

been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Today, only two Ambassadors have been confirmed by the Senate. This administration has had to wait over 200 days for its first Ambassador to be confirmed, compared to only 62 days for the previous administration. For the first 300 days of the previous administration, 55 State Department nominees were confirmed by the Senate, and now, as we approach the first 300 days of the Biden Presidency, this Senate has only confirmed 14 appointees.

Now, I agree with my colleague from Texas about the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline. I think we need to sanction it. But I am not willing to shut down the government, to allow the actions of this government to grind to a halt because I am concerned about that issue.

If Senators are concerned about our national security, they would match deeds with words and confirm career State Department nominees who have been waiting for months. When we look at the increasing global threats to the United States, operating with a depleted diplomatic corps jeopardizes our national security, U.S. interests, and the safety of Americans at home and abroad.

These political games are really risking serious consequences. It must stop. I know we can work together in a rational, bipartisan way to address the country's needs. I have seen it. I believe my colleagues who are holding things up love this country, but I am concerned that their actions don't show that they love the country.

There is no excuse for delaying or hindering the basic functions this legislative body is constituted to perform, and I urge all of our colleagues to join us, to get to work. Let's get this done. Maybe, if we do that, we can address some of the other concerns that we have that we ought to be able to work together and compromise to get done. That is what I am going to continue to try to do, Mr. President.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, George Washington, in his farewell address to the Nation, warned us against foreign entanglements and costly wars. He and the other Founders knew firsthand the danger that enduring engagement abroad posed to our Republic and to the cause of freedom.

Despite those warnings, we, the United States, have been embroiled in a directionless, trillion-dollar war in Afghanistan for the past 20 years.

And after all that investment—the American blood and treasure poured into that cause—Americans watched in

horror as any semblance of the so-called progress and investment in a democratic Afghanistan crumbled in a matter of weeks. Haunting images demonstrating this failure tragically played out before us. Americans hadn't seen tragedy of this type since the Fall of Saigon.

The Costs of War project at Brown University estimates that the total monetary cost of our war in Afghanistan amounts to \$2.3 trillion, counting U.S. military spending, both on and off budget. U.S. manpower, resources, and expertise were dedicated for decades to the war in Afghanistan.

So we must ask ourselves: What went wrong?

I rise today to explain how the erosion of Congress's constitutional war-making role permitted and, in fact, enabled these failures.

In the early years of the war, Congress shrugged as the President transformed the mission in Afghanistan. President Bush addressed the Nation and the servicemembers going to war in October of 2001, promising "To all the men and women in our military—every sailor, every soldier, every airman, every coastguardsman, every Marine—I say this: Your mission is defined; your objectives are clear; your goal is just."

At the time, the mission was clear. The goals were to capture the terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks, neutralize the threat posed by al-Qaida in Afghanistan, and ensure the Taliban was not strong enough to provide a safe harbor to al-Qaida.

In 2003, we had substantively accomplished each of those goals. Though killing Osama bin Laden would take until May of 2011, the Taliban had fallen and the leaders of al-Qaida went into hiding outside of Afghanistan. And yet, despite this reality, the Bush administration shifted the mission to physically rebuilding Afghanistan and reshaping the country's government and culture as if to mirror our own.

Even as the mission in Afghanistan was changed dramatically and unrealistically, Congress did not repeal or replace or amend the 2001 authorization for the use of military force in Afghanistan.

The Constitution charges the legislative branch to not only fund but also declare and oversee wars, and yet Congress seemed unaffected by the rather dramatic change in mission and strategy.

As a result, the war continued for longer than it should have—much longer—and the United States continued to lose tax dollars, lives, and any attachment to the original goals all at the same time.

As building a democratic Afghanistan became the new mission, Presidents of both parties and the interagency apparatus ignored explicit evidence of failure and, in fact, doubled down on American investment and involvement.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction—created by

Congress to oversee and audit funds used for nation-building in Afghanistan—has delivered 427 audits and more than 250 reports to Congress since 2008, detailing the risks, the waste, and the mismanagement in the U.S. mission. Many of these reports pointed out contradictions of our aims and explained the waste, fraud, and abuse plaguing the funds Congress appropriated for the reconstruction projects of all sorts.

Now, thanks to the investigative journalism of Craig Whitlock of the Washington Post, "The Afghanistan Papers" added another layer to the inspector general's reports, revealing evidence that high-ranking officials in the Department of Defense, in the State Department, and the White House knew that the U.S. mission had no focus, no metrics, no clear coordination, and no defined enemy.

