

NOT VOTING—1

Feinstein

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

NUCLEAR REVITALIZATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, today I would like to talk about nuclear revitalization for a few minutes.

I want to make two overarching points. First, no sane person wants a nuclear war. No sane person wants a nuclear war. But, No. 2, peace through weakness never works—never. When the United States built much of its nuclear stockpile, the Cold War was raging, and the Soviet Union was our only major adversary with a sophisticated nuclear stockpile. We remember those days. Our nuclear power deterred Soviet aggression and made sure the Cold War never escalated.

But today, fast forward, we no longer face just one threat. Russia still maintains the world's largest nuclear arsenal, but China's nuclear stockpile is growing rapidly. North Korea, as we know, continues to threaten our allies with its collection of nuclear weapons. And thanks to the disastrous nuclear deal with Iran, Iran is marching ever closer to developing a nuclear weapon of its own.

So here is where the United States finds itself today. The United States must now counter nuclear superpowers in both China and Russia while also deterring the itchy trigger fingers of unstable dictators like Kim Jong Un and the Ayatollah in Iran.

We should be innovating and preparing our nuclear arsenal for this new global dynamic. But, instead, our nuclear stockpile remains stuck in the Cold War, and that is just a fact. Put simply: America's nuclear stockpile is old, and it is shrinking. And while modernizing our nuclear arsenal should be a top priority, our effort to restart nuclear weapon production has been riddled with delays and poor planning and we do not have time to waste.

The United States has not built a single nuclear warhead since the close of the Cold War. Let me say that again. The United States has not built a single nuclear warhead since the close of the Cold War. Instead, we have focused on what we call Life Extension Programs to keep our old weapons operational by refurbishing them. Those that aren't refurbished are destroyed.

From 1994 until 2020, the United States dismantled 11,683 total nuclear warheads. And this total does not include the 2,000 other warheads that have been retired while awaiting their own demolition as well. Most of our nuclear warheads are decades old. The facilities where we built and store these are even older. As recently as 2019, the

computer system controlling our nuclear weapons ran on floppy disks. I kid you not.

Today, we are so far behind in our nuclear revitalization that we cannot even produce plutonium pits. Plutonium pits are an essential component of every nuclear weapon. Plutonium pits sit at the center of a warhead. They are not all that different from pits in a peach. The pit is essential because it triggers the nuclear explosion. Plutonium pits do not last forever. They can only sit inside a weapon for roughly 100 years before we must replace them. The clock is ticking on our Cold War-era weapons.

During the Cold War, the United States produced more than 1,000 plutonium pits per year. And without plutonium pits, you can't have a nuclear weapon. But the United States has not regularly manufactured plutonium pits since 1989. In fact, the United States has not produced a single warhead-ready plutonium pit since 2012. As you would imagine, our nuclear engineers cannot just stop by the hardware store to pick these up. It doesn't work that way. Pit production is a very complex, a very expensive, and a very time-consuming process.

But our adversaries haven't stopped. Our adversaries certainly haven't stopped. China, Russia, North Korea, Pakistan all continue to produce plutonium pits to ready their arsenals. Yet the U.S.A. fell asleep at the wheel and let our plutonium pit production die off almost entirely.

Keeping our nuclear arsenal in shape is sort of like keeping your body in shape. If you stop exercising all together, it will be very painful when you start it again. The United States is learning this the hard way.

In 2014, the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense determined that it would need at least 4,000 new plutonium pits—4,000, not 40, not 400, 4,000 new plutonium pits—to replace the aging pits in our current weapons as part of our larger refurbishment strategy. New pits are also needed for any new weapons that we choose to build.

Department officials determined that the United States would need to produce a minimum of 80 plutonium pits per year by 2030 to be able to reach our national security goals by 2080. To meet this goal, Congress passed a bill, and in that bill, we instructed the National Nuclear Security Administration—we call it the NNSA—to resume plutonium pit production in two separate facilities in 2015. Congress tasked the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico with a goal of 30 pits per year, and we tasked the Savannah River Site in North Carolina with the remaining 50 to achieve the 80-plutonium-pits-per-year capacity.

