

said is Russian support for the Taliban.”

The story later goes on to read: “Any involvement with the Taliban that resulted in the deaths of American troops would also be a huge escalation of Russia’s so-called hybrid war against the United States, a strategy of destabilizing adversaries through a combination of such tactics as cyberattacks . . . and covert and deniable military operations.”

We have learned in recent days that these reports have been circulating through the U.S. intelligence community since early 2019, but there was little to no action taken. The timeline regarding these events is of particular concern to me and, I know, to many Americans but especially to those who represent a State in which there is a direct connection.

In April of 2019, three U.S. marines were killed in a car bomb near Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. There was speculation that this may have been a bounty attack that had been carried out by the Taliban for the Russians.

There has been further reporting on this—tracking the dollars—by the New York Times and maybe by a few other outlets, but I know the New York Times did.

One of the marines killed in that April 2019 attack was a Pennsylvanian. If there had been credible intelligence regarding the Russian plot and if that intelligence had been acted upon, one question I have is—and it is only a question; I don’t know the answer to this question, but I ask it—could the death of this young Pennsylvania marine and his brothers in arms have been averted?

That is a question. I don’t know the answer to it. I hope, in the coming days and weeks—and I hope not longer than weeks—we will have an answer to that question, among many, as it troubles so many Americans.

As of the close of last year, December of 2019, 294 servicemembers from Pennsylvania had been killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—the third highest toll of any State. Our State has sacrificed a lot. If Russia had had any hand in contributing to these losses, to say that it is offensive, enraging, and deeply problematic is an understatement and warrants a close look not only at the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan but also at how we respond—how the United States of America responds—to Vladimir Putin’s efforts to disrupt U.S. efforts overseas and take American lives while doing it.

Accordingly, I have several questions about how the intelligence has been handled and what measures have been taken to hold Russia accountable for these horrific, incendiary, unlawful actions contrary to international law.

The administration must brief all Members of Congress immediately. I think Americans are offended when the administration briefs one side of the aisle. All Members of Congress should be briefed. Those briefings should occur

immediately and in close proximity to the reporting. The briefings should include when they received the intelligence—when the administration received it—when the President was briefed, and what actions were considered in response. I also call on the administration to report to Congress on a process for protecting our troops in moving forward.

You could be justifiably offended by inaction by the administration or for the knowledge that preceded that inaction, that they did nothing in response to it.

It is especially offensive now to a lot of Americans that this information now is in the public record and there seems to be no evidence of any kind of a response, any kind of an action.

So I think the administration should report to Congress not just on who knew what when, but also on what we do going forward.

The families of these fallen soldiers deserve answers. The American people, obviously, deserve answers as well.

We cannot let Russia and Vladimir Putin get away with this.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I want to thank all my colleagues and my partners, my partner Senator REED, for working so hard today to come to an agreement. It has been a tough day. We think we have created a package that is acceptable to everyone and we will be hotlining it tonight.

The Senate will come back into session at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning, and hopefully, we will be able to lock in our deal here.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to clarify a point concerning my amendment No. 2270 to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, S. 4049. This amendment would establish in law the position of the Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department and provides that the Special Envoy shall have the rank and status of ambassador. Under article II of the Constitution, the

President’s power to appoint ambassadors is subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. Accordingly, it is my view that the appointment of the Special Envoy with the rank and status of ambassador, pursuant to this amendment, requires the advice and consent of the Senate.

FOURTH OF JULY

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about our Nation’s independence.

Some 244 years ago this Saturday, the Founding Fathers of this country voted to declare our independence from Great Britain.

All Americans know the basics of this story, but not everyone knows the story behind one of our Nation’s founding documents.

Thomas Jefferson was just 33 years old when the Second Continental Congress commissioned him to draft a declaration of independence. When he sat down in a rented room in the heat of the Philadelphia summer to write it, the American Revolution had already begun.

On one level, he was simply putting the reasons for independence into words. The first shot had been fired over a year earlier, after decades of increasingly tyrannical British abuses had culminated in open revolt in Massachusetts.

Even so, it was not yet clear whether the delegates from all 13 colonies would put their names to a formal document declaring our independence. They had to be persuaded.

After 17 days of writing and rewriting, struggling to find the right words, Jefferson presented his work to Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. He then submitted a draft to the Congress on July 1, which officially adopted it three days later.

Each year on the Fourth of July, we celebrate this moment—the moment that we declared our independence from the British Empire and began to see ourselves as our own nation.

I love Independence Day celebrations in Nebraska. Like many people, my family often spends the day enjoying the great outdoors before hosting friends and neighbors for a barbecue.

But the Fourth of July is about more than food and fireworks or parades and pancake feeds. It is an opportunity to reflect on the nearly two and a half centuries of our nation’s history and remember what it means to be an American.

To me, America is a nation based on an idea. It is the idea, as Jefferson wrote, that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Belief in this creed is what unites us as Americans. And while we may not always live up to this idea, we can never stop trying. We should count ourselves fortunate to live in the greatest nation on earth, where the notion

of equal justice for all first came into the world.

I was touched to see that on June 22, 36 people became American citizens in the first naturalization ceremony held in Lincoln since February. This diverse group of people renounced their loyalty to their former countries and took an oath of allegiance to the United States. Family and friends in attendance brought homemade banners, red, white, and blue balloons, and other patriotic displays.

