EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 38.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Kenneth D. Bell, of North Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of North Carolina.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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 Kenneth D. Bell, of North Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of North Carolina.

Mitch McConnell, Roy Blunt, Joni Ernst, Steve Daines, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, Thom Tillis, John Kennedy, John Boozman, Pat Roberts, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, Richard Burr, John Barrasso, Lindsey Graham, Cindy Hyde-Smith

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

IRAN

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, years before President Trump moved to the White House, even before President Obama and his family lived there, our Nation was at odds with an isolated country ruled by a repressive leader. It wasn’t long before it became clear to the United Nations and to our country’s own intelligence community that the country I am speaking of was enriching uranium for the purpose of obtaining a nuclear weapon, threatening to destabilize a region of great strategic importance.

As the world was winding down from a cold war, tensions between the United States and this country were heating up. An administration that some would call naïve recently attempted to deescalate tensions, taking an unprecedented step to hold out an olive branch to an unpredictable regime in hopes of reaching a momentous agreement. The Trump administration, premised—on an untruth; some would say a lie.
In August 1964, then-President Lyndon Johnson announced that the North Vietnamese had engaged the U.S. Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin, and he asked Congress to pass a resolution supporting retaliatory attacks. The following day, he wrote in his request: "The United States intends to respond to these incidents, let alone nuclear-armed ones like North Korea, would be willing to negotiate with us in good faith.

Now, there is another option here. Yesterday former U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Ryan Crocker, published an op-ed in the New York Times in which he wrote the following:

But war is not inevitable. President Trump campaigned on bringing troops home, not sending tens of thousands more to the Middle East. Such a deployment, although inadequate for a full-scale war, is more than foolish. War in the Middle East, as we should have learned by now, is neither swift to end nor sure to achieve its purpose.

Reformists in Iran have expressed an interest in diplomatic solutions with the United States and our allies, including a possible prisoner exchange. The foreign minister of Iran, whom I first met a dozen years or so ago, at the Iranian Embassy in New York City—not the Ambassador to the United States but the Ambassador to the United Nations, a fellow name Javad Zarif. It turned out that when I met him, I was impressed with how well-spoken out he had gone to undergraduate school at San Francisco State, I believe, in California. He is a really smart guy. He is not only well spoken but knew a lot about America and spoke English as well as any of us in the room. He went to graduate school in Denver, CO, and he ended up here as the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations.

Later, when Ahmadinejad left office—Ahmadinejad was a bad guy, a really bad President of Iran before Ruhani—Ahmadinejad sent Zarif back home, got him out of the United States, got him back to Iran, and he sort of disappeared until the new elections. Ruhani emerged as the more moderate—kind of a Gorbachev-type guy, really—leader in Iran and said: Zarif, I would like you to be my foreign minister. That is like being their Secretary of State, a position that he still holds.

Not long ago, about a couple of weeks ago, in that same op-ed, he suggested that we do a prisoner swap. We hold a number of people of Iranian descent who are in this country. Actually, it worked—not perfectly, but it worked. The elections that they conducted a couple of years ago—6 years ago—reflect that.

Sadly, this administration— I can’t believe that they did it intentionally, but their policy in the Middle East has been to undermine the effectiveness and the standing of the moderates in Iran, and they have rallied support of Iran around the extremist and around the hardliners. This was just the opposite of what was done in the last administration.

We have to be smarter than that. We have to be smarter than this. When I think about the contrast between the Trump administration’s actions in North Korea and Iran, I can’t help but wonder why there is such a stark contrast? I would not trust the leader of North Korea any further than I could throw him, and for this President to say that, it is just the opposite of what was done in the last administration.

During the 8 years of previous administrations, our foreign policy was designed to strengthen the standing of the moderates in Iran and to under-
George W. Bush, in the same breath he talks about how he got us into a war that cost us thousands of lives and has cost literally tens of billions of dollars—the Iraq war. So that would suggest to me that the idea of drawing more troops and a whole lot more money into a war with Iran has to be something you do with care.

So on this 1-year anniversary of the Trump administration’s pulling out of the Iran deal—I think, foolishly doing so—I would urge the President and his administration to think carefully about what outcomes we really seek as a country. We should be prioritizing diplomacy at this time, not escalating tensions and risking war with American lives with no coherent strategy. It is my hope that cooler heads will prevail. It is also in America’s best interest that they do.

