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Senate

The Senate met at 11:15 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Lord and Ruler, Your Name is great, and we see Your glory in the earth, sea, and sky. We are grateful for this Nation and for the deliberative process of lawmaking, with its challenges, setbacks, and opportunities. As our Senators debate the issues that are vital to our liberty, give them wisdom, integrity, and courage for the living of these days. Lord, inspire them to be fully persuaded about the course that will bless our people, Nation, and world. Give our legislators respect for honest differences as they remember their accountability to you. Bless and keep them now and always.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The President pro tempore.

250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Mr. GRASSLEY. At the start of this new year, one of the dates is coming up that we always honor, but this is a special honor of that day because, on July 4 of this year, the United States of America will celebrate the 250th anniversary of our Nation's founding.

Throughout our history, Americans from all walks of life have shaped our story, including, and most importantly, the 56 colonists who signed the Declaration of Independence. These men—if it were happening today, there would be women in that group. These men reflected profiles in courage, pledging their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor on a piece of parchment paper. As benefactors of their bold commitment to freedom, we must never take for granted the remarkable risk and providential promise that they embraced.

Since July 4, 1776, Americans can trace a shared heritage—a heritage of freedom—to that founding document proclaiming our unalienable rights and self-evident truths: equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The Declaration of Independence launched the American experiment that continues from one generation to the next. This experiment is unique in the 6,000-year history of humans.

Earlier this week, the Washington Monument, here on our National Mall, was illuminated to mark keystones in American history: discovery, independence, westward expansion, the Industrial Revolution, innovation, and the future.

Last August, the yearlong Great American State Fair was launched at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, IA. On this Fourth of July, fair exhibits from all 50 States will be featured on the National Mall, right here in Washington, DC. I encourage Americans of all walks of life to participate in local celebrations across our beautiful country.

I am grateful to celebrate 250 years of freedom and honor all those who served in uniform to keep us free for generations yet to come.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as someone who grew up in rural South Dakota, in the town of Murdo, which has a population of roughly 500—and that would be rounding up—I know firsthand the joys of living in a rural community. I also know some of the challenges.

Everything from package delivery to internet reliability can be more difficult when you live far outside a major city, and access to healthcare can sometimes be a real challenge. More than 100 rural hospitals have closed over the past two decades, and doctors can be few and far between in rural areas.

But thanks to the working families tax cut legislation, however, help is on the way. Republicans' legislation created a \$50 billion Rural Health Transformation Program to address the rural healthcare crisis. Instead of a top-down, Washington-dictated approach, we are giving States the resources and the freedom to find solutions for the particular challenges in their State and to find sustainable ways of ensuring rural healthcare access in their communities going forward.

The response has been robust. Every State in the Union—red and blue, alike—has applied for and been approved for funding from this program. States have big plans.

The Texas Tribune reports:

- This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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The state's health care agency said it will use the funds to strengthen rural health care clinics in a variety of ways, including: creating wellness and nutrition programs to rural providers; educating and attracting health care professionals to work in rural areas; and modernizing resources and technology in rural centers.

More specifically, it plans to "add more than a thousand rural health care" positions with the additional funds.

Another news article reports on Ohio, noting that "the state's proposal focuses on addressing barriers to healthcare by building on existing state investments to expand access to care, strengthen the rural health workforce and modernize facilities and technology."

Georgia will be using Rural Health Transformation funding to upgrade technology and invest in its rural workforce. North Carolina will use the fund to, among other things, support more than 400 rural health facilities.

The list goes on.

My own State of South Dakota will be using its funding to invest in a number of priorities, including a major investment in telehealth, which can be a key way to access healthcare for those in rural areas.

South Dakota will also be using its funding to create regional hubs for emergency services and to improve access to maternal and infant health, to ensure delivery of essential medical care.

Back in June, a few months before Democrats tried to repeal the Rural Health Transformation fund, the Democrat leader said:

This little fund to help reimburse rural hospitals is just a fraud.

He should tell that to his State, which applied for the program and received a \$212 million grant. And that is for 2026 alone. When the State announced its application, the Office of New York State Mental Health Commissioner, Dr. Ann Sullivan, stated:

Expanding access to services in underserved communities is an important part of our effort to strengthen mental health care statewide. The Rural Health Transformation Grant will help New York State explore new partnerships, build our health care workforce, and pursue innovative opportunities to expand care in these areas.

Let me repeat that.

The Rural Health Transformation Grant will help New York State explore new partnerships, build our health care workforce, and pursue innovative opportunities to expand care in these areas.

That doesn't sound like fraud to me.

Perhaps the Democratic leader would have preferred his State to miss out on these resources.

Perhaps he would disagree with the Democrat Governor of Hawaii, who said:

As a relatively small State, this will help us a lot to keep our hospitals open, to make sure there are providers available to have telehealth available.

Mr. President, the Democrat leader can spread all the disinformation he wants. The Rural Health Trans-

formation Program is in effect, and every State in the Union is benefiting. Republicans will continue to work to make healthcare more comfortable and accessible for American families.

I want to thank Dr. Oz and his team at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for their tireless work to get this program up and running on an expedited timeline. I look forward to seeing all the ways this program will help transform healthcare in rural America.

I yield the floor.

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

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

VENEZUELA

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today having just come out of a secure briefing about the arrest of Nicolas Maduro.

Our country has carried out one of the boldest law enforcement operations in decades, and we should be very proud. We should celebrate it and be proud of the men and women in uniform who made sure this was successful. This administration had the courage to do what was right, what needed to be done; and America, Venezuela, and the world are much safer as a result of it.

Operation Absolute Resolve was conducted for one reason: to bring to justice a murderous dictator and an indicted drug trafficker. Maduro is an outlaw, and he is now in custody. The Trump administration indicted him in 2020 on drug trafficking charges. President Trump put a \$15 million bounty on him. The Biden administration agreed, and they actually increased that amount to \$25 million. Neither the first Trump administration, nor the Biden administration, nor the current administration recognized Maduro as the legitimate leader of Venezuela.

Now, we are not alone in that view. Many of our allies around the world have taken the same position, hold the same belief. Yet only America had the resolve and the resources to bring Maduro to justice. No American lives were lost, as we learned in our briefing and as we have seen, and it was a textbook example and demonstration of peace through strength. The message to the entire world is clear: If you poison and kill the American people, you are going to be held accountable.

Arresting Maduro also advances America's national security. Maduro's allies and enablers are united in their commitment to undermine our Nation: China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, even Hezbollah. Communist China was buying half a million barrels a day of oil from Venezuela—day after day, after

day. In exchange for that oil, the Chinese Communist Party loaned Venezuela over \$100 billion. Just hours before his arrest, Maduro was meeting in Caracas with officials of the Chinese Communist Party. This axis of aggression is weaker now because President Trump has taken decisive action, and our men and women in uniform were able to carry it out.

All around the world, people are seeing dictatorships failing. That is why Venezuelans are celebrating in the streets today. It is also why Iranians are uniting today across their country to protest the suppressive dictatorship. They have good reasons to demand their freedom.

Yet, today, there are Democrats in this Chamber—some may come to the floor later today—who are using the arrest of Nicolas Maduro not to advance American interests, no. They are using it to attack President Trump. This week, they are going to force a vote on another War Powers Resolution to tie the hands of the President. Let me be clear about what that resolution does and what it does not do. It does not reassert Congress's powers. It does not make America stronger. It makes America weaker and less safe. It will weaken the President's legitimate constitutional authority.

This body, the U.S. Senate, is being asked whether the President of the United States has the authority to arrest indicted criminals. Of course he does. Democrats want to weaken the President's ability to enforce the law of the land. That is the wrong message to send to hardened drug traffickers and to dictators.

It is interesting because, for years, Democrats were for holding Maduro accountable. Senator CHRIS MURPHY, a Democrat from Connecticut, tweeted in 2019 that "getting rid of Maduro is good for the United States." That is one of the Democrats who are opposing what the President of the United States has done. He called for it in the past.

Senator CHUCK SCHUMER, the Democratic leader, who will be on this floor in a few minutes, came to this very floor in 2020 and complained about President Trump, saying President Trump "hasn't brought an end to the Maduro regime."

Senator CHRIS VAN HOLLEN from the Foreign Relations Committee, a Democrat from Maryland, told MSNBC just last year—he said:

[T]he United States needs to work with its partners and allies in the region to ratchet up the pressure [on Venezuela].

Democrats know absolutely that President Trump did the absolute right thing. They won't admit it on this floor. They prefer to play politics instead. Within the last several days, Senator SCHUMER called arresting Maduro "reckless." What a change and reversal in tune. Senator VAN HOLLEN said it was an illegal "act of war," a complete reversal of his previous positions.

Senator MURPHY told CNN on Sunday that Venezuela, he said, is “not a security threat” to the United States. He sure viewed it differently in the past. Evidently, they were all for it before they were against it. That is what we see with these Democrats: something they are for, President Trump does it, and now they are against it.

The question I have for Democrats is, Do they no longer think that arresting Maduro is a good thing? They supported it in the past—every one of them.

Arresting Maduro was not partisan or political. It was a professionally executed law enforcement action conducted by a superb team of dedicated military professionals, and I congratulate each and every one of them. Every parent in this country should be happy today about this arrest because now their children will be safer from poisoning and death. This arrest will save thousands of American lives—lives that would have been lost due to Maduro’s drug trafficking.

And what are the numbers? Was it 80,000 American lives lost since 2020 as a result of the poison that Maduro has forced into this country? On Saturday, President Trump took bold action, and he took action to protect the citizens of this great country.

We should celebrate the success in Venezuela. We should take great pride in the brave men and women who carried out the successful mission. Republicans are going to continue to stand on the side of safety, security, and America peace through strength.

I yield the floor.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this month, January 2026, marks a new era for Medicare. After decades of empty promises about lowering the cost of prescription drugs, the prices of the 10 most expensive drugs under Medicare will finally fall.

Starting this year, 2026, seniors who rely on medications to treat blood clots, diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers will see discounts of up to 79 percent for these essential drugs. There are 9 million American seniors who will save a total of \$1.5 billion in annual out-of-pocket costs, including nearly 300,000 seniors in Illinois who take 1 of those 10 drugs.

Why did it take so darned long to lower these prices? Politicians have been talking about it for years. For years, Medicare was blocked from negotiating the price of drugs by the pharmaceutical companies. They didn’t

want to cut into their profits. That changed when Democrats passed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 under the Biden administration. This law empowered Medicare to bargain for fair prices for medications used by seniors.

Not one single Republican voted for this bill in 2022. Let me say that again. Democrats overcame the objections of congressional Republicans and Big Pharma, who were complaining about how negotiating drug prices was socialism—socialism. Now seniors will be saving hundreds of dollars a month because Democrats rolled up our sleeves to deliver price cuts on prescription drugs.

What has President Trump done to make healthcare more affordable? Nothing. Instead, he decided to slash Medicaid by \$1 trillion with the passage of the so-called big beautiful budget bill.

Because of this law, many hospitals across Illinois and across the country, especially in rural areas, may not survive. Rural hospitals are the backbone of communities in my State and in many others. They are the anchors of the local economy. Several hospitals that are barely squeaking by today have told me they will fall into the red because of the Republican healthcare cuts in this law. Recently, I surveyed all of the hospitals in Illinois, and 129 responded to my survey. They wrote to me to say they will struggle greatly with these cuts from the big beautiful budget bill of the Trump administration. These hospitals will face longer emergency room wait times. They will be forced to cut services, including behavioral health and maternity care. They will have to lay off doctors and nurses, which is exactly the opposite of what we need in rural America.

My Republican colleagues know exactly how devastating these Medicaid cuts will be. That is why they attempted to remedy the situation by including a \$50 billion rural health transformation grant in their Big Beautiful Bill. Let’s do some math here. They are cutting \$1 trillion out of Medicaid, and they are trying to fill that gap with \$50 billion. I am a liberal arts major, but I think I can do basic math. What they are talking about doing is restoring 5 percent of the \$1 trillion they are cutting from Medicaid—5 percent.

In addition to cutting \$1 trillion from Medicaid, congressional Republicans refused to extend the Affordable Care Act enhanced premium tax credits under Trump’s Big Beautiful Bill. Last year, 22 million Americans relied on these credits to afford their healthcare, but now they have expired. Despite pressure from patients, physicians, and providers, congressional Republicans refused to extend them.

What is the impact of refusing to extend this program that makes health insurance more affordable? I am afraid it is obvious. During the 2026 open enrollment period, millions of people decided to drop their health insurance coverage. Others are being forced to

make impossible choices between food, car payments, and housing costs. If we fail to immediately solve these problems, millions of people will become uninsured in this country, and those who will retain coverage will pay double or triple for their healthcare plans.

It is not too late to do something even though we are hopelessly divided on most of the issues facing us. Let’s hope that health insurance will be the exception. Congress can extend the tax credits and reopen the signup period before the worst impact is felt.

At least some of my Republican colleagues recognize the pain their refusal to negotiate has caused. Last month, four Senate Republicans—four—broke ranks to vote with Democrats to extend the enhanced premium tax credits and help people pay for their health insurance—four Republicans. In the House, four House Republicans signed a discharge petition to force a vote later this week to extend the tax credits. We must be ready to act when the bill arrives in the Senate.

Americans do not have time for Congress to litigate the entirety of the U.S. healthcare system, but we do need to triage now. Let’s do something to help these people keep their health insurance. I have spoken with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and have made it clear we want to help Americans pay for these bills. I want to join them. It should be done on a bipartisan basis, and we should waste no time.

VENEZUELA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is a heady experience to go through a classified briefing at the highest levels of our government, and virtually every U.S. Senator of both political parties had that opportunity this morning. I took advantage of it. It is rare and important. It was an explanation by our leaders in the Cabinet and the administration of what happened in Venezuela just a few days ago when Mr. Maduro was removed from power and brought to the United States to be held accountable for his actions in narcotics terrorism.

This is not a new issue to me. In 2018, I took a trip to Caracas and met with President Maduro, his First Lady, and members of his administration. It was clear to me that Venezuela was in trouble. You could see it on the streets. People were literally starving, and hospitals were going without medicine. It was pretty clear to me that Maduro was ruling not by democratic appeal but by the force of his power in office.

He was facing an election in just a few weeks, and I told him at that time that, if he did not have international observers at his election to verify that it was an honest election, the world would not believe the results. He ignored my advice, which was no surprise. He went ahead with the election and had a disputed result. He claimed victory, which others said didn’t happen, and he did it again a few years

later. So he discredited himself in the eyes of the world community, and his country continued to suffer.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Venezuelans abandoned Venezuela, saying it was impossible to live there under his authoritarian rule without the basics of life: food, medicine, and shelter. So this decision to remove him is not one that causes tears in my household. We believe he was unfit for office. He was defeated in the election, and he had to pay a price for it. I am glad that he is not in power today.

During the course of our briefing this morning, our military leaders and others spelled out the details of how he was physically removed from office just a few days ago. He still is going to be held accountable in the courts of law in the United States—that is for sure—but there is also discussion about where we go from here.

If you remove the President of a country, what happens next?

Under their constitution, a woman named Delcy Rodriguez, the Vice President, was sworn in as his successor. I met her during my visit there. She is a hard-liner when it comes to the politics of the region and her brother even more so. We spoke for a period of time, and I became convinced that they would be difficult to deal with, although that is the reality of the moment.

Here is the point I want to make: I understand why our administration was very careful in disclosing information about the removal of Maduro from office. The lives and futures of the men and women in uniform from the United States were on the line, and we should not compromise their safety in any way to achieve our goal; but there comes a point—and that point should be immediately—when this administration decides to trust the American people and tell them the whole story. I believe there are things that can be said which will not compromise the safety of the United States or our friends but that explains to the American people what is at stake here.

What happened in that raid to remove Maduro from office?

Most of the details are an amazing display of military superiority, which the United States enjoys, but there were other questions that were raised, too, during the course of this.

In addition, the question is, Where do we go from here? What is going to happen to Venezuela's future? What is our responsibility? What are we accepting?

The American people need to be in on that conversation. It is easy, I learned in my time in the House and Senate, to get into a war but that it is far more difficult to get out of one. I worry that, many times, we have blundered into a situation which looks so simple in terms of nation building, and it turned out to be so complex. Then the war went on for years and years and years at the expense of not only American taxpayers but, more importantly,

American lives. It is time for the American people to be part of that conversation. Why do I think so? Because the Constitution explicitly says it.

The Constitution says that the power to declare war in the United States resides in this Chamber and in the House of Representatives. Congress has the only authority to declare war. This President, like many others of both parties, has ignored that requirement and, I think, at his own peril. They are engaging us in a long-term conflict which could cost us dearly, and they are not engaging the American people in the discussion and rationale of our ultimate goals in the region.

This briefing this morning was a good one. Senator TIM KAINE of Virginia asked a question, and I think it was the right question: When are we going to trust the American people enough to tell them exactly what happened in Venezuela leading up to the removal of Maduro and what is likely to follow? It is an important, critical question. It will be costly in terms of the future of the United States of America if we are not explicit and honest with the people of this country. Now is the time for that honesty.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Democratic leader is recognized.

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just got back from an all-Senators briefing with senior administration officials about what is going on in Venezuela. Again, another briefing. Again, no answers.

As before, we walked out of the room with far more questions than answers. It is not just the Senators and Congressmen in the SCIF, a classified room, who deserve answers, it is the American people who deserve answers.

The American people want to know: How much is this going to cost us at a time when we are seeing our costs rise for things like housing and groceries and healthcare? They want to know what kind of troops—how many troops are going to be needed there?

It is clear that the leadership's succession plan that the administration envisions now that Maduro—the awful person that he is—is gone, the people who are replacing him are just as untrustworthy, just as corrupt, just as bad as he is.

How is Trump going to run the country with these people as his underlings?

So the public deserves answers at this crucial moment because the American people are asking: What the hell is going on in Venezuela? And why is this President, who campaigned on "America First," now spending all his time and energy on escapades overseas?

What is going to happen next? The public is totally in the dark.

We need to know how long an involvement in Venezuela is going to last. Trump has said it is going to take some time. What does that mean? Iraq was more than a decade.

How many troops are we talking about?

How much money and what guardrails are in place?

The American people want to know, is there a place where you say no more? Nobody knows. On something as risky and as different as this—differently bad as this—people need real answers. That is how our system is set up, but this administration is totally—totally—opaque and, frankly, dishonest with the American people when it comes to Venezuela.

We discussed so many things in the room. And in the room, there was a bipartisan sense of concern with America simply plunging into other countries. I did not get adequate answers.

Are we planning on going into Greenland? Are we planning on going into Colombia? Mexico?

The answers were very unsatisfying.

So this escapade is fraught with huge peril that history teaches us we should avoid. There is chaos in the streets of Caracas right now. Organized gangs are patrolling the streets, oppressing the rights of citizens. At any moment, the interim government's grip on power could deteriorate. The Vice President—former Vice President under Maduro, who is now the President—is totally unreliable, is corrupt, and hates America. That is whom we are relying on. What kind of plan is this?

Again, it is not enough for Senators to walk into a classified briefing and hear the administration's sales pitch. The public has to hear it. I am certain that the public, once they hear it, is going to be as angry, as skeptical, as unconvinced as we are.

The American people need answers and facts presented in public.

My Republican colleagues: Don't you have an obligation to hold hearings—public hearings—and bring Hegseth and Rubio before you and ask these tough questions, not in the closed quarters of a SCIF, where no one is allowed to repeat what they say, but in public?

Where are our chairs of the relevant committees? Not to hold a hearing on something as momentous and potentially destructive as this—where are our Republican colleagues?

We need administration officials to come testify and to answer the tough questions in public. That is what this Republic is all about. That is why we have three branches of government. That is why the Founding Fathers said the war power, as important a decision as going to war is, should be in the hands of the Congress, a public institution, not in the hands of just an Executive.

And yet, right now, it is in the hands of an Executive because our Republican colleagues are supine. They just aren't demanding hearings, aren't demanding that the President come clean in terms of talking to the American people.

Looming over all of this, the American people are asking: What the heck does this have to do with “America First?” How does spending years and potentially billions of taxpayer dollars in Venezuela help families pay their rent, their mortgages, their grocery bills, their electric bills, their healthcare bills?

It has nothing to do with it. In fact, it takes money; it takes attention away; it diverts attention away from the No. 1 thing the American people care about: affordability, costs of living, being able to pay the bills of things you very much need.

Bombing Caracas and bragging about oilfields are not going to lower people's rents. Even in this cockamamie plan they have, the money would go back to Venezuela. The American people are saying: That is “America First?” Spend all this time, effort, and dollars getting rid of Maduro and then sending all this oil money back to Venezuela when America needs help?

Threatening Greenland is not going to make groceries cheaper. Military threats against NATO are not going to help families pay the bills. The American people did not sign up for this kind of military adventurism when they voted for Donald Trump, and Republicans who go along will be betraying the American people.

Donald Trump doesn't realize any of this. Why? He is focused on his Big Oil buddies and personal vanity projects like renaming the Kennedy Center and choosing which marble armrests to install.

Just listen to what Donald Trump said yesterday at the Kennedy Center to House Republicans. Once again, he showed everyone he is trapped in a billionaire's bubble. Donald Trump told Republicans, “I wish you could explain to me what the hell is going on with the mind of the public,” because he can't understand why people are souring on his agenda. He can't understand that when you can't pay the groceries or your car breaks down and you can't afford to get it fixed and you can't get to work, that troubles people? He can't understand that?

He doesn't have a clue. He talks to his limited circle of rich friends. They don't have to worry about the things 95 percent of Americans worry about. He is in a bubble, and when Presidents are in bubbles, it is the American people who get hurt.

