

almost no end to the options Mr. Marcus had when I asked him a simple question, but we do not know where he stands because he wouldn't name a single thing—not one.

He said: "I really couldn't say, Senator." That was his response to my question.

There are reasons to oppose this nomination, but for me, this non-response to what should be an easy question was enough for me. We have to have someone in this position who is not only able to say that he disagrees with President Trump when it comes to civil rights; we need someone who is prepared to stand up to him. We need someone who is not only able to say they stand on the side of civil rights in the face of constant attacks; we need someone who is actually willing to disagree with their bosses—President Trump and Secretary DeVos—when civil rights are being threatened. But Mr. Marcus could not commit to me that he would do either, and that is something I simply cannot support.

I will be opposing this nomination, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. We yield back our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Marcus nomination?

Mrs. MURRAY. 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 Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL), the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS), and the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 118 Ex.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Boozman	Cassidy
Barrasso	Burr	Collins
Blunt	Capito	Corker

Cornyn	Hoever	Risch
Cotton	Hyde-Smith	Roberts
Crapo	Inhofe	Rounds
Cruz	Isakson	Rubio
Daines	Johnson	Sasse
Enzi	Kennedy	Scott
Ernst	Lankford	Shelby
Fischer	Lee	Sullivan
Flake	McConnell	Thune
Gardner	Moran	Tillis
Graham	Murkowski	Toomey
Grassley	Paul	Wicker
Hatch	Perdue	Young
Heller	Portman	

NAYS—46

Baldwin	Heitkamp	Reed
Bennet	Hirono	Sanders
Booker	Jones	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Manchin	Tester
Cortez Masto	Markey	Udall
Donnelly	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Durbin	Menendez	Warner
Feinstein	Merkley	Warren
Gillibrand	Murphy	Whitehouse
Harris	Murray	Wyden
Hassan	Nelson	
Heinrich	Peters	

NOT VOTING—4

Blumenthal	Duckworth
Coons	McCain

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS— H.R. 5515

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 5515; further, that the motion be agreed to and Senator INHOFE—myself—or his designee be recognized to offer the substitute amendment, No. 2282, which is the text of the Senate-reported bill. I further ask that it be in order for Senator BOOZMAN or his designee to call up amendment No. 2276 and for Senator REED or his designee to call up amendment No. 2284 and that the amendments be debated concurrently, with the time equally divided until 2 p.m.; finally, that at 2 p.m., the Senate vote in relation to the Boozman and Reed amendments, in the order listed, with no second-degree amendments in order to the amendments prior to the votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, two bedrock principles of American jurisprudence are the presumption of innocence and the right to have a trial by jury. I have one amendment that I would ask unanimous consent be included in this bill. This amendment would ensure that no American would ever be held indefinitely in prison without having a trial by jury. I can't imagine why we can't have this. One Republican Senator has been blocking this for 6 years.

I object to this unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we allow my amendment to be heard and voted on in the upcoming bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma has the floor.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, first of all, I agree with Senator PAUL's amendment and have agreed with his amendment, and I have made it very clear for a long period of time. Procedurally, I want to get to it, and it is my intention to have a vote on it. That will have to come after we are on the bill. We need to get on the bill first.

So I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 5515. I further ask that notwithstanding rule XXII, the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 5515 at 1:45 p.m. today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 442, H.R. 5515, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HONORING NEBRASKA'S SOLDIERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN COMBAT

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise to continue my tribute to Nebraska's heroes and the current generation of men and women who have given their lives while defending our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each of these Nebraskans has a powerful story of answering the call to serve.

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS TRICIA JAMESON

Today I honor the life of Nebraska Army National Guard SFC Tricia Jameson.

Tricia grew up in St. Paul, which is a small town in central Nebraska's farm country. She had a love for animals and wanted to pursue a career as a veterinarian. Tricia usually kept to herself and was not outspoken, but she displayed great determination when something was important to her.

In elementary school, upon learning that she and other young girls could not play organized softball, she started a letter-writing campaign to change the rules. The community soon took notice and revised the policy to include girls her age. When her friend took his own life because he was picked on at school, Tricia again took up her pen and wrote a letter that was published in a local newspaper, whereby she condemned bullying and honored the life of her friend. She advocated for what is right and how others should be treated. In looking back, it seems obvious that her selfless spirit would, one day, lead her to serve her country.

Tricia attended St. Paul High School, where she was a determined athlete. She participated in volleyball and set athletic records that still stand to this day. Her family then moved to Omaha. She spent her senior year at Millard South High School and graduated in 1989.

Like many young people, Tricia saw the benefits of joining the National Guard as it could provide extra income and help her with her college tuition. She joined in 1994. It didn't take long before her grit and determination caught the eye of her superiors. They rewarded her with a promotion to become a full-time training instructor at Camp Ashland.

As combat intensified in Afghanistan and Iraq, so too did the need to improve battlefield medical knowledge. Sergeant Jameson was assigned to improve the combat lifesaver course. The course teaches soldiers basic medical skills for application on the battlefield. With the same dogged determination that was evident throughout her life, Sergeant Jameson raised the program into a world-class operation. Hundreds of soldiers who learned from Tricia in that program would go on to save lives on battlefields across the world.

In 2005 Nebraska's 313th Medical Company needed to replace two soldiers. So it reached back to Nebraska for volunteers, and when her country called for her service, Sergeant Jameson eagerly stepped forward. She quickly got her personal affairs in order and was sent to her deployment training. By June of 2005, she was in Iraq and on duty with the 313th Medical Company at Camp Speicher. Her impact was felt immediately as the camp was stretched thin to support combat operations in northern and western Iraq.

Staff Sergeant Jameson's first mission on the road was a long one. She was the vehicle commander of an M997 ambulance that was headed to Trebil, near the Jordan border. Staff Sergeant Jameson and her battle buddy, SPC

Rachelle Spors, had just left with a convoy when an urgent call came to help marines who had been injured in combat a few miles away. Without hesitation, Tricia was speeding toward the battlefield to attend the fallen when their field ambulance was struck by an IED. That day, Tricia gave her life while serving her country.

The Nebraska Prairie Soldier newspaper wrote of Tricia's service: "Hundreds of family, friends, veterans group members, state governmental leaders and uniformed co-workers flooded into St. Bridget Catholic Church in Omaha, to help lay a fallen hero to rest."

Her name and reputation live on as soldiers save lives, just as she did, on the battlefield.

