

pandemic with the state's most vulnerable small businesses to increase awareness of critical programs like the SBA's Paycheck Protection Program, Mr. Syed has consistently helped empower and uplift our nation's small businesses.

Mr. Syed's nomination has the support of more than 150 civic, government, higher education and business leaders and organizations, including endorsements from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Black Chambers, National Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship, Small Business Roundtable, Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Congress, and many others. Upon confirmation, Mr. Syed would become the highest-ranking Muslim American in the Biden administration to date, as well as one of the highest-ranking AAPIs.

However, we are disappointed to see the treatment Mr. Syed has received from those on the Committee that have held up his confirmation vote, based on false accusations, anti-Muslim sentiment, and efforts to hamstring Committee business unless specific conditions on unrelated matters are met. Since June 16, the Committee has made three different attempts to consider Mr. Syed's nomination, but each time certain members have challenged the proceedings or blocked them from moving forward. On two separate occasions, these members even boycotted the proceedings—denying Mr. Syed fair consideration. Targeting nominees like Mr. Syed for their faith, ethnicity, or place of birth, furthers the perpetual foreigner stereotype to which AAPIs are constantly subjected. We stand firmly against the use of these typecasting misconceptions. These tactics have been rejected by leading civil rights and faith-based organizations and have no place in our government or our nation. There is no question that Mr. Syed is uniquely well suited and highly qualified for this role, and small business owners and entrepreneurs across the country deserve this standard of leadership at SBA. Continuing to block his nomination is a disservice to these business owners and entrepreneurs.

The Deputy Administrator role has traditionally been focused on managing execution of SBA's programmatic mission and day-to-day operations, which includes bringing desperately needed relief to struggling small businesses and entrepreneurs across the nation. This position has been left vacant for over three years and continuing to do so prevents the agency from having a fully staffed senior leadership team at a time when the SBA's importance in our nation's economic recovery is at an all-time high.

Mr. Syed's impressive background both in public service and the private sector in business and entrepreneurship along with his leadership in the AAPI community will undoubtedly be assets in his role as SBA's Deputy Administrator. We are confident that Dilawar Syed is the perfect fit for this role and we urge the Committee to promptly move forward with his confirmation.

Sincerely,

Judy Chu, Member of Congress, CAPAC Chair; Grace Meng, Member of Congress, CAPAC First Vice-Chair; Kaiiali'i Kahele, Member of Congress, CAPAC Freshman Representative; Mazie K. Hirono, U.S. Senator; Mark Takano, Member of Congress, CAPAC Second Vice-Chair; Ami Bera, M.D., Member of Congress; Tammy Duckworth, U.S. Senator; Ted W. Lieu, Member of Congress, CAPAC Whip; Al Green, Member of Congress; Pramila Jayapal, Member of Congress; Jan Schakowsky, Member of Congress; Ro Khanna, Member of Congress; Dina Titus, Member of Congress; Barbara Lee, Member of Congress; Norma Torres, Member of Congress.

Ms. HIRONO. In the midst of the pandemic, what is normally a very bipartisan small business committee, Republicans are blocking Mr. Syed's nomination. This is particularly egregious behavior by Republicans on the committee because Mr. Syed is exceptionally qualified to hold this position and is widely supported by business groups and communities across the country.

In fact, let me read a paragraph from the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus letter that I just mentioned.

I am reading from the letter:

Mr. Syed's nomination has the support of more than 150 civic, government, higher education and business leaders and organizations, including endorsements from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Black Chambers, National Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship, Small Business Roundtable, Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Congress, and many others. Upon confirmation, Mr. Syed would become the highest ranking Muslim American in the Biden administration to date, as well as one of the highest ranking AAPIs.

Republicans have continued to block this nomination for months. Earlier this summer, they disputed the results of a meeting the committee had to advance the nomination. Since then, they have refused to show up for three other meetings, including one we held last week, denying the necessary quorum for a vote to be taken.

The reasons for blocking Mr. Syed's nomination have changed over time. First, they were concerned about SBA loans his company received during the pandemic, even though these loans were lawful and fully repaid before he was nominated. Then they insinuated he was somehow anti-Jewish and anti-Israel—note the groups that I read that have supported him—despite his widespread support in these communities. And now, they are concerned about lawful SBA loans to Planned Parenthood Health Centers, something that Mr. Syed certainly had no control over.