He cannot wrap his mind around the fact that his very own policies have made life worse for ordinary people. But the average citizen knows it. That is why his numbers are plummeting.

Again, yesterday morning, he slammed “affordability” as a buzzword and said no one knows what it means. Well, he doesn't know what it means because he has enough money to pay for all the things he needs.

Donald Trump, “affordability” is not a buzzword. It is not a con job, and it is not a mystery concept to most people. “Affordability” means you can af-

ford to make trips to the doctor when you or your child is sick. It means you can go to the grocery store and not have to worry: Well, should I buy eggs or cheese or milk? I can't afford all of them.

It means you can pay the rent, pay your mortgage.

What “affordability” doesn't mean is sending helicopters over Caracas and saying we have the right to attack NATO allies. It doesn't mean bailing out Argentine farmers. It doesn't mean giving away critical chips to China so that they can use them against us.

Now, if Donald Trump and Republicans won't focus on lowering the cost of living, Democrats are happy to do it for them. Later today, I am joining with Senators WARREN, SMITH, and KLOBUCHAR and housing experts from around the country to talk about this horrible housing crisis, one of the worst manifestations of rising costs.

Today's housing roundtable is a kickoff event for our Senate Democrats and our cost initiative, which will be our North Star for the year and beyond. We are going to be focused like a laser on the increased costs Americans face to pay the necessary bills that they must pay to live a decent life.

And just as we talked about for months, about helping people to afford healthcare, we are going to continue to focus on helping people pay the rent, keep up with their mortgage, and be able to afford a home for the first time.

In the coming weeks, Senate Democrats are going to lay out the many things Congress could do right now, if only the Republicans were serious about lowering costs, when it comes to food, childcare, energy, home ownership, healthcare, childcare, and more. These are things the American people care about: paying the bills, buying a new car, going on one vacation a year with your family—not invading Venezuela, not invading Colombia, not thinking about invading Greenland.

Donald Trump doesn't get it. He admits he doesn't get it. He doesn't understand why the American people are mad at him when it is as plain as could be.

But Democrats get it. We are going to focus like a laser on costs today, next week, next month, and all year long. The Republicans and Donald Trump will be hearing plenty more from us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we are back for a short workweek, following the holidays, and, boy, is our plate full. But I think it is appropriate to take just a few minutes to reflect on the incredible progress we have made last year under the leadership of President Trump, Senate Majority Leader THUNE, and Speaker MIKE JOHNSON.

Of course, one of the most important things we had to do in the Senate was

to confirm the President's Cabinet and various nominees. Of course, our Democratic colleagues resisted at every turn, requiring that we actually change some of the rules of confirmation to allow the President to fulfill his mandate following his election and to get his team on the field. Democrats not only were sore losers when it came to the election of President Trump, but they wanted to deny him the team he needed in order to actually do what the American people elected him to do.

The most important piece of legislation we passed—actually, there are a couple that come to mind, but one is the working family tax cuts act. I heard the Democratic leader talk about all sorts of “affordability” issues, and, of course, that has now become the buzzword. Affordability is really nothing new in politics, as the Presiding Officer knows. It is all about kitchen table issues. That is what people care the most about. And there are a lot of things that we have already done, without any Democratic help, to try to make life more affordable for working families in Texas, in Nebraska, and across the Nation.

But, obviously, we have a lot of work left to do. First, we have to finish a full year of government funding. Democrats have prevented us from passing normal appropriations bills, which have caused us to lurch from potential shutdown to shutdown. And, indeed, they ultimately pulled that trigger to the detriment of the American people and shut down the government for a historically long period of time.

And for what effect? Well, a lot of people got hurt. A lot of people got inconvenienced. Many people didn't get paid.

And what did the Democrats get? A talking point about healthcare. That is all they care about. They did not care about solving any of these problems, working together in a bipartisan way, which is what I believe we should do, but rather to try to score political points and try to embarrass the Trump administration and Republicans.

But we have to finish that full year of funding because we do have another short-term continuing resolution deadline that expires on January 30. But I know Senator COLLINS, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senator MURRAY and their counterparts in the House have been working very diligently to try to get the first tranche of appropriations bills across the floor so we can avoid staring another government shutdown in the face on January 30.

Can you imagine how much actual work we could get done if we didn't exhaust ourselves in the fights over shutdowns and lurching from one deadline to the next? Well, maybe that is something we ought to think about, and that is the opportunity cost of going from shutdown to shutdown and all the spending cliffs.

I would hope our Democratic colleagues have learned a lesson from

their last misadventure, which resulted in the shutdown, and I hope they will spare the American people and a lot of folks who didn't get paid, who were inconvenienced, and for no real reason other than to provide them a talking point in the upcoming election.

Again, we are happy to solve problems—that is why we serve here—and even on a bipartisan basis, but we are not interested in government shutdowns, which do nothing but try to advantage the Democratic Party in pursuing a talking point leading to the midterm elections.

We have a lot of things to do between now and November of 2026. On the healthcare front, we offered an alternative to the disaster known as ObamaCare. There is incredible fraud against U.S. taxpayers in the ObamaCare subsidy regime and, particularly, the enhanced subsidies that were bumped up during the Inflation Reduction Act as part of the COVID era.

But, unfortunately, insurance companies got rich, and the American people were not well served when it came to access to their healthcare. And the taxpayers were positively gouged by the fraud and mischief that occurred under the ObamaCare enhanced subsidy regime.

We offered an alternative. President Trump said the money shouldn't go to insurance companies; it ought to go to the consumer, because who knows better than the consumer what they actually need in terms of their health insurance coverage.

But, of course, our Democratic colleagues wouldn't countenance that. They don't actually believe in consumer choice. They don't believe in free enterprise. What they believe in is more government, more expensive government, and we know that is not the answer to the challenges that face working families when it comes to access to healthcare.

Having choice to make a decision, not making young people subsidize old people, not making people buy something they don't need, and not foisting the bill on taxpayers by extravagant subsidies which do nothing but enrich insurance companies.

Well, we know we have got a lot of work to do in that area, and we stand ready to work in good faith to come up with a workable bipartisan solution that will lower the cost of healthcare in the long term, if our Democratic colleagues are willing.

Suffice it to say, we have our work cut out for us, though, in the Senate. While this year has barely started, President Trump has lost no time in defining the year with his usual strength and decisiveness.

You know, back in the Federalist Papers, they debated what the Office of President should look like. And one of the things they talked about is the need for an energetic President and head of the executive branch. And, I must say, that is exactly what we got

with the election of Donald J. Trump to his second term of office—a President who does what he says and is willing and has the courage to act decisively in the face of various threats.

And, of course, the one that is now looming large is Operation Absolute Resolve. This past weekend, in the middle of the night, in Caracas, Venezuela, our brave servicemembers successfully accompanied law enforcement personnel in detaining the illegitimate President of Venezuela, someone who had become the head of a drug cartel and who was working with our most concerning adversaries all around the world, whether it is Cuba, whether it is Iran, whether it is Russia or China.

And, in fact, Venezuela had become a hub for illegal drug trafficking, along with everything else that goes with that. And it also had become a foothold for Iranian terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and was using the money they were able to raise from illicit drug trafficking to then send it to terrorist organizations in the Middle East and to threaten peace around the world.

I want to say that what we saw demonstrated by the U.S. military, working in cooperation with the intelligence community and the Department of Justice and law enforcement personnel, was nothing short of magnificent. It gives me a great deal of pride to know that only the United States could have pulled off such an operation and brought someone so despicable as Nicolas Maduro to justice in a Federal court in Manhattan.

I wanted to thank all of our personnel who participated in the operation. I hope and wish and pray for the speedy recovery of the handful who were injured, and I think it is a proud day for the United States.

It was a challenging decision, I am sure, to make, and there will be many hard days ahead as Venezuela has to correct its course of actions. And under President Rodriguez, hopefully, with the levers that are available to the Trump administration and our friends and allies, they will learn from some of their mistakes and allow a transitional government, which will then be able to represent the hopes and the dreams and the aspirations of the Venezuelan people.

President Trump's New Year's message to friends and enemies could not be more clear. American strength is back, and we will stop at nothing to ensure that the American people are safe from foreign threats and especially here in our own hemisphere.

Walter Russell Meade put it well when he recently wrote:

The operation was a dazzling and magnificent act, and the competence and resolve that it demonstrated will do more to shore up American power and world peace than all the best speeches President Obama ever made.

President Trump has made it clear to dictators around the world that if they try their hands at making mischief, there will be consequences. And I can

guarantee that the illegitimate heads of the governments of Nicaragua, Cuba, and others in the region took note of what the U.S. Government is capable of doing if it is determined to do so under the leadership of a decisive, energetic President like President Trump.

And I think it sends an enormous message of deterrence to adversaries around the world and potential adversaries like China, North Korea, Iran, Russia. When they see a demonstration of competence and professionalism that is really second to none in the world, I think it sends an enormous message of deterrence and helps make our country safer and helps keep the peace.

But, of course, this represents a stark contrast with the status quo under the previous administration. I think that is one of the things that makes this so startling to so many people. After all the words with no action, all the breast-beating about America under President Biden, to see what President Trump is able to do, with the incredible contributions made by the intelligence community, our military, and law enforcement, has got to get the attention of our adversaries around the world. We know, during the Biden administration, the world had become a much more dangerous place because when our adversaries sense weakness, it is actually an incentive for them to act.

I think it has been said before, and I think it is true, that Putin would not have invaded Ukraine again if President Trump had been in office. But with President Biden and then previously with President Obama in office, he knew that paper tigers weren't going to hold them accountable, and so they kept coming and taking whatever they could grab. That makes the world a much more dangerous place.

From the first year of his Presidency, President Biden signaled weakness and incompetence on the world stage, especially with his disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. His failure to secure the southern border in Texas and in New Mexico and California and Arizona invited the drug trafficking crisis that is continuing to have downstream effects in our country even today. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost their lives to the illegal drug trafficking coming across our southern border.

And these failures, of course, do not happen in a vacuum. Our friends and enemies around the world are watching—our friends to see whether they can rely on the United States and our enemies to see whether we will stand up for ourselves and defend our interest and our values. And, of course, that shapes their actions and their decisions.

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, escalating a war that had started back in 2014 and continues today with massive casualty figures on both sides now ranging into the millions. October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists,

who are Iranian proxies, launched the deadliest attack in history against the nation of Israel.

And all the while, China prepares for war. They have actually threatened to forcibly take Taiwan. President Xi has ordered the People's Liberation Army to be ready to do so by 2027, of course, escalating tensions in the Indo-Pacific and engaging in provocative joint military exercises with Russia.

Notwithstanding the chaos around the world, America was suffering direct consequences from the drug war, as I alluded to a moment ago. Cartels in Mexico and Latin America took advantage of President Biden's open border policies and refusal to act where action was required. Of course, they made untold millions of dollars selling these drugs and transporting them beyond their borders into the United States, taking countless lives and inflicting untold misery.

Now the Department of Justice has charged Maduro and his coconspirators with transporting tons of cocaine into the United States by moving the drug under the protection of Venezuelan officialdom, including the law enforcement and their military, by providing diplomatic passports to drug traffickers and facilitating diplomatic cover from planes to move drug proceeds from Mexico to Venezuela.

Iran, through its proxy Hezbollah—which operates primarily in Lebanon, north of Israel—they were embedded in Venezuela working with the Maduro administration and helped collaborate to provide those elaborate trafficking networks. And, of course, Hezbollah used the drug trafficking proceeds to finance their own nefarious activities around the world.

Back in 2022, Venezuela signed a 20-year economic cooperation agreement with Iran, the No. 1 state sponsor of international terrorism, an agreement between two of the most heavily sanctioned regimes in the world, all designed to defy the United States and expand their criminal enterprise.

In a hearing before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control that I chaired late last year, one of our witnesses described Venezuela as playing a very important role in what they called the “axis of evasion,” a global sanctions-defying network that also includes Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

And, of course, Maduro was an important part of that within this “axis of evasion” because he is the one that gave them a foothold in our backyard in the Western Hemisphere.

And, of course, all of this went on during the Biden administration and right under their nose, but they did nothing—virtually nothing—about it. President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas turned a blind eye, allowing these illicit happenings to continue while drugs poured into the United States and totalitarian dictators and terrorists enriched themselves and spread their misery.

But President Trump has now begun to turn the tide. He began on day one of his administration with an aggressive immigration enforcement, rounding up and deporting members of MS-13, one of the most dangerous gangs in the world; Tren de Aragua, another dangerous Venezuelan gang; and other criminal networks who had set up shop here in the United States in our neighborhoods and in our communities.

Given the vast networks of these international gangs, it became clear to President Trump that it was not enough to simply send them back from where they came so they could regroup and reorganize. President Trump and Secretary Rubio and President Trump's administration, rightly, determined that further action was necessary. And, of course, that began, most notably, with a series of strikes on drug boats in the Caribbean designed to deter the cartels and disrupt their evil trade.

Now, by capturing Maduro, by enforcing an indictment made by a U.S. grand jury in a Federal court in Manhattan, President Trump has shown, without a doubt, that he means business.

Of course, the radical left is losing their mind, as they usually do every time President Trump acts decisively and with boldness. Protestors outside the courthouse held signs reading “Free President Nicolas Maduro” and “Hands Off Venezuela.”

I guess any jurisdiction that would elect a new mayor like a democratic socialist, Mamdani, that is probably what you would expect. So I don't think anyone was surprised.

But the message of Operation Absolute Resolve to our allies and adversaries around the world could not be more clear: America is back. The Trump administration will act with boldness and decisiveness. And if you threaten the American people with drugs or terrorism or any other sort of criminal or military attack, you better watch your back because you could be next.

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

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

VENEZUELA

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, today is a great day in America. Nicolas Maduro—an indicted drug trafficker, an illegitimate communist dictator who has the blood of hundreds of Arkansans and thousands of Americans on his hands—is behind bars in a prison in New York. Again, he was an illegitimate communist dictator, in league with all of America's enemies around the world.

With the Venezuelan people crushed underneath his iron fist for years, Maduro turned the country into a crossroads and a playground for the likes of communist China, Cuba, Iran, Russia, and even Islamic terrorists like Hezbollah.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the exceptional skill and bravery of our troops, CIA officers, and FBI agents for executing such an amazing military and intelligence operation that brought Maduro's reign to an abrupt end. It is impossible to overstate the complexity of this mission. But for our troops and our intelligence officers—whose skill, professionalism, and bravery are unmatched in the world—“impossible” isn't in their vocabulary.

I also commend President Trump for having the courage to take bold, decisive, and audacious action against Nicolas Maduro. This action was well within the President's constitutional authority. The operation was in keeping with President Bush's operation to arrest the drug lord and Panamanian President Manuel Noriega, in 1989. If anything, Maduro was much worse than Noriega, and Venezuela now is even more vital strategically than Panama was then.

Additionally, this operation did not violate the War Powers Resolution. Even if you believe the War Powers Resolution is constitutional, these troops were in and out of Venezuela in a couple of hours.

Only the United States could execute such a dangerous and difficult mission without the loss of a single American life. But instead of celebrating Maduro's ouster and America's success, our Democratic colleagues are determined to condemn the operation, all because President Trump ordered it.

Consider that, in 2020, Senator SCHUMER criticized President Trump for bragging “about his Venezuela policy” but failing to bring “an end to the Maduro regime.” It sounds like a call for regime change to me, just like Joe Biden's decision to increase the bounty on Maduro's head seems like a call for Maduro to be apprehended and brought to justice. Yet when President Trump did exactly that last weekend, Senator SCHUMER said this is “reckless.”

Also, consider Senator MURPHY, who said, in 2019:

Getting rid of Maduro is good for the United States.

I agree. Unfortunately, he has changed his tune lately. The day after Maduro's capture, Senator MURPHY said:

The invasion of Venezuela has nothing to do with American security.

Nothing.

He further said:

Venezuela is not a security threat to the [United States].

I disagree. I think it has more than a little to do with our national security and our safety. I have heard from too many Arkansas mothers and fathers whose children have died because of a

drug overdose. This operation was about protecting those families and families like them, anyone who struggles with or who has lost a loved one to addiction.

Again, Nicolas Maduro was an indicted drug trafficker and narcoterrorist. He was in league with the very drug traffickers who are in the business of killing our kids for profit. He didn't just tolerate drug traffickers in Venezuela or lose control of his territory and allow them to run wild; he was a drug trafficker.

I didn't conclude that alone. That was not President Trump's sole decision or even President Biden's decision. That was the finding of a grand jury made up of normal Americans, on more than one occasion.

As for the future of Venezuela, well, of course, it is ultimately up to the Venezuelans. The interim authorities in charge in Venezuela today know what we expect of them: Stop the drug trafficking and the weapons trafficking. Accept the return of their refugees and migrants. Release political prisoners. Expel the Iranians, the Cubans, the Islamic terrorists, like Hezbollah operatives, who have turned Venezuela into a launching pad for regional instability and threats to America's interests.

It will be a difficult road. Our best source of leverage, though, over the interim authorities is the quarantine that we have imposed on their black market oil, which the Maduro regime used to enrich itself—not just the regime but the senior leaders of the regime as well, if you know anything about their spending habits or their tastes.

Yet this resolution—this very resolution we are debating—might very well require the removal of our Navy ships from the Caribbean that are enforcing the quarantine. Is that what our Democratic friends really want—to let these Chavistas in control of the interim authorities start exporting black market oil again, to keep themselves in power, unaccountable not only to their own people but to America's vital national security interests?

I will say I don't think so. I don't think our Democratic colleagues want to let Venezuela start exporting black market oil again. I believe they were genuine years ago, when they called for Maduro's ouster. I believe they are genuine, now, when they condemn Maduro as an illegitimate dictator and a drug trafficker, someone who repressed his own people, even if they then immediately want to eat their cake and have it too by saying that President Trump still shouldn't have removed him. I think it is just that they are so blinded by their hatred of President Trump that they feel they have to condemn this action in some way.

Instead, why don't we just, as I said at the beginning, celebrate the removal of a virulently anti-American, illegitimate communist dictator who was trafficking drugs into our country and

then help the Venezuelan people build a bright future that restores the glories of their past, turning a nation that was the most dangerous, anti-American country in our backyard into the most stable and prosperous pro-American country in our backyard.

So I urge a "no" vote against this resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN KEAST

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, this week, we began a new year's work here in the Congress. But as we open this chapter, I have a bittersweet task of helping to close another.

Beside me sits John Patrick Keast, my longtime adviser and friend. In a few short days, John will conclude nearly two decades of service to my office, to the people of Mississippi, and to the United States of America. The U.S. Senate and the people we represent are better off because of John Keast and his work.

For years, John has been beside me, through hearings, briefings, and meetings, at campaigns and community events, and during negotiations, decisions, and celebrations. Through it all, he has been a wise and steady presence. So, for a few minutes today, I want to commend his remarkable record of service.

More than 30 years ago, a very young but wise John Keast came to work for an upstart who was running to represent Mississippi's First Congressional District. I hired John Keast to be my campaign manager. As he would do time and time again, John rose to the challenge and then some. Not only did we win the election that year, but John began absorbing in encyclopedic detail the ins and outs of Mississippi. This knowledge enabled him to serve our people well.

Name a town in the First Congressional District of Mississippi, and John can tell you where to find the precinct boxes. List a few local issues, and John could tell you what he has done to help alleviate problems there. It is fitting that John will soon be settling down in the First Congressional District of Mississippi in Oxford.

I mentioned John's outstanding recall and knowledge because John would never do that. And it is that combination of intelligence and humility that has proven so dynamic. John often told me that he likes to hire staff who are smarter than he is. I can say that for myself. It is easier for me to find staff that are smarter than I am. It is a little bit difficult and a tall order for John. He has the command of the nitty-gritty and of the big picture. He can go toe-to-toe with the best of the policy wonks, but he also knows what he doesn't know. He understands when to defer to the experts. That self-awareness is just what you want in an adviser.

When John and I got to Washington, we were determined to make a difference. It was 1994, the first Republican majority in the House in 40 years, the famous Republican Revolution. We were excited to fulfill our contract with America, as it was called. I remember it well, and so does John. We stayed in session for 93 days, managing to vote on every Contract with America item before the 100-day milestone.

Somehow, I became president of the freshman class, and John was there every step of the way—brainstorming with me at Bullfeathers restaurant during new Member orientation, building an all-star team for the office, and advancing my priorities for north Mississippi. And what teams he has assembled over the years—there may be some of them in earshot of me today. That constitutes a network of John Keast friends and alumni, and they are accomplishing great things across this body, across this city, and in this country.

I expect if we were to send each of them a pop quiz, most would be able to answer one question in particular, and that would be: What are the "Four Ps of Success in Washington"? When John gives staffers guidance in DC, he tells them to focus on four areas. They should understand policy, process, politics, and people—policy, process, politics, and people, the four dynamics at work on Capitol Hill and in this city.

John has earned every right to give his advice because he has been the embodiment of it. John is fluent in policy. John knows that we come to Washington to make good legislation and provide good oversight that benefits the American people. Name a portfolio, and John Keast has influenced it.

In our days in the House, John was especially vital in my efforts to improve our energy resources, our roadways, and our national defense assets. Together, we fought to create jobs and commerce for hard-working Americans.

The world has changed a lot in 30 years. We no longer use the IBM Selectric correcting typewriters my office inherited when John and I were setting up shop in the House. The world continues to evolve rapidly. John has shaped policy that has and will maintain American leadership through all this change. Nowhere is this truer than in his leadership of my Commerce Committee staff and my Armed Services Committee staff.

