

they have the best idea of the reality of care at their facilities.

I appreciate the work of my colleagues, Senator JAMES LANKFORD, Congressman MARKWAYNE MULLIN, and Congressman STEVE RUSSELL. It turned out to be a real good team, and we are able to get these things done. We are already starting to see real progress in improving the veterans' care in Oklahoma and across the country because as we are improving the system we had in Oklahoma, that same system can be improved in Nebraska or any other State.

We need to get our VA facilities from their current ratings to the highest standard. The highest standard rating is five stars. We are now up to three stars in Oklahoma. We were at one star when we first discovered this problem on that fateful day 2 years ago today in an article in USA TODAY.

President Trump will continue to be an important partner for Oklahoma as we continue to improve our veterans' care.

SUPPORTING OUR MILITARY

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, President Trump's commitment to our veterans is only matched by his commitment to our servicemembers and our national security. You can't really segregate it out and say, well, we are going to take care of our veterans' activities and then still say we are not going to allow our country to have the national security they fought so hard for.

We saw that earlier this week when the President outlined his national security strategy, charting a new course for American foreign policy, leaving behind the failed policies of the Obama administration. With his national security strategy, President Trump has been clear that he is committed to protecting the homeland, promoting American prosperity, and advancing peace through strength. Have you ever heard that before, peace through strength? I am one of the few who is old enough around here who remember our great President we had who talked about peace through strength when he had to rebuild the military after the Carter administration. It was actually as bad—or as downgraded as our military has become from the last administration.

Now he is asserting America's leadership in the free world. We saw how under President Obama the military was forced to divert resources for priorities that weren't even about defending America. He used the military to advance his liberal agenda, which led to the wasteful spending on what they call the green Navy and the green bullets. The idea that climate change was the largest threat to our national security, all of that has changed and not a moment too soon.

President Trump is focused on what matters, rightfully taking out things like just worrying about climate

change as opposed to rebuilding our military, and he is building it at a very rapid rate right now.

We passed the bill, the Defense authorization bill, and we have made a great start on this.

Now, when the President came into office, our military was facing a readiness crisis, and Americans didn't really understand this. They didn't know. They had not been told this. We had a biased media that didn't allow this information to get out. As an example, our Air Force today, right now, is short 1,500 pilots, and 1,300 of those are actually fighter pilots. Only 50 percent of the Air Force squadrons are trained and ready to conduct all of their assigned missions. I have to repeat that. Only 50 percent of our Air Force squadrons are trained and ready to defend America.

The Navy is the smallest and least ready it has been in years. It currently can only meet 40 percent of the demand for regional combat. The commanders in the field include only enough personnel to man six and a half of our nine carrier air wing.

A carrier air wing is something a lot of people are not familiar with. A carrier air wing has approximately 75 combat aircraft. Currently, we have manned only 6½ wings and are 8,000 sailors short.

This is an air wing. They have F-18s, they have EA-18s, they have F-35s, they have C-2As. Again, just a little over half of ours are actually ready. Well, that is the problem we are faced with right now. More than half of the Navy's F-18s are grounded because they are awaiting maintenance or lack of necessary parts. If you look at our Marines, our Marines are using F-18s, and 62 percent of F-18s will not fly. People are just shocked when they find out about it. It is because we don't have the spare parts. Well, we are getting busy on that. We are going to make sure we correct those problems.

The Army has said that only about one-third of their brigade combat teams, one-fourth of their air aviation brigades, and one-half of their division headquarters are currently ready.

A brigade combat team consists of 7 battalions, approximately 4,500 students. I wish I had time to come up with a chart on this, but the carrier wing is one that is absolutely necessary to get folks straight, and we plan on doing that.

Faced with the most dangerous threats I have seen in my lifetime, these are critical gaps in our military we simply cannot accept.

I often say, when I look back at the good old days of the Cold War, where we had two superpowers—and the superpowers, we knew what they had, they knew what we had. It is totally different now.

You have a country like North Korea, which has demonstrated that they have the capacity now to reach an American city. We learned that on November 28, when they actually dem-

onstrated a range that would reach one of our continental U.S. cities.

They tried to give us a little bit of comfort in saying, well, we don't know that they would be able to carry a warhead. We don't think they would have the capacity to do that. Well, we don't know that. That is not much comfort.

When they say: We don't have the capacity to be accurate on a reentry because of what a missile has to go through on a reentry, well, that is not very comforting that this would happen.

Anyway, the NDAA—the bill we passed, that the President signed into law—would be a good step in correcting the readiness shortfalls. I look forward to continuing to work with him on this critical process.

We have a committee that already is having hearings about the problems we are having. We had one, actually, in the subcommittee hearing I chaired just this week. We are busy correcting these problems.

Meanwhile, back to our VA problems in Oklahoma, we put two new great directors in the VA clinics. We have a level of veterans' care Oklahomans are proud of. Only yesterday, President Trump signed the Enhancing Veteran Care Act to ensure that we continue to give our veterans the best care. They deserve it, and they are going to get it.

At the same time, we are going to restore and rebuild the military as our Nation's No. 1 priority. Our troops deserve it, and they are going to get it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from South Carolina.

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. President.

This week, we took a major step toward helping the middle- and working-class family by passing the first significant tax reform package in a generation.

I wanted to take a few minutes to thank a lot of folks for their efforts, hard work, and dedication to this process. At the Member level, both Leader MCCONNELL and Chairman HATCH did amazing work leading us through this process.

I also had the privilege of working as part of the Core 4, with PAT TOOMEY, JOHN THUNE, and ROB PORTMAN, over the past year developing this bill. Those three guys are some of the hardest working Members we have.

I also thank MARCO RUBIO for his dedication to improving the child tax credit, as well as MIKE LEE and Ivanka Trump.

We were also able to include my Investing in Opportunity Act as a part of the legislation. This is legislation that will help distressed communities throughout the country. More than 50 million Americans today live in those distressed communities, and the Investing in Opportunity Act can usher