

million to \$22 million for a couple, and then it is permanently repealed by 2023. The corporate rate cut and pass-through cut also stays permanent—a boon to wealthy shareholders. Middle-class tax deductions and credits expire. Deductions for corporations and the wealthiest are permanent or even get better.

As Mark Mazer, the director of the Independent Tax Policy Center, said, “You could create a plan that just cuts taxes for middle-class people. That’s not what this is.” Yet that is how Republicans are selling it.

A few days ago on Hugh Hewitt’s show, my friend the majority leader said that “at the end of the day, nobody in the middle class is going to get a tax increase” under the Republican bill. Again, that was MITCH MCCONNELL: “Nobody in the middle class is going to get a tax increase.” Well, if Leader MCCONNELL was referring to the House bill, that is just a bold-faced lie, and he ought to retract it, but to give the Senator the benefit of the doubt, maybe he is referring to the Senate tax bill still under consideration. Let’s see.

In the Republican bill, will nobody in the middle class get a tax increase? We will wait and see. If past is prologue, I doubt it because the House said no middle-class person would get an increase, then their bill walloped the middle class. One-third get an increase immediately, and then half get an increase over the next 10 years.

I would remind my Senate Republican colleagues that their House Republicans sold their bill as a middle-class bill—a middle-class tax cut—and then put together a plan that raises taxes on millions of middle-class families, one-third of all families making between \$65,000 and \$150,000.

If the Senate bill follows the same path, promising universal, middle-class tax cuts but delivers smoke and mirrors and hidden tax increases, it will get clobbered in the court of public opinion, as it would deserve.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

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

ceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of John H. Gibson II, of Texas, to be Deputy Chief Management Officer of the Department of Defense.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 60 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Connecticut.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, we are grieving yet again today another horrific mass shooting in a church in Texas—over 25 dead, others still clinging to life. We were barely past our stage of grief as more than 50 people were shot dead and 500 were injured at a country music concert in Las Vegas. Of course, every single night in this country, parents and brothers and sisters go to bed having lost their loved ones, and 90 people die every day from guns in this country.

I just think it is worth stating that this happens nowhere else other than in the United States. This is not inevitable. This is not something that we should accept. We are not impotent or helpless to try to change the scope of tragedy that is crippling for families that have to go through this.

I want everyone to take a quick look at this pretty simple chart. The United States has more guns and more gun deaths than any other developed country. It is not close, we are not even in the neighborhood of any of our other G-20 competitor nations. While the President told us the other day that this is a mental illness problem, one cannot explain this outlier status through a story of mental illness because none of these other countries have any lower rate of mental illness. There are just as many people who are mentally ill in these countries as there are in our country.

We cannot explain it by the attention we pay to mental illness. We spend more money on treating mental illness than these countries do. This isn’t a mental illness problem. We have to do better in treating people who have psychological disorders in this country, but the reason that we are an outlier nation when it comes to the number of gun deaths and the epic scale of our mass tragedies is explained by something else.

Here is a quick story. This graphic shows the States that have background check requirements on all gun sales in the private sector, and here are the States that have no background check laws beyond those that are required in Federal law. It is a fundamentally different story when it comes to gun-related homicides. In the States that have background check laws, the average rate of homicide is substantially lower—substantially lower—than in States that haven’t background check laws. That is because in this country, with the loosest, most lax gun laws in the industrialized world, private citi-

zens are able to get their hands on weapons that are designed not for hunting and not for shooting for sport but to kill. These tactical assault-style weapons are being used over and over in these mass tragedies, and more people end up in harm’s way.

Smarter gun laws—just making sure that the right people have guns, not the wrong people—lead to less gun deaths. It is time for us to admit that this is a uniquely American problem and that it deserves our attention rather than our silence, which has been our response every single session that I have been a Member of Congress.

This poster shows but a few of the faces that have been lost to gun violence in this country. My small town of Sandy Hook is a broken community. It is a beautiful, wonderful community, but it is a broken community. The ripples of grief that come with losing that number of children—beautiful children—all at one time never really gets repaired. That small community in Texas, Sutherland Springs, will suffer that same fate. It will be a community that will not ever truly repair itself, having lost so many beautiful people at one moment. You can’t rewind the clock.

