

upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized as if in morning business for such time as I shall consume.

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, first of all, I am going to do something that is a little bit unusual. I will start off by saying thank you. We have got a lot of people to thank. Yet we never seem to do that.

When we look at what happened in Afghanistan over the past 20 years—I can't approximate how many times I was over there—that was tough duty for those guys and the gals there; it was not easy. This is not the place you want to go take a vacation—and to their families. Then, of course, on August 26, we were reminded so painfully of what we ask our troops and their families to do. They lay it all on the line for this country. Our servicemembers represent the very best of us. Over the past 20 years, they did everything that they could in Afghanistan to root out evil and to champion American values. I couldn't be more grateful to or have more respect for them than I have today.

I say this not only because we should say it more often but because it is important to remember that what we saw in Afghanistan over the past few months was not a failure of our military; it was a failure of the Commander in Chief—the President of the United States—and the people who advised him on his policy in Afghanistan.

I still don't know who those people are, and, you know, I have chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee and other committees. People ask me, when I go back to my State of Oklahoma—they will say: Hey, who is advising the President to do all these things? I have to tell them I don't know, and I have been around for a long time. I don't remember any administration where I just honestly didn't know who was making the decisions and who was advising—in this case, advising the President.

But what we did witness, though, was a failure of the Commander in Chief and whoever was advising him. No one can look at what happened over the past few months and claim that it was a success like President Biden did. It was a disaster. Leaving Americans behind, and allies—don't forget our allies who are still left behind. It was un-American.

The administration keeps saying: "We didn't inherit a plan." That is false. They inherited a condition-based agreement and made their own policy decisions. It was condition-based; it wasn't open-ended. It was something that was out there, and they had the reins.

Let's keep in mind, this administration has a majority in the House and the Senate and the White House, and they make their own decisions. And they say: We didn't have a plan. They had a plan, and we had a plan, but everything we did and the previous administration did was condition-based.

So according to the condition-based approach, President Trump agreed to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan if and only if the Taliban acted against al-Qaida. Now, that is one of the things. There were many other conditions, and one condition was to leave some of our troops there, not just to walk away, to vacate. And those conditions were in line when this administration came in, and that didn't happen. President Biden knows it. Secretary Blinken admitted it.

When President Biden announced his decision to withdraw back in April, a senior administration official told the Washington Post: "The President has judged that a condition-based approach is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever." That is a quote.

Just last week, in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, when asked if the Taliban had severed its relationship with al-Qaida, Secretary Blinken said the relationship has not been severed.

Let's keep that in mind. We keep hearing that, yes, they are taking action against that administration, but the relationship has not been severed.

Now President Biden says that he will hold the Taliban accountable, but he didn't hold the Taliban accountable while our troops were still in Afghanistan. I mean, that is when we had the leverage to do it, but we didn't do it, and he has presented no plan for holding the terrorists accountable now.

This decision—this rushed withdrawal that has left the Taliban stronger than it was in 9/11 was President Biden's alone. He is responsible for the chaos that followed. He is going to be held accountable and should—everyone who advised him to make such a horrible decision.

Now, what is more outrageous to me is that President Biden left Americans behind. That is not something we do. He said that we were going to get everyone out, and that didn't happen.

You know, when historians look back at this—this may be decades from now, centuries from now—this is what they will remember: The Biden administration knowingly left Americans behind.

The administration has tried to downplay this. Early in the evacuation, Secretary of State Blinken said that there were perhaps 10,000 or 15,000 American citizens in Afghanistan. Our men and women in uniform, working tirelessly and effectively with our diplomats under incredibly difficult circumstances, managed to evacuate about 6,000 of our citizens. Now, according to my math, that means that between 4,000 and 9,000 Americans were left behind. Secretary Blinken says that there were only 100 and that the

rest of them preferred to stay in Afghanistan.

By the way, some legitimately did prefer to stay in Afghanistan because they were married people, they had families, and they made it very clear that—when something like this normally happens, families are moved as a family unit. Not there. That is not what happened.

So that is more than bad math; it is a lie. We know and every congressional office that tried to get people out of Afghanistan knows—and I know this because our Senate office was very busy at that time helping people to get out—that there were many U.S. citizens who wanted to leave Afghanistan, but they couldn't leave because the Taliban would not let their families go with them. Well, that is exactly what I would expect from the terrorists who were there at that time.

So Secretary Blinken wants you to think that these people made a choice. He wants to hide the fact that the administration in which he serves created its own hostage crisis and gave the Taliban the upper hand.

Keep in mind when we talk about this, it is the Taliban. They were the terrorists.

He also wants you to think it was the fault of those families they didn't get out before August, repeating that they had been telling Americans to leave for months. There is a kernel of truth to that, but it is clouded by the fact that they repeatedly stated that it would be a year, probably more, before Kabul was at risk of falling to the Taliban. Instead of 36 months, the fall of Kabul only took 36 hours.

In addition to American citizens, President Biden left behind our Afghan partners who risked everything to support our shared security goals. I was out there many times in the past, talking about that very thing, about the problems they had and the dangers they were in.

Now, these are not our American citizens; they were some of our allies who were left over there. In addition to American citizens, President Biden left behind our Afghan partners who risked everything to support our shared security goals. As a result of the President's decision, Afghan women and children have been thrown back to the stone age. We all know that. We know what they are doing right now. We don't have to guess.

Our allies and partners around the world are questioning our credibility, our leadership, and our commitment. These are our allies. They are not used to having the rug pulled out from under them. This is the first time.

Our enemies are bolstered by President Biden's policy, which puts Taliban terrorists in charge of Afghanistan—a policy that spread the perception that we not only abandoned our allies and partners, but we also abandoned our own citizens.

