

manufacturing facilities have been announced across the country, employing thousands and thousands of people—and not just in junky, low-wage jobs but in good, high-pay, high-skill jobs, with training to boot. Again, these new facilities mean even more good-paying jobs for years to come in construction, manufacturing, clean energy, and so much more.

As the new jobs are being created, wage growth continues to go up. It is now exceeding inflation. So the amount brought home in your paycheck has gone up more than the cost of goods has gone up. That is a new thing. It only happened in the last few years.

The policies that we have passed here in the Senate—that Democrats have passed here in the Senate, frankly—are making a huge difference. Of course, we are only getting started. As we continue implementing the IRA, the American people will see more evidence of the Democratic agenda working for them.

#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on AI, finally, with so much going on in the Senate, I want to remind my colleagues that today we will hold our third all-Senate briefing on artificial intelligence. Our presenters are Rick Stevens from the Department of Energy's Argonne National Lab, Dr. Sethuraman "Panch" Panchanathan from the National Science Foundation, and Dr. Kathleen Fisher from the Information Innovation Office at DARPA. Finally, our moderator will be Dr. Jose-Marie Griffiths, member, National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, and president of Dakota State University. It is a broad range of presenters.

The last few briefings were well-attended. I know people are busy today, but please try to make the time. And the Q-and-A was surprisingly very direct. We got a lot of answers and learned a lot.

So I look forward to seeing my colleagues at the briefing for what surely will be an illuminating, important discussion, and I thank everyone for their good work.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 2226, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2226) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2024 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:

Schumer (for Reed/Wicker) amendment No. 935, in the nature of a substitute.

Schumer amendment No. 936 (to amendment No. 935), to add an effective date.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

S. 2226

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, last week, we saw an important step to recognize the legacy of our nuclear weapons program and live up to our obligations to the people and communities still touched by that work. And, no, I am not talking about a movie. The new release may focus on part of the story, but there is another important chapter I will not let us overlook or forget, one that takes place in my home State of Washington, one that is not over yet. That is Hanford, where men and women in my State are diligently now doing the hard, dangerous work of cleaning up one of the most hazardous nuclear waste sites on the planet.

As some of my colleagues may know, during World War II, the Federal Government established the Hanford Site in Central Washington State to produce the plutonium our Nation needed for nuclear weapons. Hanford wasn't just where they made the plutonium; it is also where they left 177 tanks, 56 million gallons of highly toxic radioactive waste. For decades now, workers have been doing the critically important work and very dangerous work of cleaning up that site.

I have fought for decades to make sure the Federal Government lives up to its moral and legal obligation to support our Hanford workers and clean up the Hanford Site, and I am still fighting to make sure we live up to those obligations today. That is why I meet regularly with workers from Hanford to hear about the challenges they are facing and the help they need. It is exactly why I have been pushing so hard to get my Beryllium Testing Fairness Act passed, and I was thrilled that the Senate voted overwhelmingly last week—96 to 2—to add this to the annual Defense bill.

My legislation makes sure that workers are getting support to deal with one of the most dangerous threats they face at Hanford—beryllium exposure. This is a serious health risk that can cause severe respiratory disease, irreversible scarring of the lungs, and lung cancer.

Now, Congress passed legislation in 2000 providing care to those who have made incredible sacrifices by working on our nuclear arsenal. I fought to make sure this covered the medical costs for those with chronic beryllium disease and provided cash benefits to

people who have been diagnosed with that disease. But here is the thing: Not everyone who needs those critical medical benefits for beryllium exposure can get them today. That is because the diagnostic standard is outdated and out of line with current science.

Right now, to qualify for advanced medical monitoring, you have to show an abnormal blood test. But if your blood test is borderline for beryllium sensitization, that doesn't count toward your diagnosis at all—even when you are plainly experiencing the effects of beryllium exposure or even if it is your third such borderline result. That is not right, and by the way, it is not consistent with today's science.

Workers in America who are cleaning up one of the most toxic and radioactive nuclear sites on the planet should not have to jump through cumbersome and unnecessary hoops and have the care they need delayed or denied all because the standard is outdated. That is why my bill will update that statute and bring it in line with an OSHA rule that was finalized actually under the last administration so that three borderline tests count as conclusive and more workers can get the care they need.

Let me take a step back to make clear why this policy matters. Less than a year ago, when I met with Hanford workers to talk about my bill and to hear their stories, I heard from one worker whose name was Tina. She talked about her friends and neighbors, people who power the work at Hanford. She talked about how a colleague's mom got beryllium disease, and then she retired. After many years of working at the site, she is now not chasing her grandkids around. She can't. She doesn't have the lung capacity to run around and play with her grandchildren. It is heartbreaking, and it is not an uncommon story in the Tri-Cities. That is why this bill matters.

Yes, it is technical. Yes, it may not seem like a big difference if you are not involved in this kind of work day to day. But this bill will make sure we don't lose precious time getting workers the support they need to manage this awful disease.

I am glad we are on track to get this passed into law now, and there is a lot more I want to get done to make sure we are living up to the obligation to take care of those workers. But this is meaningful, important progress. They may not be telling the stories of these workers on the silver screen yet, but as long as I am in the Senate, you can bet their voices will be heard in the Halls of our Nation's Capitol.

I yield the floor.

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

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in 1793, in his annual address to Congress, George Washington noted:

If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known that we are at all times ready for war.

Or in the words of another President nearly 200 years later:

We maintain the peace through our strength; weakness only invites aggression.

The United States has a well-deserved reputation for strength, and aggressors think twice before tangling with the U.S. military. But strength has to be maintained, and we have not done a good job, or good-enough job, of that lately.

Five years ago, the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission released a report warning that our readiness had eroded to the point where we might struggle to win a war against a major power like China. While we have made some progress since then at rebuilding our readiness, we are still a long way from where we need to be.

Recent U.S. war games envisioning a United States-China conflict following an attack on Taiwan have had grim results, showing enormous military and economic costs on both sides. One news story on these war games noted:

And while the ultimate outcome in these exercises is not always clear—the U.S. does better in some than others—the cost is [clear]. In every exercise the U.S. uses up all its long-range air-to-surface missiles in a few days, with a substantial portion of its planes destroyed on the ground.

Let me just repeat that last line:

In every exercise the U.S. uses up all its long-range air-to-surface missiles in a few days, with a substantial portion of its planes destroyed on the ground.

I don't need to tell anyone that that is a profoundly concerning position for us to be in. China is growing increasingly aggressive in the Indo-Pacific and has also adopted an increasingly aggressive posture toward the United States, and it is investing heavily in its military.

If we want to deter China aggression, we have to ensure that our military is strong enough to make China want to avoid challenging us. We can't accomplish that if we would run out of key munitions in a few days of combat.