For her service to our Nation, SFC Tricia Jameson earned many military decorations, including the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, posthumously.

Today I ask that we take a minute to remember Tricia and her selfless spirit.

I wish to thank her family, her mother Pat, and her brother Rob, who share their own heroic burden. SFC Tricia Jameson loved her family. She embodied the pride of her State and the values of our Nation. I am honored to tell her story.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we vote right now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

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:

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 proceed to Calendar No. 442, H.R. 5515, an act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities at the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Todd Young, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, Johnny Isakson, Joni Ernst, John Hoeven, Thom Tillis, James E. Risch, Tom Cotton, Dan Sullivan, Mike Crapo, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, John Barrasso, Deb Fischer.

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

proceed to H.R. 5515, an act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) would have voted "yea".

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS) and the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) are necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 92, nays 4, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 119 Leg.]

YEAS—92

Alexander	Gardner	Murray
Baldwin	Gillibrand	Nelson
Barrasso	Graham	Perdue
Bennet	Grassley	Peters
Blumenthal	Harris	Portman
Blunt	Hassan	Reed
Booker	Hatch	Risch
Boozman	Heinrich	Roberts
Brown	Heitkamp	Rounds
Burr	Heller	Rubio
Cantwell	Hirono	Sasse
Capito	Hoeven	Schatz
Cardin	Hyde-Smith	Schumer
Carper	Inhofe	Scott
Casey	Isakson	Shaheen
Cassidy	Johnson	Shelby
Collins	Jones	Smith
Corker	Kaine	Stabenow
Cornyn	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	King	Tester
Cotton	Klobuchar	Thune
Crapo	Lankford	Tillis
Cruz	Leahy	Toomey
Daines	Lee	Udall
Donnelly	Manchin	Van Hollen
Durbin	Markey	Warner
Enzi	McCaskill	Warren
Ernst	McConnell	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Menendez	Wicker
Fischer	Murkowski	Young
Flake	Murphy	

NAYS—4

Merkley	Sanders
Paul	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Coons	McCain
Duckworth	Moran

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 92, the nays are 4.

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

The Senator from Mississippi.

RECOGNIZING SEERSUCKER THURSDAY

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise today to comment about the economy, but I want to observe that I am proudly wearing a seersucker suit today. I would mention to my colleagues that Senators have worn seersucker suits for decades, for literally centuries, on this Senate floor.

This is officially Seersucker Thursday in the Senate—a tradition that was begun by my predecessor, the former majority leader, Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi, and has been carried on until today by the senior Senator from Louisiana, Mr. CASSIDY. It is a time for those of us who choose to humble ourselves and call attention to ourselves at the same time to have a little fun in a bipartisan manner and to recall the days of old, before there was air conditioning and before we worried so much about how we looked.

I thank Senator CASSIDY for getting a bipartisan group together to have a little fun and remember the days of old, when a lot of folks wore seersucker suits.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE REPUBLICAN-LED CONGRESS

Mr. President, we ought to be smiling today because the economy is doing so well. The economy is strong and getting stronger. We have 1 million more jobs in America than we had 6 months ago. Last month, we added a quarter of a million jobs in just 1 month. We have a 3.8-percent unemployment rate—an excellent report, the lowest in 18 years. So I am glad to rise this afternoon and say a word or two on the occasion of the 500th day of the Trump administration and of a Republican Congress. We seem to be doing things right. I hope the American people are recognizing that.

The May jobs report was full of good news. Beyond the 3.8-percent unemployment rate, which I have already mentioned, the number of long-term unemployed—those out of work for 27 weeks or longer—has dropped. Wages are on the rise. These are markers of a strong, energized economy.

Let me quote the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. The Wall Street Journal recently ran an editorial entitled, “The Rising Jobs Tide.” It points out how much has changed for the better over the last year and a half. There are 3 million more full-time workers than we had when this administration began. More than 2.5 million jobs have been added. More than 2 million of these jobs are occupied by Americans between the ages of 25 and 34.

The editorial concludes: “In the last year business confidence has improved, investment is increasing and workers are reaping the benefits.”

Those are American workers who are reaping the benefits, and I am pleased to rise this afternoon and agree with the Wall Street Journal.

I also want to give a shout-out to the New York Times, which is something I haven’t made a habit of doing on the Senate floor. The New York Times said that they have run out of words to describe how good this economy is. There is widespread acknowledgement of this, and I think it is a result of the things this Congress has been trying to do, the things this administration has been trying to do and succeeding in doing, putting policies in place that are de-

signed to create jobs and make it easier on job creators, and they are having a powerful impact.

I am proud of things we have done, like the historic tax cuts—lower taxes. This has meant that middle-class families have more money to live the lives they want to live. This has meant that job creators are not losing out to foreign competition. This has meant that we have ushered in bonuses for some 4 million Americans. Minimum wages are going up from company to company. Energy bills are lower.

Speaking of energy, we are producing a lot more energy now, and I am proud to have been part of that. I am proud to have been part of the vote that allows us to explore energy in a very small part of Alaska called the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, something our distinguished colleague Senator Stevens stood for and worked for tirelessly when he was alive and when he was a Member of this body.

Support for our troops and our veterans has increased. After years of defense sequestration—which Secretary Mattis said harmed our national security more than an enemy could have—we have ended that, and the military is finally getting the money it needs to be prepared. This means a modernized force. It means statutory recognition that we are going to get to a 355-ship fleet that can respond to complex challenges around the world.

Just recently we passed the VA MIS- SION Act, which allows us to continue to improve options and healthcare choices for our veterans.

We rolled back one of the major problems that existed with ObamaCare. We didn’t get it all done, but we did roll back the individual mandate—the law that required free Americans to buy a product or pay a big tax whether they wanted to or not. We were able to do that as part of the tax cut legislation, and I am proud that we took this penalty off the backs of hard-working middle-class Americans.

We rolled back a ton of regulations. We have used the Congressional Review Act and actually started doing that on January 20, 2017, the first day of the Trump administration. We passed 16 Congressional Review Act regulations and put them on the President’s desk that first day to repeal harmful, burdensome, well-intended but job-killing regulations that had come forward in the last days of the Obama administration.

We passed the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act to provide relief for our small banks, for our community banks, so we are not treating them like some New York bank or some of the largest banks in the country. We freed up the small banks to have a little more ability to loan money to job creators, to small business people seeking to borrow funds and expand their workforce, to allow families to get a loan just a little bit easier with a little bit less regulation so that they can lead the kinds of lives they have wanted to.

