

production? Follow the law; put a pause on new restrictions; declare how long they are going to actually hold off on Russian oil and how long that will be to give certainty for people in their investment; and pause all these new restrictions on capital.

If the Biden administration did that today, we would see an even greater increase in oil. Listen, there is no incentive that needs to be put in place. I have had folks say: What incentives do we need to put in place to be able to increase American production? Can I just say oil is at \$120 a barrel.

There is no incentive that needs to be put in place. The problem is not the incentive; the problems are the restrictions on the other side. With that certainty in a constantly changing environment, very few people want to be able to take the risk for it.

So if Secretary Granholm is serious when she is calling out oil companies to ramp up production, do the work behind the scenes to open the path for them so that they have that kind of certainty.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

UKRAINE

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, conditions are bad in Ukraine, and they are getting worse. Vladimir Putin's war is escalating in severity and scale.

This past Sunday, we received the first public reports that Russia is now deploying proxy fighters to Ukraine. Putin put out the call to action in Syria, Southeast Asia, and Chechnya, and now the mercenaries are pouring in. On Tuesday, we heard further allegations that as many as 1,000 proxy fighters from the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group will deploy to Ukraine and attack Kyiv.

This latest news about proxy developments makes it even more obvious how willfully blind the President has been to the disaster unfolding in Ukraine. If you look back at footage from the past few months, it is clear that the Biden administration thought they would be able to talk Putin out of this. They thought they could send in the diplomats, offer a few concessions, pat everyone on the back, and head home. But while they were lining up their talking points, Vladimir Putin was lining up bodies to throw at Ukrainian defenses.

When we first started to debate the threat that the Chinese Communist Party poses to the free world, it took a lot of time to convince the skeptics of China's tight hold on the global order. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, cheap telecom build-outs, and control over important supply chains, Beijing has created spheres of economic influence all across the globe.

The Kremlin has done the same thing with its proxies. But it is important to remember that this is not new informa-

tion. The existence of Wagner and other Russian proxy groups is not a secret, and neither is their brutal history.

This won't be Wagner's first time in Ukraine. In fact, that is where these mercenaries actually got started. But for the past decade, they have been wreaking havoc all across Africa. Again, this is no secret. We know for a fact that they have caused chaos and bloodshed in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Madagascar, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic and that they have helped turn Mali into yet another "hermit kingdom." And what have the Russians received in return? They have gotten access to oilfields, diamond mines, silver, gold, and other extremely valuable natural resources.

By using his proxies, Putin gets the best of all worlds. He is able to force open doors into strategically important areas. He will then suck them dry of their natural resources and make his own name synonymous with violence in the face of resistance.

Furthermore, mercenaries exist outside the bounds of laws and norms, which means groups like Wagner operate with impunity and give cover and plausible deniability to Moscow. In their opinion, it is the perfect legal fiction.

Meanwhile, these proxy fighters have been accused of abductions, torture, and rape. They murder journalists and conduct summary executions on behalf of their Kremlin overlords. They target civilian populations with the specific purpose of terrorizing innocents and eliminating dissent, and when they are done, they simply disappear. That is what Vladimir Putin is preparing to unleash on the brave Ukrainian people.

I sent, and other Members joined me—we have insisted since February 24 that this is not a special military operation; this is a war. But by bringing proxies into the mix, Putin has signaled that he is prepared to do more than inflict violence on key strategic targets; he is preparing for a massacre.

This isn't a head fake. He knows exactly what he is doing because he has done it before. He is following the Syria playbook to the letter, from the booby-trapped humanitarian corridors to his use of cluster bombs, to the presence of proxies to carry out his dirty deeds.

It is no wonder that Moscow has ordered their fighters to travel with mobile crematoriums. It is the only way they will be able to even attempt to cover up the brutality inflicted by Putin's private army.

Over the past few months, Putin has shown us exactly what he intends to do to the brave Ukrainian people. He has made no attempt to hide behind diplomacy. His military commits war crimes in broad daylight for the benefit of the cameras. The introduction of proxies is the natural progression of this increasingly savage attack.