While China has to be a major focus when it comes to our defense policy, it is far from the only threat out there. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine is all the reminder that we need that Russia is not a peaceful nation. North Korea launched two missiles just this Monday. Iran continues to pursue its aggressive nuclear agenda, threaten Israel, and attempt to seize ships in the Persian Gulf. And the list goes on; which brings me to this year's National Defense Authorization Act, which the Senate expects to wrap up this week.

I am pleased to report that this year's NDAA makes real progress on the readiness front. It bolsters our se-

curity posture in the Indo-Pacific and deepens our ties with Taiwan. It rejects the President's dangerous plan to shrink the U.S. Navy and authorizes investment in new ships. It also contains multiple measures to increase our supply of munitions, including the addition of six critical munitions to the Pentagon's multiyear procurement program.

Two of these munitions—Tomahawk missiles and MK-48 torpedoes—play an important role in our ability to deter China.

On the European front, the bill invests in Russia deterrence by continuing support for Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, and it bolsters oversight to ensure U.S. funding is being used appropriately.

The NDAA also holds NATO members accountable for investing in their own defense by prioritizing our links with partners who meet the commitment to spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense.

This year's bill also ensures that our military keeps its focus on defense and not divisive Democratic social initiatives by limiting so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion bureaucracy.

Above all, I am proud to report that this year's bill authorizes full funding for the next steps of the B-21 mission—the Air Force's new long-range strategic bomber which will revolutionize our long-range strike capabilities and be hosted at South Dakota's own Ellsworth Air Force Base.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: If we don't get national security right, the rest is conversation. If there is one area in which we can't fail, it is providing for the defense of our Nation.

This year's National Defense Authorization Act is not sufficient to address all of our Nation's readiness issues, but it makes an important down payment on boosting our preparedness. And I look forward to supporting it later this week.

I hope that we will continue to have a robust amendment process so that other important ideas can be considered and all Members have a chance to make their voices heard. And I hope that Congress will continue to make investing in our military a top priority.

I yield the floor.

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

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

#### IMMIGRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on Monday, President Biden's Department of Justice filed suit against my State, Texas, over our efforts to secure our border. Of the 2,000-mile southern border, Texas has a 1,200-mile border with Mexico; and, of course, that has been

the epicenter of the humanitarian and public safety crisis that we have seen get nothing but worse over the last 2 years.

It is almost laughable, if it wasn't so serious. The administration filed suit over what it called humanitarian concerns, which is more than a little ironic. This is the same administration whose policies have ushered in an unprecedented humanitarian and public security crisis at the southern border.

I have talked previously about the 300,000 children—unaccompanied children—who have been placed with sponsors in the interior of the United States by the Biden administration during the last 2½ years and the fact that the administration has lost track of at least 85,000 of those 300,000 children. When they were contacted or attempted to be contacted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and Health and Human Services, 30 days after they were placed with a sponsor, there was no answer and no followup by the administration.

This is the same administration that turned a blind eye when countless young migrants were being exploited on American soil. The New York Times has run two investigative pieces pointing out that, essentially, the administration doesn't know where any of these 300,000 unaccompanied children are—whether they are going to school, whether they are getting their healthcare attended to, whether they are being recruited into gangs or sexually abused or otherwise neglected. They don't know, and, apparently, they don't care because, if they did care, then they would make the effort to find out and do something about it.

Vice President HARRIS was designated as the administration's border czar during this unprecedented crisis, which has taken a devastating toll on migrants, law enforcement, and border communities, and it has affected every city in the country, from New York to Washington, DC, to Chicago. Every State, in a sense, has been affected by the border crisis and has become a border State in that sense.

Vice President HARRIS, despite her effort to do anything to address this crisis at the border, has had the audacity to criticize Governor Abbott's actions as “inhumane,” “outrageous,” and “un-American.” Of course, she can't be bothered to actually go to the border and find out what is happening there on her own.

Now, there are a lot of misconceptions about the border. People who haven't been there haven't learned for themselves or from the experts at Border Patrol and the nongovernmental organizations that do their best to try to take care of these people. Vice President HARRIS simply hasn't bothered to learn, yet she has the audacity to criticize Governor Abbott for doing what he has to do because of the failure of the Biden administration to do its job. The unavoidable reality is we wouldn't be in this situation if it

weren't for President Biden abdicating his responsibilities.

This is an international border, as we all know. That, by definition, is the Federal Government's responsibility, but the Biden administration has simply, as I said, abdicated its responsibilities, with tragic consequences. Unlike President Biden, Governor Abbott took action. His constituents—my constituents—30 million Texans, insisted upon it, and he put measures in place to try to deter migrants from attempting the dangerous journey from their home across the border into the United States.

We know, particularly now with temperatures in the triple digits, that migrants face a brutal environment: heat, dangerous waters, treacherous terrain. And, sadly, many migrants do not survive the journey.

Does President Biden understand that, last year alone, at least 748 people died making their way across the southern border?

I know he has never been to Brooks County, which is the location of one of the interior checkpoints where the coyotes will drive people up from the stash houses along the border, short of the checkpoint, and tell the migrants, "Get out of the vehicle, and here is a gallon jug of water"—and maybe a candy bar—"and meet me on the top side, on the north side of the border checkpoint," in order to evade the interior checkpoints.

Well, Brooks County had so many migrants who died under those circumstances, making that trek around the checkpoint, that they didn't have the money to actually bury the bodies, and so we actually had to try to provide some additional resources to help them do that.

Again, the hypocrisy of the Biden administration complaining about the State trying to do its best to deal with a vacuum when it comes to Federal responsibility is absolutely ridiculous. So 748 people, we know, died trying to come across the southern border, and they are complaining about efforts to try to deter or dissuade people from making that dangerous trip in the first place. That is what Governor Abbott is trying to do and being criticized by the very people who are not doing their job.

If the President is unhappy with the actions Texas has taken, there is a clear solution: Do your job. If the President and his administration did their job, there would be no need for the State to use its resources and its tax dollars to do the job that the Federal Government should be doing. Until then, Governor Abbott has every right to use the powers available to him to keep our State safe, to protect our citizens. That is his right as an elected head of a sovereign State.

I want to make a point of thanking all the countless Federal, State, and local law enforcement officers as well as the National Guardsmen from Texas, the Department of Public Safe-

ty, and others who have been deployed to the border for their tireless work to protect our State and our country. They deserve our commendation and our appreciation, not criticism, particularly when it is so misguided and unfair.

The Biden administration may not appreciate the efforts of the State of Texas, but the vast majority of us see, understand, and are grateful for everything Texas guards, local law enforcement, DPS, and others are doing to keep our country safe.

