

hardline Iranian Supreme Leader that aimed to undermine our own President's efforts to negotiate a deal—the agreement is working.

As the International Atomic Energy Agency has documented, Iran has shipped more than 8.5 tons, or 98 percent of its stockpile, of enriched uranium to Russia—enriched uranium that no longer poses a threat for use in a nuclear weapon; disabled more than 12,000 centrifuges used to enrich uranium; poured concrete into the core of a reactor at Arak designed to produce plutonium which can also be used to produce a nuclear weapon; removed all nuclear material from its once-secret nuclear facility at Fordow; and allowed comprehensive ongoing inspection by the IAEA to make sure Iran doesn't cheat.

So, instead of a runaway effort to create the fuel and infrastructure needed to build a nuclear bomb within a few months, Iran's ability to build a nuclear weapon is dramatically disabled.

Its breakout time is at least a year—and any effort to do so would almost certainly be caught quickly by the international community.

And equally important, a breach would make any military action against Iran that much easier for those in the international community to get behind.

As President Obama said earlier this year, the deal effectively “cut off every single path Iran could have used to build a bomb.”

In fact, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon under Prime Minister Netanyahu and harsh critic of diplomacy with Iran recently said that Iran's nuclear program, “has been frozen in light of the deal signed by the world powers and does not constitute an immediate, existential threat for Israel.”

When the nuclear deal was reached last year, I came early to the floor to announce my strong support for this agreement.

I noted that strong countries negotiate with their adversaries and have done so for generations, regardless of who was in the White House at the time, and agreements reached from talking with our enemies have had tremendous benefits to our national security.

The deal with Iran is no different.

Now, I know opponents of the deal, who have spent much of the last year looking for ways to undermine it despite its success, will justify further such efforts by saying Iran's other behavior is problematic.

Well, it is. It was before the nuclear agreement, and it continues to be, whether in Syria or Gaza or Yemen.

Iran continues to repress its own citizens internally, brazenly trying to keep reformers off Iranian election ballots and locking up those who peacefully urge greater freedoms.

But it does those actions without a nuclear weapon.

You see, just as President Kennedy negotiated with the Soviets when they

were threatening possible nuclear war with missiles in Cuba or just as President Nixon began to establish ties with China while it was supplying weapons to the North Koreans who were fighting American soldiers or just as President Reagan negotiated with the Soviet Union even though it was occupying Eastern Europe and fomenting violent revolutions around the world, there are times when such agreements serve our national interests and make the world a somewhat safer place.

This deal with Iran was never about all its genuinely troubling behavior in the region. It was about ending Iran's ability to rapidly or easily make a nuclear bomb.

And that is what it did.

I fully support ongoing efforts to address Iran's ballistic missile program, to halt its support for extremist groups in the region, to forcefully push back on its threats to Israel and other allies in the region.

But these efforts shouldn't be straw men to undermine the nuclear agreement.

And addressing these issues will be far easier without Iran having a nuclear umbrella.

There have been so many decades of mistrust between the United States and Iran.

I myself cannot forget what happened in 1979 when our embassy was seized and more than 60 Americans were held hostage for 444 days. There were mock executions and other inhumane acts. Anyone who is familiar with this story knows the pain these people and their families suffered.

And no one can forget the horrible threats made by some Iranian leaders against the Israeli people or denials of the Holocaust.

Israel has genuine security concerns about Iran. So do I.

But at the end of the day, I believe this agreement is the best way to take one of those concerns—an Iranian nuclear bomb—off the table.

It won't change Iranian behavior overnight, but in the long term, it also has the potential to empower the Iranian moderates—those who want a more open and internationally respected country.

So I want to thank this President and so many of my colleagues here in the Senate who defended this agreement. Quite simply, the dismantling of the Iranian nuclear threat is a remarkable historical achievement.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTINA MULKA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, I want to say a few words about one of my most loyal and reliable aides, Christina Mulka. For nearly a decade, Christina worked in my office, most notably as press secretary and deputy communications director. Later this month, Christina will be moving to Detroit. To say we are going to miss her would be a gross understatement. If you ask my staff, they will tell you

they don't refer to their friend and colleague by her first name. Everyone calls her “Mulka.” There are a lot of Christinas on Capitol Hill, but only one Mulka.

