

Less than 1 month ago, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard stopped a wooden sailing vessel heading from Iran to Yemen and found 70–70–tons of missile fuel component that Iran was trying to sneak to the terrorist rebels—this, on top of countless small arms, UAVs, and rockets that Iran has provided to support Houthi terror.

Iran has long seen the fight in Yemen as a way to expand its influence and tighten its grip on regional power. There is little question that an Iran-backed Houthi victory over the U.N.-recognized Government of Yemen would be bad news for American interests in the region and the interests of our close partners.

Iran and their Houthi partners want a platform to launch indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilian cities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and against ships belonging to Israel and other internationally flagged vessels.

The Iranians will continue to use Yemen as a testing site for the same kinds of weapons that Iran has long used to target and kill American forces in Iraq and Syria—the same kinds of weapons Iran is now also providing to Russia to rain death and destruction on Ukraine.

This is just about the worst imaginable time the U.S. Congress could go out of our way to alleviate the pressure that Tehran and its Houthi proxies are feeling.

A fragile cease-fire in Yemen is on the line. Why send a signal that we are backing away from our partners? Why emboldened the Houthis at this juncture?

Just as the Iranian people themselves are fed up and have been fighting back against their country's oppressive regime, Senator SANDERS wants to cut Tehran a huge break?

If the United States inflicts this kind of self-inflicted wound on our Middle East strategy; Iran will celebrate; Russia will pop champagne; China will enjoy more oxygen to expand its own creeping regional influence as well; and America's allies and partners will be left questioning our resolve, our partnership, and wondering if it wouldn't be a safer bet to turn toward Beijing instead.

Yemen is also home to the wing of al-Qaida that poses the greatest threat to the United States. Don't take my word for it. President Biden's Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, has publicly warned about the threat from AQAP in Yemen.

We rely on the U.N.-recognized Government in Yemen, as well as key partners in the region like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to keep pressure on al-Qaida on multiple fronts.

Do we really want to send a signal to partners on whom we can rely that they cannot rely on us?

I have been critical of the Biden administration's mistakes in the Middle East and its passivity in the face of Iranian aggression, but even this administration strongly—strongly—opposes Senator SANDERS' resolution.

The Senate has enough crucial business to tackle this week without going out of our way to make life better—better—for our enemies and harder for our partners.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise today to speak about the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, about to come before us.

First, let me say this bill is aptly named in recognition of nearly three decades of service in the Senate of our colleague Senator JIM INHOFE of Oklahoma. I count him as a friend, and I wish him the very best in his future endeavors.

I am grateful to him, Chairman JACK REED from Rhode Island, and their staff for working to produce this bill.

This is the 62nd year that Congress has reached a bipartisan, bicameral agreement to produce this Defense authorization bill. It is about the only thing which you can count on with regularity every year, and I commend Senator REED and Senator INHOFE for maintaining that tradition and maintaining our commitment to the men and women in uniform and the defense of the United States.

This fiscal year 2023 Defense authorization bill has a top line of nearly \$858 billion for defense and a deserved 4.6-percent pay raise for our troops—that is the largest increase in 20 years—to help military families deal with inflation.

The bill also supports employment opportunities for military spouses, their kids, and improved military housing and childcare.

It ensures that the United States can defend effectively against threats from China, North Korea, or any other nation foolish enough to challenge.

And it boosts military aid to Ukraine, which is at the frontline of democracy, as defense against the Russian thug's brutal and illegal war.

The bill invests important and innovative capabilities and technologies to improve the safety of military tactical vehicles and discover PFAS-free alternatives to firefighting.

And it includes several provisions that I requested with Senator DUCKWORTH, from protecting Scott Air Force Base—one of our premier Air Force bases—from divestment to strengthening security cooperation with our Baltic allies, to expanding Federal mental health services after FEMA emergency declarations.

I am pleased the bill also includes bipartisan provisions from the Judiciary Committee to improve the security of

Federal judges and strengthen protection for sexual assault survivors.

You wonder, What is that doing in this bill?