It is increasingly impossible for me to continue to go back to Newtown, CT, and tell the people of that community that even after mass murder after mass murder in this country, at a scale that occurs in no other Nation, our response as a body is to do nothing. It is a level of callousness that is frankly unexplainable to the victims of this violence, and this macabre club of families that have had to deal with the consequences of gun violence is getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

Why? Because the number of people who die by guns is not going down. It is not leveling off. It is exploding. Every year, more people—not less people—are killed by guns in this country, and it seems to be the only problem in which there is zero interest in this body to solve. When a terrorist plows into civilians with a truck in New York City, Republicans in this body are talking about policy change within hours, but after somebody walks into a school or a church or a shopping mall, we are told that there has to be a restraining order on policy debate for days. It is ridiculous, and it is offensive to the families who have gone through this.

So, let’s just for a moment set aside the issues that I will admit are unlikely to come up for a vote in this body between now and the end of this session. I think it is unbelievable that universal background checks, supported by 90 percent of Americans, can’t get a vote here. I don’t think there is another issue like that in the American public, where 90 percent of Americans agree on something and Congress can’t even conceive of getting it done.

The only place where background checks is controversial is in the Congress. Every single gun owner I talk to

in my State wants to make sure that criminals and people who are seriously mentally ill can't buy guns.

Similarly, let's admit what is happening here. It is not a coincidence that the same kind of weapon is used every single time in these shootings. These are copycat shootings in which people see the kind of destruction that comes with an AR-15-style weapon, and they use it again in order to maximize the lethality.

Wake up. Wake up to the reality that these weapons are being used to murder with speed and power, and the killers are watching what happens in Sandy Hook, what happens in Texas, what happens in Orlando, what happens in Las Vegas, and they are repeating the process. They are replicating the weapon. They shouldn't be in the hands of civilians. You can have plenty of fun hunting without an AR-15 or AR-15-style weapon. So let's set aside universal background checks and assault weapons for a moment. I get the politics of this place. I understand those are unlikely to pass.

Why, then, can't we work on the things that we know we agree on? I have listened to dozens of Republicans in the House and the Senate claim that they are for making real the prohibition on automatic weapons. People shouldn't have fully automatic weapons in this country. Nobody should be able to do what that guy did at an upper story window in a hotel in Las Vegas, and the law that we all passed is being ignored by companies that are selling these aftermarket modifications that turn semiautomatic weapons into automatic weapons. The company that sold the modification took it off the market, but only for a couple of weeks. They are back to selling bump stocks again because we have signaled that we are not going to do anything about it.

It is not enough to just tell the ATF to do it. Why? Because the law is vague. The ATF said it was vague in 2010. All we have to do is clarify it, but aftermarket modifications that turn semiautomatic weapons into automatic weapons shouldn't be legal. It seems we have agreement on that because I have listened to many Republicans saying they are willing to take that step. Let's take it and stop talking about it. Put legislation on the floor that says you cannot have an automatic weapon in this country. Let's do it. We agree on it.

I didn't agree with the President yesterday when he said it is a mental illness problem, but similarly we could work together to make sure that people who are seriously mentally ill don't buy weapons. That is the second non-controversial policy proposal on which we could work together. Let's just admit we are going the wrong way, not the right way.

Earlier this year, Republicans passed a piece of legislation that allowed for 75,000 people in this country who have serious mental illness to be able to get

off the list of prohibited purchasers and start buying guns again. These are people who were judged to be so mentally ill that they couldn't deposit a check. They were given conservator status for Social Security purposes. These are people who were so mentally ill, so limited in their cognitive abilities that they couldn't take a Social Security check and deposit it. Those people were prohibited from buying guns. This Congress passed a law earlier this year to say that those people who can't deposit a check should be able to go buy an assault weapon.

If we are serious about trying to stop people with mental illness from getting weapons, let's work together on that instead of moving backward.

Finally, it is an open secret that the existing background check system is broken. Let's not pretend we just woke up yesterday in amazement that the records of people who are seriously mentally ill or have been convicted of crimes aren't ending up on the background checklist.

I am holding in my hand the data that is available to every single one of us about the records that are being uploaded onto the background check system. For the Department of Defense, it is a whole bunch of zeros. The Army, the Navy, the Air Force—zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero.

Similarly, States aren't doing their part either. Connecticut uploaded 363,000 felony records onto the NICS system over the course of 2016. Colorado uploaded 10 felony records in 2016. New York uploaded 57,000 domestic violence records in 2016. North Carolina uploaded 261. There weren't 261 people in North Carolina who were convicted of domestic violence crimes in 2016; it is just that only 261 people went up on the list. Many other States, like the Department of Defense, have zeros in all of these columns. Many States are uploading no records onto the system.

