

heartbreak in the Middle East—specifically, that six innocent Israeli hostages had been executed by Hamas, even as the talks were ongoing for their release.

One of them was a young man in the prime of his life. We met his parents. He had ties to our State of Illinois—Hersh Goldberg-Polin. He was one of the young people at the music festival on October 7, in Israel, during the heinous Hamas attack that sparked so much death and destruction. He lost part of his arm trying to protect the others who were taken hostage from a grenade, only to find himself being taken as a hostage.

His parents, Rachel and Jon, spent the next 329 days of his captivity crisscrossing the globe on a desperate effort to save their son and end this ghastly war. Can there be a crueler fate for a parent than suffering the daily plea and waiting for a horribly injured child's release?

Hersh is no longer with us, but the heroic lengths his mom and dad made to save him touched many of us deeply, including me.

The fate of these six hostages and the ongoing suffering and violence of the region are reminders of something that I said early in the conflict: Israel would be wise to learn from the United States' mistakes after 9/11 in responding amid unimaginable rage and pain.

I believe this lesson has been lost on the current Israeli Prime Minister, who, with each passing day, seems to step deeper into the pernicious and ruthless trap set by Hamas. He seems to have no long-term plan for stability. He has failed to secure the release of the hostages. He has created a terrible, terrible humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and appears more concerned with his far-right coalition's survival than a viable path forward.

Let me be clear. There are those in the region who want to destroy Israel, and that nation has a right to exist and a right to defend itself. But I worry its current Prime Minister is pursuing a highly counterproductive strategy. He is alienating allies in the region and abroad who want to help with a path forward. He is creating even more suffering and animosity among the Palestinian people and pursuing political survival above all else.

Or as Middle East expert Tom Friedman recently wrote:

Netanyahu has one interest: his own immediate political survival, even if it undermines Israel's long-term survival.

Or the former Mossad chief, Meir Dagan, who, before his death some years ago, concluded that Israel, over the decades "achieved a long string of impressive tactical successes but disastrous strategic failure."

It is long overdue that both sides reach an agreement on a cease-fire that leads to the release of the remaining hostages, greater humanitarian access, and a long-term, two-state vision that allows for both Israelis and Palestinians to live safely and in dignity.

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. SCHUMER. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

SENATE WORK PERIOD

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, welcome back.

The Senate gavels back into session after a busy and productive August work period. I wish to extend a "welcome back" to all my colleagues. I hope everyone's time back home was well spent.

Last week, I traveled across Upstate New York and New York City listening to New Yorkers from all walks of life and holding events about lowering prescription drug costs, implementing the infrastructure law, and all the ways Democrats are delivering for the American people.

WELCOMING SENATE-DESIGNATE GEORGE HELMY

Madam President, now that we are back, our first order of business will be to swear in the newest Member of this body, George Helmy, selected to represent the people of New Jersey until they choose a new Senator this November.

New Jersey couldn't have a better caretaker for the next few months. Senator-designate Helmy's career has been wholly dedicated to service. He was a longtime Senate staffer for both the late Senator Frank Lautenberg and Senator CORY BOOKER and served as chief of staff to the Governor of New Jersey. George Helmy knows New Jersey like the back of his hand.

When he is sworn in later today, he will be escorted by none other than his former boss, Senator CORY BOOKER. It is a proud moment for them as well as for all of George's family.

Finally, Senator-designate Helmy's brief tenure will be historic. He will be the first-ever member of the Coptic Orthodox Church to serve in the Senate. The Coptic Church is one of the oldest institutions in all of Christianity, dating back to the first century, when the Apostle Mark evangelized in Egypt.

Today, there are at least half a million Coptic Americans living in the United States, with large communities in New Jersey and in my home State of New York. Today, one of them will join this great body.

I thank George for answering the call of service. We wish him nothing but success and are ready to assist him however necessary in the weeks and months to come.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Madam President, now on the CR, the Senate is back in session for what will be three very busy, fast-paced, and consequential few weeks.

This afternoon, we will hold our first vote on cloture on the nomination of Adam Abelson to be a district judge for the District of Maryland.