This bill is the vehicle for many good things to happen, and the bills that I have just referenced were bipartisan bills coming out of committee which we have hitched a ride on this bill to deliver.

At the same time, I am troubled by several provisions in the text of the bill.

First, this bill would lift the Pentagon's policy of requiring servicemembers in the military to receive COVID-19 vaccines. This is an extremely alarming and even dangerous decision.

Mandatory vaccinations for the U.S. military are not new. They date back to the earliest days before we were a nation, when George Washington ordered small pox inoculations for troops in the Continental Army.

The Pentagon currently requires several vaccines for military members, and appropriate exemptions already exist for medical and religious purposes.

So many troops serve around the world in extreme conditions and in close quarters for extended periods of time by assignment, making any risk of infectious disease such as COVID all the more threatening and troubling.

And the lingering damage of long COVID—and don't discount it. There are Members of the Senate who are privately and quietly battling with this issue—including respiratory, heart, neurological, and autoimmune conditions. This underscores the importance of our servicemembers being vaccinated.

Thankfully—thankfully—more than 97 percent of all Department of Defense employees have been fully vaccinated, and more than 99 percent of Active-Duty servicemembers have had at least one dose.

But the repeal of this mandate at the insistence of Republican Members of the House is a dangerous, disturbing insertion of politics into an important public health and national security matter.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, whom I greatly respect, has made it clear that he opposes this provision, as do I.

In addition, the final bill extends for another year unnecessary restrictions on transferring detainees from the detention facility at Guantanamo. Did you think Guantanamo was gone and closed? No, it isn't.

Included in this bill is a complete ban of transfer of any of these detainees to the mainland of the United States for any purpose whatsoever for any period of time.

This ban includes even transfers to the United States for prosecution in a Federal court or necessary medical care.

This puts our medical professionals in a terrible, untenable, unprofessional position of having to provide medical

care that cannot be safely provided on that naval base, Guantanamo.

That endangers the lives of their patients, when we mandate it in this bill.

I have come to this floor to advocate for the closure of Guantanamo for years. It saddens me that for more than two decades, the legacy of torture and indefinite detention has continued to betray our values as a nation and the rule of law. This detention facility was deliberately created to serve as a legal black hole where detainees could be held incommunicado, beyond the reach of law, and even subjected to torture. There is still, all of these years later, no due process for the prisoners at Guantanamo and no justice for the families of the thousands of people who died on 9/11.

We held a hearing on Guantanamo, and one of the family members of the survivors of that terrible 9/11 occurrence came and said to us: Finally get it over with. Close this facility. Try these individuals if you have a charge against them; if not, put an end to it.

Since that prison opened in Guantanamo, hundreds of detainees have come and gone. Today, there are 35 individuals at an unjustified and embarrassing cost of \$550 million per year to keep the facility open. Quick math—we are spending \$15 million a year for each of these detainees while there are ample vacancies in our Federal prisons. Why?

The vast majority of the men who remain indefinitely detained have never—never—been charged with any crime and have been unanimously approved for transfer by defense and intelligence agencies, and American taxpayers pay \$15 million a year for each of them to stay at Guantanamo. They languish at Guantanamo for no justifiable reason, contrary to any notion of due process or rule of law.

I filed an amendment to this bill that I am referring to earlier this fall to close this prison at Guantanamo once and for all. Put it behind us. I am disappointed that it wasn't taken up and that the final bill doesn't address it.

The Senate, again, did not have a regular floor process for this bill, which would have allowed debate and amendments. That is what the Senate used to do routinely. Now, it hardly ever happens in this body.

Ultimately, I will vote for this bill even with my objections I have stated, but I want the record to be clear: The Defense Authorization Act has not been bogged down by "liberal nonsense," as the Senate minority leader stated last week on the floor of the Senate. The reality is, this bill authorizes nearly \$75 billion more for the national defense compared to the last fiscal year—a significant increase and critical for our Nation's defense and our troops—but I hope it will be matched in an omnibus by nondefense spending to keep parity as well.

We must finalize and pass an omnibus bill without delay to keep our Federal Government functioning.

