

serious threat, arguably, stems from North Korea, under its dangerous and unpredictable dictator. North Korea, which has the fourth largest military in the world, continues to make progress on its nuclear and ballistic missiles programs in violation of international sanctions.

Since 2006, North Korea has tested a nuclear device five times. The main goal of North Korea's nuclear weapons program is to develop a warhead small enough to be mounted on a ballistic missile. Unfortunately, North Korea has also shown substantial, even startling, progress in its missile programs.

Since 2014, North Korea has conducted nearly 50 test launches of ballistic missiles. North Korea is an imminent threat to our allies South Korea and Japan and the nearly 80,000 U.S. troops serving those two countries. And as its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programs advance, North Korea poses a rising threat to the United States homeland itself.

The U.S. policy approach to North Korea must be comprehensive and carefully calibrated. Miscalculation could result in armed conflict, possibly involving the use of nuclear weapons, and cause catastrophic loss of life. To be effective, U.S. strategy must be informed by the best possible intelligence on North Korea's intentions and capabilities.

North Korea is a difficult intelligence target. It is a secretive society where dissent is severely punished. This makes the recruitment of human resources inside the country very challenging, and moreover, high-level defectors from North Korea with intelligence about the regime are rare.

My first bill would require the Director of National Intelligence to create a North Korea-focused integration cell consisting of experts who would streamline, synthesize, and synchronize intelligence on North Korea so that U.S. policymakers have the best possible information upon which to base decisions.

The cell would seek to ensure that the U.S. Government is collecting intelligence on North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, missile programs, weapon sales, and other activities that violate U.N. sanctions. The cell would also work to make certain that this intelligence is efficiently disseminated to the appropriate national security policymakers so that it can inform decisionmaking.

While my first bill is specific to North Korea, my second bill seeks to safeguard Americans by promoting security and stability in the Asia Pacific region more broadly. This region encompasses about 40 countries containing over 60 percent of the world's population, including many of our top import and export partners. The region offers the United States economic opportunities, but also presents security challenges. Indeed, some senior American officials often describe the Asia Pacific as the most consequential region for the future of our country.

Historically, under Presidents of both parties, the U.S. has maintained a strong military and diplomatic presence in the region to reassure allies and deter adversaries. The core of U.S. strategy has been close cooperation with our regional partners. These partnerships are an essential component of our effort to confront aggression by North Korea, judiciously manage the rise of China, dismantle terrorist networks, ensure freedom of navigation in international waters, guarantee the free flow of commerce, respond to humanitarian emergencies, and promote respect for the rule of law.

These partnerships, built on mutual trust, are not self-sustaining. They require U.S. leadership, energy, and resources. To deepen cooperation, my bill would create a commission of U.S. security officials and their counterparts from willing regional partner nations. The commission would aim to increase military readiness, strengthen counterterrorism operations, enhance maritime security, bolster cybersecurity, and improve intelligence coordination.

The commission would send a clear signal to allies and adversaries alike that the U.S. commitment to the Asia Pacific region is intensive and enduring.

I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will support these two bills, which are aimed at addressing the immediate threat posed by North Korea, and strengthening our security alliances with key regional partners.

PAKISTAN IS PLAYING THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, when our forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001, the goal was simple: remove the Taliban government that sheltered the plotters of the 9/11 attacks on America, and destroy al-Qaida.

Nearly 16 years later, Afghanistan is still a haven for terrorists who seek to attack and kill Americans. Since then, the Taliban has waged an insurgency in Afghanistan, destabilizing the country, creating perfect conditions for terrorists to exploit.

The Taliban and al-Qaida have launched many of their attacks in Afghanistan from Pakistan. Taliban insurgency is stronger today than at any other point since 2001. Just last week, a Taliban sneak attack killed more than 160 Afghan soldiers, prompting the defense minister and army chief of staff to resign.

But the Taliban don't just stage attacks, they seize territory. The Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction said in January that 172 Afghan districts are controlled, influenced, or contested by the Taliban. Al-Qaida has a long history of loyalty to the Taliban. Osama bin Laden swore his allegiance to the Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, even before 9/11. When

bin Laden was killed in Pakistan, Ayman al-Zawahiri renewed that oath and cemented ties between al-Qaida and the Taliban. Wherever the Taliban has influence, we can be sure that al-Qaida is not far behind.

