

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, I just want to add my voice of support. Why do we need a farm bill? Because we need farmers, and we need food. And one of the wonderful things about our farmers is they do a job that is incredibly hard to do.

It is a job that is filled with uncertainty. What is the weather going to be today? What are the prices on the futures market tomorrow? What is going to happen in our neighborhood?

It is incredibly uncertain, but the farmers love the work.

And who among us works harder than farmers? Maybe coal miners, but not many more. So they stand for hard work and feeding America.

The second thing is farmers need stability because they have no control over things that profoundly affect them. But the other thing is farmers actually are the custodians of our landscape. And they, in all of our communities—whether it is dairy, say, in Vermont, or it might be wheat or corn in Illinois, or cherries in Michigan—they are providing a benefit to all of us who are not farmers and can't take on the courage they have to do that work.

And on the conservation title, I have talked to a lot of farmers in Vermont. They are so appreciative that, in addition to feeding us with nutritious food, they have a chance to actually get some income to help us conserve the land. That is a good thing because that is another income stream for the farmers.

So this should not be a fight among opposing sides. What do we have to do to provide stability to farmers? They have to get a fair price for their crop. And then, if they are going to make contributions on the whole issue of conservation in reducing carbon emissions, they have to get some income for that. And that is in the farm bill.

So let's pass the farm bill because we need farmers, we need food, and we need a clean and healthy environment. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I want to thank the Senator from Vermont and remind people that his comments make it clear this is not just a Midwestern issue. It affects the whole Nation, from one side to the other.

As I said, Senator STABENOW has been our leader. I hope we can get a breakthrough in the coming days and weeks.

TRUMP CABINET

Madam President, it is hard to believe it has been less than 2 weeks since the last election—2 weeks. If it seems long, it is because you may have been following what has happened since.

Already, President-elect Donald Trump is selecting his proposed members of his Cabinet. Last week, when it came to the Department of Justice, Mark Paoletta, who is overseeing the Trump transition team for the Depart-

ment of Justice, warned that "career DOJ lawyers must be fully committed to implementing President Trump's policies or they should leave or be fired." He shamefully slandered these nonpartisan public servants as the "deep state"—whatever the heck that is.

And Cleta Mitchell, an adviser to President-elect Trump, argued that "every lawyer in the voting section and likely the Civil Rights Division needs to be terminated."

Of course, the President may set policy directives, but the Department of Justice is not—and should never be—any President's personal law firm. Civil servants have an independent duty to uphold the Constitution and the laws of the United States and should never be under pressure to take illegal action.

During his first term, then-President Trump tried to use the Department of Justice to overturn the 2020 Presidential election, as detailed in the Senate Judiciary Committee's "Subverting Justice" report.

Unfortunately, President-elect Trump has already made it clear that, in his second term, he will again undermine the rule of law and weaponize the Department of Justice to seek revenge on his perceived enemies.

The clearest illustration of Trump's resolve to remake the Justice Department into his personal political law firm is his intent to nominate former Congressman Matt Gaetz to be Attorney General.

Let me be clear. Former Congressman Gaetz is the least qualified person and the most radical person ever to be nominated to be Attorney General. While he is a lawyer, he practiced law for only a short time, and his congressional career has been distinguished by his extremism. For example, former Congressman Gaetz has regularly called for eliminating the Justice Department that he has now been nominated to lead. He also wants to abolish the Justice Department's components, most prominently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, "if they do not come to heel"—his words. Last year, he introduced legislation to eliminate the ATF.

Former Congressman Gaetz's main qualification seems to be unquestioning loyalty to Donald Trump.

Why do I keep referring to Mr. Gaetz as "former Congressman"? That is due to the most serious concern about his being entrusted with this new responsibility.

While Mr. Gaetz just won reelection and the 118th Congress is still in session, he resigned his seat in the House of Representatives of last week. Why? Why would he quit the House at this point if he has just been reelected? It was an apparent attempt to prevent the House Ethics Committee from releasing a damaging report on his personal alleged misconduct.

Mr. Gaetz has been credibly accused of engaging in sexual misconduct with

a minor, illicit drug use, sex trafficking, bribery, and obstructing government investigations into his alleged misconduct.

I might remind those listening to this debate: We are talking about Donald Trump's choice to be the Attorney General of the United States of America.

These grave public allegations against Mr. Gaetz speak directly to his fitness to serve. Let me add that President-elect Trump's announced intent to offer Mr. Gaetz's nomination without even a standard FBI background check that every Presidential appointee undergoes is completely unacceptable.

As chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee for the last 4 years and a member of that committee for over 20 years, I can tell you that people have been eliminated from consideration for judgeships and other important appointments because they smoked a joint—because they smoked a marijuana cigarette, eliminated from consideration. They have also been eliminated from consideration if they didn't file the proper tax returns for paying a babysitter or nanny.

I have had Members' nominees excoriated because of poetry they wrote while they were in college. And now we have the President-elect saying: We are not going to do an FBI background check on a man who could be Attorney General, and we may call for recess appointments so the Senate loses its opportunity for advice and consent.

The heartening thing that has occurred in the last few days is that a number of Republican Senators have stepped up and publicly joined me in calling on the House Ethics Committee to release this report on Mr. Gaetz so that we can review it, if he is truly going to be the nominee of President Trump in this capacity.

The Senate has a constitutional duty to advise and consent, and it is crucial that we consider all the information necessary. Before considering this nomination, the Senate Judiciary Committee must review this ethics report from the House, from a bipartisan committee—equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans—who have released it.

Last Thursday, all Democratic members of the Senate Judiciary Committee requested the House Ethics Committee provide these materials to us immediately. There is substantial precedent for the release of these materials in both Chambers. The House Ethics Committee released a preliminary report about former Congressman Bill Boner after he left Congress.

