

year games while our adversaries and competitors plan years and decades in advance.

As former Defense Secretary Bob Gates put it in an interview this week, cutting spending on our military would be “a terrible mistake.” That is President Obama’s Defense Secretary, Bob Gates.

There could not be a more dangerous approach for the United States—short-changing the Pentagon and making America less competitive.

The first draft of the so-called jobs bill that the White House put forward would play into the same dangerous dynamic. I am talking about the multi-trillion-dollar proposal that spends less than 6 percent—less than 6 percent—on roads and bridges, the plan that Ivy League economists say would cost hundreds of billions of dollars more than the White House says; push American workers’ wages down; and somehow manage to shrink our economy despite taxing, borrowing, and spending trillions more dollars. That is not a plan to make America stronger and more competitive; it is a plan to pile up debt to leave us even weaker. It would be better news for Beijing than for our own citizens.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the Senate can do better. This body has long tackled real infrastructure on a commonsense, bipartisan basis and ended up with bills that passed by big, lopsided, bipartisan votes. That is what we Republicans are prepared to do again. That is the path I discussed with President Biden at the White House just yesterday. It was a good meeting. That is the road that the practical proposal from Senator CAPITO and a number of my fellow Republican Senators would begin to take us down.

If our Democratic friends are finally ready to reach across the aisle and work together to locate common ground, I am hopeful we can do a lot of good for the country and compete with China for real.

IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. On one final matter, the attacks being directed at innocent Israeli citizens are coming from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad. Both these terrorist groups receive support from Iran.

The regime in Tehran is the most active state sponsor of terrorism in the entire world. The regime supports Shia terrorists, Sunni terrorists, and secular terrorists.

Many of the rockets now raining down on Israel cities are gifts from Iran, technologies of terror honed by Iran’s proxies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Days ago, the U.S. Navy seized weapons on a vessel that appears to have been dispatched from Iran bound for Yemen to fuel the violent Houthi terrorists, in violation of the U.N. embargo. Just last night, the Houthis again fired missiles against Saudi Arabia.

Public reporting suggests Iran’s proxies, on top of assassinating Iraqi protesters, are stepping up attacks on the U.S. and coalition presence in Iraq as well. Iran is emboldened by our retreat from Afghanistan. They are eager to challenge an administration that appears desperate to return to a failed deal.

What former Defense Secretary Bob Gates said this week about weakness inviting challenge from China and Russia applies to Iran as well.

The answer is not accommodation; it is America’s strength. But reportedly, this administration is considering preemptive concessions—a huge rollback of sanctions, squandering our leverage, just to leap back into a failed nuclear deal. I sincerely hope these reports prove to be wrong.

It is difficult to believe an American President would consider removing terrorism- or missile-related sanctions at the very moment Iranian rockets are raining down on Israel, Iranian-backed militia are attacking American facilities in Iraq, and Iranian missiles are being trained on Saudi Arabia.

I cannot understand why the administration is considering any sanctions relief to induce Tehran back into the Obama deal in the first place. It would be total malpractice to squander our leverage just to jump back into a flawed deal. That kind of preemptive capitulation would make negotiating a better deal much, much more difficult.

Iran’s own Foreign Minister has lamented that the terror masterminds of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps basically run the country. So what on Earth does our administration think the successors of Soleimani would do with another influx of cash?

If the administration will stay smart, stay tough, and work toward a better deal that truly halts Iran’s nuclear and missile programs, as well as a strategy to confront Iranian terrorism, then the President will find support and partnership from the Republican side. But if the administration chooses policies that leave America weaker and the world more dangerous, Republicans will stand up for the right course.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Amber Faye McReynolds, of Colorado, to be a Governor of the United States Postal Service for a term expiring December 8, 2026.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

AFGHANISTAN

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to address what I believe is an urgent and fundamental issue of our policy in Afghanistan, and that is, what happens to the women and girls when the United States and NATO forces leave after 20 years?

