

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to consider H.R. 2670, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2670) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2024 for military activities of the Department of Defense and 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.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, a substitute amendment, which is the text of S. 2226, as passed, is agreed to; the bill, as amended, is considered read a third time and passed; and the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table.

The amendment, in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The bill (H.R. 2670), as amended, was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, S. 2226 is indefinitely postponed.

The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I now would like to congratulate my colleagues in the Senate for passing a very important National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.

I see that my distinguished chairman has come back to the floor, and I want to thank him for his cooperation. I want to thank every member of the committee and every Member of the Senate for their cooperation. As the public has learned, we do much of this through unanimous consent, and it is a tribute that we have gotten as far as we have and it is July 27, with another full 2 months to go before the end of the fiscal year. I think we are on the right track.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act will help meet the dangerous national security moment we face. It will equip our military with many of the tools necessary to implement the national defense strategy.

Every year, as has been mentioned, we pass the NDAA. This is the 63rd time we have done so, and it is a lasting, continual testament to Congress's commitment to our servicemembers and our security.

To be sure, our threats are much greater than they were back in 1961 when the first NDAA passed. Today, the United States faces undoubtedly the most complex and dangerous security situation since World War II.

This year's NDAA is an important step forward in our quest to build our arsenal. Ideally, we would have an annual 3 to 5 percent boost above inflation to our top line. We were not able to come to an agreement on that, but

even without that budget increase, our committee has advanced a strong, bipartisan product that contains numerous important provisions. Let me summarize just a few.

The bill authorizes a 5.2-percent pay raise for servicemembers and includes a host of other quality-of-life improvements for our troops and their families.

The bill also contains provisions that will help the military solve its recruiting crisis.

We include a massive expansion of the Junior ROTC Program, a citizenship builder in our high schools. We also included support for our submarine programs. We need to do more in that regard.

The legislation addresses the ongoing maintenance delays by sending funds to our shipyards. It expands our deterrent capabilities with a sea-launched nuclear cruise missile and allows us to make good on our commitments to the United Kingdom and Australia, commonly referred to as the AUKUS agreement.

The bill makes six more munitions eligible for the all-important multiyear procurement contracts. These multiyear commitments send a clear signal to our industrial base. And we will produce these arms at home, here in the United States, equipping American troops with American-made weapons and ammunition.

Notably, we have fully authorized the construction of the next amphibious ship, the LPD-33.

Our committee realizes military competition in the 21st century will be decided by our willingness to harness emerging technology. This NDAA accelerates the development of artificial intelligence, offensive cyber, hypersonics, and unmanned platforms. Because we intend to lap Beijing in the 100-year innovation marathon, we are authorizing a new Pentagon authority with the Office of Strategic Capital.

As always, partnerships with our allies act as a force multiplier on all the tools we are providing American soldiers. I am glad this bill enhances security cooperation with allies in every part of the free world, from the Baltics to the Pacific.

Starting in January, the Armed Services Committee held countless hearings, briefings, and oversight hearings of the Department. This is one of the most encompassing bills as a result of our work, which began in January. The committee mark included 1,217 provisions. Of that, 504 were the result of member inputs. During the committee markups, an additional 240 amendments were considered.

Throughout the process, my colleague and teammate, Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, has been a gentleman in every way and a patriot, as demonstrated by his service in the military and his service in the House and Senate. I thank him for helping to make this process exceedingly smooth.

To take a moment, let me thank the following staff members who were so

essential in getting this done smoothly and efficiently: Rick Berger, Brendan Gavin, James Mazol, Greg Lilly, Brad Patout, Olivia Trusty, Eric Trager, Adam Trull, Kevin Kim, Adam Barker, Sean O'Keefe, Katie Magnus, Isaac Jalkanen, Eric Lofgren, Kristina Belcourt, Pat Thompson, Katie Romaine, Travis Brundrett, Jack Beyrer, and Philip Waller. And all of these people on my side of the dais were led effectively by a veteran staff member from the House and Senate, my staff director, John Keast. Thank you to all of these people.

