

the north. Like America, Canada is at once an Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic nation, and it is time for Ottawa to take its obligations to NATO, to NORAD, and to its own defense more seriously.

That said, for our European allies, the holiday from history really is over. Their greater investments in collective defense also include growing contributions to Ukraine's defense. In fact, 18 countries are making larger relative contributions to helping Ukraine resist Russian aggression than the United States. Of course, this doesn't absolve America from playing a leading role. America is the glue that keeps the alliance together. We are a critical catalyst of allied contributions. Nations all over the world look to Washington for guidance.

From before Russian forces even advanced in February of 2022, I have urged the Biden administration to quit its hand-wringing and hesitation over delivering Ukraine the lethal tools it needed to defend itself. The President's unfounded fear of escalation deprived our friends of the advanced, long-range capabilities they needed to make a more decisive stand against Putin sooner. Avoidable supply shortages continue to prevent Ukraine from taking the fight to Russia across the frontlines.

The conflict is at a critical moment, and it is exactly the wrong time for folks on our side of the aisle to imitate and compound the timidity and shortsightedness of our Commander in Chief, which he displayed from the outset of the conflict.

The vast majority of armed conflicts end in negotiated settlements, but whenever and however this particular conflict is resolved, it is in America's interests that Ukraine operate from a position of strength.

Our own security, the security of our closest allies and most important trading partners, the credibility of America's commitments—none of these interests are served by withholding assistance to Ukraine or withholding urgent investments in the sort of industrial capacity and capabilities that both our friends and our Armed Forces need.

Starving Ukraine of needed capabilities wasn't the smart way for the Biden administration to avoid escalation, and neither is it a political masterstroke by some of the administration's Republican opponents. It is strategic and moral malpractice that risks dooming Ukraine and undermining our own national interests.

From Europe, to the Middle East, to the Indo-Pacific, the world is watching to see whether the United States still has a will to lead the West and preserve the international order responsible for our own prosperity for the better part of a century.

So I will continue to urge our House colleagues to take up and pass the national security supplemental without delay.

H.J. RES. 98

Mr. President, now on a different matter, I have spoken before about the effort led by our colleagues, Senator CAPITO and Senator CRAMER, to block a coercive, one-size-fits-all mandate from the Federal Highway Administration that would force States and localities to build transportation infrastructure the way the bluest coastal cities do. I am glad our colleagues will have a chance to support this resolution. I am grateful to our colleagues from West Virginia and North Dakota for their leadership.

The Senate will also vote today on a resolution to overturn the administration's latest attack on small businesses and consumers. President Biden's Big Labor allies at the NLRB have issued a new rule that would expand the definition of an employer in a way that would make employers liable for other business employees whom they don't even directly oversee.

Known as the joint employer rule, the new standard amounts to more regulatory redtape, threatening the very existence of small businesses—especially those that follow the franchise model.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the American dream. As many of our colleagues who own small businesses know, it requires a tremendous amount of hard work, long hours, and sleepless nights to own and operate a business. The Biden administration's regulatory state is already putting that dream out of reach for many hard-working Americans, but this new labor rule would add even bigger headaches and turn small business owners—including many in my home State of Kentucky—into middle managers.

One such Kentuckian wrote me a letter saying that this rule has the potential to kill his small, independent marketing organization. Here is what he said:

I implore you to stop [them] from killing many small businesses like mine. . . . This government overreach has got to stop. We are no longer a country that supports small businesses.

I have always been a proud supporter of small businesses in this country, and I have spent years fighting the joint employer rule. I am glad to join Senator CASSIDY and Senator MANCHIN in leading the CRA to block this rule.

One Federal court has already put this rule on ice. As the appeals take their course, I would encourage each of our colleagues to join us in rejecting the radical NLRB's new rule.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, despite President Biden begging bureaucrats to

return to work, government buildings remain largely abandoned, and Washington, DC, is a ghost town. Heads of Agencies have mysteriously disappeared without a trace. Even the White House was left in the dark when the Secretary of Defense vanished for days.

