

leader to abandon this political wish list. Let's get to work on the issues facing the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 137

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, one of the aims of American foreign aid is to assist countries in times of need. This spirit exemplifies a trait Americans and Utahns rightfully value, that of giving to those in need.

Yet, for many years, our foreign aid dollars in support of abortion have been used to impose violent cultural imperialism. Instead of helping to preserve, strengthen, and sustain the lives of women and children abroad, our taxpayer dollars have been used to harm women's lives and to end the lives of their unborn children, especially baby girls. In some of these countries, girls are disproportionately aborted precisely because they are female. U.S. aid is used not to affirm the equal dignity of women but to violently deny it.

In some of these countries, abortion is forced on women who don't even want abortions, women in countries like Vietnam and Peru, for instance, who were forced to endure the coercive abortion and sterilization campaigns of the 1990s, just to name a couple of examples.

What kind of aid does violence to women and girls? What kind of help is it to impose U.S. abortion extremism on countries that culturally and democratically reject it or contribute to international organizations that allow regimes to use abortion as a tool of oppression? What kind of progress is it to encourage sex-selective abortion and the denigration of human dignity for both the baby and the mother?

U.S. advocacy abroad for the taking of innocent, unborn life is not pro-woman, it is not pro-child, and it is not pro-healthcare. It is pro-sexism. It is pro-violence. And we must end it.

According to recent polling, the American people overwhelmingly agree. Nearly 60 percent of Americans oppose using tax dollars to pay for abortions, and more than 75 percent of Americans oppose using tax dollars to support abortions in other countries.

Thankfully, President Ronald Reagan took steps to reverse this support, starting in 1984, instituting the Mexico City policy to prohibit foreign aid from going to organizations that provide or promote abortions or that advocate to change abortion laws in a foreign country. Since then, the policy has, unfortunately, been rescinded and reinstated again and again, repeating this cycle between changing administrations.

Another policy that used to have lasting support is the Hyde amendment. This legal provision prohibited the use of Federal funds to pay for abortion with a set of exceptions. Recently, Democrats have abandoned this bipartisan position and have placed the Hyde amendment under threat. It, too,

could become a back-and-forth, ping pong policy, depending on who holds majorities within the two Houses of Congress.

The lives of babies and the dignity of women and girls are not political footballs. Women and unborn children everywhere have immeasurable dignity and eternal worth regardless of where they are from, and they are entitled to the right to life and protection from harm regardless of who happens to be in office from one moment to the next.

The Protecting Life in Foreign Assistance Act affirms this truth. This bill would permanently stop the use of our foreign aid money from funding or promoting abortions overseas.

In our laws and through our lives, we must uphold the dignity of each and every human person regardless of race, regardless of sex, and regardless of appearance, abilities, or age. The measure before us today does just that, and I urge my colleagues to support it. The lives of millions of women and children, born and unborn, depend on it.

So, Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be discharged from further consideration of S. 137 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from the Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, my colleague and friend from Utah and I agree on a couple of points. Yes, President Biden did rescind the global gag rule, which this proposal would not only reestablish but make permanent and expand, disastrously, and yes, women and children should not be political footballs, nor should this issue be one. Unfortunately, that is the objective of this proposal.

It is difficult to exaggerate the breadth of this proposed legislation or the breadth of harm that the global gag rule does. In fact, it prohibits foreign organizations receiving U.S. assistance from providing legal abortion services or referrals or even information—information—on abortion services even when those activities are funded without any connection to U.S. Government money. It egregiously blocks organizations receiving U.S. funds from advocating for abortion legislation—mere advocacy—stifling their ability to champion their patients, even if that advocacy is not funded in any way by U.S. taxpayers.

This legislation would not only codify this dangerous policy but expand it even beyond what was implemented under previous administrations—expanding it, not just codifying it.

Thankfully, President Biden has rescinded this policy. It was an impor-

tant effort to restore U.S. leadership abroad, promoting healthcare access in places it is needed most. It was a critical step toward what is now needed—permanent prohibition of the global gag rule, not codification of its expansion.

Let's be very clear. The global gag rule does nothing to protect the health of people around the world. It blocks healthcare access, it stifles local advocacy efforts, and it undermines reproductive rights worldwide, putting in jeopardy the people who need those services most. It impedes access to a range of health services, including contraception, HIV prevention and treatment, and maternal and child care, because it cuts off funding for many of the most experienced healthcare providers.

Some proponents of this dangerous policy seem to claim it will reduce abortions or it is intended to do so, but studies have shown that, in fact, it does just the opposite. The global gag rule actually increases rates of abortion—many of them unsafe—because it reduces access to contraceptives and it increases the number of unintended pregnancies.

In short, we should be joining other countries in addressing global goals like creating an AIDS-free generation, ending preventable maternal and child deaths, and achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, not putting unnecessary restrictions on U.S. funds that cause fear and impede access to healthcare. Unfortunately, that is what the global gag rule and this legislation do, impeding countries' efforts to improve global health, advance human rights, and achieve gender equality.

I oppose the Lee bill. I urge my colleagues to come together and work, instead, to promote global health. Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I have tremendous respect for my friend and colleague, the distinguished Senator from Connecticut. He and I both acknowledge that the policy we are arguing—the nature of the policy is one in which we have seen something of a tug-of-war, a ping pong match over the years.

The Republican legislation will put in place or restore the so-called Mexico City policy, prohibiting U.S. foreign aid from going to organizations that perform or advocate for abortion overseas. It is backed by an estimated 75 percent of Americans who don't believe that we should be using U.S. taxpayer dollars especially to further the cause of conducting or advocating for abortions overseas.