These 36 people, despite being citizens for only a few weeks, are just as American as you or me. And these new citizens chose to be Americans. They weren't born here, but they saw America for what it is: a shining city upon a hill, where our institutions, though they sometimes falter, strive to honor Jefferson's promise of God-given rights and equal treatment before the law for all citizens.

We are not perfect, but neither can we forget our founding purpose. The United States was the first nation in history to set this lofty standard for ourselves, and we remain its best example.

This Independence Day, as our country wrestles with both a pandemic and national unrest in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, I urge you to remember that we remain, as President Abraham Lincoln said during the Civil War, "the last best hope of earth."

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING MARNY XIONG

•Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, today I rise to honor the life of Marny Xiong, who served as chair of the St. Paul school board and was a beloved member of the community taken from us too soon on June 7, 2020. As one person put it, Marny wasn't just well-liked, she was well-loved.

Those who knew Marny best described her as someone with a joyful spirit who was great at making other people laugh. Mayor Melvin Carter of St. Paul may have said it best when he noted that she "embodied our city's spirit, gave her heart to our students, and worked tirelessly to uplift the voices of the unheard."

The daughter of Hmong refugees whose parents fled Laos to a refugee camp in Thailand before arriving in Minnesota, Marny and her eight siblings grew up in St. Paul and attended St. Paul public schools. Her father earned a high school diploma as an adult, opening career opportunities for him and showing Marny firsthand the value of education and hard work.

Marny Xiong represented the best of us, driven by a simple mission to do good and to give back. As the chair of the St. Paul School Board, she demanded equity for her students—and fought for justice for all people across

our State. During the Covid-19 pandemic that sadly took her life, she took on the fight against hate crimes against Asian Americans and hateful rhetoric about the virus. She stood up against these acts of hate that threatened the lives and dignity of so many in Minnesota.

Marny led St. Paul's school board and Asian American elected officials in condemning xenophobia and denouncing racism, saying: "While they brew hate, we're building a powerful movement for change." Marny understood that there are more students to help, more teachers to respect, more communities to support, and more justice to deliver. Marny wasn't afraid or intimidated to take on these challenges. She was resolute and determined to enlighten those who engage in the politics of fear and division. That is Marny's legacy and what we have inherited from her.

Marny Xiong is a role model and an inspiration and will be sorely missed, but as we mourn her loss today, tomorrow we can honor Marny's legacy by building on the movement to which she committed her life, a movement to see a better, more just, vision of our communities and our country, Marny's movement.

Thank you.●

RECOGNIZING AMWAT MOVING WAREHOUSING STORAGE

•Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, each week I recognize a small business that exemplifies the American entrepreneurial spirit at the heart of our country. Today, it is my distinct honor to recognize a family-owned business that not only provides excellent moving, warehousing, and storage services but also prioritizes dignified work for its employees. This week, it is my pleasure to honor AMWAT Moving Warehousing Storage of Tallahassee, FL, as the Senate Small Business of the Week.

AMWAT was founded in 1997 by college sweethearts Dean and Gloria Pugh in Tallahassee, FL. After helping several friends move residences, the couple realized they had the potential to start their own business. Initially named "A Man With A Truck," the business started as a one-man operation consisting of a pick-up truck and trailer operating out of Dean's spare bedroom. Soon after, A Man With a Truck moved into a small warehouse, hired six employees and acquired three moving trucks.

In 2008, Dean and Gloria acquired the largest, oldest moving company in the Tallahassee area and rebranded as AMWAT Moving Warehousing Storage. AMWAT has grown to include 26 employees and a 13-truck fleet. They provide long-term storage, handle shipping for local businesses, and provide shipping services nationwide. Gloria serves as president and chief executive officer and Dean is the chief operating officer.

AMWAT's high-quality work has earned awards from business groups, including the Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, the Tally Awards, Angie's List, and Wheaton World Wide Moving. Dean and Gloria are also active in the American Moving and Storage Association and the Professional Movers Association of Florida.

From the beginning, Dean and Gloria have understood that providing dignified work is crucial to personal and community development. Through training, mentorship, and teamwork, they encourage their employees to feel a sense of ownership in the company and take pride in their work. At AMWAT, the employees are the most valued asset.

Locally, AMWAT is committed to addressing poverty, upward mobility, education, and the arts. Their signature charity event is the annual Summer Fill-a-Truck Food and Fund Drive, which benefits the Second Harvest of the Big Bend. They have also partnered with ECHO, Junior League of Tallahassee, and LeMoyné Arts.

Like many other small businesses, AMWAT experienced a sharp decline in revenue due to the coronavirus pandemic. When the U.S. Small Business Administration launched the Paycheck Protection Program, PPP, Gloria and Dean quickly applied. The PPP provides forgivable loans to impacted small businesses and nonprofits who maintain their payroll during the COVID-19 pandemic. When their funding was approved, Gloria and Dean used it to keep their 26 employees paid and adapt their business procedures to meet public safety standards. For Gloria and Dean, the PPP was a "blessing" and a "godsend," providing the security needed to continue serving their customers, employees, and community.

AMWAT Moving Warehousing Storage is an outstanding example of the important role small businesses play in creating dignified work in their communities. I commend AMWAT for providing excellent moving, storage, and logistical services and uplifting their employees. Congratulations to Dean, Gloria, and the entire team at AMWAT. I look forward to watching your continued growth and success.●

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

•Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the 10th annual "State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

SAMUEL DOOLEY, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL,
SENIOR

The country that we live in today is plagued with fundamental problems. Ranging from political corruption to an inefficient healthcare system, yet the single most important issue facing our country today is nationwide environmental neglect. Without