United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 162 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2016 No. 114

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God of peace, help us to receive Your peace today and become Your instruments of reconciliation on Earth. Forgive us for the times we have permitted acrimony to deface Your image in humanity. Use our lawmakers to communicate Your peace, bringing hope and healing to our Nation and world. Lord, make our Senators channels of Your grace to transform discord into harmony and conflict into cooperation. Help us to hear the drumbeat of Your direction and march to the cadence of Your guidance.

And Lord, bless the illustrious summer 2016 Senate page class that prepares to leave Capitol Hill. Thank You for the faithfulness of these outstanding young people.

We pray in Your wonderful 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Chair lays before the Senate the House message to accompany S. 2943, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Resolved, That the House insist upon its amendment to the bill (S. 2943) entitled ''An Act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes,'' and ask a conference with the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

COMPOUND MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to disagree in the amendment of the House, agree to the request from the House for a conference, and appoint the following conferees: Senators MCCAIN, INHOFE, SESSIONS, WICKER, AYOTTE, FISCHER, COTTON, ROUNDS, ERNST, TILLIS, SULLIVAN, LEE, GRAHAM, CRUZ, REED, NELSON, MCCASKILL, MANCHIN, SHAHEEN, GILLIBRAND, BLUMENTHAL, DONNELLY, HIRONO, KAINE, KING, and HEINRICH.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to disagree in the House amendment, agree to the request from the House for a conference, and the appointing of the following conferees: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Cruz, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, Heinrich.

Mitch McConnell, John McCain, Tom Cotton, Kelly Ayotte, James Lankford, John Thune, Orrin G. Hatch, Johnny Isakson, Mike Crapo, Thom Tillis, John Hoeven, Joni Ernst, Deb Fischer, Jeff Sessions, David Perdue, Richard Burr, Dan Sullivan.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 10, H.R. 4465, H.R. 4487, AND H.R. 4901

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there are four bills at the desk due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 10) to reauthorize the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 4465) to decrease the deficit by consolidating and selling Federal buildings and other civilian real property, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 4487) to reduce costs of Federal real estate, improve building security, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 4901) to reauthorize the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATION BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is hard to understand why our Democratic friends continue to filibuster the funding needed to fight Zika.

We have already shown the reality behind various claims and half-truths about the compromise anti-Zika conference report: the idea that it would underfund Zika; the idea that it would prohibit funding for or deny access to birth control; the idea that it would actually weaken clean water protections;

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

Printed on recycled paper.

the idea that its offsets don't have any bipartisan support; the idea that it would cut funding for veterans. We have shown that all of these claims just don't stand up to scrutiny.

Despite all this, Democrats now say they will only accept the Zika bill if it limits health care funding in the territories that need it most, drops critical funding for our veterans, and even restricts the ability to kill mosquitos. That is apparently their position. My friend the Democratic leader warns that these mosquitos are ''vicious,'' ''awful,'' and ''ravaging.'' He is just not all that interested in killing them.

So I would like to echo the words of the senior Senator from Texas, who said that our Democratic colleagues seem to be operating in a ''logic-free zone'' when it comes to Zika. It is time to get back to reality. This is a serious crisis that demands serious solutions. It is time for our friends to start worrying less about pleasing outside political groups and start worrying more about actually helping the Americans who are counting on all of us.

We have a conference report. It is before us. It contains the exact level of funding to fight Zika that Democrats already agreed to—$1.1 billion. It includes more health care funding than the bill that originally passed the Senate. It does not prohibit funding for or deny access to birth control. It contains bipartisan offsets that move money from lower priorities to higher priorities. It contains temporary but meaningful reforms that actually allow us to fight mosquitoes in an effective way. It also honors our veterans with record levels of funding.

This compromise conference report offers the only way to get this done now. The only way to achieve the outcome is to pass this conference report now. We could pass it today.

I am urging our colleagues to please look within themselves and make the right decision. Otherwise, what will they say to pregnant mothers this summer? What will they say to our veterans the rest of the summer?

I hope our friends will think about what they will say to our Active-Duty troops as well. As every colleague knows, there are two types of bills necessary to fund our military. First is the Defense authorization bill, which authorizes the many things our military needs. Democrats voted with us to pass that important bill last month. Second is the Defense appropriations bill, which actually funds the things the Defense authorization bill authorizes. That is the bill Democrats have been filibustering since last week. In other words, Democrats are happy to make promises to our men and women in uniform with the Defense authorization bill, but they are not prepared to keep those promises by actually passing the Defense appropriations bill.

Both the current and incoming Democratic leaders essentially just made this point themselves. Here is what the senior Democrat from New York said just yesterday:

> [A bill] without actual appropriations . . . is like a Hollywood movie set: Something that appears real on the surface but has no substance and no life behind its false facade.

Here is what my friend the Democratic leader said:

> Authorizing legislation is a start, but without resources, it's very, very meaningless.

Very, very meaningless. A false facade. Harsh words from Democrats about their own actions on defense funding.

In an attempt to make a misleading political point about the CARA bill—a point that doesn't hold water, of course—these Democratic leaders inadvertently stepped on their own party's message for opposing the funding bill our military needs. If they really believe what they said to be true, then why are Senate Democrats blocking the Defense appropriations bill when they talk about how important it is to actually provide ''real funding''? This is a defense funding bill that the top Democrat on the Defense Subcommittee called ''a responsible approach to protecting our country.'' It is a bill that every single Democrat and every single Republican supported in the Appropriations Committee. It also respects the budget caps in place. It is the epitome of regular order—the epitome of regular order. Senate Democrats may try to spin their actions now, but it all boils down to one thing: This is just a partisan game.

At a time when we face an array of daunting challenges around the globe, it is imperative that the Senate take the next steps today to provide the resources and training our servicemembers need.

The CIA Director recently said he would be surprised if ISIL isn't trying to carry out an attack in the United States like the one we saw recently in Istanbul. And we are continuing to see terrorism hit home in Orlando and San Bernardino and across the world in places like Bangladesh and Baghdad and Saudi Arabia. These factors only underscore the importance of taking up and passing this defense funding bill as soon as possible. They also underscore the importance of our Commander in Chief finally leading a campaign to defeat ISIL, which is the only way to end ISIL-directed and ISIL-inspired terrorism once and for all.

It is clear that preventing future attacks inside our borders requires defeating ISIL where it exists—beyond our borders. Passing this defense funding bill is crucial to achieving that goal, just as it is crucial to fulfilling the commitment that President Obama made last week regarding the 8,400 troops who will remain in Afghanistan through the end of his administration. The President's statement represents another glaring example of why the Senate must pass this Defense appropriations measure. It is what is needed to fund the training to prepare forces for deployment to Afghanistan and the weapons they will carry and the spare parts and fuel consumed in training and operations and the ammunition they will need to execute their missions. It also includes resources to fund basic pay, deliver necessary medical services, and support quality-of-life programs that military families count on. The President has made a commitment to our allies, and we must meet our commitment to the force.

Our men and women in uniform courageously put themselves in harm's way to help keep our country safe. They do so willingly. They do so voluntarily. They don't ask for much in return, and they never ever forsake their commitment. Senators shouldn't forsake their commitment, either.

Today, our Democratic colleagues will have the opportunity to join us in meeting the first part of that commitment by voting to go to conference on the Defense authorization bill. Then they will have the opportunity to join us in meeting the second part of that commitment by voting to end their filibuster of the defense funding bill so we can pass it.

America's men and women in uniform don't need ''false facades'' or ''very, very meaningless'' gestures from our Democratic colleagues. They need Democrats to put politics aside and join us in advancing a strong Defense authorization bill and a strong Defense appropriations bill because our servicemembers and our national security depend on both of these bills.

Despite Senate Democrats' efforts to put partisan politics before pressing issues like national security and Zika, the Republican-led Senate is working hard to advance solutions for the American people.

One newspaper recently declared that the Senate ''has settled into a new normal'' under Republican leadership, ''passing bills at [a] rate not seen in decades.'' That is good news for the American people, and here is why.

The new normal includes more than 225 bills that have been passed, along with more than 140 bills that have become law, and I am not just talking about bills from Republicans but bills from Democrats as well. For instance, the senior Senator from Delaware who has seen four of his bills become law; for instance, the senior Senator from California who has seen three become law; and, for instance, our Democratic colleagues from Rhode Island and Minnesota who saw the CARA bill they worked on with Republican Senators like Senator PORTMAN, Senator AYOTTE, and Senator GRASSLEY pass yesterday.

CARA is a comprehensive legislative response to the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic that is ravaging our country. Legislation to address this epidemic languished under a previous Judiciary chairman, but Senator GRASSLEY worked to change that. He made it a priority, and he moved it swiftly. CARA wouldn't have been possible without him, just as it wouldn't have been possible without Members

like PORTMAN and AYOTTE, who have worked to drive this bill forward every step of the way. I would also like to thank Senator ALEXANDER for his work in the conference committee to secure a strong final bill. The bill we passed will help protect Americans from addiction and overdose, and we expect the President to sign it into law soon.

Here is another important bill we passed yesterday and also expect the President to sign into law soon. It is the most comprehensive aviation security reform legislation in a decade, and it contains significant consumer protections for airline passengers as well. This important bill will help protect Americans at our airports and in our skies, and it would not have been possible without the good work of Senator THUNE, who worked with Senator NELSON to guide it through to passage.

In just the past week or so, we saw the crisis in Puerto Rico, and we responded with responsible legislation designed to prevent a taxpayer bailout and at the same time help the Puerto Rican people.

We saw the threat of rising food prices for middle-class families, and we responded with science-based legislation designed to prevent confusing and costly laws in one State from raising grocery bills in another.

While Senate Democrats are now trying to make it impossible to get the basic work of government accomplished with some filibuster summer sequel, we have been able to make progress there too. The full Appropriations Committee has approved all 12 funding bills—at a record early time and with broad bipartisan support—many of them with unanimous backing from both sides. The full Senate has passed some on the floor, and if our Democratic friends would work with us, we could pass the others as well.

The Republican-led Senate set out to give these appropriations bills ample amount of floor time for Senators to debate the measures so more of the American people could be represented in the lawmaking process, and that is what we have done.

The Republican-led Senate set out to give colleagues from both sides more of a voice, allowing amendments and bills from both sides because better process leads to better results for the American people, and that is what we have done. We did so because this Republican majority is following through on what we set out to do from the beginning: open up the legislative process, get committees up and running again, empower Members from both sides, find areas of common ground, and advance legislation that can make a difference for people all across our country.

Just because Democrats are again reverting to their dysfunctional ways because they believe it suits them politically, it doesn't change the reality that we have made significant progress in restoring the Senate to significantly better health.

