

the EPA can actually use in rulemakings. The Science Advisory Board found serious shortcomings with how the EPA conducted these rulemakings. Either the cost-benefit analysis was deficient or insufficient, the Agency did not use the best available science, or the legal rationale that underpinned the rule was faulty.

In case you are wondering who selects the members of this EPA Science Advisory Board, as it turns out, it is the President. In this case, all 44 members of the EPA Science Advisory Board were nominated or were renominated under this administration, by this President. They said that there are serious problems with the four rulemakings that I just mentioned. They are not Obama's people. They were nominated by this President.

Mr. Ray has served in top leadership positions at OIRA since June of 2018. First, he was an Associate Administrator. Then, in March of last year, he was promoted to Acting Administrator. Mr. Ray has presided over or has been involved with dozens of controversial rulemaking decisions in the last year and a half at OIRA, including the rulemakings outlined in the letter that I mentioned we are sending him today.

That is why, during the vetting process of his nomination, I, along with my colleagues on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, asked for information about Mr. Ray's background and his work in the last year and a half at OIRA, which is within the OMB. Specifically, we asked him about his involvement in many controversial regulatory rulemaking decisions that have been put forward by the current administration. Unfortunately—sadly, really—Mr. Ray and the Office of Management and Budget have refused to provide the Senate with the information needed to vet Mr. Ray's nomination. As best as I can tell, they didn't even try.

Unfortunately, throughout the vetting process, Mr. Ray apparently refused to answer the Senators' questions by asserting privilege or deferring to the OMB's General Counsel more frequently than any past OIRA nominee who has ever appeared before our committee. Something is wrong with that. I don't care if you are a Democrat or a Republican in this body or if the nominee comes from a Democratic President or a Republican President; something is wrong with that.

In fact, Mr. Ray asserted privilege or deferred to counsel 19 times in his prehearing questionnaire responses alone. Is that a lot? That may well be more times than any other nominee in the history of this agency. Think about that. While it might be appropriate to withhold or redact particular content in some narrow circumstances, Mr. Ray and the OMB's Office of General Counsel have misapplied overly broad privileges to avoid providing Congress with critical information and documents related to his work at OIRA.

Have you ever heard of checks and balances? There is a reason we have

oversight. There is a reason we don't have Kings or Monarchs here who can do anything they want without a check or a balance. Sadly, this nomination process, at least for this nominee—and I think he is well qualified and bright—takes a thumb and sticks it in the eye of checks and balances.

Unfortunately, should this body vote to confirm Mr. Ray, his general approach of nonresponsiveness to the committee's vetting process sets a concerning precedent, not just for him and not just for nominees of this agency, but for future nominees and subsequent oversight efforts to hold the executive branch accountable.

It has been my privilege to serve on the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for 19 years now. We are an oversight committee that conducts oversight not just over the whole Federal Government but on matters that are important to our Nation outside of the government. One of our core duties is to ensure that nominees are forthcoming and provide the Senate with the information we need to do our jobs.

Eventually, we are going to have an election. Who knows who is going to win the next time and who will be in the majority here in this body? Yet, under any administration, we should expect the nominees who appear before the Senate to be forthcoming and to provide us with the relevant information we need to adequately vet their nominations.

For these reasons, I must reluctantly note my opposition to Mr. Ray's nomination for now and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CARPER. Will the Senator yield?

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I yield to the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

IRAN

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, before Senator BLACKBURN arrived on the floor, I talked about Iran, as many of us have. I mentioned the opposition that some folks in Iran had—that the Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force had—to actually entering into negotiations with the United States and five other nations to get the Iran deal, the JCPOA. As far as I can tell, nobody was a stronger opponent to Iran's negotiating with us and five other nations—nobody, as best I can tell, was a stronger opponent for Iran's doing that, for sitting down and trying to work things out—than Soleimani.

We are not going to miss that guy, but he was one of the strongest opponents who had actually taken what, I think, was a reasonable course. Sadly, this administration walked away from it.

I thank my colleague for yielding.

NOMINATION OF PAUL J. RAY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, let me begin by saying that Paul Ray is a

Tennessean and that we are delighted he is being confirmed to the OIRA. He is qualified and will serve our Nation well in the future just as he has in the past.

