

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, 80 years ago this month, America and our allies embarked on a mission that would change the course of history. We stormed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Along with our allies, we formed the largest armada in world history, with more than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft, with the goal of liberating Nazi-occupied Europe and defending the free world. To our country's eternal gratitude, these brave soldiers succeeded in their mission.

On the 80th anniversary of D-Day on June 6, I joined a bipartisan Senate delegation to Normandy to honor the Americans—among them, Tennesseans—who put their lives on the line in the name of freedom.

Of the 16.4 million Americans who served in World War II, less than 1 percent are still with us today. So it was a special honor to meet with some of those brave heroes who served, and we sat together as we commemorated this day.

Among them was Tennessee native Cletis Bailey, who fought to liberate Europe while serving in the 84th Infantry Division. Two years ago, at the age of 96, Mr. Bailey received a Bronze Star for fighting at the Battle of the Bulge. That was 76 years after his service had come to an end.

Like so many Americans who served in World War II, Mr. Bailey was gracious and humble about the incredible sacrifices that he made to defend the country. It was a powerful reminder that the "greatest generation" viewed their service to our country, even through the horrors of war, as their duty as American citizens.

But during the memorial ceremonies, these heroes received the recognition they deserve in front of a crowd of 10,000 people from all over the world. It was so moving to see French President Macron recognize 11 U.S. veterans with the Legion of Honor—France's highest distinction—for their role in helping to free France from Nazi oppression.

While we thanked the surviving D-Day veterans for their service, our delegation also honored the brave soldiers who never returned home to America. In Normandy, there is no greater symbol of their sacrifice than the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, which holds the graves of 9,387 American war dead. Many of these warriors fell just hundreds of feet away from the cemetery grounds right there on Omaha Beach—the site of the fiercest fighting on D-Day, where U.S. forces suffered approximately 2,400 casualties.

While many markers of the landings have long since disappeared, along the coastline, you will still see fortifications which Nazi forces used to rain machine gun fire on American soldiers who stormed the beaches to free a continent.

In so many ways, Normandy is a reminder that America is the home of

the free because of the brave. And while we can never repay their sacrifices, we must ensure that no veteran is ever left behind—especially when it comes to the benefits and the quality care they deserve.

In the Senate, I have championed legislation to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs' caregiver program and protect veterans' personal information. Thankfully, both of these bills have become law, but there is much more that needs to be done to honor their service. That is why I introduced the Veterans Health Care Freedom Act, which would expand healthcare options for veterans by allowing them to seek care in their local communities instead of VA facilities that are often far away from their homes.

These efforts will not only benefit our Nation's veterans but also the more than 1.2 million Active-Duty troops when their service comes to an end. During the delegation trip, I was pleased to meet many of these brave warriors, including members of Fort Campbell's 101st Airborne Division who live in Tennessee.

On D-Day, the 101st was crucial to the Allies' victory, parachuting into France behind enemy lines to clear a path for the infantry divisions that were storming the beaches. Eighty years later, the current members of the 101st honored this incredible legacy, conducting an air assault drill in Carentan, a French town liberated by the 101st.

The outpouring of support for our veterans and servicemembers was a powerful reminder of General Eisenhower's words to the 175,000-strong expeditionary force on the eve of the D-Day landings: that—then and now—"the hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with" America and our Armed Forces.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, last week, the United States and Allied nations observed a significant milestone in world history: the 80th anniversary of D-Day. That day—by land, air, and sea—this massive military operation unleashed the largest amphibious assault known to the world.

More than 18,000 paratroopers dropped onto the beaches of Normandy. More than 14,000 dispatches from Allied Air Forces provided cover. Nearly 7,000 naval vessels participated, including more than 132,000 ground troops who swam ashore amid heavy German artillery.

American families lost 2,500 servicemembers on D-Day alone. All told, as

we know, more than 400,000 Americans died during World War II serving their country. These courageous patriots defended America's standing as the beacon of hope and freedom around the world.