John Kennedy said a lot of things that are memorable, and one of my favorites is this: “Never negotiate out of fear, but never be afraid to negotiate.” I think we would be wise to remember those words with respect to Iran.

The last thing I would say to the President, who is former military, is this: “Never negotiate out of fear, but never be afraid to negotiate.” I thought I would offer a bit of a counter view for those watching in the Gallery or on TV on what he just talked about. It is a really important issue, but I just happen to disagree with most—not everything, but most—of what my colleague just mentioned. So I am just going to touch on that before I talk about an Alaskan who is doing great work.

Just listening to my colleague talk about President Trump’s turning his back on Iran, the sanctions that we placed on Iran, which we all voted for here in the Senate, are antagonizing Iran. Foreign Minister Zarif is a moderate. Well, let me just touch on that. I think there is the new narrative that is just coming to come from my colleagues, and, again, I have a lot of respect for my good friend from Delaware, but about this kind of blame America first, blame Trump, as if the generals and admirals weren’t advising him, and that Iran is some kind of this new innocent moderate that we are turning our back on and we are sanctioning them and antagonizing them. With all due respect to my colleague on the opposite side, this couldn’t be further from the truth. Iran is no innocent. Iran is no innocent at all.

Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world and has been for decades. As for the JCPOA, which my colleague is lamenting, I read that, I certainly dug into that. I have been involved in our broader Iran isolation policy for many years. That was the first major foreign policy national security agreement in U.S. history that had the backing of senators and a bipartisan majority of House Members who were against it—against it, not for it. That did not have support in this body—certainly not in the Senate, not in the House, and not from the American people.

So as for the myth that somehow this was this great agreement, it wasn’t. It was a giveaway—billions to the largest state sponsor of terrorism, where in 10 years they are free to go develop nuclear weapons. This was not a good idea, and this body said so. A bipartisan majority in the House and the Senate disagreed with President Obama. A bipartisan minority in the House and Senate, for the first time in U.S. history, on a national security agreement of this magnitude, somehow passed it.

So there is this myth that this was supported by Congress. It wasn’t. Democrats and Republicans opposed it. The majority in both Houses. And by the American people, it certainly wasn’t.

Remember, this is the country that, after the deal and during the deal, continued to say what we should do to wipe Israel off the map. It is not a really nice, innocent nation saying that: We want to wipe Israel off the map. They continue to say that.

Here is the final thing. In my 4 years in the Senate, I have only heard one other U.S. Senator—Senator Corrino from Arkansas—even talk about this issue.

Starting in 2004, 2005, I was a staff officer, as a marine, to the commander of U.S. Central Command, and there was top-secret information that started to show in the region—and we were out there a lot, the Middle East—that the Iranians were supplying the Iraqi Shia militia with very sophisticated improvised explosive devices that were killing our soldiers and our marines and our sailors. The Iranians, of course, denied it. They were lying. It all came out to be true. These were infrared tripwires, explosively formed projectiles that could punch through tanks and kill our marines—and if you were an American soldier and you got hit by one of these, you were pretty much dead.

I asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in an open Armed Services Committee hearing how many American military members were killed by these Iranian IEDs, and over 2,000 was his answer—2,000. I have never heard any of my colleagues talk about that.

The notion that Foreign Minister Zarif was a moderate when he was negotiating with Secretary Kerry is belied by the facts. This Foreign minister literally had the blood of American soldiers on his hands.

So I take these issues very seriously, like my colleague from Delaware does.

There is this notion that our allies were all for the JCPOA. They weren’t. Some of our most important allies—Israel, the Gulf Arab States, which we continue to provide arms for decades were adamantly opposed, and they are the closest to Iran.

So this notion that we are going to blame the administration—by the way, we keep talking about President Trump. He is getting advice from senators—Abrams tanks, military to reinforce our military presence in the region because they see threats.

In the media right now, there is this narrative that the President is trying to drum up a war. What about the generals? What about General Dunford, a very well respected marine and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs? Are they doing this?
I just came from reading some of the intel in the SCIF that is prompting this discussion. Of course, I can’t talk about it, but I support what the administration is doing with regard to reinforcing our military capabilities in the region, and this is the reason: It sends a message to the Iranians that if they are going to try to do what they did in 2004, 2005, and 2006, which is kill and wound thousands of our military members, we are going to have the capability to make them pay.