We have clearly put the Senate back to work too. There are so many other measures we have passed besides those I have mentioned already: groundbreaking reforms in education and in transportation, permanent tax relief for families and small businesses, trading more of Washington's annual patches and punts for real solutions. All of these good ideas and so many more are now law, which benefit the people we represent.

We have gotten so much done already, but there is much more we can do, as long as our Democratic colleagues aren't determined to obstruct for its own sake. I think many on the other side have much to ponder over this upcoming State work period. Think about Zika, my Democratic colleagues. Think about veterans over the summer. Think about our men and women in uniform. Then they will have to decide, do they want to continue with these partisan games on critical issues like Zika and National Defense or do they want to work with us to keep making progress for our country.

We will certainly give them more opportunities to make progress on appropriations. We will certainly give them opportunities to make progress on important issues like Energy and Defense. Even if Democratic leaders might prefer dysfunction and partisan games, Members from both sides know the Republican-led Senate has given them more of an opportunity to move legislation and their constituents more of a voice.

Let me say that again. This Republican-led Senate has given all Senators more of an opportunity to move legislation; thereby, giving their constituents more of a voice.

With continued hard work and cooperation from our friends across the aisle, we can continue to add to that record of achievement for the people, the American people all across our country. After all, isn't that what they sent us here for?

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I assume my Republican friend feels that if you say just the opposite of what is valid and true, some people will believe it. You talk about a logic-free zone, as my friend mentioned—boy, we got one in the last half hour here. We do have a new normal here, and it is not a good new normal. Take, for example, defense. The Republican leader resorts to name-calling, trying to paint Democrats as weak on defense. He cites Democrats voting against proceeding to the Defense appropriations bill before we have a budget deal.

Let me remind the American people, let me remind the Republican leader, the result of Democrats blocking the Defense appropriations bill three times last year was we got a better budget, a much better budget. We got a budget agreement that increased spending for national security by $33.5 billion over the sequester. It was their sequester level; that is, they wanted to cut it even more. That is the truth.

The further truth is that the defense of our country, the security of our country, depends more on the Pentagon. We have every Democrat who is just as patriotic as any Republican. We believe in the security of this Nation just as much as they do. We look at that differently, though, in this sense: I repeat, the security of this Nation is more than bombs and bullets. It is also making sure we have an FBI that works and is adequately funded. It also means the Drug Enforcement Administration has the personnel to do their job. It also means the Department of Homeland Security, created by a Republican President, is up and running and able to do its job. They have tremendous responsibilities. The border security is their problem. They have to deal with that, and it has to be adequately funded.

We have issues that relate to the security of this Nation. For example, the Centers for Disease Control has to be adequately funded. They don't do bombs or bullets, but they do take care of this Nation's security.

The National Institutes of Health, one of the premier organizations in the history of the world, helps us become a more secure nation. So we are going to continue—we will block today, if he brings it up again, the Defense appropriations bill. Why? Because he wants to do that. It is so obvious. He wants to do that and walk out of here and leave the other appropriations bills stirring in the breeze and meet the craziness we see out of the House of Representatives as it relates to spending.

We want more resources for our troops, but if we get more resources for our troops, we are going to get more resources for those entities that keep us safe and secure that aren't Pentagon-related.

Again, I assume my friend believes that if you keep talking about something that is absolutely untrue, people will think it is true. For example, let's take the Zika situation we have in America today. No one disputes the fact that these mosquitoes are ravaging and are horrendous. Mosquitoes have been very difficult and dangerous. They have been terrible since recorded history. They cause death and illness. It is hard to comprehend. For the first time in the history of the world, we have now the mosquito spreading a virus that causes women to have deformed babies—badly deformed babies.

What we did, on a bipartisan basis, the senior Senator from Washington and the senior Senator from Missouri got together and they came up with a Zika funding measure. I felt it was inadequate dollarwise. We agreed with the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health that it should be $1.9 billion. We said: OK. We will go along with this because it is an

emergency. It is like all emergencies, whether it is flood, fire, or wind, whatever it might be. This is an emergency, and it should be treated as such—$1.1 billion, no offsets. We passed that with 89 votes. Every Democrat voted for it and virtually every Republican voted for it. It went to the House of Representatives.

Now, here is where my friend's logic-free zone really pops in hard. Remember what we sent to the House of Representatives, and here is what they sent back to us. There is no disputing this, even though he can say it a million times if he wants. Under the bill we got back—and the Republicans in the Senate approved what happened in the House—Planned Parenthood, an organization where hundreds and hundreds of thousands of women go for their care, do you think they are going to have a little rush of business now? Because women in America today want to make sure they have the ability to not get pregnant. Why? Because the mosquitoes ravage pregnant women. Under the logic of my friend the Republican leader, they don't need to go to Planned Parenthood. They can go to their boutique doctor someplace in Las Vegas or Chicago or Lexington, KY. They can go to an emergency room and say: I am sorry, I didn't get birth control; will you help me? That isn't what emergency rooms are for. That is what Planned Parenthood is for. The vast majority of women who need help, that is where they go, Planned Parenthood. Under the legislation we got back from the House, there is no money to be provided for that.

We know the Republicans don't like the people who wear the green eyeshades, the so-called environmentalists. So what did they send to us? They had to do something. The only thing they could get out of the House of Representatives—they have to do something to attack the environment so they said: Well, here is what we will do. With spring, we are going to eliminate the Clean Water Act, which makes it extremely dangerous. That is why the EPA looks at this so closely and all other Federal agencies. The Clean Water Act is the law of the land, and it has been for decades. They eliminate that.

The Republican leader gets up here and talks about: I hope they are happy—words to that effect—what they are doing to veterans. The bill we got back as it relates to Zika takes $500 million from veterans—from the Veterans' Administration. That is what they did. I can't make this stuff up. What was that money to be used for? Processing claims.

The Presiding Officer has been out front on finding a way to speed up veterans' claims. They need to be handled more expeditiously. There was a provision in the original legislation to give them $500 million to speed it up, but now that money will be put toward the Zika bill. It is gone.

Two years ago a ravaging epidemic swept Africa—Ebola. It was terribly hurtful to the people of Africa. People in America were afraid. We had nurses and doctors coming here to be treated because we had better facilities than they have in Africa. Well, it is still around, and they are still putting out fires as we speak. The bill we got back from the House took $107 million from the Ebola funding. Everyone knows that the $543 million they took from ObamaCare to help fund the Zika matter—I could raise a point of order right now and it would go out. No one disputes that.

As Speaker Boehner said—just to demonstrate how crazy they are over there in the House—they couldn't get something passed there unless they did something to take care of the really, really, really rightwing crazies. What did they do? They struck a prohibition on displaying the Confederate flag. They wanted to be able to fly the Confederate flag at military cemeteries. That is the bill we have which also deals with Zika. How can anyone in good conscience vote for that? We can't, and we are not going to. Of course, it sets up the terrible precedent of offsetting emergency spending.

It is July 14, and the Senate is going to take a short, 7-week break. As we heard the Republican leader say: It has all been done. We have done great things here. He scheduled the Senate for a 7-week summer break—vacation, time off, call it whatever you want. It is the longest Senate recess in more than 60 years. We would like stay and work. I would like to work for the people of Nevada and the rest of the American people, but the Republicans don't want to hear any of this. They want to go listen to Donald Trump. Some of them may not be there because they are kind of embarrassed to be seen with him, but they will watch it on TV.

We will be back in September to tie up loose ends and make sure that the government gets funded, but that is about all we have the ability to do now.

As we get ready to adjourn for 7 weeks, let's look at just a few of the things that are being left behind, such as Zika. The Republicans are choosing vacation rather than protecting pregnant women and their babies from these terrible birth defects that can be prevented.

Have we done anything about guns? No, even though the Republican leader said we would have a vote on guns, we are not going to have a vote on guns. The legislation sponsored by the Republican Senator from Maine, joined by a significant number of Democrats—the Republican leader said we would have a vote on that. Why? Well, we thought it would be a good idea to make it so that suspected terrorists can't go out now and legally purchase a gun or explosives. No, we will not have a vote on that.

What about criminal justice reform? Look at what is going on in the country today. Is there a need for justice reform? Of course there is. We have a bipartisan bill that is drowning in the Judiciary Committee. We understand there is only a handful of Republicans who don't support this. Democrats support it. They have refused to address the failings of our criminal justice system despite ample bipartisan support on and off Capitol Hill.

How about the Supreme Court? Republicans still refuse to give Merrick Garland a hearing and vote. Do I need to say more about that? I don't think so.

What about Flint, MI? The whole city was ravaged by lead. Thousands of boys and girls will now never be who they could have been because of lead in their water. There is no relief for them—zero relief. There are 100,000 people who live in that city. They were all adversely affected and poisoned.

What about the opioid epidemic? We passed a bill, which is the first step, but they refused to fund it. They will make due with money they had from before, and now all these additional duties will be given to all of these agencies. We passed the conference report to address opioid addiction, but we don't have the money to do the things we are asking these agencies to do. These are just a few of the things. I guess they are the immediate issues.

What about the other problems the Republicans have ignored for 19 months? How about something for the middle class? How about creating a few jobs? How about building some roads or repairing our very delicate bridges, dams, and our water and sewer systems?

Nothing has been done about the minimum wage, pay equity, student loan debt, job creation—nothing, nothing, nothing. We have crumbling roads and bridges.

What about basic American rights? What has Senator MCCONNELL done or said about ensuring justice for the American people? Nothing.

This is the headline from today's Politico: ''Mitch McConnell's historic judge blockade.'' I didn't write the headline. I will read a couple of paragraphs.

> Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland may be the most prominent casualty of the GOP-controlled Senate's election-year resistance on the Federal judiciary—but the pace of overall judicial confirmations under Mitch McConnell is on track to become the slowest in more than 60 years. Under the McConnell-led Senate, just 20 district and circuit court judges have been confirmed at a time when vacancies are hampering the Federal bench nationwide.

This is nothing to be proud of.

The Republican leader instituted a blockade of judicial nominations. He did it last year. Last year they made history by confirming the fewest judges since the 1950s, but they will do even less this year. Because of their obstruction, judicial emergencies—those courts with more cases than judges can handle—have more than doubled. That means that Americans seeking justice are being denied their constitutional rights. Here is the issue. I have been

there. I spent a lot of time in courts. That is what I did. I was a trial lawyer. I can remember going to both the State and Federal courts, and they said: Sorry, but we are going to do criminal cases for the next few months and not do anything with civil cases. Civil cases are just as important as criminal cases, but because of what the Republicans have done, judges will be forced—because of the law—to take care of the criminal cases and put the civil cases in the back of the bus.

What about voting rights? Senate Republicans have done absolutely nothing—zero—to protect Americans' right to vote. Time and again this Republican Senate has proven itself to be a colossal failure. Yet Senator MCCONNELL has had the nerve to pat himself on the back every day for all he and the Republicans have done in this Congress.

