

even though he had grown up in Mississippi—that his grandfather was one of the original shareholders in the Green Bay Packers. And Hal has followed in his grandfather's and his father's footsteps as a Packers fan. For the last several decades, Hal has organized annual trips to Green Bay to watch the Packers play, and I was lucky enough to join him in November for what has turned out to be Hal's final football season.

Now struggling with the effects of Alzheimer's, Hal has approached his illness the same way he has approached life: with no bitterness. He said to me, the last time I saw him, "I'm the luckiest guy in the world, with the life I've lived." He tells me he has no regrets, so I can't have any either.

So Lisa and I will continue to keep Hal and his family—including Anne, Alex, and Astrid—in our thoughts and hold them close to our hearts during this difficult season.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Vermont.

ISRAEL

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, every day we are reminded of the worsening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Most of the infrastructure in the territory has been destroyed. Thousands of apartment buildings, schools, mosques, hospitals, shops, and markets have been reduced to piles of twisted metal and rubble, under which the bodies of an unknown number of people are buried.

Of the world's many humanitarian crises, the situation in Gaza is among the worst. This is due in large measure to the onerous impediments by the Netanyahu government to the delivery of sufficient food, water, medicines, shelter, and fuel.

Getting aid to those who are suffering and preventing starvation should be our most immediate and highest priority, along with obtaining the release of the hostages.

As I said when I spoke out for a cease-fire in November, an immediate and indefinite cease-fire is the only way to achieve these goals. I am very heartened by Vice President HARRIS's call for an immediate—if temporary—cease-fire to get aid in and hostages out, because the reality is, the supply of lifesaving aid has dwindled to a trickle.

Last week, the depth of the humanitarian emergency in Gaza exploded with the deaths of dozens of Palestinian civilians as they frantically tried to reach food supplies from aid trucks that were guarded by Israeli soldiers. People were trampled, people were run over by trucks, and they were shot.

It was a horrifying scene and a direct result of the Netanyahu government's failure to put in place workable procedures for the delivery of sufficient aid to starving people. As others have said, there is no legal or security justification for restricting humanitarian aid

to civilians who are caught in the middle of an armed conflict.

The more desperate people become, the more chaotic and precarious the security situation, the more likely there will be other senseless tragedies just like this.

I recently introduced a resolution, along with 15 of my colleagues, calling for the urgent delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid.

The Biden administration has repeatedly called for greater access for more aid trucks to Gaza, but the number getting through remains far below pre-war levels. And I am encouraged, nevertheless, that President Biden has directed the United States to begin airdropping aid in—a decision made with the understanding that, while not enough by any means, it could save lives.

Israel now occupies Gaza. It has an obligation under international law—not to mention the moral responsibility—to feed and shelter Palestinians under its occupation.

Beyond the moral imperative, the path to peace, security, and stability would be enhanced dramatically by facilitating the delivery of essentials for survival to the Palestinian people whose fate is imperiled. But as we saw last week, that is not happening.

The Netanyahu government's rejection of U.S. and international appeals to meet the basic needs of innocent Palestinians trapped in Gaza and the resulting loss of innocent lives, is really the latest in a pattern that we have seen for years.

The United States has long supported—and the United States will always support—Israel as a free and Jewish democratic state. But candor requires acknowledging that we have an ongoing, serious difference with Israeli leadership.

It is the longstanding U.S. policy that the Middle East conflict can only be solved through negotiations to create two independent states of Israel and Palestine. President Biden has reaffirmed this.

But Prime Minister Netanyahu has publicly rejected a two-state solution, and he has even credited himself for actively working to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. I will use his words. He couldn't have been more clear. He said:

I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over the entire area in the west of Jordan—and this is contrary to a Palestinian state.

The United States opposes settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes, orchards, schools, and other infrastructure in the West Bank. It violates international law and is a severe obstacle to peace. Secretary of State Blinken has reaffirmed this.

Yet Prime Minister Netanyahu embraced the settlements. In 2017, he said:

We will deepen our roots, build, strengthen and settle.

In 2019, he said:

With God's help we will extend Jewish sovereignty to all the settlements as part of the land of Israel, as part of the state of Israel.

Under his leadership, settlements have expanded exponentially. Settlements bring extremist settler violence, some of it with firearms financed by American taxpayers.

Shootings of West Bank Palestinians, threats laced with hateful messages that if they don't leave their homes, they will be killed, and the destruction of land and other property have surged—surged—in recent months, including, in some instances, with Israeli soldiers passively standing by and watching.

It is the longstanding U.S. policy, codified by the Leahy law, that units of foreign security forces that violate human rights are not eligible for U.S. training or equipment or other assistance.

And according to multiple reports, that law has not been applied to the Israeli Defense Forces, despite numerous cases of shootings of Palestinian civilians.

We must face the contradiction of what we are doing. We are airdropping food to famine-stricken Gaza today and supplying bombs for Israel to drop on devastated Gaza tomorrow.

We call for humanitarian relief, but how can that call be meaningful when aid workers are killed in their effort to deliver it and Palestinians are killed in their effort to retrieve it?

It is time for us to acknowledge—all of us to acknowledge—what the entire world knows: It is impossible to deliver humanitarian aid in a very active war zone.

Israel is a great country, Jewish and democratic. Israel has been—and remains—our closest ally in the Middle East. For decades, Israel has been under attack by those who have sought to destroy it.

President Biden—and so many of us—understand the history of Israel and the history of the Jewish people. October 7 was the worst attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. And we cannot ever let that happen again.

