

can work together to replace the fear and anguish of Obamacare with the hope and promise of true health care reform.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, the Defense authorization legislation before the Senate would authorize the programs and funding that provide the kind of training and equipment our military needs in the face of aggressive threats such as ISIL. It would provide a well-deserved pay raise to the brave men and women who give us everything to keep us safe. It contains exactly the same level of funding—exactly the same level of funding—President Obama requested in his own budget: \$612 billion.

It is just the kind of legislation you would expect to receive strong bipartisan support. Up until now, it has. The NDAA is a bill we typically consider every year, and it is one that typically passes with bipartisan support. This year's House bill passed with votes from both parties, while the Senate version of the bill passed the Armed Services Committee by a huge bipartisan margin of 22 to 4. That was in the Senate Armed Services Committee, the vote on the bill we have before us. It should be sailing through the Senate for passage by a similar margin this week, but some in the Democratic leadership are now trying to hold it hostage for partisan reasons.

We live in an age when, as Henry Kissinger recently put it, "the United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War." Yet some Democratic leaders seem to think this is the moment to hold our national security hostage to the partisan demands for more spending on Washington bureaucracies, such as the IRS. They seem to think it is OK to hold our troops and their families to ransom if they can't plus-up unrelated bills, such as the one that funds their own congressional offices.

The Armed Services Committee chairman just penned an op-ed on the issue that I would ask my colleagues to read. It made many important points, including this one: There is bipartisan consensus that we cannot continue to hold defense funding at BCA levels after years of dangerous cuts. Military officials have told us that to do so could put American lives at risk, which means it is a scenario we should be working to avoid at all costs. But some Democratic leaders seem to view such a worrying scenario as little more than leverage to extract more spending for unrelated bureaucracies.

"It is the first duty of the federal government to protect the nation," Senator McCAIN wrote in his piece. "With global threats rising, it simply makes no sense to oppose a defense policy bill full of vital authorities that

our troops need for a reason that has nothing to do with national defense spending." He is right.

I ask unanimous consent that Senator McCAIN's op-ed be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

Here is what I am asking today. I am asking every sensible Democratic colleague to keep outside with the American people and pull these party leaders back from the edge. I am asking my friends across the aisle to join with us to support wounded warriors instead of more partisan brinkmanship, to give our troops a raise instead of giving gridlock a boost. And I am asking them to work with us to defeat the contingency funding amendment offered by the senior Senator from Rhode Island so that we can keep this bill intact and consistent with the budget resolution.

The new Congress has been on a roll in recent months, getting things done for the American people in a spirit of greater openness and cooperation. Let's keep the momentum going. Let's keep that spirit alive. If Senators have amendments, I would encourage them to work with Senator McCAIN to get them processed. But above all, let's ignore the partisan voices of the past and work together for more shared achievements instead. I think our troops and their families deserve no less.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Politico, June 9, 2015]

OBAMA IS WRONG TO HOLD DEFENSE FUNDING HOSTAGE

(By Sen. John McCain)

Congress has passed a National Defense Authorization Act, vital legislation providing the necessary funding and authorities for our military and the men and women who volunteer to defend the nation, for 53 consecutive years. This year's NDAA should be no different.

The NDAA delivers sweeping defense reforms that will enable our military to rise to the challenges of a more dangerous world. The legislation contains the most significant reforms in a generation to a broken acquisition system that takes too long and costs too much. It modernizes and improves our 70-year-old military retirement system, expanding benefits to the vast majority of service members excluded from the current system. The NDAA reforms Pentagon management to ensure precious defense dollars are focused on our war fighters, not on expanding bloated staffs, which have grown exponentially in recent years.

With \$10 billion in wasteful and excessive spending identified in the Pentagon's budget, the legislation invests in crucial military capabilities for our war fighters. The bill accelerates Navy shipbuilding and adds fighter aircraft to address shortfalls across the services. As adversaries threaten our military technological advantage, the bill looks to the future and invests in new breakthrough technologies, including directed energy and unmanned combat aircraft.

