

Let's put the cards on the table. Under former President Trump, the future of NATO was in doubt, and NATO members did not know if the alliance would continue to exist, let alone rise to any challenge. When President Biden took office, that changed immediately. He made this alliance alive again at a time when it was needed, now more than ever with the situation in Ukraine.

To expand to include Finland and Sweden was a dramatic move forward. Hundreds of miles of Finnish border, for example, with Russia are now part of the NATO alliance on the Finnish side.

I spoke to a man, Niinisto, who was the President of Finland, about the decision of his nation, after so many decades in the Cold War, to finally step out and join NATO against Russia. He said: Senator, it came down to a telephone conversation I had with Vladimir Putin. I called him to tell him that Finland was going to join NATO. Putin said to me: You don't have to worry about us. Don't join NATO. You don't need to.

And President Niinisto said: I told him I could no longer trust him after what he did in Poland and Georgia and other places.

That just shows how important the NATO alliance is—that a country as substantial and with a storied history like Finland would decide to step forward and finally enlist their support for the NATO alliance. It speaks well of the alliance, what it has achieved and what it can in the future. And it speaks well of President Biden's leadership in expanding NATO at a critical moment in history.

Despite Putin's warped paranoia to the contrary, NATO is not a threat to Russia. It will defend every inch of its members' territory from Russia or any other attacker.

Putin's colossal strategic blunder in Ukraine cost the lives of more than 100,000 Russians so far, and it has devastated Russia's standing around the world, leaving Russia no other choice than to beg for weapons from, of all places, North Korea and Iran.

Much to his chagrin, Putin's senseless invasion strengthened and expanded NATO, and recent summits have included historic participation of several countries from the Asia-Pacific region, strengthening the alliance even more.

I believe Ukraine's future rests ultimately within NATO, and, until then, the United States and our allies must continue to support the defense against Russia.

I think Lithuanian President Nausėda argued this well: Europeans understand that Ukraine's fight is their fight, and it is our fight too.

I share that sentiment.

So on this 75th anniversary, let's recommit to this historic alliance that has served the world so well in maintaining stability and freedom. Let us continue to work toward peace.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

HURRICANE BERYL

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, early this morning, Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Texas as a category 1 hurricane.

Texas, and particularly Southeast Texas and the Houston area, and all up and down the gulf coast, are no stranger to hurricanes.

This one struck the Texas coast near Matagorda, with torrential rain and intense storm surge, which is very dangerous, as you know, and sustained winds of 80 miles per hour. Throughout the day, Beryl has taken its sweet time traveling the expanse of our State, bearing down on our communities in the southeast and eastern parts of the State with strong winds, a lot of rain, a lot of flooding, and even tornadoes.

More than 2.7 million Texans have lost power, and that number is expected to rise as the storm continues to move its way across the State. Sadly, at least two people have died so far, mainly due to trees falling on their homes.

I have reached out to the county judges and mayors in some of the hardest hit areas and assured them that we are monitoring the situation, but, more importantly, we are standing by, ready to do anything we can to be of assistance. And, of course, we will be working with Governor Abbott and the State officials when it comes to seeking assistance at the Federal level for disaster relief.

By tomorrow morning, the worst effects of Hurricane Beryl should be behind us, and we will have a better sense of the full extent of the damage caused by the storm. Until then, I urge all of my fellow Texans to follow the guidance of local authorities and do everything possible to stay safe.

There is an expression—"turn around; don't drown"—which cautions people not to drive into standing water in the roadway. That certainly can't be said enough. Things, stuff, is replaceable. People are not.

As always, I am incredibly thankful to the first responders who are putting their own lives on the line to support their communities and the many folks who are working with the utilities trying to get power back on line as well. In many areas, search-and-rescue operations began before the Sun even rose this morning.

So thank you to those who are on the frontlines saving lives as Hurricane Beryl bears down on our State and to the linemen, again, repairing the downed lines as quickly as possible.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Madam President, on another matter, we have officially crossed the halfway mark of 2024. Election day is only about 4 months away, and the Senate still has a mountain of work piled up to complete during that period of time.