He and I both agree that President Biden has rescinded that. I think where we disagree can be highlighted and traced back to the fact that we call it by different names. He refers to this as

the gag rule, a gag rule. Now, normally when we think of a gag rule, we think of something that tells someone who is otherwise free to speak that they may not speak. It is, in fact, what happens when we don't allow people to live. It is what happens to all these baby girls who are never allowed to be born precisely because they are female. And make no mistake, when we fund abortions overseas, that is what is happening. It happens a lot in countries that receive our aid in the absence of the Mexico City policy. Some of that goes to these organizations that perform abortions.

In many of these countries, sex-selective abortions are not only tolerated culturally, they are commonplace. They are excessive. As a result, these baby girls never get to be born. They never get to become women. They never get to speak in the first place. That is a form of gagging. That is not OK.

Regardless of how you feel about abortion, regardless of whether you think that is a baby, a human life, or whether you think it is something else—I am not sure what else it could be. When someone becomes pregnant, we know that is the potential of what will one day be a human being. Absent a death—whether a natural death or a death brought about by someone's actions or by the operation of a disease or medical condition or surgical intervention in the case of abortion—it is a person. We shouldn't lose sight of that.

I have difficulty accepting the premise that the only solution to this is continuing to fund organizations that perform or advocate for abortions overseas. I reject the premise that anything we do in this area to withhold those funds will necessarily result in more abortions.

As far as the suggestion that organizations could receive these funds and still perform abortions and that not translate into U.S. dollars being used to perform abortions, I reject that premise as well for the same reason that I reject the premise that Planned Parenthood isn't using taxpayer dollars to perform abortions. It is. It is spent differently. It is a matter of accounting, but it sustains and supports an organization that itself advocates for and performs many abortions. These are, in fact, human lives, and the American people are, in fact, very uncomfortable with the idea that we are funding abortions with their taxpayer dollars, and we are doing it overseas. We shouldn't do that. This shouldn't be controversial. I look forward to the day when it is not.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, just to be clear, I understand my colleague's point, but I think I have highlighted and I want to emphasize again the limited purposes for which our taxpayer dollars are used and the advocacy, the healthcare, the contraception, HIV screening and treatment—

world health—that would be prevented by this legislation.

I think that is an unintended consequence. Maybe, it is unintended that it is gargantuan in its potential impact, and, therefore, I continue my objection.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I am here to speak on a nomination, but before I do, a point of personal privilege.

It was 1 year ago today that I had the honor of being sworn in as a Member of this Senate. As I hope my wife is watching at home on C-SPAN 2, I just want to thank her for her love and support throughout this first year. I couldn't have done it without her.

And I thank, of course, the Presiding Officer and all of our colleagues for the tremendous support and experience that this last year has been.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. President, with respect to the Thomas nomination, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

CONFIRMATION OF HOLLY A. THOMAS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I was hoping to rise prior to the vote just a little while ago but was consumed with the agenda in the Senate Judiciary Committee this morning.

So in lieu of speaking prior to the confirmation vote, I rise to applaud the confirmation of Judge Holly Thomas to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Judge Thomas is a dedicated advocate for equality under the law and has made a career of fighting to ensure the civil rights of all Americans.

A proud native of San Diego, CA, and a graduate of Yale Law School, Judge Thomas spent 10 years working on civil rights litigation and appeals. That time included litigating at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, in the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, and in the New York Solicitor General's Office.

In each of these roles, Judge Thomas was a tireless advocate for equal justice. She proved to be a skillful appellate lawyer, an insightful thinker, and a valued colleague.

She returned to California in 2016 to serve as the chief liaison between the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing and the Governor's Office. The State Department of Fair Employment and Housing is California's largest civil rights regulatory body, and in her role there Judge Thomas dedicated herself to protecting workers and families from unlawful discrimination, working closely with then-Governor Brown.

Recognizing her outstanding work and her tremendous talent, Governor

Brown appointed her to the Los Angeles County Superior Court in 2018. Now, this appointment was a full-circle moment for a person whose love of the law was nurtured by her supportive parents starting at a very young age. Judge Thomas's parents, when she was a young girl, would take her to watch court proceedings. Why? So that she could imagine what a career as a lawyer would look like.

Decades later, as a judge on the superior court, Judge Thomas actually requested to serve in the family law division because of her empathy for families going through a difficult process and experience in court.

Now, as the first person in her family to go to college after high school, Judge Thomas knows what it is like to navigate unfamiliar institutions. She is also the granddaughter of sharecroppers, and she is a passionate fighter for equal justice.

Since her appointment, Judge Thomas has proven her excellence as a jurist, as a neutral arbiter, and a compassionate voice for justice both in family court and on the California Court of Appeal, where she served in a pro tem capacity for 6 months.

Judge Thomas's compassion is matched by her legal acumen. Throughout her career, she has distinguished herself with thoughtful analysis, expert judgment, and unshakeable commitment to civil rights.

I know—and I am thrilled—that Judge Thomas will serve with distinction on the Ninth Circuit, and I congratulate her on this very well-deserved confirmation.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UKRAINE DEMOCRACY DEFENSE LEND-LEASE ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, yesterday I was dismayed to hear the President of the United States suggest that a Russian invasion of Ukraine might not provoke a powerful response by the United States and our allies.

Now, I am grateful that the Press Secretary did issue a statement subsequently which seemed to clarify the strong commitment that the American people—from the administration to the Members of Congress—have to assist our Ukrainian allies in their efforts to deter or defeat Russian aggression. I believe we have a duty to stand with Ukraine and our European allies as they attempt to defend their democracies.

Strong language and threats of sanctions have their place, but they are not enough to deter Vladimir Putin. We need to take concrete steps to deter the likelihood of a Russian attack in any form.

But it is not just the executive branch of the U.S. Government that