Over the years, as I have talked to my constituents and people around the country, one of the things they have all been united on about our effort in Afghanistan has been the difference that our intervention has made for women and girls.

Before we went into Afghanistan in 2002, girls were not allowed to go to school, women were not allowed to work, and there was no freedom of movement for women and girls unless they had a male escort. They couldn’t listen to music. They were required to wear burqas anytime they went out of their homes.

What we have seen has been safety and security for Afghan women and girls as the result of our intervention, but now all of these gains are at risk as we withdraw our forces. The lack of emphasis on the safety and security of Afghan women and girls in the peace process is what has brought us to this point.

We are leaving by September, and there is no plan to ensure that the rights that were achieved for women and girls are actually protected, even though we have legislation that says that in conflict areas like Afghanistan, we have a responsibility to ensure that women are at the negotiating table.

Well, as we rethink the role of the United States in Afghanistan, I want to put a face on what we are talking about, what it means if we don’t prioritize women’s rights there.

In March of this year, the State Department posthumously honored seven women who were given the International Women of Courage Award. These are all women who were killed in Afghanistan in 2020. They are pictured here. They were murdered—assassinated, really—for choosing to live their lives outside of the narrow confines of what the Taliban and other extremist groups deem acceptable for women, and they reflect the thousands of other women in Afghanistan who have been the targets of violence.

We have seen over the last months of 2020 and beginning of 2021 that women were deliberately targeted for assassination, particularly women in high-profile positions. These women have been murdered for going to school, for reporting the news, for delivering healthcare or running for public office. We talk about them as courageous, and certainly they are, but they should not have to be courageous to do the kinds of things that they were murdered for.

It should not require courage to be a journalist like Malalai Maiwand, who

is right here in the lower left-hand corner. It should not require courage to stand up for basic human rights like Fatima Khalil, who is up here in the middle, or Freshta Kohistani, who is right here. Fatima was a human rights official. Freshta was an activist for women rights. Yet both of these women were killed by the Taliban for doing what they believed in, for trying to improve the lives of other women. Sadly, that kind of courage is what is required of all women in Afghanistan today.

I worry that this reality is only going to escalate after our departure. Indeed, we saw this over this past weekend when 85 people, most of them schoolgirls, were killed in a car bomb outside of a girls school in Kabul.

I saw them interviewing one young woman who, I think, was about 14, about why she thought they had been targeted. She said: "I guess it's because we want an education." This is the future we risk if we don't have a plan for how we are going to continue to support the women and girls of Afghanistan.

I also want to talk about the other four women who are pictured here.

Fatima Rajabi, who is in the middle, was a 23-year-old prison guard. She was on her way home from work and was on a civilian bus when the bus was stopped by the Taliban. She was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered, and 2 weeks later, her body was sent to her family.

Then there is Freshta, who is the daughter of Amir Mohamed. She was a 35-year-old prison guard who was killed on her way to a taxi to get to work—again, killed by a gunman.

At the bottom is General Sharmila Frogh. General Frogh was the head of the gender unit in the National Directorate of Security and was one of the longest serving female NDS officers in Afghanistan. She was assassinated when an IED explosion targeted her vehicle in Kabul.

Finally, I think the most horrific and barbarous of all of these murders was of Maryam Noorzad. Maryam was a midwife, and she was killed when the hospital in Kabul was attacked by the Taliban. She was there, helping a woman deliver a baby, and she refused to leave when they were attacked. She didn't want to leave the woman she was helping as a midwife, so the Taliban not only killed her when she refused to leave the woman, but they killed the mother, and they killed the baby. These are the Taliban whom we are being asked to join at the negotiating table.

I can tell you that I don't intend to support any political efforts that will allow the Taliban to continue to commit these horrific acts of violence. The agreement we made with the Taliban has already been breached by the Taliban. They have refused to cut ties with al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. They continue to escalate the violence.

