

healthcare fight to get ready for the fall and winter and speed the search for a vaccine.

One helpful policy would be strong legal protection for schools, colleges, nonprofits, and employers who are putting their necks on the line to reopen. So long as institutions follow the best available guidelines, they should not have to live in fear of a second epidemic of frivolous lawsuits. Believe me, the virus is worry enough.

These are the kinds of smart solutions Washington must continue discussing as we evaluate what further steps may be necessary. Partisan theater and politicized wish-lists are not what the country needs.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on another matter, as I have said for weeks, our domestic challenges cannot take Congress's eye off the ball of world affairs. So, as the Senate passed other major bills and the Senate Republicans tried to advance police reform until Democrats blocked us, our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee have worked hard to assemble the next National Defense Authorization Act.

Every year, the NDAA allows us to speak clearly about the Senate's priorities on matters of national defense. As China continues to treat maritime arteries like its own backyard sandbox, the men and women of the U.S. Seventh Fleet and the entire Indo-Pacific Command remain on call to maintain order. As Russia doubles down on its support of brutal dictators and attacks democratic regimes from dark corners of the web, U.S. Cyber Command remains vigilant and our NATO relationships remain vital. As tyrants, from Tehran to Pyongyang, pave over their citizens in pursuit of power, we need our sharpest minds and best tools watching their every move.

Our Armed Forces stand watch over our homeland, and they stand watch over an entire international order that shares our peaceful values and benefits our Nation.

Now our military has also risen to the unique task of helping respond to the pandemic. Military medical facilities have added critical capacity during the first surge of COVID-19, from Navy hospital ships to soldiers from the 531st Hospital Center at Fort Campbell. National Guard personnel have established and manned temporary testing facilities across the country. DOD research facilities have joined the race to develop treatments.

As our servicemembers confront challenges new and familiar, our job is to advance an NDAA that supports them and their families. Chairman INHOFE and Senator REED led a productive, bipartisan process in committee. I hope we will see a bipartisan amendment process out here on the floor as well.

But already the bill will make major steps forward. It supports servicemembers not only while they are at their duty stations but also on the homefront.

This year's bill encourages expanded telemedicine capabilities in the military healthcare system, and it will help retain highly trained providers. It implements new quality standards for acquisitions of military family housing and increases impact aid to school districts that support large numbers of military children. It revises sexual assault-prevention policies to destroy barriers to victims seeking justice.

It includes further steps to ensure all these efforts are supported by a more efficient and transparent administrative structure over at the Pentagon. That means changes to compensation to attract top talent, expanded access to cutting-edge software, and new checks on the Department's planning process to increase accountability.

The U.S. military is the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. Our work in the coming days is meant to ensure that this remains the case. Supporting servicemembers and their families is a critical piece of this year's NDAA. Our men and women in uniform are simply the best, and they deserve the best.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 7259

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

An act (H.R. 7259) to allow acceleration certificates awarded under the Patents for Humanity Program to be transferable.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will re-

sume consideration of S. 4049, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 4049) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 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.

Pending:

Inhofe amendment No. 2301, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Portman) amendment No. 2080 (to amendment No. 2301), to require an element in annual reports on cyber science and technology activities on work with academic consortia on high priority cybersecurity research activities in Department of Defense capabilities.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

RUSSIA

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today there are thousands—thousands—of American servicemembers in Afghanistan defending us from terrorist organizations and their sponsors. They are joined by servicemembers and support personnel from allied nations and security partners. Each one of these lives is precious to a nation and to a family somewhere. Each one of us in this Chamber recognizes the solemn duty we have to our servicemembers.

We are all concerned about media reports that the Russian Government or its proxies has been offering bounties on the lives of American soldiers to Taliban-linked fighters in Afghanistan. The Associated Press has reported that the United States is investigating whether Americans died as a result of Russian bounties and is particularly focused on a 2019 attack that killed three U.S. marines, including one young man from Locust Valley, Long Island, NY, and another who worked as a firefighter in the FDNY—the great FDNY—for 15 years. On behalf of my constituents and the American people, I demand answers.

If, in fact, Putin and his cronies have been sponsoring the murder of American and coalition forces in Afghanistan, there is no question there should be swift and severe consequences. But unlike every previous administration I have ever worked with, the Trump administration has been shockingly weak-kneed when it comes to authoritarian leaders like Putin. This administration appears unwilling to even acknowledge the gravity of the situation, unwilling to even express concern about these rumors and commit to investigating them.