It is difficult to summarize John's success as staff director on these committees. He fought for legislation that brought well over \$1 billion in infrastructure and broadband funding to our State of Mississippi and across the country. His work on the CHIPS and Science Act, which I was proud to vote for, invested in the universities of America's heartland. Actions like these will help supercharge Mississippi's growth and development for decades, and you can say that for the entire heartland of our country.

We have had lofty goals on the Senate Armed Services Committee. We are charging ahead on America's military rebuild and on transformational acquisition reform and working toward the success of the AUKUS partnership, and we are helping Ukraine and Taiwan stand up to tyrants. We are making great strides on each of these efforts. John Keast has been integral to every one.

We had another lofty goal in the Armed Services Committee: to build a member-driven National Defense Authorization Act and work it through the Senate in regular order and in the light of day. It takes a master of Senate process to accomplish that goal, and John has done so. He can cite Senate rules by chapter and verse. He can anticipate and maneuver through this body's complicated idiosyncratic process. That knowledge bore fruit in countless backstage victories. But for one prominent example, take this year's success in the Senate NDAA. We saw a remarkably efficient markup followed by primetime—daylight—floor votes. Unusual in this body.

John pairs his procedural dexterity with 20/20 political vision. He understands that political realities shape what any individual Member can accomplish in Congress. John knows when to push in a negotiation and when to make difficult compromises. And that must take place in this bipartisan body. He has earned trust on both sides of the aisle. Both my colleagues and his fellow staffers know John to be a man of his word.

John understands these first three dynamics—policy, process, politics—because at the end of the day, he understands the final “p”—people. John has formed strong relationships with the mayors, alderman, and city councilmen of north Mississippi, with industry leaders and entrepreneurs across the Nation, with lawmakers, Hill staff, administration officials, and most personally with all those fortunate enough to have worked with him on Team Wicker.

His team members have been devoted and for good reason. John knows how to nurture talent. He takes time to show staff their skills and inspire them to greater heights. He sets a high bar and expects his team to meet it. When he hires someone, he gets out of the way and lets them excel. Those people skills have paid off. The policy results speak for themselves—the 30 years of policy results. But so does the outpouring of support John has received since announcing his departure. Many are here now and will be at future celebrations to honor him.

As I speak about John today, I do not speak only for myself. My wife Gayle and I both will always be grateful for John Keast. My children will be grateful for the influence of John Keast. At so many pivotal moments, he has been a trusted and faithful friend, as well as a public servant. I know he will remain so. We look forward to seeing him often.

in Mississippi—I mentioned in Oxford, where he will reunite with his wife Virginia and their children Patrick, Grace, and Anna Kate.

Until then, we remain and always will be grateful for this hero of public service, this great American patriot, John Keast.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator from Tennessee.

FRAUD ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I think we are all pleased to be back with a new year and hard at work.

One of the things that has really captured the attention of the American people in this new year is the amount of fraud that has been uncovered in Minnesota. What we have learned is that now the total has climbed to \$9 billion—still rising. It is important to note that is all stolen taxpayer money. It is so interesting that this big theft was uncovered by a young independent journalist who really blew the story open when he started visiting childcare centers following a lead, visiting these childcare centers in Minneapolis.

Despite these centers having pulled in tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, the childcare centers were actually empty. There were no children; there were no cars in the parking lot. Usually—not even any staff to come answer the door. These were visits that were made during the day when one would assume that children and their caretakers would be present in the facility.

We know and what we are learning is that this childcare fraud scheme is just one part of a widespread fraud operation taking place in Minnesota. Under State Democrats, billions of taxpayer dollars were stolen by front groups that pretended they were providing social services. But they padded their pockets. They basically took this money from vulnerable individuals—programs that were intended for children, for the elderly, for individuals with autism. So basically, they were robbing the taxpayer, padding their pockets, pocketing all of this money that was intended for vulnerable citizens.

The Trump administration has targeted this fraud network, and they have been working on this for several months. They are bringing dozen of criminal indictments, and the list of these alleged crimes is staggering. I think the list grows every day, and that is one thing that is shocking to people.

But what you have is tens of millions of dollars that were stolen through Minnesota's Medicaid Housing Stabilization Services Program. The money was appropriated. The money was sent from the Federal Government to the State of Minnesota, and poof, it has gone into pockets, not into programs. The Housing Stabilization Services Program was meant to help people

with disabilities, yet what you had was these scammers come in and take most of that money.

Millions more were stolen through the State's Feeding Our Future Program. Here, the fraudsters claimed that they were providing thousands of meals every day to needy children. Instead, what we are learning is they weren't providing those thousands of meals; they were spending your hard-earned tax dollars on luxury vehicles and on pricey real estate.

And yet millions more were stolen by a single woman who paid parents to enroll their children in her fraudulent autism therapy program even though most of those children had never been diagnosed with autism.

I know that Tennesseans and, indeed, I am sure, many Americans across the country are wondering, How in the world could this possibly happen?

One of the things I have heard from Tennesseans most on is this fraud issue because they can't believe nobody ever noticed. We are talking \$9 billion in fraud—and climbing—in one State. Well, we know the answer to this, from what we are learning, is that most of this fraud was committed by members of Minnesota's Somali community and that that community is closely tied to the State's Democratic machine. It appears that there were some Democrats who chose to look the other way, and they allowed this to happen. Meanwhile, the Biden administration poured gas on the fire by eliminating safeguards that were meant to stop the waste, fraud, and abuse of your hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

In 2024, the Joe Biden administration scrapped a rule that required childcare centers to verify that kids actually attended their facilities in order to receive Federal funding. Think about this: They removed the provision that says you have got to tell us you are actually enrolling children in your childcare center. So what does that do? That invites fraud. In total, his administration paid out more than \$19 billion to daycare centers without having any verification that that childcare center had children—\$19 billion to daycare centers.

Thankfully, President Trump and his administration are working to ensure that these fraudsters face justice and that something like this can never happen again.

Right now, you have Federal authorities on the ground in Minnesota who are working to identify and arrest these criminals who have defrauded the Federal Government and the U.S. taxpayer. President Trump has also frozen more than \$10 billion in Federal funding for social services programs to Minnesota and to other States—California, Colorado, Illinois, and New York—where there are fraud investigations.

The President's message is quite clear: If these States want to see a dime of Federal taxpayer dollars, they must prove that they have put in place

some safeguards to prevent fraud. It is common sense. If you are going to take this Federal money for your State, for goodness' sake, put some safeguards in place so you know whoever is receiving the money is going to use the money as intended, that they will meet the deliverable, that they will show their outcomes.

I think it is so interesting in Minnesota, with the spotlight on that State, that Governor Tim Walz has announced he is not going to seek reelection for that job, that he is dropping out of the race. Minnesotans deserve an immediate resignation from him, and we are hearing that he will not do that.

We know that this issue goes far beyond Minnesota. Just last month, California's nonpartisan auditor found that eight State agencies have a high risk of waste, fraud, and abuse. Yet they have taken zero corrective action—no corrective action. Across the board, the State is at risk of losing billions to fraud in food assistance, unemployment benefits, and in the State's Medicaid Program.

In New York, Republican lawmakers are calling for an independent audit of the State's spending following several fraud scandals. In one case, scammers in Brooklyn used two adult daycare facilities to steal—get this—\$68 million in taxpayer money from the State's Medicaid home care program. A State comptroller's office also revealed that the State provided more than \$500 million in Medicaid benefits to out-of-State residents.

If you live in New York and you are getting benefits through the Medicaid program and you find out that a half a billion dollars has been used to provide benefits for people who are not even residents of the State, you ought to be asking questions.

In Illinois, the State's auditor general found that the government paid out more than \$5 billion in fraudulent unemployment insurance. Well, do you know what? They didn't do a thing about it.

Last month, the Trump administration indicted two men outside Chicago who submitted nearly \$300 million in fraudulent claims to Medicare and Medicaid as well as to private insurers.

Then, this week, in Mississippi, a trial started for a man who faces charges from the Justice Department for allegedly participating in a scheme to steal \$77 million in Federal aid intended for needy families. Instead, the scammers spent the money on luxury vehicles, investments, private schools, and more.

While President Trump works to end this abuse of taxpayer dollars, Congress should do everything possible to support his efforts.

This week, I am introducing the Fraud Accountability Act, which would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to explicitly make clear that fraud is a deportable offense. If you come to our country to steal from the American people, you ought to be de-

ported; and if you have somehow gained American citizenship, you should be stripped of it. Every single Member of this Chamber should support this legislation.

The era of rampant fraud is over. Under President Trump, we are going to continue to put the American people first.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL UNDER CHAPTER 8 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY RELATING TO “AIR PLAN APPROVAL; SOUTH DAKOTA; REGIONAL HAZE PLAN FOR THE SECOND IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD”—Motion to Proceed

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 290, S.J. Res. 86.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 290, S.J. Res. 86, providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Environmental Protection Agency relating to “Air Plan Approval; South Dakota; Regional Haze Plan for the Second Implementation Period”.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, coal is America's dirtiest energy source. Coal pollution from powerplants befools our air, pollutes our water, and leaches into our food. Coal pollution causes acid rain. Coal pollution causes severe health issues, even death.

Between 1990 and 2020, pollution from coal-fired powerplants killed 460,000 Americans—23,000 deaths per year on average. Despite how massive that death toll is, the trend has been in a good direction. Coal plant-caused death rates have decreased in the last 15 years as more and more coal plants have either shut down in favor of cleaner and cheaper energy sources or—often in answer to Clean Air Act programs—adopted broadly available pollution reduction technologies which significantly reduce but do not eliminate the health-harming emissions and pollution.

One such Clean Air Act program, the Regional Haze Program, addresses haze and visibility impairment in national parks and wilderness areas. Unsurprisingly, coal plants are the Nation's most significant source of haze. The same coal pollutants that drive severe health issues and deaths nationwide, including particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and volatile organic compounds, also drive haze formation. Haze is a pollution marker. The Clean Air Act's regional haze provision requires States to reduce emissions from haze-causing sources

through controls or retirements where necessary to make reasonable progress toward natural visibility conditions.

The EPA provides guidance regulations that help States develop appropriate regional haze plans which are due every 10 to 15 years. The Clean Air Act presumes that additional controls or retirements will be necessary for reasonable progress. They are thus required each time new haze plans are due unless the State can demonstrate that no action would be the reasonable course.

South Dakota took no action in its latest regional haze plan to address haze pollution over the long term. It made no updates to significantly out-of-date controls at its three major emitters—a coal plant, a cement plant, and a lime plant—and it failed to demonstrate that that inaction was reasonable. The Trump EPA approved the plan anyway.

The resulting pollution will blow downwind toward Midwestern and Eastern States. The EPA's approval puts forward a reading of the Clean Air Act that is blatantly at odds with the text, the context, and the purpose of the act, and that encourages the spread of harm to the downwind States from these polluting plants. Well, there is something we can do about it here.

In 1996, Congress enacted the Congressional Review Act to give Congress the opportunity to vote on administrative regulations. During the Biden administration, Republicans in the Senate forced 35 rollcall votes to try to kill rules that sought to protect consumers' public health and public lands—35 to 0. It was an astonishing record. Now that the Trump administration is in power, it has engaged at breakneck speed to tear down the protections of Americans' health and safety and our environment.

I know it is an uphill struggle in our polluter-funded Congress and particularly with this polluter-controlled Trump administration, but I nevertheless urge support for this commonsense Congressional Review Act resolution and hope that we can make it a brighter day as well as a clearer day for the downwind States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

VENEZUELA

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to come to the floor and talk about a couple of things.

Earlier today, we had a classified briefing on the situation in Venezuela. I have to say that I am very impressed and thankful for the expertise, the resources, and the work that was done by the men and women on the ground. It was truly an extraordinary operation that couldn't have been done by any other nation other than the United States.

As for those who were injured, I understand they are recovering and that some have been released from the hospital. I hope they heal up safely and

that they know that we are eternally grateful for their bringing a transnational criminal to justice—hopefully so—as he goes through our court system.

NATO

Mr. President, I am also here to talk about what I think is amateurish behavior with respect to the treatment of our NATO allies. It has to start with an interview that I saw with one of the President's senior policy advisers, Stephen Miller, on CNN, a couple of nights ago.

Mr. Miller said that the U.S. Government—“obviously, Greenland should be part of the United States.”

That is absurd. We have to go back and take a look at the relationship to Greenland.

Why am I coming to the floor, a Senator from North Carolina? Because since 2018, I have been the Republican leader for the Senate NATO Observer Group. I have gone to every NATO conference. I have gone to the security conference. I have met with almost all of the leaders of the countries that are part of the 32-nation coalition known as NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Now, let's talk about why I think it was an amateurish comment and something that a Deputy Chief of Staff and senior policy adviser should not have taken the position on.

No. 1, he doesn't speak for the U.S. Government. He speaks for the President of the United States, and on that basis, he can. But when he says that the U.S. Government thinks that Greenland should be a part of NATO, he should talk to people like me who have an election certificate and a vote in the U.S. Senate, because I know what he either doesn't know or he should know, and if he did know, I can't imagine why he would make the comments that he did the other night in a television interview.

Let me give you some facts about Denmark, for example. Denmark, which has responsibility for Greenland—although, Greenland is an autonomous territory under NATO. It is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

But let's talk about Denmark for a minute. Denmark was one of NATO's most disproportionately high contributors in Afghanistan, relative to its population, size, and force structure.

What do I mean there? There has been one time in the 75-year history of NATO that the NATO allies responded to the article 5 commitment, which means when one of our NATO allies is attacked, we go there to defend them. It has been exercised one time in the history of the alliance to come to the aid of the United States and the War on Terror in Afghanistan.

Since their first mission began, more than 18,000 Danish soldiers have deployed to Afghanistan with American and British forces. Throughout their deployments in Afghanistan, 43 of their soldiers lost their lives fighting alongside American soldiers, defending our

freedom and holding the Taliban and al-Qaida responsible for the events of September 11.

Forty-three soldiers losing their lives—there are only about five or six NATO countries who lost more. And what is remarkable about this is this is a country of about 6 million people. On a per capita basis, Denmark suffered over six times the fatality rate of Germany and more than three times the fatality rate of France, matching or exceeding the losses of much larger allies with far greater resources.

So despite its small military, Denmark has deployed forces to some of the most dangerous, kinetic combat zones, particularly Helmand Province, fighting alongside UK units at the height of the insurgency. Danish forces accepted frontline combat roles—some lost their lives as a result of it—not low-risk symbolic missions.

For a small democracy, sustaining this level of risk over more than a decade reflects a serious commitment to NATO and a serious commitment to the safety and security of the United States.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this specific language and the list of NATO countries who came to the aid of our U.S. Marines be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Key takeaway: Denmark was one of NATO's most disproportionate contributors to Afghanistan relative to its size, population, and force structure.

Since their first mission began, more than 18,000 Danish soldiers have deployed to Afghanistan with American and British Forces. Throughout their deployments in Afghanistan, 43 soldiers were killed in action.

That is among the highest per-capita losses in the Alliance (second only to Estonia).

On a per-capita basis, Denmark suffered over six times the fatality rate of Germany and more than three times that of France, matching or exceeding losses of much larger Allies with far greater resources.

Despite its small military, Denmark deployed forces to some of the most kinetic combat zones, particularly Helmand Province, fighting alongside UK units at the height of the insurgency. Danish forces accepted front-line combat roles, not low-risk or symbolic missions.

For a small democracy, sustaining this level of risk over more than a decade reflects serious Alliance resolve.

Casualties (by current NATO members):

United States: 2,461; United Kingdom: 457; Canada: 159; France: 90; Germany: 62; Italy: 53; Poland: 44; Denmark: 43; Spain: 35; Romania: 27; Netherlands: 25; Turkey: 15; Czech Republic: 14; Norway: 10; Estonia: 9; Hungary: 7; Sweden: 5 (partner at the time); Latvia: 4; Slovakia: 3; Finland: 2 (partner at the time); Portugal: 2; Albania: 2; Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Montenegro: 1 each; Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Slovenia: 0 recorded deaths.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, some people around here call me cranky. I have got a couple of buddies that call me cranky.

Do you know what makes me cranky? Stupid. What makes me

cranky is when people don't do their homework. What makes me cranky is when we tarnish the extraordinary execution of a mission of fully supporting Venezuela by turning around and making insane comments about how it is our right to have territory owned by the Kingdom of Denmark.

Folks, amateur hour is over. You don't speak on behalf of this U.S. Senator or the Congress. You can say it may be the position of the President of the United States that Greenland should be a part of the United States, but it is not the position of this government because we are a coequal branch. And if that were to come to pass, there would be a vote on the floor to make it real, not this surreal sort of environment that some Deputy Chief of Staff thinks was cute to say on TV.

So you want to get me back to thanking the President for all the good things he is doing? Then give him good advice.

One of two things happened with Greenland. Either, one, the President came up with the idea that maybe we should have Greenland as a part of our assets, and somebody said that is a great idea, versus saying: Mr. President, take a look at our alliance. Take a look at the most important alliance in the history of the United States, the NATO alliance. This could actually destabilize that, Mr. President. Mr. President, you should know, at one point, we had 17 military installations in Greenland, and they would be happy to have us back. They are not refusing to allow us to have access to project power into the Arctic. We could do it without taking over a NATO country.

That is the sort of advice that should have been given. So if the President thought it was a good idea, then he needs the experts to say: Mr. President, that is why this is not a good idea.

I would defy you to find any credible general with a star on his shoulder who would say that it is because they understand that the NATO alliance is what has kept this Nation largely—or this world—largely safe for over 75 years.

The flip side could be that Mr. Miller or somebody else there said: Hey, this would be cool. Let's take over Greenland. It will be like a big aircraft carrier.

Well, that is stupid too. I am sick of stupid. I want good advice for this President because I want this President to have a good legacy. This nonsense on what is going on with Greenland is a distraction from the good work he is doing, and the amateurs who said it was a good idea should lose their jobs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

S.J. RES. 86

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to S.J. Res. 86. This resolution would repeal the Environmental Protection Agency's approval of South Dakota's Regional Haze Implementation Plan.

South Dakota has made substantial progress toward meeting EPA's ambitious 2064 visibility goals and has determined that no additional emissions goals are needed to make reasonable progress.

Overturning EPA's approval would force the State to adopt unnecessary pollution control measures, despite clear evidence that they would not meaningfully improve visibility. These requirements would impose significant costs on South Dakota communities and businesses for little to no environmental benefit, essentially burning money without improving outcomes.

This CRA ignores the fact that South Dakota's emission sources have a minimal impact on visibility in nearby class I areas. In recent years, the primary driver of visibility impairment has been wildfire smoke from Canada and the western United States, not in-State emissions. This resolution substitutes Washington mandates for State-level expertise, dictating decisions on a State the sponsors do not represent and unnecessarily constraining South Dakota's economy.

For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote against this resolution.

VOTE ON MOTION

Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that the previously scheduled rollcall vote occur immediately.

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

The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

Mr. ROUNDS. 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. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Alabama (Mrs. BRITT), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), and the Senator from Missouri (Mr. SCHMITT).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS), the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND), the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA), and the Senator from California (Mr. SCHIFF) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 43, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 4 Leg.]

YEAS—43

Alsobrooks	Hirono	Sanders
Baldwin	Kaine	Schatz
Bennet	Kelly	Schumer
Blumenthal	Kim	Shaheen
Blunt Rochester	King	Slotkin
Booker	Klobuchar	Smith
Cantwell	Luján	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Markey	Warner
Duckworth	Merkley	Warnock
Durbin	Murphy	Warren
Fetterman	Murray	Welch
Gallego	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden
Heinrich	Reed	
Hickenlooper	Rosen	

NAYS—50

Banks	Grassley	Moreno
Barrasso	Hagerty	Mullin
Blackburn	Hawley	Murkowski
Boozman	Hoover	Paul
Budd	Husted	Ricketts
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Risch
Cassidy	Johnson	Rounds
Collins	Justice	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lankford	Sheehy
Cramer	Lee	Sullivan
Crapo	Lummis	Thune
Cruz	Marshall	Tillis
Curtis	McConnell	Tuberville
Daines	McCormick	Wicker
Ernst	Moody	Young
Fischer	Moran	

NOT VOTING—7

Britt	Graham	Schmitt
Coons	Padilla	
Gillibrand	Schiff	

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Virginia.

S.J. RES. 59

Mr. KAINES. Mr. President, I rise to speak with other colleagues about my War Powers Resolution, a bipartisan resolution cosponsored by Senators PAUL, SCHUMER, and SCHIFF that will be called up for a vote tomorrow. A number of Senators will speak in this block, most in support of my resolution. I know at least one Senator, my colleague from South Carolina, is scheduled to come speak in opposition.

I spoke at length last night about sort of what I view the big picture of this—and I don't intend to speak very long. It is better now to let others have a chance to speak. But what I wanted to focus on, just briefly, was the fact that we did have a briefing by administration officials in the SCIF this morning, the classified setting, and I am not at liberty to discuss the matters in that setting.

I will say what I said last night. I think it is important on matters of this importance, especially war, when 200 combatants have been killed—and that number is climbing—when U.S. troops have been injured—two still in the hospital—when U.S. assets are arrayed around Venezuela, and when there is now a commitment for the United States to essentially manage and control the Venezuelan economy and even civil governmental services for some significant time, I think it is time for us to get this debate out of the SCIF and into the public.

So I am hoping that the Senate committees with jurisdiction, including the Armed Services Committee, on which I sit, the Foreign Relations Committee, and to the extent this was a law enforcement operation, the Judiciary Committee, will finally start to have the first public hearings where administration officials can be questioned in full view of the public so that the American public knows what is at stake.

I will say one additional thing. I made my Democratic caucus mad early on when I came to the Senate because I challenged President Obama in 2013, his proposed use of the U.S. military in Syria to punish a bad dictator, Bashar

Assad, for using chemical weapons against civilians.

