

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. McCONNELL] proposes an amendment numbered 1267 to amendment No. 1266.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the Amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

Strike “4” and insert “5”

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 550.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read nomination of Stephen E. Biegun, of Michigan, to be Deputy Secretary of State.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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 nomination of Stephen E. Biegun, of Michigan, to be Deputy Secretary of State.

Mitch McConnell, Steve Daines, Mike Rounds, David Perdue, Pat Roberts, Shelley Moore Capito, John Thune, John Boozman, Roger F. Wicker, Richard Burr, Mike Crapo, John Cornyn, Rob Portman, Richard C. Shelby, Roy Blunt, Jerry Moran, John Hoeven.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I support the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. The final, conference version of this bill reflects

a compromise. As with any compromise, there are things I support and things I wish the final bill had included.

Of great significance is the inclusion in this bill of a provision providing 12 weeks of paid parental leave for all Federal employees. There are Federal employees in every corner of this country, including in Vermont. We lead by example when we say that the Federal Government will support new parents, who will now be able to be home with their new child in those important first days. I hope that this example is one that can be replicated throughout our workforce.

The fiscal year 2020 NDAA includes important wins for servicemembers, their families, and our national security as well. I am pleased that at long last we have successfully introduced a phase-out of the so-called Widows’ Tax. This bill mandates gender integration for Marine Corps training, makes much needed progress in addressing the use and after effects of open-air burn pits, and demands new standards for microelectronics supply chains, so we know our technology is working for us.

Closer to home, the bill authorizes \$30 million to construct a new Army Mountain Warfare School in Jericho. This is important to Vermont and to the Nation. This major construction project will allow the Vermont Army National Guard, one of the Nations’ few mountain battalions, to better fulfill their mission of training soldiers from the Guard, Reserves, and Active Duty to accomplish their mission in cold, rugged terrain. Vermont is an ideal training ground because its mountains and climate are challenging, but still allow training throughout the year for all levels of expertise. That training is important to the Army because mountain skills require the ability to move from one place to another when major obstacles are in the way, something valuable anywhere the Army operates.

The bill includes an important measure based on an amendment I filed as well to improve condolence payment authorities for civilians who are killed as a result of U.S. military operations. We have included funds for this purpose for years through the appropriations process, but very few payments have been made and record keeping has often been poor. The new provisions in this bill aim to improve the process and increase its use, so that when civilians are harmed in war, their families are not left economically destitute as well.

I am disappointed that this bill does not include measures that were adopted by the House of Representatives to repeal authorizations for the use of force that were adopted nearly two decades ago. We simply must have a debate in Congress about our ongoing engagement around the world that relies on these AUMFs.

I wish the final agreement had included a hazardous substance designa-

tion for the dangerous chemicals known by their abbreviations PFAS and PFOA, nor was a sufficient authorization included that would support the cleanup of these chemicals. The NDAA also includes authorization of the President’s Space Force, which I believe increases bureaucracy at the expense of our real priorities.

Nonetheless, I believe this is a good bill that supports our troops, and for that reason, I support its passage.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I wish to state for the record that although an important engagement in Oregon kept me from being present in the Capitol to participate in the cloture vote on this year’s National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, I would have voted nay had I been present.

I am pleased that the NDAA would phase out the reduction of survivor benefit plan annuities to ensure that the families of our fallen servicemembers receive the Federal support they need and deserve; would guarantee 12 weeks of paid family leave for Federal employees; fence funds for the introduction of new Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, INF; limit nuclear cooperation agreements under section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act with countries that lack safeguards; and support the legally-binding and verifiable limits of the New START Treaty as being in the national security interest of the United States. However, other aspects of the bill are cause for serious concern, outweighing these strong points, and must not be overlooked.

I am deeply concerned by this legislation’s failure to prohibit funds for unauthorized war with Iran. There is no doubt that war with Iran would be a reckless, disastrous mistake. Yet the President has made a number of impulsive, provocative public statements that risk escalating tensions. Congress must protect its authority to declare war, and that means no blank checks to the administration for an unauthorized war with Iran.

It is also unthinkable that the final NDAA does not prohibit funds for intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition in a war that has caused a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Communities have crumbled as a result of this conflict, and an acute cholera outbreak and famine have killed more than 85,000 children under the age of 5. The United States has no place supporting, prolonging, or being complicit in this war’s widespread civilian casualties.

In addition, I am concerned that the NDAA does not prohibit funds for the deployment of a low-yield warhead on a submarine-launched ballistic missile. The use of this powerful and aggressive tool could drastically increase the risk of instigating a destabilizing nuclear arms race.