The first task on the list is to pass a strong National Defense Authorization

Act. Congress, has, of course, passed the NDAA for the past 63 consecutive years. It is a must-pass piece of legislation. It is time to build on that record, particularly at this time—the most dangerous time, I think, our country and the world have seen since World War II. The threats are everywhere, it seems.

I want to commend Chairman JACK REED and Ranking Member ROGER WICKER and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee for doing their job in advancing the 64th annual NDAA last month.

This bill was carefully crafted over a period of months and ultimately passed the committee on a bipartisan vote of 22 to 3. That strong bipartisan vote includes provisions offered by Members, of course, on both sides of the aisle.

The NDAA, the Defense authorization bill, is absolutely essential to America's defense, our military readiness, and the safety and well-being of our troops and our military families. At a time when America's position on the world stage is being tested by all of our adversaries around the world, a strong Defense authorization bill could not be more important. It should be signed into law before Congress funds our national defense, which brings me to our next big task, which is appropriations—paying the bills, keeping the lights on.

Before September 30, which is not very far away, Congress needs to pass annual appropriations bills. There are 12 of them, as the Presiding Officer knows. These bills fund every aspect of the Federal Government, from our mighty military to disaster assistance programs. We know that passing these bills is no easy task. It requires a lot of time and consideration by our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee.

But the majority leader's part-time Senate schedule has not given them much room to maneuver. By that, I mean we come into session often on a Tuesday and leave on a Thursday. This week, because of the 2-week break we have just returned from, is maybe an exception.

Here we are on Monday, and we will have one vote—what is known colloquially in the Senate as a bed-check vote—at 5:30, on a nomination, but that is about it.

But when the Senate is not meeting, which seems like most of the time now, we can't meet to consider bills or advance critical legislation. It makes it difficult, if not impossible, to solve the biggest challenges facing our country.

This summer, the Senate's timeline is so truncated that the Appropriations Committee is skipping subcommittee markups entirely. They are moving bills straight to a vote by the full committee because there is simply not enough time, given the remaining time in the fiscal year, which ends September 30, to follow regular order, which is something both the majority leader and the chairman and ranking

member of the Appropriations Committee had said they wanted to do.

Regular order simply means transparency and accountability and letting everybody know what is happening when the Federal Government pays its bills.

Chairman MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS have both said repeatedly they want to return to a more transparent, more accountable, more inclusive process of funding the Federal Government, and last summer they proved that this is not just talk. They followed through on that commitment, and the committee passed all 12 appropriations bills for the first time in 5 years. That is an accomplishment, but it should be an embarrassment that the Senate has simply not done its job for the previous 5 years.

I appreciate the time and the effort that the Appropriations Committee has invested in the process. And this is not a partisan matter; this is a bipartisan project and requirement. But I am disappointed that they are now forced to sprint a marathon during the month of July because the majority leader, our colleague from New York, has barely allowed the Senate enough time to do its work.

Unfortunately, the Senate's to-do list does not end there. In addition to the Defense authorization bill and 12 funding bills, we also need to pass a farm bill by September 30. That is when the current bill expires. This legislation is critical to America's food security as well as to the hard-working men and women who grow and produce it.

Our colleague from Arkansas, Ranking Member BOOZMAN, has been a tireless champion for America's farmers and ranchers and producers, and I know he and our colleagues on the ag committee are committed to passing a strong farm bill as soon as possible. The House has already done its job, and now it is up to us in the Senate.

But the majority leader's schedule has made their job difficult, if not impossible, to do before September 30. We don't have much time to complete this mountain of work. Including today, the Senate is only scheduled to be in session for 11 days during the month of July. That is not even a full 3 weeks of work. After that, we are scheduled to take a 5-week recess—a 5-week recess—during the month of August and return for a short period of time in September. Before September, the Senate needs to pass all 12 appropriations bills and a farm bill in order to meet the deadlines. But we are only scheduled to be in session for 12 days in September as well.