What we are going to see over the next several months and what we do is

going to impact the lives of women for generations to come in that country, which is why we must do absolutely everything in our power to support the women and those in Afghanistan who want peace and who want to see the country move beyond the extreme religious rhetoric of the Taliban.

These seven women didn't deserve to die, and those schoolgirls in Kabul didn't deserve to die. We owe it to them and to the generations who will come after them to do everything we can to prevent any more Afghan women from meeting the same fate.

This is not a partisan issue, and it is not a woman's issue. It is a human rights issue, and it is a security issue for the future of Afghanistan because, if women are empowered in that country, the potential for stability is so much greater. So I urge the Senate to do everything in our power to ensure that women are represented at the table in the future of negotiations and that their rights are preserved in Afghanistan.

We must remember these seven women and the thousands of women like them and the schoolgirls in Kabul—the girls who should have the opportunity to grow up in a world with the freedoms that their mothers fought to secure. The women and girls of Afghanistan are watching what we do, and we can't afford to let them down.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to complete my remarks before the vote.

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

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, on Tuesday, the Senate Rules Committee conducted its markup of S. 1, which is the Senate's version of the Democrats' election bill that is designed to increase the Democrats' chances of maintaining their currently tenuous hold on power.

We are told that passing this bill is urgent. We were told that in the last Congress, too, when the Democrats first proposed this legislation. They said the same thing—that there were serious election problems and that we needed to pass this legislation to address them.

Then, of course, we had the 2020 elections, which the Democrats won and which featured record voter turnout. In fact, it was the largest voter turnout since 1900. So it became just a little difficult for the Democrats to argue that there were grave problems with our electoral system. Yet they still really, really want to pass this bill—a

bill that contains what one respected legal scholar has called "some of the most blatantly partisan, most obviously unconstitutional, and most unwelcome provisions ever passed by a chamber of Congress." So they have had to come up with a new rationale for trying to jam through this legislation.

Now we are being warned about a new crisis: States, which under the Constitution, historically, have had primary responsibility when it comes to elections, are debating election administration measures that will return our Nation to the Jim Crow era, and so we have to pass S. 1 to prevent the damage these States are going to do. The only thing, of course, is that this crisis is as manufactured as the last one.

Take Georgia, the Democrats have made Georgia a poster child for the need to pass election legislation.

"Georgia's new voting law," the Senate Democratic whip asserted, "is a deliberate effort to suppress voters, particularly voters of color."

The President feverishly described the Georgia law as "Jim Crow on steroids."

The only problem with that argument is "the law does not put up roadblocks to Black Americans registering to vote."

Those aren't my words. Those are the words of The Washington Post Fact Checker, but the Democrats haven't allowed facts or reason to intrude when it comes to their characterizations of Georgia's election law.

The Democratic whip has come down to the floor and claimed that the Georgia law makes it a crime to give water to voters in line. In fact, while the law does place restrictions on activists' and candidates' handing out water and other items—an obvious conflict—it explicitly permits neutral election officials to offer voters water.

The President has repeatedly claimed that the law is designed to keep working Americans from voting, except it is not. The Washington Post, as I mentioned, gave the President four Pinocchios, a rating that the Washington Post reserves for "whoppers" for that claim by the President of the United States.

In fact, as the Washington Post Fact Checker's piece makes clear, there is reason to think that the law might actually—wait for it—expand access to early voting. A fairminded piece in the New York Times—hardly a newspaper that carries water for Republicans—concluded that the voting provisions of the Georgia law are "unlikely to significantly affect turnout or Democratic chances."

Georgia's voting laws are actually, in some ways, more permissive than voting laws in some Democratic-led States. Georgia allows more early voting than both the President and the Democratic leaders' home States, Delaware and New York. Unlike Georgia, neither Delaware nor New York offers any no-excuse absentee voting. I look forward to seeing the President and the