That brings me to my second priority: investing in our competitiveness. While our fundamentals remain strong here in America, the Chinese are outcompeting us in multiple arenas. The Chinese are running the so-called 100-year marathon. To them, victory in that race means toppling American global leadership. We need to make the long-term investments to compete in the coming decades in this marathon. The Chinese Communist Party is working overtime to achieve what they call ''the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'' by 2049. Their goal is to be the global center of economic, political, and military power.

China has pulled off the fastest military buildup in history, and they are still building. Beijing has achieved real growth in its defense budget every year for two straight decades—every year for two straight decades. It is quite likely they already spend more than we do, particularly if we count only our China-focused military spending. These investments are paying off for Xi Jingping.

Quite honestly, in many areas of warfare, China's military already exhibits greater quantity and sophistication than our own. I am particularly concerned about the rapid advancement of the Chinese navy compared to ours. The Secretary of the Navy recently shared a troubling fact: In one shipyard alone, the Chinese now boast more productive capacity than in every American shipyard combined.

I had the privilege of leading Congress to pass the SHIPS Act, which requires the Navy, in statute, to achieve a 355-ship fleet as soon as practicable. Unfortunately, the Biden administration has shirked its responsibility to enforce this statute and to maintain American naval superiority.

The administration has repeatedly sent Congress requests to actually shrink the fleet. This is unacceptable. It should be unacceptable on both sides of the aisle.

Thankfully, we took important steps in last year's National Defense Authorization Act to prevent the Navy from retiring 12 ships. We now need to make sure the Navy's battle force inventory grows each year instead of shrinking. I will push to make sure we build three destroyers per year, maximize the production of amphibious ships, and restore a healthy submarine industrial base.

For centuries, naval power has been the cornerstone of American defense policy. When we defeated the Axis Powers in World War II, our victory took place just as much in the steam and sweat of our shipyards as it did on the shores of Normandy or Iwo Jima. It validated George Washington's words from a century and a half earlier when he said, ''Without a decisive naval force, we can do nothing definitive.'' So let's do the most definitive thing we can: make a monumental investment in American command of the seas.

It is also critical that we revitalize our capabilities in the air and in space. In many ways, our challenges in aircraft production mirror those of our shipbuilders: Years of anemic budgets have created a brittle industrial base. We need to expand our orders of tactical fighter aircraft above 72 per year to get our combat air forces healthy. We need similar actions in tankers and other aircraft. We cannot continue to buy fewer aircraft every year while our older aircraft costs more to maintain. This is a death spiral. The same problems hold for our nuclear weapons production infrastructure, which my predecessor, Senator Inhofe—along with Senators FISCHER, KING, and others—has worked for years to rectify.

Our defense industrial base should focus less on efficiency and more on effectiveness. Again, it is helpful to look back to World War II to understand what I mean. In the beginning of 1942, the Nazi war machine controlled all of Western Europe. Japan's empire spanned from the borders of India to our smoldering fleet in Pearl Harbor. The forces of liberty were not on the march but on the defense. It took what one author called ''freedom's forge,'' or American industrial capacity, to defeat evil. We need to unleash our forge of freedom again—complete with all the 21st-century technologies that make it superior. Pentagon bureaucracy cannot keep getting in the way of this goal.

To that effect, we must also focus on improving the Department of Defense's ability to develop, integrate, and purchase innovative technology at scale. It is time for a culture shift at the Pentagon and here in Congress, one that prioritizes speed and effectiveness over compliance and efficiency. We may have to assume a bit more risk together, but we can and must accelerate innovation—accelerate innovation—while also improving oversight if we have the right tools.

We will win by deterring conflict, by winning the tech race, and thirdly and finally, by investing in our military personnel. We have long had cutting-edge technology, but our secret weapon has always been our people.

As a veteran myself, I know how important it is to attract the best personnel to serve our country in uniform. Unfortunately, we find ourselves in the worst military recruiting shortfall in 50 years. The injection of a hyperpolitical culture into our fighting forces I think takes a sledgehammer to military readiness and recruiting. I think it is part of the problem with our recruiting.

I will partner with any Member of Congress to expand the population of Americans eligible for military service. I will also promote solutions in this Congress, including increased support for Junior ROTC and ROTC programs and expanded incentives for servicemembers. As we recruit, we must never lose sight of our current troops. We will continue to care for servicemembers and their families.

All this will take hard work, new ways of thinking, and new partnerships between Congress and the executive branch. It will also require additional funding.

We must achieve continued real growth in the defense budget. Significant real growth is absolutely required to strengthen deterrence against the Chinese Communist Party to an acceptable risk. Any additional investments in our national defense should have the best return possible, and we should innovate in new ways that will result in real savings to the taxpayers over the long run.

In conclusion, the challenges we face are significant. Our adversaries are testing us every day, and we cannot afford to make mistakes in our defense policy or to try to do defense policy on the cheap. Legendary columnist the late Charles Krauthammer reminded us often that ''decline is a choice.'' But I am confident we can choose to pass this generational test of American resolve if we work together in the spirit that has so long defined the work of this Congress and the Armed Services Committee.

To my colleagues on the committee and across this Chamber, I say: Let's get to work.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, and pursuant to S. Res. 110, the Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m., Thursday, March 16, 2023, and does so as a further mark of respect to the late James G. Abourezk, former Senator from South Dakota.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:16 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, March 16, 2023, at 10 a.m.

CONFIRMATIONS

Executive nominations confirmed by the Senate March 15, 2023:

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

RAVI CHAUDHARY, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

BRENT NEIMAN, OF ILLINOIS, TO BE A DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ERIC M. GARCETTI, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA.