

Utah will continue to serve as an example for the Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Senator from Texas.

JUNETEENTH

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate moved a historic bill one step closer to President Biden's desk. The Senate unanimously passed legislation to finally make Juneteenth a Federal holiday and to preserve the legacy of that momentous day for generations to come.

For more than a century, Texans have celebrated Juneteenth and commemorated the anniversary of the day slaves in Texas were first informed of the news that they were, indeed, free. President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, but the news didn't reach Texas for 2½ years, until June 19, 1865.

We were the first State to make Juneteenth a holiday and, of course, it commemorates an event that occurred in Galveston, TX. But over the last four decades, many other States have joined us.

It is finally time to recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday. I reintroduced this bipartisan bill with the Senator from Massachusetts, Senator MARKEY, this year, and I have been proud to work alongside my fellow Texan Congresswoman, SHEILA JACKSON LEE, in the House to get the bill passed and signed into law. The bill now heads to the House and according to Congressman STENY HOYER, the House will actually pass it today.

I will have more to say about the history and significance of Juneteenth tomorrow, but for now, I want to thank the dozens of Senators on both sides of the aisle who have supported this effort. I think, particularly now at this point in our Nation's history, a little reconciliation can go a long way.

It is also an opportunity to learn from our past. America is the greatest Nation in the world, but we are not perfect and, indeed, the original sin of slavery when this country was created has caused this country a lot of angst, death, and injustice over the years. We fought a civil war, and 600,000 Americans died. If you extrapolated that to current population, that would be like 3 million Americans dying.

Of course, we went through the civil rights movement in the sixties, and, of course, the latest manifestation of racial strife is the unfortunate killing of people like George Floyd and the lack of trust that exists between some law enforcement and the communities that they serve.

While America is not perfect, we continue to do the work to strive to be "a more perfect Union," in the words of the Constitution.

IRAN

Mr. President, this Friday, Iran will hold its 13th Presidential election, but unlike Presidential elections in the United States or in any other legitimate democracy, this process in Iran is

more about providing the appearance of a democracy than an actual democratic process.

In America, elections are conduits for change. If the American people don't like their elected officials or the direction of their government, they can change it. In Iran, elections are a sham. The candidates are hand selected, the result predetermined, and the opportunity for change nonexistent.

The process for electing the President of Iran is just a few steps shy of the fabricated elections in places like Iraq under Saddam Hussein. In 2002, Saddam won reelection by 11 million votes—11 million to 0—and there was reported to be 100 percent turnout. In fact, there weren't any other candidates running. In fact, the question on the ballot asked if Saddam should remain in office, check yes or no.

It reminds me of the story I heard about that time of a reporter traveling with a driver whom he had hired to drive him around Iraq to report on conditions there. The reporter asked—when he learned that there was 100-percent turnout and Saddam Hussein won by 100 percent of the votes, he said to this driver: Well, you have been with me; how did you vote? And he said: Saddam must have known what was in my heart.

That, to me, is maybe apocryphal, but a demonstration how even the dictators like Saddam Hussein, even the Ayatollah in Iran, still want to give the appearance of democracy, even though they deny it to their very own people.

In Iran, the situation isn't much different than the election under Saddam Hussein. It is just a larger effort to create the appearance of choices.

While the Iranian people may vote for the eventual winner, there is a highly controlled process that selects the pool of candidates, and the puppeteer behind the curtain is the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

Unlike a true democracy, the candidates for President of Iran are not selected by the Iranian people. They are selected behind closed doors by a powerful group called the Guardian Council. This group, itself, is comprised of 12 people. Half are selected by the Supreme Leader and the other half are selected by the Parliament.

But Parliament can't select just anyone for this position. These six jurists are chosen from the options presented to the Parliament by the Chief Justice, and the Chief Justice—you might have guessed—is appointed by the Supreme Leader.

This contrived election is not the result of a fair and democratic process. So the candidates hardly represent the will of the Iranian people. Of the 592 registered candidates, only 7 were approved by the Guardian Council—5 conservatives and 2 so-called reformists.