Despite these critical reforms, President Barack Obama is threatening to veto the NDAA and future defense spending bills for reasons totally unrelated to national security.

The Budget Control Act, which set in motion dangerous defense cuts, establishes caps

on defense and nondefense discretionary spending. There is bipartisan consensus on the dangerous impact these spending caps would have on defense. All of the military service chiefs testified this year that funding defense at the level of the BCA caps would put American lives at risk.

Rather than seeking to avoid this scenario at all costs, the president is using it as leverage to extract increases in nondefense spending. As his veto threat made clear, the president "will not fix defense without fixing non-defense spending."

Such intransigence shows a disturbing misalignment of White House priorities. It is the first duty of the federal government to protect the nation. With global threats rising, it simply makes no sense to oppose a defense policy bill full of vital authorities that our troops need for a reason that has nothing to do with national defense spending.

The NDAA fully supports Obama's budget request of \$612 billion for national defense, which is \$38 billion above the spending caps established by the Budget Control Act. In other words, this legislation gives the president every dollar of budget authority he requested. The difference is that NDAA follows the Senate Budget Resolution and funds that \$38 billion increase through Overseas Contingency Operations funds.

Parrotting White House rhetoric, some Senate Democrats have been spreading misinformation about OCO funding, saying this funding is inappropriate or somehow limited in its ability to support our military. This is nonsense. The NDAA purposefully placed the additional \$38 billion of OCO funding in the same accounts and activities for which the president himself requested OCO money.

To be clear, using OCO to pay for our national defense is not my preference. But given the choice between OCO money and no money, I choose OCO, and multiple senior military leaders testified before the Armed Services Committee this year that they would make the same choice for one simple reason. This is \$38 billion of real money that our military desperately needs, and without which our top military leaders have said they cannot succeed.

It remains my highest priority as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee to achieve a long-term, bipartisan solution that lifts the BCA caps once and for all. Obama says this is his goal as well. But the NDAA is a policy bill—not a spending bill—and cannot accomplish that goal. In the absence of such an agreement, I refuse to ask the brave young Americans in our military to defend this nation with insufficient resources that would place their lives in unnecessary danger. Holding the NDAA hostage to force that solution would be a deliberate and cynical failure to meet our constitutional duty to provide for the common defense.

It is simply incomprehensible that as America confronts the most diverse and complex array of crises around the world since the end of World War II, that a president would veto funding for our military to prove a political point. The NDAA before the Senate authorizes \$612 billion for national defense. This is the amount requested by the president and justified by his own national security strategy. For the sake of the men and women of our military and our national security, it's time the president learned how to say yes.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the majority leader can't seem to let the facts as they exist get in the way of his ideology. The facts are that the Affordable Care Act is working, and 16.5 million people are proof of that because they have access to health care, most of whom did not have it before.

In the light of day, it has been shown that private insurance companies were taking advantage of the American people. They cannot do that now under the Affordable Care Act. Companies that are proposing these huge rate increases simply won't get them. Understand that 80 percent of every dollar that is charged by an insurance company in premiums—80 percent of it—has to go toward caring for people. If it doesn't, there are rebates, and hundreds of thousands of Americans during the last few years have gotten rebates as a result of insurance companies not spending 80 percent of the money they are getting in premiums for health care.

The sad commentary is that insurance companies took advantage—took advantage by not insuring people who had preexisting disabilities. One “disability” that insurance companies said was preexisting was the fact that you are a woman. Some insurance companies charged more for the same care if you are a woman and not a man. We have wide-ranging evidence that was in existence before and I guess my Republican colleagues want back again where insurance companies determine how much—they could arbitrarily cut off insurance to someone. They had these arbitrary limits. They can't do that anymore. Senior citizens have received millions of benefits from the Affordable Care Act. They get a wellness check every year for no cost at all. They no longer have to worry about the hole in the doughnut, so to speak, as we call it, on coverage for their prescriptions.

There are many things we can talk about. The fact is that the Affordable Care Act is working, and we are going to continue to defend it as the American people want us to do.