Now, he was a President of my own party and Bashar Assad was a horrible dictator. But despite that, I challenged President Obama's ability to act and deploy U.S. military against Assad, even to punish Assad for bad behavior, without Congress.

I remember the first time I really got shouted out in a Democratic caucus meeting, it was standing against President Obama's ability to do that unilaterally without us.

I tried to maintain that consistent standard under President Obama and then President Trump, term one, President Biden, and President Trump, term two.

Even in an instance—even in an instance—where military action may be a good idea—and I might have voted for use of military action to punish Bashar Assad for using chemical weapons—it should not be done on a Presidential say-so without a vote of Congress.

So the vote tomorrow on the War Powers Resolution is not about whether we like Nicolas Maduro, whether he is a good guy. He is a bad guy. He is a dictator. He has wreaked havoc on Venezuela's economy and on human rights within Venezuela.

It is, instead, whether the United States should engage in military action against Venezuela on a Presidential say-so without a vote of Congress. I believe the Constitution is clear, and I believe the equities, in terms of the respect we owe to our troops, if we are going to deploy them, gives life to the constitutional provision and really explains why it is there.

The last thing I will say before I yield to my colleague from Kentucky is one of the arguments that is being made—and this is not out of the classified setting because it is being made publicly by the administration—is this was not a military action; it was a law enforcement operation.

I think that argument is specious. I think it is—it kind of doesn't really pass the laugh test. Now, it might be an argument you would make if there were a covert operation to go into Venezuela in the dead of night and extract an indicted criminal, Nicolas Maduro—not a criminal until he is prosecuted but an indicted person—to bring back to the United States and face justice.

If it were just the execution of an arrest, you might make the argument, maybe that is just law enforcement. And you might make it even if the military was somewhat needed to carry out the arrest warrant.

This is far different than that. The boat strikes against Venezuelans in international waters, the amassing of 20 percent of the American Navy around Venezuela, the use of 150 aircraft deployed from 20 bases throughout the Western Hemisphere to carry out this operation, the arrest and deposition of Nicolas Maduro and his wife, but then also the U.S. decision to occupy and control the Venezuelan economy, its oil reserves, the indication

from the administration that this is not a few days or a few weeks; it is likely a few years of U.S. occupation and involvement in this country with a military blockade stopping commerce into and out of Venezuela—this is not an arrest warrant. This is far bigger than that, and it is the kind of hostilities that Congress specifically had in mind when they wrote the War Powers Resolution of 1973.

I urge my colleagues to cast a vote for their own relevance. Cast a vote for your own relevance by saying that power that the Constitution gives to Congress, that it is the only body that should declare war. If you vote for me tomorrow, you reserve your right to vote for war, if you think it is a bad idea or a good idea.

But if you vote for the resolution, all you are voting for is the proposition that the Nation should not be at war with an end run around you but should only be at war if you have had the opportunity to debate and vote and put our thumbprint on the validity of the mission, and your thumbprint should be necessary if we are going to send our troops into harm's way to potentially be injured or killed.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Virginia for leading this effort. There is likely no issue more important that confronts us as a nation, as a people, as a Congress, than whether or not to send our young men and women to war.

I take a backseat to no one in my disdain and loathing of state-sponsored socialism. In fact, I wrote a book, "The Case Against Socialism," describing the historic link between socialism and state-sponsored violence.

I wish the people of Venezuela well and sincerely hope that they will not repeat the mistake of electing socialists that have plagued the nation since the 1970s.

Whether or not socialism is evil, however, is not the debate today. The debate today is about one question and one question only: Does the Constitution allow one man or one woman to take the Nation to war without the approval of Congress? Full stop.

That question is bigger than regime change in Venezuela, bigger than the claims that the ends justify the means, bigger even than the depredations and evils that multiple socialist autocrats have perpetrated upon the once great country of Venezuela.

Even those who celebrate the demise of the socialist, authoritarian regime in Venezuela, as I do, should give pause to granting the power to initiate war to one man. The power to initiate war is so vast a power that it must be confined by checks and balances.

The debate today would not be happening if our leaders read and understood the Federalist Papers. The constitutional power to initiate war is placed squarely on the shoulders of Congress.

Current congressional leaders squirm and would like to shift the burden of initiating the war to the President. Less than courageous Members of Congress fall all over themselves to avoid taking responsibility to avoid the momentous vote of declaring war.

But make no mistake, bombing another nation's capital and removing their President is an act of war, plain and simple. No provision in the Constitution provides such power to the Presidency.

No Supreme Court has allowed the Congress to abdicate its role in the decisions of war and peace, and no Congressman of any self-respect will argue otherwise.

Our leaders debated fully whether or not to grant this power to the President. To a man, from Jefferson to Hamilton, the spectrum of our Founding Fathers, they all agreed with the words that Madison wrote that the executive is the branch most prone to war, and, therefore, the Constitution, with studied care, vested that power—vested the power to declare war in the legislature.

Founding-era arguments in support of ratifying the Constitution demonstrate that our government does not entrust the decision to go to war to just one person. At the Constitutional Convention, Charles Pinckney argued that uniting the war powers under a single Executive would grant to the President monarchical powers.

It would make him like a King. They did not want a King. They were tired of the endless wars of Europe. They took that power and placed it with the people's representatives. They didn't want to make it easy to go to war. They wanted to make it hard to go to war.

Some will argue—they will say that Congress is so feckless. They will never declare war.

Well, guess what, when we have been attacked, we have been virtually unanimous. When we were attacked on 9/11, the vote was virtually unanimous to go after the people who attacked us. When we were attacked at Pearl Harbor, once again, the vote was virtually unanimous to go to war.

James Wilson, one of the Founders, assured Americans at the Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention that the proposed Constitution would not allow one man or even one body of men to initiate hostilities.

In Federalist 69, Alexander Hamilton stated the Constitution gave the Presidency fewer war powers than those of the British Monarch and that the American President would be restricted to conducting the operations of the Armies and Navy. In other words, the Constitution, the declaration of war, that power would remain with the legislature. The execution of the war—how many troops are stationed here; how many battleships are stationed here—that would be the prerogative of the President.

The beginning of the war, the initiation of the war, the declaration of the war would reside with the people and

their representatives to make it less likely that we go to war.

The founding generation was largely united in the opinion that the American President would not be endowed with the monarchial powers to initiate war unilaterally. These Founders were not just engaged in a sales pitch; they were accurately representing the Constitutional Convention's decision on how to divide the war powers. Initiation, declaration of war, would be the prerogative of Congress; execution, fighting the war, would be the prerogative of the President.

An early draft of the Constitution gave Congress the power to "make war" rather than to "declare war." This was debated, and during the debate over this, South Carolina's Pierce Butler rose to defend the proposition that the new American Government should vest the war-making powers with the President.

So this one man from South Carolina rose and said, not only should the President execute the war, he should initiate the war also.

But others stood up. Elbridge Gerry, a delegate from Massachusetts, was so aghast by Butler's suggestion that he rose to say that he "never expected to hear in a republic a motion to empower the Executive alone to declare war."

And in response to Butler's proposal to vest all the war powers with the President, Gerry joined with James Madison to successfully propose amending the draft of the Constitution to give Congress the power to "declare war." They specified that Congress would have the power to initiate or declare war, but the execution of a war would be the President's power.

But they wanted to make sure that the President would be able to defend the country against foreign attack without awaiting congressional action.

This comes up all the time about: What if we are being attacked? What if it is an emergency? Can the President act without Congress?

Of course, he can. No one has disputed that. Military action in defense from another military attack has always been the prerogative of the President.

People say: Well, this had to be a secret.

Well, guess what. It was no secret that we had an entire armada lined up outside and across the coast from Venezuela. They knew we were there. They knew it was a possibility that we were coming in. Had we voted to declare war, yes, they might have been chastened even more. They might have even decided to negotiate before, had the entire Congress said: We are declaring war.

So in some ways, a declaration of war actually is more potent if you are trying to effect diplomacy. But, instead, we didn't vote. People said: Oh, they wouldn't be surprised.

If we had voted to declare war, the President still doesn't have to divulge the time or place of the war. Those secrets can still exist.

And, in fact, it is even more justified for the President not to tell us anything about the attack until afterward, if we have already given him permission to initiate a war.

And people say: Oh, this is just a technicality. Why should we care?

Well, if you have sons or daughters, you should care, because if we have unlimited war, if we have no limitations on the war-making power of one person, what happens when you get someone who will run amok with war?

I am not even talking about this President. I am talking about “what if.”

That is why the rules are in place. The rules are in place to prevent a President, at one point in time, from running amok and having millions of our soldiers strewn around the world.

Does anybody remember the Battle of the Somme? A million soldiers died over an 18-day period in World War I. Now, that war was authorized, and it was still awful. But can you imagine a million soldiers dying without a declaration?

And people say: Well, what are you talking about? They are already gone. No one is in Venezuela.

What we are talking about is taking a country to war. We aren't just talking about Venezuela. We are talking about the power of a President to have a million soldiers die in an 18-day war.

People say: We are not talking about that.

Then we would declare war. You have to declare war at the beginning.

And then people say: Well, it is not a war. All it was was an arrest warrant. It was just a drug crime.

Oh, he was guilty of possessing machineguns. That sounds like that is being made up as humor.

In 1934, we passed a law in our country saying you can't own machineguns. It is an American law. Does anybody in their right mind—does any sane individual who can read in our country—believe that it applies to the security forces of a foreign dictator or a foreign President; that if their guards have machineguns, they are guilty of breaching a 1934 U.S. law? What kind of world would we live in if we could accuse people around the world and simply go arrest them and send the military to quiet down all of their defense systems so we could arrest them?

We had intelligence reports in our country that reported that, per our intelligence, the leader of Saudi Arabia was guilty of or was involved with killing an American journalist. What if a President decided they wanted to arrest him? Can they do that without a congressional vote or permission?

There are arguments that the current President of Brazil has unfairly imprisoned the previous President of Brazil. Now, you can have an argument on both sides. You can listen to the facts, but would you want your President to be allowed to go to Brazil, free the former President, and put the current President in jail without a vote of

your representatives? What kind of world would that be? Who could be for that?

The Constitution empowers the President to defend the country against sudden attacks initiated by any foreign power. The initiation of hostilities by the United States that requires deliberation and authorization must be voted upon in Congress.

Our Founders' intent was not a close call open to equivocation. Pundits argue that Presidents have been ignoring this restriction for decades. That is true. But that is not an argument. That is just an excuse, and a lame one at that.

The Constitution is clear: Only Congress can declare war. The power to declare war was too important to be left to the competence of one man. As Jefferson wrote, “in questions of power then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the constitution.”

See, the Constitution isn't chains on the people; it is chains on your representatives so they don't usurp the power, so your representatives don't take you to war without careful deliberation.

Our Founding Fathers were explicit, and yet they still worried that a branch of government might resist the chains of the Constitution. So in pondering how they would enforce these checks and balances, they took to heart Montesquieu's maxim that if the powers of the Executive and the legislature, if they are combined—if there is no difference between the legislature and the Executive, if they are combined together—there can be no liberty. Those are strong words. They felt liberty would be endangered or imperiled if all the power resided in one person.

Madison wrote that by dividing the powers, by separating the powers within the Constitution, within the branches of government, that would pit “ambition against ambition.” The ambitions of a President to usurp power would be pitted against the natural ambitions of the legislature to keep power. The natural allure of power would be checked by each branch jealously guarding the prerogative of power.

Who among the Framers would have ever guessed or conceived of a time when Congress would lack any ambition—any ambition at all? Who would have predicted a time when Congress would be so feckless as to simply and obediently abandon all pretense of responsibility and any semblance of duty so as to cede the war power so completely to the President?

It is as if a magical dust of soma has descended through the ventilation systems of the congressional office buildings. Vague faces, permanent smiles, and obedient applause indicate the degree that the majority party has lost its grip and become eunuchs in the thrall of Presidential domination.

A President is never truly checked by the minority party, other than through elections. Meaningful checks and balances require the President's party to stand up and resist unconstitutional usurpations of power. Until that happens, the dangerous precedent of unlimited war-making power will continue to be abused by Presidents of both parties.

I recommend a “yes” vote on this resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

MR. MURPHY. Mr. President, I come down to the floor in support of the resolution, but I am hoping to use my few minutes to step back from the dizzying torrent of news that we have been delivered, often contradicting sources of news from the President and his advisers, and just ask some basic questions about the wisdom of this extraordinary military endeavor and the administration's future plans in Venezuela.

I think the basic question that people are asking in my State—and, I imagine, the same is true all over the country—is, Why did we invade Venezuela? Why is our entire national conversation today seized by this question of Venezuela? Why does Senator Kaine have to come to the floor and offer a very simple resolution to clarify that the President doesn't have the authority, unilaterally, to take military action overseas without the consent of the people? Because for people in Connecticut, they haven't been spending a lot of time, over the last 12 months, thinking or talking about Venezuela. Venezuela isn't terribly relevant for the people I represent, who are worried about an economy that seems to be stagnant; healthcare premiums that are doubling, tripling for many people in my State; prices that are going up on all the stuff that you need to afford to live. And, all of a sudden, the President is talking only about Venezuela.

So why did we invade Venezuela? Why are we still talking about Venezuela?

Well, let's rule out the reasons we know don't hold water. It is not because Venezuela presents a security threat to the United States.

There was a reason we went into Afghanistan. However badly that occupation ended, there was a reason we went into Afghanistan. They were harboring a terrorist group that had attacked the United States.

Venezuela is not harboring any nonstate actors that have plans to attack the United States. The Venezuelan Government is not a security threat to the United States of America. So you can cross off that reason. It is not because Venezuela is a security threat to the United States, and everybody basically understands and knows that.

Now, the administration spent a lot of time talking about drugs. Their initial forays with respect to military intervention in and around Venezuela were targeting these boats that they

claimed were carrying drugs. And, you know, that makes a little bit more sense to the American people because there are thousands of Americans that are dying every year due to overdose.

But those overdoses, as people know, are mainly from a drug called fentanyl. Well, Venezuela doesn't produce any fentanyl. What Venezuela produces and ships is cocaine.

Now, cocaine can kill you. But that cocaine isn't even coming to the United States. Reports are that 90 percent of that cocaine is going to Europe.

So to the extent we were targeting drug boats off the coast of Venezuela, to the extent that any of the rationale for the action against Maduro had to do with the drug trade, that drug trade doesn't really have anything to do with the American epidemic of overdoses. That will continue unabated, no matter what we are doing in Venezuela.

And, then, it doesn't have anything to do, apparently, with the restoration of democracy in Venezuela or the best interests of the people of Venezuela, because immediately after the action was taken against Maduro, the Trump administration lined up behind Maduro's second in command, who is, as we speak, ramping up the repression of political speech and political activities in Venezuela. All the bad actors in the Maduro regime, with the exception of Maduro and his wife, are still there, running a kleptocracy, stealing from the Venezuelan people, shipping drugs out of the country, while continuing to destroy the Venezuelan people's ability to protest.

So this doesn't have to do with a security threat to the United States. It doesn't have to do with the flow of drugs to the United States. It doesn't have to do with restoring democracy inside Venezuela.

And so, in those moments and days after the invasion of Venezuela, we were left to wonder: What is it all about?

And Donald Trump basically told you. I mean, he did tell you. He said it was about oil. He said that he wants access to Venezuela's oil. He wants the companies that are close to him to have access to Venezuelan oil.

Remember, there was this meeting in Florida in which the oil companies came down to see him during the 2024 campaign, and they told him—this is a report. This is not an allegation. This is a mainstream media report. The oil companies said they would give him a billion dollars for his campaign in exchange for favorable treatment when he became President.

Now, he has already given them a lot of favorable treatment, but, boy, this would be a coup—the oil industry having full access to the world's largest petroleum reserves.

But, today, this morning, in our briefing, we did learn that there is another objective.

Yes, Trump wants control of the oil for his friends. But today in our briefing—and also in public remarks so

there is no issue with me sharing this with you—the administration made clear that there is another purpose for seizing the oil, and that is nation building.

This is the business we thought we were getting out of. Donald Trump promised the country that he wasn't going to repeat the mistakes that we made in the past in which we tried to impose our will on a foreign country through military intervention or the threat of military intervention. But what they are proposing to do is exactly that.

It comes in a slightly different form than what we did in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it is from the same playbook. Here is their plan: They are going to seize control of Venezuelan oil under the threat of gunpoint, and then they are going to use that oil as leverage to micromanage the Government and economy of Venezuela. Let me say it again: We are going to seize Venezuelan oil by gunpoint. We are going to use control of that oil to micromanage the country.

That is nation building. That is nation building.

And as much as it should worry you that there is not a good national security justification and the only justification for this invasion is to get control of their oil, it should worry you more that now the plan is not just to seize the oil for the purposes of enriching Wall Street and the oil industry, the purpose is to seize the oil so the United States can manage and run the country of Venezuela.

Why should regular Americans care about that?

Well, first, it is this perpetuation of the same Bush-Cheney fantasy that America can impose its will on a foreign nation through the power of American military force.

Now, for now, this looks and feels different than Iraq or Afghanistan because there aren't hundreds of thousands of troops inside Venezuela, but let's make it clear. This is just a different kind of military force because the only way that we get the oil is through a military blockade—that is absolutely an act of war—and the threat of another invasion if the leader—whomever it turns out to be; today it is Delcy Rodriguez, who knows who it will be tomorrow—doesn't comply with our wishes. So we are essentially encircling Venezuela with the American military and telling them that if they don't do what we want, we are going to stop and board their ships. We are going to attack their country again.

And, again, this is not speculation. Donald Trump has said this is the plan; that if they don't do what we want, we will be right back inside Venezuela.

This doesn't work. It has never worked in the past. It is the essence of the quagmire that we got ourselves in, in Iraq and Afghanistan; the belief, this myopic belief that neocons, that hawks have, that warmongers have, that the

United States can use its military to impose our will on a foreign country.

And let me tell you, every country is unique and difficult to micromanage from afar, but Venezuela is a complicated country. We are talking about 30 million people. We are talking about active, armed insurgency groups. What happens when you try this Iraq-Afghanistan strategy is that, in the short term, it breeds resentment and extremism. That is what we saw with the growth of ISIS and the regrowth and reconstitution of the Taliban.

And in the long run, the country essentially just decides to wait you out. They knew in Afghanistan we were going to tire at some point and leave. So will the kleptocrats in Venezuela. They will play ball with us, but at some point the warships are going to leave. At some point, America can't devote one-third of its Navy to the waters around Venezuela. And as soon as we leave, the kleptocrats and the corrupt leaders will be right back in charge. If they don't want to change their country from within, if there isn't a viable mechanism to do that domestically, it is almost impossible to impose that from the outside.

The second reason that Americans should care is that it is illegal, and that is the subject of the resolution. It is illegal. An embargo is an act of war. Repeated military strikes followed on by invasion is an act of war.

And this engagement is not just a hostile act against Venezuela, it will inevitably draw increased frictions with Russia and China. Now, we shouldn't be afraid of friction with Russia and China as a principle. They are our adversaries.

But the reason that the Constitution says the people should be in charge of the decision as to whether to enter into military activity in a far-off nation—no matter whether it is a big nation or a small nation—is because there are often spillover impacts and affects. And if we are going to run a long-term naval blockade of Venezuela, if we are going to be running the economy of Venezuela from the White House, the American people have to have a say in that. The Founders, in fact, required that.

And lastly, the reason that the American people should care about this new plan, the nation building of Venezuela through the threat of military force, is because it is an enormous distraction from what actually matters to the people of this country, and so I will just end where I began. Nobody in the State of Connecticut was asking me for an invasion of Venezuela prior to the Christmas break. Everybody in my State knows that this has nothing to do with their interests.

Lives are going to be lost in this country when millions of people lose their insurance in the coming weeks. There are kids who are going hungry, who are being fed lunch and dinner but not breakfast or just dinner and not

lunch and breakfast because of the nutrition cuts that have been imposed by Republicans.

The problems that Americans are facing require a White House that is intent on running the United States of America. But this White House, under the plan that they have revealed today, is going to be running the country of Venezuela. And it is just true that when we were involved in the quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, it occupied an enormous amount of time at that White House. The amount of time that the President and his team spent worrying about Baghdad and worrying about Kabul—it was a distraction from the job of running the United States. And so maybe more than any of the other reasons that people should care about this plan to nation-build in Venezuela is that it is just even more reason to doubt that this President is sincere at all about doing what he said he was going to do, which is lower costs for people.

Costs are going up. Healthcare insurance is disappearing. And the President is telling you that, for the foreseeable future, he is going to be spending just as much time thinking about running Venezuela as he is about running the United States.

Finally, I will just say, if the Energy Department bill does make it to the floor of the Senate—it is being debated this week in the House—I will offer an amendment to that bill to prohibit the requisition of Venezuelan oil for the purposes of nation building.

That will, of course, be an endeavor that the Energy Department will be involved in. They will likely have to spend millions of dollars, enormous amounts of resources, to take control of that oil to sell it on the open market. That is a disastrous plan, as I have outlined, for America and the world. And so I will just tell you that we will have a chance to debate this plan if that appropriations measure reaches the Senate, and I would commend my colleagues to take a look at it and support it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, Donald Trump has taken us back to the era of gunboat diplomacy over the last 4 months, back to that era when a powerful nation would station its gunships off the coast of another nation in order to compel them to do what we wanted to enable us to have access to their resources, to force them to enable our corporations to take over their economy. It is a deeply powerfully resented strategy for nations to say: Hey, that militarily powerful other nation came and threatened us with their gunboats in order to take our resources and profit the more powerful nation—gunboat diplomacy. And yet here we are.

