

tradition of expressing Congress's bipartisan commitment to our national defense, but with the Senate's final vote later today, we will finally put this vital legislation on the President's desk. I look forward to voting to pass the NDAA today by another overwhelming bipartisan vote for our servicemembers and the critical missions they carry out.

Of course, the Senate needs to follow up the Defense authorization bill with appropriations measures and funding our national defense and domestic priorities. Ensuring the Federal Government makes careful use of taxpayer dollars is an uphill battle by definition. So it is critical that we plan in advance and deliver clarity for the full year ahead, rather than careen from one short-term stopgap to another. This point is especially crucial for our Armed Forces. Underwriting the commitments we make to the security of America's interests and our allies are the investments we make in a 21st century fighting force.

Our Nation's top military commanders have been crystal clear: This requires stable and predictable annual funding. It is as simple as that. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, put it recently, continuing resolutions are "a very ineffective and inefficient use of the taxpayers' dollars."

The Secretary of Defense hasn't minced words either: "Every day that a CR continues is one less day that we can invest in future capabilities and future technologies."

As a simple matter of good governance, avoiding another stopgap CR is an important step. So I am encouraged that the House is preparing to advance full-year appropriations bills this week. Obviously, what is actually in these bills certainly matters. So I am glad to say the efforts of Chairman SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and their counterparts in the House and White House negotiators have produced a bipartisan package of full-year funding measures that will make needed investments in our Nation's top priorities.

First is a topline increase in funding that our national defense requires. For the third consecutive year, President Trump and Republicans in Congress will deliver on our commitment to continue rebuilding America's military after nearly a decade of forced belt-tightening.

As threats to the United States, our allies, and our interests continue to emerge and evolve, this work is more important than ever. America no longer stands unchallenged in the international system.

As Russia tests the reach of its meddling influence in Europe and the Middle East, as China invests heavily in reshaping the order of the Asia-Pacific region in its image, a new era of great power competition demands our attention and our action.

The defense funding measure the House will consider today answers

these realities with a significant increase in defense funding. Our commanders will have more resources to modernize force structure, develop cutting-edge weapon capabilities, and ensure that American servicemembers receive the best training, equipment, and support available. It includes much needed upgrades to the nuclear force that backs up America's strategic posture, investments in hypersonic technologies to keep pace with our biggest adversaries, and renewed commitments to our servicemembers and their families here at home.

But our efforts are about more than equipping the U.S. military to win a fight. The funding bill takes a comprehensive approach to the security of the United States and our allies. It will unlock targeted resources for countering the creeping influence of authoritarian powers so military engagements become less likely in the first place.

I am particularly proud that, thanks to my own efforts, the legislation modernizes the reporting requirements of the Hong Kong Policy Act I sponsored back in 1992. It expands our support for democracy in Hong Kong, including legal support to Hong Kong activists, and increases the Countering Russian Influence Fund.

Of course, our work goes beyond defense and foreign affairs. We are talking about full-year funding for the Federal Government's domestic work as well, for example, big wins for the President's agenda to bring more security to the southern border. This year's funding bills provide another \$1.4 billion for the border wall system plus more flexibility on location than last year's funding. Despite the efforts of some House Democrats during this process, Presidential authorities to transfer necessary funds remain intact.

The bills also fund critical transportation infrastructure grants and inland waterways projects. They provide for our Nation's continuing fight against the opioid epidemic and help equip local authorities and first responders combating the scourge of addiction nationwide.

I am very proud and pleased that this legislation also includes Tobacco 21 legislation that I introduced with my friend from Virginia, Senator KAINE, this year. Raising the age of purchasing vaping devices and other tobacco products to 21 years old nationwide will take bold, direct action to stem the tide of early nicotine addiction upon our Nation's youth.

In another provision I fought to include in this legislation, we will secure the pension benefits of nearly 100,000 coal miners and their dependents in Kentucky and across the country.

Another key section provides hundreds of millions of dollars more for election security, another step in the work by Congress and this administration to make sure the lapses that took place on the Obama administration's watch in 2016 are not repeated.

The list goes on and on. All manner of important priorities will benefit this bipartisan legislation. It is not just about what these bills will continue, it is also about what this legislation will end.

It will take several more big bites out of the failures of ObamaCare by repealing more of its burdensome taxes. Already Republicans have repealed the board that ObamaCare set up to micro-manage healthcare and zeroed out the individual mandate penalty. We have already done that. Now this legislation the House will pass today will repeal even more of ObamaCare's misguided measures such as the medical device tax and the Cadillac tax.

So there are two timeless truths about the appropriations process in divided government. First, neither side will ever get what they would consider to be perfect bills, but, second, full-year funding definitely beats drifting endlessly from CR to CR. This legislation we expect the House to send us today satisfies the important priorities for the White House, for each of my colleagues, and for the American people. I look forward to supporting it, and I hope Senators on both sides of the aisle will do the same.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020—CONFERENCE REPORT—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany S. 1790, which will be stated by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the bill (S. 1790) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2020 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, having met, have agreed that the Senate recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the House and agree to the same with an amendment and the House agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.