

In 1950, December 19, NATO named General Dwight D. Eisenhower as supreme commander of the Western European defense forces.

Then, in 1972, December 19, *Apollo 17*, the last of the *Apollo* moon landings, returned to Earth.

Then, in 1984, December 19—I remember this well because I was in Hong Kong when this happened—that was when China signed an accord returning Hong Kong to the Chinese sovereignty. A lot of people thought it was a good idea at the time to accept the people from Hong Kong. I was there, and look what has happened now after all these years. I would have to say that created a hysteria that has continued to this day.

Then, in 1998, December 19, U.S. President Bill Clinton was impeached. I was there for that one too. That was December 19, 1998.

The event that is more significant by a landslide is what happened on December 19 of 1959. On December 19, 1959, my wife Kay and I got married. That makes tomorrow our 61st wedding anniversary. Just look at all of the beauty that has followed us—20 kids and grandkids, all of that in a 61-year period of time.

What I want to say is the beautiful life that we are still having together—and, Kay, I love you more now than I did 61 years ago.

I say to the Senate leadership that you better get this last vote done by tonight or you will have to do it without me because I am going to be with Kay on our anniversary on Saturday, our 61st wedding anniversary.

To everyone else out there, as you celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmastime, I am going to say to you: Merry Christmas and God bless you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant minority leader.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am sorry I didn't come to the floor quickly enough to wish my friend Jim Inhofe and his wife the best. He is one of the real contributors in the U.S. Senate and has been for years. He is a special individual. He decided to take an interest in the continent of Africa. I don't know that there is another Senator who knows as much about that continent as he does. He has been there so many times. His stories, many of them, relate to countries that few people have heard of. He has made a special point to understand that continent, the people on it, in addition to his responsibilities serving the State of Oklahoma and, of course, now, as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, his responsibility for funding the Department of Defense. He and our Democratic colleague, Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, have done a remarkable bipartisan job on that Defense authorization, let me add.

I sincerely hope that the President will sign that bill. His objections to it have nothing to do with the military or

defense of our country. They relate to issues which are thorny, political issues that shouldn't slow down these critical programs.

This authorization bill comes at an exceptional time. We have been learning over the last few weeks about a massive cyber security breach of our government, probably by the Russians. It has all the earmarks and fingerprints of Vladimir Putin project to compromise our national security and to create chaos whenever possible. We learned of it 4 years ago in the 2016 election, when every intelligence agency of our government agreed that the Russians were meddling in our election and doing their best to subvert the will of the American people.

We made strong statements in opposition to it, and we took action. Some of it has been publicly reported, and some of it has been disclosed to Members of Congress in a classified setting.

We were successful in thwarting their efforts in the 2018 election. I want to salute all of those who were responsible for that effort. In 2020, I believe the same can be said. We will know more as we sift through the evidence.

This latest disclosure is really troubling. We believe that beginning in March of this year, the Russians started compromising our cyber security network in many different ways. Every day there is a new disclosure of another agency that reports that they have somehow wheedled their way into this important, critical information. How much they know, what they have gained, how much they have compromised us, we don't know yet. It certainly is unnerving, and it deserves a very thorough—thorough—investigation as to how we failed.

You see, the United States was not taking anything for granted. We were literally spending billions—billions—of dollars for the safety of the security systems. We knew that included in those systems was information which is essential for the protection of the United States. To think that has been compromised at the hands of one of our implacable foes is certainly unnerving. I believe we should initiate a thorough and complete investigation, let the chips fall where they may, establish where we have failed from a technology viewpoint, and if any individuals are responsible, that they be held accountable.

At the same time, I have to say that I join the Presiding Officer in commenting on one particular aspect of this that I just can't understand. The White House has been virtually silent as all of these facts have unfolded by the day. I cannot understand that—why the Commander in Chief of the United States of America has not spoken out forcefully against the Russians for their involvement in this cyber security breach, why he has not likened this to a virtual invasion of the United States when it comes to our own national security. I believe that we should have been firm from the begin-

ning and honest with the American people, as well, about the nature of this threat. Instead, this President has been silent.

