

come to the protection of these families.

The lack of accountability and consequences of their actions that Big Tech has enjoyed for decades has allowed the likes of Amazon, Meta, Snap, and other tech companies to ignore the risks their platforms pose to kids. KOSA and COPPA, as they are known, are positive steps toward changing this dynamic that I can support, but we need more. We have got to get serious. If we create civil liability for wrongdoing, there will be an enforcement mechanism powerful enough to deal with these companies.

I will continue to advocate for a vote on my STOP CSAM Act and other measures that make the internet safer for our kids.

With that, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been a remarkable couple of weeks in our country: the attempted assassination of President Trump; the decision made by President Biden to—*notwithstanding* having won all the primaries and being, essentially, the chosen leader of the Democratic party on the presidential ticket come November—his decision to step down in what can only be described as a political coup to install the Vice President as the Democratic nominee, even after months upon months of elections where the votes of people who participated in the Democratic primary have now simply been disregarded in favor of a handful of leaders in the smoky, smoke-filled rooms here in Washington, DC, deciding who should be their standard bearer.

But tomorrow we have another very significant event occurring: Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is in Washington this week and will address Congress tomorrow. More than 9 months have passed since that terrible day on October 7 when Israel was attacked by Hamas terrorists. These attacks were against innocent civilians, not the Israeli defense forces, and these terrorists brutally murdered more than 1,200 Israelis without any warning and violently assaulted countless others. They took 251 hostages—many, unfortunately, have died, while 120 of them still remain in Hamas custody, including 8 Americans.

Over the last several months, Israeli forces have faced attacks not just from Hamas but from another terrorist proxy—or I should say two of them—Hezbollah from Lebanon in the northern part of the region and its proxy, the Houthis, in Yemen.

Sadly, many on the far left in our country have chosen to take sides not with our friend and ally Israel but with the terrorists—with Hamas, with Hezbollah and the Houthis against our friend and ally Israel. They have repeatedly called for a cease-fire, notwithstanding the fact that Israel is still under threat from Iranian proxies;

and they have attempted to frame Prime Minister Netanyahu as the villain here for a war begun on October 7 when terrorists attacked innocent Israeli civilians.

At a time when many Americans and, sadly, many Members of Congress do not seem to understand why America's support for Israel is so critical, I hope Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks tomorrow will provide some clarity and some context. There is a saying that has been going around for years: If Hamas laid down its weapons today, there would be no more violence. If Israel laid down its weapons, there would be no more Israel. Hamas is not fighting for peace; it is trying to wipe Israel off the map.

This is an existential threat to the State of Israel and the people of Israel. The United States cannot tiptoe down the line between good and evil. We must make a choice, and we must make a stand. And that stand should be with Israel.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's joint address to Congress is an opportunity to reaffirm our shared values and highlight the pivotal role that Israel plays in promoting stability and democracy in an admittedly volatile region. I look forward to hearing his remarks tomorrow, but I am concerned about one critical absence. There have been news reports that Vice President HARRIS, who is now on track to become the Democrats' Presidential nominee, will not be in attendance. Reports are she is scheduled to speak at a sorority convention in Indianapolis. But this isn't a last-minute or unavoidable scheduling conflict. The date of Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech was announced in early June. And in any event, I am sure the sorority convention would forgive the Vice President for attending to this important event here in Washington, DC, and perhaps reschedule for another time. But to openly boycott the leader of Israel at a time like this is irresponsible. The Vice President's decision to skip this joint address is clearly a snub, and it foreshadows a continuing trend in U.S. foreign policy that started under the current President. And, obviously, it is designed to send a message to Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel.

We have already heard some Members of this body call for Prime Minister Netanyahu—basically, for there to be an election to replace him, an unprecedented intrusion into the affairs of a sovereign nation, another democracy. It is disgraceful and embarrassing to see the pandering to extremist elements in the Democratic party.

Sadly, the Vice President isn't the only one shying away from showing support for one of our critical allies. Media reports say that this Chamber's President Pro Tempore, Senator MURRAY, is boycotting the speech as well.