Now, admittedly, NICS tries to get those records through other means when States don't give it to them, but it is an open secret that the NICS system is broken. Congress at least tried to make some changes. After the Virginia Tech shooting, Congress did pass a NICS improvement bill, but it has not worked. It gave the Department of Justice the power to withhold Federal funding if States don't upload records. Despite the fact that there are a handful of States that have uploaded no records to NICS—zero—no State has been penalized under that 2007 law. That is not a Republican or a Democratic problem. The Obama administration didn't penalize States, and Republican Presidents didn't penalize States. Why don't we work together on that?

A couple of years ago, the House passed additional funding to help States, other jurisdictions, upload records. Why don't we find a way to work together to at least make the existing background check system work?

This feeling of helplessness that people have in this country, this feeling of

impotence that nothing can be done to change the trajectory of violence in this country, the regular scroll across the bottom of your TV screen telling you news of the latest mass shootings where little kids and senior citizens are being gunned down in churches and schools—that sense of helplessness isn't real; it is a fiction, an invention of the gun lobby designed to make this place feel as if there is nothing that can be done in order to make sure that they can continue to make these obscene amounts of profits. There are things we can do.

I understand that despite the popularity of background checks with the public, we are probably not going to get a vote on that, but let's work together to make sure that automatic weapons can't be in the hands of civilians. Let's make real the very simple premise that seriously mentally ill people shouldn't be able to buy guns. Let's fix the background check system so that, as Republicans tell us over and over again, at least we can enforce existing law. There are ways that we can stop this slaughter, and I don't know how we live with ourselves, how we sleep at night as a body if, in the face of these massacres, we don't even do the stuff we all agree on.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS CHURCH MASS SHOOTING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I come before this body a second day in a row to talk about an event that the Senator from Connecticut has been referring to that has shocked all of us. It has rattled us to the very core and shocked the conscience of the entire Nation.

I didn't get a chance to hear everything he said about this today, but I was encouraged to hear him make comments about fixing the background check system, which I think failed us terribly here, and it failed, of course, the 26 people who lost their lives and the 20 more who were injured in this terrible shooting in Sutherland Springs, TX, during a Sunday morning church service at First Baptist Church.

Of course, at times like these, we need to respect the right and the need of people to mourn and to grieve their loss and to express our solidarity with those families who were torn apart. One woman who has lived in Sutherland Springs for nearly 70 years described the community as a place where "everybody knew everybody." She said that before Sunday, most people didn't even keep their doors locked because the town never experienced any significant crime. Well, now that has changed.

Sutherland Springs has suffered at the hands of a man whom initial reports have described as having a known history of violence, a man whose victims included his own grandmother-in-law as well as the visiting pastor of the church. No community finds it easy to deal with unexpected heartbreaking

losses like this, but the fact that this crime involved so many tightly knit friends and neighbors and occurred in a house of worship on a Sunday morning and harmed so many innocent children makes the task much harder.

As each new detail emerges from what is still an ongoing investigation, we need to study the whole puzzle and ask ourselves how this happened, why so many lives were lost, and what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it. We know, for example, that the gunman was court-martialed by the Air Force and convicted of seriousness domestic abuse, fracturing the skull of his own son. Under the relevant Federal law, the Gun Control Act of 1968, this should have prohibited him from ever purchasing a gun in the first place, but we know it didn't in this instance. This critically important information from the suspect's criminal history was not uploaded into the relevant background check databases even though a Federal law clearly requires that it be done.

Finally and most troublingly, we know what happened next: Mr. Kelley unlawfully purchased four firearms after passing Federal background checks that did not turn up his Air Force convictions. Of course, the shooter lied on his paperwork. He was asked about these convictions—that is part of the background check system—but because there was no record of it, he was able to lie his way into getting these firearms. This is very clearly a problem, and the Air Force has now admitted that Kelley's convictions should have barred him from ever purchasing or possessing firearms. What appears to have happened is that the records of the convictions were not uploaded into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. They are required to be uploaded by Federal law already.

There are still some questions to sift through, but I plan to introduce legislation—and I would be happy to work with my colleague from Connecticut—to ensure that all Federal Departments and Agencies, including the Department of Defense, upload the required conviction records into the national database. This legislation will also encourage, to the greatest extent possible under the Constitution, State and local governments to do the same. We can make the Federal Agencies do it. We can only request that the States do it, as the Senator from Connecticut pointed out earlier, and their record of compliance is lousy. It is lousy.