The bipartisan bills that have passed this Congress were blocked by Republicans in past Congresses. That is a fact. I, as the leader here, had to file cloture more than 500 times because of obstruction and filibusters by the Republicans.

Let's be real honest here. Let's do the logic. These bills passed because Democrats have been a constructive minority. We have worked with the Republicans when they were willing to work with us, but there are too many reasons why this Republican Congress has been a flop. First, Republicans made a calculated decision to appease the most radical fringes of their party. Who do they have? They have Donald Trump.

Second, there has been a serious erosion of trust since the Republicans assumed the majority. Promise after promise to the American people has been shattered and broken. Senator MCCONNELL promised to pass a budget every year. We have no budget.

Senator MCCONNELL promised a full Senate workweek. We have worked one Friday in 19 months.

Senator MCCONNELL promised no show votes. Yet today the Republican leader will force unnecessary revotes on Zika, and I am sure he will force a revote on Defense appropriations. This will be the eighth time in this Congress that the Republican leader has resorted to this tactic. It is his signature move. He is the record holder—it is not a good one—on revotes.

Senator MCCONNELL promised an open amendment process. I can remember him coming out here and saying: REID filled the amendment tree. Well, he must have learned from me because he has gotten really good at it. He has filled the amendment tree 16 times. These are all commitments that the Republican leader made to the American people which have not been honored.

There have also been a number of promises made within the Senate that have been broken. Both sides of the aisle have been left waiting for the Republican leader to keep his word—his personal word. This troubles me. I have been in this Congress for 34 years. I don't like to talk about this, but I have experienced his not keeping his word firsthand.

I had a meeting right here regarding a woman by the name of Jessica Rosenworcel. She wanted to be renominated to the Federal Communications Commission. That was in December of 2014. Senator MCCONNELL, Senator THUNE, and I had an agreement that I thought was made in good faith. The agreement was simply this: I would agree to do a Republican. We always did them together. We paired them. They said: No, we have to do this. He worked for the Senator from Arizona. He wanted to make sure that they took good care of the Senator who just left the Senate.

The agreement was that we would confirm Michael O'Rielly to the FCC, but in exchange, as soon as the new year came, they would go with Rosenworcel. That was supposed to happen in the next Congress. O'Rielly was a longtime staffer for Senator Kyl and had also worked for Senator CORNYN.

Jessica is a very talented lawyer who worked for Jay Rockefeller.

It was very unusual to do what I agreed to do, but in good faith I accepted the word of two Republican Senators. We traditionally confirm members on bipartisan boards by pairing nominees—one Democrat and one Republican. I agreed to do this out of the goodness, frankly, of my heart. I have never had the experience where someone simply didn't keep their word, and that is what has happened. I wasn't alone. Somebody who works on the Senate floor—and has for years—was there when that conversation took place.

The Republican leader asked me to make an exception, and I did. I agreed with his personal commitment that when the next Congress convened, Republicans would reconfirm Jessica Rosenworcel. I was promised that. I didn't have to agree to this, but I did it because the Republican leader said he would do his part and get Rosenworcel confirmed. Nineteen months have passed, and the Republican leader has yet to keep his word with me.

We had a big, important spending bill last year. It did a lot, but—no one disputes this—the staff of Senator MCCONNELL made a mistake and didn't put language in dealing with section 48 of the renewable tax credits, and everybody acknowledged that it was too bad. He acknowledged the drafting error and that the staff made a mistake. Republicans committed to correct their drafting error in the next revenue bill that the Senate considered. This has been unfulfilled. We could have done it with the FAA bill, but it will not be done there. He told Leader PELOSI: We are going to do that. I promised REID I would do it. Well, it hasn't been done.

It is a sad Senate when people do not keep their word, but maybe they will address those two issues. A new day will come in September. This is what Democrats and the American people have come to expect from Republicans—promises not kept, commitments not honored, and work not done. ''Integrity'' is a simple word, but here in the U.S. Capitol, it is everything.

I hope it turns around come this fall. If Republicans will stay and work instead of taking this 2-month break, we can do something to address all these issues, including Zika, Merrick Garland, and guns. But that is as much as we can do if they refuse to do their jobs.

Mr. President, I am sorry that Senator MCCONNELL and I have taken so much time, but we do that once in a while.

I ask that the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). Under the previous order, the time until 11:30 a.m. will be equally divided between the leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Nevada.

VA FUNDING

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, I rise to speak today on an issue that Congress has always been able to rally around with bipartisan support. We don't hear that mentioned a lot recently in these Chambers, but something we have always been able to come together on is our Nation's veterans.

As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, advocating on behalf of our Nation's and Nevada's brave heroes has been one of my greatest privileges, but it has also been a challenge, especially in recent years. Whether it is timely appointments for health care, eliminating the disability claims backlog, or addressing poor performance, I am constantly fighting for accountability within the VA.

It has taken years of work on the local level in both northern and southern Nevada to get good leadership in our VA regional office and the Reno and Las Vegas VA hospitals; however, all of that work is in vain if Congress does not provide the VA with the robust funding it needs to deliver high-quality care and benefits in a timely manner.

Under Republican leadership in the Senate, we have been trying to return to regular order and the appropriations process. You would think that for an issue as serious as veterans, the Senate would be able to come together to pass the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations act. Yet my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are continuing to play partisan politics and have rejected this effort.

This important appropriations bill—something we will vote on later this afternoon—includes an increase of funding over the last year, as well as important provisions I have been advocating to help Nevada's veterans. First off, it includes an amendment I filed to ensure completion of the Rural Veterans Burial Initiative so that rural

communities like Elko, NV, have a veterans cemetery that honors our veterans and all of their service.

Second, I secured an amendment to hold the VA accountable for the progress they are making to eliminate the disability claims backlog. As co-chair of the VA Claims Backlog Working Group, I have been fighting to get this backlog to zero.

But I am concerned that the VA isn't feeling the pressure to get that job done. A lot of progress was made, but for 10 months now the VA has been stuck with a 20-percent backlog. I haven't forgotten the commitment the VA made to give veterans a timely answer on their disability claims, which is why my amendment sends a clear message to the VA that Congress is still watching and still expecting results.

It is not just my amendments that are important to this bill. It is the funding that will help those who have sacrificed the most—our veterans and their families. When I sat down with veterans and the military community at roundtables in both northern and southern Nevada just a few months ago, I was struck by how far we really have to go.

Thousands of veterans are suffering from post-traumatic stress and struggling to find the care they need. Post-traumatic stress not only impacts veterans, but it impacts their family members who aren't always sure just how to get the help they need. Some of them fall into homelessness and don't know where to turn and, frankly, they just don't trust the VA. At its worst, we have more than 20 veterans committing suicide every day. Let me repeat that. We have more than 20 veterans committing suicide every day—20 a day.

I had a Nevada veteran's wife tell me how she had to jump through hoops just to get her husband a cardiology appointment through the Choice Act. It took her 3 months—3 months—to get that appointment. She said to me how she would never give up fighting for her husband's health. I continue to see how veterans come to my office for help with getting an appointment or moving their disability claims along.

We cannot expect the VA to solve these problems without funding. So I continue to urge my colleagues to pass the conference report today for VA appropriations so we can fix these problems. While funding can go a long way to providing resources for veterans, we cannot forget that the VA still struggles with accountability.

There are plenty of high-quality VA employees working every day to help our veterans, and many of those employees are in the State of Nevada. These are the ones that cared for my father at the Reno hospital, and I give the VA credit for his health today.

But then there are those employees who are gaming the system and have forgotten that the VA's mission is to serve the interest of veterans and their families and no one else. Yet the VA can't even fire these people because the Department of Justice says it is ''unconstitutional.'' So think about that. There is nothing more disappointing to me than the Department of Justice preventing these VA employees from being fired or demoted after poor performance. Instead of siding with veterans, the Department of Justice sides with the bureaucrats who don't belong at the VA. I think it is an insult—an insult to veterans and an insult to the American public.

I know that Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman ISAKSON and other committee members share my concern about this, including the Presiding Officer. Rather than ignoring this issue and Congress's intent, it is time for the Department of Justice to step up and step forward to talk to Congress about what can be done to ensure that bad VA employees are quickly removed.

Accountability has to be a priority of the VA. Secretary McDonald understands this, just as funding for the VA should be a priority for the Senate. Again, I call on my colleagues to move the appropriations bill forward so that we can keep our commitment to veterans and we can fix the long list of issues that plague our VA.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

REMEMBERING BILL ARMSTRONG

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, on July 5, the United States lost a great public servant, and Colorado lost one of its fiercest advocates. Bill Armstrong's contributions to Colorado and the country embody the virtues of integrity, devotion, and kindness and reflect his priorities of liberty, faith, and family. His mark on this world will never be forgotten.

Over the course of his life, Senator Bill Armstrong was known for many of his achievements and titles: U.S. Senator, U.S. Congressman, youngest majority leader in the State legislature, and, most recently, being elected president of Colorado Christian University, just to name a few.

But what has been reinforced to me over the last number of days since his passing were not the titles he held or the bills and the amendments he passed through committee or the Senate, but the way in which he carried himself, the respect he gave his staff, his family, and his constituents. He was a thoughtful, peaceful, graceful individual, and he always interacted with those values in mind.

It is the stories about how he treated his staff and how he listened to his constituents that stand out in our minds. Today, as we reflect on the impact he had on this country, it is the stories about the lasting effect his words had on impressionable young minds at Colorado Christian University and the relationships he built with Democrats and Republicans alike, despite the frequent bitter and partisan fights that riddled Congress while he served. He once described himself as ''relatively inflexible on principles, but flexible on the details,'' never confusing the two when working toward meaningful solutions that required compromise, always listening, ever respectful of those he may have disagreed with.

While I never worked for Senator Armstrong, a number of my closest friends, advisers, and so many of the elected officials in Colorado are a part of the Armstrong legacy and alumni of his great work. The stories they shared with me about their time with Bill Armstrong are incredible.

Sean Conway, a former staffer for Bill Armstrong, now a county commissioner in Colorado, talks about the time that Senator Bill Armstrong went to meet with the refuseniks, as they came to be known—Jewish people living in the Soviet Union who were being persecuted for their views and wanted to leave the Soviet Union for a better life. He went there without contacting his staff, without letting them know how he was or where he was, because he was afraid that the KGB would find out the work that he was doing and the harm that it could cause the people he was meeting with and perhaps even to the staff back home. But he knew he had to bring that message of what was happening with the persecution in the Soviet Union back to his colleagues in the Senate to make sure they understood so they could put an end to the tragedy that was happening in the Soviet Union.

