

We should pursue initiatives that truly make health care an option for all. Such initiatives should drive down costs by increasing competition and transparency, reforming medical malpractice, making health insurance portable, promoting pooling options for small businesses, and giving States greater flexibility in how they deliver their services.

Dr. Sergio should have better certainty for his business, and all small business people should have better certainty for their future. His employees should have a better health care system, as should all Americans. These are the goals we need to reach.

We should strive for a system that puts individuals squarely in charge of their health care and doesn't discourage Americans from working and improving their earnings. That is the American dream Dr. Sergio's father sought to achieve when he started his business 36 years ago. That is the dream we should pursue. Yet we are hampered in doing that by the onerous regulations, taxes, and stipulations imposed by the health care law passed by one party without any input from the opposing party, and famously labeled as something we would need to learn about after it was passed. That was probably the most telling statement by a Member of Congress—in this case the former majority leader and then-Speaker of the House of Representatives—about something that was shoved down America's throat without any bipartisan support whatsoever.

Now, yes, if it had been read before it was passed, we could have avoided all of this. It could have been debated and people could have looked for a bipartisan way of moving forward to provide health care for the uninsured and to ensure the health care plan they imposed would not have these negative effects. That is what should have happened. It didn't. We now have a chance to rectify that. We have a chance to remedy that. We are waiting for a Supreme Court decision before we go forward with an alternative to what has cost us in terms of jobs and all the costs to small businesses in terms of their ability to grow.

That is a part of the American dream. We have denied that under this health care program, and I am hoping my colleagues will join us as we look to address this very important issue—important not only for the health of the American public but important for the growth of our economy.

Mr. President, with that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold his suggestion?

Mr. COATS. The Senator will be happy to do just that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

PROMOTING UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN THE INDO-ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to talk about an amendment I have filed to the National Defense Authorization Act, amendment No. 1708.

This amendment would require the President to submit a comprehensive strategy within 120 days to promote U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region. This language or similar language was already placed in the House version of the fiscal year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act.

The amendment would assure that the U.S. Government is effectively marshaling resources and employing a whole-of-government approach to implement an effective, multifaceted engagement policy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

This region will be vital to U.S. national interests for generations to come, and the administration's Asia pivot or rebalance policy was intended to reflect that. This is something the administration has talked about for years, this Asia rebalance or Asia pivot. But currently, the administration does not seem to have such a comprehensive strategy or approach that seamlessly incorporates U.S. military, diplomatic, and commercial activities to make the rebalance an effective policy.

In April of 2014, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a report stating that U.S. Government agencies "have not substantially prioritized their resources to increase engagement in the Asia-Pacific region." In fact, if we look at U.S. foreign military assistance, I believe it ranks somewhere around 4 percent of spending. If we look at the Bureaus, this region we are addressing, hopefully through the Asia pivot and rebalance, receives about 1 percent or so of funding, depending on how we measure it. In fact, it is last among the Bureau funding.

Last month, at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced a new initiative that envisions a boost in U.S. military assistance over the next 5 years to enhance maritime security efforts with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. This effort is a welcomed step forward but alone is not enough.

These initiatives cannot take place in a vacuum. Department of Defense efforts need to be more effectively wedded with other efforts of U.S. Government agencies into a coherent and comprehensive strategy of assistance and engagement in the region. In light of the shared threats in the region, this lack of a comprehensive policy sends the wrong message to our allies throughout the region.

The amendment will ensure that Congress is a genuine partner to the administration's effort to implement this important effort. I ask my colleagues to support this amendment.

One of the challenges we have seen going forward, of course, in the Asia-Pacific region is—as we talk about Asia balance, as we talk about a pivot—our day-to-day attention seems to be more and more drawn to the Middle East, rightly so. But our long-term interests lie in Asia and these regions that we are trying to negotiate a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement with. Hopefully, the House will pass trade promotion authority later this week, and we can begin to work in earnest on ideas that represent our commitment through the Asia pivot or Asia rebalance.

