

percent—83 percent. Talk about a buildup. The Chinese nearly doubled their military spending in less than a decade. This is just the PRC's publicly acknowledged funding.

These numbers have very real implications. When China gets a leg up in terms of readiness or technology, they are able to hold a greater number of U.S. and allied forces at risk. They are able to push their air and maritime control further into the Indo-Pacific region, increasing hegemonic control and effectively pushing the United States and our allies back.

So the importance of this funding agreement is not simply our ability to provide for the upkeep and regular maintenance on our military as it currently exists. We are also talking about building the U.S. military of the future—research, development, and modernization—so that our Nation and our servicemembers are equipped to keep Americans safe and project power as necessary for years and decades to come.

In my view, this grave responsibility should be a top, top priority on both sides of the aisle, and this funding agreement will allow us to get it done. I am proud that it will meet the pressing needs of servicemembers stationed at installations around the country, like Ft. Campbell, Ft. Knox, and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky. The deal will secure sorely needed investment in the national defense, and it contains none of the far-left poison pills that House Democrats had sought, like going backward on the issue of life or stripping away rightful Presidential authorities. In divided government, that is what we call a good deal. The Senate will vote on it before the end of next week.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, first, the Senate will confirm several more impressive nominations. We are currently considering Stephen Dickson, of Georgia, to lead the Federal Aviation Administration. After him, we will turn our attention to two district court nominees. Wendy Williams Berger is the President's choice for the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida. She is a two-time graduate of Florida State University, with nearly three decades of courtroom experience, half of which has come on the bench.

Brian Buescher has been tapped for a vacancy in the District of Nebraska, where he has spent nearly two decades practicing law. Throughout his career, he has gained expertise in a wide array of legal areas and has earned admiration within the Nebraska legal community and beyond.

Those who know Mr. Buescher praise his "intelligence, integrity, professionalism, attentiveness, [and] character." The mayor of Omaha, where he has spent his entire legal career said: "Mr. Buescher would be an impartial

judge capable of setting aside personal opinion."

Despite his objective qualifications and all this praise, our Senate Democratic colleagues were not satisfied. Here was the bombshell that offended some of our colleagues with respect to this nominee. Listen to this. The nominee is a practicing Catholic.

My goodness, imagine that—in the United States of America, a person of faith, serving in government. Really?

In particular, some of our Democratic colleagues raked him over the coals in committee for his membership in the Knights of Columbus. It is shocking that a nominee for Federal district court would be a member of the Knights of Columbus.

Of course, we all know the Knights—a noted worldwide "extremist sect" of Catholics, which is about 2 million men strong, known among other things for their love of their Catholic faith, their unparalleled commitment to charitable work, and for hosting barbecues and pancake breakfasts.

Outrageous. I can't believe I need to repeat it in the U.S. Capitol, but there is nothing about living out one's faith that is disqualifying for public service—nothing. To the contrary, what the Constitution does forbid is imposing any kind of religious test for public office.

It is the Democrats' opposition to this nominee's faith, not his faith itself, that rubs against the grain of our Constitution. Fortunately, this tactic didn't fly. Our colleagues on the Judiciary Committee saw this tactic for what it is and voted to report Mr. Buescher favorably to the floor. I will be proud to vote to confirm him later today.

#### OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, the epidemic of opioid and substance abuse has wreaked havoc throughout our country. More than 2 million Americans suffer from opioid addiction. For years, the situation only seemed to get worse and worse. Unfortunately, my home State of Kentucky saw the pain firsthand. We are among the hardest hit States by this crisis.

Last week, both Kentucky and the entire Nation received a glimmer of long-awaited good news. Preliminary figures from the National Center for Health Statistics show that last year, 2018, saw the first—the first—nationwide decline in drug overdose deaths since 1990. For 28 straight years, overdose deaths climbed. But in 2018, that tragic number finally dropped. It was approximately a 5-percent decline nationwide.

In Kentucky, the Bluegrass State saw overdose deaths fall by nearly 15 percent last year, the largest drop in our State in more than a decade. After years of working and waiting, we are finally seeing progress in the fight to save lives. These numbers didn't hap-

pen on their own. Our comprehensive response involves countless law enforcement officers, medical professionals, educators, community leaders, and family members and friends of those affected.

I am proud of that. Several times in recent years, this Senate has done our part to bolster this fight with sweeping—sweeping—bipartisan action. We passed wide-ranging legislation to backstop the work on the frontlines with new programs, new funding for research, and new Federal resources for the communities most in need.

Just last year, we passed another landmark bill to attack the crisis of abuse from every single angle. Among its many features, the legislation makes it harder to traffic illegal drugs across the border; it supports mothers and babies struggling with opioid withdrawal; and it even includes one of my provisions to help those in recovery find a good job and stable housing as they work toward long-term recovery.

I am particularly proud of Kentucky's own role in leading in this recovery. Researchers at the University of Kentucky received the largest Federal grant in the school's history to fight opioid abuse all across our State. I was pleased to help them secure these resources as they aim to achieve a 40-percent reduction of opioid overdose deaths in 3 years.

In my hometown of Louisville, a private sector research facility received FDA approval for a medicine to ease withdrawal symptoms. I have worked to secure the inclusion of more Kentucky counties under the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program and increase coordination among local, State, and Federal law enforcement on drug interdiction.

This tireless work by Kentuckians has helped write the headlines we are celebrating today, but, of course, there is still much more to do. We know this is not the end of the battle against addiction—not even close—but it is encouraging to see the reduction in overdose deaths across the country.

As majority leader, I will continue to fight to ensure Kentucky and the Nation have the resources to build on this progress, prevent and treat addiction, and ultimately save lives.

#### ISRAEL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, yesterday, the Democratic House of Representatives took a small step—small—to denounce the scourge of anti-Semitism. They passed a symbolic resolution opposing efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and condemn the BDS movement.

It is too bad all of this, of all things, couldn't have been a unanimous vote. It is too bad that 16 Democrats voted against condemning BDS. Sixteen Democrats voted against condemning BDS over in the House yesterday.

It is regrettable that some of the Democrats who claim to represent the