Like many bright young people in Washington, DC, Christina began her career as an intern. In the spring of 2006, I got a call from former Massachusetts Governor and Democratic Presidential candidate—turned college professor—Michael Dukakis. He told me about a student named Christina Mulka at Northeastern University who needed a 6-month internship as part of her co-op program. Internships in my office are never 6 months, but he insisted I give her a chance; and he told me if I did, I wouldn't regret it. Well, 10 years later, he was right.

Not long after Christina's internship ended, I had an opening in my office for a press secretary. Christina was back at Northeastern settling into life as a student. Now, just as internships in my office are never 6 months, press secretaries in my office almost always have a college degree. But just as we did before, we made an exception for Christina—and I hired her before she graduated. She moved back to Washington, DC, and completed her degree while earning a paycheck from the U.S. Senate. It was the second time I made an exception for Christina Mulka. And let me tell you, she didn't disappoint.

For years, Christina served as my on-the-record spokesperson for Illinois media inquiries. Simply put, she had an extraordinary knack for dealing with Illinois reporters. Whenever I wrote an editorial, I could always count on Christina to work diligently to find a newspaper to print it. As many Senate press staffers will tell you, this is no small task. Despite working in Washington, DC, she maintained close connections with Illinois reporters. Every reporter and news outlet felt valued and in the loop because Christina valued everyone. That is who she is. She treated them all the same, big or small. Whether it was Chicago or Springfield, Quincy or Belleville, Carbondale or Mattoon, she truly cared that news outlets throughout Illinois were informed about what was happening in Washington, DC.

Christina worked well with my policy staff to understand the issues. She was always well prepared to promote my priorities, agenda, and ideas to help the people of Illinois. I had such confidence in her that, over time, her portfolio expanded to include many issues that I would list as my top priorities, including tobacco, dietary supplements, for-profit colleges, and the Marketplace Fairness Act.

Let me tell you a story about one of my first memories of Christina. She was staffing me during a round of Illinois TV interviews here in Washington, DC. Opening Day was right around the corner, and a lot of questions were about baseball, specifically the Chicago Cubs. When the interviews were over, she turned to me and apologized for not

prepping me better on the Chicago White Sox. I didn't know it at the time, but Christina is a White Sox fanatic. And during the interviews, she wanted me to steer the conversation away from the Cubs to her team, the Chicago White Sox—what a loyal fan.

Christina hails from Lisle, IL, but her family roots go back to the south side of Chicago, in a neighborhood known as the Back of the Yards—which explains her fierce loyalty to the White Sox. Sports have always played an important role in Christina's life. At Northeastern, she cocaptained the rowing squad and was chosen as the National Scholar Athlete by the Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association. A dean's list honoree and honors program participant, Christina also was a finalist for the Walter Byers Scholarship, the NCAA's highest academic award, recognizing student athletes who promise to be future leaders. Boy, did they get it right. Whatever the next chapter holds for Christina, she will be a leader.

Following Christina's promotion to deputy communications director, I saw her leadership skills flourish. She became a role model and mentor to junior press staff, allowing them to develop professionally just as she had done over the years. It was a pleasure to watch her energy, motivation, and spirit of service rub off on so many others.

In 2013, Christina took on another challenge, enrolling in Georgetown University's master in business administration program. For many, this would distract from their day job, but not Christina. It wasn't uncommon for her to work a full day, go to class for 2 to 3 hours, and be back in the office at 10 p.m., ensuring that nothing was missed. Despite the long hours, juggling work and school, she never missed a beat.