I am hearing from folks in Iowa who tried calling Federal Agencies for help but didn't hear boo. A nonprofit serving vulnerable, disabled, elderly, and other Iowans in need contacted my office, frustrated by the growing delays that organization is experiencing dealing with the Social Security Administration. The executive director tells me that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the response time from the local Social Security office was just a few days at most but that now it takes weeks and even months to get a call back. Some of the folks the nonprofit serves have gone without benefits as a result of unreturned phone calls. Approvals to provide support to others seeking assistance are also being delayed.

The agency's executive director says the lack of communication "is having an impact on the clients we serve and our ability to provide quality service" and that "they are running us out of business."

While the Social Security Administration's headquarters is nearly empty, with just 7 percent of its office space being used, these folks serving Iowans in need are showing up. Because the support they provide is being threatened by the Social Security Administration's unresponsiveness, I called on the Agency's inspector general to investigate.

And folks, well, that seemed to do the trick. Almost immediately, the phone finally started ringing, and the Social Security Administration is once again working with this agency to make sure my Iowans are being taken care of.

Another Iowan who worked for the Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Services tells me his former colleagues describe working from home as "like being on vacation. Very little work was assigned and all they had to do was be available by phone."

But according to another whistleblower within the Department who contacted me, it is even difficult to get in touch with coworkers. Here is some direct quotes from this particular whistleblower:

On occasions I have gone to USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. . . . it resembles a ghost town.

As a supervisor, I can tell you that full-time remote work and extensive telework are negatively affecting productivity, efficiency, and cooperation.

And yet another:

Remote work and telework employees are often unreachable and do not respond to simple email questions for hours.

When I questioned the USDA Secretary recently about these claims, he

pushed back, insisting his staff are required to be in the office a majority of the week. Yet, according to the non-partisan Government Accountability Office, nearly 90 percent of the office space in USDA's headquarters is sitting idle and unused.

Folks, if USDA staff aren't showing up for work in Washington, we should put them out to pasture by relocating the Department to Iowa.

With the spring planting season upon us, I know farmers and ranchers would appreciate some helping hands from USDA's experts in the field—literally, in the field, tilling the dirt and pulling the weeds.

Growing up on a farm, I can tell you that is what we in Iowa call “working from home.” But in Washington, working from home apparently means having a field day. That is why I have asked the USDA's inspector general to investigate and track down the location of these ghost employees.

I have also heard similar stories from folks who work for other Federal Agencies—like the employee who hasn't even seen their manager in weeks—as well as other Iowans experiencing the same frustrating lack of responsiveness.

Folks, enough is enough. It is time for Washington to get back to work, and I need your help to make that happen. The bureaucrats may not be showing up or interested in answering your call, but I am. So if you are trying to get in touch with a government Agency and keep getting ghosted, “Who you gonna call?” Right there, folks, right there—202-224-3254—or if you are working in a government building all alone, pick up the phone and call. I want to hear from you and other government whistleblowers. Together, we can be ghost busters and make Washington work again by getting the bureaucrats back to their old haunts “cuz I ain't afraid of no ghosts.”

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4093

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, it has been more than 6 months since Hamas committed heinous acts of evil against innocent civilians. It was the worst attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

Tragically, the attack included the murder and kidnapping of U.S. citizens. For the hostages still being held in Gaza, the terror continues. The hostages are being deprived of food, water, and medicine. They are being subjected to unbearable violence, abuse, and torture by Hamas terrorists.

Think about the pain, the uncertainty, and the fear that has gripped the families day after day for more than 180 days. This is personal for Americans, but it is particularly important to those of us in North Carolina.

One of our fellow citizens is among those still being held, Keith Siegel. Seeking the release of hostages de-

mands strength, demands moral clarity. We demand it from our own leaders, and we should require it from our major allies.