Throughout the last several months, Mr. Syed has repeatedly made himself available to address any concerns my colleagues might have about his background or qualifications, things that clearly matter in his ability to do the job.

It boggles the mind that Republicans are blocking someone who is the very picture of the American dream: an entrepreneur, a job creator who was born in Pakistan and educated in America, who understands firsthand the challenges businesses have faced during this pandemic. Mr. Syed would be an asset to SBA and the businesses they serve, our own constituents.

Every day that Republicans continue their obstruction, they are doing a disservice to these businesses who can least afford this uncertainty and turmoil in this moment.

Mr. Syed deserves fair consideration.

Republican efforts to block not just this nomination but so many others for the simple reason that they want to

slow the process so that this administration can have people in place who can actually do the job to help the American people—enough is enough.

I just say to the Republicans: You know, put your votes where your mouths are. You say you support small businesses; you say you support this, that, and the other thing; and yet you will not let this administration get on with their job to do what is necessary to help small businesses, to help our communities, in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. It boggles the mind. I say: Act like the Senators you are, who were sent here to do your job, and let's get on with this nomination.

I yield the floor.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Let me thank Senator HIRONO for her comments, and I also thank Senator PADILLA for his comments.

I have never gone through something like this before, where the Republicans are breaking a quorum after they have already voted a nominee for reasons unrelated to the nominee. It makes no sense, and the reasons that they are using makes no sense at all, since they are asking the SBA to violate the law.

We are going to continue. As chair of the committee, I am going to continue to look at every conceivable way that we can get Mr. Syed confirmed. I think he is an extraordinary person who will serve our Nation with great distinction, and I know our small business community needs a confirmed Deputy Administrator.

You know, what surprises me is that our Republican colleagues talk about their support for small businesses, and I said we worked on COVID together to create these programs. President Trump never filled the position of Deputy Administrator so this position has been vacant for a long time.

We need this position. The small business community needs this position. So it is my hope that we will find a path forward as quickly as possible to get this nomination confirmed. I am confident that we will get a strong bipartisan vote for Mr. Syed's nomination and confirmation. Republicans tell me they think he is well qualified.

So let's stop using these parliamentary procedures to obstruct. Let's get on with the business of the Senate.

I would suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. 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. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday's Senate Armed Services Committee hearing gave us disturbing new information on the President's Afghanistan debacle. Thanks to yesterday's

hearing, we now know that President Biden pulled troops from Afghanistan against the advice of his military commanders and was less than truthful after the fact when asked about their recommendations.

General Milley and General McKenzie's testimony made clear that they had both recommended that the United States leave a small contingent of U.S. troops in the country—advice that the President ignored.

Thanks to President Biden's ill-considered withdrawal from Afghanistan, here is the situation we now find ourselves in. The Taliban is once again in control of Afghanistan, and just in case anyone thinks this is a kinder and gentler Taliban, let's look at the facts.

The Taliban has stocked its government with terrorists, including former inmates of Guantanamo Bay and members of the Haqqani Network, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization with a number of members on the U.N. Security Council's sanctions list. Many of the members of the new Taliban Cabinet are on the U.N. Security Council's sanctions list, and the government is well stocked with pre-9/11 Taliban leaders, the same leaders who allowed Afghanistan to serve as a refuge for al-Qaida.

So that is the new Taliban government. What is it doing? Well, in mid-September the Taliban announced that secondary schools would reopen for boys. There was no mention of girls. The Taliban official announced that women would not be allowed to play any sport that might show their bodies. Women are being excluded from the workplace.

In Helmand province, barbers have been barred from shaving or trimming beards.

In one city, the body of an alleged criminal was hung from a crane in the city square, while in Kabul, Taliban members brutally flogged a man accused of stealing a phone. And a senior Taliban leader announced the return of executions and the cutting off of hands as punishment.

A kinder, gentler Taliban this is not.

And this formerly somewhat ragtag group is now the possessor of a significant amount of U.S. military equipment, including weapons, combat vehicles, aircraft, and surveillance equipment, much of it acquired from the Afghan National Security Forces.

