

with deepfakes. This bill will end that. It is a very good thing.

We passed another very good bill a few moments ago as well. The Senate passed the Preventing Financing of Illegal Synthetic Drugs Act. This bill will get to the root of financing behind these deadly and destructive drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine. I have led the way here in the Senate for months cracking down on supply chains of drugs like fentanyl.

Last fall, I met with Chinese President Xi and urged him and the Chinese Government to do more work to crack down on companies that allow precursor chemicals to make their way to countries like Mexico and made often by gangs into fentanyl and sent into the U.S.

Just a few months ago, I led the Senate passing the national security supplemental, which included the FEND Off Fentanyl Act. This bill is another step in that direction—the right direction—to better understand and anticipate how malicious synthetic drug traffickers finance their operations.

Two Senators worked very hard on this legislation and deserve the credit. Our two Senators from Nevada, Senator CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO and Senator JACKY ROSEN. I want to commend them for their excellent work.

So these two bills—they are passing quietly later this evening, but they are very important. I hope that people will take notice of them and show that the Senate is fighting the scourge of drugs and fighting the scourge of deepfakes.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### SOUTH SUDAN

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, 13 years ago last week South Sudan became an independent country. I want to congratulate the people of South Sudan on this milestone. The United States has long supported the aspirations of the people of South Sudan in their struggle for independence and democratic governance. John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, would visit the Senate to build support for the fight for self-determination.

Today, despite those efforts, South Sudan is a textbook case of a failed state where, despite rich oil deposits, millions of destitute people depend on international aid for their daily survival. Last week, the United States announced more than \$57 million in additional humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs of hundreds of thousands of crisis-affected people in South Sudan.

In 2005, the year John Garang died, the United States, Norway, and the

United Kingdom—known collectively as the Troika—supported Kenya and the other regional member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to broker the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, or the CPA. The CPA ended what, at that time, was the longest armed conflict in Africa and gave the people of South Sudan an historic opportunity to vote in a referendum that culminated in their Declaration of Independence on July 9, 2011. Their hope, and the hope of the United States and our allies, was that South Sudan was finally beginning a new democratic chapter based on the rule of law—with security, competent and honest elected leaders, and new opportunities for equitable economic development and trade.

The return of political violence in South Sudan in December 2013 was shocking to both the people of South Sudan and the international community. The leaders of South Sudan took up arms to consolidate their grip on political and economic power. Motivated by greed and personal ambition, they sacrificed the hopes, aspirations, and welfare of the South Sudanese people who, in the years since, have lost everything—including their hard-won self-rule. Today, their country is run by warlords who have driven the country into bankruptcy through grand corruption, impoverishing millions.

The democratic aspirations of the South Sudanese people, their ability to live a dignified life, and opportunities to educate their children, have all been stifled. The warlords have established a brutal authoritarian regime that has no respect for human rights or civil liberties, and no regard for democracy and the rule of law. The U.S. Department of State and human rights organizations report a pattern of repression against political dissidents, as well as widespread sexual violence against women and girls.

On July 3, 2024, South Sudan's Parliament passed repressive National Security legislation that gives a wide range of authorities to the National Security Service and its affiliated opaque institutions that have terrorized the people of South Sudan for years. The passage of this law reinforces the fact that the current government of South Sudan does not embrace human rights and democratic values. Such actions make it extremely difficult for the United States to find areas of common ground with South Sudan's leaders.

My predecessor Senator Patrick Leahy was outspoken about the calamity facing the people of South Sudan and the need for new leadership. As he said on January 6, 2022, and later that year on August 6, the government of President Kiir and Vice President Machar has shuttered both political and civic spaces, increasing the risk of political violence. It was not long ago, in August 2021, when peaceful protests organized by the People's Coalition for Civil Action—PCCA—were met with

death threats, arbitrary arrests, trumped up treason charges, and forced exile.