Thank you once again to my colleague Senator REED.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, first, let me commend Senator WICKER, the ranking member, for his extraordinary cooperation, thoughtfulness, and insight throughout this entire process. As a result, this evening, we passed in an overwhelming vote a bipartisan piece of legislation that confronts the challenges we face today in a very, very difficult world.

The first thing we did was we took care of the troops. We have a 5.2-percent increase in pay—one of the largest in decades. We also took care of the troops by investing in the best possible platforms in technology in many dimensions—underwater submarines, in the air. We are recapitalizing our triad for nuclear deterrence. We are looking closely at space, what we can do there both to defend ourselves and prevent space from undermining our national security. All of these things were done on a collaborative basis. Hundreds of amendments were considered in both the committee and here on the floor. As a result, we have legislation that I think we are all very, very proud of.

I would also like to thank and commend Leader SCHUMER and Leader MCCONNELL because they allowed us to conduct a very open process on the floor, to entertain amendments, to work closely so that we could have the conclusion we did this evening—a strong, strong bipartisan vote.

I am confident that what we have done will provide the Department of Defense and our military men and women with the resources they need to meet and overcome the challenges of a dangerous world.

Like my colleague, I recognize that the work of others made our work much easier. Indeed, the work of our staffs made this bill possible. So let me thank first my staff director, Elizabeth King, and I also thank John Keast, the staff director to Senator WICKER, who has done an extraordinary job. Together, they are a formidable team and also consummate professionals.

As my colleague has done, let me recognize the staff members on my side of the aisle: Jody Bennett, who made a very strong contribution to this effort, Carolyn Chuhta, Jon Clark, Jenny Davis, Jonathan Epstein, Jorie Feldman, Kevin Gates, Creighton Greene,

Gary Leeling, Kirk McConnell, Maggie McNamara Cooper, Bill Monahan, Mike Noblet, John Quirk, Andy Scott, Cole Stevens, Isabelle Picciotti, Alison Warner, Leah Brewer, Megan Lustig, Joe Gallo, Brittany Amador, Griffin Cannon, Sofia Kamali, Chad Johnson, Jessica Lewis, Vannary Kong, Noah Sisk, Zachary Volpe, and once again my staff director, Elizabeth King, who deserves great credit for this.

Let me also thank the floor staff and the leadership staff who have been part of this process and who have been able to keep our floor open so we could conclude this bill.

This is an important, important step. Now I look forward to joining my colleague Senator WICKER and our colleagues in the committee to go to conference to work out a bill that we can support as vigorously on a bipartisan basis as we have this Senate legislation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in 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.

#### SECURING THE U.S. ORGAN PROCUREMENT AND TRANSPLANTATION NETWORK ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before I make a unanimous request on this important bipartisan, bicameral bill, I wish to talk for a moment about why it is so critical that the Senate pass this urgently needed legislation.

For hundreds of thousands of Americans and their families waiting for a transplant, this is not an abstract issue. We are talking about life and death. More than 100,000 people are on the waiting list to receive a transplant, and, on average, 17 people die each day waiting for an organ transplant. In the first half of this year alone, more than 2,200 Americans have died while waiting for a transplant.

The inadequacies of the current system are especially harmful to minority populations who are disproportionately represented on the organ transplant waitlist, yet, on average, wait longer for a transplant and are at a higher risk of death while waiting.

I would just say to my colleagues that this is morally repugnant, and this legislation begins, finally, to root out this bias against our minority communities.

For the last 40 years, the same contractor has had a stronghold on this contract. The lack of competition has not been in the best interest of patients, and this fall the contract will be up for renewal.

In last year's bipartisan investigation, the Finance Committee found

shocking failures with the current contractor who oversees the entire system: long wait times for patients on transplant lists, viable organs being lost or damaged in transit. We saw pictures of these organs lying around in airport hangars. There has just been a lack of accountability when the problems happen, technology failures, and even patient deaths.

