

Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

IRAN

MR. DURBIN. Madam President, I see another colleague on the floor, so I will make my comments brief.

We had a briefing this week in a room in the Capitol that the public is not allowed to enter; it is called the SCIF. It was a briefing that is given to Members of the Senate of top-secret, classified information. It related to the situation in which we now find ourselves in relation to Iran.

It was troubling to hear the comments being made by the leaders of the Trump administration—the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State, as well as military leaders and leaders in the intelligence community.

You see, what we are engaging in in the United States is a confrontation with Iran. We are moving toward that. It started with this President's insistence that the United States step away from a treaty entered into by the Obama administration to stop the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

What President Obama succeeded in doing over many years of diplomatic effort was to come to the table with Iran—an enemy of the United States on many fronts—and to reach an agreement where there would be international inspectors with free access to Iran to make certain they did not develop nuclear weapons. We believed—the world believed that Iran with nuclear weapons would be a danger to the region, a danger to our ally Israel, and even a danger to the United States.

The coalition put together by President Obama was nothing short of remarkable. You wouldn't be surprised to learn the coalition included the United Kingdom, our traditional ally, but it also included Germany, France, the European Union, Russia, and China. Russia and China. All came to the table and agreed on it.

Did it work? International inspectors came and reported to Members of Congress over and over that there were no locked doors, no areas where access was denied, and that they could say with virtual certainty that Iran was living up to the terms of this agreement.

So what did this President, President Trump, decide to do? He canceled U.S. participation in the agreement. Why? Why would he believe that the development of nuclear weapons in Iran is in the best interest of anyone? Yet he did. He followed that with even more provocative efforts in relation to Iran when it came to categorizing the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization—a step that moved even closer to provocation and confrontation. And then, of course, we decided to send our own military closer in to Iran itself. A carrier group was dispatched to that region.

What is behind all this? Why is it that we are escalating the situation

with Iran? The President has been equivocal in trying to explain it, but his National Security Advisor, John Bolton, has not. John Bolton is a hawk. His position and his posture when it comes to military confrontation was so controversial that in a previous administration, he was denied the position of Ambassador to the United Nations because of statements he had made. Now he is the top national security advisor to the President of the United States. He has written articles pleading for confrontation with Iran on a military basis.

Rumors fly out of the Pentagon—this morning's Washington Post suggestion that we are already sending 10,000 more military advisors into the region; a rumor 2 weeks ago that there was a contingency plan for 120,000 American troops. I might add that the Secretary of Defense, in my office this morning, denied both of these, but the fact is, more and more information is tumbling out about a confrontation with Iran.

I will tell you that some of us—a handful of us in the Senate—were here on the Senate floor when we debated and voted on a war in Iraq. It was 18 years ago. We were given information by the Bush administration and particularly Vice President Cheney about the danger of Iraq to the United States of America, to the point where a vote came to the floor, and the Senate approved an invasion of Iraq.

I remember that night. I remember it well. Twenty-three of us—one Republican and twenty-two Democrats—joined together in voting no. It may have been the most important and maybe the best vote I believe I ever cast as a Member of the Senate.

It was a foreign policy mistake to invade Iraq. What followed was a tragedy. We have spent billions and billions of American taxpayers' dollars in that country. We have lost over 4,000 American lives in Iraq, and over 30,000 or 40,000 came home with serious injuries, including my colleague in the Senate, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH. We have paid so dearly for that mistake.

The weapons of mass destruction we were sent in to destroy did not exist. What was told to the American people about the danger of Iraq was false—false. We are still there today, 18 years later, as we are in Afghanistan—the two longest wars in the history of the United States of America. Is there anyone who believed when we voted on the Senate floor that we were voting for the longest war in the history of the United States?

Now this administration, the Trump administration, is tempted to draw us into another war in the Middle East. The question is whether Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives will abide by the constitutional responsibility and demand that the American people, through our voices, have something to say about this decision.

If the American people are ready for a war in Iran, I would be shocked. As I

travel around the State of Illinois and other parts of this country, I find no sentiment for the United States to engage in another war at this moment in our history. I also find most people believing that the provocative and confrontational efforts of the Trump administration are drawing us nearer to that day.

So we leave now for a week. We will be back, but what will happen in the 7 or 8 days we are gone? I worry about that based on the briefings we have been given and the appetite of John Bolton and others in this administration to move us into war.

We should not invade Iran. We should not engage in another invasion in the Middle East. We should not subject America's young men and young women to the possibility of military service in another war that can go on indefinitely. There are better ways to deal with this. Let's rely on diplomacy and direct negotiation. Let's work with our allies to bring a peaceable result here and to stop activity which we know Iran is engaged in which is objectionable. It can be done short of invasion, short of military force, and short of war.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

MR. MERKLEY. Madam President, I give heartfelt thanks to my colleague from Illinois for bringing the experience of his service in the Senate and his deliberate study of the challenges of international affairs to bear on the gravity of the current situation where a policy has brought us to the brink of conflict and we have no confidence that there is wise judgment being exercised at this moment to ensure that there is not a war.

I thank him for sharing the journey that he has been a part of and that this Chamber has been part of and ringing the alarm bell that at this moment, we have two key foreign policy advisors—our Secretary of State and our National Security Advisor—who prefer weapons over agreements, who have driven a strategy of maximum pressure designed to make life extraordinarily difficult in Iran, to undo all the international work of the previous years to end the nuclear program in that country, and who are talking as if a conflict somewhere—maybe an Iranian militia in Iraq—should be a trigger to a massive war, which is why we are so worried about leaving this Chamber for even a day.

I thank him for raising his voice and sharing his experience.