One of the leaders of that organization Abraham Awolich was one of the "Lost Boys" who ended up in a refugee camp in Kenya at the age of 10. From there, he was resettled to my home State of Vermont, and he later graduated from the University of Vermont. In 2011, he returned to his homeland to help with rebuilding the country, but like other pro-democracy advocates, the government of South Sudan regarded him as a threat for standing up against tyranny and dictatorship, and he was forced out of the country. He returned to the University of Vermont, where he is working towards a Ph.D.

Neighboring governments and the international community, including the United States, have given the leaders of South Sudan multiple opportunities to put their country on a path toward peace and democracy, as called for in the CPA. These gestures have been met with intransigence and a total disregard for the will of the South Sudanese people. The August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan was such an opportunity, but it was squandered when the leaders resorted to violence to resolve a political stalemate. The government claimed that the agreement was imposed on it, and President Kiir launched his own South Sudan National Dialogue, which he hoped would endorse his goal to remain in office indefinitely. The people of South Sudan, to the contrary, called on President Kiir and Vice President Machar to step down and blamed them for the instability, violence, and corruption plaguing the country.

As if to confirm the fear and verdict of their people, forces controlled by Kiir and Machar again resorted to deadly violence in July 2016. That round of violence resulted in many lives lost, the displacement of civilians, and the collapse of the 2015 agreement.

The African regional governments, with the support of the international community, gave President Kiir and Vice President Machar another opportunity to do right for their people by negotiating the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan, which was signed in 2018. That agreement was intended to last 36 months until an election. Nearly 80 months later, there has been no significant progress. Instead, President Kiir and his government have acted to frustrate peace, undermine democracy, and subvert the rule of law. Now, both leaders are contemplating another 24 months in office, something the people of South Sudan cannot afford.

The fear of starvation is a reality for millions of people in South Sudan. The economy has collapsed, billions of dollars in oil revenue have been stolen and squandered, and there is a great sense of urgency to restore security and rebuild the economy. The country needs

a new system for transparently managing public finances to ensure that revenues from oil and other natural resources are protected and used to address the needs of the people.

I have recounted this tragic history to provide context for the peace talks currently underway in Nairobi, Kenya. The High-Level Mediation for South Sudan, or the Tumaini Initiative, is another olive branch extended to the leaders of South Sudan. It seeks to chart a way forward for their people who have suffered for so long due to the greed and repression of their own leaders. The United States, Norway, and the U.K. should actively support the Tumaini Initiative, provided the process is transparent and has clearly defined goals that will finally realize the promise of the CPA and independence.

The government of South Sudan must use this opportunity to take extraordinary measures to achieve lasting peace.

The people of South Sudan expressed their preferences clearly through the National Dialogue. They blame the crises in the country on their corrupt leaders who they have called on to step aside. They have called on the Troika countries to help bring about a democratic transition, including a leadership succession plan and timelines for elections in which Kiir and Machar do not participate. That is a necessary outcome of the Tumaini Initiative if it is to succeed.

The Tumaini Initiative should also ensure that a new security structure is established in South Sudan. The current military is corrupt, splintered, and unaccountable. A coherent plan with clear benchmarks will be needed to separate the warlords and other political actors from the military. The privatized units of the army will need to be combined and repurposed with a single national mission to defend the people and sovereignty of South Sudan and a mandate to stay out of politics.

South Sudan has a long history of impunity. Human rights violations, war crimes, and the theft of public resources are rarely if ever punished, and the country suffers from a culture of lawlessness. The police and judicial system must be thoroughly reformed. The prosecution of war crimes by an international tribunal should be considered.

The United States should support the call by the people of South Sudan for a new constitution that restructures power and state institutions. The Tumaini Initiative, with the support of the Troika countries, should support a broad-based political dialogue to produce a political consensus on a constitution that strengthens the country's democratic institutions, including an independent judiciary.

While the people of South Sudan need to choose their future leaders, the conditions for a free, fair, and transparent democratic election do not currently exist. It will first be necessary to

achieve agreement on a new constitution and a new security structure, with clear timelines and benchmarks that prepare the country for democratic elections.