For the information of Senators, I have also filed cloture on the nomination of Jeannette Vargas to be a district judge for the Southern District of New York.

For the rest of the week and for the rest of the work period, we will be confirming more of President Biden's outstanding judicial nominees.

And now, as everyone knows, one of the most important things we must do this work period is avoid a government shutdown. Today is September 9. Funding for the Federal Government will expire in 21 days unless Republicans work with Democrats on a temporary extension.

As has been done time and time again, keeping the government open will require bipartisanship. Keeping the government open will mean no poison pills or reckless partisan posturing. And keeping the government open will mean tuning out the bully tactics of the hard right.

Sadly, our House Republican counterparts are not off to a promising start. Last week, House Republicans released, without even consulting the Democratic leaders of the House and Senate or the President, a 6-month CR that is transparently unserious and seemingly designed for scoring political points instead of avoiding a shutdown. In fact, it is so unserious that the White House has already issued a veto threat.

It is a shame that the House of Representatives is once again wasting time catering to the hard right instead of doing the hard work of responsible, bipartisan governance. Speaker JOHN-SON'S slapdash continuing resolution isn't a serious effort to fund our government. If House Republicans were serious, they would sit down and craft a bill in a bipartisan fashion—consulting with me, the House Democratic leader, and the White House—and they would craft a bill that, in a bipartisan fashion, would actually achieve our common goal of funding the government.

If House Republicans were serious, they would not kick the can down the road for half a year, jeopardizing our military readiness and troop pay and interrupting critical domestic investments. If House Republicans were serious, they would work across the aisle to craft a CR that does not allow a lapse of critical healthcare programs like community health centers. They would work with the Senate to make sure we extend vital programs that protect our border and our economy, like E-Verify and H-2B visas.

If House Republicans were serious, they would work with Democrats to avoid the farm bill expiration in December and prevent the horrible dairy cliff that would so hurt our farmers. If the funding provided by the farm bill expires before we act, thousands of dairy farmers could be very seriously

harmed and put in real jeopardy, and it would send costs straight up the roof for consumers on a whole lot of agricultural-based goods.

So the House Republicans' CR is simply unserious. It is pure partisan posturing.

Democrats will do everything we can to avoid a Republican-manufactured shutdown. We are ready to work on a bipartisan bill that will keep the government open. Any extraneous provisions that hinder that goal should be set aside.

Despite all this, Speaker JOHNSON knows deep down that he needs to work with Democrats to get anything done because that has been true this entire time. And it is a good sign, Madam President, that the Johnson CR finally accepts the bipartisan top-line spending agreement I reached with him months ago, as part of the deal to prevent a default. It is clear that any final agreement will maintain that funding level.

So let's stop wasting time and put together a bipartisan funding plan that fulfills our obligations to prevent a costly and unnecessary Republican government shutdown.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Madam President, now on the work period, everyone knows that an election is just around the corner, but Senators still have a responsibility to make progress wherever possible on bipartisan issues that will help the American people. There is much we can still accomplish if Republicans give us their cooperation and keep alive the bipartisan momentum that we had in July when we passed KOSA and COPPA.

There is more work to do on the NDAA, on rail safety, on lowering the cost of insulin and prescription drugs, on artificial intelligence, and on keeping healthcare costs low. We may not be able to get all these things done before the election, but I urge my colleagues to make the most of this work period so we can set ourselves up for success for the rest of the year.

Bipartisan compromise is hard—harder these days than it has been in the past—but we have seen time and time again in these last 2 years that it can be done. Bipartisanship has prevented pointless and painful government shutdowns. Bipartisanship saved the full faith and credit of the United States. Bipartisanship has rescued Ukraine from defeat on the battlefield. Bipartisanship led to the monumental passage of the Kids Online Safety legislation, and I strongly urge the House to take up KOSA and COPPA as soon as possible. Bipartisanship has kept our airports running safely and delivered disaster relief and humanitarian aid for innocent civilians in Gaza and around the world and more.