His staff remember Bill Armstrong fondly—a number of whom got married as a result of having met while working for him. One former staff member, Roy Palmer, recounted this: ''Bill Armstrong was one of the brightest and most successful persons I've ever met. Yet he didn't have a college degree . . . He spent his life improving his education; reading, studying, debating . . . with a discipline I've never seen before. But he was reluctant to divulge the fact that he didn't have a degree not because he was embarrassed by it, or ashamed about it. Rather he thought it might set a bad example for young people to abandon their education. I think he knew God gave him a special gift of intellect, discipline and drive . . . but he was also extremely aware, compassionate and tolerant of others around him who didn't have the same gift. As he became more successful and older he also became more humble.''

And while there are likely hundreds of other stories about how Bill Armstrong embodied true Christian virtues, lived out the words he spoke, and touched people's lives on a very personal level, the work he did in Congress simply cannot go unnoticed. As one former staffer said, ''Bill Armstrong should be known as the Father of Tax Indexing.'' And no doubt, every taxpayer should thank him for his work on tax indexing because without it, many Americans would be forced to go into a higher tax bracket because of inflation. He fought for it because he believed that just because someone got a

well-deserved cost of living adjustment—or COLA—increase they shouldn't have to pay more taxes because of it.

Bill Armstrong was also instrumental in the passage of the Colorado National Forest Wilderness Act of 1980 that helped preserve 1,400,000 acres of land in Colorado. The lands, which stretch across the entire State, are areas visitors and Coloradans alike enjoy each and every day.

We can all only hope that when we pass on from this life it is first, not the memories others hold of our earthly accomplishments, but what God knows in our hearts to bring us truly home, and then to know we are remembered for the good we have done in this world. Long after our crowning achievements in Congress have faded away from memory, we can all only hope that we are remembered for who we were and the things we did to help lift others up and help them find their purpose in life. As evidenced by the tributes and statements made over the last week since his passing, Bill is known for just that. He lived out the Christian faith he taught. He led hundreds of prayer breakfasts and served on the board of Campus Crusade for Christ and Christian Businessmen's Committee USA. But perhaps more importantly, he was a mentor—as evidenced by the countless stories of students whose lives were changed just because of thoughtful words from Bill Armstrong.

A staff assistant in my office wrote an email to me after his passing describing his ''life-changing conversations'' with Bill Armstrong—part of which I'd like to read: ''The first time I met President Armstrong was before I started attending CCU. I asked to meet with him for five minutes, but true to Armstrong form, he took an hour out of his day to talk about the school and shared why it might be a good fit. After I was convinced and started at CCU, a year later I got to have lunch with him to discuss my interest in economics; he told me to pursue that passion at George Mason for graduate school—his words from that conversation are the reason I'm in D.C. . . . President Armstrong's legacy is bound up in the life he led, walking the walk, adhering to principles and a devotion to serving others.''

Alan Simpson, on the day that Senator Armstrong was giving his farewell speech, said: You have heard the saying that you would rather see a sermon than hear a sermon. Alan Simpson and all of us got to see that every day in Bill Armstrong.

On the day Senator Armstrong came to the Senate floor to say farewell, he was joined by others, including our colleagues and many others. He left the Senate in his farewell speech to colleagues, and from my understanding in conversations with his family, he left this life hearing these words from the Scriptures read by his family, from the last verse of the last book of the Holy Scriptures: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

As Senator Armstrong walked off the floor of the Senate, he served his fellow man over the last 10 years at Colorado Christian University. He served in the House, in the Senate, and in the Colorado Legislature. He has now walked into a far better place, where we all hope to join him some day.

I yield to my colleague from Colorado.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, it is indeed a privilege to be here with my colleague Senator GARDNER as we recognize the life of a dedicated Coloradan, former Senator Bill Armstrong.

Last week, Senator Armstrong passed away after a 5-year battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Ellen, daughter Anne, and son Will.

He was an accomplished businessman, a longtime public servant, a dedicated educator, and, most importantly, a husband, father, and grandfather. He held strong principles and beliefs that he conveyed with eloquence and clarity. No one ever could question Senator Armstrong's devotion to Colorado or to his students.

As a young entrepreneur, Senator Armstrong bought his first radio station at the age of 22 and began a long and successful business career. Over the course of his life, he owned or operated more than a dozen businesses, including radio station KEZW in Denver, Ambassador Media Corp, and the Sun newspaper in Colorado Springs. He also served as chairman of Oppenheimer Funds in Denver.

Much of Senator Armstrong's adult life was driven by service, which began when he joined the U.S. Army National Guard, where he served from 1957 to 1963. Following his military service, he began his almost three decades in public service. He was a member of both the Colorado House and Senate and served, as Senator GARDNER said, as Senate majority leader before being elected to Congress in 1972.

After three terms in the House of Representatives, he was elected to the Senate in 1978. Senator Armstrong brought to this Chamber real world experience, which is often in short supply; a business acumen, which is also often in shorter supply; and a deep belief in the potential of those he served in Colorado.

His business background and his knowledge of economic issues earned him spots on the Banking, Budget, and Finance Committees. Throughout his time in the Senate, Senator Armstrong brought important attention to the deficit and budgetary issues. He was a founding member of the Senate Deficit Reduction Caucus. He ultimately chaired the Finance Subcommittee on Social Security, and President Reagan selected him to serve on the National Commission on Social Security Reform. This commission was not like those we see around here these days. It actually produced meaningful proposals and extended the longevity of the Social Security Program for decades and served as a model of how Congress can work together to tackle difficult and complicated issues.

While Senator Armstrong was deeply conservative, he often found ways to forge bipartisan compromise. His service on the commission was emblematic of this approach, and it is an approach that is sorely lacking in Washington today.

Senator Armstrong was also a strong advocate for our military and the men and women in uniform. He fought to honor those who served in the Korean war and to create a permanent GI bill. He recognized the importance of providing access to postsecondary education, a passion he continued to pursue long after he left this Chamber.

He pushed increased pay for our servicemembers, especially to ensure that military families had sufficient economic support. In an opinion piece in the New York Times, he wrote: ''With the G.I. Bill to boost recruiting and pay increases to ease the retention problem, the all voluntary military forces can be preserved and we can end the disgraceful treatment of Americans in military uniform.'' His impassioned advocacy led the Army Times to call Armstrong ''the military pay champion'' of the Senate.

As a Western State Senator, he, of course, worked on wilderness and conservation issues that are so important to our State, including the Colorado National Forest Wilderness Act of 1980. Because of his integrity and work ethic, his colleagues asked him to serve as chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee for 6 years.

President Reagan once referred to Senator Armstrong as ''one of the strongest voices in the United States Senate.''

President Bush called him ''one of the finest men . . . in Washington'' and ''one of the best and brightest.'' The best testaments to Senator Armstrong came from his own colleagues in the Senate:

Former Senator Dole described him as having ''been widely recognized as one of the most gifted and persuasive speakers.''

Senator HATCH said ''Senator Armstrong has been one of the most eloquent advocates in the Senate for his point of view.''

Senator COCHRAN said: ''I do not know of anyone in this body who is more respected for his integrity and ability than is Bill Armstrong.''

Finally, former Senator Wirth, my predecessor and his fellow Senator from Colorado, said the following:

> I do not think any individual has expressed his own views more articulately than has Bill Armstrong, nor has anybody pursued them more passionately than he has.
>
> I have enormous respect for that passion, Mr. President. It is precisely that sense of indignation that sometimes Bill Armstrong shows on various issues. It is the kind of indignation that drives this institution, and should.

That is quoting Tim Wirth.

Like many of his predecessors and successors from Western States, the pace and discourse of the Senate was often confounding and frustrating, but he believed it to be ''the greatest legislative body in the world.'' He appreciated the role the institution plays in our country and felt it was an honor to serve here. But, more than just the institution, he loved his fellow Members. He loved the people of the Senate. He called them a family, brought together by ''shared experiences and ideals and great love of our country and aspirations for the future.''

His respect and appreciation for the Senate, for the work we do here, and for the people here showed in his approach to the job. As Senator Wilson noted, ''in his zeal as an advocate he has been respectful of those who oppose him.'' More than that, he was, Senator Wilson believed, ''generous in terms of his own personal conduct, even in heated debate.''

The Durango Herald called Senator Armstrong ''civil and patient in interacting with fellow members of Congress,'' and the Denver Post recognized Senator Armstrong's ''statesmanship.'' These are words and descriptions we don't often hear around this Chamber much anymore.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have these editorials printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the DenverPost.com, July 7, 2016]

BILL ARMSTRONG'S CONSERVATISM ALLOWED ROOM FOR BIPARTISANSHIP

(By the Denver Post Editorial Board)

Bill Armstrong was a man of strong convictions. No one who knew the former U.S. senator, who died this week at 79, would quarrel with that statement, or with the fact that his beliefs were both deeply conservative and religious.

And yet Armstrong's most memorable accomplishment during his 12 years in the Senate was almost certainly his service in 1983 on the National Commission on Social Security Reform, which recommended a bipartisan package of reforms that Congress would ultimately enact. The deal involved sacrifice on both ends of the political spectrum, including higher payroll taxes, more benefits subject to taxation, a hike in the retirement age, and a delay in the cost-of-living adjustment.

The settlement didn't fully resolve Social Security's long-term funding woes, but it was a milestone compromise nevertheless. And it remains instructive, since a similar deal is unthinkable, unfortunately, in today's political environment.

In today's Washington, a firebrand conservative as dedicated to small government and low taxes as Armstrong was would surely spurn such a commission as unworthy of his time—if not an insult to his principles. But not only did Armstrong participate, he became the panel's conservative conscience in terms of insisting that any entitlement fix not rely solely on additional payroll taxes. And his efforts paid off in extracting concessions from Democrats even as he reluctantly accepted more taxes.

Such statesmanship on major issues is sorely lacking in today's Congress—and yet the need to address entitlements' mounting long-term liabilities, as well as complex issues like immigration, has seldom been greater. Fortunately, such stalemate is nowhere ordained as inevitable. Armstrong's example on the 1983 commission provides reason for hope even in today's divisive political culture.

This newspaper did not always share the former senator's political agenda—his vocal opposition to gay rights, for example, was especially regrettable. But even those who disagreed with him on major issues had to admire the eloquence and civility with which he often framed his case. And meanwhile, his signature concerns about the impact of spending and taxes on average Americas led to significant achievements, such as the indexing of the income tax—a reform that loomed much larger when the memory of the 1970s' high inflation was still fresh.

Armstrong left the Senate on his own terms while still in his 50s, an age when many career politicians are just hitting their stride. And he would go on, years later, to put his stamp on Colorado Christian University, spearheading ambitious redevelopment plans to expand and update the campus with state-of-the-art educational facilities. That he would contemplate such a grand goal in his 70s surprised no one who knew him well. Colorado has lost a giant in its political and civic life.

