

Mr. President, you have been to Chicago, but you may not have toured the whole State of Illinois. It is a different State down south. About 400 miles south of Chicago is a place called Alexander County, and the county seat is Cairo, IL.

Now, most students of geography would say: That is "Cairo." Not to people of southern Illinois; it is "Cairo" or "Cairo."

It has had quite a history. It is at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, so it was really a hotbed of economic activity for a century. It was a large, bustling town and with a lot of river traffic that made it a very successful town.

Over time, the economy started to slump. Interstate highways took over for rivers, and Cairo was not quite where it should be.

I graduated law school here in Washington in 1969 and went to work for the Lieutenant Governor of our State, Paul Simon. Brandnew lawyer, anxious to be successful and do the right thing, I said to Lieutenant Governor Simon: What do you want me to do? He said: Go to Cairo.

Well, that was quite an assignment in those days because Cairo was in big trouble. It was in trouble because, as the economy started to slump, a lot of the racial tensions in that community started to emerge, and there were terrible instances of violence and a lot of division in the community.

Rallies and parades led to gunshots and arson and evacuation of the white population from that town. Cairo was not another Illinois city; Cairo was the South. It was said by Paul Simon himself that Southern Illinois is a land of grits and gospel music. And it is true.

It is also the land where racial tensions had reached a fevered pitch by the late 1960s. The State's attorney for Alexander County was a man named Peyton Berbling. He could have come right out of the cast of "To Kill a Mocking Bird," a rumpled white suit. And he was head of what was known as the White Hats Organization. That was a thin imitation of the Ku Klux Klan.

He had his boys "checking out the county" every day to make sure that someone who was a stranger, a foreigner, didn't linger in his county. It was a terribly racially divided community. And as I said, it led to violence and economic slump.

Fifteen years later, I was in a situation—well, it was more than 15 years later—I was in a situation where a young State Senator from Chicago was coming down to Cairo for the first time. I was bringing him down. And as we traveled in the car the 380 miles, I told him the story of Cairo and the economic problems and the racial problems it had. As an African American, he said later he didn't know what to expect when he got to Cairo.

Well, our destination was the Laborers' International Union headquarters in Cairo, IL, and the president Ed Smith.

So Barack came to that scene, a barbecue in the parking lot, and got out of the car and was shocked to see a Black and White crowd. Men and women, members of the union, friends of the union, African American and White, sitting together, eating a sandwich, and waiting for this candidate from Chicago. He walked around to a hero's welcome from so many people who were supporting his candidacy, including a lot of African-American people who were proud of Barack Obama.

Not that many years later, when Barack was running for President, he pointed to that experience and said: I began to believe the politics of hope could overcome the politics of division.

Who brought that crowd to that parking lot? Who invited us to come down to that barbecue? Who wanted to show us the success of this union? Who wanted to demonstrate the dignity of work way beyond quitting time on Friday afternoon? Ed Smith.

Ed Smith was devoted to the workers in that community in that State. It was his life, and it was his father's life before him. They were legends in the labor movement—not just in Illinois but around the Nation. So when I saw what Ed had done in Cairo and realized how much progress he had made because of the power of his own values and the power of his own being, our friendship was cemented forever.

He passed away last week. I don't have to tell you that those of us in politics meet hundreds if not thousands of people. It is rare to find someone who is consistently smiling—Ed Smith; consistently kind—Ed Smith; consistently fighting for working people—without exception, Ed Smith. Time and again, that defined his time on Earth.

Like Senator DUCKWORTH said, he really did keep a tally of what he had done for people, and it was a lot of work to do because he helped everyone in every direction. He became eventually not only successful in the Illinois labor movement but was recognized nationally.

He came out here to Washington to be the CEO of Ullico, which is the life insurance company for the laborers union. Ed decided to do something different. He noticed that a lot of predecessors had taken the deposits from the pensions of laborers around the country and invested them in Wall Street projects. Ed said: We are going to do it differently. We are going to invest in good ideas and good projects that create union jobs for my workers.

When it was all over, he had \$5 billion in his working fund, investing so that people could go to work and have quality of life.

He was a wonderful man, and I am going to miss him a lot because I counted on him so much. But I know he has created a really idealistic vision of what you can do if you have a mission in life and live faithfully to it. He did that, and he also showed over and over again that he cared about everybody. No one was too small or insignifi-

cant. For him, the labor movement was not just a movement; it was a way of life, and he proved it over and over.