But that hasn't happened. I meant it when I said we fell asleep. That hasn't happened. Pit production has been postponed and postponed and postponed.

Most recently, NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby estimated the United States will hit its production goal sometime in 2036, 6 years later than projected. The delays are so significant—so significant—that in 2021, the commander of the U.S. Strategic Command testified before Congress that no amount of funding—no amount of money—would have been enough to get the NNSA to its production capacity goal by 2030. That is what happens when you fall asleep. That is what happens when you stop exercising.

These new pits are not just nice to have; they are essential for developing new weapons to deter aggression from hostile nations. Consider what our military calls the W87-1 Modification Program. Under this program, the United States is developing—or trying to develop—a new warhead that would ride atop the next generation of ICBMs. And an ICBM, of course, is an intercontinental ballistic missile.

But these new weapons cannot run on old plutonium pits; they require a new design. The delayed pit production means that these warheads and our ability to deter China's growing arsenal is delayed as well.

Now, I understand that plutonium pit production is not simple. And like many other workplaces in our wonderful country, supply chain issues and a shortage of qualified workers created unexpected problems for our capacity goals. I get that. But there is a difference—there is a stark difference—between encountering unexpected challenges and simply failing to prepare, and investigations show the NNSA has not taken its preparation seriously enough.

The Government Accountability Office, one of our watchdogs, determined that the NNSA lacked both a comprehensive schedule and a cost estimate for its plutonium projects. Importantly, the NNSA also lacked an integrative master schedule that can be used to coordinate everything from production to staff. Administration officials recently announced better, more concrete schedules and cost estimates, but that cannot make up for the valuable time we have already wasted. It can't. And concerning, the NNSA remains on the Government Accountability Office's list of organizations that are at high risk for "fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement" because of its practices.

It gives me no joy to point these things out.

Modernizing our nuclear stockpile is essential for maintaining our national security and affirming our position as a global leader. Our weapons don't only protect Americans—we know that. They protect our allies. As part of our extended deterrent strategy, we have agreed to help defend our allies who don't have nuclear weapons of their own, in large part to deter them from getting nuclear weapons.

But our allies aren't stupid. They see our antiquated stockpile, and they

wonder if we can follow through on our promise to protect them if they themselves do not acquire nuclear weapons. Take our friends in South Korea. They announced their doubts earlier this year. South Korea has considered developing its own weapons because its leaders do not know if America's arsenal is ready to answer the call if, God forbid, South Korea ever faces an imminent nuclear threat.

Now, our friends in South Korea—and they are dear friends—they are not going to say that in stark terms, but we know from our diplomatic relations that is how they feel. The good news is that after some recent negotiations, our friends in South Korea—our ally, South Korea—reaffirmed its commitment to work with the United States.

But this situation, I bring it up because it showcases the severity of our problem. The people of South Korea are our friends. They are our allies. They embrace democracy as we do. But if they are doubting our capabilities, our adversaries are, too. You can bet on that. Look no further than China.

Now I don't hate China. I don't hate the Chinese people. They are wonderful human beings with souls like all of us, and they have the right to freedom and self-determination. I don't want a Cold War with China. I don't want a hot war with China. But according to the Pentagon, China already has more intercontinental ballistic missiles than the United States.

In 2001, China had 400 nuclear warheads. At the rate it is growing, by 2035, China will have 1,500—far outpacing—far outpacing—the Pentagon's initial projections.

China is also rapidly innovating. The Chinese military has been testing nuclear-capable hypersonic missiles. These nuclear-capable hypersonic missiles can fly five times the speed of sound. That is roughly 3,800 miles an hour. A few weapons that China is also testing could leave its intended target only minutes to respond.

The United States of America cannot continue inching along while China quadruples its arsenal with newer and faster nuclear weapons.

The days when we could neglect our nuclear stockpile without risking our national security are over. Our ability to deter unstable nuclear powers and maintain a peaceful world relies on our ability to continue innovating in ways only freedom-loving Americans can. But these vital projects rely on our plutonium pit production, and failing to produce pits at full capacity is just not acceptable.

As the ranking member on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, I know we will continue our focus on this issue. As we modernize, we must modernize our nuclear stockpile for the peace and safety of generations to come, and I urge my colleagues to make it a priority as well.