[From DurangoHerald.com, July 10, 2016]

FORMER U.S. SEN. BILL ARMSTRONG REMEMBERED FOR APPROACHABILITY, CIVILITY

At a time when everyone is speculating as to how Congress became so dysfunctional, with both parties refusing to communicate and to compromise on almost every issue, we can remember political figures in years past when that was not the case. Bill Armstrong, who served two terms in the U.S. Senate beginning in 1978 and who maintained deep fiscal and social principles, was someone who was civil and patient in interacting with fellow members of Congress and his constituents and in advocating for what he believed. We remember Armstrong during his visits to Southwest Colorado as being approachable and a listener.

Armstrong died last week at 79.

Armstrong was unusual in attending but not graduating from college, and he grew up and had his first business successes in Nebraska before moving to Colorado. He was skilled at owning and operating radio stations in that state initially, and then radio and television stations in Colorado.

Nor did Armstrong make a career out of politics. After retiring from the Senate in January 1991, he left Washington, and he eventually became president of Colorado Christian University in Denver.

Armstrong is best known for his fiscal discipline, and on the social front for opposing gay rights initiatives. In the latter, he was out of tune with the country and what was right. He challenged President Ronald Reagan's proposed 1981 budget as too generous in future years, and succeeding in having it reduced. In 1983 he was a member of a bipartisan entitlement review commission that advocated higher Social Security taxes for individuals and employers, reduced benefits and a higher age eligibility, all in order to put Social Security on stronger financial footing. Two of the three were adopted (the higher age eligibility failed).

Democrats were a part of the commission and needed to pass the legislation, and Armstrong had both the political respect and skills to help bring them on board.

(Thirty-three years later, Social Security still requires more of the same adjustments, and it was Republican plans in that direction that have played a role in Donald Trump's rise in popularity.)

Sen. Bill Armstrong's demeanor and his willingness to join with members of the other party to craft legislation for the country's benefit is a reminder of what used to take place in Congress. That is something that does not occur today.

Mr. BENNET. Senator Armstrong once described himself as ''relatively inflexible on principles'' but ''flexible on the details.'' A former high school debater, he always spoke with passion and knowledge in an attempt to sway people his way. But when it came time to get the job done, he understood how to make a deal.

Senator Armstrong had a fiercely passionate, strongly principled yet pragmatic, respectful, and constructive approach to his work. We could use a lot more of that around here.

Later in life, Senator Armstrong decided to give back to his country and community in a different way—by serving as president of Colorado Christian University. He called his work at the university ''the most significant, energizing, and rewarding work I have ever undertaken.'' He had a vision for the college and for his students, and he devoted all his energy to their success.

Under his leadership, Colorado Christian University has flourished. Enrollment more than doubled and freshman retention increased. The school has been ranked in the top 2 percent nationally for its core education and was named a ''college of distinction.'' The university's endowment has almost doubled. The school has begun substantial redevelopment plans to expand and update the campus. He cared deeply for his students and will be greatly missed by the CCU community.

In fact, I recently asked Senator Armstrong for his input and perspective as part of a task force on higher education. I knew I could count on him to provide thoughtful advice on how to improve our system of higher education. He was glad to assist in our efforts.

Senator Armstrong had a deep respect for democracy and our country's future. He represented a time when Members of Congress held true to their convictions but knew when to forge compromise for the greater good. His is a legacy that will benefit Americans for generations to come. His example will be missed and cherished by those of us who still serve in the Senate.

There is one last point. None of us is going to be here forever, and we should keep that in mind. I think Senator Armstrong understood that. He was committed to stewardship when he was here in the Senate, and that is an example we should all follow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with my colleagues for 20 minutes, with the remaining time reserved for Senator MCCAIN.

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

DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mrs. ERNST. Thank you, Mr. President.

I would like to thank my colleagues here today who are joining in this colloquy. We have the junior Senators from Alaska and Montana, and we hoped to be joined by the junior Senator from North Carolina as well.

As I stand here today, my brothers and sisters in arms are deployed overseas. Regardless of what the President tells us, our servicemembers are at war. They are in combat, and their combat boots are on the ground.

I think our colleagues across the aisle have forgotten that as they continue to filibuster our Defense appropriations bill. We have men and women serving overseas. They are serving for us overseas. They also seem to have forgotten that all of those servicemembers are paying attention. I know because I was once one of those servicemembers deployed overseas, paying attention to the actions of the folks here in Washington.

Right now our servicemembers are watching the minority leader, and our enemies are watching just as closely.

This bill appropriates $515.9 billion for our national security, and $900 million of this funding is for the National Guard, a critical arm to the security of the United States, where I served for 23-plus years.

My National Guard unit is in the Middle East right now. My Iowa Army National Guard unit, the unit that I commanded as a battalion commander, is serving in the Middle East right now.

The minority leader doesn't care about their safety while they selflessly serve to ensure ours. He doesn't care that this bill has funding for equipment critical to their mission. He doesn't care that their families are depending on them to come home safely, and he doesn't care that his actions once again make America look weak. The minority party is filibustering this bipartisan Defense appropriations bill solely at the expense of our men and women in uniform. Those are the facts on the ground today.

I know the importance of this bill firsthand, and I stand here today ready to vote in favor of it, and I know my colleagues understand that as well.

Once again, I want to thank the Members that are joining us in this colloquy today: the junior Senators from Alaska, Montana, and North Carolina. I know this is a very important issue to all of us.

With that, I would like to turn to the junior Senator from Alaska, who also is a fellow in arms, Lt. Col. DAN SULLIVAN, U.S. Marine Corps, to hear his comments.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Iowa who has distinguished military service and just retired. We are honored that she is leading this colloquy today.

I am honored to be here with some of my colleagues. Our freshman class sees this as a critical issue, and many of us have been on the floor all week to stress the importance of what Senator ERNST just spoke about—funding our troops and stopping this filibuster that denies our troops funding.

Although we have been out here all week, I am not sure I have seen any of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle coming to the floor to try to explain to the American people why they have filibustered funding for our troops not once, not twice, not three times but four times in the last year. Hopefully, they will not do it again today for the fifth time.

It has been a good week for the Senate. We passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, which was bipartisan. Senator WHITEHOUSE, Senator PORTMAN, and Senator AYOTTE led that. We passed the FAA authorization, led by Senator THUNE and Senator NELSON, which will protect the American people in the aviation space.

But we have more important work today on defense issues and on national security issues, and much of it is dealing with supporting our troops. This is not a partisan issue. They need the support.

This past week, the President and Secretary of Defense have made many more commitments with regard to our troops, with 8,400 troops in Afghanistan, 560 additional troops in Iraq, 1,000 additional troops in Poland and a battalion headquarters, and two carrier battle groups in the South China Sea. They are protecting us, they are supporting us, and we should be doing the same. It is that simple.

Along with my colleagues, I find it amazing, remarkable, and, to be quite honest, I find it sad that the minority leader is encouraging a filibuster of the Defense appropriations bill again for the fifth time in a year.

I think my colleagues on the other side of the aisle should reject this approach. They are going to have the opportunity in the next hour to come down here and actually vote to fund our troops, and I guarantee that regardless of what State they are from, regardless of what political party they represent, the American people in every State of the United States support funding our troops and dropping this ridiculous filibuster against the men and women in uniform who are out there right now protecting us.

I call on all of my colleagues to do the right thing by our troops and by the American people and to vote today to fund our troops.

All of my colleagues have been very focused on this, but no more so than my colleagues from Iowa, North Carolina, and Montana. All of us have significant military populations and experience.

I yield the floor to my colleague from Montana, Senator DAINES, to further discuss this important issue.

Mr. DAINES. I thank Senator SULLIVAN.

What an honor to stand here today next to two lieutenant colonels—Lieutenant Colonel ERNST and Lieutenant Colonel SULLIVAN.

Lieutenant Colonel ERNST was the first woman to ever serve in combat and also serve in the U.S. Senate. I am truly grateful for their service.

I thank them also for organizing this colloquy and bringing us together. The leadership they provide as Members who have worn and do wear the uniform of the U.S. military and also serve in the Senate is critical in this most perilous time for our Nation as we face the many threats around the world—and to think that the Senate is going to recess tonight for an extended summer recess and leaving the very important unfinished business of funding the U.S. military and our troops.

Today the Senate Democrats are expected to once again block the consideration of the Defense Appropriations Act of 2017, denying our troops proper funding and support they deserve. What kind of message does that send to the men and women who are today putting their lives at risk to protect our country? What message does that send to them?

As Senator SULLIVAN said, and Senator ERNST, this is not the first time. It is not the second time. It is not the third time. It is not the fourth time. It is the fifth time we will see our friends across the aisle, Senate Democrats, filibuster the funding of our troops. This reminds me of ''Goundhog Day.''

What is even more frustrating, the Senate Democrats are refusing to even debate the issue. I spent 28 years in the private sector. I will tell you, one way to assure you don't get anything done is to not even discuss it. That seems to be the road the Senate Democrats are taking. It is the low road, not the high road.

They would prefer to once again obstruct what we call regular order in this body, much in the same fashion they did during the past few years, which became the hallmark of a failed Democratic-led Senate majority. While our troops are actively engaged in multiple theaters across the world, and they need the critical support for our growing mission overseas, my friends from across the aisle are actively blocking our troops from being combat-ready.

Let's remember—just remember this: A few short weeks ago, the House of Representatives passed this bill on a solid bipartisan vote, 282 to 138—48 Democrats supported that bill. It passed with strong bipartisan support. Then, over here on the Senate side—I serve on the Appropriations Committee. We passed this bill out of the Appropriations Committee by a vote of 30 to 0—30 to 0. That is called a shutout, that is called running up the score.

I remember that clearly. Not one Democrat opposed this bill to fund our troops when it passed out of committee. Yet, when it comes to the floor, the Senate minority leader now is instructing the Senate Democrats to filibuster getting the bill even debated

here as well as passed on the Senate floor. What has changed? What has changed? Nothing has changed, except for the fact that our troops are not getting the funding and support they need. Is that what you really want, Mr. Minority Leader?

The passage of this legislation is critical to carrying out the missions in an increasingly dangerous world. I can tell you one thing: Our enemies are not waiting for Senate Democrats to fund our troops and make it a fair fight. This bill pays the salaries of 1.2 million military Active Duty, 800,000 Reservists. The Senate Democrats are saying no to almost 10,000 troops engaged, right now as we speak, in combat in Afghanistan, an additional 5,000 troops in harm's way in Iraq, and many more throughout the globe.

I come from Montana. We have one of the highest per capita vet populations in the United States. I am proud of the Malmstrom Air Force Base. We have one-third of our Nation's ICBMs ready at any moment here to defend our freedom. They silently sit across the plains of Montana. Senate Democrats are failing them. It is unacceptable.