And while the President might like to blame the Afghan forces for disbanding, the truth is he bears part of the responsibility for their collapse. For years, the United States trained and equipped Afghan troops to fight the way that we do, including a reliance on close air support and a sophisticated intelligence-gathering operation. And the limited number of U.S. troops still in the country were playing an essential role—providing intelligence, logistics, and air support the Afghan military needed.

Then the President pulled all remaining U.S. support almost overnight. It is

no surprise that in the wake of that, the Afghan military quickly collapsed. There is no question that there were preexisting problems in the Afghan forces, including fraud and corruption. But the Afghan military was playing a key role in combating the Taliban and terrorist activity in Afghanistan, and it was the abrupt withdrawal of U.S. support that precipitated its collapse.

Thanks to the President's withdrawal, our ability to combat terrorist activity in Afghanistan and the region has been significantly degraded, as General Milley's testimony yesterday made clear. As the Washington Post reported:

Al-Qaeda remnants are in Afghanistan and interested in growing, Milley said, but the United States no longer has military or intelligence assets on the ground to keep tabs on the militants.

The withdrawal makes it "much more difficult for us to conduct intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance," Milley said, including missions to locate militants.

That, again, is from the Washington Post.

In short, there is every reason to expect that Afghanistan will once again become a haven for terrorists. In fact, because of the huge number of weapons and equipment we left behind, it is probably more accurate to say that Afghanistan will likely become a terrorist superstate. Meanwhile, as I said, our ability to effectively detect and defend against emerging threats in Afghanistan has been significantly diminished. There is no intelligence or counterterrorism strategy that will fully offset the loss of American boots on the ground.

U.S. military and intelligence personnel still in the country, in coordination with our local partners, were playing a critical role in providing intelligence on evolving terrorist threats in Afghanistan and throughout the region. That intelligence network is now gone. We no longer have human intelligence on the scene.

We no longer have any bases in-country from which to conduct operations. Future missions will have to be staged from distant bases or seaborne assets, complicating the mission and significantly increasing our response time.

That is not just an inconvenience. By compromising our ability to respond to terrorist activity, this withdrawal is endangering our country. For 20 years, we have managed to prevent another major terrorist attack on U.S. soil. How long is that going to last when Afghanistan is once again a haven for terrorists and our intelligence and response capabilities have been permanently weakened?

I haven't even mentioned the damage that the President's bungled withdrawal has done to our relationships with our allies. The President, who, supposedly, was set to restore America's standing in the world, is instead presiding over a national embarrassment that has left our allies wondering whether or not we will keep our commitments. We have damaged our credi-

bility with our allies. It is clear that Russia and China are enjoying our humiliation on the world stage, not to mention the way that our withdrawal has empowered our terrorist enemies.

Ceding Afghanistan to the Taliban and its terrorist allies has not exactly made us look like an intimidating foe. It wouldn't be surprising if terrorists are thinking that all they have to do in future battles is wait us out until we give up and withdraw.

I am sure the President would like to put his chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal behind him, but there is a big problem with that—namely, the fact that his administration still has U.S. citizens left behind in Afghanistan. The administration has been hazy on the details, either because it is not sure how many American citizens are left or because administration officials don't want to give a number. But it is clear that there are still a number of Americans stuck in Afghanistan.

And then there are the tens of thousands of Afghans we abandoned—Afghans who were affiliated with the U.S. Government or worked with the U.S. military and whom we promised to protect. These individuals and their families are currently in grave danger.

My office continues working to evacuate a number of green card holders and at-risk Afghans to safe countries in the region, and several of the individuals we are working with have received death threats from the Taliban.

And while there are dedicated State Department and Defense Department personnel coordinating with veteran-led groups to evacuate Afghan citizens, the administration is still—struggling to develop a clear path for getting them out of the country.

We still need to learn more about the chaotic U.S. evacuation, which resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. servicemembers and scores of Afghan civilians. But one thing is very clear: President Biden made an ill-considered and disastrous decision when he chose to withdraw our troops on an arbitrary timetable, and the Afghan people are currently suffering the consequences.

And should Afghanistan once again become a terrorist haven, as seems likely, our country could also pay a deadly price. We have to make sure it doesn't come to that.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, more than 3 months ago, ProPublica began publishing a series of stories. These stories were based on what they have described as "a vast trove of Internal