Since 2010, U.S. officials have incorrectly claimed that al-Qaida had a small presence in the country limited only to 50 to 100 fighters. Then, in 2015, a shocking U.S. raid in Afghanistan uncovered a massive al-Qaida training camp, rounding up over 150 al-Qaida terrorists. This was more fighters found in one raid than the U.S. officials claimed existed in the entire country. And by the end of last year, U.S. officials announced that 250 al-Qaida terrorists were killed or captured in 2016 alone.

Along with al-Qaida in Afghanistan, we have the other terrorist group, the Haqqani Network. This group is directly linked to al-Qaida and the Taliban. The Haqqani Network is responsible for more American deaths in the region than any other terrorist group. The Haqqani Network attacks inside Afghanistan have been directly traced back to—you guessed it—Pakistan.

In fact, in 2011, Admiral Mike Mullen, then-chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before the Senate: "The Haqqani Network acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency."

The truth is that Pakistan has ties to about every terrorist group in Afghanistan. And we know that the Taliban is still based in Pakistan today. It came as no surprise that when the U.S. drone strike killed the leader of the Taliban in 2016, he was—that is right—in Pakistan.

The laundry list of evidence of Pakistan support for terrorists goes on and on. We all remember where al-Qaida leader and America's most wanted terrorist, Osama bin Laden, was found and killed: in Pakistan.

Afghanistan's representative to the U.N. recently told the Security Council that Pakistan maintains ties with more than 20 different terrorist groups.

Mr. Speaker, Pakistan is playing us. Pakistan turns a blind eye to the terrorist allies, the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network fighters in the area. The Pakistan Taliban fighters ended up becoming the leaders of the ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan, known as ISIS Khorasan province. ISIS announced their Afghan affiliate in January 2015, and now has entrenched itself in the eastern part of the country.

For the first time ever, the military dropped its largest non-nuclear bomb, the Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb, earlier this month on ISIS targets in Afghanistan. It is no surprise that Afghanistan is a hotbed for terrorist mischief groups, all related to Pakistan. That is what Pakistan has always wanted: a weak and divided Afghanistan that threatens the United States.

Mr. Speaker, it is time we reassess our Pakistan policy so that it matches

Pakistan's behavior in Afghanistan. We need to call Pakistan out. We must reduce aid to the two-faced Pakistan Government. We don't need to pay them to betray us. We must designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism, and we must remove their major non-NATO ally status. In the war on terror, it is crystal clear Pakistan is not on America's side.

And that is just the way it is.

HEALTH CARE ROUND TWO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. EVANS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, what has changed since the last time the Republicans attempted to repeal or replace the Affordable Care Act?

Absolutely nothing. That is right. Nothing has changed.

Recent polls show that the Affordable Care Act is more popular than ever. Yet, the Republicans still want to get rid of a law that is helping to provide our most vulnerable Americans the affordable care they need and deserve.

In my district, Mr. Speaker, 369,000 people who receive health coverage from their employers could lose their consumer protection. 62,000 people covered by Medicare expansion could lose coverage if the ACA is repealed. These are the numbers of a few weeks back. It could be even worse now.

This Saturday marks President Trump's 100th day in the White House. And this week we have a stacked agenda with tax reform, to pass a spending bill, to prevent government shutdown, to talks of health care being back in the mix.

One may think that health care will get lost in the shuffle, but we have seen how this administration and the Republicans will not back down. They appear committed to getting rid of a law that provides quality, affordable health care to millions of Americans young and old.

The American people elected us to fight an agenda that supports the needs of everyday Americans, hardworking Americans. Instead of cutting programs like SNAP, Meals on Wheels, the Community Development Block Grant program, we should look for ways to grow programs that help build stronger neighborhoods block by block.

Over the weekend, I went to the health fair at Temple University in my district. Temple University Hospital has served the city of Philadelphia for the last 120 years. It is a job creator and a major employer in our community. We should be looking for ways to build up the engines that drive investment and grow our economy, not tear them down.