The sacrifice of the American people to back the war effort allowed the United States to flex its military superiority alongside the Allied forces. That effort bested the Axis powers, defeating their authoritarian regimes and ending the Holocaust, where 6 million Jewish people lost their lives. They were murdered.

At every opportunity, Barbara and I are honored to greet veterans who have come to Washington, DC, in what we call Honor Flights, to visit the World War II Memorial.

A World War II hero and former Senate majority leader here in the Senate, Bob Dole, came to be my best friend. He took me, a fellow midwesterner, under his wing when I first came to the U.S. Senate.

My departed friend brought uncommon courage to the battlefield, and we all know he brought principled leadership to the U.S. Senate. His mentorship made a lasting impression on me and my work in Congress. That includes a nonnegotiable tenet of America's national security, which is peace through strength.

You see, widespread isolationist sentiment kept the United States from entering World War I and World War II. America stayed on the sidelines until the cost of aggression was too high, and the threat to the United States became obviously more acute.

Separated as we are from Europe and Asia by two vast oceans and wishing no one any harm, Americans would naturally feel that we ought to be left alone and ignore foreign conflicts.

Now, here is the lesson for today. The United States learned this lesson from World War II: Preventing and stopping aggression very early is much less costly in dollars and lives.

We learned what happens when you wait. When unchecked aggression has lit the world on fire, we are forced to fight a devastating world war.

That is why the United States led our allies in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, better known as NATO. This most successful defensive alliance in history turned 75 this year.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Madam President, now, this brings me to the purpose of my comments today. Over the next few months, I will be drilling down on the issue of America's military readiness. I have grave concerns that the U.S. military has too many chinks in its armor. For the first time in decades, the invincibility of the U.S. military is questionable, which compromises the safety and security of 330 million Americans.

Scaling back resources for the U.S. military, year after year, undermines morale, weakens troop preparedness, and sends a dangerous signal to America's allies, as well as our adversaries.

Now, none of us, including this Senator, need a crystal ball to see what is on the horizon if the United States of America allows our military to wither on the vine. Unless Washington turns things around, the slippery slope that we are on will trigger an avalanche of no return. The U.S. military can't afford to play second fiddle to anybody or any country anywhere.

Our adversaries around the world take great delight when defense hawks clash here in the Congress with those who want to slash Pentagon spending to spend more on social programs. The "guns and butter" debate takes place every year when appropriators open and close the public purse.

A recent Gallup poll gauging the public's pulse on the U.S. military surprised me. I hope it surprised a lot of my colleagues. While I have long known Congress doesn't earn high approval rates from the public, I didn't expect public confidence in the military to slide to a level not seen since the threat to U.S. power during the Cold War. It dipped down to 60 percent in 2023, compared to a record high of 85 percent following the Gulf war, in 1991, and rising again after the attack in New York on 9/11.

Just 2 weeks ago, on Memorial Day, communities across Iowa and nationwide honored fallen hometown heroes. These are the beloved sons and daughters who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country, leaving their dreams and grieving Gold Star families behind. Throughout American history, tens of millions of American patriots have put their lives on the line to protect U.S. national security, defend our allies, and fight tyranny and terror from distant shores.

Since my first term in the U.S. Senate, I have worked hard to advocate for strengthening combat readiness and to ensure our troops have what they need to do their jobs. As a Pentagon watchdog, my efforts to root out waste, fraud, and abuse are rooted in one fundamental principle. That principle is the top priority of the Federal Government is national security, period.

The phrase "peace through strength" has become known as a Reagan doctrine and was espoused by my good friend from Russell, KS, Senator Dole. This philosophy aligns with my crusade to fix the fiscal mess that undercuts the Department of Defense and undermines the morale of our troops. Every dollar lost to fraud is one less dollar for military readiness.

However, my bipartisan work on this issue shows that I am not for writing the Pentagon a blank check. Protecting taxpayer dollars and boosting military readiness aren't mutually exclusive.