S. 2226

Mr. President, on another matter, the Senate is in the process of fulfilling one of its most important responsibilities, and that is protecting the safety and security of our Nation by advancing the National Defense Authorization Act.

I want to commend Senator REED and Senator WICKER, the chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, for their leadership on this bill and for maintaining the bipartisan process that has historically guided this legislation.

Congress has managed to overcome partisan differences to pass a Defense authorization bill for each of the past 62 years. That is quite an accomplishment, and I hope we can build on that record of success again this year.

Our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee compiled a strong bill, and I am glad the Senate now has an opportunity to try to improve it further by offering and voting on various amendments.

Yesterday evening, the Senate adopted a bipartisan amendment I introduced with Senator CASEY, the Senator from Pennsylvania, to strengthen our ability to counter threats from China. It does this by providing greater visibility into certain investments American entities are making in China and other countries of concern. Our amendment received overwhelming bipartisan support. It passed by a vote of 91 to 6, which is incredibly rare these days.

I want to express my gratitude to Senator CASEY and all of our colleagues who worked together—particularly on the Banking Committee and others—and thank them for supporting this amendment and working with us to overcome this initial hurdle.

We know when this bill goes to conference with the House of Representatives, there will be other discussions about this topic, but it is important that we have a strong vote on this outbound investment transparency provision because we need to know what American companies are doing to help grow the economy of our chief competitor on the planet, which is using that strong economy, by the way, to arm itself and threaten its neighbors in the region. We need to know—and this legislation will allow us to know—exactly what is going on so we can consider whether other policy provisions are necessary.

We know the House passed its own version of the NDAA last month, but it

didn't include any provisions on this outbound investment issue. So I am confident in the coming weeks Members of the House and the Senate will need to iron out the differences between our two versions. And it is absolutely critical that this outbound investment transparency that the Senate so enthusiastically supported be part of that final conference report.

We all know the Chinese Communist Party has become increasingly aggressive in its efforts to gain power and influence. Through intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers, and predatory lending practices like the Belt and Road Initiative, China has grown its economic power and is using these same methods to pursue global military dominance.

In China, there is no bright line separating the military and civilian sectors. This is part of an intentional strategy known as Military-Civil Fusion, which promotes the development of dual-use technologies. In other words, it can be used in the private sector, and it can be used by the People's Liberation Army.

In short, the Chinese Communist Party is investing in technologies that bolster both its military strength and its economic power. And unfortunately, many American entities are fueling the success of Chinese Military-Civil Fusion, maybe even without knowing really what they are doing.

In testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, an open hearing—an unusual open hearing—I heard some concerning figures that illustrate just how big this problem is.

At the end of 2020, U.S. investments in Chinese companies had a total market value of \$2.3 trillion. That is foreign investments from the United States into the People's Republic of China worth \$2.3 trillion in 2020. That included \$21 billion in semiconductors, \$54 billion to Chinese military companies, and a whopping \$221 billion in artificial intelligence.

There has been a lot of discussion here in the Senate and in Washington, DC, about what is the future of artificial intelligence. Well, American companies have been investing a lot of money in China and helping them develop their artificial intelligence capabilities. And we know this authoritarian country, under the leadership of President Xi, does not have benign intentions. We need to be very careful about exactly how much and in what sectors the American business community is investing in China when they are our No. 1 global competitor.

Intentionally or not, American companies are bankrolling the Chinese Communist Party's military rise. They are pouring huge amounts of capital into capabilities that could be used against the United States and certainly against our allies.

These few data points are deeply concerning. But the truth is, these are just a few pieces of the puzzle. We can't see the full picture, but we need to.

Currently, there are no requirements for companies to report billion-dollar investments in Chinese companies. The full extent of U.S. investments could be much larger and more concerning, but we simply don't have the information.

That is exactly why Senator CASEY and I offered this amendment and why the Senate adopted it so overwhelmingly, 91 to 6. A strong bipartisan support for this amendment is evidence that this bill strengthens our national security without impacting the free market. We are not interested in decoupling from China, as some people have advocated. And I think Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen, who have used the word "derisking"—it is an appropriate use of that term. We are trying to derisk our economies in our two countries so, hopefully, it will never come to any open conflict.

We want to make sure that we are strong enough to deter China from ever even thinking about invading Taiwan, for example.

But as our colleagues know, the requirement of providing notice of U.S.-based investments in China does not apply to every investment under the Sun—the one we just voted on. It is a highly targeted amendment and only applies to sensitive technologies like semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and hypersonics.

These are the technologies and capabilities that pose the greatest national security risk to the United States of America. And to be clear, it does not stop investments from happening or interfere with other investments by American companies in the People's Republic of China. It simply requires companies or other entities to share information about investments in certain technologies.

This is all about transparency. It will help the United States see and understand the threats from China and other countries of concern so we can act accordingly.

Some of our colleagues said: Well, we need to do more. I agree. But I think this is an important first step. And certainly when we say politics is the art of the possible, this is what is possible now. And I would hope, with additional information that is generated from these transparency measures, we can make a decision at some later point whether different policy needs to be applied. But for now, this represents an important first step.

The reality is, things like sanctions to restrictions, to an outright ban on investments don't have the political support on both sides of the aisle in both Chambers that they need in order to become law. So rather than adopt an all-or-nothing approach, which will end up leaving us with nothing, we decided to again engage in the art of the possible. And this amendment demonstrates that that is achievable.

The outbound investment provision promotes our national security, protects the free market, and it provides much greater visibility into the

threats posed by our most formidable potential adversaries. Outbound investment transparency is absolutely crucial to our ability to understand what is happening in China and to counter any threats.

I urge my colleagues in the Senate and the House as well to fight to preserve this language during the conference process.

But, in closing, let me just again thank Chairman REED and Ranking Member WICKER and all of our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee for all the work that has gone into this bill so far. I know we are not through. We are going to have a number of votes today and tomorrow. But they provided us a strong foundation and a strong base to build on. And I am glad those of us who are not on the Armed Services Committee have a chance to offer our suggestions and improve the bill by the amendment process.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I will be joined shortly by Senator MORAN, who is the ranking Republican on the Veterans' Committee, and Senator BLUMENTHAL, who has always been such a strong leader on many issues related to veterans. We are here to talk about an amendment that is before the Senate this week on the National Defense Authorization Act. This is our moment. This is our moment.

I came to the floor last night and spoke on this, and I am here again. And I am here not just on behalf of all the cosponsors of this important amendment, which includes Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, who is the lead Republican on the amendment as well as, of course, the ranking Republican, the highest Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator COONS; Senator MORAN; Senator BLUMENTHAL; Senator MURKOWSKI; Senator SHAHEEN; Senator WICKER, who I note is the ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee; Senator DURBIN, the chair of the Judiciary Committee; Senator TILLIS; and Senator MULLIN.