I want to note one top priority that should have been included in this bill

and should be included now in the omnibus spending bill. The bipartisan Justice for Victims of War Crimes Act is cosponsored by Republican Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY and myself. We introduced it, and several of our colleagues joined us.

Most Americans would be shocked to learn that the laws of the United States of America do not allow us to prosecute foreign war criminals who are roaming free right here in the United States—hard to believe.

As that unspeakable atrocity continues in Ukraine, we must not allow those who are murdering and torturing the people of Ukraine to come and reside in the United States with impunity, period. We must close this gap in our laws and ensure that foreign nationals here on our soil can be prosecuted for war crimes. America must send a message to the Vladimir Putins of the world that their henchmen will find no safe haven here.

I look forward to finally getting to this critical bill as soon as possible.

TRIBUTE TO LONNIE STEPHENSON

Madam President, next month, the pride and joy of Rock Island, IL, and my good friend Lonnie Stephenson is stepping down from his post as president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. While Lonnie's leadership will be missed, he leaves behind a legacy of amazing service and commitment to working families.

Lonnie is the son of factory workers from Moline, IL. He knows as well as anyone the challenges working families face. He saw right through the failed practices and policies of trickle-down economics, which led to a shrinking middle class and crumbling infrastructure. Only the rich got richer.

Lonnie started off as an apprentice wireman with the electricians, and even then, he knew the value of a union. He rose through the ranks of IBEW Local 145, becoming vice president before taking over as business manager in 1991.

All the while, he fought to make things better for families in his home area of the Quad Cities through safe working conditions, fair wages and benefits, and a secure retirement. He spent countless hours organizing and grew his local from 700 to more than 1,100 members. He gave back to his community in so many different ways—organizing annual blood drives, encouraging community service among his members, supporting the Red Cross when historic flooding hit the Quad Cities.

I remember joining Lonnie for Labor Day parades in the Quad Cities, where his standing in the community and respect of his fellow union members was legendary.

A good friend of mine, former Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, who tragically died in a plane crash 20 years ago, used to say, "We all do better when we all do better." No one has embodied this policy more than Lonnie Stephenson throughout his nearly five

decades of service to the labor movement.

Here is the good news: Lonnie steps down knowing we have one of the most pro-union Presidents in history carrying on his legacy to improve the lives of working families. Lonnie has been by President Biden's side from the start. Their special relationship was evident last May in Chicago when President Biden became the first sitting President to address an IBEW national convention. I was glad to be on the program.

Last year, when President Biden signed the infrastructure bill, a historic investment, I saw a familiar face at the signing. Lonnie was right there at the White House, along with 11 other IBEW members—a reflection of his dedication to creating jobs. But it is not just the bipartisan infrastructure law; Lonnie was a driving force on many more pieces of historic legislation, from the CHIPS and Science Act, to the Inflation Reduction Act, to saving the pensions of millions of union members and retirees in the American Rescue Plan.

These groundbreaking victories were no guarantee. Lonnie faced some daunting challenges during his tenure as president of the IBEW. The former Illinois Governor supported an agenda of unrelenting hostility to unions. That Governor is gone now, but he spearheaded a litigation effort that resulted in a Supreme Court decision overturning 40 years of law that rigged the economy against working families. And former President Trump made it clear he favored special interests at the expense of many of Lonnie's workers and their families.

Then Lonnie was faced with a global pandemic that created an unprecedented economic crisis that shuttered businesses and created massive unemployment. For most, it would have been hard to see a silver lining, but not for Lonnie. He faces challenges head-on.

He stood up for working families and organized thousands of new IBEW members. He made sure that his union's new membership was reflective of the community—strong, diverse—with an initiative to expand membership to traditionally underrepresented populations, like women and people of color, and we are seeing these gains across the country. Approval of labor unions is at its highest point in the last 57 years, and union election petitions increased 53 percent last year. That is no accident; it is because of the hard work of people like Lonnie. The workers are fortunate to have him on their side.

More recently, Lonnie has worked to prepare IBEW members for the jobs and industries of the future. One example—the bipartisan infrastructure law. Lonnie put a provision in there that includes \$7.5 billion for construction of