

Texas has arguably benefited more than any other State. In 2018, Texas exported nearly \$110 billion in goods to Mexico, and we imported \$107 billion worth of goods from Mexico.

When you consider actions being taken by China to counter our interests all over the world, our reliance on North American partners has become increasingly important. That only underscores the need to ratify the USMCA and strengthen our trading relationship to ensure we are not left behind as the global economy continues to evolve.

The USMCA is the most significant update to U.S. trade policy in a generation and will propel our growing economy into the 21st century. It takes into account businesses and practices that didn't exist when NAFTA was created, such as 2-day shipping, online micro-retailers, and digital products like eBooks and music. It also requires Canada and Mexico to raise their de minimis shipment value levels, meaning additional classes of shipments can enter all three countries with expedited entry procedures. That is a big win for small and medium-sized businesses, which often lack the resources to pay customs duties and taxes.

The USMCA prohibits restrictions on the cross-border movement of data. It increases goods market access. It supports small businesses. It boosts digital trade and safeguards intellectual property and supports agriculture. It also keeps jobs here at home.

In short, this trade agreement is a big win for the American people. Some even argue that the USMCA is more important than restoring our normalized trading relationship with China.

Earlier this year, the International Trade Commission provided insight into what we could expect to see once the USMCA is ratified. Within 6 years, they say, we are looking at 176,000 new American jobs and an increase in the gross domestic product by more than \$68 billion. That is a bigger impact than the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

The USMCA is expected to have a positive impact on every industry sector in the U.S. economy. We can look forward to a more than \$43 billion increase in exports and more than \$31 billion in imports. That is great news for North American workers, farmers, ranchers, and business men and women who will reap the benefits of this agreement.

When I am meeting with my constituents back home or here in Washington, one of the most common questions I get asked is, "When is the USMCA going to pass?"

Mexico has already ratified the agreement, and Canada is waiting for us to move before acting. The agreement has broad support in the Senate, and clearly the President is on board as well. So the only holdup in the entire process is the House of Representatives.

Up until about a month ago, I told my constituents that I thought the

prospects for passage sometime this year were looking pretty good. House Democrats did have some concerns, but Speaker PELOSI was reportedly working in good faith with the administration to work through them. There were indications of progress and productive conversations with Mexico and Canada to address their concerns as well.

It looked as though we were moving along a path to a deal, but then the House blew up all plans for a productive year in Congress. They marched headlong into impeachment and tossed aside important legislation. Forget working on a trade deal that will benefit every sector of the economy; House Democrats are too busy conducting secret hearings in an effort to force the President—someone they despise—out of office.

Whether they intend to allow the USMCA to receive a vote in the House is unknown, but I sincerely hope that House Democrats have enough good sense to avoid blowing up a vital trade deal over political disagreements with the President. As we all know, the closer you get to an election, the more challenging legislating actually becomes, and the clock is ticking away. It is a shame that the House continues to put politics ahead of good policy that will benefit the entire American people.

The USMCA is good for the economy, good for business, good for workers, and it sure is good for Texas. It is time for the House to quit playing games so we can ratify this trade agreement without further delay.

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

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

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2625

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, it has been 2½ weeks since the President announced he was abruptly withdrawing U.S. forces from Syria—betraying our Kurdish allies and derailing the international fight against ISIS in Syria.

In the course of one tweet, this President blindsided our allies in the region—yes, the Kurds—but the Israelis and others as well. He blindsided our diplomats and blindsided our military from the top brass down to our forces who serve on the ground. Frankly, the

only one who seemed to know that this was coming was the Turkish President, Mr. Erdogan.

As a result, brave men and women who have fought alongside the United States are now at risk of being slaughtered by Turkish forces. Already, Kurdish fighters and unarmed civilians have been killed by Turkish armed groups—militias. Already, hundreds of ISIS detainees have escaped from prison, and ISIS is being given the space and time to regroup.

Simply put, we may be witnessing one of the most significant counterterrorism setbacks in recent history.

With nowhere else to turn, the Kurds have aligned themselves with the Assad regime. That is good news for one of history's most brutal dictators—a man who gases his own people. It is also good news for his allies in Iran.

No one has, perhaps, benefited more from this disaster than Vladimir Putin. Just this week, Russia and Turkey agreed to a new joint strategy in Syria, green-lighting Russian and Syrian forces to clear the border region of any of our remaining Kurdish allies and, unfortunately, expanding Russia's footprint in the Middle East.

