

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

States of America to project power and to protect our interests throughout the region.

It is naive to think that you can pass a resolution downgrading our status with Qatar without there being an impact on that base, our personnel there, and our ability to use that base as a means to protect our interests around the region.

Qatar is the third largest customer of U.S. defense systems in the world. There are a lot of American jobs at stake when it comes to our relationship with Qatar. And the Qataris, over and over again, respond when America is in crisis. They housed more than 70,000 Afghans during the evacuation of our forces and of Afghan allies. Almost nobody else in the world would do that. But the Qataris said yes because the United States asked them.

They are an imperfect ally. They are an imperfect ally. This is a repressive regime with a bad history on human rights and worker rights, but they are a critical ally.

But more to the point of the Senator's resolution, the Senator's main critique is that Qatar hosts Hamas, a terrorist organization. I can understand why some bristle at that notion of an ally of the United States playing host to Hamas. Qatar plays host to Hamas because they were requested to do so by the United States. Hamas established an office there because the United States asked them to do that in 2012 because we knew we needed an ability to talk to Hamas.

Qatar played a contributing role in Egypt-led negotiations to get a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in 2014, 2019, and 2021. Why? Because we were able to talk to Hamas through their presence in Qatar.

And yes, Qatar has been a conduit to send money to Hamas. A lot of people may bristle at that notion, as well—our ally Qatar sending money to the Hamas political organization inside Gaza, as they have done for years. Qatar did that at Israel's request. Israel approved, in a security Cabinet meeting in 2018, an arrangement whereby Qatar, through their relationship with Hamas, would send money into Gaza “in coordination with security efforts to return calm [in] villages of the south, but also to prevent a humanitarian disaster” in Gaza. That was the Israeli position.

So I understand the discomfort of an ally having a relationship with Hamas. It has come at the request of the United States and at the request of Israel and is absolutely vital to protecting our ability to get hostages out.

If you want to make sure those hostages never leave, then cut off Qatar's role as an intermediary. You want to fundamentally harm U.S. interests in the region, you want to shut down our airbase, you want to eliminate the ability of Qatar to help us again when we are in need, as we were as we evacuated Afghanistan—then downgrade their status.

For those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Connecticut. That was beautiful, articulate. It was a beautiful articulation of all the reasons to support my bill.

You see, this week, some of the hostages' families are in Washington to meet with leaders from all branches of government. I have met with them many, many times, and every time I come away deeply moved by the strength and resilience that they are showing in the space of an unspeakable evil.

I let them know that not only are all levels of our government working to bring their loved ones home safely, but that I would do everything in my power to make it happen. Sometimes that means being direct, even with friends like Qatar. Sometimes, that means making allies uncomfortable.

But the truth of the matter is that friends are honest with one another. So this is more than about just a bilateral relationship between two nations. This is about the well-being of U.S. citizens and a native of my home State, North Carolina.

While the Senate won't be able to pass this today because of the objection, it is my hope that we can work through the committee process to get this bill across the finish line. But, more importantly, while Qatar has done less than hoped and expected, and other allies like Egypt have thankfully stepped up to fill the unfortunate void, let this bill be a tool to move the hostage negotiations forward and secure the release of all the hostages being held in Gaza.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

#### JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, last month, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas resisted Democrats' latest attempt to intimidate the Federal judiciary.

This all started a year ago, when Senate Majority Leader SCHUMER sent a letter to the chief judge of the Northern District of Texas, urging him to change the ways that cases were assigned in that district. In short, the majority leader is unhappy with single-judge divisions in Texas that have handed down rulings that he doesn't agree with.

Well, forget for a moment the fact that the left has been more than happy to file lawsuits in courts they believe will be friendly to their arguments. Set that aside for a moment. But the majority leader seeks to avoid more liberal losses in the courtrooms. He wants the chief judge to ignore Federal law—literally, ignore the law—which establishes which courts have jurisdiction and venue over a given case. As Senator SCHUMER sees it, this change, which would create a random selection

assignment system, would prevent judges who are nominated by Republican Presidents from hearing as many high-profile cases.

Well, the majority leader might be forgiven for his naivete or his misunderstanding of actually what controls what venue and what jurisdiction is under the law, but the problem is that he went a step further. He ended his letter with a clear threat. If the Northern District didn't comply with his demands, he said, “Congress will consider more prescriptive requirements.” In other words, he said: Do what we want, and, if you don't, we will do it for you.

Well, for some reason, the Senator from New York thinks he should be the one to decide how cases are assigned in the Northern District of Texas.

Late last month, Chief Judge David Godbey wrote the majority leader a letter reminding him of something that the leader already knew, which is that assignment of cases is not governed by politics but by existing law. A Federal statute that Congress passed, signed by a President, gives district courts the authority to decide how to assign cases for a given district.

Unsurprisingly, there is no requirement that chief judges consult with the majority leader of the Senate when deciding how to assign cases within their district. There is this thing called separation of powers that the majority leader may have overlooked or forgotten about.

As Chief Justice Godbey noted in his letter, the district judges in the Northern District of Texas met to discuss this topic and reached a consensus not to make the changes requested by Senator SCHUMER.

While the chief judge of the Northern District was not swayed by the majority leader's implicit threat, that wasn't the end of the story. Regrettably, the Judicial Conference of the United States, in an effort to placate the majority leader, recommended that district courts across the country randomly assign certain cases that seek to invalidate State or Federal law. In other words, now the Judicial Conference has gotten into the act, ignoring existing laws passed by Congress and signed by Presidents that establish which courts have jurisdiction and venue over a given case.

Well, that provoked another telling reaction on the part of our Democratic colleagues. The majority leader rejoiced that this guidance that he sought would prevent “MAGA-right plaintiffs” from being able to “all but guarantee a handpicked MAGA-right judge.”

How insulting is that? These are lifetime judges nominated by a President, confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and the majority leader is suggesting that a judge who has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States can be depended on to reach a predetermined result. Well, I know that is politics, but that is not