This is hot off the press from CNN. Two senior White House officials told the CNN reporters: “During conversations led by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the Trump administra-

tion told Venezuela’s interim president Delcy Rodriguez that the country must cut ties with China, Iran, Russia and Cuba, and agree to partner exclusively with the US on oil production.” And that “Rodriguez,” the Acting President, of Venezuela, “must also agree to favor the Trump administration and US oil companies for future oil sales.”

Gunboats off the coast. Threats to say we will keep grabbing your oil tankers to prevent you from selling your resource on the international market unless we, the United States, take control of your oil. Sorry, Venezuela.

Well, this certainly wasn’t about the future of a better Venezuela for Venezuelans. You know, just 18 months ago, the people of Venezuela voted in a Presidential election, and they voted for a man named Gonzalez, who was a stand-in for the champion of democracy, Maria Machado, who just received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. They voted, according to the estimates of monitors, about a ratio of 2 to 1—2 to 1—for democracy.

No, Venezuela is no stranger to democracy. They had a democracy for three decades, and they lost it to the internal corrosion of the separation of powers and the checks and balances of a democracy. And certainly that led to the current tyranny, the authoritarian state that they live in now.

But did the Trump administration say: We want to help Venezuelans reclaim their country? No. They said: We like dictatorships. We just want a pliable dictatorship. So they said: We are leaving in place this entire structure of corrupted military and government officials with massive corruption, and yet we will have a new Acting President, who has assured us that she will do what we want.

And what do we want? We want your oil. We want it under the control only of U.S. corporations.

That is hardly a message that helps the United States in our standing or our interests in the world. First of all, it produces enormous hostility from countries that faced that type of coercion in the past. They well remember the United States using its economic might, its military might, to try to exploit their resources through our U.S. corporations. So it undermines our collaboration around the world.

You know a second thing it does, it undermines the respect we are held in—or used to be held in—for advancing the vision of democracy, of government by and for the people, kind of the light that we brought to the world to say: The world shouldn’t be in a situation where citizens are ruled by powerful people for their own gain. No, they should be able to make their own decisions for their own future, for their own better future.

But you didn’t hear any discussion about honoring the will of the Venezuelan people who voted 18 months ago, 2 to 1, for democracy.

So now we are looking at a situation where we see other challenges that

flow from this, this continuation of a dictatorship by Delcy Rodriguez, the Vice President, who Secretary Rubio has said is more pliable, more manipulatable, will more service our interest than the predecessor, and yet all the corruption of that authoritarian government, all of the repression left fully in place.

President Trump said:

If she doesn’t do what’s right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro.

Leave the dictatorship in place. Put a person in charge we think is more going to bend to our pressure, and threaten her—the President of the United States threatened her with something worse than what he did to Maduro.

Trump’s goal is clear: He doesn’t mind if there is a dictatorship, as long as it is our dictatorship, serving us, the American corporations, and the Trump administration, rather than the Venezuelan people.

The people of Venezuela deserve free and fair elections.

And then let’s talk about how this entire setup for this gunboat diplomacy was based on a massive lie to the American people. The Trump administration said: This is about stopping drugs coming into the United States that have done so much damage to our families.

Well, we are all very sympathetic to stopping every bit of drugs that come into our country. We have cocaine. We have fentanyl. We have meth.

But here is the story: On the Venezuelan exports of cocaine, expert after expert says, overwhelmingly, that is the path of drugs to Europe, not the United States.

And then the Trump administration said: But—wait, wait, wait—there must be fentanyl down in Venezuela. We are stopping fentanyl from coming into the United States.

But that, too, was another lie. The fentanyl comes from Mexico. It comes across our southern border. It is made with precursors from China. We are pressing China to end their distribution or their importation or exportation of those precursors into Mexico, and we are working with the Mexican Government to stop the flow into the United States, doing everything we can to find those places where the fentanyl is made. We need to stop fentanyl in every possible way, but Venezuela is not the source of the fentanyl problem.

I think about how it was the case with George W. Bush that he created a fake story about weapons of mass destruction to lead us into a massive regime-change strategy and nation-building strategy in Iraq. Huge amounts of American treasure and lives paid the price. Four thousand U.S. servicemembers died, and \$2 trillion of our American treasure that could have built our schools, could have built our healthcare system, could have built our infrastructure was wasted because of a big lie told to the American people.

And now we have the Trump administration with this big lie that this was about drugs, when it turns out that it is about regime change and it is about oil.

What bothers me is a lot, but it is the fact that the administration directly lied to the American people and lied in the classified hearings that they held up here on Capitol Hill, saying: Nope, no plans for regime change.

Well, it turns out those plans had been developing over a very significant period of time.

So if it was about drugs, by the way, the President wouldn't have pardoned Juan Orlando Hernandez, a drug kingpin, right in the middle of the process of saying he is trying to stop drugs. Here is a guy who was sitting in our prison because he was the architect of a cocaine superhighway into the United States of America, delivering an estimated 400 tons of cocaine, devastating hundreds of thousands of American families, and Trump busted him out of prison while he was saying he was absolutely trying to stop drugs. You don't send a message about stopping drugs by taking a kingpin and setting him free, and yet that is exactly—exactly—what happened.

And then we have this issue of the administration saying: Hey, this isn't a military operation—no, no, no. It is a judicial operation.

If it is a judicial operation, then what we are talking about is an American indictment supported by an extraterritorial rendition, a fancy term for going abroad and kidnapping the person whom we have an indictment on.

Is that a principle that we abide by in the law? Are we saying: Hey, Canada, if you have an indictment, come to the United States of America and grab an American citizen. We are fine with that.

I say: Hell, no. We don't want any country coming to the United States of America and grabbing people off our streets, and yet that is the principle that Donald Trump just promoted and exemplified to the world: We are going to go kidnap somebody we have an indictment for.

And if it was about an indictment, then it would have ended the moment that he was on the plane being brought to the United States. But it doesn't end—does it?—because we are hearing from the administration that it is about us now running Venezuela.

Obviously, this was a military operation—a military operation not in support of an indictment; a military operation in support of a regime change and in support of taking oil.

That is why my colleague from Virginia is bringing forth the War Powers Resolution—because if it is a military operation, it should go through Congress because our Constitution says so.

If we go back to how the Founders viewed this situation, we can turn to James Madison, who wrote to Thomas Jefferson and said:

The constitution supposes, what the History of all Governments demonstrates, that the Executive is the branch of power most interested in war, and most prone to it. It has accordingly, with studied care, vested the question of war in the Legislature.

That is our Constitution—vested in the legislature because issues of war and peace should never be entrusted to one person. It is too tempting. That is why our Founders put it in the responsibility of this Congress.

So to my colleague from Virginia, thank you for bringing forth this War Powers Resolution.

Under the leadership of the last year, the House and the Senate have failed their article I responsibilities in three very significant ways. First of all, they have not defended the power of the purse placed here with Congress, not the President. Every time the President shuts down a program and says, "It is authorized, it is funded, but I am ending it because it doesn't align with the priorities of the administration," that is an authoritarian statement, breaking our Constitution, and all 100 Senators should be down here on the floor and saying: Hell, no.

We failed.

Second is in oversight. It has now been 4 months that the administration has been preparing their war plan, striking ships in the Eastern Pacific, striking boats in the Caribbean. Not a single oversight hearing—not one. That is our responsibility, and we failed it.

And now we are failing on the third key provision, which is that it is Congress that carries the responsibility for declaring war or authorizing war, not the President.

So this week, due to the resolution being brought forth by my colleague from Virginia Senator Kaine, we have a chance—all 100 of us—to weigh in and correct this failure on this third point and reclaim the responsibilities that we took on when we took the oath of office to become a U.S. Senator. That is our responsibility.

This should pass overwhelmingly to tell the President: no more military action in Venezuela unless Congress provides an authorization for the use of military force.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of my colleague from Virginia's resolution prohibiting the United States from engaging in any further military operations in Venezuela. And I want to begin by asking a simple question: Have we learned nothing?

Nicolas Maduro is, without a doubt, a horrendous and illegitimate dictator. He lost the 2024 Venezuelan Presidential election, but through fraud and force he stayed in power. He is a known drug trafficker and has been indicted twice by the Department of Justice on multiple charges of collaborating with drug cartels and smuggling drugs into the United States. And he is a brutal dictator responsible for murder, tor-

ture, and systematic repression of the Venezuelan people.

But the question before us today is not whether Nicolas Maduro is a brutal dictator or not. The question is, Have we learned nothing?

I am so reminded of a similar debate in Congress before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In 2002, as a Member of the House of Representatives, I spoke out against President Bush's intent to invade Iraq. I believed the Bush administration dangerously underestimated the potential consequences of a war with Iraq and did not have a clear path forward after the initial military operation.

And, lo and behold, I was right. And, as a result, thousands of brave service-members died, taxpayers were forced to pay hundreds of billions of dollars, and we got ourselves into a yearslong war that destabilized the entire Middle East.

So, again, I am here to ask the question: Have we learned nothing?

I have those same concerns with President Trump and Venezuela today as I had with President Bush and Iraq.

The U.S. military operation in Venezuela last week was remarkable. There is no doubt our military is the most capable in the world. However, President Trump's concept of a plan for Venezuela and whether the Senate will allow him to drag our country further into conflict is much less clear.

Yes, our military operation to capture Maduro last week was a success, but I would remind my colleagues that the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 was also considered a success. Yet, in both Iraq and Venezuela, the President did not have a clear plan about what would happen next. And that uncertainty today is dangerous and risks leading the United States into an all-out war in Venezuela.

President Trump has openly claimed that the United States would run Venezuela and mused about deploying U.S. military troops to the country—in other words, taking the United States to war.

President Trump and his administration have offered confusing and contradictory claims regarding their intentions. The President has offered multiple reasons for last week's operation: stopping drug trafficking, securing Venezuelan oil, and protecting the Western Hemisphere from our adversaries. Yet Venezuela is not the center of drug trafficking into the United States, and, just last month, Trump pardoned the former President of Honduras, who had been sentenced to 45 years in prison for running his country as a narcostate.

Our economy does not depend on access to Venezuelan oil, but President Trump is after Venezuela's oil to enrich his Big Oil buddies. And, if anything, our adversaries will only feel empowered by President Trump's reckless violations of international law.

Let me be clear: There is no U.S. national interest in Venezuela worth the lives of my constituents in Wisconsin.

Wisconsinites want President Trump to live up to the promise of lowering costs back home, to live up to his promises that he made during his campaign. They do not want him to pull our country into another war that the American people did not choose.

The President does not have the unilateral authority to invade foreign countries, oust their governments, and seize their resources. Under the Constitution of the United States, the power to go to war lies with the people's branch. It is time for Republicans and Democrats in Congress to reassert our constitutional role in authorizing military force when needed and hold President Trump accountable before the United States is engaged in another war that the American people did not choose.

So, again, I ask my colleagues across the aisle: Have we learned nothing? Have we forgotten how dangerous it is for our country and our constituents when Presidents recklessly take us into conflict without a plan to get us out? Have we forgotten the lessons we learned from each of the thousands of Americans killed in Iraq?

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

MR. GALLEGOS. Mr. President, 25 years ago, I made the best decision of my life and became a U.S. marine. I fought in Lima Company 3/25 alongside some of the bravest men I have ever known, and some of my closest friends didn't make it back. Coming home, knowing it was for an illegal war for oil was devastating, and it is still devastating. And now, 20 years later, here we are again at that same crossroads. We cannot blindly go into another illegal war for oil. I know I am not the only one—not the only veteran seeing the parallels: the oil, the regime change, quick declaration of victory without a long-term plan. And we do not want our country to go down this path again.

Of course, we know Venezuela has different geopolitical realities, and this won't go down exactly as what we saw in Iraq. But what is the same is this: Trump's reckless use of military power without a plan for what comes next or respect for the men and women who will be sent to fight this war—will engage in it—is going to cause problems.

He has shown us he could care less about the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are screaming from the rooftops right now not to make this mistake again. If we allow this to continue, I will have to look into the eyes of young men and women in Arizona—working-class kids like everywhere in this country who are disproportionately the ones who serve in our military—and explain what they are risking their lives for.

And I can't because it is for oil.

The American public does not want this. They do not want to be the world police. They don't want their sons and daughters from Florida, from Arizona,

from New Mexico, from New York sent to fight for Big Oil. They don't want another forever war, and that is the slippery slope we are going down right now.

When I talk to people in Arizona, they want their politicians to focus on healthcare, on housing, on work—so kids actually have a job when they graduate college—not these oil companies in Venezuela. That is what Trump campaigned on. But that is what Trump is now saying he is going to do, invest in oil instead of Americans.

Who does this war really benefit? It is clearly not the American people—Trump has done little to help them—but certainly to help Big Oil and to satisfy trigger-happy neocons like Marco Rubio. This is exactly the moment that Marco Rubio has been itching for, and he played Donald Trump like a puppet. Marco Rubio came into the Senate and lied straight to our faces when he said this was not about regime change. That was not true.

And now, it is clear to everyone that regime change was always the goal. That is exactly why I introduced a War Powers Resolution last month—because I knew this moment was coming. The Constitution is clear. Only Congress has the authority to decide when to go to war. Whatever you call this something we are in right now—whatever spin Marco Rubio puts on it—at the end of the day, when people are shooting, it is war. When the President deploys the power of the U.S. military, it is war.

Now, the Trump administration has to answer to what comes next. They must tell us who will govern Venezuela or how this will end. And they just can't do that now.

As a veteran, that terrifies me, and it should terrify you. This is the same trigger-happy neocon logic that dragged us into Iraq, into a forever war killing thousands and thousands of Americans, many of them my friends. And the American people have been clear that we do not want to be in another forever war.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Michigan.

MS. SLOTKIN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the War Powers Resolution. As a Senator from Michigan, as a former CIA officer who served three tours alongside the military in Iraq, I saw conflict up close.

But I think it is important that we put this decision to go into Venezuela in context. It is confusing. President Trump campaigned for nearly 2 years on staying out of foreign wars. That was a huge signature part of his campaign. So why do we find ourselves now “in charge,” in his words, of Venezuela?

Let's put it in context. All fall, the White House has been attacking boats in the Caribbean Sea, in the Pacific, saying that we were at war against drugs and the flow of drugs, even

though no fentanyl is produced in Venezuela. These drugs were cocaine headed towards places like Europe.

Fine, drugs were the reason we were talking about these strikes.

January 3 comes along. U.S. forces entered Venezuela, from what I can tell, in a truly amazing and heroic military operation, captured President Maduro and his wife, and brought them to New York City. Why? Why do we find ourselves doing this?

I think there are really two reasons, one unspoken, one spoken. First and foremost, President Trump is clearly deciding that he wants to distract the public from talking about his domestic failures. Donald Trump, as I said, campaigned on getting out of foreign entanglements. But let's just review. He has launched military action in nine different localities across the world: seven countries, two seas.

We went back and looked. That is the single greatest number of countries with military action that any President has taken in the history of the United States in their first year. So the man who said that he wasn't going to get us involved has done more strikes in more countries than any President and has taken more strikes in this first year than Joe Biden took in the entirety of his Presidency. So the idea that he is trying to keep us out of things is—I think—should be put to bed. He has made himself a foreign policy President.

Why? He doesn't want to talk about his domestic agenda. He doesn't want to talk about his lack of action on the things that actually matter to Americans. Most people did not wake up wondering when we could invade Venezuela, when we could take over Venezuela. Most Americans want him to be attacking—not other countries, but the things that are holding them back from living their best and most free life.

Think about what he promised. On healthcare, our premiums have gone up, for many Americans, doubling and tripling as of January 1; housing prices, up; energy costs, up; jobs, down with cuts, particularly in places like Michigan, in manufacturing. All the things he said he was going to attack, he has ignored. And all the things he has done abroad are for you to think he is a big tough guy, he is Presidential, he is in command of something.

I have three brothers. I grew up in a very active household. If you remember—those of you who got the crap beat out of you the way I did—when your brothers say, “Look over here,” “look over here” and sucker punch you, that is purposeful to distract you. That is what Donald Trump is doing with military action in his first year: “Look over here.” We are talking about Venezuela today and talking about places like Greenland instead of talking about the housing emergency or healthcare emergency. So the unstated goal by the President is to distract you. And please, please, please don't let him do that.

Secondly, the stated goal. The President has been very open. This is not about drugs. It was never about drugs. This is about taking over Venezuela and particularly their oil fields. We used to make fun of the conspiracy theories of George Bush taking over Iraq because of the oil. Donald Trump just admitted it outright. He is happy to brag about the fact that he is taking over the oil fields of another country. The only problem is, if you talk to some of the oil executives, as of this past Saturday, they had zero plan, zero idea.

The administration had no plan for the day after this removal of Maduro. And I have to tell you, as someone who served in places like Iraq, haven't we learned the lesson over and over and over again? This country always tries to get into "limited" military engagements. That is what Kennedy said about Vietnam. That is what Bush said about Iraq and Afghanistan. We may go in with intentions of things being very limited, but the world has a vote on how things go in these other countries, and we do not know where Venezuela is going to go.

Oil companies, despite how they are portrayed in Hollywood, are very conservative. They have to think in 20-year time horizons. They can't make willy-nilly moves. They have to make a profit and think about that over 20 years. It is not a surprise that some of the early plans earlier this week about what the Trump administration was going to have the oil companies do have now fallen by the wayside.

The President has said we are going to throw money at this problem. Now, the President is saying and Marco Rubio is saying we are going to control the oil. "Don't worry. The U.S. Government is going to move that oil into the United States, and we are going to help sell it, and we are going to hopefully make some profit off of that."

The only problem is the oil companies are still extremely, extremely cautious and sort of suspicious of this plan. These plans to invest in Venezuela would involve them investing a ton of money upfront and just hoping that long after Donald Trump leaves, they are going to make a profit. So it is not a surprise that he had no plan and he has no idea where this is going to go.

You don't have to imagine instability in Venezuela. In 2017, we had protests on the ground. Back in the early 2000s, the then-government had to fire or ended up firing 18,000 people in the oil industry because there was a general strike. We have no idea and, certainly, this President has no idea where this is going to go. He had no plan going in, but we are all along for the ride.

I think it is just as important to understand the context as we talk about the legal authority to go into a place like Venezuela. I would say what we all need to be cautious of is this idea that whether you go in trying to do a limited military operation or not, at the

end of the day, it is Americans' sons and daughters from places like Michigan that are called up to create calm, to create stability. You break it; you buy it.

This administration has been very open about the fact that they now believe they own Venezuela. I stand here as a Senator, yes, but also as someone who has seen this movie in other places. I call upon the administration to just be transparent. Just play it straight. Don't try to distract us. Don't try to sucker punch us. Tell us what you are doing in foreign countries, then get back to the work you said you were going to do. Attack healthcare, not Venezuela. Get to the domestic things you promised, and stop leading us around by our noses.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, no regime-change wars.

No regime-change wars.

I heard it from leftists. I heard it from rightwing people. I heard it from BERNIE SANDERS. I heard it from Tulsi Gabbard. I heard it from Donald John Trump: No regime-change wars. And yet here we go again.

Almost 25 years ago, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney cooked up claims of Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction to justify going into Iraq. Last month, just 2 weeks before ordering the capture of Nicolas Maduro, Donald Trump designated fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction. Fentanyl is terrible. It is not a weapon of mass destruction.

It was Donald Rumsfeld all those years ago who falsely claimed there was "bulletproof evidence linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaida." Marco Rubio has spent the past few months accusing Maduro of leading a cartel that even our own DEA doesn't recognize.

Just like the Bush administration insisted earlier on that oil revenue, not American taxpayers, would cover the cost of reconstruction in Iraq, Trump is hoping people will buy the fantasy his incursion into Venezuela will be cost-free. The parallels to Iraq are alarmingly obvious. In fact, according to Trump himself, here is the only way in which the situations are different:

The difference between Iraq and this is that Bush didn't keep the oil. We're going to keep the oil.

"We're going to keep the oil." He could not be any clearer. The Justice Department can dress this up in charges of narcoterrorism. Secretary Rubio can talk about the promise of a better life of Venezuelans as a secondary effect. But Trump is being very explicit about the main goal. It is the oil.

This is the same guy who for 10 years and over three Presidential runs made not getting into wars a central premise of his campaign. It scrambled the political coalitions. It really did. There were a lot of young veterans who came back from Iraq and Afghanistan and

said, "What the hell is the Democratic Party even for if not to be the party of peace?"

It doesn't mean that we are opposed to the use of force in all situations. But as Barack Obama used to say:

I'm not opposed to all wars. I'm just opposed to dumb wars.

We got away from that. Donald Trump seized that opportunity because he saw those young men and women who came home who were injured with physical and mental injuries and who were trying to reintegrate into society, and said: What was all that for? We have to stop regime-change wars.

That is why he beat Hillary Clinton.

But it turns out Trump is basically George W. Bush but with the corruption ratcheted up. How else do you explain the administration's talking to oil companies before the strikes but not to Congress—talking to oil companies before the strikes but not to Congress?

The Gang of 8, not all of us—I understand 535 of us can't be briefed on an ongoing, kinetic, risky military operation. I am an adult here. I don't think we have a right to know—all 535 of us—but there is a thing called the Gang of 8. They are supposed to be trusted with the most sensitive national security information, and they were not trusted with the national security information in realtime. But do you know who was trusted with that national security information, we think? Oil executives. This is not an accusation I am making. This is an assertion that the President is making, which is that they were in on it before the kinetic engagement. There is no reasonable explanation for this.