The truth is that I believe the President's sudden withdrawal from Syria without his having a plan and without there being serious consideration for our Kurdish allies is a disaster that may haunt our foreign policy for decades to come.

If this is how the United States treats its allies, how will anyone trust the United States on a going-forward basis?

Frankly, I fear most of the damage may have already been done. No tweet, no press conference, and no personal assurance from Erdogan or anyone else can rebuild the years of trust and progress that have been destroyed. The least we can do—and perhaps, unfortunately, the most we can do—is to make sure those Kurdish allies who served alongside U.S. forces as translators and in other military support roles are not left to die in Syria.

That is why I have introduced the Syrian Allies Protection Act. This legislation is similar to programs in the past which have granted special immigration visas to Iraqi and Afghan nationals who have served alongside U.S. forces. The truth is these Kurdish allies and their families are now at risk because of their work with U.S. forces. They are threatened not only by the Turkish incursion but also by freed ISIS fighters and Assad regime forces.

This legislation would provide permanent American residence to Syrian nationals who have worked for the U.S. Armed Forces for at least 6 months, who have obtained a favorable recommendation from a general or a flag officer in the chain of command, and who have passed a thorough background check and screening.

The legislation also directs the administration to evacuate eligible individuals to safety. If their lives are at

risk by remaining in Syria, they can either be brought to the United States or to a third country while appropriate vetting takes place.

This legislation will not reverse what we did to our Kurdish allies, but it will show those who have worked with our military forces—in many cases, we have heard of translators and others whom the American forces left without having even said goodbye because they had to withdraw so quickly—that the American people appreciate the profound sacrifices they have made in their supporting U.S. forces in the fight against ISIS. It would at least remove part of the sting.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged of S. 2625 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, ironically, the Syrian Kurds may be closer to having some degree of autonomy or homeland than they have been in decades.

With the new arrangement—or rearrangement—of alliances, the Syrian Kurds now will have an alliance with someone who will remain in Syria. Whether you like him or not, the Assad government is there to stay. There was never going to be a U.S. presence for long enough or one great enough to preserve or to create a homeland for them. I think there is every possibility, in alliance with Assad, that there will be some Kurdish arrangement. It happened in Iraq. In Iraq, the oil proceeds are shared. The Kurdish wanted more in Iraq. They didn't get as much as they wanted, but they got some degree of autonomy within their province.

I think that sort of encouraging the Syrians Kurds to abandon their country is really premature and doesn't really recognize the fluidity of what is going on on the ground there. There is actually the potential, for the first time in 8 years, to break through to a peace agreement. Peace agreements have been unable to be achieved in the past because people have refused to acknowledge that Assad is staying. It is easy to say Assad is all of the things that he likely is, but it is harder to acknowledge that no matter who he is, he is staying and that peace on the ground will, ultimately, for the Syrian Kurds, probably come through an arrangement with Assad's regime.

There has been a huge diplomatic breakthrough. As much as we have all of the talk of Sturm und Drang—that the world is ending and there is going to be a Kurdish genocide—perhaps the opposite is going to happen. I don't think we yet know, as no one can predict the future with certainty, but it

actually looks as if there has been a somewhat reasonable withdrawal. You have the Syrian Kurdish generals now saying they have agreed to the withdrawal. There is now in place, hopefully, a long-term cease-fire.

So, while nothing is ever perfect in Syria and while nothing is ever perfect in the Middle East, I think, rather than saying it is the end of the world, we should say that this is a big transition, that this is a big realignment of interests there, and that there is a possibility that the Kurds could get a homeland.

The last thing you would want is to say to all of the leaders in the Kurdish community, to all of the intellectuals, to those who speak English, and to those who are open to western ways, "Hey, come over here, and abandon your country." It would be equivalent to France's saying to George Washington during or after the war, "Hey, guys. Hey, Founding Fathers. Why don't you all come to France?" It is not a good notion to ask the leaders of a country and a movement to leave and abandon their country.

With that, I respectfully object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I disagree with my friend from Kentucky about what may or may not happen.

I believe that one thing we agree with him on is that we have not often had well-organized plans in the Middle East.

The unique thing about our alliance with the Kurds was that after trying in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places around the region to find allies who would actually stand up and fight, in the Kurds, we found those allies, and they did a remarkable job dismantling ISIS.