It is time for President Biden to pull the blinders off and decide what Amer-

ica's response ought to be, and he has to do that right now.

We have deprioritized the African theater for far too long, and now it is a breeding ground for glorified terror squads. That absolutely has to change. Russia is using proxies this very moment to destabilize and exploit Mali. We know what they did to the people of Syria. The pictures were too graphic for the nightly news. It is time to remind the world what happened there and make it clear that unless we do something, Ukraine is next.

We must also send a strong signal to Putin, Wagner, and other thugs around the world that there will be no more hiding. Collect the evidence now. Document the war crimes now. Prepare for prosecutions now. We must let Vladimir Putin know that no amount of propaganda can cover up the atrocities that he and his private army plan to commit against the people of Ukraine. But we have to do it before it is too late to free the world from Moscow's grip.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM ACT

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, on Tuesday night, the Senate took a significant and historic vote to strengthen one of our Nation's oldest and most trusted institutions—the U.S. Postal Service.

For the past 15 years, this vital service that delivers to every single community in our country, no matter how remote, has faced unfair, burdensome requirements that have jeopardized its financial stability and its ability to provide reliable and timely delivery to Americans all across our country.

With 79 votes for the Postal Service Reform Act—one of the strongest bipartisan votes the Senate has delivered during this Congress—we passed significant reforms that will set the Postal Service on a more stable financial footing, preserve mail delivery for 6 days a week, and ensure greater transparency of delivery performance for the people who are counting on the Postal Service to bring them critical mail.

When our Nation's Founders enshrined the Postal Service in our Constitution, they could have never envisioned what a vital role this institution would play in the daily lives of Americans. Whether it is families who are receiving critical medications or connecting with loved ones, veterans and seniors who are relying on the mail for benefits and Social Security checks, or small businesses that are sending important financial documents and their products to customers, Americans are counting on the Postal Service to deliver. Over the past few years—especially during COVID-19—we have seen just how essential the Postal Service is to keeping our country connected.

The legislation that we passed earlier this week with overwhelming bipartisan support will help ensure that the Postal Service can continue its vital mission, and I am looking forward to seeing President Biden sign it into law.

I am proud of our bipartisan efforts to protect this vital public service, and I would like to take just a few moments to thank the many people who made this possible.

First, I want to recognize my Senate colleague on this effort, Senator ROB PORTMAN, who is the ranking member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

I am also grateful to Chairwoman MALONEY and Ranking Member COMER on the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, who worked with me hand in hand, as well as with Senator PORTMAN, to write and to build key support for this legislation.

Senator CARPER, who is a former chairman of Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and a stalwart advocate for the Postal Service, was an absolutely indispensable resource, a critical voice, and we worked together to advance this bill.

I would also like to recognize each of our Senate cosponsors: Senators TILLIS, SINEMA, and BURR, Chairman WYDEN of the Senate Finance Committee, Senators COLLINS, HASSAN, DAINES, ROSEN, CAPITO, PADILLA, SULLIVAN, MANCHIN, HAWLEY, SCHATZ, BLUNT, ROUNDS, SMITH, CRAMER, REED, MURKOWSKI, Chairman SANDERS of the Budget Committee, and Senators HOEVEN, TESTER, MORAN, and KAINE.

Key stakeholders like the Postal Service, our postal employee unions, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, and the countless members of the public who spoke out about what timely service meant to them also played an essential role in providing technical assistance and building support in passing this legislation.

But none of these vital reforms to protect this longstanding public service would have been possible without the dedicated and tireless work of congressional staff.

First, I would like to recognize my staff on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, who worked tirelessly to ensure this bill received bipartisan and bicameral support, as well as stakeholder support.

Thank you to Annika Christensen, Lena Chang, and Victoria Pleasant for your determined efforts to craft and build support for this consensus reform.

I would also like to thank Senator PORTMAN's staff, Pam Theissen, Andy Dockham, Amanda Neely, and Renee Sheehy, who all played an important role in crafting and passing these reforms.

