

progress, but there is a lot more work to be done.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act focuses on building on the progress we have made. It invests in the planes, combat vehicles, and ships of the future, including the Joint Strike Fighter and the future B-21 bomber, which will be based at Ellsworth Air Force Base in my home State of South Dakota. It authorizes funding for research and development and advanced technology. It authorizes funds to modernize our nuclear arsenal to maximize our deterrence capabilities. It also focuses on ensuring that we are equipped to meet threats on new fronts, including in the space and cyber domains.

It is important that we invest in these new areas of the battlefield to ensure we are prepared to meet and defeat threats. We are once again in an era of great power competition, where states like China and Russia harbor imperial ambitions. The National Defense Authorization Act will help ensure that we have a credible deterrence and are equipped to meet threats from great powers as well as rogue states and terrorist organizations. This legislation will also invest in our relationships with key allies and security partners to help counter shared threats.

Importantly, this NDAA will help our military bases rebound from recent natural disasters.

Finally, of course, this legislation will invest in our most important resource—our troops and in their families.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act authorizes a 3.1-percent pay increase for our troops, the largest increase in a decade. They more than deserve it, and an increase is important for recruitment and retention in our All-Volunteer Force when the economy is as strong as it is.

The bill also focuses on addressing the recent significant health and safety issues faced by many families with private on-base housing, and it contains measures to support military spouses seeking employment and increased access to childcare on military installations.

It also allows parental leave to be taken in multiple increments, better adapting to the lives of our warfighters.

In his first annual address to Congress, George Washington noted: "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

There is no better way to preserve peace and protect our Nation than to ensure that the U.S. military is the best equipped, most capable fighting force in the world.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass the National Defense Authorization Act and to give our military men and women the tools they need to defend the country.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ADMINISTRATION POLICIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, if there is one word to describe the State of the Trump administration, it is "chaos." The administration's policy at the border is in chaos; the administration's foreign policy is in chaos; and the Trump administration itself is in chaos: the vacancies in so many agencies, people within the administration fighting with each other, and the President tweeting away, even if it is unconnected to the people who actually administer the policies.

So even though this has been a constant theme in the Trump Presidency—the chaos within—it is getting worse and more alarming.

On the border, the President announces a new cockamamie policy almost every day: a national emergency to build a wall, tariffs with Mexico, shutting down the border entirely, mass arrests and deportations inside in our borders. Many of these "policies" were announced by tweet with little or no thought or force of action behind them. Not one of them has been implemented, even though the President could implement many on his own. Most were tossed aside as casually as they were announced, and it is easy to see why. The policies he has announced at the border are cruel, inhumane, ineffective, and most are impossible to carry out.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is cutting off security assistance to Central American countries—the one thing his administration was doing to stem migration and address the root causes in the first place. Even on the issue the President talks about most, the chaos of his administration is making the problem exponentially worse, not better.

It doesn't get any better when it comes to the administration's foreign policy. In response to increased activity from Iran, the President has now announced two deployments of 1,000 troops or more without even explaining to the American people what is happening and why. As Commander in Chief, he owes it to the American people, and especially our troops, to clarify what he hopes to achieve in the Middle East. What is the strategy? What is the goal? What is the limit of what we will do, and what are the things we will do? Any foreign policy expert will tell you outlining these things helps the strategy and helps build support for it. Does the President have clear goals? Does he have a strategy or, once again, when he wakes up in the morning and thinks—one day, he tweets about it, and the next day he

thinks something else and tweets something different or even contradictory.

We have no earthly clue to the President's strategy or goals because, like everything else in his administration, his foreign policy is wracked by chaos.

The Trump administration, in terms of its personnel and leadership, is in chaos as well. Yesterday the President's choice for Secretary of Defense withdrew. Where was the vetting? Why wasn't this known by the White House long before he got to this level? So now the most powerful military in the world has been without a Senate-confirmed Secretary since Secretary Mattis resigned in December of last year—6 months without a confirmed head of the DOD. How can we conduct a foreign policy, a military policy with no head of DOD?

