

internet—whether they are in a Republican district or not; whether they are Democratic or not.

I am proud to partner with J.D. VANCE of Ohio; JACKY ROSEN of Nevada; KEVIN CRAMER of South Dakota; and colleagues in the House, YVETTE CLARKE and BRIAN FITZPATRICK. All of us have constituents and all our constituents need this access to high-speed internet; so we cannot allow this program to expire.

In the State of Vermont, what we have done in order to do the hard work of taking the money that the Federal Government has provided to build out high-speed internet is we created community union districts where towns have gotten together and used funds to contract to build out that internet and where that community union district has a commitment, not so much to shareholders or investors, but to the people in the community. The goal in Vermont is to make sure that farmer at the last mile on the dirt road in our most remote town has access to internet.

It has really worked because there has been really serious community engagement. Our local community union districts have done an enormous amount to let folks know—those who are eligible, very low-income folks, hard-working folks—let them know about this program where that \$30 is really going to make the difference on whether they can hook up or they can't.

We are really proud in Vermont, too, of one of our first internet providers that was local called ECFiber. They set up their own program even before the affordable connectivity program was established.

We have a decision we have to make as a Congress. Will we maintain this bipartisan commitment we have had to the citizens of this country to make certain that everybody, regardless of income, has the best possible opportunity to have access to that high-speed internet that is as essential to our well-being, our social connection, our sense of working together, as electricity was in the thirties?

It is very popular among Republicans, at least 62 percent; among Democrats, 90 percent. But most importantly, among rural Americans, 80 percent of rural Americans are in favor of this, and they know how vital this program is.

Mr. President, 25,000 Vermont families have benefited by it, and 22.5 million American families have benefited by it. Let us continue the program. Find the \$7 billion that is necessary to maintain this, and make sure that the progress we made working together to build out high-speed internet to make it accessible to all our citizens continues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

### GAZA

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, the October 7 slaughter of at least 1,200 innocent Israeli citizens and the abduction of 240 hostages was a monumental atrocity. The cruelty and depravity of that massacre, especially the torture and killings of women and girls, has shocked our collective conscience. Like others here, I have consistently supported Israel's right and responsibility to respond. We would all like to see Hamas disappear. But people with decades of experience in the Middle East say that is almost certainly not going to happen. To the contrary, they warn that the Netanyahu government's wholesale destruction of Gaza, which has caused the death of more than 24,000 of its citizens and displaced more than 1.5 million who had nothing to do with the crimes of October 7, will increase the terrorist threat by Hamas and other violent extremist groups who share a common hatred of Israel and the United States.

As horrifying as the October 7 attack was, neither the atrocities committed that day, nor Gaza's dense population and Hamas's insidious use of civilian infrastructure, justify the appalling scale of death and destruction in Gaza directed by Prime Minister Netanyahu that has ignited global condemnation. It has also failed to free the hostages whose survival becomes more precarious every minute of every day.

The inescapable conclusion is that the Netanyahu government is not listening to either the White House or to key Arab governments that are imploring Israel to change course. Their belief, which I share, is that the way to begin to build a safer and ultimately more stable and secure Middle East is to stop killing and otherwise mistreating innocent Palestinians. Yet Prime Minister Netanyahu, who has rejected out of hand the right of Palestinians to have a state of their own, is stubbornly pursuing the opposite approach with no political endgame. It is difficult not to conclude that his enemy is not only Hamas but also the Palestinian people. To make matters worse, he reportedly denies there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Last week, Netanyahu said he "needs to be able to say no, even to our best friends." Well, American taxpayers provided the planes and bombs and tanks, and the United States needs to

be able to say no to him. How much worse does the situation have to get in Gaza, and how much wider of a war in the Middle East, before we use this country's considerable leverage—including withholding additional lethal aid—to get Israel to stop its bombing campaign, negotiate a ceasefire and the release of the remaining hostages, and allow the dramatic increase in food, water, and other humanitarian aid needed to prevent the widespread starvation, death, and disease the UN and other relief organizations warn is imminent?

What is happening in Gaza is intolerable and we share responsibility. In a January 17, 2024, op-ed in the New York Times entitled "Team Biden Needs a Reset on Israel," David Levy, with whom I had the privilege of traveling to the Middle East some years ago, makes the case more effectively than I could. I hope President Biden and his top advisers read it.

