Sharla and I join all Montanans in sending our thoughts and prayers to these men and women as they complete their mission.

As Montana's only member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I look forward to working to serve them as honored veterans when they all come home.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DURBIN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, a few days ago, we all counted down the final seconds of 2008. In Israel they had something else to count all through last year. From January until December of 2008, a terrorist group launched more than 3,262 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli cities. These were deliberate acts of violence, provocation, and murder. The group responsible was Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization founded on one principal goal: destroying the state of Israel. Its charter says there is no value to international conferences, political initiatives, or dialogue. It says there is only one approach to the political situation in the Middle East, and that is jihad.

So it was no surprise when the terrorist group Hamas staged an illegal coup against the forces of President Mahmoud Abbas, the legitimate President of the Palestinian people. It was no surprise that Hamas rejected Egyptian and Arabian calls for an extension of the cease-fire Egypt had negotiated.

It was no surprise that when Israel voluntarily and unilaterally dismantled settlements and withdrew from Gaza in 2005 that Hamas saw this not as an opportunity to build peace but to instigate war, to continue to terrorize and kill Israelis in their places of worship, their schools, and their homes.

Since that year, Hamas terrorists have used Gaza to fire more than 6,300 mortars and rockets into Israel, reaching major cities, and pushing ever closer to the capital.

No country would be expected to sit on its hands and simply allow its citizens to endure these kinds of vicious attacks without taking action to stop the responsible party. If I am sitting in New Jersey, and rockets are landing around my house, near my children, and near our schools, my No. 1 goal, my immediate goal, is to stop the rockets. So in December of 2008, Israel sent its military to Gaza to achieve a direct goal: stop the rockets.

And now we all hope strongly that this goal can be achieved as quickly as possible. But we recognize it must be pursued if Israel is to have the sovereign right to protect itself and its citizens. Israel's acts to stop the Hamas rocket attacks are a response to the daily risk of death faced by the 900,000 Israeli citizens who live within rocket range. These innocent civilians have been forced to live constantly under the threat of mass casualties. No nation—no nation—should have to wait for the death toll to rise enough before it can act. No nation needs to wait until enough schoolchildren have fallen victim to a rocket attack before it stops rockets from falling on its cities. The launching of rockets and mortar fire is an invasion of Israel's sovereign territory. It is no different from dropping bombs out of airplanes. It is no different from any other act of war. There is no question that Israel has a right and an obligation to defend its people.

We mourn the loss of all innocent life, and the death of Palestinian civilians as a result of this conflict is tragic. There are a great many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank who completely reject the Hamas ideology. They want to live in peace and build the Palestinian state for themselves and for their children. They are, however, Hamas hostages. Hamas has hijacked Gaza, not to build a state in which you can live in peace and prosperity but to use it as a base to launch attacks against innocent civilians in Israel.

Let us remember it was Hamas that chose to end the cease-fire, Hamas that chose to fire a continuous barrage of rockets. To date, it is Hamas that deliberately uses civilians as human shields and launches its attacks from heavily populated civilian areas, putting them at risk. It is Hamas that has spent its money on rockets rather than on food for the hungry. It is Hamas that would rather focus on the rhetoric that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel than on relief for its own people.

Israel and the United States have proven their commitment to helping innocent civilians in Gaza. In stark contrast to the terrorist group of Hamas, Israel has taken significant steps to prevent civilian casualties. They give warnings of impending attacks, they drop leaflets, and make phone calls to targeted areas to warn the citizens they are in danger, even if that means losing the element of surprise and putting the lives of their own soldiers at risk.

Israel and the United States have actively provided humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Since December 26, 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid have been delivered to Gaza in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, international organizations, and various other donors.

The United States Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, is continuing to deliver humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. The United States has provided medical and food supplies to health care facilities. We support the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other nongovernmental organizations as they continue their relief efforts.