I don’t want anyone coming through Dover Air Force Base, either, but over 2,000 of our troops were killed and wounded by these leaders of the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. The notion that somehow they are some kind of innocent, country that we are antagonizing or “turning our back on” is not accurate. So watch out for the new narrative that the Iranians are the innocents and that somehow we are being provocative. What is provoking our troops? They have a long history of doing—in Lebanon, the marines—and we need to send a signal that if they are going to look at doing this again or trying to or trying to kill our diplomats, it is not going to be this time.

I support what is happening there, and I hope my colleagues will.

We are going to get a briefing by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA next week on this, and I think that if there is a remembrance of who the real bad guys are. We are Americans. Yes, we have political differences, but somehow, if we start to make this narrative that Iran is the innocent and somehow the Trump guys—John Bolton, for example—are some kind of evil people—come on. Come on, really? The largest state sponsor of terrorism, responsible for killing and maiming and wounding thousands of American soldiers, the beat and wounded American soldiers in our country, and we are the bad guys? I don’t think so.

So watch out for that narrative. I certainly hope it is not going to be something my colleagues on the other side of the aisle start getting out there. It is already in the media. You have the former negotiator for President Obama making these statements that somehow, poor Iran; all bad America. I am not a big “blame America first” member, and I think we need to be really careful when we talk about trying to demonize our generals, admirals, and national security advisers and make the Iranians look like they are some kind of innocents when they are not.

I wish more of my colleagues would talk about the number of dead military members killed and wounded by the Quds Force in Iran, because they never do. No one here ever talks about it. Amnesia.

Therefore, Mr. SCOTT of Florida assumed the Chair.

TRIBUTE TO ANGIE Fraize

Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier, it is Thursday afternoon, and it is the time I get to talk about an Alaskan who has given of themselves in order to make my State the great place that it is. We call this person the Alaskan of the Week.

I like to come down to the floor—and I am not going to take a poll, but I think it is the page’s favorite speech of the week—because I get to talk about Alaska and somebody who has really made a difference for the community, the State, or maybe even the country.

I like to talk about what is going on in Alaska because I love to encourage people to come and visit our great State.

Right now, what is going on in Alaska? Well, sunset time is approaching midnight in many places across the State. In Anchorage, the Sun officially rose at 5:06 a.m. and will set at 10:42 p.m., but twilight starts at 4 a.m. and ends at midnight. So the Midnight Sun is burning bright all across Alaska. In the summer, we are hit with this fantastic natural light of the beautiful Midnight Sun in the sky. You will find many of us up late playing softball, doing yard work, fishing, painting houses, talking to our neighbors. So it is a great time to be in Alaska. I urge everybody here in the Gallery to come on up.

The Presiding Officer also has a great State to visit, the State of Florida. So go down to Florida, and then you can take the 4,000-mile trip to Alaska. You will have a great time. Make your travel plans now.

As you know, what makes my State or your State truly great is not the hours of Sun it gets—and the Presiding Officer’s State does get a lot of Sun too—or its glorious mountains or sparkling seas, all of which we have in Alaska in spades; it is the people who help build strong families, strong communities, strong cities, and a strong State.

The person I want to honor today is Anchorage Police Officer Angie Fraize, our Alaskan of the Week.

I think it is very appropriate that we are celebrating our police forces across the country, all across America. There were many thousands in DC this week because they are a force for good in our communities who often go unappreciated. I got to speak last Friday at the Anchorage police memorial ceremony, and I had a big somber event. We have a big memorial there of all the first responders and law enforcement officers who have been killed in the line of duty in Alaska over the last 100-plus years.

As I mentioned, all jobs are important, no doubt about it, but there is something special, something noble, and something even sacred, I would say, about a job that entails protecting others and putting your life on the line to keep your fellow citizens safe.

I thought it would be fitting to honor Anchorage Police Officer Fraize. She is one of more than 400 sworn police officers, brave men and women who keep the 300,000 residents of Anchorage, AK—my hometown—safe. Let me tell you a little bit about Officer Fraize, what makes her so special, and why my friend and fellow marine, Anchorage Police Chief Justin Doll, recommended her.

She was just 12 years old when her mom raised her and her brother by herself. Her mom was a tenacious, hard-working mother—a characteristic she clearly passed on to her daughter. She worked her way through college with her two young children to support and at the age of 40 got her degree in education from the University of Alaska in Anchorage.

This is Officer Fraize’s mom. You see where she gets her good genes.