I am not surprised that some of the more radical Members of the Democratic conference may boycott, but it is shameful when their top leadership is so willing to abandon a key ally.

In light of these dynamics, I hope the majority leader, Senator SCHUMER, will make it clear where he stands and that he doesn't condone skipping one of the most important sessions of Congress in recent memory just to get more air time on cable TV.

Given the partisan antics at play, I am relieved to hear that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Senator BEN CARDIN, will sit behind Prime Minister Netanyahu tomorrow.

I don't recall when the Vice President and the President pro tempore declined to sit and the chairman of a standing committee, like the Foreign Relations Committee, was called upon to fill in. But good for him. He understands the important message that this address sends and has stepped in to do what others have refused to do.

Still, the world is watching the Vice President more closely than ever before, now that she is on a path to become the Democratic nominee for President. They, of course, are analyzing every word, every move, every signal, every decision. If the Vice President keeps up with her current plans to boycott this address, it will send a chilling message about her foreign policy priorities and the future of U.S.-Israel relations under a potential Harris administration.

It also demonstrates a disregard of the commitments we have made as a nation to our allies. At a time when the tyrants and dictators of the world are drawing closer together, America cannot abandon our allies.

As Israel faces ongoing threats in a hostile neighborhood, it is imperative that the United States stand steady beside Israel. Israel must have confidence that, regardless of who is elected in November, the relationship between the United States and Israel will remain strong.

You know, it is not just the message we send to Israel; it is the message we send to Iran, the No. 1 state sponsor of international terrorism, and its proxies—Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis in Yemen. The Vice President, whether she appreciates it or not, is sending a message to America's enemies as well. As Joseph Stalin reportedly said, "you probe with bayonets. If you find mush, you push on. But if you find steel, you withdraw." Unfortunately, the message that the Vice President is sending by not attending this address and respecting our friend and ally Israel sends a message of mush, not steel.

As we face growing challenges around the globe, including the threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions and the spread of terrorism, we need leaders who will unequivocally support our allies and uphold our commitments. I can only hope that the Vice President will change her mind and make that commitment this week. I would congratulate her if she did.

But as we look into the future, America needs leaders who understand the

importance of our alliances and who are willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends.

As I said earlier, this is not just a message to our friends and allies. This is a message to Israel's enemies and adversaries, because, if they sense a lack of commitment and resolve on the part of the United States to stand with our allies, they are going to continue to do what they started on October 7.

As I said, we need leaders who understand the importance of our alliances and who are willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends. Any leader or would-be leader who fails to meet that bar does not deserve a seat in the Senate, much less in the Oval Office.

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. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. 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.

ISRAEL

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, as a strong supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship, to talk about why it was such a big mistake to invite Prime Minister Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress and why I will not attend his speech tomorrow. I do not take this decision lightly, and I want to explain my reasons.

At the outset, I want to underscore the importance of the longtime partnership between the people of the United States and the people of Israel. After the horrors of the Holocaust, the United States led the effort at the United Nations to advocate for the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people. And then, in May 1948, the United States, under the leadership of President Harry Truman, became the first country to recognize the State of Israel. And that support—this solidarity—has held firm for 76 years, through many conflicts.

That was especially true in the immediate aftermath of the vicious Hamas terror attack on October 7. Ten days later, President Biden traveled to Jerusalem to embrace the people of Israel and let them know that we, the United States, stand with them after that brutal massacre that killed over 1,200 people and seized over 250 hostages.

Those bonds between the people of Israel and the people of the United States remain strong today. But the actions and words of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his ultra-right extremist coalition, both before and since the October 7 attacks, have weakened the ties between the United States and the Government of Israel.

All of us who care about our partnership, both in America and in Israel, should understand the enormous dam-

age that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his current extremist government coalition are doing to our relationship and to Israel's standing in the world.

So it sends a terrible message to bring him here now to address a joint session of Congress. While we warmly welcomed President Herzog's speech to Congress just over a year ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu remains the leader of the most extreme rightwing government coalition in the history of Israel. It is the coalition he personally assembled in a desperate bid to regain power and to prevent a possible prison sentence.