So, Betty, his wife, and his great family, thanks for sharing Ed with us. He really made a difference in our lives, as Senator DUCKWORTH and I have said today, and he made a difference in Illinois in the lives of countless thousands of families.

I yield the floor.

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

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

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture motions with respect to the Rodriguez and Goffman nominations be withdrawn and the Senate resume consideration of the Mehalchick nomination; further, that the cloture motions with respect to the Crews and Mehalchick nominations ripen at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Republican leader, during Wednesday's session.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Karoline Mehalchick, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

SEX TRAFFICKING

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, for several years, we have known about financier Jeffrey Epstein's alleged sex trafficking ring that targeted young girls. This is something that appears to have been quite a far-ranging international ring. What we know is that this was a large network of high-profile, high-dollar predators who abused untold numbers of minors.

Only one person has been prosecuted for these crimes, and that is Ghislaine Maxwell. What she did was to recruit and groom many of the victims and

then bring them into the Epstein orbit. But we know many more people were involved in this scheme in addition to Ghislaine Maxwell. What we do not know is the extent of that involvement. The recent release of documents by a Federal judge exposing part of Epstein's potential client list is a step in the right direction to help bring some visibility and some accountability to these predators and also to bring justice for the victims.

It is so important that, as we look at this issue, we keep in mind that this is about justice for these victims, making certain that they are able to tell and share and see the FBI take action on the information they are giving them. These women deserve justice.

The court unsealed the names of more than 170 associates who were named in a lawsuit against Maxwell by one of Epstein's alleged victims. The names are a mix. Some of them are just reference—they are not accused of any wrongdoing. Some of them are accused of wrongdoing. Some of the names in this lawsuit have accused Epstein and Maxwell of wrongdoing. Some of these names are potentially people who were aware of wrongdoing but said nothing. The documents also reveal some details about Epstein's alleged abuse, including that he and his associates would target underage girls in nightclubs—didn't pursue them, didn't recruit them, didn't groom, then—and, as the pattern goes, bring them into the Epstein orbit.

The release of this information is just the first step to uncovering the truth. The latest documents come from just 1 case with 1 victim, and there are 170 named. There are countless others who were targeted, trafficked, and abused. That is why I have repeatedly requested a subpoena for the complete, unredacted Epstein flight logs and Ghislaine Maxwell's unredacted "little black book" of contacts and addresses, along with all of the documents and records from the FBI regarding this case. We need to know who flew on Epstein's plane and who potentially participated in his international sex trafficking ring. We need to know how far-reaching this ring is. We need to have a better idea of those who also had sex trafficking rings that intersected with Jeffrey Epstein's ring.

While Judiciary Chairman DURBIN, Senator DURBIN, previously had stonewalled my request, I am encouraged that he has seemingly had a change of heart and expressed a willingness to work on a bipartisan basis to obtain records relevant to the Epstein case.

I am calling on Chairman DURBIN to hold a vote this week, and I will be urging a vote on my subpoena whenever possible at our Senate Judiciary Committee meetings so that the American people can get the whole, full truth about Jeffrey Epstein, his sex trafficking ring, about every single person who participated in these alleged crimes, and about all the horrific

abuses suffered by his victims so that we can get justice for these women and children who were abused in this sex trafficking ring.

One thing should be clear, and that is that I am not going to stop trying to get complete and total transparency on this issue so that these innocent victims can receive the justice they deserve.

We know this issue goes beyond Epstein and his associates. In America, according to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, in this country right now, a child is bought or sold for sex on average every 2 minutes. Think about this. Think about the children who are harmed by this when you see these stats. Once every 2 minutes, a child is bought or sold for sex.

The Department of Homeland Security estimates that human traffickers make—get this number—\$150 billion a year in profits. Human traffickers, sex traffickers, are making \$150 billion a year in profits. That is not my number. That is not a think tank number. That is the number that comes from the Department of Homeland Security. So we have to say, why is more not being done to break apart these human trafficking rings? Why are we not doubling down on this? In 2019, the estimate of the profits made by human traffickers was \$500 million a year. That is 2019, and now we are at \$150 billion a year in estimated profits. And all of this is being done to women and children.