We cannot fix this problem overnight. We didn't develop this problem

overnight. But if we continue to work in a bipartisan fashion, we can restore our stockpile.

We must restore our stockpile. It is time for the United States to get serious about revitalizing its nuclear arsenal so that we can continue to have the most reliable and sophisticated defense systems on the planet.

Why is that important? Let me end as I began: because peace through weakness never works. Peace through weakness never works. Never.

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

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

NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today referring to a speech that Senator Biden gave on this Senate floor 39 years ago today. The scene was this: It developed over several months of that year before May 2, 1984.

I had this idea which would be considered crazy today, that we need to get control of the budget by just freezing everything across the board. And I recruited Nancy Kassebaum, a Senator from Kansas, and Senator Biden to help in that effort.

Senator Biden gave the longest speech that day on justifying it, and most of his comments at that time were trying to justify that you could actually freeze the defense budget, and also it included the freeze on the COLAs for Social Security.

But Senator Biden spent most of his speech fighting off giants of the military industrial complex at that time, by the names of Senator Goldwater, Senator Towers, and Senator Stevens of Alaska. So that is the background of what I am talking about today.

So on this day, 39 years ago, then-Senator Biden spoke on the Senate floor saying that he was "outraged"—that is his words—that our national debt would soon be near \$2 trillion. He urged fellow Senators to "do something . . . before the debt limit increase comes up." The "something" that he advocated for was a Federal spending freeze.

Today, our national debt stands at \$31.5 trillion compared to that \$2 trillion in 1984. But in a few years, public debt as a share of our economy is expected to exceed record levels set in the wake of World War II. However, instead of urging immediate action this year, President Biden wants to kick the can down the road. I think, today, we would all consider that to be irresponsible and unacceptable.

In contrast, House Republicans are tackling our debt crisis head-on. Legislation the House passed last week would rein in excessive government spending, lift the debt ceiling, and im-

pose meaningful fiscal controls moving forward. President Biden and Senate Democrats must get off the sidelines and negotiate. We can't continue to live high on the hog at the expense of future generations.

To put our current national debt in perspective, a gross Federal debt of \$31.5 trillion equates to \$95,000 for each man, woman, and child living in the United States today. By comparison, the average cost of a 4-year public college degree in 2023 is about \$90,000. Both are more than we should be asking young people to bear. Looked at in terms of the American taxpayers, our government debt comes to a staggering \$247,000 per tax filer, and I think the number of tax filers would be close to 160 million or just a few more. That is \$52,000 more than the average home value in my State of Iowa.

Our growing national debt is unsustainable. In its most recent budget outlook, the Congressional Budget Office estimates interest on the debt will be near \$1 trillion in 2028—an amount exceeding what our Nation is expected to spend that year on national defense. Absent action, interest costs will continue to mount at an alarming rate. Looking well into the future, by 2044, interest will exceed \$2.9 trillion, surpassing what we are projected to spend on Medicare. By 2050, interest will become our Nation's single largest expense, even surpassing Social Security.

Interest costs of this size would have been unfathomable to my then-Senate colleague Joe Biden. Remember how he said he was outraged that the national debt would reach \$2 trillion? While Senator Biden was expressing outrage over a \$2 trillion national debt, he was also lamenting the prospects of \$219 billion in annual interest costs. Yet, today, President Biden barely bats an eyelash at interest projected to blow past \$1 trillion, on a path to \$3 trillion.

At the same time our interest costs are set to soar, several major Federal programs are barreling toward insolvency. According to the trustees of Social Security and Medicare, in the report they introduced this spring, Social Security's primary trust fund will become insolvent in 2033, while Medicare's trust fund will go broke in 2031.

Contrary to what some Democrats claim, doing nothing to address these programs is not an option. The Social Security and Medicare Board of Trustees, which consists solely of President Biden's administration officials, has made it clear that congressional inaction means automatic benefit cuts within the next 10 years. Yet President Biden has accused any Republican who mentions the words "Social Security" of wanting to gut the program, although nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1984, Senator Joe Biden sang a much different tune. He understood that a dire fiscal situation required bold action from this Congress. The Federal spending freeze he advocated