Now, the prognostication of the Senator from Kentucky I don't agree with it, but time will tell. The one area, though, and what my legislation would have done and where I am disappointed we were not able to move forward on, is regardless of the changed circumstances that the Assad regime may have in terms of treating people with more respect or the Turkish militias, which we have already seen evidence of their killing of Kurdish fighters, the one group—the one group I think that it is probably safe to say will be the targets of both the Syrians, the Turks—the militias—will be those Kurdish individuals who worked directly for the U.S. military.

Even if the prognostication of the Senator from Kentucky plays out on a more macro basis, I don't think anyone with a straight face can say the Kurdish translators, who 2 weeks ago were working for the American forces, will not be victims of—whether it be Turkish, Syrian, Russian, or other—aggression.

I think it would have been the right thing. I am going to continue to try to find ways to bring this legislation to

the floor. I know it will be broadly bipartisan supported. I hope we will have a chance to revisit this.

I don't think we can ever fully reverse the actions this President has taken, but at least in terms of these transfers—I am not talking about taking the whole Kurdish leadership—but these, generally, men who 2 weeks ago were working for the American military, I think we owe them a greater debt of obligation than to simply say good luck.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I think one of the interesting things about the Kurdish situation and about Syria in general is how quickly the Kurds and Assad actually did align.

If you watched the war over the last 8 years, the Kurds and Assad have largely not fought each other. There isn't a great deal of the blood sort of lust or curdling animosity between the two, and it was actually pretty remarkable how quickly they came together.

One of the things is we think we are doing best, and we try to do the best when we insert ourselves in the Middle East, but sometimes we get unintended consequences.

So we have been there. We want peace, but we refuse to allow the Kurds to talk to Assad. There is a stalemated civil war that has gone on 8 years. Had we never been involved, Assad likely would have crushed the rebellion in 6 months, maybe 500,000 people wouldn't have died, maybe 3 million people wouldn't have left, and you would still have a dictator.

Instead, we have 500,000 people dead, 3 million refugees, and we still have a dictator.

So I think we need to question our strategy as to what our intended goal is and what ends up happening.

Syria is an utter disaster but made no better by our intervention, the Saudis' intervention, and the Qataris' intervention.

There is a great deal of unknowns as to whether the Sunni extremists who were supported by the Saudis, Qataris, and sometimes us would actually be more humanitarian or more for human rights than Assad is.

I think we can agree that Assad has abused his people, has used chemical weapons, et cetera, et cetera, but on the other side were Sunni extremists allied with the ideas of radical Islam, with radical jihad, with the things that led to 9/11.

So it is a very complicated situation over there, but I think we cannot say with certainty that there will not be a deal that sticks, actually, between Assad and the Kurds.

If the Kurds want a homeland and they believe Assad is staying, it makes all the sense in the world for them to work together. If Assad wants to actually protect that region of north Syria, either from Turkey or from others, and the Kurds are willing to help him do it,

the Kurds have proven they are good fighters.

The Kurds would probably have to acknowledge there is a greater Syria and that they are part of it. If they want to break off from Syria, there will be continual war. If they are able to make an arrangement with Assad, there is a chance that there could be an oil-sharing arrangement like we have in Iraq.

The bottom line is, we sometimes see the world in black-and-white terms and think we can get Thomas Jefferson in Syria or in Libya or in Iraq, but what happens is, time and time again, we topple a dictator, we get chaos, we get more terrorism. ISIS sprang out of the vacuum that was Iraq after a government that was incapable of doing it after we get rid of the same. The same thing happened when we got rid of Qadhafi in Libya. I think we need to rethink our approach to the Middle East.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. I will not belabor the point. I know my friend from Connecticut is here to raise another issue.

I don't agree with the analysis of the Senator from Kentucky. I hope he proves to be right. I would agree with him; sometimes our notion that we are going to find Thomas Jefferson to rebuild these countries has not proven to be the case.

This legislation I am proposing is not broad policy changing; it is simply saying let's look at a very limited universe of individuals who 2 weeks ago were working with the American military.