But both of our countries right now are on a wrong path. Israel must stop its indiscriminate attacks that are killing so many Palestinian civilians—women and children, the majority among them who perished.

And the United States must end its unconditional support when Israeli policies are wrong that are unjustified; that are causing so much suffering; and that, in the view of many of us, are doomed to fail in the goal of achieving lasting peace.

How many times do we have to be repudiated by Prime Minister Netanyahu on the use of indiscriminate force; on the recklessness of expanding West Bank settlements; on impeding the delivery of aid; on advocating an endless Israeli post-conflict occupation of Gaza? How long and how often will Prime Minister Netanyahu reject our policies but take our money before we say, "Enough"?

How many more than the 30,000 Palestinians already killed and the 70,000

wounded before we say to Prime Minister Netanyahu, “Enough”? How many more homes and shops and schools and childcare centers and hospitals must be destroyed before we say to Prime Minister Netanyahu, “Enough”?

Israel must—and Israel always will—make its own decisions as to who will be its political leaders. Israel must and Israel always will make its own decisions as to when and how to defend itself. It is their right.

But the United States, too, must make its own decisions consistent with our values, with our judgment, and with what we believe to be in our national interest. The Biden administration has taken important steps to bring accountability through diplomacy by issuing a national security memorandum that builds on the Leahy law, but it is time for us—and I include all of us in the U.S. Congress—to stop accommodating the Netanyahu government. It has consistently shown it does not share our goal of achieving peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Our failure to act damages the authority, credibility, and reputation of the United States, not to mention our foreign policy and security interests. In my view, it undermines the security interests of Israel, which is increasingly isolated in the international community. Opposition to the disproportionate use of force in Gaza is widespread, including in our own country. So, too, regrettably, is the rise of anti-Semitism, which we must always condemn, and Islamophobia, likewise, which we must always condemn.

It has been said many times before: U.S. aid is not a blank check. When it comes to the Netanyahu government, it has, for many years, across Democratic and Republican administrations, been a blank check. It is long past time for the United States to stop supporting by commission and omission actions that are inconsistent with our principles and our policies, and which make peace between Israelis and Palestinians ever more elusive, ever more difficult to achieve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NOMINATION OF RONALD T. KEOHANE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise in support of tonight’s vote to move forward the nomination of Mr. Ronald Keohane to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

I need not remind my colleagues, with the instability throughout the world right now, how critical it is to ensure that strong civilian leadership is in place across the Department and the military services.

As the Commissioner of the National Defense Strategy concluded, “The implementation of the National Defense Strategy must feature empowered civilians fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, particularly regarding issues of forced management. Strong

civilian oversight is the central hallmark of U.S. civil-military relations, codified in the Constitution and embraced throughout the Nation’s history.”

Mr. Keohane was reported out of the committee not once but twice—the first time on March 23, 2023, and then again this conference on February 8, 2024. Both times, he was reported out by voice vote with no one asking to be recorded as a no. To my knowledge, no one has raised any objections to his qualifications. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs is the principal adviser to the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness on all matters related to civilian and military personnel policies, reserve integration, military community and family policy, and total force planning and requirements. Additionally, the Assistant Secretary exercises day-to-day supervision of the Department of Defense Education Activity and the Defense Commissary Agency, and provides oversight of the Armed Forces Retirement Homes.

Confirming Mr. Keohane is critical. The military’s greatest asset is its people, and filling this void will help the Department navigate the myriad challenges associated with managing the total force—military and civil workforces—to field the most lethal military in the world, especially considering unprecedented recruiting challenges at the moment.

Mr. Keohane is being held not by reason of his qualifications, which are extensive, but because of the position for which he has been nominated has oversight of some matters that a few of my Republican colleagues find objectionable.

Mr. Keohane has previously served in the Department of Defense and other Federal Agencies, making him eminently qualified for this position. Notably, he previously served as the Department Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy in the Obama administration, where he was awarded the Defense Medal for Exceptional Public Service.

I urge my colleagues to vote yes to move this well-qualified individual with extensive experience—to move this nomination forward so we can do more to assist our men and women in the field by providing the kind of policy and direction that an experienced and already recognized talented individual can lend to the Department of Defense.

I yield the floor.

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

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Ronald T. Keohane, of New York, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Alabama (Mrs. BRITT), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from Utah (Mr. ROMNEY).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 65, nays 29, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 68 Ex.]

YEAS—65

Baldwin	Fischer	Padilla
Bennet	Gillibrand	Peters
Blumenthal	Graham	Reed
Booker	Hassan	Ricketts
Boozman	Heinrich	Rosen
Brown	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Butler	Hirono	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Capito	Kelly	Shaheen
Cardin	King	Sinema
Carper	Klobuchar	Smith
Casey	Lujan	Stabenow
Collins	Manchin	Tester
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cornyn	McConnell	Warner
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warnock
Cotton	Merkley	Warren
Cramer	Moran	Welch
Duckworth	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wyden
Ernst	Murray	Young
Fetterman	Ossoff	

NAYS—29

Barrasso	Hawley	Schmitt
Blackburn	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Braun	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Budd	Lankford	Sullivan
Cassidy	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Marshall	Tuberville
Daines	Mullin	Vance
Grassley	Paul	Wicker
Hagerty	Rubio	

NOT VOTING—6

Britt	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Hoeven	Risch	Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). On this vote, the yeas are 65, the nays are 29.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

MERGER FEES

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I am here to talk about a provision in the appropriations bills that was unveiled just yesterday. I thank my colleagues for their work on these bills—it has been incredible—and the bipartisan effort in the Senate and the