We all want peace in Gaza and hope it can come very soon. But peace cannot be achieved so long as Hamas continues its missile attacks. If a just and lasting cease-fire is to occur, it is incumbent upon Hamas to immediately and permanently halt all attacks against the Israeli people.

I rise today to express unwavering commitment to the welfare, security, and survival of the state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. That is what the resolution before us affirms. As the resolution states, the ultimate goal of the United States is a ''sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that will allow for a viable and independent Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.'' This will not be possible as long as Israeli civilians are under threat from rockets. As this resolution correctly lays out, Hamas must end the rocket and mortar attacks against Israel, recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and agree to accept previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Today, the Senate must stand in support of the state of Israel, stand in support of its right to defend itself against terrorists, stand in support of its right to exist. Having said all of this, of course, we urge Israel as it defends its sovereignty and its people to use every option it can to limit the loss of innocent lives. So let us vote for a resolution that demonstrates our commitment to one of the strongest allies the United States of America has in the world, and let us do all we can to make it a peaceful 2009.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER.) The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS FOR JOINT SESSION OF THE TWO HOUSES

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:46 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair, to reassemble in the Hall of the House of Representatives for a joint session, and at 2:30 p.m. reassembled in the Senate Chamber when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip is recognized.

SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I would like to speak to two subjects. The first deals with a resolution the Senate unanimously adopted this morning.

Mr. President, today the Senate approved a resolution recognizing the right of Israel to defend itself against terrorist attacks from Gaza and reaffirming the United States' strong support for Israel in its battle with Hamas.

The first thing the resolution does is remind people why the State of Israel had to act.

Israel has had to endure more than 6,300 rocket and mortar attacks on its citizens since it fully withdrew from Gaza in 2005. In fact, the town of Sderot, which is about 3 miles from the border of Gaza, has been suffering for over 8 years from these attacks.

Is there any doubt that if the United States were suffering an attack from just across the border similar to what Israel is facing, that we wouldn't react to stop that from happening? I think there is no question that we would act to stop this terrorism, and this resolution expresses the United States' support of Israel's right to defend itself.

The second point the resolution makes is that there is no equivalency between the terrorist actions of Hamas and the defensive actions of Israel. Israel conducts its military operations to spare innocent life. It has specifically targeted Hamas command centers, security installations, rocket-launching sites, weapons stockpiles, and weapons smuggling tunnels. It has tried very hard to avoid civilian casualties. Hamas, on the other hand, deliberately and maliciously fires rockets into civilian areas from civilian areas, thereby making it more difficult for Israel to target the terrorists and increasing the likelihood of civilian casualties when Israel does take action.

Finally, this resolution speaks to calls for a cease-fire. Many voices in the international community have been heard pleading for an immediate cease-fire, although I think it is instructive that one never hears those voices condemning rocket attacks by Hamas terrorists.

I believe the path to a halt in the violence is clear. A cease-fire is appropriate if, and when, it is durable and sustainable. A precipitous cease-fire, on the other hand, that would allow Hamas to rearm and rebuild its support in Gaza is not acceptable. Hamas cannot be given a cease-fire that only serves to provide it breathing room to regroup and then start firing its rockets and missiles again.

By adopting this resolution, we have said to the Israeli people: ''We stand with you, and we support you in defending yourselves against terrorists.''

In short, the resolution expresses strong support for the defense of Israel by its military action today in the Gaza Strip, the fact that it has been repeatedly attacked by Hamas terrorists from the Gaza Strip, and finally decided that the only way to stop those attacks on its citizens was to go into Gaza and try to remove the weapons and the launching sites and to try to arrest the terrorists who were involved in the launching of those rockets.

This resolution expresses strong support for Israel. It reminds us all why Israel was forced to act. It makes the point that there is no equivalency between the action of the Israelis and the terrorist action of Hamas, which deliberately seeks to harm civilians. Finally, it speaks to the question of a cease-fire, noting that the position of the United States is correctly that a cease-fire could only be supported if it is durable and sustainable; in other words, it ensures that the conditions that created the controversy today are not simply repeated another 6 months from now when the Hamas terrorists have had an opportunity to rearm.