Much of the trafficking does occur at our southern border, where the Biden administration appears to have lost track of 85,000 migrant children who came across our border into the custody of DHS, which hands them off to Health and Human Services and the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

I know that in the last couple of years, the Office of Refugee Resettlement changed the vetting procedures for these individuals who were going to take these children and be the foster parents, be the surrogates. They were tasked with taking care of them. They loosened their vetting procedures for these individuals, and now 85,000 migrant children cannot be found. They do not know where they are. They do not know if they are alive or dead. They do not know if they are in a labor gang. They do not know if they are in a gang or if they are selling drugs or if they have been put in a sex trafficking ring. They cannot find them. Why is it they cannot find these children? Because when they call the individuals who have been given the responsibility of caring for these children, they don't answer the call.

There are 85,000 children who can't be found. These are children who are vulnerable to being preyed on by criminals, and HHS and ORR cannot give us an answer as to where these children are, who has them, what kind of conditions they are living in, and how they are spending their days. I would imagine many of them are spending their days in absolute and total fear. This is

certainly irresponsible, and it is sickening.

One of the things we have learned—and I have heard so much in Tennessee about this—is that this issue of human trafficking and sex trafficking affects every single county and every single community. Here are some of the stats from Tennessee, and we went to the stats because we found it so interesting.

You know, I visit with every single county in my State each year. That is 95 counties. I started that 95-county tour last week, and what we heard from our law enforcement officers, from healthcare personnel, and from individuals who are in charge of classrooms and schools was the uptick in the number of sex trafficking reports that are taking place.

In Tennessee, in 2016, there were 60 reports of sex trafficking of minors in our State. That was in 2016. By the time we got to the end of 2021, that number had jumped to 600. By the time we got to November of this last year, 2023, by November, we had already hit 700 reports of trafficking minors. This is one State. These are our stats. You go from 60 reports of trafficking minors in 2016 to, in 2023, in 11 months, you are at 700 reports.

See, this is something that is out of control—out of control—and this is why we have to get all of this information and be sure law enforcement is apprehending these traffickers.

This is modern-day slavery. This is what is happening to women and children in this country. They are being recruited. They are being groomed. They are being brought into the orbit of a trafficker. We have to have information that is going to break this apart. We have to know who all is involved. And, you know, when it comes to Jeffrey Epstein, I had somebody say today: Why do you want this information?

I will tell you why. First of all, I can't believe you don't want this information. And secondly, this is not about celebrity or who done it. This is about criminal activity. This is about modern-day slavery. This is about breaking apart human trafficking and sex trafficking rings and making certain these predators and these pedophiles are put in jail where they belong.

We have to put some light on this criminal activity, and we have to take steps to end it. Now, as we get this information and as we look at this issue, as I have talked to law enforcement, one of the things they regularly say is: Look, we need more tools in the toolbox.

So the SAVE Girls Act is legislation that I have that I brought forward. And I thank Senator KLOBUCHAR, who has worked with me on this. What this legislation would do is provide States, local governments, and nonprofits with resources that they need to train personnel, to conduct rescues, and to help save some of these women and girls.

There is another piece of legislation Senator DUCKWORTH and I have; it is

the SALONS Stories Act. This replicates a program, Shear Haven, that is taking place in Tennessee. Illinois, Senator DUCKWORTH'S State, also has a program, and it trains aestheticians and barbers and beauticians on the signs of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and violence and what to look for in human trafficking and then how to get people to the right resources for a rescue, for an intervention, for the help that they need.

And last month, the REPORT Act, which Senator OSSOFF and I did in a bipartisan way, will give NCMEC—the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children—and law enforcement the resources that they need to crack down on child trafficking and online child sexual abuse material.

We are pleased that these are pieces of legislation that are moving forward. We are hopeful to get the subpoena on the Epstein flight logs and further information of his associates. And we are clinging to the promise—clinging to the promise—of justice for these victims by this Chamber paying close attention to what is happening with human trafficking in our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, one of the Federal Government's primary responsibilities—mentioned in the preamble of the Constitution no less—is to keep America safe.

Right now, the world is a very dangerous place. Russia has launched an unprovoked war on Ukraine. Hamas, a terrorist organization backed by Iran, has attacked one of our strongest allies, Israel. There have been 127 attacks on American servicemembers in Iraq and Syria. Houthi rebels are attacking shipping and our U.S. Navy in the Red Sea. The Chinese Communist Party has its eyes set on Taiwan and are violating our sovereignty with things like spy balloons and other forms of espionage.