We passed legislation to fight opioid abuse. We are not through in that regard. We know we still have a problem. If it were easy, we would have solved it a long time ago, but we are tackling that, and we are accomplishing good things and getting good results.

This is a great economy. The New York Times says so. The Wall Street Journal says so. I think Middle America says so when we are back at home going from county to county, having our town meetings and speaking to our constituents.

We are determined to bear down this summer. We have canceled the August break, and I congratulate the leadership for doing that because we have a lot of things yet to do.

We have a defense bill to pass. We are on it now, and we are going to be on it hopefully with amendments and meaningful improvements next week. Additionally, we are going to pass a farm bill. We are going to pass an FAA reauthorization. We are going to pass legislation strengthening our water infrastructure. For the first time in a long time, our goal—our fervent belief—is that we can get back to the practice of passing our spending bills in regular order and avoiding this last-minute, end-of-the-year omnibus process. Nobody on either side of the aisle likes that process, unless you are one of the one or two people in the room writing those bills, which the President has correctly denounced, and which the American people do not understand.

So we are going to get back to regular order, take these bills one or two or three at a time and put them through the regular process like we are supposed to do.

In addition to that, I hope we have an opportunity to continue confirming conservative judges at the rate we have been. Over one-eighth of the circuit court of appeals is now comprised of new conservative judges, appointed by President Trump and confirmed by the Senate in the last year and a half.

So I am proud of this 500-day process. I am proud of our accomplishments. I am proud to give this interim report and to say we need to resolve to keep it up and build on this great record that has given us the lowest unemployment rate in decades and the most Americans working ever in the history of our Republic.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

NATIONAL SEERSUCKER DAY

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I rise to address two separate topics. Let me begin with National Seersucker Day.

Senator WICKER started and I spoke a little bit earlier about celebrating National Seersucker Day. It is a bipartisan tradition to celebrate an American tradition that started in New Orleans. Anyone who has been in New Orleans in July and August can understand why you would like a lightweight summer suit.

I was asked today by a reporter: Why would you continue the seersucker tradition?

I was thinking, wait a second. Why wouldn't you wear a lightweight suit on a summer's day as opposed to a wool suit? It just makes such sense. But sometimes such sense is in short supply here in Washington, DC.

On the other hand, it is something in which both parties, folks from all regions of our country, participate. It started in New Orleans when Joseph Haspel developed seersucker. It is a lightweight suit. It is, if you will, a lighthearted tradition, but it is one that celebrates an aspect of our country and how something in one part of our country can be adopted by folks elsewhere to the benefit of all.

Once again, I say happy Seersucker Day to everyone, and if you wish to join my office in wearing seersucker every day throughout the summer, you can similarly be comfortable on a hot summer's day here in Washington, DC.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, let me now address something that is on the topmost of Americans' minds, and that is the high cost of healthcare. It is important for our country, for our States, and it is important for families sitting around their kitchen tables. We have to lower healthcare costs. We have to do something about the high price of medicine.

Just some examples of the importance of this issue: Medicare actuaries just this week issued a report that the Medicare trust fund—that trust fund which pays the benefits for the senior citizen on Medicare going to see her physician, going to the hospital. It pays the hospital. That trust fund will effectively be exhausted in 8 years. In 8 years, the Medicare trust fund we have all been paying into will be exhausted. In part, that is related to the high cost of medicine, the high cost of drugs. We must do something about that.

It is not just those on Medicare; it is also those in the individual market. In Louisiana, if you are 60 years old with a family and you are not getting a subsidy through ObamaCare and you want to go into the individual market, your policy, plus deductible and copay, can be up to \$50,000 a year, after-tax dollars.

Think about this: You are making \$150,000, but your after-tax expense for your insurance, deductible, copay, pharmaceutical costs, et cetera, is about \$50,000 before your insurance kicks in.

The Washington Post thought I was exaggerating. They went down and interviewed somebody in Louisiana. They said: He is right—it really would cost you about \$50,000.

The high cost of healthcare and the high cost of drugs impact the Medicare trust fund. It impacts individuals. It also impacts States.

If you look at State budget after State budget that is struggling to make ends meet, inevitably a major expense, which has grown over time, is

Medicaid. States do all sorts of machinations in order to decrease their State's cost of maintaining their Medicaid Program, but despite all those little tricks they do—which, by the way, cost the Federal taxpayers more—still, Medicaid gobbles up more and more of a State's budget. Consequently, one of the reasons college tuition has risen so much—and along with it, the amount of money college students have to borrow to get through even State universities—is that the amount of State general fund dollars going for State university support has declined as Medicaid expenditures have risen.

So whether it is Medicare, Medicaid, or the individual family, rising healthcare costs are significant.

One more thing I should say about families. From 2007 to 2014, the amount middle-income families have had to spend on healthcare has risen by 25 percent even though the amount they have had to spend on other things has fallen. So we have to decrease the cost of drugs and the cost of healthcare.

We did have a bill earlier this year that had been negotiated between Senator ALEXANDER, Senator MURRAY, Senator COLLINS, and Senator NELSON—two Democrats, two Republicans—that would have lowered premiums for those in the individual market and done many other things. For example, there was a Federal reinsurance program that could have lowered premiums by as much as 40 percent, I am told, in terms of this year. If you are getting sticker shock—in a few months or right now—as regards what your next insurance premiums are going to be, this would have lowered that increase dramatically. For those getting short-term, limited-duration policies, it would have put guardrails on those policies to make sure they were good policies. It would have helped young people get back into an insurance market they had been priced out of. It would have given States flexibility on how to implement various programs—again, with the goal to lower insurance costs. It was a bipartisan bill.

By the way, whenever I hear one of my Democratic colleagues stand up and say “We have to do something about healthcare,” I then ask “Why did you object and oppose a bipartisan bill you helped negotiate that would have lowered premiums?” You can see it. It is not me saying it; it is actually the Democratic Party that stood up and said, on the procedural motion to proceed—can we move to a vote on this bill?—that got up and said: No. No, we do not want this bill that will lower premiums for the American people.

What I am saying is not opinion; it can be found on YouTube, on C-SPAN. It was a bipartisan bill which they helped negotiate and which they subsequently objected to, preferring that the American people pay higher premiums, I suppose, so that they would have a campaign issue to talk about.