Now, Christina is off to pursue a new adventure. She found herself a great partner in Brad Carroll. Their wedding is in a few months. They are moving back to the Midwest—Detroit will be their new home—closer to her family in the suburbs of Chicago. And I want to thank the whole Mulka family for sharing Christina with our office for the last 10 years—her parents, Diana and Tom, and her younger sister and brother, Stephanie and Nick.

Christina joined this office with a high school diploma, and she is leaving after many years of serving the people of Illinois with a college degree, a graduate degree, and many friends and colleagues who will miss her. I couldn't be happier for her as she moves on to the next chapter in her life with Brad.

I will close with this: While at Northeastern, Christina developed her interest in public service with the help of Michael Dukakis. Recently, at a Northeastern Capitol Hill alumni event, Christina ran into her old mentor. She told him about her engagement and upcoming move to Detroit. His face lit up, and he immediately encouraged her

to run for mayor. I am not surprised. To know Christina Mulka is to expect big things from her. I am proud of the work she has done and will do, but more importantly, I am proud of the person she has become. Congratulations on a job well done, and best of luck.

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

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the compound motion to go to conference on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this motion was 90 to 7, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

The National Defense Authorization Act specifies the budget and expenditures of the Department of Defense. This legislation is essential to support our men and women in uniform and to defend our Nation. I voted in favor of this legislation on final passage in the Senate.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on Senator SHAHEEN's motion to instruct the conferees on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA. This motion to instruct would increase the number of visas for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa, SIV, program. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this legislation/motion was 84 to 12, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa, SIV, program has served an important role in protecting Afghan allies who risk their safety, as well as the safety of their families, in order to help our troops serving in Afghanistan. This program is supported by two former commanders of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, retired Generals McChrystal and Campbell, who both acknowledge how crucial the SIV program is to our national security and to our allies.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on Senator SULLIVAN's motion to instruct conferees on S. 2943, the National Defense Authorization Act. This motion would help implement President Obama's announcement to maintain troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as improve the capacity of the NATO Alliance. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of the motion. The final vote on this legislation-motion was 85 to 12, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

I support this motion to instruct conferees because the proposal would strengthen our fight against ISIS and our security partnership with European allies. Last week, President

Obama announced that the United States will maintain a force of approximately 8,400 U.S. military servicemembers in Afghanistan through 2017. These servicemen and women will continue to train and advise Afghan Forces and conduct counterterrorism operations. In order to maintain the progress that global coalition made against the Taliban during Operation Enduring Freedom and to prevent the spread of ISIS in the region, it is essential to authorize these operations.

As we work to fight terrorism abroad by increasing our efforts to build and lead the international coalition against ISIS, we must also confront the threat that Russia poses. That means we need to increase capacity and operational responsiveness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw this month, President Obama and our allies pledged to increase the capacity of the European Reassurance Initiative. This is essential to deter Russian aggression and ensure that one of our most vital defense alliances is able to respond to evolving threats. The U.S. troops who will participate in the increased rotational presence in Poland represent a necessary response to Russia's increased aggression and provocation in the region.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture on H.R. 5293, the fiscal year 2017 Defense Appropriations Act. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted against invoking cloture, as I did on July 6, 2016. The final vote on this motion was 55 to 42, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

Congress passed a bipartisan agreement, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, which outlines funding levels for 2016 and 2017. Attempts to circumvent the Bipartisan Budget Act are a violation of that agreement.

Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the motion to invoke cloture upon reconsideration on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2577, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations. I missed the vote today because I was attending a funeral. Had I been present, I would have voted against the motion to invoke cloture, as I did on June 28, 2016. The final vote on this motion today was 52 to 44, and my absence did not impact the outcome.

On May 19, 2016, I voted for the Senate version of the 2017 appropriations legislation to fund military construction and the Department of Veterans Affairs when the Senate passed that bill by an overwhelming majority of 89–8. However, this conference report does not reflect the Senate position and instead slashes \$500 million from our military and our veterans when compared to the funding levels included in the bipartisan Senate-passed bill.

This conference report also includes certain policy riders I do not agree with attached to the funding that the