She often had to shower at the university. Their car was always breaking down. They were always struggling to make it, but they always did make ends meet—a family struggling and building it.

None of that dimmed Officer Fraize’s dream of catching the bad guys—a dream she had since seventh grade. She graduated with honors from high school and was able to attend the University of Wisconsin. She was only 16 years old—very smart. Her first job out of college was as a residential youth counselor working with adolescent sex offenders who had mental health issues. So right away, she was in the law enforcement area.

When her husband was offered a job with the Anchorage PD, she decided at that time that she, too, wanted to be a police officer.

Officer Fraize has had various duties in the last 12 years she has worked as an Anchorage police officer. She has been a police officer, a coordinator for the academy, and now she is a recruiter particularly focused on recruiting young women and spreading the word about how great APD is. So if you want an adventure and you want to come to Alaska and you like law enforcement, give her a call.

All the jobs Officer Fraize has had require empathy. She said her life experiences, being a chronic alcoholic, she said, don’t wake up every day choosing to drink. People who act badly don’t wake up wanting to be bad people. The trick, she said, is to listen to people, to find a connection, and to see the humanity in each individual.

She is also incredibly passionate about connecting police officers with the people they protect, so she chairs a group called Anchorage Cops for Community, where the police officers interact with the public in positive ways at coffee shops, community council meetings, and public events throughout Anchorage. This gives the community a
chance to interact with officers in a positive way. It also gives police officers a chance to get their fresh perspectives from community members.

On Tuesday, for instance, the cops and firefighters got together for an eating relay at a local barbecue restaurant in Anchorage. Members of the community came out to cheer their favorite police officer and fireman. The proceeds went to Special Olympics Alaska, which is another passion of hers.

Officer Fraize is a great champion of advocating for those with special needs. She and her husband have two daughters: Italia, who is 14 years old, and Gianna, who is 10. Gianna has Down syndrome and, according to Officer Fraize, is the most popular girl in her fourth grade class. That is no surprise.

Officer Fraize is the chair of a local group that advocates for individuals with special needs, and she is also involved in Special Olympics Law Enforcement Torch Run, which is a great event that so many in our community get behind. She was one of 50 police officers in America chosen to carry the torch at the 2019 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Abu Dhabi. She brought the torch home to Alaska, and she is giving it to Special Olympics in Alaska this weekend at the 2019 Alaska Law Enforcement Torch Run and Pledge Drive. This is going to be a great event.

Anchorage Police Chief Justin Doll said:

We are so proud of Officer Fraize’s work at the APD, and I believe the rest of Anchorage should be as well. She is the epitome of the public servant ideal that is the foundation of our relationship with the Anchorage community. I am genuinely honored to have her at APD upholding our most cherished traditions of community service.

That is the Anchorage police chief. We are also proud of all our police officers and first responders in Alaska. We are so grateful for the work they do to keep us safe. We want them to know that we honor their jobs and their commitment to our community. We also honor their families. These are very tough jobs, and it is hard on supportive families when a wife or husband goes off every morning to a job that could involve risking their lives.

We want them to know, not just in Alaska but here in the Senate, we have their backs.

To Officer Fraize, thanks for all that you do. We are so lucky to have officers like you in Alaska, looking out for us. Thank you for being our Alaskan of the Week.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I am going to talk this week about Russia. But if I might, following up on the point by the Senator from Alaska, first, I want to applaud the police officer you are honoring this week.

This is National Police Week. I think it is very appropriate that we recognize those who are serving our country and our community as first responders. I want to mention two police officers specifically, both of whom gave their lives in the defense of our community. These law enforcement officers were very young, and they went into danger rather than running away from danger. We lost two of our officers last year.

Amy Sorrells Caprio from Baltimore County, my home jurisdiction, is a member of the Baltimore County Police Department, died before reaching the age of 30, pursuing a burglary suspect who struck and killed her with the vehicle being operated by the suspect. She leaves behind a husband, parents, and sister. Our prayers are with her.

The second police officer I would like to honor is Mujahid Abdul Mumin Ramzziddin, a 51-year-old police officer from Prince George’s County, MD, who was killed while on duty. He was off duty, and he observed the need to help a person who was a victim of domestic violence. He went to help that person and was ultimately killed by the perpetrator.

He leaves behind a wife and four children, and our prayers are also with him.

