:

S. 612

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. NATIVE AMERICAN TOURISM GRANT PROGRAMS.

The Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act (25 U.S.C. 4351 et seq.) is amended—

(1) by redesignating section 6 (25 U.S.C. 4355) as section 7; and

(2) by inserting after section 5 (25 U.S.C. 4354) the following:

#### "SEC. 6. NATIVE AMERICAN TOURISM GRANT PROGRAMS.

"(a) BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS PROGRAM.—The Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs may make grants to and enter into agreements with Indian tribes and tribal organizations to carry out the purposes of this Act, as described in section 2.

"(b) OFFICE OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN RELATIONS.—The Director of the Office of Native Hawaiian Relations may make grants to and enter into agreements with Native Hawaiian organizations to carry out the purposes of this Act, as described in section 2.

"(c) OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The heads of other Federal agencies, including the Secretaries of Commerce, Transportation, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Labor, may make grants under this authority to and enter into agreements with Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native Hawaiian organizations to carry out the purposes of this Act, as described in section 2.

"(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section \$35,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2025 through 2029."

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, this summer marks an important milestone in the great American experiment. On July 4, 2026, our country will celebrate the 250th anniversary of our founding—a nation founded on the universal principle that all people have inherent God-given rights. To protect those rights, our forefathers established a democratic republic.

Throughout the year, communities from sea to shining sea will hold events celebrating our rights and freedoms.

This is also a fitting time to reflect on our Nation's history. The story of America is filled with acts of courage and righteous struggles. America has