

The United States has free-trade agreements in place with 20 countries. One problem we have had with our agreements is that other countries don't always live up to the text and spirit of the agreement they signed. I will work with the administration to hold our partners accountable in order to improve outcomes for American businesses and consumers, but most important to American businesses and consumers is to get the proper respect for the rules of trade that come as a result of the WTO.

In short, the Finance Committee has its work cut out for it and for us on the committee next year. International trade is a force for good. Farmers and businesses in Iowa and across the country have benefited tremendously from international trade and are better off because they can sell their products around the world. I am committed to making sure they have access to open markets with the guarantees of fair treatment and enforceable protections.

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I now would like to go to a final set of remarks—probably the final set of remarks for this Congress as we draw to a close—to summarize some of the work of the Judiciary Committee, as I have been chairman for the last 4 years.

I have served on the Judiciary Committee for each of my 38 years in the Senate. Four years ago, I became chairman. Senator LEAHY, my colleague from Vermont, who served as chairman before I took the reins, marked the occasion by presenting me with a larger than life gavel. Of course, that was a lighthearted moment, and I appreciated his gesture of good will and collegiality. It is this spirit of camaraderie that sustains the Senate and has guided the bipartisan accomplishments of the Judiciary Committee.

The work we do on the Judiciary Committee shapes our way of life in America to a great extent. Its legislative jurisdiction includes constitutional amendments, bankruptcy laws, civil liberties, immigration, patents, copyrights and trademarks, antitrust laws, juvenile justice, criminal laws, and more. The committee conducts oversight of the Justice Department, including the FBI and sections of the Homeland Security Department. It also handles consideration of judicial nominees.

As chairman, I put forth a number of legislative priorities. I wanted to increase oversight efforts to hold government accountable and advance judicial confirmations. I wanted to strengthen whistleblower protections and increase competition in the pharmaceutical markets to lower the cost of prescription drugs. I wanted to enact juvenile justice reform and update our criminal justice system. I wanted to protect election integrity and bolster victims'

rights. At the close of this Congress, I am happy to report that the committee has made progress in all of these areas.

This week, the Senate passed the FIRST STEP Act, a historic criminal justice reform bill that had overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress and the backing of the President.

Earlier this month, the Senate unanimously passed bipartisan juvenile justice legislation, which legislation hadn't been updated since 2002.

The Elder Abuse Prevention and Prosecution Act, the Missing Children's Reauthorization Act, and Kevin and Avonte's Law to help families locate people with dementia and others who wander and go missing all became law during the 115th Congress.

Overall, 61 bills were reported out of committee, all of them bipartisan. Of those bills, 45 were passed in the Senate, and 29 became law in the past two Congresses under Presidents Obama and Trump. And if the House passes our criminal justice reform bill today, that figure will be 30 bills that have gone through Congress. Again, I want to emphasize that all were bipartisan.

The committee also delivered on judicial nominees. This wasn't so bipartisan. The Senate confirmed a historic number of lifetime appointments to the Federal bench this Congress. That includes 53 district court judges, 30 circuit court judges, and 2 Supreme Court Justices—85 Federal judgeships in the last 2 years. This reflects an alltime record for the first 2 years of any Presidency. These lifetime appointments will uphold the rule of law and preserve freedom and liberty for generations to come.

These accomplishments weren't easy. There was contention, and there was rigorous debate and, as I said, plenty of disagreement.

The confirmation hearing for Justice Brett Kavanaugh was the height of discord on the committee. As chairman, I was determined to uphold order and the rule of law, protect due process, and maintain credibility in our constitutional responsibility of advice and consent. I took the allegations that were brought forth very seriously. The committee conducted the most thorough, comprehensive, and transparent confirmation process in history. And if that word "history" bothers you, it is numerically justifiable by saying that we had more documents on Kavanaugh than we had on the previous five Supreme Court Justices combined. So I hope, after half a million documents, it is shown that we left no stone unturned. In the end, another extremely well-qualified Justice was confirmed.

However, the divisions that defined the Kavanaugh hearings do not define the body of work produced by the committee this Congress. The Judiciary Committee passed seven bipartisan bills to help families, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement address the opioid crisis in their local communities. The President signed

these measures into law with the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act. We also passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act in 2016 to rapidly respond to the opioid crisis and prevent others from falling into addiction.

With hearings and legislation, the Judiciary Committee also worked toward ending the pervasive problem of human trafficking. In all, the Senate adopted a series of five bills that were signed into law to enhance Federal efforts to protect victims and prevent and prosecute enslavement for forced labor and sex trafficking.