The Guardian Council, in fact, prevented most reformists or moderate candidates from even participating in

the race, and the candidate pool was carefully whittled down to a point that the outcome is virtually a known certainty.

All signs point to the eventual winner being Ebrahim Raisi, the favorite of the Supreme Leader and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. It is easy to see why Mr. Raisi is the chosen front man for the corrupt leaders of a brutal regime, because his resume is nothing less than a long list of atrocities. Mr. Raisi's first step to power came after the 1979 Revolution.

Throughout the 1980s, he gained more power and influence and the trust of the Ayatollah. In 1988, he was chosen to be one of the four members of the so-called "death commission" charged with carrying out executions of Iranians' political prisoners. Mr. Raisi played a central role in these executions, which took place over the course of 5 months.

It is difficult for us to be sure how many political prisoners were killed, but it is widely known to be in the thousands. Some believe the death toll could be as high as 30,000 from these death commissions.

Mr. Raisi's reign of terror did not stop there. He continued to serve in high-ranking positions throughout the government and inflict violence on dissidents. He currently serves as the Judiciary Chief, where he continues to direct the execution of protesters and ethnic minority groups. Once again, this mass murderer is expected to be the next President of Iran.

This election comes at a very precarious time for the regime. Iran has experienced major uprisings since the last election in 2017. Popular slogans included: "Death to the dictator" and "Our enemy is right here; they lie when they say it is America."

Iranian citizens place the responsibility for the economic crisis that the country is currently experiencing on the regime that controls the country. The vast majority of Iranians live below the poverty line, and the government's pathetic mishandling of COVID-19 has made already harsh circumstances even more unbearable.

The Iranian people know this election is a sham. Candidates approved by the Supreme Leader offer no window for the freedoms and change that they desperately want and desperately need.

The Iranian resistance has called for an all-out boycott of the elections, and turnout is expected to be the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

For the United States and our allies, this changing of the guard cannot be just a blip on the radar, because Iran continues to commit human rights abuses and back terrorist organizations and authoritarian figures, including dictators around the world.

Currently, two Iranian warships are making their way across the Atlantic, and we have reason to believe that these ships are carrying missile-equipped fast-attack boats and other military equipment to Venezuela.

Whether this is a test or a threat or an effort to seek some kind of leverage remains to be seen, but what is abundantly clear is that Iran has no intention of taking its foot off the gas.

Over the past 2 months, U.S. military assets in Iraq have been attacked by drones laden with explosives, and all signs point to the responsibility being on Iranian-backed militias. Just last month, the world watched in horror as the conflict between Israel and Palestine gave way to more violence and destruction than we have seen in years. This was a proxy war waged by Iran against the Jewish State. Hamas—that proxy—receives significant financial support from Iran, which is the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world.

Now take these actions over the past few months, and add that to what we have seen over the last several years. Iran has arrested and continues to detain American citizens. It engages in gross human rights abuses. It backs terrorists around the world. We have also watched as Iran has blatantly ignored the restrictions on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called JCPOA, which is designed to prevent Iran from enriching uranium and building a nuclear weapon.

During the time that it violated the terms of the JCPOA, Iran was led by President Hassan Rouhani, broadly considered to be a moderate when compared to his expected successor. Following this election, Iran's already extreme President will be replaced by an even more punishing leader. The United States cannot simply stand by and enable Iran to continue down its current path.

In recent years, Iran has felt significant pressure from the United States and our allies. The Trump administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and placed sanctions on hundreds of businesses and individuals who helped finance Iran's illicit activities, and there is no question that Iran stood the most to lose from the historic Abraham peace accords that were brokered this last year. This took a number of Arab countries that were nominally adversaries, and they joined together to declare their willingness to let Israel live in peace and to recognize it as a legitimate state.

The Biden administration has already loosened the pressure valve on Iran. President Biden has made it clear his intent to revive the Iranian nuclear deal no matter what the cost. At the same time, the administration has rolled back sanctions that would have provided the U.S. maximum leverage to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

By simply signaling his intent, the Biden administration has already emboldened and encouraged Iran's malign activities. Iran did not play by the rules of the JCPOA the first time around, so there is absolutely no reason to believe that this will change when a radical mass murderer assumes the Presidency.