Douglas Lute, a three-star Army General who served as the Afghanistan war czar under President Bush and President Obama, is quoted in the published interview saying "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn't know what we were doing."

While I share the view with the majority of Americans that withdrawing forces from Afghanistan was the right choice and was, by all accounts, inevitable at some point, the Biden administration's disastrous withdrawal was the culmination of American failure in Afghanistan.

Kabul fell to lawlessness and mass panic. Afghan security forces laid down arms to the Taliban. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled his nation. And the evacuation was so poorly directed that potential terrorists and men with child brides secured seats on U.S. evacuation flights while American citizens were left behind enemy lines. Our Nation lost 13 servicemembers, with many more seriously wounded, to a terrorist attack, and the administration ineptly responded by killing 10 innocent civilians, including 7 children.

President Biden's closing of the war in Afghanistan has been riddled with avoidable mistakes, resulting in both tragedy and embarrassment of historic magnitude. The President and other high-ranking officials must be held accountable for this failure. Anyone else engaging in such mismanagement of our actions in a theater of war would surely be held accountable, and they must too.

Throughout 20 years of engagement, Congress itself has shamefully failed to respond to an executive branch plundering powers that constitutionally belong to Congress. It is time for Congress to do its job. It is time to ensure that such a grave mistake that cost us so much in American taxpayer resources, but most importantly in American blood, will never, ever happen again.

Some of my colleagues and I may disagree on when and exactly how to use military force, but we should debate those matters in the light of day for

the American people to view and, even more importantly, for the American people to influence. U.S. engagement in Afghanistan over the last decade and the recent blundered withdrawal demand that we prioritize such a debate. It is long, long overdue.

That is why I, along with my colleagues across the aisle, Senator CHRIS MURPHY and Senator BERNIE SANDERS, introduced the National Security Powers Act, which would restore Congress's role in national security decision-making. This is an opportunity to protect our constitutional order. American citizens and especially those who serve in our military deserve nothing less.

Despite our political differences, as members of the branch of government most accountable to the people, we feel the weight of American blood and treasure sacrificed in our Nation's wars. We may not have all the answers—I certainly don't claim to have them, but we put forth a really thorough, well-reasoned, much-needed set of reforms to ensure that America is not thrown into another endless war without continual congressional input—congressional input that is not just helpful; it is not just a good idea, but congressional input that is actually required by the Constitution itself.

It is that kind of input that has been neglected. And, sadly, it has been neglected not just by the executive branch, but it has been neglected by the Congress, by the very people who are supposed to wield it.

See, there is a big difference when it comes to war-making power between our system of government and the one we left behind—the one that was based in London. As Alexander Hamilton explained in *Federalist No. 69*, this was one of the key design features of the Constitution, one of the things that differentiates it from our former London-based system of government.

There, the Chief Executive—that is the monarch; in those days, King George III—would take the country to war unilaterally. It was up to Parliament then to figure out how to fund it. Our Founding Fathers decided to make a break from that practice. They did not give this power to declare war to the Chief Executive, no. They gave that power only to the branch of government that would stand accountable to the people at the most regular intervals, the legislative branch.

When we denigrate this role, when we minimize this responsibility, when we shirk this duty, we do so to our own everlasting shame and in violation of the oath that each and every one of us has taken to support the Constitution of the United States.

In this Republic, Congress can no longer sit idle while the Executive alone decides the fate of our Nation's wars and those who fight in them. While we can't change history, we can live up to the ideals of our Constitution. I pray that we will. And I know that together we can, we must, and we will.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, there have been a lot of discussions on the floor today—and I fully support them—about an important, important role of the U.S. Senate that we need to take on with regard to our oversight responsibility of what the entire country has recently observed as a fiasco, debacle, with regard to foreign policy in Afghanistan that is going to have consequences for years.

Like all of us, I was home over August when all of these images on TV were unfolding. And I will tell you, I don't think I have ever seen my constituents madder about a single issue than this. It wasn't just Republicans. It was across-the-board Alaskans.

Why?

Because they saw our great country humiliated. They witnessed time and time again the President of the United States, the Commander in Chief, telling them blatant falsehoods that they knew were falsehoods, and there is yet to be any accountability on this.

Now, the hearings have begun. We have had two hearings on the Armed Services Committee, but they continue to insist on keeping them classified. No reason to do that. We need to have these hearings out in the open. The American people want to see them.

We had hearings on the Foreign Relations Committee this past week, and we started to see the beginnings of the Biden administration's strategy as it relates to explaining this fiasco, this debacle.

What is it?

