

their goals are: Preserving their rule, expanding Iranian hegemony across the region, and harming the United States and Israel. That is what they want to do. That is why Iran exports violence, intimidation, and coercion. That is why Iran expands its ballistic missile program. That is why Iran uses proxies, such as the Houthis, Hezbollah, and other Shia militias, along with cyber attacks and other terrorism, to meddle in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, and beyond.

During the Obama administration, America drew down our forward-deployed military and conventional force structure. We chased after a flawed nuclear agreement. We reduced our commitment to our Sunni Arab partners. Iran noticed our reticence and saw an opportunity. It expanded its support of proxies and built strategies to exploit the unrest following civil wars in Yemen and Syria and the rampage of ISIL into Iraq.

If this meddling is to be confronted, if terrorist threats are to be countered, and if arms shipments are to be curtailed, the United States will need the help of our regional partners. One key partner is Saudi Arabia. We have shared common interests for decades. We have worked together to counter Iran, support the Free Syrian Army, and combat ISIL. Today the support the United States provides to the Saudi-led coalition, including aerial refueling over the Red Sea, contributes to greater precision in their air campaign and actually leads to fewer civilian casualties. So let me say that again: Withdrawing U.S. support would increase, not decrease, the risk of civilian casualties, and it would signal that we are not serious about containing Iran or its proxies. The Houthi presence would continue threatening shipping lanes in the Red Sea. Iranian missiles would continue threatening Riyadh, and Iran would be further emboldened. That is why the goal of this resolution is bad policy.

But my colleagues' resolution is also procedurally mistaken. The expedited authorities they wish to draw upon are meant for removing U.S. forces from actual participation in hostilities, but our support for the Saudi coalition has not caused us to enter active warfare or hostilities in Yemen.

The Department of Defense and Secretary Mattis have made clear that U.S. forces are not engaged in exchanges of fire with hostile forces. According to the Acting General Counsel of the Department of Defense: "The limited military and intelligence support that the United States is providing to the [KSA-led] coalition does not involve any introduction of U.S. forces into hostilities for purposes of the War Powers Resolution or of section 1013 of the Department of State Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1984 and 1985."

I support that assessment. The refueling of aircraft over the Red Sea does not equate to introducing U.S.

forces into hostilities nor does intelligence sharing. U.S. forces are not transporting Saudi forces into combat within Yemen by air, land, or sea. So the expedited procedures this resolution seeks to exploit simply do not apply here.

If Senators disagree with my assessment of the merits and oppose our support for the coalition, they have several legislative tools available to them. They could try to restrict funds through the appropriations process, amend the Arms Control Export Act for the licensing of defense services or the National Defense Authorization Act. Instead, we face a resolution which purports to require the President to withdraw U.S. forces from hostilities in Yemen—hostilities which we have not entered.

In a recent speech, Secretary Mattis explained:

History proves that nations with allies thrive. . . . Working by, with and through allies who carry their equitable share allows us to amass the greatest possible strength.

Imagine how challenging that would become if every advise-and-assist mission our forces undertake around the globe becomes subject to misapplication of the War Powers Resolution.

Thus, I oppose this resolution on grounds of policy and on grounds of procedure, and I urge our colleagues to join me this afternoon.

#### OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on a final matter, later this week, the Senate will consider an omnibus spending package to address a number of critical priorities, from rebuilding America's infrastructure to fighting the opioid epidemic. In particular, building on the funding agreement passed in February, the measure will deliver the resources and certainty that America's military deserves. To be specific, this legislation will provide the largest year-on-year increase in defense funding in 15 years. After years of disproportionate cuts to our armed services, Congress has begun to provide adequate resources to put an end to the harmful decline in combat readiness, to fulfill our commitments to American families who sacrifice through service—many of them in my home State of Kentucky.

For our men and women in uniform, this means a well-deserved pay raise. For our veterans back home, it means increased oversight and modernization in the Veterans' Administration care system, thanks to a record level of VA funding. Our warriors on the frontline deserve to be trained to the highest standards, as do the units that replace them. Now our commanders can work to restore combat readiness—and not a moment too soon. Threats around the world are only growing in number and intensity. By strengthening our investment in missile defense, by funding new weapons systems, by scaling up

shipbuilding and aircraft procurement, and by investing in our all-volunteer servicemembers, we will send a strong message to our allies and our foes alike that America's military is regaining dominance.

This week, my colleagues will have the opportunity to follow through and address the pressing needs of the defense community. I hope each of them will join me in voting to swiftly pass the omnibus, thus giving our Armed Forces the resources they need and deserve.

I yield the floor.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

#### OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, while the Senate conducts an important debate today on Yemen, we continue to negotiate an omnibus spending bill. It will follow through on the bipartisan budget deal we struck in February that, for the first time in a long time, will robustly fund our military and provide substantial investment in our middle class.

For too long, the arbitrary and point-less sequester caps held back Federal investment in jobs, scientific research, healthcare, and education. They also handicapped our military and prevented long-term planning at the Pentagon. The budget deal paved the way to do away with the harmful sequester caps, and now the omnibus will put the nail in the coffin.

Negotiations continue between the four leaders. A few sticking points remain but we are very close to signing off on legislation that both Houses will be able to take up and pass by the end of the week.

Mr. President, on the omni, I agree with the leader. Hopefully, we can come to an agreement and pass it this week. It has some things no one likes, and it has a lot of things not everybody likes but most people like. The basic structure of it was a fair compromise, and, hopefully, we can come to an agreement. Our staffs are working really hard.

#### PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS HURRICANE RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I would like to say a word about Puerto Rico. Today marks the sixth anniversary of Hurricane Maria's landfall on the island—the 6-month anniversary. We all know that the storm in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands was one of the most powerful and devastating ever to have struck those islands. There was terrible damage to schools, hospitals, water systems, roads, homes, and businesses.

For months and months, people didn't have electricity or clean water or cell service. Far too many people are still waiting for relief. There are 120,000 people without electricity. Hundreds of thousands continue to lose power on a temporary basis. Calculating the hours of lost electricity service, Puerto Rico has experienced the longest blackout in the history of the United States.

Tens of thousands are still awaiting permanent shelter, and 10,000 small businesses are closed.

Puerto Rico struggled with a severe debt and healthcare crisis before Hurricane Maria came to its shores. The damage wrought by the hurricane has set the island even further back, despite the valiant efforts of its people.

Congress has passed significant relief as part of the bipartisan budget agreement earlier this year. We have to make sure that the aid goes to where it needs to go and that we provide additional aid if it is required.

To the long-suffering citizens of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the thousands who have relocated to the mainland, we haven't forgotten you. We are here to help you. You are on our minds, and we are going to keep fighting to help you rebuild your homes, your communities, and your beloved islands.

#### REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, on the tax bill, I just note that, once again, every day the more people learn about this tax bill, the more they don't like it. Stock buybacks continue at a hugely rapid rate. Aid to workers is much, much smaller, and the American people are learning this bill was of, by, and for the wealthiest Americans and the most powerful corporations. That is wrong. We welcome the debate on the tax bill because the more people learn about it, the more they don't like it.

Since the beginning of the tax debate, Republicans have insisted their bill is about cutting taxes for working Americans. Even though the bill would direct 83 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent, Republicans said workers were the focus. Even though they made corporate tax cuts permanent but let the individual tax cuts expire, they said the middle class would be the real winners.

Democrats warned that if you gave big corporations and the wealthiest Americans the lion's share of the tax cuts, those benefits wouldn't trickle down to employees and the middle class. We warned that corporations would do what they always do when they have profits—distribute them amongst themselves. Even though big companies like AT&T were already paying low effective corporate rates, they had been shedding jobs and investing for years even before the tax bill.

Unfortunately, our warnings proved prescient. Almost every day, we hear a new story about a corporation using

the savings from the Republican tax bill to purchase its own stock, called a stock buyback, which boosts the corporation's stock price to provide a reward for wealthy executives and shareholders.

Just this morning, the Kentucky-based chemical company Ashland announced a brand-new \$500 million share repurchasing program. And last night, the total amount of corporate share buybacks surpassed \$225 billion since the Republican tax bill became law.

Stock buybacks are a big reason why workers no longer see the benefits of record corporate profits. Why? Because instead of investing corporate profits in things that benefit the long-term health of the company and its workers—like higher wages, new equipment, research and development, or new hires—corporations spend the money on share buybacks.

In fact, stock buybacks were illegal until 1982, which is about the same time that wages stopped increasing with corporate profits.

Republicans dutifully remind us that companies are also handing out bonuses. Yes, a few. But let me highlight the disparity between buybacks and investment in workers: According to a recent analysis by Just Capital, only 6 percent of the capital allocated by companies from the tax bill's savings has gone to employees, while nearly 60 percent has gone to shareholders.

The theory behind the Republican tax bill was to allow corporations and the richest Americans to keep more of their already outrageous wealth, and maybe the benefits will trickle down to everyone else. As we are already seeing, that idea was a folly, and the American middle class will eventually pay the price.

Because of the enormous cost of the Republican tax bill, \$1.5 trillion, the deficit and debt will grow over the next several years and Republicans are already targeting Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare for cuts to make up the difference. So on top of a tax cut that mostly goes to the folks who need it the least, the Republican tax bill is an excuse for Republicans to come after Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

That is why the bill is so unpopular that Republicans have abandoned it in last two special elections in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

The American people are already waking up to the reality that the Republican tax bill was not the middle-class miracle the Republicans promised, and in November, they will have the chance to move America in a dramatically different direction by voting for a party that actually wants to focus tax relief on working America, not corporate America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### ALLOW STATES AND VICTIMS TO FIGHT ONLINE SEX TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 1865, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 339, H.R. 1865, a bill to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to clarify that section 230 of such Act does not prohibit the enforcement against providers and users of interactive computer services of Federal and State criminal and civil law relating to sexual exploitation of children or sex trafficking, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

#### S.J. RES. 54—MOTION TO DISCHARGE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, pursuant to section 1013 of the Department of State Authorization Act, fiscal years 1984 and 1985, and in accordance with the provisions of section 601(b) of the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, I make a motion to discharge S.J. Res. 54 from the Committee on Foreign Relations.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there is 4 hours of debate on the motion, equally divided between the proponents and the opponents.

Mr. SANDERS. Thank you, Mr. President.

Article I, section 8 of the Constitution states in no uncertain terms that "Congress shall have power to . . . declare war."

Let me repeat it. Article I, section 8 of the Constitution states it is Congress that has the power to declare war.

The Founding Fathers gave the power to authorize military conflicts to Congress, the branch most accountable—not to the President but to Congress—and that is the issue we are going to be debating today.

For far too long, Congress, under Democratic and Republican administrations, has abdicated its constitutional role in authorizing war. The time is long overdue for Congress to reassert that constitutional authority, and that is what today is about.

That is why I and 14 cosponsors of this resolution—Senators LEE, MURPHY, WARREN, BOOKER, DURBIN, LEAHY,