We all know how this is likely to end, and it will not be good for us. We paid a mighty price for our blunder in Iraq in the thousands of lives lost, trillions of dollars spent, and untold new problems in the region and elsewhere. In response, as a country, we said no more—no more war—but especially not when our fundamental national interests are not at stake. Yet Donald Trump is now knowingly, enthusiastically dragging us into another conflict again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, this is an important debate we are having, and I will give you my view on how all of this works.

Under the Constitution, two things occur: The President of the United States is designated as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, not Congress. So the Commander in Chief is one person, the President. Declaring war is a duty of the Congress. In the case of modern times, it requires 535 people to vote.

The question is, Can you use military force as the Commander in Chief without a declaration of war?

The answer is yes.

There have been five declarations of war in the history of the country: the

Spanish-American War, the Mexican-American War, the War of 1812, World War I, and World War II. Only five times in the history of our Republic has the Congress exercised its responsibility and right to declare war—five times.

Now, does that mean that other actions taken by the Commander in Chief don't exist where there were no declarations of war?

The answer is no. They do exist. We have been able to find 130 examples of a Commander in Chief using military force without a declaration of war by the Congress and also without congressional authorization under the War Powers Act.

One example is in 1989, when President Bush 41 literally invaded the country of Panama. He sent ground forces in, sustaining casualties, to take down Noriega, who was the leader of Panama, who was a drug kingpin. Panama was being used as a drug safe haven when President Bush 41 authorized the military without having congressional approval to go in and take him down—take him out of Panama and put him in an American prison. We used ground forces, and we lost people in that endeavor.

Things like this, President Clinton used and threatened military force to take a military coup in Haiti down and returned power back to the elected leader of Haiti.

I could go on and on and on about how different Presidents have used military force that has sometimes involved casualties without their having congressional approval. So I don't want to hear anybody tell me that this has never been done before. It is actually the norm.

What is odd in America is to declare war by the Congress. The norm is for the Commander in Chief to use military force as he or she deems necessary to protect the national interests.

The 1973 War Powers Act is a congressional statute, not a constitutional provision, that has a series of reporting requirements when military force is used, crescendoing with an approval process by the Congress, and if that approval is not given, the operations must cease.

In my view, it is patently unconstitutional. You are creating, through the War Powers Act, 535 Commanders in Chief. The Members of Congress sit in judgment over the Commander in Chief, and under the War Powers Act, they have a veto under the law. I think that violates the constitutional structure that has been around since the founding of the Republic.

Now, what can Congress do?

If Congress doesn't like a military operation, the Constitution says that it is Congress that appropriates money, not the President. So, for instance, in Venezuela, if you don't want any American boots on the ground, I think you could come forward and pass through the appropriations process a prohibition of funds to be used to have

American ground forces in Venezuela. If you don't like the seizing of the oil for the mutual benefit of Venezuela and the United States, you could say that no money could be used on behalf of the American Government to seize the oil. We would win the day because that is the way you check what you think is an out-of-line action by the President when it comes to using military force. You can do those two things.

What we can't do is substitute our judgment for the decision itself. We can't all sit around up here and say: You know, I don't know if we should use troops here or troops there. I don't like the way this thing is shaping up.

That is chaos.

President Trump is well within his legal rights under article II to use military force to advance the national interest, which is to end the drug trafficking dictatorship of Maduro, which every Republican and Democrat condemned, and President Trump finally did something about it. He was flooding our country with drugs, and it was a safe haven for Hezbollah and other drug cartels. Everybody said he should go. Well, President Trump made those words real. He used military force in the advancement of a national security interest of this country: to stop Venezuela from being a safe haven for drug dealers and international terrorists.

He has a plan to rebuild the country and eventually transition it, through an election, to a new regime. Regime change will come to Venezuela through the ballot box. In the meantime, he is threatening military force to people who want to undercut this effort.

He is taking the oil and selling it and creating an account for the benefit of Venezuela, which is basically out of money. He is telling those people who are holdovers from the regime: I want to work with you to get to where we need to go, which is to rebuild the country and have a free and fair election, but if you don't work with me and you try to undercut what I am doing, then you can meet the same fate as Maduro.

Maduro was an indicted drug guy. He had indictments for being a drug trafficker. The argument is that this operation was to enforce the warrant. It was more of a law enforcement activity because he was the President of the country—not legitimate, by the way, and everybody pretty much denied that he was the legitimate President when he stole the election.

So the bottom line here is—the theory that some of my colleagues are hanging their hats on is that this is legitimate because it is actually a law enforcement function. I respect what you are saying, but I don't agree. This is clearly beyond issuing a warrant. This is clearly beyond using law enforcement power. The game plan is not only to take the indicted leader of the country—who is a horrible person—and put him in jail but to change the country in a way that doesn't threaten

America in the future, in that it will not, in the future, be a drug haven for cocaine to be dumped into our country, and it will not be a safe haven for Hezbollah and other drug cartels.

That is the goal. Well, that is going to take a while. That is not about the warrant; that is about our national security interests.

People ask about “America First.” What does it mean?

Here is what I think it means: “America First” means that we are not going to tolerate—in Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba—countries in our backyard that are run by international drug cartel leaders, who are not legitimate in terms of being elected, to poison this country; that we are going to clean up the drug caliphate in our backyard; and that we are going to use a combination of tools to do that, including military force.

So there will probably be another one of these War Powers Act resolutions. I want to tell my colleagues where I am going to be on that: If you don't like what you see coming about threatening force in the future to have a transition to make Venezuela free and fair and if you don't like taking the assets of the country and selling them to prop up a failing economy, then limit the President's ability to do that by denying funding for those operations. That would be lawful.

The War Powers Act, in my view, is unconstitutional because you are not denying funding; you are basically vetoing the decision of the President to enact a national interest, and the national interest is far beyond taking Maduro down and putting him in jail. It is about transforming the country so we will never live again with Venezuela threatening America by dumping cocaine into our country—killing tens of thousands of people—and being a safe haven for international terrorist groups like Hezbollah. They are aligned with Russia. The goal is to make sure that it never happens again, and that will be a process that involves military force, potentially, and diplomatic engagement.

What the Congress, I fear, is going to do is to limit the President's ability to achieve that national interest by misapplying the War Powers Act—by substituting our judgment for his when it comes to how to change Venezuela.

The bottom line is, if you don't want troops on the ground—right now, there is no need for them—and if you think that is a bad idea, then let's pass an appropriations bill that denies funding for that. If you don't like taking the oil, selling it, and putting the money in an account to get Venezuela back on its feet and to help pay us for the operations, then say through the appropriations process: No money can be spent to do that.

That is within our lane.

The idea that we are going to reject the plan of transforming Venezuela that has been drafted by the Commander in Chief because you don't

agree with it means that he is not the Commander in Chief; we are. So, if a congressional enactment can veto the Constitution, then we are really off script here.

A congressional statute has to give way to the Constitution. The Constitution names the President as the Commander in Chief—only the President. The Constitution says that Congress and only Congress can declare war.

After 250 years, what have we learned?

There have been five declarations of war. They are unusual. There have been over 130 military actions without congressional authorization that have used military force to advance the national interests. That is the norm. The War Powers Act throws that into chaos.

So I look forward to future debates. President Trump has all the constitutional authority he needs to execute the game plan against Venezuela and to advance our national interests.

Again, if you don't like what he is doing, there is a constitutional process available to you, and that is to cut off funding. The other process would be impeachment. If you think he is doing something unlawful under international law, you can impeach him. Those are your two options.

So I will be voting against this idea, and I will be voting against this idea in a new form in perpetuity because I think it creates a constitutional imbalance of where the Congress, over time, becomes the Commander in Chief, not the President, and we cannot run this country having 535 Commanders in Chief.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I think the real danger is that over time, this Congress has conceded and delivered its constitutional responsibilities to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and President Trump and other executives. It is time for Congress to take seriously its responsibilities, including the constitutional responsibility to decide when to declare war.

Here at home, our fellow Americans are facing higher costs for virtually everything: for groceries, for electricity, childcare, healthcare. The list goes on and on. Folks all over the country are working nonstop just to make ends meet.

So you would think that President Trump would be focused on keeping his campaign promise to bring down prices. He said he was going to do that on day one of his administration, but that is not what he is doing. He is doing the opposite.

He and Republicans right here in the Senate and in Congress are actually driving up costs, including healthcare costs across the country. Members of Congress on the Republican side voted against extending tax credits to help middle-class Americans afford their healthcare. In fact, those tax credits

expired at midnight on December 31, and 20 million Americans are seeing their healthcare costs spike.

President Trump is also breaking another promise. He is breaking his promise to keep America from being dragged into costly foreign conflicts. He is not focused on nation building here at home. He is focused on nation building overseas—exactly what he said he did not want to do.

First of all, he bailed out Argentina, and now, he says he is running Venezuela. He says he is in charge of Venezuela. In fact, just this morning, President Trump's Secretary of Energy Chris Wright said the United States would be overseeing the sale of Venezuela's oil production "indefinitely."

Here is a Washington Post story: "U.S. vows to control Venezuela oil sales 'indefinitely'"—Energy Secretary says.

That is what this has been about from the beginning, grabbing and controlling Venezuela's oil for the benefit of Trump's billionaire buddies. That is why Wall Street appears to be drooling at the prospect of making more money in Venezuela.

So I think we should start by pointing out the fact that the Trump administration has been engaged in a long campaign of deception and lies to the American people about the reasons for this adventure in Venezuela.

They lied to the American people when they said this was all about stopping the flow of drugs into the United States. We all support that goal. But that is not what this has been about. If this was about stopping the flow of drugs into our country, the Trump administration would not have proposed big budget cuts to the Drug Enforcement Administration. They would not have shuttered the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force. They shut it down.

President Trump talks about deaths caused by fentanyl in the United States. He is absolutely right about that. What he does not tell the American people is that the fentanyl killing Americans is not originating or even transiting through Venezuela.

And, of course, if President Trump was serious about fighting drugs, he would not, just as he did weeks ago, have pardoned the former Honduran President and notorious drug kingpin Juan Orlando Hernandez.

I should say, even closer to home in December, we learned President Trump also pardoned a Baltimore City drug kingpin whom the DEA called "one of the largest cocaine and heroin dealers to be arrested by the DEA in recent history."

That sends a signal to everybody that Donald Trump is willing to pardon people who have been engaged in poisoning our people.

So this has not been about stopping drugs for Donald Trump. And it certainly wasn't about removing an illegitimate leader—and Maduro is an illegitimate leader—but Donald Trump

cozies up to dictators all over the world.

Of course, yesterday was the fifth anniversary of Donald Trump's efforts to overturn a free and fair election right here in the United States.

The President himself has made clear that this is all about the oil. When he announced the fact that the United States had seized Maduro, he said: "We're going to get back our oil" and "We need total access . . . access to the oil and to other things in their country," meaning other natural resources in Venezuela. He uttered the word "oil" 19 times when he announced the seizure of Maduro.

Indeed, while President Trump did not consult or notify Congress about his plans, as is required, he revealed that "the oil companies were absolutely aware that we were thinking about doing something."

So colleagues, Donald Trump wants to grab the oil, and he wants to do it to help his billionaire buddies. Case in point is Paul Singer. He is the billionaire head of Elliott Investment Management and a Trump megadonor. He recently acquired Citgo, the U.S.-based subsidiary of Venezuela's state-run oil company in November 2025, just a few months ago. He acquired it for approximately half the company's estimated value.

Now, according to the Wall Street Journal in an article on January 5:

Now Elliott appears poised to reap the rewards of owning Venezuela's most valuable foreign oil asset. The regime change could lead to an increase in Venezuelan oil production, which would likely provide cheap feedstock to Citgo's Gulf Coast refineries and increase the company's value, analysts and refining experts said.

So a huge win for one of President Trump's biggest donors.

Now, I think we all need to acknowledge and salute our troops who took part in this operation. They performed magnificently, flawlessly, bravely. I want to thank them on behalf of my fellow Marylanders.

But it is also outrageous that President Trump would put the lives of American service men and women at risk to grab Venezuela's oil to enrich his friends on Wall Street. At least six of our American service men and women were wounded, approximately 80 Venezuelans were killed in this operation, including civilians, not to mention the over 100 people who were on those boats over the last couple of months who had been killed.

And while the Trump administration and congressional Republicans attempt to bask in the euphoria of Maduro's removal, the hangover of running Venezuela is still to come. In fact, it has started.

In recent remarks on Venezuela's future after Maduro's capture, President Trump said:

You know, rebuilding there and regime change, anything you want to call it, is better than what you have right now. Can't get any worse.

Well, actually, colleagues, it can, and we have seen it before; two decades in

Afghanistan, years in Iraq stand as a warning: The United States spilled blood and treasure on state-building fantasies that failed, undermined American interests, and left a more fractured and unstable region in their wake.

The United States has no mandate to decide Venezuela's future. That is up to the Venezuelan people, not to be imposed through U.S. military regime change efforts that are really motivated by oil company interests and not to be dictated by threats of occupation.

This time, President Trump has co-opted the U.S. military in service of those goals, benefiting oil companies and his billionaire buddies. And in doing so, he has charted a dangerous playbook that they say they may employ elsewhere.

As we all know, since seizing Maduro, President Trump has threatened further action against Cuba, Colombia, and Greenland. After being asked about an operation in Greenland, which he has threatened several times with invasion since beginning his term, he said—President Trump said:

We need Greenland.

Just yesterday, the White House confirmed in a statement that they are discussing “a range of options” to acquire Greenland, not excluding military force.

When asked about a U.S. operation against Colombia, President Trump said:

It sounds good to me.

Look, what we have seen is President Trump resurrecting a policy from a by-gone era, one which would be better left in the dustbin of history, the Monroe Doctrine.

That was encapsulated in his recent press conference as well when he said that “American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again.”

What he means by that is that he will deploy U.S. forces wherever he wants for whatever purpose he wants—and, again, trying to leave Congress out of the equation. You know, you listen to our Republican colleagues here who apparently just want to give the Executive a blank check.

If you look at the National Security Strategy that the Trump administration unveiled a few weeks back, you will see how serious a change their proposal is because it essentially throws overboard the idea that the United States will employ a foreign policy based on values and principles, that we will support a rules-based order, human rights, freedom, and democracy.

However imperfectly we have done that—and we have been far from perfect—that has been one of the guiding lights for U.S. foreign policy. And when you throw that overboard in favor of this new policy, which says we will essentially reassert a dominance in the Western Hemisphere, it is clearly a signal to others around the world—or at least this is the way they will hear it—

that they get free rein in their neighborhoods, which explains why President Trump has been so weak when it comes to negotiating with Vladimir Putin over Ukraine.

We can explain it when we understand that when Donald Trump says “Ukraine is your neighborhood,” you, Vladimir Putin, get to do what you want in Ukraine. So he invites Vladimir Putin to a summit in Alaska, thinks he is going to sweet talk Putin. As soon as the summit is over, Russia and Putin escalate their attacks against Ukraine.

Maybe in Donald Trump's mind it is like: Well, you know, Ukraine is in your neighborhood, none of my business. That is a very dangerous signal to send.

Of course, President Xi—I mean he is looking at Taiwan 90 miles away and saying: Well, that is in my neighborhood.

So Donald Trump has unleashed this idea that we are going to focus only on the Western Hemisphere—or mostly on the Western Hemisphere—and that we are essentially going to live by the rule that might is right. When you unleash that idea around the world, other significant powers will listen and it will make the world a lot more dangerous and it will undermine American interests.

So I do want to close where I started, which is instead of engaging in these costly foreign adventures that cost billions of dollars and put American lives at risk, we should be doing what Candidate Trump said he was going to do, which is focus on making sure we improve the lives of American people right here at home.

That is not what the President is doing. That is what we should be doing, and we should start by saying no to this foreign, illegal adventure by supporting Senator Kaine's resolution.

And then we should get about making sure that we work to bring costs down here in the United States, including, after the House passes later this week, legislation to restore those tax credits that help people afford their healthcare. We should take that up in the Senate and get it passed.

Let's focus on helping the American people here at home rather than putting Americans and their lives at risk in costly foreign adventures to get our hands on Venezuela's oil for the benefit of Donald Trump's donors and billionaire buddies.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Maryland for his wise words. I was glad to be here for the end of his remarks because he is right about this moment that we are facing.

Donald Trump has painted himself as the peace President since 2016, promising that “we will stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about.”

In 2024, he said that “I'm not going to start wars, I'm going to stop wars.”

One year into Donald Trump's second term, we know how false those promises were. Just in the last 12 months, President Trump has ordered military action against seven countries, blown up alleged drug boats in the Caribbean without any authorization, deployed Federal troops to at least 10 cities in the United States of America, all without congressional authorization.

Now, he has bombed and invaded Venezuela to capture its dictator, Nicolas Maduro. I have said over and over again, for years, how illegitimate Maduro was as President of Venezuela, and that is not up for debate.

And by the way, it is also not up for debate what an excellent job the U.S. military did in its effort to get him out of there. It was extraordinary to learn exactly what they went through to get there. They did their job. They did their job. They did it excellently.

And now Congress has the responsibility to do our job here. As we meet here today, President Trump is blocking Venezuela's ports from exporting oil while threatening to collapse their economy and also to threaten future military strikes against the country if they don't comply with his will.

Despite what the President claimed on the campaign trail, war and threats of future wars with Colombia, with Cuba, with Mexico, and even our NATO ally Denmark, when it comes to Greenland, are now animating features of his foreign policy.

The President's team claims their operation to oust Maduro was a “law enforcement” operation about drugs. That is the legal pretext for the action that they have led, but Maduro is now in jail in New York City and 15,000 U.S. troops and an American armada are still hovering off Venezuela's coast.

We already captured Maduro. He is in jail. So what are our troops doing down there? Clearly, this is not about law enforcement. This is not about democracy. No, as my colleague from Maryland was saying, this is about oil. The President has made that painfully clear.

President Trump mentioned oil 20 times in his January 3 press conference after Maduro was captured. He complained that Venezuela “stole” oil from the United States, and we must “run” the country to take the oil back.

But the United States doesn't need the oil. Even U.S. oil companies didn't want this invasion, nor did these U.S. companies ever own oil or own land in Venezuela. The Venezuelan Government definitely nationalized its oil industry in the seventies. That is true. From that point forward—by the way, that was when I was about 6. I am so old.

But that did happen in the seventies when I was about 6. From that point forward, Venezuela was certainly not an easy place to do business. I don't think anybody here would say that, but American companies stayed, stayed

there despite the nationalization and lack of full compensation they should have had that was ordered by international courts.

In fact, American companies never pressed for higher compensation during that initial nationalization. And I would say failing to reimburse American companies is surely outrageous, but a decades-old legal dispute over a compensation is not a legitimate justification for the United States to go to war. And very few Americans—very few Americans—would support putting boots on the ground to secure Venezuela's oil.

It would be shockingly irresponsible for the President to send American troops to "run" Venezuela as he promised this weekend, seemingly, with the sole goal of accessing that country's oil.

Bolivia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Mexico, Angola, Peru, and countless other countries have nationalized some American oil assets in the 21st and 20th centuries. All of them took advantage of American companies.

Would the Trump administration have us invade and occupy and govern all these countries to reverse that history? Would the President wield our military as tax-funded security for the expansion of American oil giants in these markets?

Remarkably, incredibly, this seems to be his plan. President Trump has floated sending American troops to secure U.S. companies to rebuild Venezuela's oil infrastructure. He has even said the U.S. Government could subsidize these oil companies. Estimates suggest it will cost a staggering \$110 billion to bring Venezuela's oil and gas infrastructure back to peak production levels and take at least a decade.

I, for one, can think of a lot better uses for that money. And instead of "no new wars," this President has plunged us into a quagmire—paid for by the American taxpayer—seemingly, with the primary goal of giving expensive handouts with respect to oil.

Why should the American people foot the bill for this misadventure? Why should our tax dollars fund private interests in Venezuela? Why should American troops risk their lives for any of this? Perhaps the greatest irony is that Chevron, America's only remaining major oil company in Venezuela, was not even asking for any of this to happen. Instead they simply asked the Trump administration, as they had the Biden administration, to allow their continued operation in Venezuela, which President Trump had restricted during his first term.

Other American oil firms weren't asking for this either. Few have much desire to go back into Venezuela, which helps explain why Chevron and other American companies have no plans—no plans—to spend, as the President says, "billions and billions of dollars" rebuilding Venezuela's oil industry as the President has declared.

Despite the President's promises to not start new wars nor pursue regime

change operations abroad, today there are 15,000 brave U.S. troops and an American armada off of Venezuela's coast all without congressional authorization. And the President is threatening more attacks on more countries, including every time you turn the TV on, it is another country: Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Greenland, part of Denmark, a NATO ally.

Congress has not authorized any of these dangerous potential operations which risk destroying alliances and relationships that have long kept the American people safe. The Trump administration, however, continues to trample on our Constitution with unauthorized military actions while threatening others, weakening U.S. democracy, and making the world more dangerous in the process.

Congress cannot allow this to stand. I congratulate the Senator from Virginia for his leadership to make sure the American people's voices are heard in this moment, on this floor, in this Chamber. We must reassert our role to prevent the President from his continued irresponsible conduct.

And I think it is really important for us, as I have heard the Senator from Virginia say—it is critically important for us to hold public oversight hearings in which the administration explains to the American people what they plan to do with the thousands of U.S. troops off Venezuela's coast, with their plan to "run" Venezuela, and with the regime in Caracas over which they now claim to have control.

The unusual thing about where we are right now is this is not some after-action report where kinetic activities is already done and now Congress is complaining that it hasn't been brought into the loop. Fifteen thousand troops are off the coast of Venezuela today. The administration should be here today explaining to the American people what the plan is for those troops.

And if it is, in fact, to secure oil assets for the United States of America in Venezuela, which I don't believe the American people will support, I know the American people will never support putting boots on the ground. The President said I don't mind using the words "boots on the ground." I think the American people will mind it.