On the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Mark Stephenson and Ethan Van Ness on Chairwoman MALONEY's staff, as well as Christian Hoehner, Jake Greenberg, Daniel Ashworth, and Bill Womack on Rank-

ing Member COMER's staff, provided valuable counsel and expertise on the legislation.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman WYDEN's staff, Eva Dugoff and Sam Conchuratt, and Ranking Member CRAPO's staff, Erin Dempsey, offered vital assistance to ensure the Medicare integration proposal worked effectively.

House Ways and Means Committee staff Kathryn Olson, T.J. Sutcliffe, and Elisa Walker all provided critical technical assistance.

Leader SCHUMER's staff provided vital expertise and guidance throughout the entire process and especially over the past few weeks as we prepared to pass this bill on the floor.

Finally, Jackie Maffucci from Senator CARPER's office and Erin Bursch and Erin Schulte from Senator SINEMA's office spent countless hours helping to craft and secure robust support for the bill.

These folks, along with countless others, ensured that the Postal Service would be able to keep delivering for the American people.

In recent years, it has been a rare occasion when the Senate comes together to pass this kind of bipartisan, consensus legislation with such overwhelming support to address a very, very real problem. I am grateful to every person who played a role in raising awareness—working on this legislation—and getting it passed by both the House and the Senate.

Once signed into law, this groundbreaking, bipartisan bill will help ensure that the Postal Service can continue its nearly 250-year tradition of providing delivery to every American.

I yield the floor.

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, government funding, as we all know, is set to expire tomorrow night at midnight, and the Senate has the responsibility not just to keep the lights on but also to make critical investments in our country.

I could only wish that we had come to this point through a more rational and more deliberative sort of way; but, unfortunately, this seems to be more the norm than the exception where four people get into a room and they write a piece of legislation, then they bring it to the floor, and your only option is to vote yes or no on it. We don't have a practice of making sure that on each one of these bills, people get to actually offer amendments and shape that legislation. I guess that is a quaint and old-fashioned notion, but that is how I thought the legislative process was supposed to work. Maybe that is a topic for another day, but it is unfortunate that this is where we are.

Last night at 10 o'clock, the House voted on an almost 3,000-page bill, and

then we are expected to vote on it the next day or the next 2 days. This is not a way to run a railroad.

We all know that democracy is under attack in the world, and that means we need to do everything we can to provide for our defense and to support our friends and allies around the world.

We know that there has been a tug-of-war between our Democratic colleagues and this side of the aisle when it comes to prioritizing national security spending, and that actually is one reason why we find ourselves here at this late date, voting on this multi-thousand-page bill, because our colleagues on the other side of the aisle wanted to prioritize domestic spending, not national security spending.

Thank goodness that has been now negotiated where there is virtual parity. Thanks to the leadership of Ranking Member SHELBY and our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, the bipartisan bill includes \$42 billion more in defense spending. I can't think of any time in our recent history where we need those additional resources more for our security and the security of our friends and allies.

This \$42 billion increase in defense spending will provide our military commanders with what they need to respond to the threats that we are facing today and to prepare for those threats we see on the horizon.

It is ironic I find myself speaking to the Senator from Maine, whom I serve with on the Intelligence Committee, because he knows a lot of this subject matter as well—certainly well, maybe better than I do. But we all know that Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine was what we thought was a relic of the past.

My dad was a B-17 pilot in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He was shot down on his 26th bombing mission over Nazi Germany and captured as a prisoner of war, where he served for the last 4 months of that war. We thought—Europe thought, the world thought—that perhaps we had gotten beyond that sort existential threat to our way of life and that the autocrats of the world—people like Vladimir Putin, President Xi, the Ayatollah in Iran, Kim Jong Un in North Korea—that these individuals would be deterred from provoking a war like Vladimir Putin has provoked in Ukraine.

One thing Winston Churchill liked to say: If there is one thing for sure, it is that humankind is unteachable. We keep making the same mistakes over and over again. We keep thinking, well, we can cash the peace dividend because that is in the past, only to find ourselves, as Secretary Bob Gates said—he said, of all the military conflicts we found ourselves involved in, in the last several generations, we haven't planned for a single one of them. But we had to be ready, and we had to be able to defend our way of life and our values and our allies.

So Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine is a reminder of the threats