AMENDMENT NO. 1521

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this afternoon the Senate will vote on an important amendment offered by a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, the Senator from Rhode Island, JACK REED, who is also the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee.

I commend Senator REED for the stellar job he has done in being a manager of this bill. He is one of the most thoughtful and responsible Members of the Senate and always has been. He has great legislative experience, having served in the House before he came here.

Senator REED's amendment addresses a major threat to our national security and the middle class—sequestration.

Sequestration refers to deep, mindless, automatic cuts throughout the government. These cuts were authorized 4 years ago to force Congress to reduce the deficit in a balanced way.

Unfortunately, they did not work. Republicans are unwilling to close even a single tax loophole—not a single tax loophole to reduce the deficit. Now we face the prospect of arbitrary and unreasonable cuts that were once assumed to be so stupid that Congress would not allow them to happen. But something that everyone thought was stupid is now official Republican policy. Unless we can reach a bipartisan agreement to fix sequestration, these cuts will occur, not smoothly but as if done by a meat cleaver.

That threatens not only our military security but also the economic security of America's middle class, which really is our national security. The bill aims to avoid sequestration for the Defense Department with a widely ridiculed budget loophole, which would put actual defense spending on the Nation's credit card, increasing our deficit and our debt.

I am stunned by my friend, the senior Senator from Arizona. When I was an appropriator, I was on this Senate floor and I watched him, with his staff in the back of the room every time we did an appropriations bill. He pored through line by line with his staff of every appropriations bill. If there was something he thought was askew he would object to it. We got used to that because, frankly, it saved money over time.

He referred to all the pork that was in these bills, and he and I disagreed on what was determined to be pork, but I understood where he was coming from. I am just flabbergasted now that the senior Senator from Arizona, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, is agreeing to a one-time gimmick. All the experts have said these gimmicks don't work—especially this one. Now, the committee, led by my friend the senior Senator from Arizona, is agreeing to this gimmick. Think of that. The Republicans, led by the senior Senator from Arizona, are advocating deficit spending big time—not a little bit, big time—tens of billions of dollars.

Our troops deserve better than this. Meanwhile, unless we deal with the impact of sequestration more broadly, middle-class America will suffer drastic cuts in things that matter to them the most—cuts in priorities such as education, job creation, and lifesaving research. Sequestration of nondefense programs is also an attack on our military families. For example, sequestration threatens to cut VA spending, health care spending for the military, job training for returning veterans, schools that teach children of military families, and heating assistance for veterans who are struggling.

If we are going to be fair to military families, just as to millions of other working Americans, we need to fix sequestration for more than just the Pen-

tagon. We need to fix it for defense and nondefense programs jointly. Defense and nondefense are inextricable. They are certainly things we cannot separate.

That is what the Reed amendment is designed to change through bipartisan negotiations. There is no reason to wait to negotiate a bipartisan budget. It makes no sense to start spending extra money on defense or anything else until we agree on an overall plan. Put simply, we ought to budget first and spend later. That is the only responsible way for a family or our Nation to conduct its business.

That is why the Reed amendment makes so much sense. I urge my colleagues to support the Reed amendment. A plan that avoids unnecessary cuts to priorities such as education, job creation, and research is what the Reed amendment is all about. It is a plan that funds all agencies that protect our security, including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Drug Enforcement Administration—all of these vital programs. It is a plan that funds our troops, protects military families, and makes the long-term investment needed to ensure a secure, prosperous future for all Americans.

Less than 2 years ago, Democrat PATTY MURRAY and Republican PAUL RYAN proved it could be done. Let's put an end to the games and gimmicks and start putting together a responsible budget.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided, with the majority controlling the first half and the Democrats controlling the final half.

The Senator from South Dakota.

NATIONAL DEFENSE
AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last fall, Republicans promised that if we were elected to the majority in the Senate, we would get the Senate working again. A big part of that is getting the appropriations process working again. When the Senate is functioning properly, 12 separate appropriations bills are considered individually in the Appropriations Committee and then brought to the Senate floor for debate and amendment.

This process is designed to allow Senators to carefully examine programs and consider the best and most responsible way to distribute funding. But the