So whenever one of my Democratic colleagues gets up and talks about the

high cost of healthcare, it begs the question: Why did you oppose the bipartisan bill that would have lowered premiums this year? It is a question the American people should be asking.

On the other hand—I am personally working on this—we just put out an 8-page white paper on what we as a nation can do to lower healthcare costs and to decrease the cost of medications. There are several things in there.

One is to adopt the bipartisan legislation which we thought we had agreement on but which was subsequently opposed by those who had negotiated the bipartisan agreement on the Democratic side.

Second is price transparency. Can you imagine this: If you go and get an x ray that your doctor orders or you go to buy medicine, you would actually know the price of that medicine or the price of that x ray before you go in, and if the price is too high, you would be able to comparatively shop and go someplace where it is less expensive. We do it for jeans. We do it for cell phones. We do it for cars. We should be able to do it for healthcare.

By the way, you probably know I am a gastroenterologist, a physician. I spent 30 years in the healthcare system. This can happen, and it does happen. I am told by a GI friend of mine that in North Carolina, Blue Cross of North Carolina will publish the cost of a colonoscopy. He is a lower cost, higher quality provider, and he gets folks coming from as far as 50 miles away for their colonoscopy, to his facility, because folks look online and see that it is a lower cost and that the quality is great. It can work.

One more thing on how this works. We ask that you ban gag clauses. Right now, some pharmacy benefit managers will tell a pharmacist that she or he cannot tell the patient that it is cheaper to pay cash for their prescription than to pay their insurance copay. The pharmacist could tell them, but the pharmacist is not allowed to because if the pharmacist tells them they would save money by paying cash instead of going through their insurance, the pharmacist would lose that contract with that pharmacy benefit manager. That is wrong. The patient should have the power. If the patient has the power, we lower drug costs, and we lower healthcare costs.

We have many other ideas in this paper, and we invite people to go to the website Cassidy.senate.gov to see this. We would like feedback. We hope that eventually it will be bipartisan. In the meantime, we will continue to work, as will my Republican colleagues, on how we can lower costs on medicine, lower the cost of drugs, and make it easier for those families sitting around the kitchen tables to meet their bills.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, earlier this year, the Commerce Department found the Chinese telecommunications giant ZTE guilty of persistently and willfully violating U.S. sanctions laws on North Korea and Iran. That is a pretty serious offense for a large company to commit. It found that the company then repeatedly lied about it and went to great lengths to cover it up.

In response, as we should, across party lines, our government took action and put a series of strict export and transaction prohibitions on ZTE in mid-April of this year. We did what we should do. A large international company—it happened to be Chinese in this case—broke the law, broke a serious law on sanctions and then lied about what it did, so we took action.

It is pretty galling to learn that early this morning, the Commerce Department announced yet another agreement with the Chinese telecommunications giant to enable it to interact with U.S. companies. They committed that kind of offense, then they lied about that kind of offense, and now we are saying: It is OK. You can come back into our country and do business with us.

What gives here? We can't allow a Chinese company or a company anywhere—I mean, I am not picking on China in this case, but China is a country we have had difficulty with. It is habitually breaking international trade laws and seems to have as much trouble with the truth as some people in the White House have. Yet we have allowed this Chinese company to violate U.S. law time and again, to lie about it time and again and get away with it. By turning a blind eye to ZTE's blatant violations, the Trump administration is putting Chinese jobs ahead of American jobs, putting Chinese national interests over America's national security. Why in the world would we do that?

ZTE is a Chinese company best known for making cheap smartphones, mostly sold in developing countries, although it also sells them here. That is important. It means a company that knowingly breaks U.S. laws could have control over information people have on their phones.

It is bad enough that we send this message: OK, you broke the law. That is bad enough. Then you lied about it. You broke serious international law, sanctions laws that protect our national security in part and protect the world from these countries—countries such as North Korea and Iran, which are bad actors. You broke the law by helping them, breaking sanctions laws, and then you lied about it. That is bad enough. Now we are not only not penalizing them, we are giving them an advantage when these companies could

have control over information people have on their phones.

This company that cheated isn't a company that makes cars; this is a company that makes telecommunications equipment that can be used in an insidious sort of way against our own people. This could have real national security implications if that information is abused. As we have seen with recent revelations about Facebook giving Chinese telecom giants access to its data, private firms are not always careful with how they manage people's private lives and private data.

The administration's new agreement with ZTE reportedly emerged from direct discussions between President Trump and the President of China. I can't even imagine what those discussions must have been. Think about what the President of China had to defend, what his country did, what his company did. Yet the President of the United States was willing to say: Oh, we will forgive it. We are not really worried. We love you. We love your country. We love this company—even though it is prioritizing Chinese jobs over American jobs, and it is prioritizing Chinese national security interests over America's national security interests.

In a nutshell, America's national security must not be used as a bargaining chip in negotiations. I don't know if the President, talking to the President of China, said: OK, we will do this for you, and you did this for us. Whatever the "you did this for us"—I don't know whether it means the President's business or the President personally or whether "us" means America's national interests, but I have not seen any of America's national interests that are getting favored in this whole transaction.

Trading American sanctions enforcement to promote jobs in China is a bad deal for American workers and a very bad deal for the security of all Americans.

Let's look at how we got here. Last year in March, ZTE agreed to a combined civil and criminal penalty and forfeiture of \$1.2 billion after illegally shipping telecommunications equipment to Iran and North Korea, in direct violation of U.S. sanctions laws. They made false statements and obstructed justice.

I am not a lawyer. I understand that this is serious stuff—shipping telecommunications equipment to Iran and North Korea, which are two really bad actors in the world, two countries that virtually everybody on this Senate floor has spoken out against at one time or another. It violated U.S. sanctions laws—laws that this Senate passed close to unanimously. They made false statements. They obstructed justice. Then the Commerce Department determined that ZTE then lied about its crimes. How does it get more serious than that?

Commerce Secretary Ross said recently—the Commerce Secretary ap-

pointed by the President, Secretary Ross. I know him well. I like some of the things he has done, particularly in Cleveland. He said: "ZTE made false statements to the U.S. Government when they were originally caught and put on the Entity List, made false statements during the reprieve it was given, and made false statements again during its probation."

At least the company is consistent: They lie during this part of the process, and they lie during that part of the process, and then they lie during that part of the process. So we know that about this company's character.

These false statements covered up the fact that ZTE paid full bonuses to employees who had engaged in illegal conduct, and failed to issue letters of reprimand.