The responsibility for keeping America safe ultimately lies with the President of the United States. But he has a team of critical advisers who are essential to ensuring that Americans are defended. One of those advisers is the Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. The Secretary links the chain of command between the President and the uniformed military. The law is very clear: If the Secretary of Defense cannot do their job, there are protocols in place to ensure the chain of command remains intact. The law also requires proper notifications be made.

Last week, Secretary Austin went to intensive care in a hospital after complications from surgery. We wish him well in his recovery. Yet, for 3 days, the Defense Department failed to notify the President, the National Security Council, even the Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks that the Secretary of Defense was in the hospital and unable to perform his duties.

So let me get this right. The Secretary of Defense is in the hospital, the Deputy Secretary was on vacation in Puerto Rico, and nobody thinks to tell the President? Are you kidding me?

The Pentagon's explanation that the chief of staff was unable to do routine notifications because she was sick does not hold water. America's national security cannot be put on hold for a sick day. During Austin's secret hospitalization, the U.S. military launched a drone strike on Baghdad, returned fire against Houthi rebels, and was considering other military action in the Middle East. Given the potential implications of these actions, it goes without saying that we needed our Secretary of Defense at the helm.

Now, I am glad the Secretary's condition is improving. I know all of us want to wish him a speedy recovery from the infection and in his fight against prostate cancer. But the fact the Department did not inform Congress or the President, in contradiction to the law, is unacceptable and put Americans at risk. This shocking lack of transparency was more than just bad judgment; it was utter incompetence. But this is quickly becoming a feature, not a bug, of the Biden administration and how they run government.

This administration failed to give the American people the facts about the Chinese spy balloon. This administration failed to give the American people the facts about the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan. And Biden's border policies have created a catastrophe at our southern border.

Now, we have a Secretary of Defense who went off the grid for 3 days without the President or his team even knowing, all this at a time when our adversaries are threatening American lives both at home and abroad. Americans need to be able to trust that their leaders are in charge.

Right now, we have more questions than we have answers. Why was the law not followed, and who made that decision? Was there actually a period of time when nobody was in charge of the Defense Department?

There must be consequences for this stunning incompetence. Americans deserve answers. Congress deserves answers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

CONGRATULATING THE MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, as everyone knows, I am a proud graduate of Michigan State University. If I accidentally cut my finger, I am going to bleed green and white. But just for this week, I am setting aside my Spartan loyalties because, how about those national champions, the University of Michigan Wolverines? Go blue.

I speak for my entire State when I say that we are so proud of this team. They are among the best in the school's history—winning the Big Ten Championship, the Rose Bowl, and the National Championship last night. What a game.

In fact, they won every game they played during their undefeated 15-and-0 season with a suffocating defense and a relentless ground game. They are the first team in school history to reach 15 wins in one season and the first college football program in the Nation to win 1,000 games—1,000 games.

Like any team, they had their challenges, especially coming back from the 2020 COVID season. But through it all, they remained focused and, importantly, supportive of one another. And that focus and support paid off in a big way last night in Houston.

Michigan dominated the game under the leadership of quarterback J.J. McCarthy—amazing—running back Blake Corum, Donovan Edwards, and defensive back Will Johnson. And we can't forget that incredible late interception by Mike Sainristil that sealed the deal. The final score: a decisive 34 to 13 victory against the University of Washington team that was itself undefeated.

I am definitely looking forward to collecting some wonderful Washington products, thanks to the friendly wager I made with my dear friend and colleague Senator MARIA CANTWELL. We actually came into the Senate together in 2000. Usually, we are on the same side fighting issues; last night, on the opposite sides of the field.

I am so very proud of this team, Mr. President. Congratulations to the National Champion Wolverines. And "Go Blue."

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. RES. 169

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, my colleagues and I stand here today to demand accountability on behalf of the American people for the worst border crisis we have ever seen.

For the past 3 years, Americans have witnessed the negligence and gross mismanagement at our southern border unfold, each day worse than the day before. The consequences of this crisis have been fatal, killing 300 Americans a day, 300,000 Americans over the last 3 years due to drugs trafficked into our homeland. It has been costly, putting an undue burden on American taxpayers to the tune of \$500 billion per year. It is becoming more dangerous by the day as terrorists, Chinese nationalists, and over 1.7 million "got-aways" exploit our border at a rate higher than we have ever seen before.

The Biden administration has for all practical purposes erased our southern border and embraced a structure of complete lawlessness, letting our national security hang in the balance.