I recall not that long ago, a few months ago, we disclosed—we found evidence that the Russians were offering bounties on the heads of American soldiers in Afghanistan. It is an outrageous and unthinkable act. Yet the White House was silent, refused to respond to what I know—because I have seen it—was credible evidence that this was linked directly to Moscow and the operatives of the Russian Government. The attempted assassination of Navalny, the dissident in Russia, has been well documented. Yet, again, our White House, our President are silent. I don't understand it.

I am hopeful that the new President, Joe Biden, when he takes office January 20, will make it a priority to establish a new understanding and relationship with Vladimir Putin. The United States cannot be a victim of Putin over and over again without speaking out—and more. I am counting on Joe Biden to do that. I believe he will. He is a realist. I know he wants peace in the world, and I do, too, but we also must defend this country. The men and women in uniform who risk their lives every single day should be our highest priority.

I am heartened by Joe Biden's closing that he is using in all of his public speeches now. He, of course, says it more artfully than I will, but he calls on God to bless America but also God to keep our troops safe. I am sure it has special meaning to him since the death of his son Beau is a reminder of the sacrifices that not only the men and women in uniform but their families make for us every single day. I hope that continues to be the watchword of his administration.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, there is not much activity on the floor of the Senate today. I hope there will be before the end of the day. The leaders in the Senate and House—Democrat and Republican—as well as the White House, with Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, are fast at work, we are told, establishing a COVID-19 relief bill.

I was part of an effort, which the Presiding Officer also shared in. It was a volunteer activity that involved about 3 weeks of endless telephone conferences and Zoom calls. Staff supported us all the way or we couldn't have done it.

But it started off with eight of us eating dinner one night and deciding to come together as a group to see if we could break the logjam. The whole notion of COVID-19 relief was dead in the water for some reason—no action, no activity.

We remember back in March when Congress—particularly, I remember the Senate, by a vote of 96 to 0, passed, on a bipartisan basis, the largest relief bill in the history of the United States. It was over \$3 trillion in the CARES

Act, which was for addressing and fighting the pandemic as its first priority, but, secondly, trying to rescue our floundering economy.

Thank goodness we did that, and we came together. We hoped that it would be a short-lived requirement, but it turned out to be much longer. Many of us anticipated that by the middle of this year things would have come under control. We know, sadly, that is not the case.

There has been a call ever since to step back into this theater of confrontation with this pandemic and the weakening economy. But for some reason—and I won't point fingers—we have been unable to reach any bipartisan agreement.

Well, eight of us willful Senators—four Democrats and four Republicans—set out to try and get the conversation started and see what we could agree on. It was a great experience. Even though there were parts of it where we could not agree, and there was a lot of frustration, there was also a lot that was constructive and encouraging.

At the end of the day, we produced two documents. One of these documents was a \$748 billion consensus document, which spelled out the things that we thought were essential as part of any COVID relief package—extending unemployment benefits for 16 weeks, including for about 160,000 people in my State who claim the pandemic unemployment assistance and 248,000 who claim pandemic emergency unemployment compensation. Millions of Americans—12 million Americans will lose their unemployment compensation on the day after Christmas. Imagine that.

We also, in this bill, provided assistance for small businesses, including the second round of Paycheck Protection Program loans for the hardest hit businesses; extended the eviction moratorium through January 31, 2021, providing emergency rental assistance to help families stay in their homes; provided funding for hospitals and clinics for testing and to quickly and fairly distribute vaccines, including \$500 million to Illinois for testing and vaccine distribution and \$1.5 billion for Illinois hospitals and healthcare providers.

We provided \$82 billion nationwide for education—\$54 billion for K–12, \$20 billion for higher ed. We extended the Federal student loan forbearance from its current expiration, January 31, 2021, through April 30, 2021.

We provided \$10 billion nationwide of much needed support for the struggling childcare sector.

We addressed hunger by increasing SNAP benefits for nearly 2 million individuals in my State and millions more across the United States and by providing funding for food banks and senior nutrition programs, serving more than 1.5 million people in Illinois.