I am concerned that we have talked a lot of good talk and we have put together some fancy rhetoric and put a pretty good label on our foreign policy efforts as it relates to the Asia Pacific, but what we haven't done is actually followed through. While I commend Secretary Carter for his efforts and commitment, we can't just stop there. We must make sure we are doing everything we can to grow our opportunities in this region through an Asia pivot or Asia rebalance that truly does need reenergizing.

One of the best ways to help a rising China truly become a great nation is to make sure it is abiding by the norms and standards of acceptable international behavior. We have talked before about the challenges we have—from violations of intellectual property rights and cyber theft. In fact, five PLA officers have been indicted. President Obama has put forward an Executive order listing possible sanctions on cyber threats. We know that if we can start avoiding these kinds of bad behaviors when we start engaging Asia and our neighbors and friends throughout the region, the region we will be dealing with through the Trans-Pacific Partnership—it is my hope we can truly bring this amendment through the National Defense Authorization Act to bring coherence and clarity to the rebalance strategy we have talked about but so far have not been the best in our execution.

COLORADO'S WESTERN SLOPE

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I wish to talk a little bit about what is happening on Colorado's Western Slope this morning.

Several weeks ago, a judge in Denver, CO, ruled that a permit was improperly given to a mine known as the Colowyo mine on the Western Slope in Northwestern Colorado. This lawsuit was brought, I think, some 8 years after this permit was granted. Mine employees number around 220 people on Colorado's Western Slope. It is critical to the region's economy, and it is critical to the economy of Craig, CO. Without these employees and without this mine, it will truly be an economically devastating moment in Western Slope history.

So I hope the Department of the Interior will pay attention to the multiple

letters they have received from our colleague Senator BENNET, from Governor Hickenlooper of Colorado, who have urged this to be taken seriously, to be reconsidered and appealed. It would be economically devastating for these communities to lose 220 jobs. I certainly hope the administration is paying the serious attention to this matter that it deserves.

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

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

The Senator from Arizona.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, we will begin today, and hopefully, with the agreement of my friend from Rhode Island, we will have some amendments, voice votes, and recorded votes today. My colleagues can look forward to it. Also, those who wish to come to the floor to propose amendments, we are still looking at, hopefully, an agreement that the amendments will be closed out by this evening.

Mr. REED. We are fine with that.

THE PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I would like to say a few words here about the fact that apparently President Obama is now going to send hundreds more troops to Iraq. "The President plans to deploy hundreds," according to the media reports, "more American troops to western Anbar Province, POLITICO has learned, to step up training for Iraqi troops who'll be charged with retaking the city of Ramadi and other ground lost to ISIL."

However, American troops still will not go into combat with Iraqi units, to help fight ISIL directly or to call for airstrikes. And defense officials continue to worry about Iraqis' end of the bargain—whether Baghdad can send enough recruits to take advantage of a widened American training pipeline. One U.S. training center, at Al Assad Air Base in western Anbar, hasn't had any Iraqi recruits to train for months.

We are going to send 400 more people, maybe, to staff up their headquarters. I don't know, but when we have a situation where 75 percent of the air combat missions over Iraq and Syria return—75 percent of them—without dropping a weapon, it is so reminiscent of another war at another time many years ago where, under then-Secretary of Defense McNamara, this same kind of strategy prevailed.

I would remind my colleagues of the various statements that have been made by President Obama and others.

January 27, 2014: "Obama Likens ISIS to 'J.V. Team.'"

On August 7, 2014, Mr. Obama said that "the United States had no intention of 'being the Iraqi air force.'"

September 10, 2014:

President Obama authorized a major expansion of the campaign against the Islamic State, saying the United States was recruiting a global coalition to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the militants.

Unfortunately, there is still—the President said I believe the day before yesterday that "we do not yet have a complete strategy" for fighting the Islamic State and that thousands of new fighters were replenishing the ranks of the militant group faster than the coalition could remove them from the fight.

In other words, we are losing.

I would remind my colleagues of the news items today. The Wall Street Journal: "U.S. Strategy in Lebanon Stirs Fears."

Critics say Washington's funding cut for a program in Lebanon to develop alternative Shi'ite political voices to Hezbollah is an effort to appease Iran.