With so many troops and assets still in the region, this is the opportunity for Congress to help determine what our path forward is going to be in our backyard, right here in this hemisphere.

The American people did not vote to send U.S. troops on President Trump's project to Venezuela, but I don't think they voted to dominate the Western Hemisphere either, which is what President Trump says his overall mission is.

And as my colleague from Maryland said, he is willing to twist the Monroe Doctrine. He is not even following it. He is twisting the Monroe Doctrine, which the United States actually used

to keep colonial powers out of our hemisphere, to justify his own colonial intentions to exploit Venezuelan oil.

That is a complete inversion of what the Monroe Doctrine is. So I guess the President has rightly amended it to call it the "Donroe" version of the Monroe Doctrine. But in any case, it is gunboat diplomacy, a 19th century foreign policy we have not seen on this scale since President McKinley was the President of the United States. And it will normalize a world in which "might means right," as the White House is saying today, doing away with the rules-based international order that we helped build, that has served the United States so well since World War II.

All of this would seem to be part of the President's embrace of a "spheres of influence" arrangement with China and with Russia. The President seemed totally fine with allowing China to dominate Asia and Russia to dominate Europe, as long as they let us dominate the Western Hemisphere. That is a 19th century idea if there ever was a 19th century idea.

He clearly sees little reason to compete or constrain them as demonstrated by his willingness to accept the trade deal with China's Xi Jinping that overwhelmingly—overwhelmingly—favored Beijing. He was giving Xi Jinping stuff that he didn't even ask for the minute he was worried that somehow we were going to get cut off from his critical minerals.

But as an unrestrained Chinese Middle Kingdom will inevitably expand outward, as will Russia with its imperial design, history shows us the result will be a global conflict when these ambitions collide, as they inevitably will, a global conflict that ultimately will implicate the United States and put America in danger.

This begins to show you how out of the mainstream this President's view of the world is. His constant abandonment of basic principles of international law and order are, again, going to eventually reverberate against America's national interests. The only question is when.

Indeed, the kind of "spheres of influence" arrangement on which the President seems to be so obsessed or focused is exactly the arrangement that produced two world wars. It is exactly why, after World War II, the United States and our allies established the rules-based order to peacefully resolve conflicts, regulate global trade, and ultimately ensure rules-based international exchange. That order was never perfect.

And the United States often undermined it with our own hubris, particularly the invasion of Iraq—which I opposed. And we need to learn from our own mistakes, including by avoiding reckless new wars like the one President Trump has launched.

Nevertheless, the postwar order that prevented war between the great powers, among the great powers, and for

all its flaws, it largely kept the American people safe. And criticizing that order seems pretty easy, given its imperfections. But the critic's task becomes harder once they are forced to compare it with what came before, the anarchy that preceded the Second World War and what China and Russia offer for the future of this world.

This is what President Trump risks with his 19th century foreign policy, with his actions in Venezuela, his lawless strikes across the Caribbean and Pacific, his threats to invade Colombia, Cuba, Greenland, and Mexico. These actions and threats will have serious implications for U.S. national security today and tomorrow.

In the case of Greenland, the President's threats risk the unity of NATO, our most vital alliance, the most successful alliance in world history. They risk setting precedent for authoritarian regimes all over this world to intervene militarily under the guise of going after leaders accused of criminal conduct or simply to access valuable natural resources or critical technologies under their control.

Donald Trump, President Trump, says he wants to dominate "our hemisphere," he calls it. Surely, China's Xi Jinping wants to dominate what he would describe as his region in Asia, and Vladimir Putin would like to dominate what he sees as his region in Eurasia. President Trump's recklessness risks normalizing such imperial aggression, putting us on a pathway toward a more dangerous world in which "might means right" and the rule of law is abandoned.

Colorado cannot allow this President to create such a world for our children, which is why we need to continue to fight on a bipartisan basis when possible to prevent another forever war in Venezuela or beyond and to constrain the President's dangerous, dangerous ambition because our country deserves better than this administration's recklessness and our children surely do as well.

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today, and I hope this will be a moment when we come together and fulfill the demands that our Constitution requires of the people fortunate enough to serve in this body.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Colorado, and I want to thank my colleague from Virginia for their leadership on what is the very important question before the U.S. Senate.

In the weeks and months leading up to the capture of Nicolas Maduro, President Trump sent 15,000 U.S. military personnel to the Caribbean and Venezuela, that included Special Forces, Marines, and specialized units from all of our branches of government. He sent 13 warships to the Caribbean, including the USS *Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group, and several am-

phibious assault ships. More than 100 advanced combat aircraft were deployed, including F-35s from the Vermont National Guard. And we can estimate that thousands of military and intelligence personnel were involved in planning and executing the raid that seized Maduro.

A mobilization of this size costs hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions. This operation is, and apparently always has been, about one thing: seizing control of Venezuela's oil. President Trump and his closest advisers have made that clear. It is about President Trump using the power that he has as President, without restraint, to get the oil that he wants.

This is not my assertion. These are President Trump's words:

We built Venezuela's oil industry with American talent, drive and skill, and the socialist regime stole it from us . . .

It was the greatest theft in the history of America. They took . . . away from us.

We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure, the oil infrastructure and start making money for the country. We will be selling large amounts of oil to other countries.

I think it is a fair question. If that is the President's goal, what is in it for farmers in Vermont? Small business owners in Ohio? For the elementary school teacher in Texas? For a truck mechanic in South Dakota? There is absolutely nothing in it for everyday Americans. And we spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a mission that can only benefit the oil industry who didn't even ask that this be done in the first place.

So what about this operation is "America First"? It might be "Trump First" or it might be "Chevron First," but it is not "America First." And we just saw the revelation that a major donor to President Trump bought at bargain basement prices a Chevron subsidiary and can stand to make literally billions of dollars. Should our foreign policy be about pure profits, as opposed to pure benefit for the American people? About profits that go to big corporations and to the President's friends? That is what is going on here.

There is no limit. Within hours of Maduro's capture, President Trump was threatening Greenland; they have minerals. Colombia, they have resources as well. Cuba and Mexico. Is this the world that will work for us or the world that we want where rather than acting as a defender—actually the leader—in maintaining long-established principles of national sovereignty, we threaten and invade countries to seize their natural resources? That is the way it was before 1945: "Might makes right." That is a dangerous world. And is that the world that the United States wants to leave to future generations?

There are two questions before the Senate. One is a policy debate, the wisdom of this attack on Venezuela. There is no dispute about the evil of Maduro.

None. There is enormous respect and appreciation for the professionalism, the bravery of our military that did something that, frankly, seems impossible. But in service of what? This is an extraordinary military victory, but it is in service of a neocon dream. We saw this in Libya. We saw this in Iraq. We saw this in Afghanistan.

President Trump is now saying we are going to "run the country." And President Trump is heralding that Maduro is in jail in Manhattan. We all are. But left behind in Venezuela is every structure that Maduro put in place. His hand-picked Vice President is now the leader. His repressive, brutal, murderous Interior Minister is still in charge. So, yes, Maduro is gone, but everything he built remains behind. What kind of victory is that?

The second question—and I thank Senator Kaine for being the leader on this—is one that every person who serves in the U.S. Senate has to answer: Will we do our job? This is not optional. Article I of the U.S. Constitution says it is up to Congress to authorize the use of military force in going to war. It is our job, and it is our responsibility. And one of the enormous threats to our democracy right now is the capitulation of too many Members of the House and too many Members of the Senate of powers that are vested in this body, under the Constitution, in ceding those authorities to the Chief Executive.

Why is that wrong? It is wrong because there is wisdom in the Constitution's separation of powers that power cannot be concentrated in one branch of government. And it is as a result of one branch of government ceding its authority and its responsibility to the Executive. We have an obligation to protect our constitutional role, and it is not about us. It is about our country. And what is a greater responsibility than the decision to send men and women into combat? That is our job.

And, Senator Kaine, thank you so much for all of your efforts to remind us of our responsibility and to tell us to do our job.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today because the American people are looking at this administration's actions in Venezuela and asking: What is the plan? As someone who worked in national security before coming to Congress, I have been in the situation room for discussions about military operations. I worked on and in both Afghanistan and Iraq, where our country has seen the risk of getting pulled into open-ended commitments trying to run other countries.

And I have seen the importance of always having a plan for the day after, something this administration clearly did not do. So what the American people are seeing from this administration is hubris, but without strategy—a dangerous combination.

Moreover, it seems President Trump is drunk on this hubris. We have now seen Stephen Miller saying that the United States has the right to take Greenland. Secretary Rubio threatened Colombia and Cuba. It appears that President Trump thinks that reverting back to an era of imperialism or “spheres of influence” is the best way to demonstrate power, that just because a military operation was skillfully executed by our brave military personnel without Americans killed, that there are no costs, that a world where “might makes right” benefits American interests.

He is simply wrong. We live in a global world—if anything, an increasingly shrinking world. Borders and oceans no longer protect us against many of the threats we face today, including cyber threats and the changing nature of warfare. The idea that protecting our immediate surroundings will keep the American people safe is a dated, 19th century idea that long ago became irrelevant.

This approach also risks taking our eye off the ball on other critical challenges—like the one posed by China—while opening further feuds with critical allies and partners.

Just look at the letter signed the other day by leaders from Denmark, France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Poland reminding President Trump that Denmark is a treaty ally of the United States and, in doing so, effectively issuing a “hands off” on Greenland.

I have told you I worked in Afghanistan. I worked on a NATO military base alongside military servicemembers from Denmark who were there to be able to protect and defend us with the work we do. I was there as part of that NATO mission that was part of the article 5 response that was about protecting the United States and supporting us after September 11 in our time of need. Denmark lost many in that fight, and the idea that we are now threatening that nation is shameful.

By staking claim to anything and everything within our so-called sphere, we are risking alienating ourselves from allies and partners, which is, arguably, our greatest strength. Furthermore, this approach of “spheres of influence” and “might makes right” is one that our leading competitors and adversaries—China and Russia—have been asserting themselves. We are using their language. President Trump’s adoption of this approach endorses and advances their world view, a move that could have dangerous global consequences.

How will this administration tell Putin that he does not have the right to assert the same control over its proclaimed sphere of influence or that Xi cannot exercise his will unchecked in the Indo-Pacific, including with respect to Taiwan? The United States should be countering this vision of a world based on spheres of influence

with our own alternative of a stronger global order, not participating in the destruction of the existing one by endorsing Moscow and Beijing’s alternative.

These moves also have costs at home. At his press conference over the weekend, President Trump demonstrated a deep lack of understanding that there is always a cost to our actions. There is the cost for our servicemembers—more than 15,000, at last reports—currently positioned in the Caribbean and focused on the operations in and around Venezuela. Their lives are on the line. They have been taken away from their families.

And there is the cost to the American people. Millions of Americans are about to see their healthcare costs rise exponentially. Why are we conducting military operations in a country that has no direct security threat to the United States when people are about to lose their healthcare?

Even if this administration had a sound foreign policy, it would be essential that Congress assert its authority to speak for the American people. But this administration does not have a sound foreign policy; it has one that is rooted in bluster, built on extortion and extraction, for the President’s own benefit and without the best interests of the American people at heart.

It is for them that we must reassess our authority. It is for them—the American people—that we must be a strong check on this reckless and feckless foreign policy.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. 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.

TRIBUTE TO JO ELLEN DEUTSCH

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary career and service of Jo Ellen Deutsch, who recently retired after a nearly 40-year career focused on ensuring and expanding rights for all Americans.

Jo graduated from Smith College in 1982 with a B.A. in American studies and later received her M.A. from the George Washington University, focused on women’s studies, specializing in public policy and women’s history. Although her activism began long before her college years, Jo jumped immediately into advocacy and public service as she began her professional career.

On Capitol Hill, Jo spent a year as a fellow in Representative Barbara Boxer’s Washington, DC, office. She then joined the Association of Flight Attendants, as their director of government affairs, focusing on passing a ban on smoking in-flight to protect work-

ers and passengers from secondhand smoke. Later, with roles at both the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees and the Commercial Workers International Union, Jo continued her work to support and defend the rights of working men and women across our Nation.

In 2011, Jo joined Freedom to Marry as their Federal director, with the goal of overturning the so-called Defense of Marriage Act which defined marriage as between one man and one woman. Jo, as she did with all her efforts, threw herself wholeheartedly into this fight for equality. She built coalitions—including Mayors for the Freedom to Marry, Young Conservatives for the Freedom to Marry, and the Respect for Marriage Coalition—signaling that there was sustained momentum and progress across our Nation in support of the freedom to marry. She used her deep knowledge of the inner workings of Capitol Hill to build support with a bipartisan coalition of Members in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Jo’s sustained efforts paved the way for change across the Nation.

After 2015’s landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, establishing the freedom to marry across the country, Jo turned her advocacy into sustained mentorship. She established the Deutsch Initiatives Group, sharing her experiences and expertise in lobbying, management, training, and messaging. She later joined the Campaign Legal Center to advocate for critical reforms goals to the laws undergirding our democracy, particularly with regard to campaign finance, ethics, and voting rights laws.

Jo’s landmark work at Freedom to Marry paved the way for legislation I was proud to help author and usher into law in 2022, the Respect for Marriage Act. This act repealed the Defense of Marriage Act and ensured that under Federal law, you were free to marry the person that you love.

And love has always been at the center of Jo’s world. Together with her wife Teresa, they have centered their family in their adopted home of Maryland. After 29 years together, in 2013, they were married with their three children serving as their wedding attendants, an event I was honored to attend.

I am delighted to congratulate my friend Jo on a wonderful and deeply impactful career. The ripples of her determination and advocacy will be felt for generations to come, and I am thrilled to see what the next chapter holds for her, Teresa, and their family.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING NATHAN CLARK

• Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, last month Tennessee lost a great man, community leader, and champion of our State’s military community: Mr. Nathan Clark.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Clark served as a store manager for Lowe's in Clarksville, TN, always looking for ways to give back to the community, including to the brave men and women who serve at Fort Campbell. Over the years, he spearheaded several major improvement projects on the base, including the complete restoration of the Night Stalker Remembrance Trail, which honors the fallen warriors of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; the revitalization of Gabriel Field, the sacred ground honoring the fallen of the 5th Special Forces Group; and the transformation of the Survivor Outreach Services building, a place of solace and support for families who have lost loved ones in service to our Nation.

For his dedicated support for our servicemembers, Mr. Clark was honored with the titles of Tennessee Colonel Aide de Camp, Kentucky Colonel, and Champion of Fort Campbell.

On behalf of all Tennesseans, I extend my heartfelt condolences to Mr. Clark's family, including his wife Marcia and their children Madison, Montgomery, and Callie. While our State has lost a great leader, Mr. Clark's legacy will endure in Clarksville and at Fort Campbell for generations to come.●

RECOGNIZING KINETIC TECHNOLOGIES

• Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, as chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, each week I recognize an outstanding Iowa small business that exemplifies the American entrepreneurial spirit. This week, it is my privilege to honor Kinetic Technologies of Kossuth County, IA, as the Senate Small Business of the Week.

Founded in 2021 by Mark and Betsy Barglof, Kinetic Technologies began as a small custom manufacturing and fabrication shop in Algona, IA. Initially focused on machining, custom tooling, and prototype development, the company quickly earned a reputation for practical, reliable solutions to everyday production challenges. Their early commitment to craftsmanship and problem solving laid the foundation for its evolution into a trusted manufacturing partner.

Under the leadership of founder and president Mark Barglof, an experienced engineer and Small Business Administration-certified veteran business owner, Kinetic accelerated its growth and sharpened its focus. Mark's technical expertise, hands-on industry experience, and the discipline and integrity shaped by his military background helped define the company's culture. His vision guided Kinetic's transition from a traditional fabrication shop to an advanced automation firm built for modern manufacturing needs, supporting greater efficiency. Working alongside him, business manager Betsy Barglof strengthened the company's

operational backbone with a people-centered approach that positioned Kinetic for sustainable growth. Her leadership in business operations, customer relationships, and internal processes has ensured that the company's drive for innovation is matched by stability, reliability, and exemplary service.

Today, Kinetic Technologies is recognized for innovative robotic welding systems and custom automation solutions and is proud to serve as a FANUC Authorized System Integrator. Backed by a dedicated team of 15 employees, the company provides end-to-end services, including design consultation, simulation, custom fixtures and tooling, system installation, and on-site employee training. Whether manufacturers need complete robotic work cells, automated welding solutions, or specialized equipment integration, Kinetic delivers systems engineered to address real production challenges and bring measurable improvement.

Kinetic Technologies also remains deeply committed to its community as a member of the Algona Chamber of Commerce, by supporting a robotics class at the local high school, and through providing job shadowing and internship opportunities for students interested in engineering. The company also partners with the local Future Farmers of America chapter, helping inspire the next generation of skilled professionals.

From its origins as a small fabrication shop to its role as a modern automation integrator, Kinetic Technologies demonstrates how innovation, adaptability, and strong leadership can propel a small business into a nationally respected industry player, shaping a lasting impact on the manufacturing landscape.

It is my honor to recognize Mark and Betsy Barglof and the entire Kinetic Technologies team for their outstanding work and dedication to their community. I look forward to their continued success and wish them the very best in the years ahead.●

RECOGNIZING THE KANSAS CITY, KANSAS, POLICE DEPARTMENT NARCOTICS UNIT AND TASK FORCE OFFICERS

• Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the Kansas City, KS, Police Department Narcotics Unit and Task Force officers for their exemplary service in protecting others from dangerous, illicit substances.

On December 30, 2025, the KCKPD conducted one of the largest drug busts in the city's history, seizing 120 pounds of methamphetamine, 8 firearms, and arresting 4 individuals.

This marked the culmination of a successful year for the Kansas City, KS Police Department, during which officers seized 1,305 pounds of methamphetamine, 3,540 pounds of marijuana, 673 pounds of cocaine, 1.5 pounds of heroin, 30 pounds of powder fentanyl, 12,761 fentanyl pills, 375 firearms, and \$1,224,507.

Under the leadership of Chief Karl Oakman, the KCKPD has adopted an effective approach to responding to the rampant fentanyl epidemic. By responding to every overdose incident, whether fatal or nonfatal, the police department is able to identify and dismantle drug trafficking networks at their source.

As part of the Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas—HIDTA—program, the KCKPD coordinates with Federal, State, local, and Tribal law enforcement partners to combat drug trafficking in critical regions of the United States.

Fentanyl alone has killed tens of thousands of Americans, and it is the leading cause of death for young adults. By seizing these lethal substances, the KCKPD Narcotics Unit and Task Force officers have prevented the deaths of countless individuals. Keeping these drugs off the streets is crucial to public safety, and I commend the police department's commitment to protecting the health of its community.

I now ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the KCKPD Narcotics Unit and Task Force officers for their outstanding service and tireless efforts in combating the flow of deadly drugs into our Nation.●

RECOGNIZING DR. RICK WAITLEY

• Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I rise today with my colleagues Senator MIKE CRAPO, Congressman MIKE SIMPSON, and Congressman RUSS FULCHER to honor Dr. Rick Waitley for his 32 years of dedicated service as the executive director of Leadership Idaho Agriculture, LIA, and more than half a century of advocating for the State's farmers and ranchers.

Founded in 1985, LIA has provided countless Idahoans with hands-on learning and experience to help keep the Gem State's agricultural communities strong. Since taking the reins in 1993, Rick has led the organization to resounding success, overseeing 37 classes and facilitating the graduation of over 1,093 individuals. Many current and former members of the LIA Board of Trustees and other industry leaders credit Rick with influencing their personal and professional journeys. Under Rick's stewardship and vision, LIA has sparked tremendous growth in the number of leaders developed within Idaho's agriculture industry, creating a lasting impact felt throughout the State.

Outside of LIA, Rick's commitment to public service is evident in his creation and involvement with organizations that advance Idaho agriculture, including Food Producers of Idaho, the Idaho Coop Council, Idaho Ag in the Classroom, and the Idaho Ag Summit. As a member of the Food Producers of Idaho, Rick plays an integral role in facilitating meetings during the State's annual legislative session and connecting local farmers and ranchers

with elected officials to discuss issues affecting the industry. Rick's efforts have also opened doors to other crucial initiatives for many aspiring leaders, including State and international exchange tours and the Washington, DC, experience.

Rick's dedication extends beyond his professional life. He is a steadfast partner to his wife Dorita, a father of two daughters, and an active member of the Valley Shepherd Nazarene Church in Meridian.

As Rick assumes his new role as executive director emeritus, we are confident that he will continue to provide invaluable support and guidance as his daughter Kendra Dustin takes the helm as executive director.