IRAN

Mr. President, I also want to say a few things about the situation in Iran and about some of the comments that we have heard here on the floor today.

First of all, I think it is important to set the record straight when it comes to the Iran deal. We hear people say: Well, we never should have walked away from it. Let me tell you something. We should never have been in it in the first place. We should never have been in this. How in heaven's name could anybody have thought it was a good idea to put \$1.7 billion of cash on a pallet, stick it on a plane, and fly it to Iran? Whoever would have thought that?

The Iran nuclear deal was not something that helped to stabilize an issue; it incentivized Iran to do bad things. See, the Iran deal included a lifting of sanctions on Qasem Soleimani. Where was the first place he went? Where was the first place he went to get somebody to help to fund the Quds Force—to help fund all of this terrorism? He went to Russia—to his friends. This is why the Iran deal was not a good thing.

Now, you can say they had to open their nuclear facilities to the IAEA, but there was a little caveat in there that doesn't get talked about a lot. They opened it with notification. Well, if you are going to get prior notification that somebody is going to look at your company, to look at your operation, to look at your house, to look at your country, what are you going to do? You are going to clean it up, and you are going to hide things. That is the Iran deal. They didn't stop enriching uranium. What they did was enrich it right up to the point at which it was just under the mark. Did they give it up? No, they didn't give it up.

My colleague had mentioned the Reagan term of "trust but verify." Thank goodness we have a President who decided he would verify, and thank goodness we have an intel community and a U.S. military that did the heavy lifting of figuring out what needed to be done.

When you hear one of my colleagues ask, "How do we put this back together or can we ever put it back together?" we have started putting it back together. We have done it by saying: All right, folks, here is our redline. Guess what. This redline means something. This redline is drawn with the blood of hundreds of Americans who have been killed by this murderous villain. It is a redline of justice.

So let's not have happy talk when it comes to this situation with Iran. Let's make certain we understand what has transpired. We know that our military and our intel communities watched for 8 months as there was escalating violence. We know that violence was orchestrated by none other than

Soleimani himself. Intelligence provided to senior administration officials prior to the strike confirmed that Soleimani had posed a defined threat to the United States.

When we speak about Iran in the context of conflict versus deterrence, we are not referring to a government or a military organization. It is important to note and for the American people to know that Iran is the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. Do you know who it points that terrorism to? Isn't it interesting. Iran tends to have little bywords. It says: This is our goal—to destroy America, to destroy Israel. That is what Iran has been up to. It has nurtured a proxy network that has helped it to claw its way into the heads of regional leaders who are either too weak or who are wholly unwilling to resist those overtures.

Relationships with Russia and with Bashar al-Assad in Syria have kept Iranian leaders a part of mainstream conversations about national security.

Hezbollah in Lebanon is a close friend of Iran, and their support of militias and Houthi rebels in Yemen adds to the aura of chaos around Iran's activities.

So what does all of this have to do with a targeted strike on one man? That one man has spent a lifetime doing exactly what he was doing the day he died—using violence and intimidation to bring Shiite ideology into prominence and, to quote the notorious Ayatollah Khamenei, “end the corrupting presence of America in the Middle East.”

That is what they thought. Those are their comments, their words—not mine, not the President's, not the military's, not the intel's—the Ayatollah's. That is what he said.

Soleimani took to the frontlines with the Revolutionary Guard in 1979. That may trigger some thoughts of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and American diplomats and citizens that were held hostage.

Soleimani was not a new arrival to the terrorist community. Sometime between 1997 and 1998 he was named commander of the Quds Force. Under his leadership, the Revolutionary Guard has gained control of over 20 percent of Iran's economy, and the Quds Force has extended its influence to all Gulf States, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

He controlled Iran's intervention in support of Assad in Syria and was the primary architect of Hezbollah in Lebanon. They have built up and trained scores of Hezbollah and Houthi fighters, as well as Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, and those Iraqi militias killed more than 600 U.S. troops during the Iraq War.

Soleimani made much of his militaristic role, but he was a general in name only. He hid behind a uniform while designing, devising, conducting, and advising terror plots, and that is what earned him a spot on the list of people sanctioned by the EU, the

United States, and the U.N. He wasn't a bureaucrat. He was not one of many respected generals.