As a committee, we have made great progress on behalf of the American people. We tackled the priorities I outlined at the beginning of my chairmanship and achieved success on a bipartisan basis. That is what our constituents expect from those of us who are Senators. That is what I strive to deliver every day.

The 115th Congress is drawing to a close. Although I won't serve as chairman during the next Congress, I have every confidence that my friend Senator GRAHAM of South Carolina will build upon the successes we have accomplished. I look forward to continuing my service on the Judiciary Committee in the next Congress, and I am thankful to all of my colleagues on the committee and even some off the committee for their hard work and cooperation on behalf of the American people.

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 called the roll.

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

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

SYRIA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, yesterday, Christmas came early to the Kremlin. First, we have President Trump's announcement to pull our troops out of Syria. Second, the administration wants to delist three companies controlled by Oleg Deripaska, though, I am not sure he has adequately relinquished control of those companies. Third, the administration has done nothing to respond to Russian aggression in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. This is a trifecta for Vladimir Putin and sends a global message that creates real concerns. Christmas has indeed come early to Moscow.

The Trump administration's withdrawal from Syria lacks any strategy, is foolhardy, and it puts U.S. security in the Middle East—including our ally, the State of Israel—at great peril. This is not simply an error. It is dangerous. It is dangerous.

Let me be clear. Withdrawal from Syria without success is failure. American credibility will take a horrible hit

if the President moves forward with this decision.

As a country, we have said that Assad, who has butchered his people, cannot stay in power. Assad is likely to stay in power into the foreseeable future. Second, we have said we cannot leave Syria because we have strategic interests. By leaving, and doing so precipitously, the President is willing to leave these strategic interests in the hands of Iran and Russia, and Moscow will be given a solid foothold in the Middle East—something it has aspired to for some time, and now it will happen. It will have developed bases there, and it will have unfettered determination as to what to do.

Third, this move will strengthen Iran's ability to attack Israel.

We are entering a very dangerous time, as it is increasingly clear to all—including many of my Senate Republican colleagues and especially our international allies and adversaries—that this President is completely incapable of addressing our security challenges. Only in Donald Trump's parallel alternate universe has ISIS been defeated. There is no one who would suggest that is reality at this point. We have made gains, and we have had successes, but they have not been defeated.

His erratic decision making indeed poses a great threat to our security interests.

Trump tweeted that Russia is “not happy” about his decision to withdraw our forces from Syria. Well, I guess he missed President Putin's end-of-the-year press conference where, in his own words, he showed this morning that Russia is indeed thrilled with this abdication of U.S. leadership.

I worry that we are sending the wrong global message, as well, if this plan is executed. The Kurds have been the most significant fighting force on our behalf and in our interest in Syria. They have been our partners. By pulling out, we are abandoning them. Turkey will come in and seek to destroy them. They will be hit not only by Turkey, they will be hit by Assad, and they will be hit by others.

Imagine the message that sends to other potential partners around the world. For those to whom we say “Fight with us, fight for us, instead of sending our sons and daughters,” the message is “Once the United States is done using you, we will abandon you.”

We can't afford that message. In any other place in the world where we want people to fight with us or for us and carry the burden of being on the frontlines so that our sons and daughters are not in harm's way, they are going to look at this moment and say: No way. They will say: The United States will abandon us. They will say: The United States will leave us on the battlefield to die.

As someone who has voted against the deployment of U.S. troops elsewhere, I don't take these issues lightly. I want our sons and daughters to come

home as soon as possible. But by withdrawing these forces now with no strategy, the United States is placing our security and that of our allies at grave risk, and the sacrifices that have been made by our troops will be lost.

Russia has entered into this war in Syria with an unholy marriage with Iran—yes, to prop up Assad, but also, for Iran, it was to gain a tactical vantage point on Israel's northern border. Our withdrawal leaves a vacuum that Iran will fill, putting Israel at even greater risk.

To believe that we can outsource our allies' interest to Russia and that Russia will tell Iran to leave now, in Syria, is ridiculous. Iran is not a simple agent of Russia in this regard. Iran has shed its own blood and national treasure in pursuit of its interests, both to prop up Assad and to have a vantage point on the northern border with Israel—another place to strike at Israel. It is not going to give that up simply because Putin says to leave. Anyone who believes that has a clear misunderstanding of the realities of this relationship.

Completely withdrawing the United States from Syria at this moment with no strategy in place signals to the region and to the world that we are willing to cede our interests to Putin, to Iran, and to others who will exploit this leadership vacuum.

In addition, President Trump has been silent in the face of egregious behavior from Saudi Arabia, a behavior that this Chamber spoke to in a unanimous way.

He has no strategy for securing our interests around the Middle East or the world. It is all too clear who is winning.