Justice Department records indicate that some Federal Agencies and State governments are failing to comply with the Federal law. According to the Department of Justice, the number of these records that are actually uploaded is staggeringly low. That is unacceptable, and it must change.

What is important to note, though, is that when the dust settles, the appropriate answers won't necessarily be the easy ones. The fact remains that under

existing law, this atrocity should have been prevented. This gunman should not have been allowed to purchase firearms and should have been arrested when he tried to do so. We need to better understand why our existing laws didn't work in this instance, and that is what my proposed legislation will do. After analyzing the problem, we will try to ensure that everyone is complying with the law.

In 2015, I introduced legislation called the Mental Health and Safe Communities Act that addressed a related issue: the failure of State and local authorities to upload valuable mental health records into the NICS background check database. I hope this demonstrates my willingness to work together with anybody who is willing to meet these problems head-on.

Right now, we need time and clarity. We need to know and continue to study the facts. Then, as we have already started to do, we need to consider all existing laws and regulations, both State and Federal, in light of this new information.

Mr. President, I know we are coming up on a deadline. I ask unanimous consent to speak for an additional 5 minutes.

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

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as we wait for additional details, I want to say a few more words about the strong community of Sutherland Springs, one just 35 miles from my hometown of San Antonio, TX, where I grew up.

First Baptist Church, where the shooting occurred, has served as a mainstay in the town since 1926. It is the site of church services every Sunday, weddings, social gatherings, and even some funerals. We hope the First Baptist Church can bounce back from this tragedy, and I am confident they can because faith, hope, and love can never be extinguished no matter the depravity, the evil that tries.

We are not sure what will happen to the building or the congregation itself, but no matter what, the unique spirit of this community will no doubt endure. I am hopeful that the town of Sutherland Springs will come back too. If people like Stephen Willeford are any indication, it will. Stephen, of course, is the plumber who managed to hit the gunman through a gap in his body armor. He was joined by Johnnie Langendorff. In a truck, the two chased the gunman at high speeds for 11 miles into neighboring Guadalupe County. What these two men displayed is that in the worst circumstances, we won't let evil have its way. We won't let sick individuals like this shooter escape the consequences of their crimes. Strangers will come together and act quickly and courageously to defend the communities they love and in which they live.

Today I join Governor Abbott, my colleagues—Senator CRUZ and Representative HENRY CUELLAR, in whose House district this occurred—and so

many other Texans in once again pledging my support to the people of Sutherland Springs. I send my thoughts and prayers to those who lost parents, children, friends, and relatives in this unbelievable act of evil.

The biggest danger, though, is that we become numb and we just simply move on to other matters. We can't let that happen. As Sherry Pomeroy, the wife of the pastor at First Baptist, said yesterday, "Please don't forget Sutherland Springs." And when we hear people ask us to do something about terrible tragedies like this, let's do what we can, working together in a bipartisan way, to fix the holes in what is already the law, which says that people like this shooter should never have gotten their hands on a firearm in the first place. But either through human error or some failure of the background check system, he was able to do so. We need to fix that, and hopefully, in doing so, we can bring some small sense of justice to the people who lost so much last Sunday in Sutherland Springs, TX.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, all time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Gibson nomination?

Mr. ALEXANDER. 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 91, nays 7, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 262 Ex.]

YEAS—91

Alexander	Durbin	Manchin
Baldwin	Enzi	McCain
Barrasso	Ernst	McCaskill
Bennet	Feinstein	McConnell
Blumenthal	Fischer	Moran
Blunt	Flake	Murkowski
Boozman	Franken	Murphy
Brown	Gardner	Murray
Burr	Graham	Nelson
Cantwell	Grassley	Perdue
Capito	Hassan	Peters
Cardin	Hatch	Portman
Carper	Heinrich	Reed
Casey	Heitkamp	Risch
Cassidy	Heller	Roberts
Cochran	Hirono	Rounds
Collins	Hoeben	Rubio
Coons	Inhofe	Sasse
Corker	Isakson	Schatz
Cornyn	Johnson	Schumer
Cortez Masto	Kaine	Scott
Cotton	Kennedy	Shaheen
Crapo	King	Shelby
Cruz	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Daines	Lankford	Strange
Donnelly	Leahy	Sullivan
Duckworth	Lee	Tester

Thune	Van Hollen	Wyden
Tillis	Warner	Young
Toomey	Whitehouse	
Udall	Wicker	

NAYS—7

Booker	Markey	Warren
Gillibrand	Merkley	
Harris	Sanders	

NOT VOTING—2

Menendez	Paul
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

Mitch McConnell, Orrin G. Hatch, John Barrasso, Johnny Isakson, Chuck Grassley, Thom Tillis, Lindsey Graham, Roy Blunt, John Cornyn, John Thune, John Boozman, Cory Gardner, Pat Roberts, Mike Crapo, JMike Rounds, James M. Inhofe, John Hoeven.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 51, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 263 Ex.]