RUSSIA

Mr. President, I rise today to address the continuously abusive nature of the Russian Government in impeding on democratic institutions, undermining the human rights of its people, and destabilizing activities in the United States, Ukraine, Syria, and worldwide. Over time, we learned that Mr. Putin’s increasing aggressive behavior abroad is directly related to his need to maintain power at home.

In January of 2016, I released a Foreign Relations Committee Democratic member report that documented Mr. Putin’s pattern of asymmetric warfare against democratic institutions, universal values, and the rule of law in Russia and across Europe over the last 20 years. The report explained how the Russian Government has repeatedly deployed and perfected, as well as its techniques to attack democracies both internally and abroad.

Among many other takeaways, we learned that Mr. Putin will continue to simultaneously step up his attacks on democracies around the world while also acting to maintain power in Russia.

We have also learned that it is ultimately the Russian people who bear the brunt of Mr. Putin’s international decisions. We have an obligation to support human rights around the globe, both as individuals and as a nation. Part of that obligation is ensuring that violators of international human rights are held accountable for their actions and are not given the resources they need to continue their nefarious actions.

In an effort to address these obligations, I partnered with nine bipartisan colleagues in the 115th Congress in January of 2017 to introduce the Countering Russian Hostilities Act. It is comprehensive sanctions legislation on Russia in response to its cyber intrusion, aggression, and destabilizing activities in the United States, Ukraine, Syria, and worldwide.

It certainly was not the first nation to be targeted. Reflect back to its illegal invasion of Ukraine and subsequent annexation of Crimea. Look at Russia’s role in the ongoing hostilities in Eastern Europe. Consider Mr. Putin’s role in Syria’s civil war and support for dictators like Bashar al-Assad. He resorted hundreds of thousands of citizens and assisted in the collapse the country’s infrastructure. Russia has shown us time and again its disdain for international laws and norms under Mr. Putin’s leadership.

After the trift of Russian interference in Ukraine, Syria, and our democratic Presidential election here, I partnered with nine bipartisan colleagues within the first week of the 115th Congress in January of 2017 to introduce the Countering Russian Hostilities Act. It is comprehensive sanctions legislation on Russia in response to its cyber intrusion, aggression, and destabilizing activities in the United States, Ukraine, Syria, and worldwide.
Originally, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act provides that anyone involved in Sergei's imprisonment, torture, or death who has not been brought to justice in Russia would be denied access to our financial system, the ability to travel to our country. This bill also targets those who have abused their power in the country to violate the human rights of anyone in Russia who disagrees with Mr. Putin's corrupt regime.

Senator McCain and I wanted to send a signal to Mr. Putin and his co-conspirators that there will be consequences for their actions and their inactions. The Sergei Magnitsky Act was, is, and will continue to be an effective tool at doing just that.

Senator McCain and I agreed that the United States must lead the world by using the power of our financial and legal institutions to hold human rights abusers and corrupt individuals across the globe accountable for their crimes. That is why we continued to work together to author the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which was signed into law in 2016. Senator McCain and I shared the critically important belief that the value of American leadership in enforcing human rights worldwide transends party lines.

I might point out that following the U.S. example, other countries have enacted similar laws to make sure we have a blanket protection against those who commit these human rights violations.

In the past year, Global Magnitsky designations have targeted individuals around the world responsible for acts of genocide, violence, and significant corruption. My colleagues and I have called for numerous sanctions under this act, and I am pleased that the administration has acted, particularly issuing Executive order 13818, which expanded Magnitsky authorities. Freezing the financial assets of perpetrators and denying them visas to the United States sends a clear message: We will not stand by while individuals are stripped of their freedoms and their rights.

Unfortunately, while the Global Magnitsky legislation has proved hugely successful, we continue to witness human rights violations around the world and, more specifically, at the hands of Mr. Putin.

In recent reports, human rights groups have noted that the number of political prisoners in Russia has risen at a rapid rate over the past few years. Many of these groups are calling on the United States to impose sanctions on more Russian officials to hold them accountable for the inhumane treatment of over 250 reported political prisoners. Unfortunately, this issue of Russian political prisoners has not been the forefront of the U.S.-Russia discussions.

President Trump continues to treat Mr. Putin with the utmost respect, despite the Russian President's holding almost 300 individuals hostage as political prisoners in Russia.

Most recently, the President has scheduled another formal meeting with Mr. Putin next month during the annual G20 Summit. Of course, Secretary Pompeo just met with Mr. Putin on Tuesday. Human rights must be on the agenda for such talks.

