

Naturally, as the Kurds leave the space in northern Syria under attack from Turkey, one of the places they are likely to go is to Kurdistan and northern Iraq. In the first 10 days, nearly 9,000 Kurdish refugees from Syria have crossed the border into Iraq.

So as we are looking to humanitarian assistance to deal with the scope of this crisis created by President Trump's action, I hope we will consider humanitarian support to the KRG as Kurds cross the border.

I call on Congress to pass the bill that has been introduced by Senators WARNER and BLUMENTHAL, which would provide special immigrant visa opportunities for Kurdish translators and others who have worked alongside our military. This is something we have had a good track record of doing with people who supported our troops in Iraq and supported our troops in Afghanistan and then are left in harm's way because of that support. Those on the Kurdish side who have worked together with our troops in northern Syria, I think, should be extended the same special immigrant visa status.

The administration should be asked to come to both Houses of Congress and testify about the plan to prevent a resurgent ISIS. This is something Americans should be afraid of. Maybe the administration has a plan about how they will try to protect against that happening, but whether they have a plan or not, they should come to Congress, and we should ask them about it.

Finally, I want the White House to release the transcript of the call between President Trump and President Erdogan in which this deal was hashed. When I heard the testimony of Ambassador Jeffrey at the hearing yesterday—the testimony was public—that he wasn't consulted and that the British and French, who have just recently put in troops, weren't consulted, I still have real questions about why this decision was made. I believe those questions would largely be answered if the transcript of the call between Presidents Erdogan and Trump were delivered, whether in a classified or other context to Congress, so I call on the White House to release the transcript.

I am going to conclude with this: Along with many of our colleagues today, I gathered here in the Chamber at 10:30 to go over to the memorial service for Elijah Cummings, and it was a powerful one. It was a powerful one. Not many Members of Congress—Senate or House—lie in state in the Capitol, and it was a moving occasion.

I knew Elijah Cummings pretty well, being kind of a next-door neighbor of Virginia and Maryland. Over the years, we did a number of events together. One of the things that Representative Cummings used to say in one of these voices that sounded like it was coming out of the Old Testament—you know, it was a fire-and-brimstone voice—was this powerful, powerful statement: "We are better than this."

He would say that, and when he would say it, he would say it about a

number of circumstances. He said it probably most recently, most vividly, when pictures emerged of children in cages at the border. But he would often say it, and he would say it to criticize actions. It would sound like a tough criticism.

But as some of the eulogists today were mentioning that statement of Representative Cummings, I thought about "We are better than this," what it means, and it suddenly struck me as not a critical statement. It suddenly struck me as an extremely optimistic and positive statement. I hadn't really thought of it that way until I heard it earlier today.

Why do I say it was optimistic and positive? The statement "We are better than this" says that whatever the imperfections of the day, we are really more defined by our ideals than our imperfections. We are more defined by our values than our vices. And, sure, when he would use that statement, he would be criticizing an imperfection of the day—a bad decision or bad policy—but he would be criticizing it by saying that we as a country, we as a Congress, we as a Senate, even we as individuals are actually better than this. Our ideals are better than the way we are acting right now.

If you look at reality, you can define it by its imperfection or you can try to define it by its ideals, and I would like to have a judge who looked at me and judged me by my ideals more than my imperfections, even while calling me to live up to my ideals.

The fact that an Elijah Cummings, who had suffered throughout his life many kinds of second-class treatment of discrimination, even being routed into special ed classes as a kid because people thought he was slow when he was actually really, really gifted, the fact that he would go through life and still believe so strongly that our country's values and ideals were a more accurate reflection of who we are than our imperfections and vices is something that I found pretty inspirational as I thought about his life.

I do believe we are better than this with respect to this particular issue. I think we are better than abandoning battlefield allies. I think we are better than empowering authoritarian dictatorships. I think we are better than suggesting we care more about oil than we care about people. I think we are better than facilitating ethnic cleansing of a proud population, including kids. I think we are better than this.

So in the spirit of Representative Cummings, I am going to define us as a nation, us as a Senate, us as individuals more by our ideals than by our imperfect actions and then call us to live up to it. There are concrete steps we can take—some of which I have outlined—that I think will be more in tune with who we actually are and the ideals we hold.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. HARRIS. Mr. President, I was absent, but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 332, the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 457, Justin Reed Walker, to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Kentucky.