They break the law. They lie and lie. Then they give bonuses to the executives who lie. How much more can this company grind Americans' faces in the dirt as they lie, cheat, and steal, and then the American President, in a face-to-face meeting with China, says: It is OK. We don't mind. I speak for the American people. Do it again.

It fundamentally says: If you grind Americans' faces in this muck after all that China has done and this company has done to America's national interests and then you say "We are not going to punish you," it pretty much says you are free to do it again.

Secretary Ross said:

ZTE misled the Department of Commerce. Instead of reprimanding ZTE staff and senior management, ZTE rewarded them. This egregious behavior cannot be ignored.

The President's Secretary of Commerce has said that we can't ignore it. He has said that they cheated, they broke the law, they lied, they lied again, and they lied again. They rewarded those lies and gave bonuses to those who lied. They never reprimanded them. That is what the President's Secretary of Commerce is saying. Then the President said: It is OK. It is OK. We don't mind. We will get something else for this.

That is why this spring, after Ross's comments, the Department of Commerce issued a law enforcement decision imposing a broad denial of export privileges on ZTE for its repeated violations of U.S. sanctions and export control laws.

These denial orders are law enforcement actions. Any changes to them should be decided independently. But that ain't happening here. The President is overruling a law enforcement decision—as he criticizes the FBI almost daily—made in the interests of America's national security, in part by people appointed to their offices by the President of the United States. He didn't just appoint the FBI Director; he didn't just select his Vice President; he appointed Mr. Wilbur Ross as his Secretary of Commerce. The Secretary of Commerce is saying, fundamentally: Mr. President, don't do this. This company needs to be punished.

Again, the President overrules a law enforcement decision made in the interests of America's national security, all in order to save jobs. That is at least a reason, but the problem with that is that the jobs saved are in China. They are not in Mansfield, OH. They are not in Cleveland, OH. They are not in Shreveport, LA, the Presiding Officer's home State. They are not in Toledo, OH. Think about that. The administration looks the other way for a company that broke the law, that threatened national security, and is doing it to protect jobs in Communist China, in the People's Republic of China. It defies all odds.

Can you imagine China saying: You know, I think we are going to hurt our national security so we can put some more jobs in Akron, OH. We are going to compromise our workers' interests so we can put more jobs in Zanesville, OH. It is OK that China is going to get a little hurt so we can get some more jobs in Chillicothe, OH.

I don't think they think that way. They do everything in their power. They steal our technology. They undermine our industries. They put our companies out of business. And then we do this. The only person I know who wants to do this is the President of the United States. The Secretary of Commerce doesn't like this decision. I am sure the FBI doesn't like this decision. I have yet to meet a Republican or Democratic Senator who says: Attaboy, Mr. President. Undermine our national interests. Protect Chinese jobs over jobs in Harrisburg or jobs in Ann Arbor or jobs in Madison, WI, or jobs in Atlanta, GA.

America's policies toward China—it might be an interesting idea to put Americans first, that our policies toward China should put our country first. That is what China does in reverse. That is why Congress needs to push back on this decision by the President and address it directly as soon as possible. The National Defense Authorization Act offers a chance to do that.

Senator VAN HOLLEN inserted language into the CFIUS bill which received overwhelming support from both parties when we marked it up in the Banking Committee 2 weeks ago. That legislation is now in this Defense bill. With the settlement agreement announced by Commerce, that legislation will require some change, some tweaking, to make sure that it covers what the administration has already done and at the same time prevents the President from moving forward with this agreement. Senator COTTON, a conservative Republican; Senator VAN HOLLEN, a progressive Democrat; Senator CRAPO, a Republican and the chairman of the Banking Committee; and I, a Democrat and the ranking member of the Banking Committee, pressed for an amendment that would do that.

This bipartisan amendment would send a clear signal to the White House

and, more importantly, would send a clear signal to the world that we don't agree with that behavior. It would send a clear signal that Congress disapproves of this most recent agreement.

It is inexplicable. Unless the President has some personal reason for doing this—unless it makes the President's business more profitable, unless it puts money in the pocket of his family or himself—and I am not accusing him because I just don't know—I can't figure out what all of this means. Why would you side with Chinese workers over American workers? Why would you side with Chinese national security over our domestic security?

I can't figure out why you would unroll, unspool, a decision by your own Cabinet member to punish this company for breaking the law once, twice, three times with Iran and North Korea, for lying about it once, twice, three times, and for giving rewards to those company officials who broke the law and then lied about it. I can't think of any other explanation as to why a President of the United States would possibly make a decision like that unless it was in his own, personal financial interest.

This bipartisan amendment would send a clear signal that Congress disapproves of that, so I urge my colleagues to support the Van Hollen-Cotton amendment.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO ED SCHOENFELD

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, it is Thursday, and that means it is the afternoon when I get to talk about someone in my State who is doing a great job for the State, and oftentimes for the country—someone who is really making a difference. As the Presiding Officer and the pages know, I like to refer to this person as the "Alaskan of the Week." It is one of my favorite parts of the week in the Senate, being able to talk about someone who has made a real difference.

When I give this speech every week, I like to talk about what is going on in Alaska. It is a beautiful State. It is the biggest State—we all know that—in the country. The State is fully in bloom. Its tourists are flocking north by the tens of thousands to view the wildlife, glaciers, mountains, to eat our delicious seafood, take in amazing views through hikes, and have an adventure.

I want to make sure that everyone who is watching in the Galleries or on TV on C-SPAN—you have to come to Alaska. You will have the trip of a lifetime, guaranteed. Come on up.

What is truly impressive about my State is the people who live there and

the sense of community we have there. Alaska isn't always the easiest place to live. It is far from the lower 48 States. The weather can be extreme, but, as a result, the people in the communities bond, and they work together, particularly in some of our most remote communities. We are one big community in Alaska, even though our State is so big.

Every community in Alaska and America needs to be able to share reliable, credible information. On that topic, there has been quite a lot of negative attention paid to the national media, in particular, these past few years. Some of it is merited; nobody is perfect, right? But the vital role of local journalism and how that plays in different communities across our country haven't been talked about nearly enough. We all know this, and in many ways we all benefit from the thousands of local reporters who are working in our country, day in and day out, reporting great factfinding stories and working hard. I believe we should all be saluting them for doing this important work, and that is what we are doing here today.