The administration is escalating tensions in Iran and sending troops overseas without a permanent Defense Secretary, someone who is really in charge and thoroughly vetted at the helm. It is not just the Defense Department where chaos reigns. The positions of Homeland Security Secretary, OMB Secretary, SBA Administrator, Ambassador to the U.N., and even the Chief of Staff in the White House are all in the acting capacity.

It is a revolving door. People want to leave. Most people of substance can't stand the chaos and misdirection from the President, and we have had less focused attention to issue after issue from this President than any in a very long time because of chaos. The institutions of our government under Donald Trump lack steady and experienced leadership. It is a crisis of competence. The President is making decisions without proper counsel, preparation, or even communications between the relevant agencies. It is policy by whim. The withdrawal of his Secretary of Defense nomination is only the latest example of an administration in chaos.

I raise these points not to disparage the President but because the swirling chaos in his administration hurts the American people. It has frustrated our ability to find real solutions at the border and stunted progress on issues Americans care about, like infrastructure and healthcare. Above all, I fear the chaos in the White House could lead our country closer to a conflict with Iran that most Americans want to avoid.

In short, the amateur hour must end. The U.S. Government is not an episode of "The Apprentice." It is real life with real consequences. It is deadly serious business. For the sake of the country, the Trump administration needs to get its act together.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. President, now on climate, when I come to the floor to speak on matters of legislation, it is almost always about legislation here in Congress. But in our Federal system of government, the States, too, have enormous power to shape the current events in our country.

Today, I want to talk about a bill in my home State of New York that I believe will do just that. A few weeks ago, I endorsed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, a bill that would put New York on a course for a net zero economy, meaning negligible to no carbon pollution by the year 2050. It is an ambitious target, but we need ambition because we live in unprecedented times.

We are witnessing human-caused climate change in the storms, floods, droughts, wildfires, and other extreme weather that has throttled our country in recent years. It has caused loss of life and destruction of livelihoods all over the country and all across the world. We must prioritize the urgency of climate change, and we must recognize the need to take bold steps to confront it aggressively.

It is unfortunate that here in Congress, because of our Republican colleagues, we don't do a thing, not one single thing on climate change. The bills the House has sent over and the bills that Democratic Senators have proposed end up in Leader McCONNELL's legislative graveyard. Nothing happens, and climate gets worse.

Thank God the States are doing something, and that is why I supported the climate bill in New York State. That is why I am so proud today that my State's legislative leaders have reached an agreement that will clear the way for its passage, with a vote in the Senate as soon as this evening.

I look forward to watching my State pass the most robust climate policy package passed by any State in the country. I am proud of that fact. I hope that it serves as an example for other States to follow, another catalyst for the national debate about how we can tackle climate change, and a reminder that we, in Congress, must do our part.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, Leader McCONNELL comes to the floor often to laud the quality of his party's judicial picks. But even the slightest scrutiny reveals that many of these judicial picks will disgrace the Federal bench.

Take the nominees we are considering this week. Several have terrible records on women's reproductive health, LGBTQ equality, and other issues, but Matthew Kacsmark from the Northern District of Texas takes the cake. Mr. Kacsmark has demonstrated a hostility to the LGBTQ community bordering on paranoia. He has opposed marriage equality. He has defended businesses that discriminate against people on sexual orientation, and he has opposed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission protections for people based on orientation.

Here is what he said. This is a man who is being given a lifetime appointment to the Federal bench. He said the nationwide right to marriage equality was a "road to potential tyranny." He called the inclusion of LGBTQ protections in VAWA "a grave mistake." He labeled the Equality Act a "public af-

firmation of the lie that the human person is an autonomous blob of Silly Putty, unconstrained by nature or biology, and that marriage, sexuality, gender identity, and even the unborn child must yield to the erotic desires of liberated adults."