Of course, this bill is supported by many, many other Senators—in fact, the majority of the U.S. Senate, which sounds to me like when you have the numbers, you should be able to have a vote, and that is what I am asking for today.

I am pushing this because this is our moment. We have had 2 years to show the world whether or not we are going to stand with those who stood with us. For 2 years, we have worked on this bill. Our colleagues have had plenty of time to look at it. They have had input. It was introduced last year.

But you know who else is watching? Our military is watching. Every single one of the Senators in this Chamber have been approached by a member of our military, whether it is on Veterans Day, whether it is on Memorial Day, whether it is just walking down the street. Those who served in Afghanistan have come to us and said: Hey, I wouldn't be here today if this guy hadn't stood with me on the battlefield or if this interpreter hadn't helped me out or if this guy had not put his family on the line to gather intelligence.

And they have all asked us the same thing, and that is to not leave these courageous Afghans, who stood with our military, in limbo. We did not leave the Hmong and the Vietnamese who came over to our country. After that withdrawal and evacuation, we did not leave them in limbo. They were given a legal status, which allowed them to work, which allowed them to pursue citizenship at some point. I know because I have the biggest population of Hmong, next to California, in my State.

What do they do now, generations later? They are police officers. They are firefighters. They are teachers. They are elected officials. They are pillars of our communities.

That is what we do. That is what we did when so many Cubans came over to this country. We didn't just leave them in limbo. We included them in the fabric of life of our country, and we are the richer for it.

But this, these Afghans—so many of them vouched for by the top leaders in our military—they took bullets for us, literally, and we must stand by them.

The decision we make right now of whether we live up to the covenant we made to our Afghan allies is going to reverberate militarily and diplomatically for longer than any of us will serve in this body because the next time we are in a conflict and we ask people to serve and to put themselves at risk and put their families at risk, do you think they are not going to hear that 80,000 people are in complete limbo if we don't do something about this?

This bill strengthens our national security. And I will give you a long list of generals in a moment, very famous leaders in our military who support this bill. It does right by our Afghans who worked alongside our troops. And it shows the world that when the United States of America makes a promise, when we make a covenant, that we keep it.

Nearly 80,000 Afghans who sought refuge in our country after that evacuation are in limbo. They are in our country. Let me repeat this. They are here now. So we can choose to have some order here and have a vetting process, which is why so many of my more conservative colleagues are supporting this bill, are on this bill—because right now that process isn't in place. So this will allow us to vet people and then create some order so that

they have a provisional status in this country and they don't worry that they are going to be sent back to live under the rule of the Taliban, which certainly so many of them would be killed. Among them were brave translators, humanitarian workers, courageous members of the Afghan military who stood shoulder to shoulder with our troops.

We were right to help these people come to the United States. And now it falls on us to uphold the covenant we made to them and help provide them with the stability and the security they need to rebuild their lives here. We may have disagreements—of course we do; our country does on Afghanistan—but those need to be put aside right now to talk about what we are going to do about the covenant that we made to these people.

The bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act creates a more thorough system, as I noted, for our Afghan allies to apply for permanent legal status. It requires that applicants go through vetting that is just as vigorous as the vetting they would have gone through if they came to the United States as a refugee, a standard that eight former Trump and George W. Bush administration national security officials have called the gold standard of vetting. Remember, there is no vetting right now. This is the way you get the vetting. Senator GRAHAM and I worked closely with Senator MORAN and others in this Chamber and the Department of Defense to make sure that the bill's vetting provisions met that gold standard.

In addition, our legislation updates a Special Immigrant Visa Program, also known as SIV, to include groups that should never have been excluded from the program in the first place, including members of the Female Tactical Team of Afghanistan, who had our troops' backs as they pursued missions hunting down ISIS combatants on unforgiving terrain and freeing prisoners from the grips of the Taliban.

The entire purpose of the Special Immigration Visa Program is to provide permanent residency to those who have supported the United States abroad. And it is clear to anyone that looks at this that these brave women should qualify.

The Afghan Adjustment Act is supported by a bipartisan group of Senators, as I just noted—11 cosponsors with many others that have pledged their support. Many others. And it has earned the backing of more than 60 organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars—that is the VFW—and the American Legion.

This bill is a top priority for these two leading veterans groups. They have contacted, literally, every Senator about the importance of passing this bill. And I hope people will listen.

Who else is this supported by? Some of our Nation's most revered military leaders, including Admirals Mike Mullen, William McRaven, James Stavridis, and Generals Richard Myers

of the Air Force, Joseph Dunford from the Marine Corps, and Stan McChrystal from the Army.

We can decide that the thoughts of these military leaders aren't important to us. We can decide they don't know what they are doing. I think it is kind of the opposite, that maybe we should be listening to them when they tell us this must happen.

Here are some of the stories:

Mahnaz, a commander of the Afghan National Army's Female Tactical Platoon, who worked closely with our military to facilitate conversations between our soldiers and the Afghan women they crossed paths with in the field.

Ahmad, a pilot whose helicopter was shot down, not once, but twice. Ahmad is in legal limbo. Speaking of his work with our troops, he said:

In the face of danger, we were united, we were relentless, we were resilient.

Another pilot who wants his name not known because he is in fear of what will happen to his family who are still back in Afghanistan, he spent 10 years helping American soldiers identify Taliban positions in the mountains of Afghanistan. He said his job was to "capture the bad guys like al-Qaida and Taliban."

Or there is Nangialy, an Afghan interpreter who put his life on the line to support our troops. Why? To use his words:

Same goal, same target, and same achievement.

A helicopter fighter pilot who also asked that his name not be revealed, who worked with our troops to combat the Taliban in remote areas of Afghanistan for 8 years—8 years—all the while thinking there was a covenant that he was going to be able to come to this country and people were going to protect him if needed. He survived being shot in the face by flying bullets.

There is the story of Reggie, another Afghan interpreter. Remember, being an interpreter in Afghanistan wasn't a desk job. You weren't sitting in a conference room whispering to your boss what the words were of someone whose language you don't understand. This meant working shoulder to shoulder with our troops while they were on foreign soil. Where the troops went, the interpreter went. If the troops got ambushed by bullets, the interpreter got ambushed by bullets. If the troops got bombed, the interpreter got bombed. That is a risk Reggie took every day.

On August 8, 2012, Reggie was working on patrol with a group of servicemembers including Army CPT Florent Groberg. Suddenly, a suicide bomber approached. Groberg acted fast and protected other members of his unit by shoving the bomber aside. But the vest still detonated, leaving Groberg and Reggie bloody and fighting for every breath. The explosion left Reggie with 23 pieces of shrapnel lodged in his own body. But even still, he used the energy he had to go to Groberg's aid and help him stop the bleeding.