I would like to introduce Ed Schoenfeld, a reporter in Alaska who is our Alaskan of the Week and who has been reliably reporting the news from Southeast Alaska for 37 years. He recently took a well-earned retirement. Well done, Ed. You are our Alaskan of the Week.

Let me talk a little bit about him. He hitchhiked to Fairbanks when he was 20 years old for a little trip, and as so many do, he promised himself that when he had the opportunity, he would go back to Alaska. That opportunity came in 1979 when the program director position opened up in the public broadcasting station KTOO in Juneau, AK.

Now, Alaska public radio was and still is, in many ways, renowned across the country for its local reporting and for its crucial link to rural communities who need that reporting throughout our State—and need it badly. Interestingly, I think, because of the challenges it presents to reporters, some of National Public Radio's most famous reporters nationally—NPR's most famous reporters—have all cut their teeth in Alaska. So some of the people listening probably heard of Peter Kenyon, Corey Flintoff, Elizabeth Arnold. These are kind of the big dogs at NPR right now. Well, they all got their start in Alaska.

So public radio is where Alaskans throughout my State get their news about the weather, about whale hunts, about bear attacks, about births, deaths, crimes, baptism, good works, bad deeds, and you name it; that is where we get our information. In smaller communities, this information could be critical. Because public radio stations across Alaska work cooperatively, they always pretty much keep it local.

So, from KTOO, Ed went to the newsroom of the Juneau Empire, where he

stayed for 18 years. That is the big paper in Juneau. For the last 15 years, he has been one of the voices of Southeast Alaska on CoastAlaska, a public broadcasting consortium of five local communities. His nickname is “dean of the Douglas press corps.” Now, this is a bit of a joke, not toward him but just what “Douglas” means. Douglas is an island of about 3,000 people.

As the Juneau Empire put it, Ed has earned the professorial status of the dean of the press corps. That status came about because of the dozens and dozens of reporters he has trained and mentored throughout the years, and that is a great legacy.

Of course, he also takes his work very seriously. He has done plenty of lighthearted features about equestrians in Wrangell, exploring caves in the Tongass National Forest, which is the largest national forest in the country.

There are also deeper dives, as you would expect from a serious journalist. He has won an investigative journalism award about allegations of corruption related to a State contract. He has covered our important businesses extensively. There is nobody who has done more digging into an issue that I and my fellow Alaskans care deeply about—particularly in Southeast—and that is what we call the transboundary mining issue—mining waste that comes from mines in Canada into Alaska's waters. Ed has focused on that more than any other reporter, and it is an issue that, as I mentioned, many of us take very seriously. Transboundary mining is complex. Ed has traveled both in Canada and Alaska to the communities that are impacted by this pollution. He has spoken to everyone—community leaders, fishermen, government officials, environmentalists, mining companies, tourism businesses—and what he ultimately came to on this subject is that our concerns about this pollution are legitimate, but unlike some are saying, not all mines are bad—certainly not in Alaska. We have a number of mines, and certainly some are trying to do the right thing. It is more complicated than what the critics often say, says Ed. That is the way it is on most stories, and that is why we need good reporters.

So many issues are complicated. We can get so frustrated with the kind of simplistic “he said, she said” reporting that gets in the papers or on TV today, but good reporters, as we all know, dig much deeper. They cut through the propaganda. They lay out all the facts and facets of an issue and, in many ways, they let us decide. They recognize the people who are listening are intelligent, and they try and help us figure out the importance of some of these big issues. These are the kind of reporters we need in every community. These are the kind of reporters who I think are critical for our democracy.

So now Ed will spend more time with his wife—also a former reporter—Betsy and his two daughters, Elizabeth and Maggie. I am sorry to see him, as I am

sure most Alaskans are, hang up his dean's robe. I know his colleagues are sad, but there will be others who follow in his footsteps, others he has mentored—young, eager reporters who want to inform their community, reliably report the news and facts, and of course there is no better place to do that than in Alaska.

So, Ed, thanks for all of your 37 years of hard work for our great State, and congratulations on being our Alaskan of the Week. Your voice will be missed.

Mr. President, as you know right now, we are debating on the Senate floor the National Defense Authorization Act, and I want to congratulate Senator INHOFE, my good friend from Oklahoma and the acting chairman of the Armed Services Committee. I also certainly want to congratulate Senator MCCAIN, whom we are all praying for, who is struggling with some health issues right now, who is the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, the ranking member on the Armed Services Committee, for the great work they have done shepherding this very important piece of legislation through the committee process. Now we have it on the floor, and we are debating it. It is certainly one of the most important pieces of legislation we bring to the Senate floor every year.

It is over 50 years, without missing 1 year, we have moved the NDAA bill, which authorizes funding and policies for the men and women in our military, through the Senate floor. So there are a bunch of things in this bill that are very important for our troops, for the national defense of our Nation. By the way, it is a very bipartisan bill, just like it was last year. So we are going to be discussing this for the next week, and hopefully people watching back home or here in Washington will get a sense of just how important this legislation is.

What I want to do this afternoon is talk about two provisions my team and I authored in this bill. They are two provisions that are very important, as the President of the United States and his team head to Singapore for the summit that the world is watching with the dictator of North Korea, Kim Jong Un. I wanted to highlight two key sections because what they are meant to do is strengthen the President's hand and the leverage of the United States as the leaders of our country move into these negotiations with a very unpredictable dictator whom, in my view, we can't trust at all. Nevertheless, what we are trying to do is bolster the President's hand in these negotiations, and we are all cautiously optimistic that something positive can come out of this summit.

So what are these two provisions? The first provision deals with strengthening America's missile defense, and the second one focuses on the status of U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula. What I would like to do first is talk about the missile defense provisions in the NDAA this year.

Now, as this chart shows, Kim Jong Un has dramatically increased testing for North Korea's missile program and nuclear program. If you look at what happened under his grandfather Kim Il Sung and his father Kim Jong Il, the current leader of North Korea has dramatically increased both the testing on intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear missiles, and nuclear weapons.

Fortunately—and I think the American people want this—we have seen this threat coming. A number of us have seen this threat coming. So that is why, in last year's national defense authorization, we had a bill—my office authored it, but we had many cosponsors, both Democrats and Republicans—to significantly enhance our Nation's missile defense. That passed in the NDAA. It was fully funded by the end of the year—almost \$5 billion to increase missile defense for our Nation.

