

lessons of successful counterterrorism campaigns. At times, Israeli forces have conducted heavy bombing campaigns using weapons with large payloads, rather than more targeted operations that yield more successful, albeit slower, results.

The IDF's willingness to bomb heavily populated areas to pursue Hamas leaders has changed both the perceptions and realities of this war. Protecting the civilian population is a strategic imperative in counterterrorism operations and the law of war. You want to separate the insurgents from the population and gain the trust of the population to continue to successfully conduct your operation against an increasingly isolated terrorist group. But, simply put, Israel's current strategy risks creating more terrorists than it is eliminating. Can you think of a 15-year-old who has lost his youngest sibling, his mother, his father, his grandparents? Where will his rage and fury and profound sadness be directed? That is a question I think we should all contemplate.

The second issue we have to understand is the broken, polarized political environment that badly weakened Israel's national security before October 7. Prime Minister Netanyahu returned to power in 2022, facing charges of corruption and a criminal trial. His narrow political coalition is the most far right, conservative government in Israeli history. He has continued to make clear that he will never support a two-state solution.

In a desperate attempt to stay in power, Netanyahu has emboldened the most far right members of his coalition. He has not only allowed extreme positions to be the stated goal of his administration, he has provided far right members of his coalition with ministries by which they can enact their agendas. His Minister of Finance, Smotrich, has fought his entire career to expand settler control in the West Bank and now has control over restarting payments to the Palestinian Authority. His Minister of National Security, Ben-Gvir, has been convicted on at least eight charges, including supporting a terrorist organization and incitement to racism.

In facing his own criminal charges, Netanyahu worked to significantly weaken the Israeli judicial system for his own benefit. He did this despite hundreds of thousands of Israelis protesting in the streets. And we were there when those protests were going on last February. And he did this over the objection of his Israeli military reservists, who, at that point, said they would refuse to report to duty in protest. And he did this despite warnings from Defense Minister Gallant that the IDF would be weakened as a result.

Adding to this toxic and destabilizing mix was Netanyahu's strategy for dealing with Hamas. For years, he purposely propped up Hamas as a means to ensure that his two-state solution would never come to fruition. As far

back as 2012, Netanyahu told Israeli press that "it was important to keep Hamas strong, as a counterweight to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank." It was not just a counterweight. He knew that having Hamas in power in Gaza meant that a two-state solution would never be possible. This strategy to prop up Hamas also included allowing Hamas to receive suitcases full of cash coming from Qatar and other places. A former Defense Minister for Netanyahu, Avigdor Lieberman, blamed this tactic as one that directly paved the way for the October 7 attacks.

Netanyahu's long, relentless pursuit of political survival and power are now fueling his strategy for war in Gaza—and it strikes me that it is his strategy, not Israel's direction; his future, not Israel's future that is the foremost factor at play.

These factors add up to several hard truths that must be spoken from one ally to another, just as Leader SCHUMER did last week, with courage and principle.

Most importantly, Israel can't use military force alone to reclaim peace and security for its people. Military force is used as a means to a political end. Military force itself will never provide the final answer.

A political solution will take hard bargaining and diplomatic negotiations. Working with the United States, Qatar, Egypt, and other allies and partners, the Israelis must reach a temporary cease-fire that allows for the safe return of hostages, expansion of humanitarian assistance, and capacity to safely deliver assistance to the people of Gaza. The ongoing airdrop campaign and seaport efforts are a step in the right direction, but Israel must do more to ensure that the increase supply of food and other desperately needed supplies can reach the people of Gaza.

There must be a realistic plan for day-after operations in Gaza. There needs to be a return to a framework for a two-state solution, where the State of Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian State exists side by side in peace and security. This plan will require buy-in from all—Israel, the Palestinian people, the world community, Arab neighbors. Israel should not and will not find the long-term security and peace it wants by indefinitely reoccupying the Gaza Strip.

Finally, while it is a decision that will ultimately be made by the Israeli and Palestinian people, like Leader SCHUMER, I believe it is time for new leadership for both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Palestinian President Abbas is almost 20 years into what was supposed to be a 4-year Presidential term, and finding a successor for the Palestinian Authority is long overdue. A new Palestinian leader must recognize that the only path to peace, security, and prosperity is to renounce terror, to work with Israel, to work with regional part-

ners for a path to statehood which is stable and peaceful.