Remarkably, it is to blame Donald Trump—if you watch the Secretary of State testify in front of the Foreign Relations Committee—and then blame the Generals, and then continue to quote the President of the United States that this withdrawal in Afghanistan was “an extraordinary success.” Let me repeat that: An “extraordinary success.”

That is what the President of the United States has called this. And, unfortunately, his Secretary of State, his Under Secretary of Defense—who testified in front of the Armed Services Committee just a couple of days ago in a hearing that was the height of deniability on any responsibility—all of them continue to cling to this blatant falsehood that every American knows is not the case.

This wasn't an extraordinary success, what we witnessed in Afghanistan. The whole country knows that. In fact, the whole world knows that.

This is the cover from a few weeks ago of *The Economist* magazine—pretty honest, well-respected magazine. Much of the world reads it.

And that is what *The Economist* called it: “Biden's debacle.” If you look in the magazine, it goes into several articles about the implications of Biden's debacle. Here are some of the names, titles of the articles in this magazine: “The fiasco in Afghanistan

is a huge and unnecessary blow to America's standing” in the world. That is not an extraordinary success. How about this one from another article in *The Economist*: “Joe Biden blames everyone else.” That is not accountability. And then perhaps most importantly: “The big win for China in Afghanistan is seeing America humbled.”

These are articles in an international magazine—a well-respected international magazine—that the whole world is reading, and this is what happened in Afghanistan. It wasn't an extraordinary success; to the contrary, it was a debacle. It was a debacle.

Now, some things are becoming increasingly clear. The administration tries to defend this, tries to explain it. As *The Economist* magazine mentions, this is President Biden's fiasco. Despite attempts by the civilian leadership in the Biden administration to explain this away with regard to blame on Donald Trump or the generals, this was 100 percent President Biden's decision and debacle.

It is becoming increasingly clear even in the classified hearings that we have had on the Armed Services Committee that the President's senior military advisers said to the President: Do not do this, sir. Do not go to zero with our troops. Instead, you should keep a small force there.

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that the President's military advisers then said to the President: If you do go to zero, if you do get rid of all our troops—especially if they are pulled out before others leave—you are going to see many bad things happen tactically, operationally, strategically for our country.

In essence, what Americans witnessed and saw on TV in August—this was predicted. The President was told this. He ignored this advice, so he owns this debacle. What he needs to do now is tell the truth about it. He and his administration need to tell the truth about it.

There are many things that are disturbing about what has happened over the last several weeks in Afghanistan, but what has been so disturbing is not only how the President has been blaming everyone but himself; it is that when he talks to the American people about this issue, he has clearly not been telling the truth, and the American people know it.

Let's start with the issue I just mentioned: the advice that the President received from his military advisers.

President Biden was on a media interview show on August 18 as this whole fiasco was unfolding. He was asked:

Your top military advisors warned against withdrawing on this timeline. They wanted you to keep about 2,500 troops.

That was the question from George Stephanopoulos.

The President of the United States said:

No, they didn't.

Later, Stephanopoulos pressed: Your military advisers told you not to do

this, that “we should keep 2,500 troops” in Afghanistan.

The President of the United States:

No. No one said that to me that I can recall.

That is not true. That is not true.

During that same interview, George Stephanopoulos said:

We’ve got, like, 10,000 to 15,000 Americans in the country. . . . Are you committed to making sure that [American] troops stay until every American who wants to [leave gets] out?

That was the question.

The President said:

Yes.

I am quoting him:

If there’s American citizens left, we’re gonna stay—

The military is going to stay— [until we] get them all out.

That is a quote from the President of the United States. That wasn’t true.

In a later interview, the President mentioned that al-Qaida is all gone from Afghanistan. That isn’t true. We know that.

The President also said that our NATO allies:

Every one of them knew and agreed with the decision I made to end, jointly end, our involvement in Afghanistan.

That is not true. That is not true.

Then the President and his advisers—the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy most recently—have been highlighting this incredible, over-the-horizon capability to go after terrorists whom we still have in Afghanistan. That, we know, has been greatly diminished. We have heard that from the military leaders who know these issues. So even on that issue, they are not leveling with the American people.

These are not small, marginal misstatements I am talking about; these are dramatic, obvious falsehoods that go to the very heart of the foreign policy fiasco we have all witnessed. These are life-and-death deceptions that the President of the United States told the American people and he told the world.

Here is the thing: The American people, the people in Britain, the people in our NATO ally countries, the leaders in countries that are adversaries—everybody knows that these statements were false.