I know many Senators on both sides still want bipartisanship to continue as much as possible for as long as possible. We will have our fierce disagreements in the weeks to come, but that

doesn't change or diminish this responsibility we all have to ensure that the American people are taken care of. So let's continue.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Madam President, now on high-speed rail, finally, I just came down from a great event in Horseheads, NY, in the southern tier of the Appalachians, on the New York-Pennsylvania border, where very soon the next chapter of American high-speed rail is going to be written. It is a historic day for Upstate New York, for the Southern Tier, and for the entire country.

High-speed rail jobs are coming to Horseheads, where Siemens Mobility has heeded my call to build a first-of-its-kind manufacturing facility in Chemung County. This facility will create up to 300 new, good-paying jobs and, more specifically, union jobs.

Not long ago, high-speed rail seemed like a dream in this country, but because of the infrastructure law I led in the Senate, it is becoming a reality.

On the west coast, work is underway to bring high-speed rail to serve commuters between Las Vegas and Southern California, thanks to the incredible work of my friend JACKY ROSEN. To make this project a reality, we need a new fleet of state-of-the-art passenger trains that can travel up to 220 miles per hour. Siemens Mobility had a number of options for where they could manufacture these trains, but I pushed and prodded and urged Siemens Mobility to choose Upstate New York to take advantage of our great workers and facilities and strong transit supply chains. After a lot of pressure, Siemens Mobility heeded my call. To the people of the Southern Tier, good-paying rail jobs are on the way.

I thank President Biden not only for helping us pass the bipartisan infrastructure bill but also for overseeing his Cabinet, including the great work of the Transportation Department and Secretary Buttigieg, to make sure all of our great plans that were passed in that legislation are now being implemented. This is one great example.

Today's announcement is the Democratic agenda in action. This project is going to receive billions from the bipartisan infrastructure law of the Senate. It is going to take a million cars off the road in the long run, and it is going to promote good-paying union jobs.

The bottom line is this: It is my dream to make New York's Southern Tier the No. 1 transit ecosystem in America. Today's announcement helps make that dream come true.

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. 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.

IOWA COUNTY MEETINGS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, as Iowans have come to expect of this Senator, in August, I finished my annual 99 county meetings, holding at least one Q&A meeting in every county across my home State. I have kept up this tradition for 44 years in a row. The hallmark of my meetings is hour-long question and answer sessions. No question is off limits.

This year, a third of my meetings were open town meetings, and the rest were hosted by high schools, small businesses, service clubs, farmers, and hospitals throughout the State.

Ever since I started my meetings in 1981, the variety of meetings has been the same. I want to hear from a cross-section of the population, and the best way to do that is to go to them where they work, study, and raise their families. No matter the setting, the format is the same. Iowans set the agenda.

During the course of my travels, I have learned about businesses that I never knew existed. I have come to the conclusion that that is the case because Iowans don't brag enough about what goes on in our State, particularly in some of the businesses that I have learned about.

I have observed the hard work and ingenuity of Iowa workers on the factory floors, where they put together, for instance, trailer beds. I learned about infant formula being made in the town of Allerton, population: 430.

The heart and might of rural America are inspiring, although they don't come without hardships, especially as Iowans face low commodity prices and the absence of a new 5-year farm bill.

One purpose of my meetings is to keep my finger on the pulse of Iowans and the issues that impact them the most. This year, I was struck by the number of people who told me about the high cost of living, how it is making it hard to put food on the table and how it makes it hard to pay their utility bills. Iowans are hurting from the high cost of food at the grocery store—up 21 percent since President Biden and Vice President HARRIS took office.

Iowans ask about illegal immigrants flooding across our border. For the last 3½ years, they see migrants crossing the Rio Grande. They see it on television almost every night. That has added up to the tune of about 10 million people on the Biden-Harris watch.

Long before I came to Congress, a law was passed to make entering our country without our country's permission illegal. Iowans can't make sense of the open border policies of the Biden-Harris administration. They implore me to secure our border and to protect American citizens. Protecting the American people is the No. 1 responsibility of the Federal Government. Unfortunately, we have a President who is not upholding his oath to faithfully execute the laws.

At a town meeting, someone from the back of the room will often shout: How come you guys in Washington, DC,