This is a judge? Is this someone who is weighing both sides carefully and who is giving equal consideration to plaintiffs and defendants?

It is unbelievable that this man has been nominated, and he is not alone. The parade of narrowminded, often bigoted people who are being put on the bench simply because they are members of the Federalist Society is unprecedented in this country—unprecedented.

Beyond his work for the anti-LGBTQ group called the First Liberty Institute—which boasts such luminaries as Jeff Mateer, who said transgender children were "part of Satan's plan"—Mr. Kacsmark has no judicial experience. None. Why on Earth is this man a nominee for a lifetime appointment? Why would my colleagues want to drape black robes over these bigoted views? Our judicial system is designed to protect liberties, not denigrate them.

One Republican Senator rightfully voiced concerns about this man's fitness. Where are the others? Where are the others? I urge my friends on the other side to study this man's record because any fairminded look at his qualifications would demand a "no" on his nomination.

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

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

ESCAPE ACT

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, we talked a lot in recent weeks about the importance of a transatlantic political and military alliance between our country and many other nations. In celebrating NATO's 70th anniversary in Washington a few months ago and the 75th anniversary of D-day in Europe, there has been a common theme, and that common theme has been security cooperation. The common theme has been a need to strengthen our response to threats that continue to arise around the globe.

I believe energy security is a critical part of our shared defense. That is why I just introduced legislation to help our NATO allies escape Russian bullying by improving European energy security. My bill imposes sanctions on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline. It also speeds up U.S. natural gas exports to our NATO allies.

For years I have raised concerns about Russia's energy export pipeline project. Nord Stream 2 would carry

added Russian natural gas supplies to Germany via the Baltic Sea. It would do it along the existing Nord Stream 1 route. This pipeline will fuel Russian aggression as well as regional instability. For our sake and the sake of our allies, we must stop it.

Nord Stream 2 makes Europe and our NATO allies more dependent on Russia and so more prone to Russian influence. It also means a massive money transfer from our allies straight into the Kremlin's pockets. That is new money that Russia can use to fund their military.

As we know, Russian President Vladimir Putin is no friend. He is a dangerous foe, and he has plans to divide Europe and destroy NATO. Putin uses Russia's military and economy as tools of intimidation. One of Russia's biggest economic levers, of course, is its gas monopoly in Europe. In fact, Putin has a history of using his Russian energy resources as a geopolitical weapon.

Russia literally threatens to turn off the gas if its demands are not met. Putin did cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine in 2006, again in 2009, and most recently in 2014. Of course, 2014 was the year that Russia invaded Ukraine and Crimea. Currently, most Russian gas exports to Europe must cross Ukraine, but by using Nord Stream 2 to bypass this route, Russia can freely undermine Ukraine's economy.

Putin threatens not just Ukraine but also our NATO ally Poland. Just last week Poland's President was here in Washington meeting with President Trump to discuss security issues. Unlike Germany, Poland is working to free itself from Russian energy reliance. Poland has signed a deal to buy an additional \$8 billion of abundant reliable American natural gas, and this is on top of the \$25 billion already under contract.

At the meeting last week, President Trump said he is considering Nord Stream 2 sanctions. He also warned Germany to end its dependence on Moscow. President Trump rightly noted: "We're protecting Germany from Russia and Russia is getting billions and billions of dollars from Germany."

The President is right. He went on to add: "Reliance on a single foreign supplier of energy leaves nations totally vulnerable to coercion and extortion."

The Economist magazine calls Nord Stream 2 "a Russian trap"—one that Germany has fallen into. I agree with the President and I agree with the Economist. Nord Stream 2 will completely undermine the European Union's efforts to diversify energy sources, suppliers, and routes.

Already, Russia supplies nearly 40 percent of European Union gas imports, and European demand for natural gas is expected to continue to grow rapidly. Many of our NATO allies, especially Germany, are becoming addicted to Russian gas. It is time for American intervention.