One of the many things that are so harmful to come out of this, because of these kinds of statements—when they come from the Commander in Chief, this undermines the credibility and honor of the United States of America in front of the rest of the world. That is one of the major reasons why so many of my fellow Alaskans and our fellow Americans are so upset by this Biden debacle.

There are going to be more hearings next week in the Armed Services Committee. We are finally going to have open hearings. What we will need are straight, truthful answers from the witnesses, particularly those in uniform, who are not obligated to cover

for the Commander in Chief’s unwise decisions or blatant falsehoods. To the contrary, these witnesses will need to tell the truth—will need to tell the truth.

Speaking of the truth, Mr. President, here is one truth that, to me, has been clear for months, and I have been talking about it for months, and it is even more relevant and urgent today in light of this foreign policy fiasco in Afghanistan. The Biden administration’s budget is dangerous to America.

Take a look at it, America. This is a \$6 trillion budget—\$6 trillion budget—where almost every Federal Agency in the U.S. Government gets a big increase in its budget; some 40 percent, 20 percent; all this green; double digits for most. Two Agencies—two Agencies—in this Biden budget blowout actually get cuts. Adjusted for inflation, they are cuts. Which are they? The Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.

If you are looking at the border right now, you know that Homeland Security doesn’t need a budget cut, and we certainly, in this time of increasing danger globally, don’t need the Department of Defense cut, but that is what this administration is doing right now.

Like the President’s actions and statements on Afghanistan, this budget is divorced from reality because here is the reality: We have a growing threat from international terrorism once again as Afghanistan once again has become a safe haven for some of the most dangerous, violent, extremist organizations on the planet. We know it. We see it. The Taliban, the Haqqani network, ISIS-K, al-Qaida—they are all celebrating, and they are all coming back to Afghanistan, and guess what they are doing. They are plotting against this great country. It didn’t have to be this way, but that is the reality.

Here is another reality: After watching this administration’s chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, our adversaries are going to test Joe Biden’s will in other areas of the world. It is going to happen—Russia with regard to Ukraine or the Baltics or Poland; Iran with regard to Israel, which the terrorist leaders in that country continue to say they want to wipe off the face of the Earth; and, of course, communist China, with Taiwan. As some of you may have seen, during the Biden Afghanistan debacle, China started rattling its saber as it relates to Taiwan for this very reason.

Let me underscore this again. The weakness and lack of resolve demonstrated by the Biden administration in Afghanistan and this very weak military budget is likely, I think—very likely, unfortunately—to invite aggression by our adversaries in other parts of the world.

Here is my message to the President and his team: You better be ready for this. You better be strong. And being strong starts with supporting a Department of Defense budget that is not cut-

ting our readiness, as this one clearly does, and actually matches the realities of the more dangerous world we now find ourselves in because of this President’s foreign policy incompetence.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, 8 months into the humanitarian crisis at the southern border, our Democratic colleagues are finally, finally paying attention. This is after 1.2 million migrants have arrived since President Biden took office, which apparently did not raise any particular alarms. Neither did the countless numbers of migrants who endured abuse at the hands of criminal organizations and human smugglers.

Our colleagues didn’t spring into action either when the processing center in Donna, TX, reached 1,600 percent capacity earlier this year, and they didn’t show much concern about the fact that the surge had left huge security gaps along our border, making it easier for the drug cartels to move heaven knows what into our country. Actually, we do know what they moved into the country because more than 90,000 Americans died of drug overdoses last year, principally from illegal drugs imported across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Finally, our Democratic colleagues seem to be paying some attention.

Over the last several days, more than 15,000 migrants, primarily Haitians, have arrived at Del Rio, TX, a town of about 35,000 people—15,000 migrants in a town of 35,000. You can imagine what sort of reaction they have had. These migrants have set up camp under the International Bridge, and Border Patrol, State, and local officials have been working around the clock to ease the humanitarian crisis. Of course, the first concern in 100-degree temperatures is to try to help protect these migrants, making sure they have food and water and that people don’t die of heat stroke.

I want to thank the Border Patrol, which does a lot of good work, and a lot of the good work it does is to save the lives of migrants who are suffering from exposure or injury and have been left behind by the coyotes, but it is also the law enforcement arm of the Federal Government to secure the border.

So the Border Patrol, local, and State law enforcement and everyone seem to come together to meet the surge of migrants in Del Rio, but like the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, these men and women have been operating in crisis mode for months and are expected to carry the weight of a crisis that everybody knew was coming.

As the Biden administration races to respond to the crisis now, finally, I am left wondering: Why didn’t they see this coming? After all, 1.2 million migrants have crossed our border just