To this day, as a result of the attack, Reggie has problems with his left ear and can't control some of his body. That is what he sacrificed for our troops. That is the depth of his covenant.

Reggie and Captain Groberg survived that attack, but, tragically, several men did not. One of the men we lost that day was U.S. Air Force Maj. Walter David Gray. He left behind his kids and his wife Heather. In August 2021, 9 years after the attack, Heather learned from an NPR reporter that Reggie was being targeted by the Taliban in Afghanistan. She wrote about that experience in an essay for the Dallas Morning News. These are her words:

Turmoil is a good way to describe the emotions I felt when I listened to the radio interview. It was Reggie in Afghanistan . . . describing his service as a linguist to our military and the danger his family was in if they didn't get out.

She went on:

Reggie served with my husband, Maj. Walter David Gray, in the Air Force and was with him when David and three others were killed by suicide bombers in the Kunar Province on August 8, 2012. After listening, I called my friend Captain Florent Groberg who . . . confirmed that the man we were hearing on the radio was indeed "our guy."

With that confirmation, my family spun into action, working with others, both state-side and in Afghanistan, to get Reggie, his wife, and their four young children through the gauntlet outside [the] airport and onto a military plane.

It would be nearly November before Reggie's family was resettled in Ft. Worth where the brother lives.

Heather's story continues. She wrote:

My family traveled 4 hours to Ft. Worth to meet them . . . As we worked alongside each other assembling furniture, Reggie showed me scars from the battle that killed my husband. As he recounted stories of the many battles in which he fought alongside our servicemembers, a car backfired outside and he instinctively lowered to the floor . . . A few weeks later, I brought my current husband and kids up to spend Thanksgiving with Reggie's family. Despite the language barrier and our different religions and cultures, we celebrated as one big family, because that is what we are.

Reggie is among the Afghan allies who need Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act.

She added this:

Every time we see Reggie, he reminds my children that their father died a hero.

This story of these Afghans has too many heroes to even keep track of, and it is our job now to stand to their level, to simply pass this amendment so they are put out of legal limbo—an amendment that is cosponsored with conservative Republican Senators; an amendment cosponsored by the lead Republican on the Veterans Committee, on the Armed Services Committee, and on the Committee on the Judiciary.

I know my colleague Senator MORAN is here and is ready to speak soon. I welcome him here. I also saw Senator BLUMENTHAL. I have more words when they have completed their remarks, including the important letters we have

seen from the leading veterans groups, the leading military generals—some of whose names I have read—including the support that we have gotten from those that served in Afghanistan in our own military.

I thank Senator MORAN and his leadership on the PACT Act and so many other bills for being here.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments that I heard this morning from Senator KLOBUCHAR and appreciate her leadership and efforts to see that the Afghan Adjustment Act becomes law. I think I am followed by my colleague on the Veterans Committee, Senator BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut.

This has been a bipartisan effort to make certain that legislation was drafted, introduced, and that lives were protected and changed. From my perspective, one of the saddest days—or few days—of my time as a U.S. Senator was when the United States withdrew from Afghanistan—not necessarily the withdrawal but the manner in which it occurred and the number of people—some Americans, many of them Afghans who helped Americans during our time in Afghanistan—who were left behind and the manner in which those who were able to escape, what they had to endure in many instances to do so.

As we approach the second anniversary of this disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, many of those Afghans who escaped to the United States now face—continue to face—uncertainty in their lives—uncertainty as their original parole status is set to expire soon. Most of that status for their legal presence in the United States expires 2 years from their arrival to the United States. And in many instances, that is now the month of August 2023.

I joined my colleague Senator KLOBUCHAR in introducing the Afghan Adjustment Act to make certain that Afghans who sought refuge in the United States are able to apply for a permanent legal residency after undergoing additional vetting.

This amendment, this legislation, is now an amendment pending on the National Defense Authorization Act. I hope we are able to have a vote on this amendment—that it is included, the vote occurs, and I hope that vote is successful.

This amendment establishes a pathway for Afghan partners to begin a more certain and, perhaps, new life.

The rushed and chaotic withdrawal created a potential loophole for bad actors to be admitted to the United States. So if you are interested in our national security—which I know we all are—this amendment establishes a critical vetting process to reduce the threats to that national security. Failing to pass this amendment, failing for this bill to become law, means that none of the refugees will undergo the necessary additional vetting. Undergoing that vetting then can create the

opportunity for certainty in the lives of those Afghan refugees who are here.

For two decades, countless Afghans stood by our servicemembers and risked their lives and their families' lives to support our troops in Afghanistan. This withdrawal and the current circumstance resulted in more than 1,000 contacts with my office asking for help in getting someone out of Afghanistan, someone who served side by side with a soldier from Fort Riley—our hometown pastor's daughter and husband—missionaries, Christian missionaries in Afghanistan—looking for help to get out of Afghanistan—those people who are Christians in that country.

The vast majority of people who are in this uncertain stage were people who, either through our domestic operations, our opportunity to try to stabilize Afghanistan, or our military—they are the ones who are now living a life of uncertainty and potential return or removal from the United States.

Under the present regulations, our Afghan allies admitted under temporary humanitarian status can only attain permanent legal status through our overburdened, nonworking, dysfunctional, asylum system or the long-winded special immigrant visa process. As a result, thousands face this troubling uncertainty as they strive to create a new life here.

Recently, in the town we live in, Manhattan, KS, a block party was created to host Afghan residents of our community. It was pleasing to see the Afghan culture celebrated, and it was pleasing to see the community support their new neighbors.

It is always a good thing to see when people come together. The practical help offered to our Afghans is priceless, but all that community support and assistance will do little good if we don't pass the opportunities that the Afghan Adjustment Act provides these individuals.

The amendment before us today will help provide certainty to many of our Afghan partners and work to help other Afghan partners who are stranded in other countries. So we have the challenge of Afghans in the United States who soon will have no legal status, and we have those who are still trying to get out of Afghanistan. And, finally, we have those who have escaped Afghanistan to another country but can't yet migrate any further. Those people are stranded. They need our assistance.

We also need to make sure that our vetting requirements protect our national security. This legislation does both. It protects our national security and increases our opportunity to treat individuals—human beings—in a humanitarian way.

I thank Senator KLOBUCHAR for her invitation for me to join her here today in this bipartisan effort. Senator KLOBUCHAR mentioned a number of veterans organizations and veterans who endorsed this legislation and, thus, this amendment.

This issue was brought to me most directly by the Iraqi and Afghan veterans of America who support this legislation and who brought information and encouragement to me to help see that this legislation is passed. But it is also supported by Blue Star Families, by the American Legion, the VFW, and many other veterans and veterans organizations.