I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Jan. 17, 2024]

TEAM BIDEN NEEDS A RESET ON ISRAEL

(By Daniel Levy)

Back in 2001, in a visit to the illegal West Bank settlement of Ofra, an out-of-office Benjamin Netanyahu, apparently unaware he was being recorded, boasted to his hosts that "America is a thing you can move very easily—move it in the right direction."

At the time, Mr. Netanyahu was talking about his experience with the Clinton White House; he had undermined Washington-led peace efforts during his first stint as Israel's prime minister. But more than 20 years later, Mr. Netanyahu's assessment feels uncomfortably familiar.

Since the Biden administration pledged its early and unwavering support to Israel following Hamas's Oct. 7 attacks, Mr. Netanyahu has repeatedly slow-walked Washington's behind-the-scenes requests regarding the war, including that Israel use greater restraint in prosecuting its war in Gaza, avoid provoking a broader regional conflagration and work to forge a postwar path toward peace.

As a result, as the war has entered its fourth month, the Biden administration has achieved almost none of its goals regarding Israeli policies and actions. More than 23,000 Palestinians, including over 10,000 children, have been killed so far, according to the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, and the threat of mass starvation and disease looms. Israel's government has rejected any horizon for peace, and, after an initial pause in fighting and a hostage/prisoner exchange, such talks seem now to be at an impasse. The only "success" the United States can claim is in its steadfast support for Israel. And yet the unconditional nature of that backing stands in the way of any prospect of achieving its other policy goals and finding a path out of this horror.

It's true that in recent days, Israel has signaled a certain shift in its war strategy, using fewer troops and focusing more on central and southern Gaza. These steps appear partly driven by the need to keep down Israeli losses in the close quarters of urban combat, to offer some relief to Israel's suffering economy—and possibly in preparation for an escalation on Israel's northern border.

Such shifts don't seem intended to dial back the snowballing regional tensions, nor will they prevent the increasing humanitarian suffering. President Biden has sounded increasingly exasperated by developments on all of these fronts, frustrations echoed in comments by his secretary of state, Antony Blinken, during his latest visit to the region.

Rather than slowly amplifying expressions of disquiet, Team Biden should make a course correction—starting with exercising the very real diplomatic and military leverage at its disposal to move Israel in the direction of U.S. interests, rather than vice versa.

The first and most critical shift required is for the administration to embrace the need for a full cease-fire now. That demand cannot be one of rhetoric alone. The administration should condition the transfer of further military supplies on Israel ending the war and stopping the collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population, and should create oversight mechanisms for the use of American weaponry that is already at Israel's disposal. Ending Israel's Gaza operation is also the surest way to avoid a regional war and the key to concluding negotiations for the release of hostages.

Washington can also leverage the deliberations underway at the International Court of Justice, where South Africa has accused Israel of being in violation of its obligations as a signatory to the 1948 international genocide convention. Israel is demonstrably nervous about the proceedings and understands that an International Court of Justice ruling has left; indeed, South Africa may have already done more to change the course of events than three months of American hand-wringing. The Biden administration does not need to support the South African claims, but it can and should commit to being guided by any findings of the court.

Finally, the United States should desist from making endless ritual incantations about a future two-state outcome, which are all too easily brushed off by Mr. Netanyahu. It should take at face value his government's categorical rejection of Palestinian statehood and its written coalition guidelines that assert "the Jewish people have an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel." Washington should instead challenge Israel to set out a proposal for how all those living under its control will be guaranteed equality, enfranchisement and other civil rights.

Doing so could have the added benefit of challenging Mr. Netanyahu's position. Although he appears to have consolidated his political base for now, his governing majority would be lost with just a handful of defections. Only around 15 percent of Israelis want Mr. Netanyahu to remain in power after this war ends, according to recent polls, and street protests could reignite at any moment.

For a combination of ideological, military and personal political reasons, Mr. Netanyahu probably doesn't want this war to end. And while his political demise is not a panacea for progress—nor can it be an explicit U.S. goal—it is nevertheless a prerequisite for creating the conditions under which Palestinian rights can be advanced. The United States can and should distance itself from the Gaza debacle and the extremism of Israel's leaders.

If Washington does not change its approach, its failures in this war will have consequences, even beyond the immediate crisis in Gaza, the hostilities involving the Houthis in Yemen and the gathering threat of a wider regional conflict.