In 2016, a Russian human rights activist and a person who has dissented from Mr. Putin, Vladimir Kara-Murza, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, expressing how the United States could help Russian defenders.

He stated: Our friends in the West often ask how they can be helpful to the cause of human rights and democracy in Russia and the answer to this is very simple. Please stay true to your values. We are not asking for your support. It is our task to fight for democracy and rule of law in our country. The only thing we ask from Western leaders is that they stop supporting Mr. Putin by treating him as a respectable partner and by allowing Mr. Putin's cronies to use Western countries as havens for their loot.

That is exactly what the Magnitsky Act is all about—to deny that legitimacy.

I ask that we take these words to heart. The threat that Russia poses to our global community has never been more evident. But we must remember the distinction between Mr. Putin's regime and the Russian people. The Russian people are good, freedom-seeking people who want economic security and stability for their families just as we do in the United States. This is an important distinction for us to keep in our minds and our hearts as we continue to pursue effective tools to counter Mr. Putin's threats to the international order and the values we hold so dear.

So as we work to shape U.S. policy and diplomatic strategies toward Russia, I urge my colleagues to keep in mind the aspirations of the Russian human rights defenders who risk their lives in order to advocate for a Russia free of authoritarian and abusive leaders.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, dominant in the news—on which I have expected there to be more coverage—is a matter that I think is of great urgency to the country, global security, and peace—that being the tensions that are rising in the Middle East.

I have heard a few of my colleagues speak on the floor about it today, and I have seen a lot of press report on it, some of it absurd and some of it on point. I understand some of it. I thought there should have been more information provided to all of the Members. I am pleased to see that more will be available next week when Secretary Pompeo testifies. This is an item I have been talking about for decades—of the urgent threat, potentially, that now exists from Iran against the United States, particularly in Iraq but throughout the Persian Gulf region.

I feel like we talk a lot about Mr. Putin's strategic moves. To understand the threat, it is important to understand how Iran operates.

Iran is an Islamic republic, meaning it has a political branch of its government—a President, a Foreign Minister, and a parliamentary body. Then it has a Supreme Leader, who ultimately governs the country. In essence, his commands overrule the political branches. That is why they call him the Supreme Leader. He is a religious figure. As part of that, it has an armed services—an army, a navy, and an air force—that protects the country, theoretically. Then it has an armed forces that is independent of the army, the navy, and the air force, and that is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC. The point is that it doesn't answer the President; it doesn't answer to the Foreign Minister; and it doesn't answer to regular army forces. It answers directly to the Supreme Leader. A lot of times, people don't understand this. People of decades agree to other countries the attributes of our own.

The President of Iran is not the commander in chief, in reality, of the IRGC. It operates completely separately. By the way, that means that the IRGC—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—can oftentimes operate and do things that the Foreign Minister, who is the spokesperson for the Iranian Government, may not even know about. Sometimes it does. The point is that we have to understand that dynamic. It is not the United States. Our attributes should not be assigned to them.

The IRGC has an organization within it. It has a unit called the Quds Force. The Quds Force, led by General Soleimani, is made up of experts and has developed expertise in unconventional warfare and in intelligence activities, primarily abroad. This is the organization, for example, that helped to build all of the IEDs that killed and maimed American servicemen in Iraq. This is the organization behind the Shia militias in Iraq today. This is the organization behind a lot of the efforts that support Hezbollah in Syria and in other parts of the world.

The IRGC's Quds Force is designed to do things that have some level of deniability. The IRGC Quds Force has developed an ability, in the case of conflict with the United States—and we have known this now for the better part a decade—to attack us using proxies, meaning other groups, in order to escape and have some level of deniability. It will get some group that
it has stood up, that it has equipped, and that it has trained to attack us in retaliation for something America has done, but it can deny it. It can say: That wasn’t our army. That wasn’t our air force. That was this other group that was doing it.

This is a capability we know it has built not just in the Middle East, by the way, but all over the world. We have been aware of it for a long time. It is not a secret to anyone, and it is a capability that it has increasingly perfected.

What has happened here very recently is there has been a persistent and clear stream of information—a clear indication—that has arrived to American policymakers that the IRGC, the Quds Force, and their proxies in the region pose a serious and potentially imminent threat to U.S. forces and U.S. civilians in Iraq and in the broader Middle East.