Those who served our country—those Americans who served our country—care about those who helped save their lives in Afghanistan, and they would like to see the U.S. Senate take the steps that we are asking be taken today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am honored to follow my colleague from Kansas and engage in this bipartisan colloquy for a measure that truly has bipartisan support. My thanks to Senator KLOBUCHAR for her leadership as well. And I am going to be followed by Senator COONS, who has dedicated himself to civil rights and liberties around the world.

This issue is one that rises above politics. Every so often in this body, we are able to rise above politics, never often enough for many of us. But here is an opportunity to put down a marker, to make a statement, to show with our votes that a great Nation keeps promises. America is the greatest Nation in the history of the world. We need to keep our promises. And I know about those promises, not only as a member of the Armed Services Committee who has visited Afghanistan several times but also as a father. My two sons served during this period of time. My oldest son Matthew was an infantry officer in the Marine Corps, in Helmand Province. My second son is a Navy SEAL. And let me just put it very bluntly: As a dad, as a public official, as an American citizen, I want Americans who are deployed overseas to be helped by people in the country that we are fighting to serve. Not only in America and our self-interest here, but also abroad when our troops are deployed and put in harm's way, they depend on exactly the kind of Afghan allies whom we promised we would not abandon.

And if we want to count on those kinds of allies all around the world—not only in Afghanistan and Iraq and that part of the world, but in Africa, in South America—we need to keep our promises. If we lose that credibility and trust, our troops will be in danger. Our sons and daughters will be at risk when they depend on those interpreters, the guards, the guides, the security aides, and all of the kinds of allies that we enlist—Afghan allies—who put their lives on the line and now have targets on their backs if they were ever to return.

It is bad enough that many of those allies are still in Afghanistan and at risk of torture and murder, but we need



to keep faith with the Afghan refugees who have come to this country. I want to salute the veterans, as did my colleague Senator MORAN. They have been heroes in this fight. Their championing this cause has made a tremendous difference, and I thank them for recognizing that there is a moral imperative here. That is the reason that our promise needs to be kept.

And I will just close—and there is much more that I could say, but I know colleagues would like to comment, as well, in the limited time we have—by saying that these families, these Afghan refugees, are coming to this country, and they are flourishing here. They are contributing to their communities. They have jobs that matter. They are learning our language. They are imparting to our people the rich cultural heritage that they bring with them, the tastes and the colors of their country, as well as their incredible history. They are enriching the United States of America. We need to keep them here, and we need to give them the security and sense of permanency that is essential for them to continue to flourish.

They can't have jobs, they can't put their children in schools, and they can't keep housing if they are in limbo. So as a practical matter, we must move. We should have done it last session. We have the opportunity now. It is an obligation. Let's vote on this amendment to enable our Afghan allies to stay in this country as they deserve and need to do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, just about 2 years ago, roughly 76,000 Afghans—those who served alongside American forces during two decades of conflict—and their families were evacuated here to the United States on military planes and given 2 years of humanitarian parole. The Biden administration has worked to extend that parole, but we have to ask ourselves: To what end?

These are our allies, those who served and fought alongside our troops, those who supported our mission and our engagement in Afghanistan and who worked an incredible array of jobs—interpreters, medics, security guards, mechanics, intelligence officers, journalists, bomb technicians, and pilots.

And I know that today one family in Newark, DE, is waiting urgently to hear that we have taken up and passed this amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act. The head of household served as a bomb technician, as an EOD specialist in the Afghan forces, and I had the chance to have the blessing of meeting the mother of a Delaware soldier whose life he saved.

I have heard over and over from our veterans, from our veterans' families, from Afghans and from their families that we have to pass this bill so that they have certainty, so that the strengths and talents that they have

brought to our country they can use to put down roots and to have a foundation on which to build a family in peace in our Nation.

An interpreter—an Afghan interpreter—now living in North Carolina has said:

Permanent residency is linked to everything. What will happen [to my family] if our status fails? How will I provide for my family [in this new country]?

Another interpreter living now in Nebraska describes their current situation as being “trapped like in a prison.”

This uncertainty, this lack of clear status, harms the ability of our Afghan partners and friends to advance their careers, to put down roots, to start their new lives here in America with confidence. This uncertainty must end.

These are folks who believe in the promise of America and who came here confident we would keep our word. On my phone, I was just looking a moment ago at a family celebration that I joined with Sher and Shkira in Newark, DE. I don't want to give more details on them, other than to say that I remember that they and their children are waiting and watching to see what we will do here in the Senate.

I want to thank my colleagues Senators KLOBUCHAR, MORAN, and BLUMENTHAL and many others—Senators GRAHAM, SHAHEEN, MURKOWSKI, DURBIN, WICKER, and TILLIS—who have been cosponsors of this bill from the last Congress. It also has support from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Blue Star Families, the American Legion, and many other veterans groups; and from some of the most prominent leaders in the American military: Mike Mullen, Jim Stavridis, Stan McChrystal, William McRaven. Forgive me for skipping their titles and ranks, but some of the most respected leaders in our military have endorsed this legislation.

If you are worried, as some of our colleagues have said, that the folks brought here by the American military were not thoroughly vetted, this is the way to address it. It requires in-person interviews, oversight, and consultations that will ensure that everyone currently here comes back in for one more in-person interview, vetting, and clearing.

It also expands the opportunities for SIV visas for Afghan combatants. It helps those still stuck in a hell outside our country. That would allow families to be reunited.

At the end of the day, I just have to thank two people and make one plea. I have to thank the family in Delaware who continues to inspire me and push me to support Senator KLOBUCHAR in her tireless work to get this bill the vote it deserves. I want to thank my colleague Senator KLOBUCHAR for hearing the voices of American veterans, for hearing the voices of Afghans now in our country who deserve legal status, and I join her in demanding a vote on this amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much to Senator COONS for his strong words and for focusing on what matters here, which is the people of our own country, the military and those who support them, who believe that this situation is simply untenable, that these Afghans who have stood with us risk, at any moment, being deported—not right now because of an order that President Biden has in place.

But that is not the only problem about uncertainty. The problem is they can't go on with their lives as has happened with past evacuees—after Cuba, I noted; after Vietnam. They are part of the fabric of life in the United States of America now.

So let's hear what some of these security experts have to say. I am going to read a portion of a letter that a group of them sent to congressional leadership.

They said this. These aren't my words. This is theirs:

The bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act honors our nation's commitment to its wartime allies by providing a path to permanent status for Afghan evacuees. It also ensures that these evacuees are properly and scrupulously vetted prior to considering them for such status.

The status quo leaves tens of thousands of evacuees in legal limbo while failing to put to rest security concerns raised in the Office of Inspector General reports.

So we can just pretend that report doesn't exist. We can just do nothing. How can that be the answer?