On January 8, 1790, in his first annual address to Congress, President George Washington said that "to be prepared for war is one of the most effectual [ways] of preserving peace."

Our Nation's 40th President continued President Washington's legacy at

the nominating convention 44 years ago in Detroit. Ronald Reagan said this:

We know only too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak. It is then that tyrants are tempted.

During his 8 years in the White House, President Reagan modernized the U.S. Armed Forces. The U.S. Army grew by two active divisions, and the United States developed new weapons systems to thwart nuclear attacks.

Reagan stared down the "Evil Empire." Those are his words as he referred to the U.S.S.R. and ended the Cold War. The Reagan doctrine taught us really what works.

On the other hand, the appeasement of Presidents Obama and Biden have only incentivized our adversaries to take another inch. Think of the uncertainty that we have today, which arguably stem from the Obama administration airlifting pallets of cash to Iran, followed by the Biden administration lifting sanctions.

Given their public action, I wasn't too surprised when FBI whistleblowers recently came to me with records showing just how easy on Iran the Obama-Biden administration really was. Their own Secretary of State, John Kerry, actively worked to prevent dangerous Iranians from being arrested in order to protect this reckless negotiation that ended up being the Iran nuclear deal.

It has never been a secret that Iran uses its wealth to underwrite terrorism in the hopes of wiping Israel off the map, and they also have a target on the United States.

To give another example, think of the uncertainty in Eastern Europe when Putin annexed Crimea in 2014. The world blinked. Now, he is waging war in Ukraine and itching to knock down the doors of the liberated Baltic States, Poland, and elsewhere to resurrect the old Soviet Union.

I want to remind my colleagues and the American people what the Russian President said in 2005 during his annual state of the nation message. Can you believe this? He called the collapse of the Soviet empire the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."

Something else Ronald Reagan said rings as true today as it did 40 years ago. He declared the Soviets "must be made to understand we will never compromise our principles and standards [nor] ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire. To do so would mean abandoning the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil."

Eighty years after D-Day, our Nation is at a crossroads. As we look ahead toward our Nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, America can't afford to blink.

I never imagined the lessons of the Holocaust would be questioned on the U.S. college campuses, particularly after the unprovoked atrocities and murders of innocent civilians on October 7 last year by Hamas. I never im-

aged isolationism would fuel Putin's brazen efforts to restore the old Soviet Union.

And let's not forget, President Xi has made no bones about his mission to usurp America's global leadership. American leadership has created the conditions for countries to pursue independence, self-determination, and freedom.

In contrast, President Xi seeks to expand China's global footprint through his sinister Belt and Road Initiative, debt-trap diplomacy, and outright military bullying. All of these tactics aim to export the Chinese Communist Party's model of state control over citizens' lives and exert a neo-imperial domination over countries all around the globe.

With intention, the communist Chinese Government silenced the 35th anniversary of the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Communist leaders have all but scrubbed the murder of protestors by armed police and 180,000 troops from Chinese public memory.

Let there be no mistake, authoritarianism regimes use any means necessary to censor free speech, snuff out economic freedom, and pursue and persecute religious freedom.

When Putin and Xi talk about a multipolar world, they mean a world in which they can dominate smaller countries against that country's citizens' will.

In another speech, I will shine a light on religious persecution happening against groups like the Uighurs and other Muslim minorities, Tibetan Buddhists, and Christians in China, as well as Crimean Tatar Muslims, and Evangelical Christians in Ukraine.

Our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly, and the right to peaceably petition the government.

As we look forward to our Independence Day, I encourage all Americans to recognize and appreciate these freedoms. And if Americans want to guarantee these freedoms, peace and prosperity for generations to come, we cannot blink in our commitment to promoting peace through strength. If America doesn't lead, our allies won't follow and our enemies will no longer fear us.

I will close with one more piece of sage advice from President Reagan:

If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

I yield the floor.

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.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Texas.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, for 3½ years, President Biden's border