YEAS—51

Alexander	Cotton	Hatch
Barrasso	Crapo	Heller
Blunt	Cruz	Hoeven
Boozman	Daines	Inhofe
Burr	Enzi	Isakson
Capito	Ernst	Johnson
Cassidy	Fischer	Kennedy
Cochran	Flake	Lankford
Collins	Gardner	Lee
Corker	Graham	Manchin
Cornyn	Grassley	McConnell

Moran	Rounds	Sullivan
Murkowski	Rubio	Thune
Perdue	Sasse	Tillis
Portman	Scott	Toomey
Risch	Shelby	Wicker
Roberts	Strange	Young

NAYS—47

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Nelson
Bennet	Harris	Peters
Blumenthal	Hassan	Reed
Booker	Heinrich	Sanders
Brown	Heitkamp	Schatz
Cantwell	Hirono	Schumer
Cardin	Kaine	Shaheen
Carper	King	Stabenow
Casey	Klobuchar	Tester
Coons	Leahy	Udall
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Donnelly	McCain	Warner
Duckworth	McCaskill	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden
Franken	Murray	

NOT VOTING—2

Menendez	Paul
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 51, the nays are 47.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:52 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

OUR COUNTRY'S MIDDLE EAST FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, in recent months, the United States and coalition forces have achieved major gains against Iraq and Syria. Building upon the retaking of Mosul in July, U.S. coalition partners have liberated ISIS's former capital of Raqqa in Syria, the pocket of Hawija in northern Iraq, and, just days ago, the border town of al-Qaim in western Iraq. The so-called caliphate that the terrorists claimed would overrun the Middle East is now a shadow of its former self—a shrinking swathe on a map once defined by an open reign of terror.

Unfortunately, however, our challenges in the region remain daunting despite these hard-fought tactical victories. Our relentless focus on destroying ISIS, which is, of course, essential, has obscured a troubling reality: The United States lacks a clear comprehensive strategy that addresses the Middle East in all of its complexity.

This is part of the unfortunate legacy the Obama administration left for its successor, but nearly 1 year into the Trump administration, we lack clarity on essential questions about our Nation's role, and we are left to observe as bystanders the intensifying symptoms of a collapsing regional order. While in some cases we are bystanders who take action, we do so with unclear and often unstated objectives.

The United States has committed to the sale of over \$100 billion of weapons to Saudi Arabia. We have announced an outline of strategy to counter Iran while providing only minimal detail. We remain conspicuously silent on the future of our role in Iraq and Syria beyond eliminating ISIS, as the Assad regime and its partners consolidate power.

Our power and influence is diminishing in the Middle East as a result of our lack of direction, and the vacuum has been filled by forces working contrary to American interests. Consider the events that have swept the region in recent months.

In Iraq, Iranian forces are working to sow discord as we recently saw in Kirkuk, where the presence of the Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani, exacerbated tensions among the Kurds and the government in Baghdad. Iranian-backed militias continue to gain power and aim to turn next year's election into a setback that drives American influence out of Iraq. Meanwhile, the scourge of ISIS remains despite recent military successes. The terrorist attack last week in Manhattan shows its persistent appeal. Its rise in the wake of U.S. withdrawal years ago demonstrates the danger of leaving before winning the peace.

Across the border in Syria, the Assad regime, backed by Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and an array of militias, has retaken most of the country, including many eastern areas that are strategically important. The consequences of the resulting humanitarian crisis have spilled beyond its border for years, destabilizing nations far beyond Syria and paving the way for radicalization. Forces that are hostile to both our interests and our values are shaping the future on the ground while we remain silent, focused on the immediate defeat of ISIS.

I want to emphasize, we want to defeat ISIS. We are defeating ISIS, but that is not our only goal in the Middle East.

On Saturday, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Hariri, resigned, claiming that he faced death threats from Iran, leaving the United States with one less valuable partner in a divided government in which Hezbollah plays a major role. I happen to have become friends with Mr. Hariri over the years. He is a good, pro-democratic, outstanding individual who basically was forced out of office.

A web of Iranian proxies and allies are spreading from the Levant to the Arabian Peninsula, threatening stability, freedom of navigation, and the