The Kremlin attacked Ukrainian ships and captured Ukrainian sailors nearly a month ago. Those vessels and sailors remain in Russian hands. They are hostages—hostages—who were taken at the high sea in international waters in violation of international law. And what has the administration done—canceled a meeting with President Putin?

It canceled a meeting; that is it. It hasn't rolled out new sanctions on those responsible for the attack. It has not increased U.S. and NATO presence in the Black Sea in order to preserve international maritime passage for all. It has not announced new security assistance for the Ukrainians.

One month has passed, and President Putin has felt zero pressure—zero pressure—on any of these actions or to release these sailors. There is zero pressure to ease the tensions in the Kerch Strait and zero pressure to negotiate an end to the war in the Donbass or to return Crimea to the Ukraine.

In fact, Putin seems quite at ease. His yearly press conference earlier today was a victory lap. He is already prodding President Trump, welcoming the evacuation from Syria, and calling for President Trump to stand by his campaign commitment to also with-

draw from Afghanistan. He is doing it purposely to see if he can elicit the same reaction he has elicited in Syria.

This retreat has left Vladimir Putin with a glow of victory. He is winning in Syria; he is winning in Turkey; he is winning in the Ukraine; and Trump wants to take our players off the field. And this misguided withdrawal from Syria drives that point home.

Putin's control of Trump came into sharp focus yesterday, and I urge our Republican colleagues to see this for what it is. The small price that Putin paid to interfere in our national elections has paid off in Syria; it has paid off in Ukraine; and the American people are paying the ultimate price.

This is a dangerous time, and our security lies in the hands of a President who, I will respectfully say, is clearly not up to the task.

I have called on this administration and the last to develop and present and execute a clear and comprehensive strategy to promote our interests in Syria. This means a comprehensive strategy to counter Iran and its proxy networks, which, from Hezbollah to the Houthis, have grown only stronger as this administration continues to bungle its way through one foreign policy crisis to the next.

The President has the opportunity to reverse course and avoid a spectacular failure. He should listen to his military and national security advisers, none of which—none of which—ultimately recommended this course of action. He should listen to our allies, none of which have recommended this course of action.

He should invest in alliances and international institutions that multilateralize and strengthen our reach across the globe.

He should listen to this bipartisan chorus from Congress. There have been voices on both sides of the aisle here who have said: Change course. This is a grave mistake. He has an opportunity to avoid a grave mistake.

I will repeat what I said earlier today at a press conference with Senator GRAHAM and Senator REED: Withdrawal from Syria without success is failure. Simply withdrawing is not a success. Withdrawing without honoring the sacrifices that have been made by our troops there, without honoring the sacrifices that have been made by our allies there, like the Kurds, without recognizing the enormous civilian casualties that will take place in the aftermath, without recognizing that we will leave a void for other particularly nefarious entities to ultimately fill that void, without recognizing that we create a risk for our ally, the State of Israel and its northern border, without recognizing that at the end of the day, our strategic interests will be totally lost in this regard, is indeed a great failure.

I hope the President takes this opportunity to change course, to listen to his national security and military advisers and to the chorus of bipartisan

voices in the Senate, including those of us who are engaged in national security questions, whether it is I, as the senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, or Senator REED, as the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, or Senator GRAHAM, who sits on Armed Services and is the chair of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the Appropriations Committee. These are bipartisan voices, among others, who are making it very clear that this is a grave mistake. We have a chance not to make that grave mistake and the consequences that flow from it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MENENDEZ. 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. PERDUE. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

THE BUDGET DEFICIT

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, as we come to a close of the 115th Congress, this will be my last speech in this Congress. It is an honor to be in this body. It is a privilege that I take very seriously, as I know the Presiding Officer does as well.

Today, I come to talk about a topic that I told this body in my maiden speech was the reason I ran for the Senate, and at the end of each year, I try to remind us all of where we are on this topic—the financial crisis that the United States faces today. It is intertwined with the global security crisis that we heard about in a speech just a minute ago. They are very much interrelated.

Today, we have \$21 trillion in debt. What makes that so important is that just this week, just recently, the Federal Reserve increased the Fed fund rate one-quarter point. To most people, that really doesn't sound like a big deal, but this is the ninth increase in just the last couple of years. Just this one-quarter point increase means \$50 billion of new interest that the Federal Government is obligated to pay each year, every year. Over the last couple of years, those nine increases together represent a 2.25-percent increase. So that 2.25 percent increase in the interest rate means an additional \$450 billion of new interest expense liability the Federal Government has incurred over the last couple of years. To put that in perspective, we only raise about \$2.2 trillion in total Federal income tax. We spent about \$700 billion on our military and only \$200 billion on our veterans.

This is a train wreck, and it is a crisis of full proportion. Yet here we were just last night passing our 186th continuing resolution since 1974 when the

Budget Act of 1974 passed. That is one of our problems. Combine that with 8 years of lethargic economic productivity, and you end up with a burgeoning debt crisis.

It is projected by the Congressional Budget Office that, at current interest rates, with no other interest rate increases, the interest on the debt will grow—by 2023, just 5 short years, we will be spending more on just interest than we will on national defense. That cannot happen. The world bond markets probably won't let that happen. And here we are in 2018.

How did we get here? In 2000, at the end of the Clinton administration, this country had \$6 trillion of debt. In 2008, at the end of President Bush's administration, we had \$10 trillion of debt. In 2016, at the end of President Obama's tenure, we had \$20 trillion of debt. In that 8 years, America added more to the debt than all other Presidents combined prior to 2008.

Today, the rate of growth continues. We are at \$21 trillion. In my office, we have a debt clock that actually shows real time how this debt clicks forward every day, every minute. It is a sobering thing to watch because this is a legacy we are giving to our children and our grandchildren, and there is no reason to let this go forward. We can solve this today.

Under the Obama administration, over those 8 years, the Federal Government borrowed a little less than 35 percent of what it spent as a Federal Government. Let me say that again. It borrowed almost a third of what it spent. To put that in perspective, the discretionary part of our budget—we spend about \$4 trillion a year, including all of our mandatory expenses, but only 1.3 of that 4.3 is discretionary. Discretionary spending is about 25 percent. So if you are borrowing 33 percent and your discretionary spending is 25 percent and all of your first money that comes in goes to pay for the mandatory expenses—like a car payment, a house payment, insurance payments—automatically deducted, that is exactly what happens in the Federal Government. What we have is a situation where every dime—during those 8 years—of discretionary spending was by definition borrowed money.

Today, we are not borrowing quite that much, but the problem continues that most of our domestic discretionary spending is borrowed money. This is not lost on leaders around the world. Our near-peer competitors in Russia and China pay attention to this. They saw we cut our military spending over those 8 years ending in 2016 by 25 percent. That is one reason we see a very active China right now in the South China Sea. It is also why we see Russia being very active in the Middle East. It is because of our inactivity and our withdrawal from the global stage, and that was driven largely by the political position that administration was in at the time, but I also believe it is because of the Federal crisis we have relative to our national debt.

Today, if you look at the sources of our income and the uses of that income and our expenses, just on the Federal budget side, we raise about \$2.2 trillion.

The first three line items that we dedicate money to or allocate money to is a subsidy for the Social Security trust fund. Now, this is the first year that has really happened. It was never supposed to happen. The trust fund was supposed to sustain itself forever, indefinitely. It was supposed to be self-sustaining.

The second item is the Medicare trust fund. Now, the Medicare trust fund has to be subsidized by the general account of the Federal budget.

The third is this unlimited entitlement we have called Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. It is an unlimited expense depending on what different Governors decide to do and what the Federal Government has to do in terms of matching funds that go to those States.

Those three line items—just those three—account for more than 50 percent of all Federal income tax dollars we collect—over 50 percent.

The Social Security trust fund is projected to go to zero—the balance in that trust is supposed to go to zero in 12 years. The Medicare trust fund is supposed to go to zero in 8 years. This is a situation that is exploding before us. Discretionary expenditures have leveled out. Those are being fairly controlled. What is not being fairly controlled are all the mandatory expenses—the Social Security, expense of Medicare, Medicaid, pension benefits for Federal employees, and the interest on the debt. The fastest growing of all that is the interest on the debt, as I mentioned earlier. We have added \$450 billion of new interest expense just in the last 2 years.

I believe there is a way forward. We have been talking about it. President Trump said job No. 1 when he got elected was growing the economy. Why? Well, one of the benefits—we put people back to work, we have confidence going again, and we get the economy going, but it also raises more dollars for the Federal Government.

The Congressional Budget Office said that if we grow the economy 100 basis points more than we were growing during the Obama administration, which was only 1.9 percent over 8 years, that that 1 percentage point of growth adds \$300 billion a year. Well, we are growing much faster than that now. We are growing at almost twice the rate. The GDP is growing at almost twice the rate it grew during the Obama administration. What that means is that we have lowered the curve over the next decade of this debt cycle—this ever increasing debt cycle—we have lowered the curve by as much as \$3 trillion, by some estimates. That is the first step.

The second step is this budget process we are working on to try to fix it. We formed a joint select committee this year of equal numbers of participants from Republican to Democrat,