Over the last few days, the leaders of the G7 have reaffirmed the need to stop

Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. I agree that this is one of the most critical responsibilities of our time, but a flawed agreement that relieves pressure on Iran, without concessions, with regard to its nuclear weapon aspiration will only continue to embolden the regime. Iran's belligerence cannot be rewarded with sanctions relief, and the administration should not continue to squander our leverage.

The Biden administration needs to resume the maximum pressure campaign on Iran, and I would encourage the President to work closely with us in Congress to identify an approach that is effective, comprehensive, and built on bipartisan foundations. We have to stop Iran from ever achieving a nuclear weapons capability.

I asked the Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, during her confirmation hearing: Should the United States prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon? She said: Yes. She didn't hesitate.

I asked Ambassador Burns, the new CIA Director, the same question: Should we let Iran get a nuclear weapon? He said "no" without hesitation.

I find that encouraging from these two new members of President Biden's Cabinet, but we need to work together, as Republicans and Democrats, as Members of Congress, with the administration to ensure that our efforts to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons can last beyond the term of a single President or Congress.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here to talk about the escalating crisis on our southern border.

I am the ranking Republican, the senior Republican, on the Homeland Security Committee, which is a committee that has, among other things, oversight over what happens at the Department of Homeland Security and therefore at the border and with the Customs and Border Patrol and has other responsibilities. We have been looking at this issue carefully over the past few months. We have been trying to figure out how we can address this surge at the border that is really overwhelming the Border Patrol.

It is obviously about people, but it is also about drugs. Unfortunately, there are more and more drugs coming over the southern border as well, which, in effect, makes States like mine, Ohio—which is not on the southern border; we are actually on the northern border—part of the border, in effect, because we are affected by what happens down there.

At one time, most of the most deadly drug, fentanyl, which is a synthetic opioid, was coming from China. Frankly, a lot of it was coming from the mail system, from our own Postal Service. We passed legislation here in this body. I have worked with Republicans and Democrats alike on it, and we have largely been able to deal with that issue, but those same drugs have now moved to Mexico, and now they are coming across our southern border. So, if you look at the amount of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids—again, the deadliest of all drugs at a time when more people are dying from overdoses in our country than ever in history—more and more of that is coming across the southern border in addition to the cocaine and crystal meth and other dangerous drugs that were already coming.

This is about the immigration system not working properly and having a huge surge of individuals—family members, unaccompanied kids. It is also about not having control of that border and having this contraband come over—in the case of these dangerous drugs—that is actually resulting in overdoses and deaths all over the United States, including in my State of Ohio.

So how can we tell that it is getting worse? I would just look at these numbers here. This is the latest from the Customs and Border Protection folks of its encounters at the southwest border.

Remember, we had a crisis in May of 2019, which was deemed to be the worst crisis of its kind, and it was pretty bad. We had a lot of unaccompanied kids coming at that time and a lot of family members as well as individuals. The high point was here at 144,000 individuals. We are now, as of May of 2021, which was last month, at 180,000.

Some of my colleagues have said: Well, it is getting better. I don't see that it is getting better, and the numbers don't say it is getting better. It is really at the point now where it is overwhelming those people whose jobs are to try to control the border. They just don't have the resources to be able to handle this.

It is also overwhelming our system all the way through. A lot of this is of families and kids coming in, as an example, and we don't have the facilities to take care of these children.

During this first period of time—here is the Biden inauguration. After the inauguration, this huge increase started to happen, and it was because policies were changed. A new President who is coming in has the right to change policies, but in my view, what a President doesn't have the right to do is to change policies without preparing for it.

It is one thing to say we are not going to have an emergency on the southern border anymore and that we are going to do away with title 42—a provision that says, if you have somebody coming over the border during COVID, he can be turned back—and immediately the President is saying: No,