"China military says conducted drills near Taiwan, Philippines."

Chinese warships and aircraft on Wednesday passed through Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines to hold routine planned exercises in the Western Pacific.

The Hill: "U.S. training base in Iraq hasn't seen a new recruit in weeks."

The U.S. mission in Iraq has stalled at one of the five coalition training sites because the central government has not been sending new recruits, according to defense officials.

There is an interesting one in the Wall Street Journal: "Iraqi City of Mosul Transformed a Year After Islamic State Capture."

I remind my colleagues of the many statements made by American officials as well as Iraqis that they were going to retake the city of Mosul very quickly.

In Islamic State's stronghold of Mosul, the extremist group is working day and night to repair roads, manicure gardens and refurbish hotels. Iraq's second-largest city has never looked so good thanks to strict laws enforced by the Sunni militants. But beneath that veneer, the group metes out deadly punishments to those who don't comply with a long list of prohibitions imposed over the year since it took control of Mosul on June 10, 2014, according to interviews with more than a dozen current and former city . . . officials.

Mosul is still almost fully inhabited—a contrast to cities where Iraqi and coalition forces have pushed the Islamic State out.

Doctors, judges, and professors who defied or questioned Islamic State laws have been executed, sometimes by public stoning or crucifixion. Prisons are filled with people awaiting their sentences from the Islamic court.

"Nearly no one gets out alive," one of the residents said.

Then came the attacks on minorities.

"There are many things we do not consider Islamic at all, like the way Christians were treated," said a female doctor from Mosul who is pious and veiled.

"All of Mosul does not accept what has happened to the Christians," said the

woman, who lives in the northern city of Kirkuk. The group's attack on minorities "was a major mistake that cost them our support."

"Suicide bomber attacks tourist site in Luxor, four Egyptians wounded."

"China military conducts drills near Taiwan, Philippines."

"Al-Qaida militants in Libya attack IS after leader killed."

"China exports repression beyond its borders."

"Foreign Policy: Airstrikes Killing Thousands of Islamic State Fighters, but It Just Recruits More."

"The strength of ISIS continues to grow, so they're getting more in from recruits than they are losing through casualties," said Rick Brennan, a former U.S. Army infantry officer who was a civilian adviser to the U.S. military in Iraq. . . . Brennan, now a senior political scientist at the Rand Corp., said he was basing his opinion on intelligence estimates that have been made public.

So the bragging about killing 10,000 ISIS—they forgot to mention that there are more coming in than they are killing—also reminiscent of the days of the Vietnam war where body counts seemed to be the criteria.

"Islamic State keeps firm grip one year after Mosul's fall."

Weak Iraqi forces no closer to reclaiming strategic city.

The New York Times: "ISIS Stages Attacks in Iraq and Libya, Despite U.S. Airstrikes."

Islamic State militants staged attacks near Baghdad and the Libyan city of Surt on Tuesday, underscoring the group's persistent strength on both fronts despite a monthlong American-led air campaign against it in Syria and Iraq.

The Wall Street Journal: "U.S. Prepares Plan to Send Hundreds More Trainers to Iraq," as I talked about.

The Associated Press: "State Dep't spokesman: Saving Iraq could take 3-5 years."

Naturally, there is no mention of Syria.

By the way, they said that they were developing if not a complete strategy—I would like to know the incomplete part of it. I would like to know what strategy there is of any kind.

The Wall Street Journal: "Iraqi City of Mosul Transformed a Year After Islamic State Capture."

I mentioned before that ISIS stage attacks in Iraq and Libya despite U.S. airstrikes.

It goes on and on. Meanwhile, the President of the United States will, according to the media reports, announce today that we will send 400 or so more to Iraq, none of which is accompanied by a strategy, none of which is accompanied by forward air controllers, so we will continue to see 75 percent of the combat missions flown return to base without having discharged their weapons since we have no one on the ground to identify targets. This is incrementalism at its best or worst, depending on how you would describe it.

Today, I hope we will be able to take some additional amendments. We have a managers' package getting prepared,