As the Senate heads home for the work period, I challenge my Democratic colleagues to go back home and look at those veterans and those Active-Duty troops in the eyes and ask: Did I serve these selfless men and woman or did I let the minority leader of the Democrats play cheap party politics with funding their pay? The minority leader's constituents in Nevada deserve more, Montanans deserve more, and the American people deserve more.

I want to now recognize the junior Senator from North Carolina THOM TILLIS, who has an amazing group of Active military and veterans there in North Carolina. I am proud to stand here with Senator TILLIS. I look forward to what Senator TILLIS has to say.

Mr. TILLIS. I thank Senator DAINES for all the work he does in supporting our troops, and Lieutenant Colonels SULLIVAN and ERNST, I thank them for their service to the Nation—their continued service. I thank Senator SULLIVAN for continuing to pound on this. It is important.

Yesterday, or earlier this week, I talked about how this is approaching personal with me. I am going to try and not get as loud as I got a couple of days ago, but I want to talk about what this means. I want to talk about the process, an appropriations process where all 30 members of the Appropriations Committee, including 14 Democrats, voted for this bill.

What we are trying to do now is have the broader membership vote for it and send it out of the Chamber. All Democrats—and I would not be surprised, if you went on their social media presences or if you took a look at press releases, that they rightfully announced to their constituents how they voted to support a bipartisan appropriations bill coming out of committee.

Now, I want them to follow up with a press statement that says HARRY REID tells me I have to vote no now. I have to say no to troops. I am not going to support providing critical funding for training and readiness and overseas contingency operations. I don't know about you all—in the Gallery or people watching on C–SPAN—I don't feel particularly comfortable with the situation around the globe. I don't like what Russia is doing.

So we have to put resources in portions of Europe to make sure we can counter the potential threat there. I don't like what China is doing in the South China Sea. So we are having to pay more attention to that and have resources looking at it to protect that region. I generally don't like what Iran is doing. I mean, they have welched on commitments they made in the Iran nuclear deal. They are funding Hezbollah and Hamas and the Iran terror network across the world, including this hemisphere. I don't like what is going on in Syria. I think Iraq has problems, much of it created as a result of the President's withdrawal. Well, good news. He recognizes that maybe we need to increase our presence there. How are we going to pay for those extra 564 soldiers that are going to secure the airstrip that was won over by the Iraqi forces? Where does it come from?

That is a commitment he has made so it is going to come from somewhere else. It is certainly not going to come from the increased funding we are trying to get through this appropriations bill. I don't know about you all, but I believe the generals and the intelligence community that come before our committee and say we are in some of the most dangerous times in their lives. The threats are everywhere. America has to lead because when America doesn't lead, the world is a less safe place. America leads. The tip of the spear is our armed services, our presence across the globe to protect the freedom of other nations and to protect our own freedom. Failing to vote for this bill is failing to make sure they are trained, equipped, and capable of defending freedom.

I want to talk about the personal side of things for the folks down at Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune and Seymour Johnson and New River and Cherry Point—marines, airmen, people in the 82nd Airborne, the 18th Airborne Corps, and the conversations I bet they are having with their husbands or wives.

When they come home from training and they hear the commanders down at Fort Bragg say: We are just not getting enough repetition in. We are trying to teach these men and women how to jump out of planes in hostile situations with 100 pounds of equipment connected to them and do that safely.

I don't know about many people, but I don't think I would want to do that if I weren't trained and ready and had the muscle memory to make sure I was going to do that safely. The Global Response Force down at Fort Bragg takes it to another level. They not only have to drop 1,000 or so men and women out of planes, they also have to drop entire cities out of planes: earth movers, weather stations, medical hospitals, all the things you need to provide relief in the event of a disaster or that you need to support a combat operation. We are sapping the resources to be able to do that.

So here is how the discussion, I think, goes with the men or women who go home before they get deployed:

Honey, I am about to be deployed somewhere.

Maybe it is Iraq, maybe it is Afghanistan, some other part of the world.

I am a little bit nervous because I only got about 80 percent of the training I really needed, that the Army or the Air Force or the Marines deem necessary for me to be able to do that job safely and be certain I can complete the mission. I am sorry, Hon, I have sworn to defend this country. So I am going to do it, but I know I am not at the level of training and capability I should be.

Then they say goodbye and that spouse, hopefully, sees that person come home again. So, you know, guys, politics is an interesting thing. Debate is an interesting thing. We have heard the theater on the floor today that has nothing to do with the vote we have before us. We have heard global warming. We have heard all of these other things. What we have not heard is from the Democrats who voted for this precise bill.

Some people lead you to believe it has changed since they voted for it. It has not changed. It is precisely the same bill, but they have a minority leader who says: Don't vote for it. Play my game. Let us then come down here and say: Do your job.

We are doing our job right now. JONI ERNST is doing her job. DAN SULLIVAN is doing his job. STEVE DAINES is doing his job. I am doing my job by saying: You guys went into a committee and you voted for this bill. You went home and told everybody you are supporting our troops. Now you have a minority leader who is telling you: Don't do your job and let's go on the floor and pretend those of us who want to support our troops are not doing our job.

It is disingenuous, at best, and it is dishonest, at worst. My colleagues here, we need to pound this issue. I need to go home and be able to tell the story and say: We support you, Fort Bragg. We support you. We are going to do everything we can to get this bill passed.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry: How much time is remaining on the Republican side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is a total of 6 minutes remaining on the Republican side. Senator ERNST has 1 minute left in her colloquy.

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I yield back my time.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I reserve the remainder of my time until just before the vote at 11:30.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask unanimous consent that my time be preserved for the remaining 7 minutes before the vote.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. 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. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator PERDUE be recognized for 5 minutes and that it not be taken from my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I appreciate the accommodation.

I would like to add to what has been said here in the last few minutes.

We are at a very critical juncture during this Congress and, indeed, in our country. What I want to talk about today is the nonsense that is going on right now on funding our military. These are men and women in uniform around the world whose mission it is to protect our freedom.

Let me remind everybody that there were only six reasons why the Thirteen Colonies got together in the first place to create this Union. One of those was to provide for the national defense. Yet here we are basically trying to do what the President has asked—fund the military—and we are being obstructed by the people across the aisle. I just don't understand that.

Right now, we have people who are in danger of not being able to fulfill their missions around the world. A member of the Foreign Relations Committee, I have traveled extensively over the last 1½ years. Around the world, I have seen where dedicated men and women don't have the resources to fulfill their missions, and it endangers the very freedom we have here at home.

I believe this is a critical point in this Congress to tell the American people that we are either going to break through this gridlock and move to do what is right or we are going to sit here on our hands and argue the political side of this while our men and women are in danger.

One of the hardest things to understand right now is the fact that in the last 30 years, we literally have continued to disinvest in our military. This chart shows how we have disinvested in the military under the last three Democratic Presidents. This green line is a chart of the percentage of GDP we spend on our military. It has gotten down all the way to where today we are spending 3 percent of our GDP. It is the lowest point in the last 30 years. I will say this: The 30-year average here is about 4.2 percent. That differential is 100 basis points. What that means is, in the size of the economy today, it is about $200 billion. Put that in perspective. We are spending about $600 billion on our military today. Can you imagine what a difference that would make?

The last time a Secretary of Defense put a budget up based on a bottom-up estimate of need based on the missions around the world—it was Secretary Gates in 2011. In 2011, he estimated that for 2016 and 2017—what we are talking about here in their budget—his estimate was some tens of billions of dollars more than what we are doing now. His estimate was prior to ISIS and prior to Russia's activity in Crimea, Ukraine, and Georgia.

What happens now is that in the next 10 years, unless something is done—under the current Presidential plan of spending for the next 10 years, not only are we going to add $9.5 trillion to our debt, but we are going to reduce military spending to 2.6 percent of GDP. That is another roughly $100 billion of cuts if the economy stays the same.

I just don't understand this brinksmanship that we see. This is not the first time; I think this is the fifth time we are going to have voted on funding our military. The reaction of the other side befuddles me from the standpoint that they tell us they want to support our men and women. They give us these heart-wrenching stories, and yet they won't stand up and even let us get the bill on the floor.

To be brief, it is time for the Democrats to stop the obstructionism and the political showmanship. This is about the security of our country, about the lives of our men and women abroad. They deserve better than this. We can do better than this.

The world is more dangerous than at any time in my lifetime. It is time that we stand up and tell the world what we are committed to, and that is to provide for our own national defense. That means funding this Defense appropriations bill.

Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. 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. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask to be recognized, and if the Senator from New Hampshire, Mrs. SHAHEEN, comes to the floor, I would yield to her until the time that I already have reserved.

Mr. President, we are about to vote on a couple of motions to instruct the conferees on the Defense authorization bill and the Defense appropriations bill to move forward on it. All of these votes are very vital to the future of this Nation in a time of turmoil, a time of the greatest number of refugees since the end of World War II, threats throughout the world, and attacks on the United States of America.

Very appropriately, Senator SULLIVAN's motion to instruct the conferees is for us to account for and authorize funding for the recent actions taken by the President of the United States and the Secretary of Defense—a force of 8,400 sailors, airmen, and marines within Afghanistan; the President's budget for the European Reassurance Initiative, which is additional funds sufficient to enable the air, ground, and amphibious force structure to fulfill the commitment that Secretary Carter made at the Shangri-La dialogue within the Pacific theater. The list goes on and on.

Every time we turn around, we hear of another increase in our military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and buildups, for example, in Eastern Europe, which was recently decided at a meeting of the NATO nations. Yet, with all of these promises and commitments, we see no request for additional funding to take care of these new missions and new requirements for our military activities. So I think Senator SULLIVAN's motion is entirely in order.

Does it really make sense to have these very large, when you put them all together—billions of dollars of increased requirements, announce them with great fanfare, and yet never come over—not yet once—to request additional funding for them? That is obviously, at best, disingenuous.

So I urge my colleagues' support for the motion by Senator SULLIVAN to disagree and insist that the final conference include authorization for the commitments that are described in the motion.

The second, of course, is an issue that has been plaguing us or has been the subject of great discussion and debate and heartache, frankly, on the floor of the Senate, and that is the issue of the Afghan special immigrant visas.

It is heartbreaking that Members of the Senate, for their own parochial interests—just a couple, actually—would block this legislation, which calls for us to be able to bring to the United States these people who literally risked their lives on our behalf and whose lives are in danger as we speak.

My colleagues don't have to take my word for it. Ambassador Ryan Crocker—probably the most distinguished diplomat I know—speaking of these interpreters, recently wrote: ''This is truly a matter of life and death.''

I repeat what Ambassador Crocker said:

> This is a matter of life and death. I know hundreds of people who have been threatened because of their affiliation with the United States. Some have been killed. Today, many are in hiding, praying that the United States keeps its word. We can and must do better.