I am pleased the Senate has spoken in such a timely fashion on this important issue. I commend my colleagues for supporting the resolution.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, the president-elect spoke to the stimulus package today. The Finance Committee had an informal meeting today to discuss the proposition. Its outlines are still quite vague. There is no specificity to what precisely will go into the stimulus package, but there are some general concepts emerging.

So what I wanted to do today, very briefly, is to outline what I think would be some sensible tests to evaluate what is being proposed, and what it may reveal is that some ideas would not meet these tests and should not be part of a stimulus package. Others would meet the tests and would help to resolve the economic crisis that faces America today.

I think the context we put this in is one in which we have already had some bailouts, and Americans are a little suspicious that some of the money we have committed to these bailouts is going to help—the $200 billion bailout to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the $150 billion bailout of AIG, the insurance company, the $700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program, the recent $17.4 billion auto bailout, and, by the way, the announcement yesterday was that for the first time in the history of the world the budget deficit of a country—namely, the United States of America—will top $1 trillion. That is over 8 percent of our gross domestic product.

A friend of mine reminded me today—I think it is an interesting bit of trivia—$1 trillion is more money than all the cash in circulation in the world today of the United States of America. All the dollar bills, the ten-dollar bills, the hundred-dollar bills, and all of the quarters, nickles, and all of the other cash of the United States does not equal $1 trillion, and that is how much the deficit is going to be for just this current year. That is a lot of money.

In that context, we have to be very careful about how we spend another $1 trillion or thereabouts to stimulate the economy. The money comes from somewhere, and it either comes from taxpayers directly in the form of increased taxes or it is borrowed and the taxpayers eventually have to pay that back with interest. The interest cost, by the way, is expected to be well over $300 billion. So, as a result, we have to be very careful that we do more good than harm by taking this money away from American taxpayers. The first test obviously is, will it work? Will it stimulate economic growth? That is the test that Larry Summers, an adviser to the President-elect, has stated. In fact, he said, and I am paraphrasing, that investments will be chosen strategically on the basis of which will do the most to spur the economy. So if we have tried something before, and it has not worked, it is a good sign that probably we should not do that.

The reason I say that is we had a stimulus already: the so-called tax rebate. We spent $150 billion on it. The facts are now in. It did not work; it did not stimulate the economy. In fact, only about 12 percent of the money turns out to have been spent. The lesson to be learned in a situation like this is, if you have tried something before and it has not worked, then do not repeat it because it is throwing good money after bad.

The reason it did not work is because when people get a one-time windfall, they tend to save it or to pay bills with it. They spend it if they believe that it is a permanent part of their income forever, more so if it is going to relate to their taxes, we need to ensure that they know that they are going to have permanent tax relief. If it is simply something they believe they are going to have for a year or two, chances are they are not going to spend it. It is not going to do any good.

Another test is, would Government action be better in the private sector or the Government sector? We know in America it is small business and some big business. It is our free enterprise system that creates jobs, that creates economic growth. The Government cannot create economic growth.

In fact, when the Government gets involved, there is more potential to do harm than good. We can tax them, we can regulate them. Usually, it does not do them any good. Sometimes you can do things to help business. Usually, you do it in a way that helps with their tax burden. There are some good ideas that I have heard discussed that would, by making it more tax friendly to invest in certain kinds of equipment, for example, or to hire more people, if we knew that would stimulate an economic activity, that those kind of activities would be very useful.

But frequently when we spend Government money, in this case, for example, potentially creating 600,000 new Government jobs, remember we are taking that money out of the private sector, and it is likely to do less good in the public sector than it would if we left it in the private sector.

In fact, a couple of economists with whom we spoke yesterday noted that