On behalf of the people of Idaho, we extend our sincere appreciation to Rick for his dedication and exemplary service to Leadership Idaho Agriculture and to our great State. His legacy will undoubtedly inspire future generations of leaders in Idaho and across the West. Thank you, Rick, for your years of service, and congratulations again on this well-deserved recognition. •

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:59 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has agreed to the following resolution:

H. Res. 975. Resolution that the Clerk of the House inform the Senate that a quorum of the House is present and that the House is ready to proceed with business.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-2405. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-215, "Green Housing Coordination Temporary Amendment Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2406. A communication from the Director, Office of Personnel Management, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled "Agency Financial Report: Fiscal Year 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2407. A communication from the Deputy Director, U.S. Trade and Development Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Agency's Performance and Accountability Report for fiscal year 2025; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2408. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-216, "Food & Friends Property Tax Exemption Temporary Amendment Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2409. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-238, "Private Vehicle-for Hire Operator Clarification Temporary Amend-

ment Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2410. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-237, "Avanti Real Estate Services, LLC Real Property Tax Relief Temporary Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2411. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-218, "Juvenile Curfew Second Temporary Amendment Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2412. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on D.C. Act 26-217, "D.C. Income and Franchise Tax Conformity and Revision Temporary Amendment Act of 2025"; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2413. A communication from the Administrator of the General Services Administration, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Administration's Semiannual Report to Congress for the period from April 1, 2025 through September 30, 2025; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC-2414. A communication from the Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Rescinding Portions of Department of Justice Title VI Regulations to Conform More Closely With the Statutory Text and To Implement Executive Order 14281" (RIN1190-AA83) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 5, 2026; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-2415. A communication from the Acting Deputy Division Chief, Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Weighted Selection Process for Registrants and Petitioners Seeking to File Cap-Subject H-1B Petitions" (RIN1615-AD01) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 5, 2026; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-2416. A communication from the Secretary, Judicial Conference of the United States, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled "Report of the Proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States" for the September 2025 calendar session; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-2417. A communication from the Acting Deputy Division Chief, Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Security Bars and Processing; Confirmation of Effective Date; Partial Withdrawal" ((RIN1615-AC57) (RIN1125-AB08)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 5, 2026; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. GALLEGUO, Mr. BUDD, Mr. TILLIS, Ms. LUMMIS, Mr. HAGERTY, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. SCHMITT, Mr. LANKFORD, and Mr. MULLIN):

S. 3584. A bill to amend the definition of aggravated felony in the Immigration and Nationality Act to include certain serious drunk driving offenses; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. COTTON:

S. 3585. A bill to amend the Federal Power Act to exempt consumer-regulated electric utilities from Federal regulation, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. YOUNG (for himself and Ms. CANTWELL):

S. 3586. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to require small business development centers to assist small business concerns with the use of artificial intelligence, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Mrs. BLACKBURN:

S. 3587. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an exemption from gross income for interest paid to taxpayers by the Internal Revenue Service following an audit or litigation in which the taxpayer prevailed; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, Mr. KAINO, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. FETTERMAN, and Mr. HEINRICH):

S. 3588. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide funding for trained school personnel to administer drugs and devices for emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BANKS (for himself, Ms. HAS-SAN, Mr. CASSIDY, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. YOUNG, and Ms. SMITH):

S. 3589. A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide students with disabilities and their families with access to critical information needed to select the right college and succeed once enrolled; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER (for herself and Mr. CURTIS):

S. 3590. A bill to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to reauthorize the clean water infrastructure resiliency and sustainability program, to amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to reauthorize certain resilience and sustainability programs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. KING (for himself and Mr. BANKS):

S. 3591. A bill to require the Secretary of Labor, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to develop a notice detailing benefits available to veterans, and to require employers to display such notice, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. WYDEN, and Mr. BOOKER):

S. 3592. A bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to parole into the United States certain relatives of current and former members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. MOODY:

S. 3593. A bill to increase the penalties for health care fraud, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. LUJÁN:

S. 3594. A bill to provide additional funds to States for administration of certain nutrition programs; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. BENNET:

S. 3595. A bill to prohibit the use of funds for the deployment of United States military

or intelligence personnel in Venezuela for certain purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 128

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES) was added as a cosponsor of S. 128, a bill to amend the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to require proof of United States citizenship to register an individual to vote in elections for Federal office, and for other purposes.

S. 570

At the request of Mr. KELLY, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 570, a bill to amend the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2014 to establish payment and performance security requirements for projects, and for other purposes.

S. 1281

At the request of Mr. TILLIS, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1281, a bill to establish a new nonimmigrant visa for mobile entertainment workers.

S. 1504

At the request of Mr. CASSIDY, the names of the Senator from Indiana (Mr. YOUNG) and the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. HASSAN) were added as cosponsors of S. 1504, a bill to require the Social Security Administration to make changes to the social security terminology used in the rules, regulation, guidance, or other materials of the Administration.

S. 1552

At the request of Mr. COTTON, the name of the Senator from Michigan (Ms. SLOTKIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1552, a bill to promote and protect from discrimination living organ donors.

S. 1650

At the request of Ms. DUCKWORTH, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1650, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify authorities relating to the collective bargaining of employees in the Veterans Health Administration.

S. 1924

At the request of Mr. KENNEDY, the name of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1924, a bill to add suicide prevention resources to school identification cards.

S. 2106

At the request of Mr. VAN HOLLEN, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2106, a bill to provide a process for granting lawful permanent resident status to aliens from certain countries who meet certain eligibility requirements, and for other purposes.

S. 2858

At the request of Mr. BOOKER, the names of the Senator from Colorado

(Mr. BENNET), the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BANKS), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN) and the Senator from Michigan (Ms. SLOTKIN) were added as cosponsors of S. 2858, a bill to improve research and data collection on stillbirths, and for other purposes.

S. 2918

At the request of Mr. WHITEHOUSE, the names of the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT) and the Senator from Maryland (Ms. ALSO BROOKS) were added as cosponsors of S. 2918, a bill to amend the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act to improve the implementation of the seizure of Russian sovereign assets for the benefit of Ukraine, and for other purposes.

S. 3480

At the request of Mrs. MURRAY, the name of the Senator from Virginia (Mr. Kaine) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3480, a bill to prohibit the Secretary of Health and Human Services from implementing the WISER model under the Medicare program.

S. 3570

At the request of Mr. SCHATZ, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3570, a bill to establish duties for online service providers with respect to end user data that such providers collect and use.

S.J. RES. 98

At the request of Mr. Kaine, the names of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. LUJÁN), the Senator from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN), the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. KIM) and the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH) were added as cosponsors of S.J. Res. 98, a joint resolution to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela that have not been authorized by Congress.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I have two requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority Leaders.

Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today's session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, at 3:00 p.m., to conduct a closed briefing.

CONDEMNING THE RISE IN IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED ATTACKS ON JEWISH INDIVIDUALS IN THE UNITED STATES, INCLUDING THE RECENT VIOLENT ASSAULT IN BOULDER, COLORADO, AND REAFFIRMING THE COMMITMENT OF THE SENATE TO COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

RECOGNIZING THE THIRD COMMEMORATION OF THE ANTI-LGBTQ+ ATTACK THAT OCCURRED ON NOVEMBER 19-20, 2022, AT CLUB Q, AN LGBTQ+ BAR IN COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

COMMENDING CENTENARY COLLEGE OF LOUISIANA ON THE OCCASION OF ITS BICENTENNIAL AND ITS YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE STATE OF LOUISIANA AND THE UNITED STATES

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the applicable committees be discharged and the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following resolutions: S. Res. 288, S. Res. 503, and S. Res. 543.

There being no objection, the committees were discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the resolutions en bloc.

Mr. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the resolutions be agreed to, the preambles be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all en bloc.

The resolutions were agreed to en bloc, as follows:

The resolution (S. Res. 288) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of June 18, 2025, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

The resolution (S. Res. 503) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of November 19, 2025, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

The resolution (S. Res. 543) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of December 11, 2025, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand in recess until 10 a.m., Thursday, January 8; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Senate be in

a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each; further, that Senator Kaine or his designee be recognized to make a motion to discharge S.J. Res. 98, and if made, the Senate vote on the motion to discharge at 11 a.m.; finally, following the vote on the motion to discharge, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of Calendar No. 574, Van Hook, and the Senate execute the order of December 18 in relation to the nomination at 1:45 p.m.

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

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask that it stand in recess under the previous order, following the remarks of my colleagues.

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

The Senator from Rhode Island.

PERMITTING REFORM

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here to give, I guess, an explanation and update to my colleagues about the status of permitting reform.

I think, as you know, the chair and ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the chair and ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee were working on a permitting reform bill until very recently. I have, together with Senator HEINRICH, declared a pause in that permitting reform process, and I want to explain that because the progress had actually been good. We were working toward what I think could have been a very meaningful, very effectual, very bipartisan permitting reform bill. There were fairly new ideas being developed in it—like requiring front-loaded stakeholder engagement so the whole rest of the process, as it goes forward, is accelerated; disciplining the despised-by-me interagency process mechanism that excuses so much executive branch delay and indecision. I was actually pretty pleased with the way the process was going.

Off of Rhode Island, we are developing offshore wind. Our offshore wind project, Revolution Wind, had already weathered one stop work order which came out of the blue from the administration. This was a project then with about \$4 billion of investment already expended and north of 80 percent complete—a lot of turbines fully complete out there.

And that order was without any lawful basis. As a result, the order was challenged in court. And in court, the Federal judge said: You can put that project back to work. The stop work order from President Trump is invalid.

The judge made that decision on September 22. The Trump administration had 60 days to appeal. It did not appeal.

We got to November 21, the last appeal day, no notice of appeal was filed. The matter was settled; work could continue; and everybody was already back at work.

Thirty days later, the 22nd of December, a new stop work order was dropped by the Trump administration with no explanation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the stop work letter of December 22 be printed in the RECORD at the end of my remarks.

So the first stop work attempt by the Trump administration had cited the protection of national security interests of the United States as one of its bases. And, obviously, that was deliberated in court. There were pleadings on that subject. The Trump administration lost. They did not appeal the order finding that they had lost, declaring that they had lost, so that was a settled question.

This second letter goes back and says again, national security risks. It does not identify them. In comments made on FOX News, it has been said that radar interference is the risk. Radar interference was deliberated in the initial permits. Radar interference was deliberated in the stop work order proceedings where the Trump administration lost. So what this looks like is a vindictive attack outside the law and proper due process by the Trump administration.

It is not the only mischief, and I am going to be joined here by Ranking Member HEINRICH to talk about some of the more westerly tricks that the Trump administration has been up to to interfere with clean energy.

But that second stop work order kind of tore it for me—because any negotiation that we would enter into, any good bill that would result from it, would then have to be implemented by this administration; and this administration has been found to have illegally stopped work on this project, did not appeal that finding, and then came up with a new stop work order 30 days later. If that is not vindictive harassment without legal basis, I don't know what is.

It is in litigation right now. With any luck, it will be stopped again, and they can go back to work again. And—who knows—maybe there will be a third imaginary stop work order that drops. But in an environment like that, where the executive branch refuses its constitutional duty to faithfully execute the laws, it doesn't make any sense for us to continue negotiations on a major bipartisan bill.

I want to say, in particular, that Chair CAPITO has been helpful, thoughtful, a good partner. All the Environment and Public Works Committee Republicans have been helpful and thoughtful. There is literally zero blame for this to land on the other side of the aisle in the Senate. This is entirely a legislative versus executive problem of an executive branch—a rogue executive branch—that refuses

to faithfully execute the laws, notwithstanding its constitutional duty.

It is so bad that the three major miscreants in this process—Zeldin, Burgum, and Wright—have gone on a campaign of falsehood about the cost of offshore wind. Here are some of the things that they have been saying. Secretary Burgum said that “intermittent, highly expensive wind is bad.” “Highly expensive,” he called it. He then tweeted:

Offshore wind is one of the most expensive . . . schemes ever pushed upon American taxpayers.

He said:

Offshore wind forces consumers and taxpayers to pay CONSIDERABLY more for electricity.

He said that “blue State offshore wind policies . . . lock in high prices.”

Zeldin criticized the economic impacts of wind.

Wright said that “wind and solar brings us . . . less reliable energy delivery and higher electric bills.”

So all three of them have falsely asserted that offshore wind will raise electric bills.

In court proceedings, where you actually need to tell the truth—as opposed to in tweets and talk shows—the story that emerges is exactly the opposite. In the Rhode Island and Connecticut sworn complaint, we alleged that Revolution Wind, the project off our shores, “will . . . yield substantial cost savings to the States’ ratepayers.”

[S]avings to ratepayers—

the pleading continues—

are estimated to be hundreds of millions of dollars over 20 years.

The September complaint brought in the Federal court by Orsted—again, a court filing—pled that long-term contract prices “are expected to act as a successful hedge against rising electricity rates,” projected to save ratepayers “hundreds of millions of dollars.”

In January—just now—in the litigation about the second stop work order, an affidavit was filed that swore that Revolution Wind would be a new source of low marginal cost power in New England; that “once operational, Revolution Wind alone will provide hundreds of millions of dollars each year in energy bill savings to New England.”

The ISO, the grid operator, specified that during a specific cold snap, from December 24, 2017, to January 8, 2018—what is that?—2 weeks, basically—had this offshore wind been online during that period, it would have “lowered regional electricity production costs by \$80–95 million” over those 2 weeks, “resulting in an \$11–13 per megawatt-hour reduction” in what the grid charged ratepayers.

Revolution Wind has cleared in the New England capacity market, and if it were to fail, it would require increases in electricity rates in New England of hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

Over and over again, when people who know what they are talking about

have to say in court pleadings, where they have an obligation to tell the truth, what the cost effect of Revolution Wind will be, they talk about cost savings of hundreds of millions of dollars. And that is confirmed across the country by grid operators. You can go to any grid, and you can see pretty much the same thing. They call up power units by cost. They call up the least expensive power units first, for obvious reasons, and wind and solar tend to be the low marginal cost units. They are the ones that are called up first.

So the allegations made in court of savings to ratepayers are backstopped by the actual economic practice of our electric grids.

So back to Zeldin, Burgum, and Wright. If they are conspicuously and consistently failing to tell the truth about savings, specifically misleading the public, telling them fossil fuel is cheaper when it isn't, what does that tell you about their motives and their bias and inability to faithfully execute the laws?

It tells me that there is really no point in passing a bipartisan bill, which would be a really good one, because we wouldn't get the benefit of the bill. They would just continue with illegal acts and false statements—anything to help fossil fuel.

It is not just Revolution Wind. Dominion Wind is set to lower consumer power prices in Virginia, once it is operational, and it is, too, now under a stop work order.

I want to resume. I want to get back to work. I want to do this permitting reform bill. In order to get there, I am going to need some help. The artificial intelligence folks, the crypto folks, the data system folks who need massive amounts of electrons, you all need to start showing up and letting people know that you actually want permitting reform, and you actually want an administrative and regulatory process in which electrons are treated fairly, irrespective of source, so you can get the power that you need. That is where we need to go.

If you want permitting reform, don't come to me. I am not the problem. Don't come to Democrats in the Senate. We are eager to do permitting reform. Don't bother Chairman CAPITO and the Republicans. They are ready to go too. Leader THUNE has been very supportive of our effort.

The problem isn't in the Senate. The problem is in the White House and in Environment and Public Works, Energy, and Interior. They are simply not executing the laws fairly, and the bias and injustice and illegality they have already demonstrated have got to stop if we are going to go forward.

It ain't just this bill that has to come through EPW and go through the Congress. There is also a highway bill coming. There is a water resources bill for the Army Corps bill. Are we really going to have to stop work on those big bipartisan bills because we can't trust

the Trump administration to implement them according to law?

Something has to give here, and nobody has done anything wrong in this building. All of the problems are in illegal, false, unfair, and biased enforcement of what should be faithful execution of the laws. That is where we are.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY
MANAGEMENT,
Director's Order, December 22, 2025.

Rob Keiser,
Head of Asset Management, Orsted North America Inc., Boston, MA, College Park, MD.

DEAR MR. KEISER: The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is issuing this Director's Order to Revolution Wind, LLC, pursuant to 30 C.F.R. § 585.417(b), to suspend all ongoing activities related to the Revolution Wind Project on the Outer Continental Shelf for the next 90 days for reasons of national security. During this time, BOEM will coordinate with you to determine whether the national security threats posed by this project can be adequately mitigated.

In November 2025, the Department of War (DoW) completed an additional assessment regarding the national security implications of offshore wind projects, and provided senior leadership at the Department of the Interior with new classified information, including the rapid evolution of relevant adversary technologies and the resulting direct impacts to national security from offshore wind projects. These impacts are heightened by the projects' sensitive location on the East Coast and the potential to cause serious, immediate, and irreparable harm to our great nation.

Based on BOEM's initial review of this classified information, the particularized harm posed by this project can only be feasibly averted by suspension of on-lease activities. In coordination with DoW, BOEM will determine whether the national security threats relating to this project can be mitigated and invites you to meet and confer about that possibility. Given the construction status of this project, BOEM will consider all feasible mitigation measures before making a decision as to whether the project must be cancelled.

Finally, while BOEM and DoW endeavor to reach a determination on feasible mitigation measures within 90 days following the date of this letter, BOEM may further extend the 90 day suspension period based on the status of those discussions. Even though all ongoing activities at this project are suspended, you may perform any activities that are necessary to respond to emergency situations and/or to prevent impacts to health, safety, and the environment over the next 90 days and during any subsequent extensions.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you quickly.

Sincerely,

MATTHEW N. GIACONA,
Acting Director.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

PERMITTING REFORM

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I am here today to join my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE in talking about permitting reform.

I want to start with a story from my home State of New Mexico. Right now,

across my State and Arizona, hundreds of workers are putting the finishing touches on a 3.5-gigawatt wind farm and a 550-mile transmission line.

For context, 3.5 gigawatts is roughly the equivalent of 3½ nuclear reactors. This project is literally the largest clean energy project in North American history, bigger than the Hoover Dam. That is pretty unbelievable.

But what is even more unbelievable is that the permitting process for that transmission line and that generation started over 17 years ago, and the project is being energized, as we speak. Think about that. It took nearly two decades to get the permits needed to build the project. That is 17 years of redtape. That is 17 years without the jobs this could create; 17 years of lost income, lost local spending, lost tax revenue; 17 years without the energy our Nation needs to grow; and 17 years without the roughly \$20 billion of economic impact on the southwestern part of our country that we are finally seeing—because the reality is that electricity is what powers our communities, our innovation, our economies, and our lives. And electricity has powered this country since the 1880s.

But, right now, we are facing an energy crisis of the Trump administration's own making. First, electricity is becoming prohibitively expensive. While we know that permitting reform will help lower costs, the Trump administration is dismantling the permitting process that we use to build new energy projects and get cheaper electrons on the grid.

Put simply, costs are high. We need reform, and the President is blocking our ability to do just that. It is no secret that, right now, Americans' electric bills are going through the roof. Since Trump took office, electricity prices have risen an average of 13 percent in just a matter of months. That is double digits in well under a year.

Beyond the growing costs, demand is growing too. Grid Strategies, the power sector consulting firm, predicts electricity demand will grow 32 percent by 2030, just 5 years from now. Across New Mexico and the country, people are looking at their bills and asking how they are going to find the money to keep their lights on.

The answer is that Americans need more affordable energy, more electrons on the grid, not less, and they need it now. But we can't build a future using the last century's infrastructure and redtape. We need to set up a system that can reliably get to a yes or a no on a permit in 2 or 3 years, not 10, not 17.

We know that permitting reform can work. Scientists at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory estimate that by 2050, transmission expansion could save \$270 to \$490 billion—billion with a “b.” And for every dollar spent on new transmission, over \$1.50 would be saved in system costs. That is a 150-percent savings margin. That is a deal that is hard to argue with, and it is one of the reasons why I have been such a

strong advocate for Congress taking up bipartisan permitting reform.

But instead of working to get Americans more affordable energy, the Trump administration has been orchestrating a reckless, vindictive assault on new energy projects.

On July 15, the Interior Department began requiring Secretary Burgum's personal review and approval of every single wind and solar project on public lands, not to mention things as trivial as rights of way. What this really turned out to be was a de facto moratorium on new projects, new electrons on the grid. And so far, 22 gigawatts—the equivalent of two New York Cities—of solar, storage, and wind have been stalled because of this new review requirement.

That doesn't even include other actions from the administration. We have seen stalled an additional 116 gigawatts of energy. If we are counting, that is the equivalent of powering 12 New York Cities. Or, to put it bluntly, more than half of all the new power planned to be built in the United States over the next few years is tied up in one way or another.

Let me repeat that. This administration has halted more than half of all the new power planned to be built in the United States, to be brought onto the grid over the next 4 years.

And it gets worse.

President Trump's Department of Energy canceled 26 projects that would make our power grid more reliable. The Department of Energy estimated the

transmission built through these projects would have helped add 35 gigawatts of clean power to the grid over the next 5 years. Now, that is gone too. That is over 17 New York Cities' worth of power that the Trump administration has stalled, canceled, or taken away.

The truth is that permitting reform in this building has not been a partisan issue. It is about building big things again in the United States, providing hard-working Americans, skilled trades union people with affordable energy, growing our economy, and a good job.

But to do any big energy project, you need a permitting system that actually works. Right now, when Americans need more energy than ever before, our permitting system is frozen in place. It definitely isn't going to work if Federal Agencies ignore statutory timelines, stall approvals, issue illegal stop work orders on partially constructed, fully permitted projects, pause leases, and cancel projects that were already under construction.

So what this administration is doing doesn't just undermine one of our cheapest sources of power; it wrecks the trust that is needed with the executive branch to do bipartisan permitting reform. It poisons the well.

Certainty is what is required for developers, for utilities, for consumers to benefit from faster permitting. Any permitting deal is going to have to guarantee that no administration of ei-

ther party can weaponize the permitting process for cheap political points.

By raising electricity prices and killing American jobs, this administration has made it crystal clear that they are not interested in permitting reform or bringing down the price of energy.

The bottom line is this. The Trump administration needs to follow the law. They need to reverse their illegal stop work orders, and they need to start approving legally compliant energy projects—full stop.

Finally, I will say one last thing because something that the Senator from Rhode Island said bears repeating. The challenge to doing permitting reform is not in this building. Oftentimes, the problem of getting to yes is in this building. It is not the chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. It is not the chairwoman of the EPW Committee. It is this administration that is poisoning the well. If we can turn that around, then I think we can all get back to the good work of trying to make our permitting system work for our country and for our economy.

RECESS UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands in recess until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 5:45 p.m., recessed until Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 10 a.m.