General Petraeus said:

Many of our Afghan allies have not only been mission-essential—serving as the eyes and ears of our own troops and often saving American lives—they have risked their own and their families' lives in the line of duty.

General Petraeus has stated eloquently that these individuals put their lives on the line to save the lives of American service men and women, and yet we have Members of this body who block a proposal to allow them to come to the United States of America. Remarkable. Remarkable.

General Nicholson, our commander in Afghanistan, said:

It is my firm belief that abandoning this program would significantly undermine our credibility and the 15 years of tremendous sacrifice by thousands of Afghans on behalf of Americans and Coalition partners.

I say to my colleagues, this is pretty straightforward. This is a pretty straightforward issue. That we even have to do this is testimony to the nature of the way we seem to be doing business around here, and that is that people would literally put the lives of our allies in danger for their own parochial interests, for their own amendment, which they are demanding not only be taken up but passed, which has nothing to do with the lives of these great individuals who saved the lives of Americans and whose lives are in danger, according to our military leaders and our most respected diplomats.

Retired GEN Stanley McChrystal, an individual known to all of us, said: ''Protecting these allies is as much a matter of American national morality as it is American national security.''

In the view of General McChrystal, one of our great, outstanding leaders, we are talking about our moral obligation.

I hope and pray we will get a unanimous vote on this motion to instruct.

Finally, we are going to again have a vote to move forward on the Defense appropriations bill. I understand that it probably will fail, and that is an unbelievable act. It is unbelievable, given the situation in the world today and the threats we face—in the words of the Director of National Intelligence, in the words of the Director of the CIA, there will be further attacks on the United States of America—that my friends on the other side of the aisle are refusing to take up the legislation that pays for the defense of this Nation. It is beyond belief.

I don't like provisions in the Defense appropriations bill, and I have made it very clear, and I want us to be able to take it up and amend to make it better. Maybe some of us—maybe a majority of us have priorities that were not in the Defense appropriations bill. Suppose we don't like the fact that they appropriated $1 billion for an icebreaker that has nothing to do with defense or that they have this long laundry list of porkbarrel projects that they call scientific research projects. I want to debate and amend those.

A lot has happened since the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee unanimously passed out the Defense appropriations bill. A lot has happened, and all 100 of us should have the ability to amend and make it better. Instead, we are being put down on the path to a continuing resolution and an omnibus bill on which there will not be debate and amendments to make it better for the men and women who are serving.

The President just announced that we are going to have 8,400 men and women who are serving this country in Afghanistan instead of 5,400-some. Shouldn't we take that in consideration in our deliberations on the appropriations bill? Shouldn't we accommodate for that, as is our role and obligation as the Congress of the United States? We have the power of the purse.

We are now looking at a situation where we have a world that is literally on fire. That is apparent every day we pick up the newspaper or turn on the television. Instead of having a robust debate and discussion and amendments as to how we can best defend this Nation, we are going to again have my friends on the other side of the aisle stop us from taking it up. Why? The Appropriations Committee reported it out unanimously.

The Democratic leader said that he didn't want another ''McCain amendment'' that would increase funding for defense without a commensurate increase in funding for nondefense. I have said to my colleagues: If you are talking about the CIA, if you are talking about homeland security, if you are talking about other agencies of government to protect this Nation, then fine.

Mr. President, I note the presence of the Senator from New Hampshire on the floor. I ask unanimous consent that she be granted 5 minutes and that I be granted 2 minutes after that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator from Arizona has expired.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am thankful to my colleague from Arizona.

I am pleased to be here on the floor because in a few minutes I am going to be offering a motion to instruct the conferees for the NDAA to extend the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program and to authorize additional visas for deserving applicants.

For those of us who remember the debates we had on the floor during the NDAA, we will remember that we had come to an agreement. The opponents of this program had agreed with JOHN MCCAIN and me that we needed to keep the promises we had made to so many of those Afghan interpreters who made a life-and-death difference in helping our service men and women on the ground in Afghanistan as they fought the Taliban.

This is a program that Senator MCCAIN and I have worked on for several years. We have been successful in previous years in getting this extension and keeping the word—the promise we made to those Afghan interpreters and keeping the word of the American Government that we are going to help those who helped us. Yet we go into this NDAA conference without an extension of the Special Immigrant Visa Program.

Without congressional action, the Afghan SIV Program will largely sunset around December. It will leave thousands of Afghans who stood alongside our men and women and other government personnel at severe risk.

I talked to a woman this morning who told me the story of an Afghan interpreter who just arrived in the United States last night. She said he had been waiting 3 years to get his special immigrant visa. During that time, he was so worried about his family that he slept in another room at night when he went to bed so that if the Taliban found them, they would kill only him and not the rest of his family.

This country owes a great debt to the Afghans who provided essential assistance to our mission in Afghanistan, the thousands of brave men and women who, like this man who just arrived in the United States, put themselves and their families at risk to help our soldiers and our diplomats accomplish their mission and return home safely. Congress must not turn its back on these individuals. That outcome would be a moral failing, and it would also carry significant national security strategic costs going forward.

So I would hope that when we have this vote on the motion to instruct that my colleagues will agree with Senator MCCAIN and I that this is something we need to do. We need to make sure one of the things that comes out of that NDAA conference is an agreement to extend those special visas to those individuals who were still in the pipeline.

Thank you, Mr. President. I thank my colleague from Arizona for all of his work to try to get this done, and I hope that by working together, we can make this happen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from New Hampshire for her leadership, her dedication, and tenacity in making sure this issue is not dispensed with until it is finished and we fulfill our commitment to the men and women who are serving, who have literally sacrificed their lives as interpreters for the good welfare and the safety of our members in the uniformed military, whom the Senator from New Hampshire and I hear from all the time on behalf of their interpreters. We hear from them all the time, saying: Don't abandon them. They saved my life.

Can't we understand how important this moral obligation is?

Finally, I hope my colleagues will not vote to block consideration of the Defense appropriations bill. We need to debate, we need to improve, and we

need to provide for the needs of the military and this Nation's security in an ever-changing environment.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to disagree in the House amendment, agree to the request by the House for a conference, and to appoint conferees with respect to S. 2943, an original bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2017 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) and the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 90, nays 7, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 130 Leg.]

YEAS—90

Alexander	Enzi	Murphy
Ayotte	Ernst	Murray
Baldwin	Feinstein	Nelson
Barrasso	Fischer	Perdue
Bennet	Flake	Peters
Blumenthal	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Reed
Booker	Grassley	Risch
Boozman	Hatch	Roberts
Boxer	Heinrich	Rounds
Brown	Heitkamp	Rubio
Burr	Heller	Sasse
Cantwell	Hirono	Schatz
Capito	Hoeven	Schumer
Cardin	Inhofe	Scott
Carper	Isakson	Sessions
Casey	Johnson	Shaheen
Cassidy	Kaine	Shelby
Coats	King	Stabenow
Cochran	Kirk	Sullivan
Collins	Lankford	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Thune
Corker	McCain	Tillis
Cornyn	McCaskill	Toomey
Cotton	McConnell	Udall
Crapo	Menendez	Vitter
Cruz	Merkley	Warner
Daines	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Donnelly	Moran	Wicker
Durbin	Murkowski	Wyden

NAYS—7

Gillibrand	Paul	Warren
Leahy	Reid	
Markey	Sanders	

NOT VOTING—3

Franken	Klobuchar	Lee

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 90, the nays are 7.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

Under the previous order, the compound motion to go to conference is agreed to.

The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the next two votes be 10 minutes in length.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I have a motion to instruct which is at the desk, and I ask for its consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New Hampshire [Mrs. SHAHEEN] moves that the managers on the part of the Senate at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on S. 2943 (the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017) be instructed to insist that the final conference report include language to extend the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program through December 31, 2017 and authorize additional visas to ensure visas are available for applicants who meet the criteria under the program.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I rise in support of my motion to instruct the Senate National Defense Authorization Act conferees to extend the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program and authorize additional visas for deserving applicants. The SIV Program allows Afghans who supported the United States mission in Afghanistan to seek refuge in this country because they face grave threats as a result of helping our men and women on the ground there.

I just wish to point out that when we had the debate on the NDAA, we had an agreement on what an amendment to extend the Special Immigrant Visa Program would look like. That amendment would have allowed for 2,500 additional special immigrant visas to cover those people still in the pipeline who are facing threats because of helping American soldiers. And while we had agreement from the majority of the body, unfortunately, because of an unrelated issue, we were not able to get this amendment passed.

This is an opportunity for us to come back at this and do what is right, do what our commanders and our diplomats say we need to do for the national security interests of America. So I hope all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this motion to instruct.

I would like to now ask my partner in this effort, Senator MCCAIN, if he would say a few words.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 2 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, as soon as Senator MCCAIN speaks in favor of this, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 2 minutes in opposition.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 2 minutes in opposition remaining, and the Senator from Arizona is asking for 2 additional minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Arizona has 25 seconds remaining.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, please don't take my word for it. How about general David Petraeus. Many of our Afghan allies have not only been mission-essential, serving as the eyes and ears of our own troops and often saving American lives, they have risked their own and their families' lives in the line of duty.

This program falls far short and has serious national security implications. Ambassador Ryan Crocker: This is truly a matter of life and death. I know hundreds of people who have been threatened because of their affiliation with the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. MCCAIN. I ask for an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. SESSIONS. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Who yields time in opposition?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I worked with Senator MCCAIN and Senator SHAHEEN, and we agreed to 2,500 new refugees who would enter under this program, and we had some language in there that tightened it up. This legislation allows an unlimited number to come here under the program and does not have the language that tightens up the program and brings it to an end eventually. That is the difference of opinion at this point.

I am disappointed this was brought up, and last night we first learned about it.

I would just note, there are 7,000 visas authorized over the last few years; only 3,500 have been used and 3,500 remain. The House extends the program. It does not add any additional number. They considered it at length. Chairman GOODLATTE opposes this.

Also, the motion fails to acknowledge the need to pay for and prioritize the visas. These visas will cost, according to CBO, $281 million over 10 years. Just 2,500 would cost that much so this has an unlimited number.

I think the right thing for us to do is to not agree to this motion to instruct.

I would be glad to work with Senator MCCAIN and Senator SHAHEEN and support the agreement we reached last time that got blocked by other Members for other reasons, but I oppose this because it is unlimited, it is unpaid for, and I don't believe it is necessary based on the facts on the ground.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Point of order, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, may I ask for a clarification? The vote we are having is not on a particular piece of legislation; is that correct? This is on a motion to instruct the conferees so it does not deal with the particular piece of legislation Senator SESSIONS has suggested.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct. The vote before the Senate is on the Senator's motion to instruct the managers on this matter.

All time has expired.