The last place anybody wants to hear about gross mismanagement and incompetence is in the business of saving lives. It is time for real accountability and real change.

This bill would build on the administration's recently announced plans to modernize the program and clarify that there is the ability to award multiple contracts for these key functions. This would create real competition for these contracts and ensure the best-in-class organizations can be awarded contracts to support this critical system.

The bill, which passed in the other body last week, would bring much needed change and modernization of the organ transplant system by supporting the administration's efforts and codifying, in the black letter law, modernization efforts where we aren't going to turn back the clock. We are not going to go back. We are going to go forward.

I would like to thank a number of Members on both sides of the aisle who have been on the frontlines in this fight, particularly Senator GRASSLEY, Senator CARDIN, and Senator YOUNG, who always worked in a bipartisan way. Senator GRASSLEY, in particular, has been a longtime leader on this issue, an outspoken advocate for fixing a broken organ transplant system. I believe he had a challenging schedule, as many Senators did tonight, but I wanted to thank Senator GRASSLEY. And I want to also thank my friend from Vermont, Senator SANDERS, and his very talented staff for their commitment to help us get to this point, and we are going to continue to work in the future.

Let's be clear about what is on offer. Every Member of Congress wants Americans to have the best-in-class organ transplant system. Our legislation is written from top to bottom to ensure competition for technical functions like those that will help this program perform to the highest possible level.

I said we were going to pull out all the stops to get this passed because the patients deserve it. This is the final stop after all of these years of foot-dragging and excuses. And tonight, this is the final stop. Let's send the Securing the U.S. Organ Procurement Transplantation Network Act to the President's desk today.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the Securing the U.S. Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Act is an opportunity for Congress to make history, an opportunity to change the lives of the more than 100,000 Americans waiting for an organ transplant.

Organ donation has always been a bipartisan issue. In 1984, Congress passed the National Organ Transplant Act. That bill was cosponsored by Senator Al Gore and Senator Orrin Hatch. I would like to thank the bipartisan group of Senate colleagues who cosponsored our bill. I would like to give special thanks to Senator CASSIDY, who championed the bill in the HELP Committee. I would also like to recognize Senators WYDEN, CARDIN, and YOUNG, who have worked with me for years to shine a light on the deadly failures of the Nation's organ donation system.

Thank you all for your leadership. Our bipartisan work will continue. The organ donation system has failed patients and generous donor families from all walks of life. After years of bipartisan work in the House and Senate, we have finally passed this bill. Success with this bill means patients are the winners.

For almost two decades, Congress, government watchdogs, and the media have questioned the United Network for Organ Sharing's ability to carry out its responsibilities. I have written about these issues since 2005. Since then, 200,000 Americans have died on the organ waiting list.

Those aren't numbers; those are lives. To put it in perspective, that is the population of Des Moines, IA. There is a reason I call the United Network for Organ Sharing the fox guarding the hen house.

In August of 2022, the Senate Finance Committee issued a bipartisan report that detailed vast disparities in how Organ Procurement Organizations serve their communities. Based on the findings, the organ network has worse outcomes for people of color and rural residents. This bipartisan investigation, which started when I was chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, uncovered fraud, waste, abuse, criminality, deadly patient safety issues, failure to recover organs, and retaliation against whistleblowers. The Senate Finance Committee's bipartisan report was clear: "From the top down, the U.S. transplant network is not working, putting Americans' lives at risk."

We must break up the monopoly that has held the U.S. organ donation system hostage since 1986. Patients deserve the best possible care; it is the difference between life and death. Our bipartisan bill will help ensure they get the best care.

Earlier this week, our colleagues in the House passed this same legislation to break up the organ monopoly and serve patients instead of special interests. Today, by passing this bill, we have accomplished a major milestone in saving lives and taking care of those who need it most.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 2544, which was received at the House and is at the desk; further, that the bill be considered read a