TRIBUTE TO LOUIE RECKFORD

MR. MERKLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor because I am losing a key member of my foreign policy team who has wrestled with the issues of the Middle East and who has been engaged in the dialogue and conversation about a smart policy to end nuclear proliferation.

I can tell you that it is always, for any Senator, a moment that one has a conflicted heart when a man or a woman on their team who has contributed so much and has become part of the family, the Senate family, is ready to take on a new challenge away from these Chambers to develop their skills and to take their experience to a new extended conversation. It is a bittersweet moment.

We are proud of what our team members have contributed and proud of what they are going to contribute as they go off to a new responsibility.

Today, that member of my team is Louie Reckford. Louie, seated behind me, first came to my office in the fall of 2013 as part of that semester's intern class, and it wasn't long before he stood out, distinguished himself, and thus, when we were hiring a deputy scheduler the following March, Louie's name was at the top of the list, and he formally became a part of our team.

So for more than 5 years now, he has contributed. He has never stopped distinguishing himself, taking on one task and one position after another and excelling at every one of them. In his 2 years as deputy scheduler, Louie fielded thousands of requests for meetings, from constituents, from nonprofits, from local businesses and more, making sure that every detail was right. His attention to detail and to turnaround time made a very positive impression with all who contacted our office.

Over the last 3 years, he has been an invaluable member of my correspondence and foreign policy team, first as legislative correspondent and later as legislative aide. On top of sending out 181,000 pieces of constituent mail, mail from my office to my constituents, an average of 251 per day—on top of that, he has used his considerable leadership skills and subject-matter experience and strategic negotiating abilities to help pass a host of bills and resolutions in committee and here on the floor. When our foreign policy top staffer was transitioning into a new role as legislative director, he stepped up to fill the gap, helping to manage a team with two foreign policy fellows at that time. I could spend quite a lot more time extolling his list of accomplishments—his instrumental role in planning several international congressional delegations, his role in helping me carve out a new role on the Foreign Relations Committee, and, of course, that vital role of leading our office softball team.

I will just say that Louie will be deeply missed by all members of Team Merkley, and we wish him well in his new adventure with Foreign Policy for America, where he will continue to be an invaluable leader of a myriad number of pressing foreign policy issues confronting our Nation today.

Louie Reckford, we here in the Senate wish you all the best in your next chapter of contributing to solving the complex international issues that face our Nation.

Thank you, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, the Appropriations Committee staff was working until midnight last night, as they do so often, on the disaster supplement. We know that in January the House sent us a disaster supplemental appropriations bill to help communities across the Nation. These communities were dealing with the deadly aftermath of hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes.

It has been my experience over the years that normally disaster bills sail through both Chambers of Congress. Every Member knows that one day it will be his State or her State that needs help recovering from a disaster.

I well remember when we had a terrible hurricane in Vermont; it created the most damage in generations in our State. The day after the devastation, I went with our Governor and the head of our National Guard in a helicopter to survey the damage. For many towns, the only way we could reach them was in a helicopter. The bridges were like a child's toy, twisted and gone. The roads totally disappeared. Houses were upside down in the river.

It was heartbreaking, but as we were going there, I received email after email. My Senate colleagues, many of them Republicans, said "Vermont stood with us when we had"—and they named the disaster. "We will stand with you." That is what we do. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a Republican or a Democrat; if there is a disaster, you stand together.

What I cannot understand is that in my 44 years here—it was different this time. When we brought up a disaster supplemental appropriations bill in January of this year, the President of the United States came out swinging against it. Why? Because the bill contained assistance for Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico had been hit by 2 back-to-back, category 5 hurricanes, and apparently providing assistance to 3 million Americans in need was a step too far for him. He did not want to provide aid to these Americans. "Not one more dime for Puerto Rico" he was reported to have said—shocking words for somebody who holds the highest office in the land, especially after they had nearly unprecedented back-to-back hurricanes.

From the beginning, I have said what my Republican colleagues and Democratic colleagues have always said. It is a role of the Federal Government to stand by all Americans in times of need. It should not matter whether you are a Georgia peach farmer, a California small business owner, or a child living in San Juan. If your community is devastated by a natural disaster, you are an American, and the American community will stand with you. That is what I have always fought for.

So here we are, 5 months later—5 months of negotiations, 5 months of talks—and we finally reach a deal on a disaster aid bill that helps all—all Americans. We don't pick and choose. It is a good deal. It addresses the need from Alabama to California and many States in between. But 5 months is too long to wait. It is far too long for the communities who are trying to rebuild their homes and their towns, so we have to act now.

The President has asked that we add \$4.5 million to the disaster supplemental bill to address the issues that we face at our southern border. I agree with the President that some of this money is badly needed. We don't dispute that. But everyone in this Chamber, Republicans and Democrats, knows that under this President, anything to do with immigration is controversial; it is going to be hotly debated. We have been working night and day to strike a compromise on the President's request. When we finished in the middle of last night, we were close, but we are not there yet.

I hope in the next few hours we can resolve our remaining differences, but if we cannot reach agreement, then at least pass the disaster bill without it today—not tomorrow, not next week, not next month—today. Five months has been too long for America to have to wait.

We have a deal on the disaster aid bill. It is a bipartisan bill. It is supported by Democrats and Republicans. It is ready to go. Let's pass it today, and let's show the American people we stand with them in times of crisis, just as Members of this body stood with my beloved State of Vermont when we were hit. We didn't say we are Republicans or Democrats. We said that we are Americans, and Americans have been hurt, and Americans stand together when we are suffering. Today, Americans are suffering across this country. Let us—as the conscience of the Nation, the U.S. Senate, let us stand with them, and let's get the disaster aid they need.

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. SASSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECESS

Mr. SASSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until noon today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 10:57 a.m., recessed until 12 noon and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. FISCHER).

MORNING BUSINESS—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.