New leadership, as I indicated, also includes Prime Minister Netanyahu. Polling indicates that more than 75 percent of Israelis believes he should step down, and I agree with Leader SCHUMER that Netanyahu represents an obstacle to long-term peace in Israel.

I have long been a friend and supporter of Israel's. I traveled there in the early nineties and have traveled there periodically since. More importantly, the United States has been Israel's closest ally for 75 years.

In 1948, when the Israelis declared their independence, the world was not particularly accepting except here in the United States, where, to his immense credit, President Harry Truman stood up and said that we will recognize and support the State of Israel. That profound bond exists today and, in my view and in my hope, will always exist. We can't have anyone break that bond.

Great allies must hold each other to high standards, share hard truths when needed, and the U.S.-Israeli alliance is no different. So I urge Israel to change course in Gaza immediately, to work with all of us to establish ultimately and enduringly, we hope, a secure and peaceful Israel and the protection of its people, as well as a just, secure, and safe place where all people of that region can live safely.

I yield the floor.

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

FARM BILL

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, first day of spring, National Ag Day, a perfect time—a fitting time—to address the Senate on something that I think is really important and something that is frustrating to me and to the people I represent. American agriculture is at a crossroads, a pressure point. Things are really challenging for those who provide our food, fuel, and fiber. There is record-level volatility in the farm economy, and farm income is falling by the most significant amount of all time.

We ought to be providing certainty to those who provide our food. I was troubled to read a report that the Senate Committee on Agriculture—its chair—indicated that there is a level of comfort with scrapping negotiations for a new farm bill and continuing with the outdated, now at least 5-years-old, policies from the past. In that same article, surprisingly, disappointingly, Secretary Vilsack expressed his support for that decision.

Our farmers deserve and, even more importantly, they need better. Agriculture is an incredibly difficult industry, as farmers and ranchers face challenges from weather events, economic shocks, and supply chain shortages. Added to these challenges are the inflationary policies that have raised the prices on farmland and, ultimately, at the grocery store. This includes soaring input costs, which are up nearly

\$100 billion since the last farm bill, which covers interest on loans, livestock feed, fertilizer, labor, fuel—to name just a few of the things that farmers need to produce that food.

Looking back at 2023, USDA, or the Department of Agriculture, forecasted that America's farmers and ranchers would see farm profitability fall by \$42 billion nationwide, nearly a 25-percent drop compared to 2022.

So during the life of the farm bill, USDA is estimating that profitability will decline by \$42 billion. This is just unsustainable. Farmers can't manage these circumstances. These challenges don't just impact farmers, but, ultimately, they impact American consumers trying to feed their families.

For Kansas, agriculture is our State's largest economic driver, with a total output contribution of \$81 billion into the State's economy and supporting more than 250,000 jobs, which is about 13 percent of our entire State's workforce.

Beyond crops and animal husbandry, Kansas agriculture is at the forefront—forefront—of producing renewable energy, critical research and education, and furthering sustainability and conservation practices throughout Kansas and worldwide.

Kansas is also a leader in animal health science. As part of the animal health corridor, Kansas has the largest concentration of animal health interests in the world. Last year, Manhattan, KS, welcomed the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, or NBAF. This is a state-of-the-art facility that protects and will defend our Nation's farmers and citizens from potentially severe zoonotic and biological diseases.

In addition, Kansas and many places of the country continue to experience weather challenges. In Kansas, there is a wide array of those challenges, but most oppressing is the drought. We need to address drought through mitigation and resiliency.

On Monday of this week, yesterday, I was in Liberal, KS, for the 2024 Ogallala Summit. Ogallala is an aquifer that, in about the western third or western fourth of our State—along with five other States, six other States—is a huge component of the agricultural economy. This event, this conference I attended in Kansas, brought stakeholders from across the High Plains region and beyond to discuss and learn about water management practices. How do we do better in preserving our assets? And how do we conserve and utilize more efficiently that great asset?