What it did is it increased capacity, building new fields of missiles that can shoot down any incoming missiles. It increased capability, which would mean accelerating technology for multiple warheads on top of each missile to again increase our ability to shoot down any incoming missile, and it required more testing by the Missile Defense Agency so we can perfect the regional and homeland missile defenses we have in the United States. That is big progress. It is already happening, and of course that is really important, given the threat we now face as a country.

As Alaska's Senator, I am proud of the fact that a lot—actually most—of our Nation's missile defense is located in the great State of Alaska. This is simply physics. This is physics and location, location, location. If there is going to be a threat from either Iran or North Korea or anywhere else with regard to the United States of America, that threat is almost always going to fly over Alaska.

We have our radar systems there. We have long-range discrimination radar there. We have the missile fields protecting every city from New York to L.A., to Miami, all based in the great State of Alaska.

So what are we doing this year? Well, we have an entire new section in the NDAA that builds on what we did last year to dramatically increase our Nation's missile defense even more because you can never be too sure on this. This is an insurance policy that is going to protect every city in America.

So this year, in the current NDAA we are debating right now, the big issues with regard to missile defense are that this bill calls for the development and deployment of space-based sensors. It mandates these within the next couple of years—critical. It also promotes a more integrated missile defense, accelerates our defenses against what are called hypersonic threats—not ballistic missiles but hypersonic threats. Importantly, in terms of missile defense, this bill focuses on our allies, working together with our allies in Korea, in

Japan, and other places in Europe to share these missile defense capabilities so we, as our allies, have a much more robust system.

Let me talk briefly on the very important issue of space-based sensors. Every expert who has testified in front of the Armed Services Committee, whether the current Director of the Missile Defense Agency, General Greaves; whether the four-star general in charge of strategic command, General Hyten; or whether the former Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Admiral Syring, they have all said space-based sensors are critical. The time is now.

What does that mean? What does that do? Well, we have different systems in different parts of the country or different parts of the world. In South Korea, we have the THAAD system. Off the coast of Japan with our Navy, we have the Aegis system ashore and on our Navy ships. Then, back home, we have the home-based system, and that is mostly based in Alaska.

What a space-based sensor program does is it integrates all these systems and has the ability to track—what the military calls an unblinking eye—the ability to track a missile that is shot at our country or shot at our troops from the moment it is shot until the end. We don't have that yet, but we need it to integrate these different systems. Importantly, that is what the NDAA we are debating this year will do to further bolster our Nation's missile defense.

Why do we need that? There has been a lot of recent good will with regard to Kim Jong Un. I want to read a quote by him from this past January. It is a New Year's Day quote. He said:

The whole of [the U.S.] mainland is within the range of our nuclear strike and the nuclear button is on my office desk all the time; the United States needs to be clearly aware that this is not merely a threat but a reality. . . . This year we should focus on mass producing nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles for operational deployment.

That is from Kim Jong Un just a couple of months ago. So let's not be taken by this dictator too much as he meets with the President. For decades, he and his dad and his grandfather have been threatening the United States and our troops on the peninsula and our allies in Korea and Japan.

With this state-of-the-art technology, this missile defense system, we are giving the President additional leverage in his negotiations. Indeed, people are asking: Why did Kim Jong Un come to the table? He has been very belligerent. He is saying things like he said on his New Year's Day address. It is really three things: the maximum pressure campaign; the diplomatic campaign by the President, by the administration, by this Congress—we have passed very aggressive legislation on sanctions; and it has been the development by Secretary Mattis of credible military options in the event diplomacy doesn't work.

The Koreans know we are serious. That is ongoing. And with the Secretary of Defense—a former four-star Marine general, Secretary Mattis—I don't think anyone thinks he is bluffing. So that is putting pressure on the North Koreans, and it is this system—this system. The North Koreans know we are now developing technology, so if Kim Jong Un does want to go out in a flame of glory and tries to fire one or two or three intercontinental ballistic missiles at New York or Chicago or L.A., the system we have here, which we are further bolstering, will shoot it down. This is going to give the President more leverage.

We are confident that section 1249 of the NDAA will increase the President's leverage. It involves the critical issue of our U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula. This section expresses the will of the Senate by highlighting some key points as they relate to our military on the Korean Peninsula and the history of that military.

What is in this section? It talks about how the United States and South Korea have been allies for decades and how our military forces on the Korean Peninsula, working closely in conjunction with the South Korean military and our alliance, have been the linchpin of peace and security, not just on the Korean Peninsula but in the entire Indo-Pacific region.

This provision of the NDAA focuses on how South Korea has contributed heavily not only to its own defense but also to what our military forces are doing on the Korean Peninsula. It emphasizes that U.S. military forces, pursuant to international law since the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950, have been lawfully deployed on the Korean Peninsula. Yet the nuclear and ballistic missile programs of North Korea are in clear and consistent violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions and international law. Importantly, this provision focuses on the fact that China, Russia, and North Korea have had as their long-term strategic goals the removal of U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula. That is what they want.

Indeed, there are reports in the media and other places that President Xi Jinping of China may be trying to coach Kim Jong Un, saying: When you go to these negotiations with President Trump, one thing to shoot for is to get rid of those American forces on the Korean Peninsula. Make that one of your goals.

This provision ends by saying it is the bipartisan sense of the Senate that the significant removal of U.S. military forces from the Korean Peninsula is a nonnegotiable item with Kim Jong Un for his nukes. We are not going to trade lawfully deployed U.S. military forces on the Peninsula for illegal nukes that the North Koreans have developed.

What are we trying to do here? First of all, this is a point that Secretary Mattis has been emphasizing. As a

matter of fact, last week I led a CODEL of Senators to a defense ministers' conference in Singapore. This is the biggest military conference of defense ministers, foreign ministers, in the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Secretary Mattis and his team, the Secretary of the Navy, and the admiral in charge of the Indo-Pacific were all there. We met with them and strategized with them. Secretary Mattis gave a great speech on U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific, as we are now calling it. He was asked about this very topic. He said this is not an issue that is on the table with Kim Jong Un, nor should it be. The issue of possibly removing U.S. military forces is not even a subject of negotiation.

You see here in this picture U.S. marines and ROK marines training together. We are not going to talk about the issue of moving our legally deployed forces on the Peninsula in exchange for illegally developed nukes and intercontinental ballistic missiles. This is what Secretary Mattis said last week in front of all the defense ministers of Asia.