Between now and election day, November 5, the Senate is only scheduled to be in session for 23 days. Election day is 120 days away, but we are only scheduled to be in session for 23 days. That should be a source of embarrassment to everyone. The schedule is not conducive to getting our work done. Given the important tasks before us, it is not just lazy; it is downright dangerous.

Funding the government, protecting America's food supply, investing in the safety and security of the American people—these are core to governing. There is no excuse for the majority leader to give us only 23 days to complete all of this incredibly important work. We have a lot to accomplish, and the majority leader, who sets the schedule, needs to let us get our work done.

Forget voting on President Biden's nominees or scheduling partisan show votes, which is what I read that he has scheduled. We need to start doing our job, which is to legislate.

Our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee have done their job. The Appropriations Committee, no doubt, will get their job done. Neither one of these are partisan bills, but we need to get them done and get them done before the deadline.

The Senate needs to especially prioritize America's national security. I urge Senator SCHUMER to file for cloture to start the process of voting on the national defense authorization bill so we can have a full debate on the Senate floor and pass this legislation before the recess begins at the end of July. With everything we need to accomplish in the next few months, we can't afford to waste time on stunt votes or radical judicial nominees. Senator SCHUMER needs to file for cloture on the NDAA and give Members of this Chamber, on a bipartisan basis, the opportunity to do what we were sent here to do, which is to legislate.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I happen to know you are from Mississippi, and so as I speak about flood insurance, I suspect there are people in Mississippi whom you know or, perhaps, are related to who can relate to that which I describe.

I am speaking specifically about the uncertainty felt by those who rely upon flood insurance as we enter hurricane season. Unfortunately and tragically, we actually have a real, live example of this as Hurricane Beryl has hit an area that was devastated by Harvey just a few years ago. And anyone along that gulf coast who is dependent upon flood insurance to rebuild—and their premiums just rose—have now been hit by Beryl, and they can anticipate their premiums rising once more.

A program that is supposed to give security, instead, is creating anxiety. It isn't just the people who flood because some people who don't flood and who have never flooded will see their premiums rise as well. Why? It is be-

cause of the way that this program is being implemented.

Let me say that Louisiana stands with Mississippi; Louisiana stands with Texas; and we stand with all parts of the Nation that will suffer under the way that this program is being implemented.

So let me put up my first floor chart. We have the National Flood Insurance Program—or NFIP, as we call it—as a safety net for homeowners after a storm. It protects them from being financially wiped out by a hurricane or any other act of flooding. But this year is different from past years for two reasons. First, the National Weather Service predicts that 2024 will see above-normal hurricane activity in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. Second, there is much more uncertainty about—and this is the key thing—whether NFIP will remain affordable due to FEMA's new risk assessment system called Risk Rating 2.0. For most people, the short answer is no—no that it will remain affordable.

But this is not the issue just for Louisiana. It affects Mississippi. It affects Texas. It affects all coasts and anyplace where there is a river or a stream. Anyplace there is water, there is a risk of flooding.

The National Flood Insurance Program covers 4.7 million policies across the country. And so those 4.7 million Americans rely upon NFIP to insure their homes and businesses, to keep their family safe. And we have seen flooding in States that you typically don't think of when you say “flooding.” Virginia, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Pennsylvania, California, Mississippi, and Alabama are all States that have had more than \$1 billion in NFIP claims since 1978. Again, these States, over \$1 billion in claims since 1978.

And those are just the States hardest hit, those in the dark. These lighter colored States have all been affected as well. Now, maybe not a billion, but if you are the family whose home has been washed away, it has affected you in one of the most profound ways.

I will also point out that this is not a rich man's program. If you look in these communities, like in Pennsylvania, oftentimes that is called riverine flooding. And folks who are less well-off tend to have the older homes in the bottom of the valley. When the flooding goes through and rips up their home, they have fewer financial resources by which to rebuild. So the kind of charge that this only protects luxury homes on a beach—totally false. This is for middle-income families, working families, and poor families, allowing them to have the security that they can rebuild after a tragic event.

In the past 3 years, we have seen seven major flooding events across the country, each costing more than \$1 billion. In 2021, Louisiana saw flash flooding affecting thousands of homes. California, the State the Presiding Officer