I believe it is time for our Nation to reexamine whom we can count on to be on our side and who stands on the side of the terrorists.

The State of Qatar, for example, hosts Hamas leaders in their capital of Doha. Now, initially, Qatari officials claimed that they were exercising leverage on Hamas. Then, they publicly stated thereafter that they don't have any leverage. And now, they are promoting a cease-fire, regardless of the release of the hostages.

After 6 months, the patience of the United States has run out. The truth is that Qatar does have significant leverage over Hamas. They have the ability to expel these terrorists if they don't release the hostages or at least engage in reasonable negotiations.

In fact, last month, a bipartisan group of Senators stated clearly that “if Hamas refuses reasonable negotiations, there is no reason for Qatar to continue hosting Hamas' political office or any of its members in Doha.”

After multiple more than fair offers from Israel, Hamas has refused to accept any deal or even show flexibility on terms. The truth is that Hamas is not interested in releasing the hostages, and Qatar seems equally uninterested in forcing them to do so. It is time that we hold nations like Qatar accountable for their dithering and for their stalling.

Since 2022, Qatar has enjoyed “Major Non-NATO Ally” status. This designation is a privilege that nations like Qatar must continuously earn.

Failure to take action against Hamas is beginning to look like tacit support for a foreign terrorist organization designated by the United States. This is not acceptable behavior for a Major Non-NATO Ally.

That is why I introduced a bill this week to require the Secretary of State to formally certify four things: One, whether it is in the national interest of the United States for Qatar to maintain its designation as a Major Non-NATO Ally; two, whether Qatar has exerted any and all leverage it has over Hamas to secure the release of the U.S. hostages from Gaza; three, that Qatar does not directly or indirectly support—financially or otherwise—acts of international terrorism or foreign terrorist organizations, including Hamas; and, four, that Qatar has expelled or agreed to extradite to the United States any individuals bearing responsibility for the terror attack on October 7, 2023.

If the Secretary of State cannot make the certification in good faith, then the President is required to immediately terminate the designation of the State of Qatar as a “Major Non-NATO Ally.”

I don't introduce this bill lightly. It is not where I started with this relationship, but it is a reflection of where

we are today as a result of the repeated warnings that Members of Congress have given to Qatar about the liability of continuing to host Hamas.

Since October 7, I have engaged privately and publicly with Qatar. At times, I have even thanked them, including for the November hostage deal, which included the release of some U.S. citizens. But I have also been clear about expectations for Qatar's relationship with Hamas and mediation of a hostage crisis moving forward.

You see, the United States expects its allies to use all leverage and exert all possible pressure to secure the release of our citizens when they are taken hostage.

At the beginning of this year, I told the Qataris that time is up and the United States will be watching. It is now long past time, and we have been watching closely. The time for talking is over, and the time for action is now. If we don't see action, then Qatar must face consequences.

At the end of the day, the bill represents another step toward securing the freedom of our fellow Americans. It is my sincere hope that this Chamber can speak with one voice in solidarity and assure these families that we are indeed doing everything to bring their loved ones home.

So as in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4093, which is at the desk; I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I agree with the Senator from North Carolina that our priority as a nation and as a Senate should be negotiating the release of the hostages that Hamas currently holds. But the surest way to guarantee that those hostages never get released is to pass this resolution.

I get it. We may not like the fact that we have to be negotiating with a terrorist organization. We may not like the fact that someone in the region has to be the conduit for those talks. But we don't live in a world of fantasy; we live in a world of reality.

And the reality is, without Qatar playing a role, as they historically have, to try to unwind crises in the Middle East more broadly and specifically between Israel and Hamas, there is no existing alternative. If you don't want the hostages released, then pass this resolution.

Further, with great respect for my colleague, I think this resolution is fundamentally dangerous when it comes to protecting broader U.S. interests in the region.

We have 10,000 Americans right now based in Qatar, mostly at Al Udeid Air Base. That airbase allows the United