Seeing all these failures, Americans are demanding accountability, and they deserve it.

But let's make this crystal clear: None of this is the fault of our military. Our military leaders, the ones with real experience on the ground, advised the same thing that I did, and that is, leave a small force in Afghanistan. Now, this would have supported the Afghan military, prevented the Taliban's takeover, kept the pressure on the terrorists, reassured our regional partners, and kept our homeland safe.

President Biden pretends that none of this was possible. He claims that he had two options: a massive deployment or zero troops, which is not true. In fact, I publicly supported a third option: maintain a small force to preserve our air power. We can't do the air power without some troops on the ground. We needed to have some troops on the ground—we did—counterterrorism operations and military options.

Many of us here supported a small, tailored deployment to protect our core interests, and so did his own military advisers. Yet, when he was asked, "Did your top military advisers warn against withdrawing on this timeline? Did they ask you to keep 2,500 troops?" President Biden said, "No, they didn't. That wasn't true."

But it was true. We talked to the—in fact, you are going to find something out this coming Tuesday when we have a hearing. We are going to have many of the principals whom we really haven't heard from, principals who were involved in advising the administration as to what the military wanted and didn't want.

Except it was. We know that now. The former commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, General Miller, told the Senate Armed Services Committee just this last week—this is our committee, the committee I chaired for some period of time—he said no. Now, he didn't tell President Biden directly because President Biden didn't even bother calling his top commander on the ground before making his decision, but General Miller did report it to the chain of command.

Now, we are talking about General Miller. At that time, he was the top commander on the ground. So the President didn't even consult him as to whether or not we should—he made it very clear he advised him not to go, not to close everything up.

He also tried to say that al-Qaida is "gone" from Afghanistan and that "terrorism is not emanating from that part of the world." Well, we know that is not true. General McKenzie said al-Qaida remains the main focus in the region.

Last week, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency—that is LTG Scott Berrier—said that the projected timeline for al-Qaida to have the capability to threaten our homeland is 1 to 2 years at most, if not sooner, and that is it.

So President Biden was not telling the truth in that area about having only two choices. He didn't tell the

truth about getting American families out of Afghanistan. He failed to tell the truth about the advice that he got from his military commanders, saying that his military commanders did not advise him. We know better than that, and if you don't know it, stick around for next Tuesday, and you will find out. He didn't tell the truth about al-Qaida not being a threat.

So I have to wonder, if he is not telling the truth about this, what else is he not telling the truth about? If we can't trust the President on this, if we can't trust him to tell the truth and we can't trust him to put together a good strategy in Afghanistan, how can we trust him to protect the Nation from our strategic competitors?

After watching President Biden stumble badly in Afghanistan, I am worried that he won't pursue a strong strategy to push back on China, and China is our top threat right now. We all know that. We don't like to talk about it, but it is true.

As former Secretary Gates famously wrote in his memoir, President Biden has "been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades." That was Secretary Gates, former Secretary of Defense.

I am also worried about the administration desperately trying again to return to the Obama administration's failed Iran deal and offering Iran massive sanctions relief, sanctions that were put on in the previous administration to get their—of course, we know Iran would just use the sanctions relief to ramp up terrorism.

You know, I don't know how the American people—maybe it is the people in Oklahoma. They are the ones I have talked to more than any other groups. You know, what else would they do? What would Iran, with their background, do with sanction relief or with funds? They would use it on terrorism. That brings us back to Afghanistan, which is only one of many, many examples in the Middle East and North Africa where the administration has no plan for countering terrorists and keeping us safe.

President Biden and his administration have broadly talked about a new over-the-horizon strategy to counterterrorism. "Over the horizon" means that we don't have boots on the ground. We send airplanes in from afar—something our military leaders have told us is way more difficult than most people believe, far more expensive, and almost impossible without partners on the ground.

We can't do it. You can't just lead with military airpower. Even if it is possible, experts are telling us it won't be effective. We haven't even seen a plan for how this will be enough to keep American families safe.

This is a failure of leadership. Along the way, President Biden has tried to blame everyone else—the Afghan Security Forces, the Afghan Government, and the previous administration. But

the blame lands squarely on him, and he owns this.

We should expect his failures in Afghanistan to bleed into other issues. China and Russia see a weak America now. Terrorists see safe havens and use Afghanistan as a rallying cry.

I still have a lot more questions and expect President Biden and his administration to have more answers. Thirteen brave Americans died in the chaos created by President Biden's policies. We need explanations and we need accountability.

We are going to hear from Secretary Austin, General Milley, and General McKenzie next week. This is going to be on Tuesday. I have reminded people of that for a long time because we need to have a clear understanding, and we will get that understanding. We are going to start to understand this—just what went wrong, who is to blame, and what we need to do to protect ourselves. This is going to be an open meeting. This is not a classified meeting. This is an open meeting that is going to take place this coming Tuesday. We are going to be doing this as transparently and openly as possible because the American people deserve the truth. Our servicemembers and their families who sacrificed so much over the last 20 years deserve that, too, and we are going to give them the truth. That is going to happen next week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE CHILD TAX CREDIT

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, it is always a thrill to come to the floor to talk about the child tax credit, especially with three colleagues who really are the authors and the most important pushers, if you will, of this bill in the Senate.

I am going to turn it to Senator BENNET—he and I worked on this for damn close to a decade now—and Senator BOOKER. And then we will be joined last by Senator WARNOCK, who has only been in the Senate for a year—not even—and has done so much already for the State of Georgia, and he is one of the best supporters of this in the U.S. Senate.

So I will reserve my comments for a little later. Senator BENNET will go first.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Ohio, Senator BROWN, for his remarkable leadership in getting us to this point with the child tax credit and with the earned income tax credit for childless families which, thanks to his leadership, we have been able to triple.