My fear is, at least in terms of how those translators and their families will be viewed by both the Turks and by the Assad forces, that they will not be viewed as Thomas Jeffersons, but they will be viewed as Benedict Arnolds, and my fear is their fate will be on our hands.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1247

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Virginia for his advocacy on this critical measure, and I support him on it and also for his advocacy on the FIRE Act. It is very similar to the measure on which I am going to ask for unanimous consent. He has done wonderful and dedicated work on both measures.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Rules Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1247; that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I am concerned

that this bill would put an undue burden on anybody who decided to run for office in the sense that you would be burdened with trying to understand everyone you talk to anywhere in the United States—whether or not they are an agent of a foreign government or an agent of a foreign principle, such as a foreign company.

For example, I might run into Hunter Biden in the airport. I know he is an American citizen, but this bill doesn't prevent American citizens from being an agent of a foreign principle. Hunter Biden also worked for a Ukrainian oligarch and a company with mysterious origins that may well have something to do with our foreign policy.

So if I meet Hunter Biden, I am concerned that now it may be against the law or I could be reprimanded or fined by the FEC for talking to Hunter Biden.

The same might also exist—I enjoy going to the Indian New Year in Louisville, and I sometimes see 5,000 to 6,000 Indian Americans, but I can't tell you how many of them are brand new to the country, what their visa status is, whether they have a relative from government there who might come up to me.

So I think we need to be very careful about putting forward law, particularly by unanimous consent, that hasn't been scrutinized and might end up having a burden that we don't really agree with.

There has been a certain degree of hysteria over the Russian thing. Some on the other side of the aisle can't get over they lost the Presidential election, and so they continue to blame the Russians for losing the election.

It is so bad that their candidate from the last election, Hillary Clinton, had to go after TULSI GABBARD, a Democratic Member of the Congress, a sitting Congresswoman, the first female combat veteran to run for President, and she has been labeled by Hillary Clinton a Russian asset.

So you can see that the hysteria over Russia is a little bit concerning; that we may be going too far in this hysteria.

Then, once we apply this to the world, is there going to be a hesitancy to talk to someone who looks different than you, who dresses different than you, who has a different color skin than yours because you are concerned they might be from a foreign country?

So I think this would have the ability of stifling speech—stifling political speech—and I think it is a reactionary way to look at things, and it really fits in with this unseemliness of Hillary Clinton's thinking everybody is a Russian agent to many of the Democrats saying: Donald Trump is a Russian agent.

We spent \$35 million on this notion. This was probably a notion promulgated by people within the intelligence community who already hated Donald Trump before he was elected. I hope we get to the bottom of this, but I am not

about to allow, by unanimous consent, an attempt to politicize our election process and make it so absurd that you would have to worry about whom you talk to as you travel the country.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I truly regret the objection by my colleague. I regret even more the reasons for his objection, characterizing the threat of Russia interference as hysteria.

Well, I suggest that my friend from Kentucky spend a little bit of time—it will not take a lot—with members of the intelligence community, any member of the intelligence community, all the members of the intelligence community, who agree unanimously that the threat of Russian interference is real. In fact, it is ongoing.

That is the warning we have received from the CIA, the Director of National Intelligence, and, most pointedly, from the Director of the FBI. They have warned us, in no uncertain terms, that the Russians are interfering now, spreading disinformation, creating false accounts and sites and that they are planning to do it even more intensely. It is not only the Russians but other nations.

That was the warning of Robert Mueller when he said that the Russians' interference in our last election was sweeping and systematic and that they were doing it again and we need to pay attention to it.

That is exactly what my colleagues and I have been doing for the past few days, raising for floor consideration various election securities bills. We have done it not only in the last few days but for months—the PAVE Act, the Honest Ads Act, the SHIELD Act, but my colleague from Kentucky says it is hysteria.

Well, it is a well-founded fear based on fact. As one of our former colleagues, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, once said: People are entitled to their own opinions; they are not entitled to their own facts. The facts here are indisputable, set forth in numbing detail by the Mueller report but also by the intelligence community, independently, in the hearings that have been conducted by various of our committees, in open and public, in Armed Services and Judiciary, and also behind closed doors. Some of them the intelligence community—which produced a report, most recently by the Senate Intelligence Committee, a bipartisan report, showing how the Russians scan every single State to penetrate them, seeking to disrupt them, and that is an absolutely chilling fact-based, evidence-founded prospect that we need to counter, and that is the reason my colleagues and I have come to the floor for these measures. A number of them I have been proud to cosponsor and helped to lead.

The one that brings me here now is the Duty to Report Act, S. 1247, and it