I was absent, but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall No. 333 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 457, Justin Reed Walker, to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Kentucky. •

CUBA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the travel section of the New York Times on Sunday, October 6, 2019, included a lengthy article about the extraordinary music of Cuba and the rich culture that has developed over many generations around the creation and performance of music in that country. The article is too long to insert into the RECORD, but I encourage all Senators to read it as it describes in colorful detail the unique creativity, ingenuity, and complexity of Cuban music that derives from the infinite variety of sounds, instruments, artistry, and talents of Cuban musicians drawing on their African, Haitian, and European heritage.

I mention this because it is illustrative of the many aspects of Cuban society today that Americans should be able to experience for themselves. The Cuban people, who endure many hardships, are as resilient, ingenious, and hard-working as any people I have met. Despite an economy broken by mismanagement that discourages private initiative, a one-party political system that punishes dissent, racial, and gender inequality, and only dreams for a better future, they know how to enjoy life's pleasures and to make strangers feel welcome.

Unfortunately, rather than encouraging Americans to travel to Cuba to experience Cuban society and build relations with the Cuban people, as we do with people living under other autocratic governments, President Trump has slammed the door.

Egged on by a handful of Cuban-American hardliners in the White House, the State Department, and Congress—few, if any, of whom have ever set foot in Cuba—the President has adopted a bankrupt approach toward that country that is steeped in hypocrisy.

These are the same people who for years have unreservedly supported

spending hundreds of millions of dollars on TV and Radio Marti, despite abundant evidence that they were little more than anti-Cuba propaganda broadcasts masquerading as objective journalism. Finally, thanks to a recent investigation, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting has new leadership and reforms are underway. Those reforms should include relocating the Office to Washington, DC, where it would be less vulnerable to the political interference and ideological influence that has plagued it in the past.

Every few weeks or months, this White House devises a new way to ratchet up pressure on the Cuban Government and, in doing so, cause greater hardship for the Cuban people on whose behalf the White House professes to act. The latest was announced last week, when the Commerce Department said it is revoking licenses for aircraft leases to Cuban airlines and will deny future applications for aircraft leases. It will also expand sanctions to cover more foreign goods containing as little as 10 percent U.S. content.

Since this, like other sanctions against Cuba, will backfire, there is only one rational explanation: The White House, and their enablers in Congress, care little about the impact of these punitive policies on the Cuban people. They are motivated by personal and ideological animus.

The White House has imposed onerous restrictions on travel by Americans who want, and have a right, to visit Cuba as they can to every other country, except North Korea, and by Cubans who want to visit or resettle in the United States. Just to apply for a U.S. visa, Cubans must now travel to a third country at a cost of hundreds of dollars that very few can afford. Cuban entrepreneurs, whose fledgling small businesses depend on American customers, have seen their incomes plunge as visits to Cuba by Americans have fallen by 50 percent.

For the first time that I can remember, Cubans with claims of being threatened and arrested for their political activism in Cuba and who have requested asylum in this country have been locked up in U.S. jails and deported.

The White House has severely limited remittances, on which many Cuban families depend. President Trump apparently believes it is his prerogative to dictate to Cuban-Americans how much—or how little—of their hard-earned income they can send to needy relatives.

The State Department ordered the departure of U.S. Embassy personnel from Havana and Cuban Embassy personnel from Washington, which has brought diplomacy to a virtual halt. Discussions on a wide range of topics, from public health to climate change that began under President Obama have all but ceased, and our top diplomat, Secretary of State Pompeo, has nothing but praise for a failed policy that is completely at odds with the

mission of his Department. Exhaustive investigations have not produced any evidence that illnesses suffered by U.S. Government personnel in Havana that triggered the ordered departure were caused by the Cuban Government, as some initially charged. Yet, 3 years later, our Embassy is barely functioning with a skeleton staff, and the State Department has done nothing to try to mitigate the adverse impact this is having on our relations with Cuba.

Under President Obama, negotiations began to seek a resolution of the thorny issue of expropriated property claims. The Trump White House summarily abandoned that process and has instead encouraged lawsuits against American companies that want to do business in Cuba, if doing so involves property confiscated during the Cuban revolution 60 years ago. Airports, seaports, warehouses, hotels, homes, and restaurants, many of which were once owned by Cuban elites who profited off the spoils of the U.S.-supported Batista dictatorship, are now off limits. This is a legitimate issue that needs to be addressed, but tying up U.S. courts for years and hurting American companies is not the way to do it.

The White House has insisted that each of these and other punitive actions is designed to bring democracy to Cuba and human rights to the Cuban people. And I have little doubt that creative minds in the White House will conjure up additional sanctions in the coming months. None of them will achieve those goals or anything positive for Cuba or its people.