Key conservation research and education programs are authorized in the farm bill, including USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provides technical assistance and conservation programs, like the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

In previous farm bill years, I have led the effort to maximize that program, called CREP, on the Upper Arkansas River Basin to reduce the amount of

groundwater used for irrigation, improve groundwater levels, increase stream flows in the Arkansas River, and protect water quality in our region. The program is working, but we need additional tweaks, changes in the law, which is why I introduced the CREP Improvement Act, which would provide additional flexibility for family farms to better utilize the program.

In Kansas, landowners view access to the Ogallala as their lifeblood and the core of their rural communities and are committed to conserving and replenishing the Ogallala.

These are just a few sections. In fact, throughout the last year or more, we have been working with both Republican and Democrat Members of the Senate, particularly Senator BENNET of Colorado, to figure out what more we do. And we have introduced several pieces of legislation, all with the anticipation that that legislation would be considered at the same time the farm bill was considered and potentially be included in the farm bill.

But the recent announcement by the chair of the committee indicates that we are going to abide by the status quo—no conversations, no additional efforts.

I have been an aggie since I came to Congress, including my days in the House, where I chaired the subcommittee on farm commodity programs, and I have been through numerous farm bills. And they are always hard, and they are always late, and we never get them done easily. But this seems different to me, for the first time saying: What we have is what we get.

There are many provisions that affect agriculture that need to be addressed in a new farm bill, and it is important. I underscore how valuable, how important it is to pass a farm bill in the House and Senate and send it to the President.

We must deliver a farm bill that provides certainty of risk management programs to help farmers and ranchers weather the storm, and we must rework revenue protection programs to provide a critical safety net that works with market challenges and allows farmers, particularly young farmers, to borrow the money to stay in business.

If we fail to pass a farm bill, we are passing up opportunities to grow alternative fuel production through policies that encourage investments in biofuels for aviation, for example. Our global competitors are outspending the United States year after year by billions in agriculture research.

The Senator from Illinois and I have legislation designed to increase the support for agricultural research, which we hope—at least I hoped—would be a part of the farm bill. And we will be left behind in your investments for research if we don't meet the needs of the day.

A farm bill would include investments in education for our land grants and our Agricultural Research Service,

which provides cutting-edge science and tools to allow farmers and ranchers to do more with less and contribute to our national and food security.

A good point, the farm bill is a component of our national security. The farm bill maintains critical authorizations, as well, for reauthorization of global food aid programs. Through these programs, America's farmers and ranchers proudly provide U.S. grown commodities throughout the world as a lifeline to many who are in war-torn regions or recovering from economic or natural disasters. Global hunger, unfortunately, is real and threatens the future of millions of people every day.

I join three others of my Senate colleagues, another Republican and two Democrats, in cochairing the Senate Hunger Caucus. And you just look around the world at Russia's invasion of Ukraine, around the Middle East, Africa, and Haiti, and we see starving people. From a young age, most of us—each of us—were taught that it is our duty to help those in need. So many in Kansas have answered that call time and time again.

A Kansan, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, created Food for Peace. Senator Bob Dole worked to expand our Nation's efforts to provide food for the most vulnerable populations through the Dole-McGovern—or McGovern-Dole—Food for Education Program, and Senator Pat Roberts prioritized these programs in previous farm bills.

Kansans have taken this moral responsibility to heart, and we must do our part by reauthorizing these programs in a farm bill considered this year. The time is now to show leadership—to show leadership for America's farmers and ranchers. Tough decisions are ahead of us. The farm bill is always difficult, but we have always been able to come together and accomplish our goals. We should not walk away from the process. It is a dereliction of duty to the farmers and ranchers of America. I hope that we, as leaders, can get back to the table and produce a farm bill that provides meaningful and real relief for Kansas producers and protects our country from the challenges that we face around the globe.

I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF NICOLE G. BERNER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Nicole Berner to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

After receiving her B.A., M.P.P., and J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, Ms. Berner clerked for the Hon. Betty Binns Fletcher on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the Hon. Thelton E. Henderson on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California.

After several years in private practice, Ms. Berner served as a staff attorney at Planned Parenthood Federation of America, litigating cases to protect and expand access to reproductive healthcare.

Since 2006, she has worked at the Service Employees International