The Ayatollah called him a living martyr in his lifetime, but I intend to call him exactly what he was—a ruthless terrorist and a shameless, even proud, engineer of hatred, death, and destruction. That is his legacy.

His tendency toward violence as a default was thrown into full relief when President Trump withdrew from that Iranian nuclear deal, just as I said a moment ago.

In early May of last year, the intel indicated an increased threat from Tehran, and between May and September, Iran and its proxies perpetrated more than 80 violent attacks in the region—80—on us and our allies, 80 attacks. They attacked multiple tankers and commercial vessels. They downed an American drone. They took out 5 percent of the world's oil supply. Now we find out that they have taken out a jetliner.

They used their own drones to attack a Saudi airport. A suicide bomber murdered four Afghans and wounded four U.S. troops traveling in a convoy in eastern Kabul.

Soleimani was very confident, but perhaps he should have thought a little harder about the increased level of vulnerability he had built into his expanding network, because he didn't die in a hidden bunker or behind the walls of a fortified compound. He died in public while traversing the Middle East, defining impunity and even taking selfies with proxy terrorists. He did every bit of this in violation of U.N. resolutions. He died because his aggression morphed into a pattern of arrogance and violent escalation that U.S. officials could not, in good conscience, continue to allow.

This month Iranian officials lost their chief terrorist, but they have gained an opportunity, and, I will tell you, the ball is in their court.

Their retaliatory strikes against our shared bases in Iraq did nothing to repair their image as a belligerent and deeply vulnerable regime. If their lack of precision was calculated, no one got the intended message.

The Iranians are now left with two choices, and they are theirs. Pick one. We hope they choose well.

Option No. 1, they can come to the table and behave like a normal country. They are a country rich in resources and smart, educated people. Come to the table and behave like a normal country in the community of nations and allow deterrence to make a comeback.

Option No. 2, they can risk being reminded that the United States will defend to the death the redline that separates justice from chaos, and the American people are going to make certain that we continue to go after monsters who crusade as the declared enemies of freedom.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

TRIBUTE TO LAUREN OPPENHEIMER

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I want to take a few moments to recognize an individual, Lauren Oppenheimer, who, after nearly 5 years as an invaluable member of my team, has recently moved on to begin the next chapter of her career. We all on Team Merkley are very sad to see her go, but we do feel extraordinarily fortunate that she hasn't gone far—just over to Senator JONES' office on the other side of the Hart building. So Oregon's loss has been Alabama's gain.

Lauren joined my team in 2015, back when I was a member of the Banking Committee, to handle that important portfolio. It was a position that she was extremely qualified for, having a wealth of experience working on those issues in both the House and at the Center for American Progress. But then a seat opened on the Foreign Relations Committee, and I had to turn in my credentials for Banking in order to take that Foreign Relations position.

Well, we knew that that really kind of undermined the vision of why Lauren had come to our team, to really take on that set of banking issues. It would not be an understatement to say it was not a completely thrilling day when I shared this news with her.

But being the dedicated team member that she is, she willingly and graciously took on a new role within the team and a whole new portfolio of issues to work on—issues like election reform and telecom, judicial nominations, rules reform. It might not have been the job that she signed up for, but she excelled at it nonetheless. She excelled because she is extremely smart and talented and because she is passionate about her work, and she threw herself into this new set of issues.

I mean it when I say she is passionate. A quick conversation about Fintech can last for hours, as she excitedly informs you about all of the recent developments in that emerging industry—an industry, by the way, that I had hardly heard of before Lauren came to my team.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said: “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.” It requires “the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” Well, Lauren is certainly one of those dedicated and passionate individuals, and throughout her time on Team Merkley, she has helped move our country forward in ways large and small.

For years she has worked on ensuring the implementation of the Volcker rule, a key part of the Dodd-Frank Act, which closed the Wall Street casino by separating old-fashioned banking from high-risk, high-leverage bets on the future prices of stocks and exchange rates and interest rates and commodities—bets that placed our entire banking system and economy at risk.

Lauren wrote the bipartisan SAFE Banking Act, which had its hearing in the Banking Committee just a couple of months ago, to ensure that legal