We provided billions for transit, including hundreds of millions of dollars for Illinois transit agencies and help for Amtrak as well. We provided bil-

lions for airports, including millions of dollars for Illinois airports and airline relief as well. We provided more than \$1 billion in funding for Amtrak to prevent further furloughs, provided millions in payroll support to protect jobs of thousands of Illinois airline workers, and provided funding to help struggling Illinois bus companies keep their workers on the job.

That is not the end of the list, by any means. Part of the money we put in here was for the logistics of the vaccinations which are now taking place across the United States. We provided some. I think the negotiators are adding to the amount, and I applaud them for that.

What we left out of this, I think, was significant too. We did not provide any direct assistance to State and local governments. This morning, I got on the telephone with a group that has been kind enough to volunteer for many years to consider the applications of individuals in Illinois who want to attend our service academies. Some of these people have been doing this for 20 years. I really respect them and thank them for doing it. I tried to take myself out of that consideration so no one can ever claim political consideration was taken in any way.

One of the persons who did part of the meeting this morning was Skip Lee. Skip is the mayor of Sterling, IL. He said to me: Senator, can you provide any help for COVID relief for towns like Sterling, IL?

I said: Skip, there will be some help, I think, but it won't be the kind of help that I wanted.

I do believe we should help State and local governments. I have been reminded by the Presiding Officer and others that every State is not the same, every locality is not the same. Some have suffered real losses in revenue directly related to COVID-19 and some have prospered. It just depends on your circumstances.

In my circumstance, the State of Illinois has paid a heavy price as a State and in the localities as well. We do not include the direct relief for State and local governments, which I hoped would be part of this agreement.

I hope we can return to that issue soon, very quickly—after the first of the year, perhaps, with the new President—and find a way to provide this relief.

The alternative is awful. I know what is going to happen to a lot of the local budgets. Police officers are going to be furloughed—firefighters, teachers, healthcare workers—just at a moment in time when we need them the most. Many of these communities will be unable to continue providing those very fundamental services to keep us safe. I hope we can get back to that as quickly as possible.

Finally, let me say that we are all anxious to fund this government at midnight tonight when the continuing resolution, which we passed several months, ago expires. It would be a real

tragedy if we saw this government come to a close for any reason at any time. And certainly, at this moment, when our economy is so tenuous and our worries are so large over the healthcare of our Nation, we shouldn't allow this to occur. I pray that the negotiators will be able to spend good time today and report to us soon that they have reached an agreement. It is time for us to get our work done.

And like Senator INHOFE, who is going home for his 61st anniversary, many of us are anxious to return to our homes and families. We won't have the expansive Christmas this year that we have had in the past. We won't be reuniting with children and grandchildren who really make the holiday, but we are looking at the long run. The long run is we want to be around for next Christmas. Instead of one tree, we are going to have two to make up for this year.

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

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

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2019

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, in a few moments, I am going to ask unanimous consent for the Senate to pass S. 2800, which is the bipartisan NASA Authorization Act. Before doing so, I want to make some brief remarks about how important this legislation is to American leadership in space and to our continued space exploration efforts.

Well over a year ago, I joined with Chairman WICKER, Ranking Member CANTWELL, and Subcommittee on Aviation and Space Ranking Member SINEMA, and we began writing the NASA Authorization Act, using as a foundation the bipartisan bill that I had previously authored with Senators CORNYN, RUBIO, MARKEY, and then-Senator Bill Nelson, from the last Congress, as our starting point. We solicited input from hundreds of stakeholders, from individuals and academics to industry partners and even our international allies. Hundreds of pages of suggestions, proposed edits, and comments were submitted. Over many months, our staffs worked diligently through each and every submission, trying to incorporate the feedback to the greatest extent possible, and what resulted is this bill, which was marked up last year and unanimously reported.

What we have achieved together is legislation that enjoys deep and broad bipartisan support and that sets bold goals for NASA and the United States in space. It provides the direction and