Let me remind you, Republicans want to vote on the healthcare bill that gets rid of essential health benefits—for example, coverage for emergency rooms, maternity care, and pre-

scription drugs. But because of the people, because of you and all of your phone calls, all of your emails, all of your letters, their attempt to repeal the healthcare bill was stopped.

This just happened. Yes, they still want to vote on a bill that destroys protections for people with preexisting conditions.

I want to tell you a story of a small-business owner in my district named Andrea. Andrea owns a small pet shop, Spot's—The Place for Paws, in Narberth, Pennsylvania. Andrea left her Philadelphia law practice to pursue her dream of owning a small business. Andrea has type 1 diabetes. Without the ACA, she would not be able to get well-priced coverage that covers her health expenses and medication and allows her to keep her shop open.

Andrea's story is like that of so many Americans across the country. We cannot support legislation that makes life harder for those trying the hardest to get ahead.

Last week, I visited another wonderful resident in my district, Sister Mary Scullion. She is truly an inspirational individual who has made it her mission to help the most vulnerable citizens. Sister Scullion made a comment that stuck in my head: "Public housing is the best way to cure and prevent homelessness for the future."

In thinking about how we view our healthcare system, I am reminded of my conversation with Sister Scullion. We need to work together to lift our people out of tough situations. We need to work together to provide everyone in our neighborhoods with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

As I mentioned, this Saturday marks President Trump's 100th day in office. Interestingly enough, the President will be in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—a place that I have worked for many years.

What do we have to lose under this administration? Well, don't we have to lose a lot?

Affordable housing, Meals on Wheels for our seniors, before- and afterschool programs for our kids, and the list goes on.

Well, we have a lot to lose, Mr. President. We will continue to make our voices heard. The resistance is alive, and the resistance is working.

□ 1030

RECOGNIZING NANCY BILLET

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Nancy Billet, the office manager and financial administrator of my Washington, D.C., office. After working for three Members of Congress over a span of 36 years, Nancy will retire on Friday, and she will be missed by all.

Nancy grew up on Maryland's Eastern Shore, and she never thought about

working in politics. After graduating from Chesapeake College, she and a classmate moved to the D.C. suburbs, and Nancy found her way to Capitol Hill.

In 1981, shortly after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President, Nancy began her career as a staff assistant with Congressman Phil Crane, a Republican from Illinois. She worked for Congressman Crane, a member of the Ways and Means Committee, for almost 14 years as a staff assistant, legislative assistant, and office manager.

She joined a softball team that played on The Mall after work hours, and that is where she would eventually meet her husband, Barry. They got married, had a baby boy, and Nancy continued working, but only part-time. She also continued her education with evening classes at Northern Virginia Community College and proceeded to receive a bachelor's degree from George Mason University.

After the birth of their second son, Nancy would return to the Hill full-time after the 1994 election. In January 1995, Nancy was hired as an office manager for Congressman Phil English, a Republican from Pennsylvania. Nancy worked with Congressman English until his retirement in January of 2009.

When he heard about her retirement, former Congressman Phil English said Nancy was a "fabulous source of stability and good humor in an office where we were always a kite dancing in a hurricane. Your gracious manner and personal generosity made many difficult days tolerable and the cause possible to pursue. You brightened the lives of all you worked with, all you touched."

Congressman English went on to say that Nancy's consistent patience with constituents, interns, and any individual who came through the door was legendary. I couldn't agree more.

Nancy came to work in my office in 2009, and we have been so blessed to have her on staff. I was able to hit the ground running as a freshman Member with such a knowledgeable veteran Hill staffer on my team. Nancy can master the most difficult tasks with ease, but it is her pleasant personality that I will miss most. I have been fortunate to have her on staff, and her shoes will not be easily filled.

Her institutional knowledge is remarkable. Nancy has had a front-row seat to so much change in the Capitol, from using an IBM typewriter with a correctable ribbon to floppy disc computers, to today's laptops, iPads, and smartphones; from busy phone booths in the Longworth Building outside of the Ways and Means Committee to everyone talking on their own personal cell phone in every hallway and every office; from easy access to the buildings to the barriers put in place after the September 11 attacks; and all the administrations to come and go. Nancy was employed for Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and now under Donald Trump.