(Mr. HICKENLOOPER assumed the Chair.)

How can the answer be to just put our heads in the sand while they put their lives at risk for us in the sands of Afghanistan? That is why we have to vote on this amendment.

They go on to say—the security experts who worked for a number of Republican and Democratic Presidents: “No action is not an option—we urge you to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act.”

I want to repeat that last point: “No action is not an option.”

Here is another letter of support from the former Ambassadors to Afghanistan. Eight former U.S. Ambassadors—think about this: They actually served in Afghanistan, and a number of us—probably nearly everyone in this Chamber who was around during that time, which is many of us, has visited with these Ambassadors during one President or another. These Ambassadors served under Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. Each has an intimate understanding of the stakes for getting this right.

They wrote together:

We are a group of retired Ambassadors, all of whom served as Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, who have dedicated our professional lives to furthering America's interests in the world. We are writing today because we are convinced that

the Afghan Adjustment Act furthers those interests. The need is urgent and time is short. . . . Without the Afghan Adjustment Act, the task of American diplomacy will be much more difficult. . . . [I]n the future our allies will be less likely to support the U.S. missions if they see that our Afghan partners are abandoned. In diplomacy, our words will have lost meaning. . . . We urge you to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act without delay.

I have spoken a lot about the Afghan stories today, as have my colleagues—Senator COONS, Senator BLUMENTHAL, and Senator MORAN—because this is all personal for those of us who meet with our military and hear the stories of those who saved their lives and who put their lives on the line. But this is also about U.S. interests abroad and the bigger story of our national security, about keeping our covenants when we make promises, about expecting other people in other lands in future conflicts to be willing to put themselves and their families at risk to stand with our soldiers. Who is going to want to do that again if they hear that we made promises over decades, and then, when those brave people came to our country, we left them in legal limbo?

You heard the sad, tragic story out of Virginia a few weeks ago where an Afghan who had served as an interpreter, who was working two jobs—in legal limbo—was murdered as a Lyft driver in the middle of the night. Those are the stories.

If people see that brinksmanship in Congress outweighs the promises we made overseas, how can we lead?

Finally, I want to share some words from a group of more than three dozen of our Nation's most esteemed military leaders, including Gen. Joseph Dunford, U.S. Marine Corps; Admiral Mike Mullen, U.S. Navy; Gen. Richard Myers, U.S. Air Force; Admiral Jim Stavridis, U.S. Navy; GEN Peter Chiarelli, U.S. Army; GEN Stan McChrystal, U.S. Army; GEN David McKiernan, U.S. Army; Admiral William McRaven, U.S. Navy; GEN Austin Miller, U.S. Army; GEN John Nicholson, Jr., U.S. Army; GEN M. David Rodriguez, U.S. Army; GEN Curtis Scaparrotti, U.S. Army; GEN Raymond A. Thomas III, U.S. Army; GEN Joseph Votel, U.S. Army; and Gen. Mark Welsh, U.S. Air Force.

I read the complete list last night, and I will do it again because that gives you a sense of the kind of people I think we should be listening to. Maybe it is worth my colleagues'—a minute of their time to sit back and look at the people who are supporting this bill who lead our military or have led our military. They have been resolute in their support for the Afghan Adjustment Act, and the letter they sent to congressional leadership makes that clear.

In their words—these are their words, not mine:

If Congress fails to enact the [Afghan Adjustment Act], the United States will be less secure.

Let's read that again.

If Congress fails to enact the [Afghan Adjustment Act] the United States will be less secure.

My colleague Senator MORAN outlined why. It is about the fact that there is no vetting in place, and this puts the vetting in place. Most importantly, it is about the fact that to keep our Nation's leadership and to be true to our covenant, we have to be true to our word.

Finally, we have the stories of people who, if allowed to flourish in this country, will go on to do great things. So it is on us.

This is what else they wrote:

Potential allies will remember what happens now with our Afghan allies. If we claim to support the troops and want to enable their success in wartime, we must keep our commitments today. The [Afghan Adjustment Act] will go a long way.

Additionally, without the fixes—

These are their words—

applied by the Afghan Adjustment Act, our immigration system will be less capable, not more capable, of properly processing and vetting applicants. The enhancements that the Afghan Adjustment Act adds to the security screening process of those who were evacuated are of critical importance to our national security.

Mr. President, this is a harrowing warning from our military's top brass.

Without the Afghan Adjustment Act, our soldiers will face new obstacles in finding allies on the battlefield, because in the past, we kept our covenants. We kept them. We kept them no matter if the Congress was Democratic or Republican or the President was Democrat or Republican. We kept our commitments.

All I am asking is that we have a vote—along with my colleagues—on this amendment. And I will repeat: the leading Republicans on Judiciary, Armed Services, and the Veterans' Committee—Senator MORAN, who is here today—are cosponsors of this amendment and are asking for a vote. We have Senator DURBIN, the chair of the Judiciary Committee, asking for a vote. We have dozens and dozens of Senators who want to get this done. We need this vote. We have Republicans, Democrats, military and veterans groups, national security leaders, retired U.S. Ambassadors to Afghanistan, and flag officers all on the same page. They are not debating the nuances of every little word because that bill has been out there now for 2 years.

We have strengthened it vastly in response to our colleagues. We have made changes to it, and it is ready to go, just like our Afghan allies have been ready to go because they have been here for nearly 2 years, waiting for us to keep our covenants—ones who have taken bullets to the face, ones who have lost legs. They are in our country waiting for us to keep our covenant.

Until we get this done, we are essentially asking our allies—those who took shrapnel across the body, those who took bullets to their faces—to rebuild their lives on top of a trapdoor

that could fall out from under them at any second. Without the Afghan Adjustment Act, all of it—their jobs, their homes, their safety, their families—could disappear.

By including this amendment in the NDAA, we can strengthen the national security of our country by making our vetting program more thorough. You heard Senator MORAN talk about that. It was a huge issue with Senator GRAMM, and we worked together to build the gold standard, which, as I mentioned, has been supported by leaders under every single one of the last four Presidents.

So let's put aside the politics and distraction. Let's do what is right for our national security, for our global reputation, and for Afghan allies who shed blood alongside our troops on the battlefield.

This Defense bill is about what? No. 1 and foremost, our Nation's security. So ask yourselves, those in the Gallery who have been listening for the past hour to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle who support this bill, does this amendment support our national security? Of course it does. The top ranks, those who were in charge in Afghanistan, have told us that it does.

No. 2, this bill that we are voting on this week and all the series of amendments—it should set a moral example for the world. That is what the United States did through World War I and through World War II. We set a moral example for the world. That is what this amendment does too. It sets a moral example for the world.

No. 3, we must show people everywhere that when America makes a promise, when America makes a covenant, it must be kept.