To do that, he formed a government with certain individuals who had previously been on the dangerous, most extreme fringes of Israeli politics and considered totally unfit to govern. They include the likes of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, both unabashed racists and religious bigots. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak referred to them "as the racist messianic fanatics with whom Netanyahu has cast his lot."

That is former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

In fact, they are the ideological successors to the extremist Meir Kahane, who wanted to ban relations between Jews and non-Jews and expel all Palestinians. Kahane was banned by the Israeli Supreme Court from participating in Israeli politics decades ago, and his party was placed on the U.S. Terror Watchlist.

But in 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu gave those ideological descendants of Meir Kahane—Ben-Gvir and Smotrich—key powerful government positions. These are the individuals who now control Prime Minister Netanyahu's political fate, who threatened to withdraw their support and bring down his government if he fails to do their bidding. And, in many ways, they are now calling the shots when it comes to the policy decisions of the Government of Israel—in Israel, in the West Bank, and in Gaza. They have also made it abundantly clear that, when it comes to the war in Gaza, they do not prioritize the safe return of all the hostages, including American citizens taken by Hamas.

President Biden has prioritized the safe return of all the hostages. Prime Minister Netanyahu has not. He continues to put his own political survival first, above the interests of the people of Israel and those American citizens.

I renew my call for an immediate cease-fire and the return of all the hostages.

Just last Friday, 4 days ago, during a visit to Israel, I met with Israeli families, including American citizens, whose loved ones had been brutally murdered by Hamas on October 7. Some of them lost parents; others lost siblings or children. All of them—all of them—have faced tremendous personal trauma and suffering.

So I was shocked to learn that none of the family members that I met with had heard from Prime Minister

Netanyahu or any member of his government since that horrific Hamas attack. That is hard to fathom. Neither the Prime Minister nor any member of his government had reached out to them to offer a helping hand.

So I say to Prime Minister Netanyahu: Before you come speak to Members of Congress, go meet with the families I saw whose loved ones were murdered on October 7.

I also met, in Tel Aviv, this past Friday, with families whose loved ones were kidnapped by Hamas on October 7, including American citizens. Some of them had their loved ones returned safely as a part of the agreement reached last November. Others said they have been told that their loved ones have died. Most held out hope that their loved ones were still alive. All of those that I met with expressed deep, deep disappointment in the fact that Prime Minister Netanyahu has not prioritized the safe and swift return of the remaining hostages.

Recent polls indicate that large swaths of the Israeli people—over 70 percent—want Prime Minister Netanyahu to resign now or when the war ends, and that is certainly what I heard from many Israelis during my visit to Israel last week. They saw the Prime Minister's invitation to address a joint session of Congress as a political stunt to help him in his efforts to escape legal and political accountability for his actions and inactions, including the massive intelligence failure that allowed the October 7 attack to have such devastating consequences.

That sentiment that I heard expressed directly was captured by a headline in the Jerusalem Post on the same day I met with those families. That headline reads:

Protesters call on Netanyahu to delay flight to US until hostage deal is closed.

The protesters stated that Prime Minister Netanyahu "is running away from the hostage families, running away from a deal, running away from decisions about the day after." I agree with those families.

What I heard directly from many Israelis was also described by a piece written by a well-known and well-regarded Israeli writer and journalist by the name of Amir Tibon. Amir Tibon's family survived October 7 by hiding for hours—hours—huddled in darkness inside a safe room of their family home until his father arrived at the kibbutz and heroically saved them.

Here is what Amir wrote in the Haaretz newspaper back on June 2:

There is nothing "pro-Israel" about this invitation. It is not "pro-Israel" to side with Netanyahu's party against the brave families of the hostages, who are fighting to secure a deal for their release.

"It is not 'pro-Israel,'" he wrote, "to help Netanyahu address Congress while knowing that since October 7th he has not found the time to speak with any of the Israeli communities invaded by Hamas under his watch."

Or take this June 26 op-ed in the New York Times, entitled "We Are Israelis