The world, after all, is watching, and Washington should not underestimate the extent to which the extremely unpopular as-

sault on Gaza is seen globally as not only Israel's war, but America's as well. The U.S. government's transfer of arms to Israel and the political-diplomatic cover it provides, including by deploying or threatening its veto at the United Nations Security Council, makes its ownership of this war highly conspicuous—and damaging.

There are long-term security implications, too. The callous Israeli military campaign and its profound impact on civilians will almost certainly provide recruitment material for armed resistance for years to come. Arab countries will find cooperation and normalizing relations with Israel more burdensome, and Israel's opponents are gaining greater resonance: Hamas displaying resilience, the Houthis an impressive disruptive capacity and Hezbollah disciplined restraint.

With Israel making clear in word and deed its intention to continue down this dangerous path—indifferent to U.S. needs and expectations—shouldn't Mr. Biden be keeping a greater distance?

#### TRIBUTE TO SOPHIA OHLE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to Sophia for her hard work as an intern in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. I recognize her efforts and contributions to my office, as well as to the State of Wyoming.

Sophia is a native of Virginia. She is currently a junior at the Madeira School in McLean, VA. She has demonstrated a strong work ethic, which has made her an invaluable asset to our office. The quality of her work is reflected in her great efforts over the last several months.

I want to thank Sophia for the dedication she has shown while working for me and my staff. It is a pleasure to have her as part of our team. I know she will have continued success with all of her future endeavors. I wish her all my best on her journey.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO MICHELLE ARCHER

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Vermont State Police Trooper Michelle Archer for her lifesaving rescue of a young child. Trooper Archer's heroic actions are an extraordinary example of public service.

Trooper Archer joined the Vermont State Police in 2018 and has worked out of both the Williston and Derby barracks, serving the counties of Chittenden, Lamoille, and Orleans.

On December 17, 2023, Trooper Archer was on patrol in Lamoille County. When a 911 call came in from the town of Cambridge reporting that an 8-year-old child had fallen through the ice on a frozen pond into 40-degree water, Trooper Archer was on scene in less than 5 minutes. Without hesitation, she jumped into action. Trooper Archer put her training to use by grabbing a throw rope and floatation device, quickly but calmly entering the freez-

ing water and swimming out to the victim, and bringing the unresponsive young girl to shore. There, Trooper Archer's colleague, Trooper Keith Cote, provided first aid. The child spent time in the hospital, but thankfully, and in no small part due to the troopers' decisive actions, she is fully recovered.

While Trooper Archer's rescue rightfully made headlines, it is just one example of the dedication of Vermont public servants in law enforcement and beyond. Every day, they renew their commitment to protecting and serving Vermonters with fairness and compassion. This often means putting their own lives and safety on the line. They are our neighbors, friends, family members, and fellow Vermonters—committed to the values of integrity, courage, and honor—and to making a difference in the lives of others.

Trooper Archer, along with Trooper Cote, demonstrated exceptional service during this rescue, and for that, they have the sincere appreciation of all Vermonters. I am hopeful that their exceptional display of public service will inspire others to step up and serve their communities. In Vermont, we need more dedicated people to join the ranks of the Vermont State Police and other law enforcement agencies, and to enter other public sector jobs like teaching, healthcare, the fire service, and beyond.●

#### REMEMBERING DEBORAH WOMBLE JOHNSON

• Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a great North Carolinian, Deborah Womble Johnson.

Born in Nash County, NC, on December 8, 1952, Deborah had a highly successful 37-year career as a healthcare executive, advising some of the top companies in the world, including Abbott Laboratories based in Rocky Mount, NC.

Deborah was a loving wife and mother, a devout Christian, and a pillar in her community. She was an active and lifelong member of the Temperance Hall Methodist Church, founded by Dr. John Mercer, who built her family's historic home. She was an outdoor enthusiast who made countless friends as the president of the Englewood Garden Club, a Nash County certified Master Gardener, and a member of the Wilson County Beekeeper Association.

Deborah is survived by her husband of 28 years, John M. Johnson, Jr.; his son and Deborah's stepson Brian Marshall Johnson of Alexandria, VA; her sister-in-law Laurie Womble and her sons Van and Billy Womble, of Spring Lake, NC; nieces Toni Rouse, Yvonne Harrell, Roberta Weaver, of Pinetops, NC; niece Renee Womble and nephews Dave Womble, Curtis Womble, of Lunenburg, MA; and Bobby Womble of Lexington, NC.

I would like to offer my deepest condolences to Deborah's loving family and the many friends she made throughout her life in North Carolina.