What we are trying to do with this provision in the NDAA is strengthen the leverage of the administration and show Kim Jong Un—and let's face it, Russia and China, which also want these forces gone—that the Congress of the United States and the executive branch, the Trump administration, speak with one voice on this issue. What this provision in the NDAA says is exactly what Secretary Mattis said last week. So we are speaking with one voice on this very important issue that is likely going to come up in Singapore when the President is there.

Again, we know some of our adversaries in the region want these forces gone. I don't think that makes strategic sense. Fortunately, neither does a very strong, bipartisan group of Senators. When this bill passes the Senate, we are going to have the entire Senate speaking with one voice on this.

I had the opportunity to talk to Secretary Mattis, Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador Bolton, who is the National Security Advisor, and the President about this provision in the NDAA and how it is the Senate's intent to give them more leverage in the upcoming negotiations with North Korea. I think they are all appreciative of what we are trying to do in the Senate with this important section in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Let me conclude by making a bit of a historical point, but it is actually quite an important point, as we talk about this topic. The Senate has actually played a critical role on this very issue previously. Some might recall that President Jimmy Carter, when he was elected, actually ran on this topic. One of the campaign promises he made, remarkably—I think it was strategically very misguided—was to run on this issue: When I get elected, I am going to remove U.S. military forces out of South Korea. That is what Jimmy Carter campaigned on.

When he got in, he started to look at ways to implement that. Then the Senate reacted. You have long-term strategic interests represented by this body, and a very famous Senator of the President's own party—Jimmy Carter was a Democrat, and Senator Scoop Jackson of Washington State was a well-known Senator and well-known foreign policy national security expert. He led a delegation of Senators to South Korea. They looked at this issue in detail after President Carter was elected. They came back to Washington after this trip, and they said: It is not a good idea to remove our forces, which have kept the peace on the Korean Peninsula since 1953. We don't think this is a good idea.

The story goes that Scoop Jackson actually went to the White House, talked to President Carter, and said: The Senate is going to oppose this. You are going to have a hard time removing these troops.

So we have a role to play here; we have had a role to play here; and we have played this role.

I want to end with one final anecdote from that trip. The Senate Navy liaison officer who helped lead that delegation of Senators in the late 1970s to South Korea was a Navy captain by the name of JOHN MCCAIN. Yes, that is right; the JOHN MCCAIN whom I mentioned we are all praying for, and by the way, we named this bill after him. This is the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act. The current chairman of the Armed Services Committee who wrote this bill was on that trip as a captain in the U.S. Navy. I think that historical fact makes this provision in the current bill we are debating now, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act, even more powerful.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I was unable to appear in the Chamber today to vote on the nomination of Kenneth L. Marcus, of Virginia, to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education due to official business away from the Senate. I

would like the record to show that I oppose his nomination and would have voted against his confirmation.

Throughout his confirmation process and career, Mr. Marcus has demonstrated consistent disregard for the rights of the very students he would be expected to protect in this role: women, LGBTQ individuals immigrants, and students of color. It is clear that Mr. Marcus is in lockstep with the Department of Education in this regard. He has supported the Department's decision to dismantle critical title IX protections for survivors of sexual assault, stood in the way of LGBTQ students seeking an educational atmosphere free from discrimination, and refused to commit to protecting a child's constitutional right to an education regardless of immigration status.

Mr. Marcus has made abundantly clear that he is unfit to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education. I would like the record to show that I oppose his nomination and would have voted nay during today's confirmation vote.

(At the request of Mr. DURBIN, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for vote No. 118 on the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 603, the nomination of Kenneth L. Marcus, of Virginia, to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of Education. On vote No. 118, had I been present, I would have voted nay on the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 603.●

TAX REFORM

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, as you may know, I supported the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that became law in December of last year. We hear stories every day of the positive impact this law has had on the economy at large and in the lives of Americans who are seeing more money in their paycheck. What we don't hear are enough stories about the small businesses that have benefited from this law. As chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I supported this legislation because I believed that it would spark investment, increase economic growth, and reduce taxes for millions of small businesses whose work ethic and perseverance shows that the American Dream is still possible. I also saw the potential that the legislation would have, not just to help small business owners and their employees in my home State of Idaho, but to positively affect small businesses across the country. A couple of weeks ago, I began this series of speeches highlighting small businesses that have benefited from this legislation.

While there are numerous stories about the benefits of tax reform, I rise

today to talk about the story of the Don Ramon Restaurante Cubano and Social Club located in West Palm Beach, FL. Dina and Juan Rubio are the operators of this successful restaurant that offers traditional and affordable Cuban dishes in charming surroundings. Don Ramon Restaurant also offers catering services, provides live music, and hosts private events. Often, Juan will take the stage with his keyboard and entertain patrons with his rollicking renditions of traditional Cuban dances such as the salsa, son, and guaracha. This dedication to an authentic Cuban experience over the last 27 years is what has made this restaurant a popular culinary destination and landmark for people all over south Florida.

From Cuba and Nicaragua respectively, Dina and Juan appreciate the opportunities afforded everyone by the American Dream and have worked hard to realize their goal of becoming successful entrepreneurs. New tax law changes implemented under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act have allowed Dina and Juan Rubio to give their employees pay increases and larger holiday bonuses than normal. This law has also allowed them to begin planning capital improvements for their restaurant. They are planning to renovate their restaurant, open a take-out window, install new refrigerators and coffee machines, and hire up to eight new employees. Stories like the Rubio's demonstrate the benefits that tax reform has already had on numerous small businesses. Overall, it can be said that tax reform was a worthy goal that has increased small businesses' optimism, employee bonuses and wages, lowered taxes, and driven new capital investment.

REMEMBERING EMMETT PUGH III

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I wish to acknowledge the recent loss of one of West Virginia's best and brightest and recognize the life of a good man, kind friend, and dedicated public servant, Emmett Pugh III.

Emmett was widely known for his accomplishments as the city of Beckley's longest serving mayor, and while his positive impact on the city was immeasurable, Emmett was the sort of person who had a positive impact on the lives of everyone he met. Countless people benefited from the work, words, and kindness of Emmett Pugh throughout his life.

Emmett was a native son of Beckley, WV, and came from a long tradition of public service that followed him to the University of Alabama. While at Alabama, he cultivated a deep love for two things: the Crimson Tide and his hometown. After earning a degree in political science, with a focus on State and local government, Emmett returned home to serve as the president of Bowl-Wick, Inc., a bowling center that brought joy and entertainment to the citizens of Beckley for many years.