The President of the United States and the administration are confronted with this information. What is the wholly appropriate thing for them to do? The appropriate thing for them to do is to reposition military assets to the region. No. 1, to protect the Americans there in case they come under attack and No. 2, to be in a position to retaliate.

The reason this is important is you hope to deter this sort of attack. What you are hoping to do is to show them that there will be consequences if they attack Americans. The administration are there in case they come under attack and we get them out? That is the first question everyone would have is, Why didn’t we have military assets in the region so that if we are attacked by their proxies at the direction of the Quds Force, we are going to respond to that forcefully. What you hope that will do, along with public messaging, is get into their heads and make them decide “We are not going to do this.” That is what has happened here, and it is wholly appropriate.

For a moment, I want you to imagine. If, in fact, an attack such as this occurred, it would not just be a proxy attack. Americans were killed. The first question everybody would have is, Why didn’t we have military assets in the region to protect them? Why couldn’t we get them out? That is the first question everyone around here is going to ask.

What the administration has done to pre-position military assets in the region for this potential contingency is entirely appropriate. Also appropriate is the thing we are not going to do is start a war, but if we are attacked by Iran’s proxies, we are going to respond against those proxies, and we are going to hold Iran responsible. It is going to pay a price for this as well. Who could disagree with the notion that if we see an attack we have a right to defend ourselves and respond? That is the only thing that is happening here.

I am pleased that in the last day, more Members of the Senate have been made privy to this stream of information. The administration can be seen to be thinking about the actions the administration has taken up to this point are not just wholly justified but are appropriate.

Yet I am concerned about some of the reactions I have seen with regard to this because I think they bode ill both for this case and for the future.

One of the first reactions I have seen is that this is not true, that they are not making this up, that there is no such intelligence and that it is being exaggerated. There are even some leakers—I don’t know who these people are—who are lying to media outlets about the contents of this intelligence because they have axes to grind in the administration, and they want to create embarrassment.

Look, I get this bureaucratic infighting, but I don’t understand it when it comes to issues of national security. Even if this information is 50 percent accurate, we have an obligation to err on the side of caution, especially when Americans are on the line.

I encourage all Senators to read this information or access it through their offices and agree that there was a briefing with the appropriate officials, to attend that as well, and I believe you will agree with me.

The second thing I am hearing is “Oh, this is just a path to war”—equating that to what happened over a decade ago. This is nothing like that. That was a defensive operation. That was an invasion of another country. This is not posturing for a military attack; this is military posturing for that purpose of defensive operations. As I have said repeatedly, it is very straightforward: If Iran attacks, there will be a war. If Iran does not attack, there will not be a war.

I think the most disappointing is some insinuation, including by Members of this body—publicly and privately—that somehow, we are going to provoke an attack; that elements of the American Government are going to go out and do something to get Iran to hit us. That is having an excuse to go to war. I don’t know how you prove a negative, but I find that to be wholly unsubstantiated and dangerous.

Let me tell you why this is problematic. What encourages Iran to believe it can get away with this is that it believes if one of these groups—one of the Shia militias in Iraq—attacks us, it is going to be able to say that it is “not us,” that it is some rogue group that did it. “Don’t hold us responsible for it, and we have an excuse to go to war. I don’t know how you prove a negative, but I find that to be wholly unsubstantiated and dangerous.

The second thing I am hearing is that this is a capability we know it has, that it is built not just in the Middle East, by the way. As I have said, it is there in case—we have to think about what the Quirinale is doing in Afghanistan, in Yemen. We have to think about the Peshmergas, and the broad future of the United States in the Middle East.

The second reason Iran thinks it can get away with this is, we know it has a capability, that it is some rogue group that did it. “Don’t hold us responsible for it, and we have an excuse to go to war.” I don’t know how you prove a negative, but I find that to be wholly unsubstantiated and dangerous.

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I hope all of the misinformation will stop because this matter is too important with which to play political games.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, across America, there are 130 million individuals who have a preexisting condition. That is 130 million Americans that already have a preexisting condition. This means individuals have a diagnosis, an illness, a medical condition that without the Affordable Care Act would likely mean they were priced out of insurance because the costs associated with their illness are so high that no insurer would provide them coverage or the cost of insurance is much higher than those who don’t have that illness or that condition.

These preexisting conditions don’t discriminate. They affect Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, people who watch FOX News, people who watch MSNBC. This isn’t a partisan issue; preexisting conditions affect everybody.