Anyone who knows Cuba, and who knows the Cuban Government, understands the fallacy of the White House's approach. I wish it were otherwise, but human rights have not improved since President Trump announced his punitive policy 3 years ago. In fact the situation is worse, as the recent re-arrests of Jose Daniel Ferrer, Berta Soler, and other dissidents illustrates. As access to the Internet in Cuba has increased, so has persecution of critics of the government. With only a handful of staff at our Embassy in Havana, there is no one to regularly interact with the Cuban dissident community or their families.

Cuba is no closer to being a multi-party democracy than it was 3 years ago, nor is the Cuban Government any closer to withdrawing its support for Nicolas Maduro despite his corrupt, abusive, and disastrous reign in Venezuela. So yes, we have profound disagreements. But while the administration continues to tighten the screws on Cuba, making the lives of the Cuban people even more difficult, President Trump sings the praises of other foreign dictators and pretends to be concerned about corruption in Ukraine.

He called Egypt's President al-Sisi a great leader. He invited President Erdogan to the White House. He admires Vladimir Putin and Roberto Duterte. He has spoken endearingly of Kim Jung Un, and he has praised Xi

Jinping and the Saudi Crown Prince. How can one possibly reconcile embracing these ruthless, corrupt strongmen while at the same time throwing the book at Cuba, a tiny, impoverished country that poses no threat to the United States and whose people want closer ties with the United States?

This is what happens when national policy is subverted by local politics, when promises derived from campaign contributions take precedence over the national interest, when family grievances and the personal vindictiveness of a few with political influence trample on the aspirations of the majority of Americans.

This administration's policy toward Cuba is no different from past failed attempts to force the Cuban Government to transform itself into a democracy, or to incite the Cuban people to rise up and overthrow it. It has not worked, and it won't work. And in the meantime, the Russians are eagerly filling the vacuum, only this time it is 90 miles from Florida, not 6,000 miles away in Syria. Russia's Prime Minister Medvedev visited Cuba just 3 weeks ago.

No one is saying that we should provide aid or sell weapons to the Cuban Government the way this administration does to despotic governments in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines.

No one is saying that we should not criticize the Cuban Government for its repressive policies and its abuse of those who speak out for greater political, economic, and journalistic freedom.

No one is saying that we should excuse Cuba's support for Maduro or for the corrupt and repressive Ortega Government in Nicaragua.

What we are saying is that pursuing a policy that has failed for more than half a century is nonsensical, indefensible, and wrong. It has achieved none of its objectives, while it is harming the Cuban people and infringing on the rights of the American people.

And if we are serious about controlling the spread of deadly viruses; mitigating the effects of climate change; combating organized crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking; protecting fisheries and other marine resources; addressing the causes of migration; expanding export markets for American companies; and countering the influence of Russia and China in this hemisphere, we need to engage with every one of our neighbors whether we agree with their policies or not.

I hope the new National Security Advisor will review this policy. I hope he will put it to the test of time and common sense. I hope he will assess whether it is achieving its objectives and whether it is serving our national interests. I hope he will ensure that the right people, who will put the national interest first, are the architects of our policy toward Cuba. And I hope he will consult widely on ways to improve our

policy, rather than rely on a handful of extreme voices that are not representative of the majority of the American people or the majority of Members of Congress.

POLIO

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today is World Polio Day, and I want to comment briefly about the funding to support global polio eradication efforts in the Senate version of the fiscal year 2020 Department of State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill, which was reported unanimously by the Appropriations Committee on September 26.

Polio is a highly infectious, crippling, and potentially fatal disease. While there is no cure, there are safe and effective vaccines. The global strategy to eradicate polio, therefore, focuses on preventing infection by immunizing every child until transmission stops and the world is polio-free.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, the United States provides financial support and technical leadership around the world to support the eradication strategy. USAID focuses specifically on recognizing and raising the importance of identifying and reaching mobile populations, cross-border coordination, communications, and the need for more women vaccinators and community-based disease surveillance.

Since global polio eradication efforts began 30 years ago, when cases numbered 350,000 annually, polio has been eliminated in more than 120 countries and remains endemic in only three—Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

While significant progress has been made, much work remains. Cases of polio persist in insecure areas and in countries with porous borders and large migratory populations, posing considerable obstacles to eradication. However, while there have been real setbacks, and the goal posts continue to change, complacency is not an option.

To that end, the Appropriations Committee has recommended \$61 million in fiscal year 2020—an increase of \$2 million over last year—for USAID's polio eradication activities. Increased resources are necessary to get over the finish line in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan, and to demonstrate the continued U.S. commitment to polio eradication. It is our hope that this increase will cause other donors to follow our example.