The question is on agreeing to the motion.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) and the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 84, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 131 Leg.]

YEAS—84

Alexander	Enzi	Murkowski
Ayotte	Ernst	Murphy
Baldwin	Feinstein	Murray
Barrasso	Fischer	Nelson
Bennet	Flake	Perdue
Blumenthal	Gardner	Peters
Blunt	Gillibrand	Portman
Booker	Graham	Reed
Boozman	Hatch	Reid
Boxer	Heinrich	Roberts
Brown	Heitkamp	Rounds
Burr	Hirono	Sanders
Cantwell	Hoeven	Sasse
Capito	Isakson	Schatz
Cardin	Johnson	Schumer
Carper	Kaine	Shaheen
Casey	King	Stabenow
Cassidy	Kirk	Sullivan
Coats	Leahy	Tester
Cochran	Manchin	Thune
Collins	Markey	Tillis
Coons	McCain	Toomey
Corker	McCaskill	Udall
Cornyn	McConnell	Warner
Cotton	Menendez	Warren
Daines	Merkley	Whitehouse
Donnelly	Mikulski	Wicker
Durbin	Moran	Wyden

NAYS—12

Cruz	Lankford	Scott
Grassley	Paul	Sessions
Heller	Risch	Shelby
Inhofe	Rubio	Vitter

NOT VOTING—4

Crapo	Klobuchar
Franken	Lee

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, I have a motion to instruct at the desk and ask for its consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alaska [Mr. SULLIVAN] moves that the managers on the part of the Senate at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on S. 2943 (the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017) be instructed to insist that the final conference report include authorization for the following commitments recently made by the President and Secretary of Defense:

Maintaining a force of approximately 8,400 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines within Afghanistan into 2017 as announced by President Obama on July 6th to continue to train and advise Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations;

The President's budget request for the European Reassurance Initiative to establish increased rotational presence in Europe, provide ample United States Armed Forces end strength and combat capability to meet all regional contingency plans, increase operational responsiveness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and to fulfill President Obama's commitment to move forward with ''the most significant reinforcement of collective defense anytime during the Cold War'';

Sufficient naval, air, ground and amphibious force structure and weapons systems to fulfil the commitment made by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter at the Shangri-La Dialogue that within the Asia-Pacific theater ''the United States will remain the most powerful military and main underwriter of security in the region for decades to come'';

Sufficient levels of military forces, munitions, logistics support, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, and other enabling support, and the deployment of sufficient operational capabilities to meet President Obama's commitment to go after ISIL aggressively until it's removed from Syria and Iraq and finally destroyed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, I rise to support my motion to instruct in relation to the NDAA of 2017. In the past few weeks the President and the Secretary of Defense have made additional military commitments across the globe for our men and women in uniform, and we have read about these. These include 560 troops to Iraq to help reinforce the fight against ISIS, a decision to keep 8,400 members of the military in Afghanistan fighting against terrorism, 1,000 troops in Poland and a headquarters to beef up NATO's eastern flank, as well as two carrier strike groups in the South China Sea to protect freedom of the seas.

I believe many of us are supportive of these commitments. However, in order to support these pledges, we need to make sure we fully authorize these commitments so our brave men and women in uniform have everything they need to fight and win these battles.

When our service men and women train here and deploy abroad, they need to know that the Congress of the United States and the Senate of the United States stand with them. Supporting this motion to instruct lets them know we have their back, as we should.

I yield to my colleague from Rhode Island, Senator REED.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, we worked with Senator SULLIVAN on this instruction. It is consistent, as the Senator has indicated, with the President's proposal with respect to force structure in Afghanistan and with our European Reassurance Initiative, where we are increasing our presence and cooperating more closely with our European allies. It is consistent with our position in the Pacific as articulated by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. It is consistent with proposals that have been made in other areas, and it does not expand the authority of the President. It simply recognizes what he has asked not just of our Congress but more importantly of the men and women who wear the uniform in the United States. This instruction will help us in our deliberations, and I would thank the Senator and urge its passage.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, as you can see, there is bipartisan support for this measure. I ask that all my colleagues support it now.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the motion offered by Senator SULLIVAN to instruct conferees to the Defense authorization bill includes several important proposals.

First, it urges conferees to fully fund the cost of overseas military operations, including our commitment to Afghanistan. This stands in sharp contrast to the irresponsible House proposal to cut off war funding on April 30, 2017. This provision is reckless and short-sighted and is the subject of a veto threat by the administration.

Second, it endorses full funding of the European Reassurance Initiative. This is the administration's most important response to Russia's aggression in the Ukraine and threatening behavior towards our European friends and allies.

The President's budget request quadrupled spending on this effort, from $789 million this year to $3.4 billion next year. In light of the recent NATO conference, full support for the European Reassurance Initiative is critical to demonstrating the American commitment for the security of the people of Poland, the Baltics, and many other countries who are worried about Vladimir Putin.

Third, the motion endorses statements made by Secretary of Defense

Ash Carter that highlight the U.S. commitment to maintaining the strongest, most capable Armed Forces in the world.

The commitment calls to mind the testimony of Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, earlier this year, before the Senate Armed Services Committee: ''I will take umbrage with the notion that our military has been gutted. So I stand here today a person that's worn this uniform for 35 years. At no time in my career have I been more confident than this in saying we have the most powerful military on the face of the planet.''

Finally, the motion endorses all the necessary military tools to meet the President's commitment to destroy ISIL in Iraq and Syria. So far, our campaign against ISIL has resulted in their loss of nearly half their territory in Iraq, and nearly a quarter in Syria.

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency warned that ISIL remains very dangerous and is likely plotting or inspiring more terrorist attacks. We must keep up the pressure on ISIL, using not only our military but all of our intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and financial enforcement tools that our Nation has.

I have concerns that our government can do more to stop the ISIL threat that is not limited to our military campaign. For example, after the tragic shooting in Orlando, the American people heard stories of the labor-intensive effort that is required for the FBI to track the many tips relating to domestic terrorism sent in by the public.

Defeating ISIL will require the use of every tool at the disposal of our government, not just our Armed Forces. We should ask ourselves: if ISIL is squeezed out of Syria and Iraq, where are they going to go? And are we doing enough intelligence, law enforcement, and diplomatic work to catch ISIL terrorists as they cross international borders?

It is my hope that Congress will be able to negotiate an omnibus appropriations bill this fall, and we should reject one-sided solutions that only address one part of the ISIL threat. I hope we can address that issue in the same bipartisan way that I expect the Senate to support these motions made by the Senator from Alaska.

ZIKA VIRUS FUNDING BILL

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to talk about the urgent need to provide full funding for our response to the Zika virus. Nearly 5 months ago, on February 22, President Obama submitted a request to Congress for $1.9 billion in emergency supplemental funding to address the growing Zika epidemic. The request included $1.509 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services, HHS; $335 million for the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID; $41 million for the Department of State; and support for several other Federal agencies.

The administration's plan—which has the full weight of the scientific community behind it—represents a coordinated and well-funded, whole-of-government approach to combating the virus with a focus on prevention, treatment, and research.

But instead of listening to the experts, Republicans choose instead to abide by a partisan agenda: offering a Zika conference report that underfunded critical Federal, State, and global response efforts by more than $800 million, and included poisonous policy riders and pay-fors that gratuitously attacked the Affordable Care Act, the safety of our Nation's drinking water, and women's reproductive rights. The Senate rejected the Zika conference report and rightfully so.

The Republican leadership particularly in the House seem to be forgetting that the Zika virus is a mosquito-borne disease that has a real, devastating impacts on women and their babies. There have been over 1,100 travel-associated Zika cases reported in the continental United States, including 31 in my home State of Maryland and 2,474 locally acquired cases across the U.S. territories. Because of Zika, babies are being born in the United States and throughout Central and South America with horrible birth defects. To date, more than 600 pregnant women in the continental U.S. and the territories are being monitored following laboratory evidence of possible Zika virus infection, according to the U.S. Zika Pregnancy Registry.

Without congressional action to fund our response to the Zika epidemic adequately, the efforts to better understand and combat this disease will be derailed. According to Dr. Tony Fauci, the Nation's leading infectious disease expert and Director of the National Institute of Allergy & Infectious Diseases, NIAID, ''The vaccine effort will be blunted if not aborted if we don't have the funding.''

Dr. Fauci also emphasized that other vital HHS and NIH programs will suffer if the agency is forced to focus funding primarily on vaccine development. The NIAID has already diverted funds from malaria and tuberculosis research to fund Zika efforts. It is unconscionable that the Republican leadership is forcing our public health officials to make these kinds of decisions.

State and local health departments also bear the brunt of the consequences of not fully funding our Zika response efforts. Our Nation's health departments are on the front lines of combating this disease, working on a grassroots level to expand and enhance prevention efforts, including mosquito surveillance and control; promoting culturally conscious education campaigns to raise public awareness; and equipping our health care workforce with the most medically accurate guidelines to help patients make informed decisions about their health care.

Zika will not simply disappear without adequate funding. Congress must pass an adequate and clean Zika funding bill. Leaving Washington, DC, for the summer recess without sufficiently funding Zika response efforts is irresponsible and does an incredible disservice to the American people.

Neglecting to pass an appropriate Zika response bill is a failure to expectant mothers who have growing concerns about the lasting impact a mosquito bite this summer could have on the health of their unborn children; it is a failure to the ambitious U.S. athletes who are considering sidelining their dreams of Olympic glory over the fear of contracting the virus; and it is a failure to the millions of Americans who entrust us to do everything in our power to safeguard their health and well-being. Although we should not incite panic about Zika, the seriousness of this problem is too great to be ignored. If we expect to make adequate progress on combating this virus this year—and if we want to protect the health and welfare of all Americans—Congress must pass a clean, well-resourced Zika funding bill without delay.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) and the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 132 Leg.]

YEAS—85

Alexander	Enzi	Nelson
Ayotte	Ernst	Perdue
Baldwin	Feinstein	Peters
Barrasso	Fischer	Portman
Bennet	Flake	Reed
Blumenthal	Gardner	Reid
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Booker	Grassley	Roberts
Boozman	Hatch	Rounds
Brown	Heinrich	Rubio
Burr	Heitkamp	Sasse
Cantwell	Hirono	Schumer
Capito	Hoeven	Scott
Cardin	Inhofe	Sessions
Carper	Isakson	Shaheen
Casey	Johnson	Shelby
Cassidy	Kaine	Stabenow
Coats	King	Sullivan
Cochran	Kirk	Tester
Collins	Lankford	Thune
Coons	Manchin	Tillis
Corker	McCain	Toomey
Cornyn	McCaskill	Udall
Cotton	McConnell	Vitter
Crapo	Menendez	Warner
Cruz	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Daines	Moran	Wicker
Donnelly	Murkowski	
Durbin	Murray	