The Afghan adjustment amendment advances all those objectives.

I am asking my colleagues simply for a vote. If they want to vote against it, it is fine. They can vote against the generals and the VFW and the American Legion. They all have differences. That is fine. But why would we deny those who took bullets for us even the ability to have a vote in what should be and has been called the Nation's greatest deliberative body?

Let's be as great as we are supposed to be, which means standing by our values and showing the world that our word, that America's covenant, matters.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

AMENDMENT NO. 199

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 199 and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Georgia [Mr. WARNOCK] proposes an amendment numbered 199.

The amendment (No. 199) is as follows:



(Purpose: To provide enhanced protection against debt collector harassment of members of the Armed Forces)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

**DIVISION \_\_\_\_\_ FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES FOR SERVICEMEMBERS**

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_ 01. SHORT TITLE.**

This division may be cited as the “Fair Debt Collection Practices for Servicemembers Act”.

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_ 02. ENHANCED PROTECTION AGAINST DEBT COLLECTOR HARASSMENT OF SERVICEMEMBERS.**

(a) COMMUNICATION IN CONNECTION WITH DEBT COLLECTION.—Section 805 of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (15 U.S.C. 1692c) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(e) COMMUNICATIONS CONCERNING SERVICE-MEMBER DEBTS.—

“(1) DEFINITION.—In this subsection, the term ‘covered member’ means—

“(A) a covered member or a dependent as defined in section 987(i) of title 10, United States Code; and

“(B)(i) an individual who was separated, discharged, or released from duty described in such section 987(i)(1), but only during the 365-day period beginning on the date of separation, discharge, or release; or

“(ii) a person, with respect to an individual described in clause (i), described in subparagraph (A), (D), (E), or (I) of section 1072(2) of title 10, United States Code.

“(2) PROHIBITIONS.—A debt collector may not, in connection with the collection of any debt of a covered member—

“(A) threaten to have the covered member reduced in rank;

“(B) threaten to have the covered member’s security clearance revoked; or

“(C) threaten to have the covered member prosecuted under chapter 47 of title 10, United States Code (the Uniform Code of Military Justice).”.

(b) UNFAIR PRACTICES.—Section 808 of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (15 U.S.C. 1692f) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(9) The representation to any covered member (as defined under section 805(e)(1)) that failure to cooperate with a debt collector will result in—

“(A) a reduction in rank of the covered member;

“(B) a revocation of the covered member’s security clearance; or

“(C) prosecution under chapter 47 of title 10, United States Code (the Uniform Code of Military Justice).”.

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_ 03. GAO STUDY.**

The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study and submit a report to Congress on the impact of this division on—

(1) the timely delivery of information to a covered member (as defined in section 805(e) of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, as added by this division);

(2) military readiness; and

(3) national security, including the extent to which covered members with security clearances would be impacted by uncollected debt.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, servicemembers report being harassed by predatory debt collectors at a higher rate than the civilian population. Predatory and unscrupulous debt collectors send messages to commanding officers with their private financial information, all in an effort to harass our men and women in uniform—the best among us standing up for us. They harass serv-

icemembers by threatening rank reduction—the debt collectors—revocation of security clearance, or punishment under the military justice code.

These threats cannot be carried out by the debt collectors, and these practices are manipulative, and they undermine our national security by distracting our servicemembers from focusing on their mission and caring for their families. In fact, a 2014 Army Reserve review found that the second leading contributing factor to servicemember suicide was financial stress.

This amendment reinforces the existing protections provided to all Americans but especially those who are putting their lives on the line to protect all of our families and our communities by restricting predatory debt collection practices aimed specifically at our servicemembers.

This bipartisan amendment costs nothing. It has broad support among the Nation’s military and veteran community. They believe, as I do, that debt collectors should not be able to weaponize servicemembers’ services. It even has the support—listen—the support of reputable and responsible debt collectors themselves, the very industry it would affect.

I want to thank Senators BUDD, CORNYN, TILLIS, LUMMIS, and BROWN for their partnership on this, and I look forward to the support of my colleagues in passing this bipartisan amendment to protect our Nation’s servicemembers.

I yield back the balance of my time.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 199

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, the question is on agreeing to the amendment.

Mr. WARNOCK. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN), the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN), and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 95, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 198 Leg.]

YEAS—95

Baldwin	Cassidy	Grassley
Barrasso	Collins	Hagerty
Bennet	Coons	Hassan
Blackburn	Cornyn	Hawley
Blumenthal	Cortez Masto	Heinrich
Booker	Cotton	Hickenlooper
Boozman	Cramer	Hirono
Braun	Crapo	Hoeven
Britt	Cruz	Hyde-Smith
Brown	Daines	Johnson
Budd	Duckworth	Kaine
Cantwell	Ernst	Kelly
Capito	Feinstein	Kennedy
Cardin	Fischer	King
Carper	Gillibrand	Klobuchar
Casey	Graham	Lankford

Lee	Peters	Smith
Lujan	Reed	Stabenow
Lummis	Ricketts	Sullivan
Manchin	Risch	Tester
Markey	Romney	Thune
Marshall	Rosen	Tillis
McConnell	Rounds	Tuberville
Menendez	Rubio	Van Hollen
Merkley	Sanders	Vance
Moran	Schatz	Warner
Mullin	Schmitt	Warnock
Murkowski	Schumer	Warren
Murphy	Scott (FL)	Welch
Murray	Scott (SC)	Wyden
Ossoff	Shaheen	Young
Padilla	Sinema	

NAYS—2

Paul Wicker

NOT VOTING—3

Durbin Fetterman Whitehouse

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The yeas are 95, the nays are 2.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is agreed to.

The amendment (No. 199) was agreed to.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m. today.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:12 p.m. recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. ROSEN).

**NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024—Continued**

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

CHINA

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, earlier this month, the Chinese Communist Party’s relentless propaganda efforts rose to the forefront of international discussion yet again. China’s authoritarian government squashes opposition at home without hesitation, but its censorship and propaganda spreads far beyond China’s borders.

The CCP uses an array of insidious means to push its messages across national boundaries. Concerns that the CCP’s influence is seeping into Hollywood continues to grow. This issue flared up once again this month. Why? Well, in a word, “Barbie.” You heard me right. A movie about a plastic doll is the last place you would expect national security questions to arise, but it has.

One trailer for the “Barbie” movie depicted a cartoon map of the title character’s world travels. On the map is a roughly drawn continent of Asia, but it might be more than just a cartoon character’s doodle. The map includes a dotted line extending out from the east shore of China.

Well, that line is curiously similar to what is known as the nine-dash line. Everyone in the defense space is familiar with this line. It is a Chinese-drawn boundary in the South China Sea. China uses this boundary to claim ownership of maritime territory, even