I am not alone in my support for these activities. The State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee heard from more than 20 members, Republicans and Democrats, requesting funding for global polio eradication efforts in fiscal year 2020.

So while many Senators have advocated for this critical funding, I want to be sure that all 100 Senators are aware of these efforts which are essential to achieving a polio-free world.

REMEMBERING ELIJAH CUMMINGS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, my heart is heavy today as we mourn the loss of Congressman Elijah Cummings. He was a powerful voice for the people of Baltimore, a champion of justice for our country, and a dear friend to me and so many others.

I first met Elijah when he was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates, where I was the speaker, but our lives had intersected in formative ways even before that. We both grew up in Baltimore and shared a deep and abiding love for the city. We went to the same high school—Baltimore City College High School—and we both earned law degrees from the University of Maryland before balancing private law practices with public service in the Maryland General Assembly.

So when I met Elijah, I couldn't help but feel a kinship with him, but I think that was perhaps just Elijah's power—the ability to build kinship with anyone and the commitment to do so with everyone. He was constantly searching for common ground, always looking to make human connections. As a result, he developed meaningful friendships with people all over the political, social, religious, and geographic map.

Elijah's talent for building consensus, as well as his work ethic and dedication to his constituents, propelled him early on to positions of leadership in the Maryland House of Delegates. There, he became the youngest ever chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus and the first African American to be named speaker pro tempore. He served in that chamber for 14 years, during which he worked tirelessly to advance the rights and opportunities of Maryland residents.

Then, in 1996, Elijah was elected to represent Maryland's Seventh District, including our home of Baltimore, in the U.S. House of Representatives. He filled a seat previously occupied by civil rights legacies Parren Mitchell and Kweisi Mfume, and, let me tell you, there was no person more prepared to carry on their fight for equality and freedom.

Elijah was the son of sharecroppers who worked the same land in South Carolina where his ancestors had been enslaved. His parents moved to Baltimore to build a better life for their family, but the city was rife with racial intolerance. From a young age, Elijah faced prejudice and discrimination. He attended a segregated elementary school, and he was pelted with bottles, rocks, and jeers when he and other children integrated the local public swimming pool.

In the face of all that hatred, he found the hope and determination to overcome every obstacle set before him so that he could rise up and lift others up too. He worked diligently, excelling as an undergraduate at Howard University, going to law school even though people told him he could never become a lawyer, successfully practicing law, and then launching a career of public

service that led him to the U.S. Congress. Elijah continued to climb until he was elected Chairman of the House Oversight Committee.

All the while, he remained firmly based in his community. He lived in the same house in West Baltimore for more than 30 years—in the inner inner city, as he put it—and he returned home every night after a long day of work in DC. He was known to sit on the stoop of that house and feed the neighborhood pigeons. And every Sunday, he went to church, where he was often met by a line of people waiting to share their concerns, and he would listen to them and try to help them all.

Elijah never for a moment forgot that his purpose was to represent the folks back home in his district, to be a voice for the many who were silenced. He once said that while it was his "constitutional duty to conduct oversight of the executive branch," it was his "moral duty" to fight for his constituents. And fight, he did. In the 23 years that he spent in Congress, he was a fierce advocate for his district, especially for Baltimore. Where others saw problems and danger, he saw opportunities and solutions. He advanced measures to improve education, to expand affordable housing, to curb addiction, to enhance public infrastructure, to promote gun safety, and to reform police practices. He worked to erase the racial and class divides that he had grown up with, so that future generations of Baltimoreans would not face the same obstacles he did.

Although he never shied away from contentious issues, he also understood when harmony and healing were needed. After the tragic death of Freddie Gray, Elijah went to the streets to ask the citizens of Baltimore to come together and find a peaceful path forward. Then, true to form, he launched into action, pushing hard for policies and programs to help the city recover.

Because of his heroic service to his constituents, Elijah was beloved by his community, perhaps more than any other elected official I have known. His loss is a devastating blow to Baltimore and to Elijah's entire congressional district.

But it is not just Maryland that will feel this loss—Elijah's passing leaves an unfillable void for the Nation as a whole. He loved this country deeply. Elijah believed in the potential of American ideals, so he held us to the highest moral standards. In moments of moral crisis, he would famously remind whoever was listening, "We are better than this!"

He was passionate about rooting out corruption, protecting our democracy, and achieving equality and freedom for all. As chairman of the Oversight Committee and in life, he fought for what was right simply because it was right. And Heaven forbid anyone should stand between Elijah Cummings and justice, because, while Elijah was always calm and respectful, he was never afraid to hold someone's feet to the fire.