In my State, give or take, 522,000 people have preexisting conditions, and I talk to them every time I go back to Connecticut. I remember 2 years ago when I was walking across the State—something I do every year. I take about a week in the summer, and I walk from one end of the State to the other end—there were families who would find out on social media where I was going to be walking that day and pre-position
My intention was to come down to the floor today and offer a unanimous consent request to get us on the road to solving this latest assault on people with preexisting conditions. Let me explain to you what my request was going to be. I understand there are Republican objections, and there is not the support today we need to make this request, so I will reserve the right to make that request until early next week.

Here is the substance of the request I was planning to make today. Last week, the House of Representatives passed a piece of legislation called the Protecting Americans with Preexisting Conditions Act, and what this legislation would have done—and will do, if passed and signed by the President—is prevent HHS from taking any action to implement the administration’s waivers for States to set up these junk plans, these skimpy plans.

It is because of the intent of the Affordable Care Act, which is to allow flexibility for States—there is an ability under the Affordable Care Act for States to innovate and to be flexible, but the Affordable Care Act says you can’t do that in a way that harms consumers. You can’t do that in a way that provides less coverage to consumers.

The rule the Trump administration is proposing, in many of our minds, is a violation of the Affordable Care Act in and of itself, which is still the law of the land, but this piece of legislation would clarify that you cannot allow for the development and widespread sale of these junk insurance plans without dramatically undermining the healthcare of the 130 million Americans who have preexisting conditions.

So my intent was to ask for an unanimous consent request to bring this bill for a vote in the Senate. I will do that next week.

At some point, we have to act like we actually are the U.S. Senate. It is not enough to just say over and over again that you support people with preexisting conditions, and then do nothing as the administration launches a daily, nonstop, unending, unceasing, relentless effort to destroy healthcare for people with preexisting conditions.

This is the latest assault on people with preexisting conditions, but it stands in a very long, ongoing line of actions by this administration, backed up by Republicans in the Congress, to try to reduce coverage and increase costs for people with preexisting conditions.

It started, of course, with the whole repeal effort, which would not have replaced the Affordable Care Act with anything meaningful. The bill that passed the House of Representatives would have stripped healthcare away from 30 million Americans. The tax bill that included a portion of healthcare repeal that was passed and signed by the President eliminates healthcare for 13 million Americans, and many of those have preexisting conditions.

As we speak today, the administration is readying to go to court with a whole bunch of Republican attorneys general and the Trump Federal judicial system to overturn protections for people with preexisting conditions. So having failed to get the entirety of the bill repealed through the Congress, the administration now is going to court to try to get these protections for people with preexisting conditions repealed. Once again, this Congress, this Senate is silent on that case. We have offered another piece of legislation to stop that lawsuit from going forward. We don’t have any takers on the Republican side. This assault is real. I didn’t make it up. It is not imagined. If this court case that the Trump administration is pushing succeeds, over the entirety of the Affordable Care Act will be invalidated, and there is no plan to replace it.

If these junk plans go into effect—listen, maybe I will be wrong. I hope I am wrong. Maybe there will not be a flight of people to these junk plans, but much of the analyses I have seen suggests that will happen. If it does, there is just no way, other than for the cost to go up for everybody who is left behind on the regulated plans. I don’t know about you, but when I talk to my folks living paycheck to paycheck in Connecticut, they don’t have a lot of room in their budget for increased premiums for healthcare. They are maxed out as it is.

So I will stand down for now, but I will be back early next week to offer this unanimous consent request. I hope, if my colleagues turn it down, if they don’t want to bring up a piece of legislation that would stop this latest regulatory assault on the Affordable Care Act, that they will come to the table with other ideas as to how to protect people with preexisting conditions from this campaign of sabotage by the administration; that they will finally recognize that this assault on the Affordable Care Act in the court system is a really awful precedent to set.

It is going to come back and bite all of us as legislators if it is successful. Without any real hope of a replacement for the Affordable Care Act, it leads to a humanitarian disaster in which 20 million to 30 million people lose insurance because of it.

This is as important as it gets. There is very little that matters to people more than their health and their healthcare, and if this is not fixed, possibly next week we can come together as a body and finally do something about the administration’s attempt to take away these protections for sick people and people with complicated diagnoses all across the country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. M CCONE S S, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

JOINT REFERRAL OF NOMINATION

Mr. MCCONE S S. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the nomination of Robert Wallace, of Wyoming, to be Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife, be referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, be referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, be referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.