The Tumaini Initiative may be the last opportunity for the countries of the region, led by Kenya and with the support of the international community, to finally help end the South Sudanese people's nightmare. Their current leaders have betrayed them. Multiple previous attempts to persuade their leaders to fulfill their obligations under the CPA have failed. Millions of people are hungry and have lost hope for a better future. The Tumaini Initiative offers them that hope.

The United States has invested billions of dollars and years of diplomacy to support the South Sudanese people. There are emerging democratic voices in the country that can help propel South Sudan forward. We should now play an active role in helping to ensure that the Tumaini Initiative achieves what previous attempts did not—a sustainable path to peace, democracy, justice, and a brighter future for the people of South Sudan.

#### 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF EDGEComb, MAINE

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, in 1774, just 2 years before America declared its independence, a small village on the Maine coast incorporated and took the name of Lord George Edgcumbe, a British naval hero and political leader who was known as a devoted friend of the Colonies. Today, it is a pleasure to join the people of Edgecomb, ME, in celebrating the 250th anniversary of a community that is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise families.

Edgecomb has a rich history. For thousands of years, the land where the Sheepscot and Damariscotta Rivers meet the sea was the hunting and fishing grounds of the Abenaki. Originally called Freetown due to the pro bono success of a Boston lawyer in defeating baseless deed challenges by land speculators, the early settlers farmed the fertile soil and put those rivers to work powering mills for grain and lumber. That early prosperity was invested in schools and churches to make a true community.

As the town grew, so did the range of industries to include brick-making, canning, tanneries, and shipyards. In addition to valuable granite, mica, and quartz, the land was found to contain rich deposits of the highest quality feldspar, used in the manufacture of fine china. Today, Edgecomb and the neighboring communities are home to ceramic artists whose work is prized by collectors around the world.

Edgecomb is home to many outstanding examples of New England architecture with several listings on the National Register of Historic Places, including the revered Edgecomb Community Church. One of the most fas-

cinating buildings is the so-called Marie Antoinette House. In 1793, according to legend, a local sea captain named Stephen Clough planned to rescue the doomed queen and take her the stately house on the Sheepscot River that he had outfitted with the finest French decor. Tragically, she was arrested before Captain Clough could put his daring plan into action.

Perhaps the building with the greatest historical significance is Fort Edgecomb, an octagonal blockhouse built in 1808 and 1809 to protect shipyards during a time of ongoing tension with Great Britain. Crucial to the defense of New England during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, the fort is now a popular state park.

Edgecomb's historic connection to America's freedom continues today. Last year, the town, along with neighboring communities, launched a new tradition by decorating streets and roadways with more than 250 banners paying tribute to the region's veterans.

Maine is known as Vacationland, and Edgecomb perfectly fits that picture. With beautiful rivers for kayaking and canoeing, several nature preserves for hiking and wildlife-watching, along with great food and shopping, there is always something to do. The energy and planning going into the town's yearlong 250th anniversary celebration demonstrates the pride the townspeople have in their town.

Edgecomb's 250th anniversary is a time to celebrate the people who pulled together, cared for one another, and built a great community. Thanks to those who came before, Edgecomb, ME, has a wonderful history. Thanks to those there today, it has a bright future.

#### 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF YARMOUTH, MAINE

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, the incorporation of the town of Yarmouth, ME, on August 8, 1849, was but one significant moment for one of the oldest communities in New England. On this 175th anniversary, it is a pleasure to commemorate a long and fascinating history that exemplifies the determination, resiliency, and ingenuity that defines our State.

For thousands of years, the area was the homeland of the Abenaki people, who thrived where the fast-flowing river they called Westcustogo meets the sea. In 1636, just 16 years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, William Royall, a cooper in the employ of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Company, was provided a small land grant in the area. The farm he established gave birth to a new settlement on the frontier.

Drawn by the abundant natural resources, the small village grew and became part of North Yarmouth, the eighth town incorporated by Massachusetts in the Province of Maine. The river, now called the Royal River in honor of the first settler, powered sawmills and grain mills, and the