The preliminary report stated:

[T]he general policy against issuing reports . . . is outweighed by the responsibility of the Committee to fully inform the public regarding the status and results of its efforts up to the date of Representative Boner's departure from Congress.

It is difficult to imagine a more compelling instance where there is a need to inform the public of the results of an

ethics investigation than when the subject has been nominated to be the Nation's top law enforcement officer.

It is also deeply troubling that Mr. Gaetz is not the only example of President-elect Trump's intended nominees who would lead the Department of Justice and inevitably weaponize it to seek vengeance.

President-elect Trump also announced last week that he intends to nominate Todd Blanche as Deputy Attorney General and John Sauer as Solicitor General—two critically important appointments in the Department of Justice. Mr. Blanche and Mr. Sauer happen to have been two of Donald Trump's personal defense attorneys in the actions taken against him, and they now will be poised to be his attorneys at the Justice Department.

Mr. Gaetz would be a disaster as the next Attorney General. As the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am committed to ensuring my colleagues of both parties have every fact at hand to understand his danger. I will do everything in my power to ensure that Donald Trump cannot turn the Department of Justice into his personal law firm, and I will defend the career public servants who work at the Justice Department and have dedicated their lives to defending the rule of law.

President-elect Trump won the election fair and square, but that doesn't mean he is entitled to choose extreme, unqualified loyalists to fill his Cabinet. The Senate must fulfill its constitutional responsibility to advise and consent.

I yield the floor.

THE ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Jersey.

GAZA

Mr. HELMY. Madam President, I come to the floor today as a New Jerseyan, as the only Arab American serving in the U.S. Senate, and as a human being utterly devastated—broken, even—by the unfathomable scale of human suffering taking place right now in Gaza and the West Bank as a direct consequence of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

This war has already claimed an estimated 44,000 lives across Gaza and the West Bank. Almost half of those killed by the bombshells and bullets of this war have been women and children—teens, toddlers, infants. That is not to mention the millions more who have been displaced from their homes by this conflict and threatened by famine and illness.

According to current estimates, every hour, this conflict claims the lives of 15 innocent people—every single hour. It is reported that fully rebuilding Gaza and the West Bank after the war could take at least 200 years or more—literal centuries from now, well beyond our lifetimes.

It should not matter what one's politics are, what one's religion is, what one's nationality is, or one's ethnicity. These facts should shock our conscience to the very core. On our watch,

right before our eyes, we are witnessing one of the most rapid decimations of human life in recent history.

Now, let me be clear about a couple of things. I have always and continue to firmly, unquestionably support Israel's right to exist and defend itself against all forms of terrorism and those who sponsor terrorism. I vehemently condemn Hamas and the barbaric attack against Israel and its civilians on October 7, 2023, when 1,200 innocent Israelis lost their lives—a dark day in history during which Hamas also took hundreds of innocent hostages, including U.S. citizens. One of those hostages is New Jersey resident Edan Alexander—a 20-year-old Tenaflly High School graduate who should be immediately returned home safely along with all remaining hostages.

Again, all human beings, regardless of political persuasion or ideology, should be devastated by the widespread loss of human life and human suffering on all sides, but I have some real, some hard questions about what is causing the scale of suffering in Gaza and the West Bank and why we are seemingly unable to alleviate it in any significant way. These questions are not abstract. They stem from what I have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears during a recent official trip to Jordan to assess the state of humanitarian assistance in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon.

What I saw was this: There is a de facto blockade of even the most basic aid supplies getting through the Kerem Shalom crossing, the only viable point of entrance for aid to Gaza and the West Bank. This blockade has severely restricted the amount of aid to make it to the desperate Palestinians, whose lives literally depend on it. Just today, it was reported that nearly 100 trucks transporting lifesaving aid were violently looted at gunpoint, adding yet another unique challenge to getting aid to civilians.

The effects of this chokepoint have resulted in other absurd outcomes. I recently toured warehouses, including one that U.S. Secretary of State Blinken toured himself, stocked to the very brim, practically overflowing with lifesaving aid supplies. This blockade has prevented the safe transport of those supplies into Gaza and the West Bank, where just miles away women, children, and families are literally starving. These are pallets, upon pallets of food, medication, pillows, latrines, and winterized tents to keep families warm as winter sets in, all of it just sitting there because of a man-made blockade.

What I heard was this: I met with medical surgeons and doctors of the Jordanian Armed Forces serving in Gaza who recounted harrowing stories of amputations on children, futile attempts to keep the malnourished alive, and operations in makeshift tents under live fire and drone strikes. These frontline providers—heroes—told me

that a number of partially operational hospitals are resorting to using everyday materials like sewing thread for clothes to stitch up patients after surgeries because they have run out of appropriate medical supplies. That should appall every one of us.

Israel's recent passage of two laws to totally ban UNRWA from operating anywhere in Palestine has, of course, threatened to make the problem even worse. It is irrefutable that UNRWA is the primary, on-the-ground provider of aid, food, and other essential services to the people of Gaza and the West Bank. Shutting down UNRWA at this time is shutting down the very nerve center of humanitarian aid and assistance within Palestine.

These insights have left me with many questions: Do these actions intent on limiting aid into Gaza and the West Bank, taken under the pretense of security operations, comply with international humanitarian laws and norms? Are these the actions we should expect from one of our closest democratic allies in the world? Perhaps these are questions for people far more versed in the matters of war and legal compliance than I, but Members of this body should be asking these same questions. Many are, and I thank them for their bold leadership.

And what exactly are we doing to ensure that our closest ally in the Middle East is living up to the humanitarian principles and human rights that we claim to embrace and enforce around the world?

My conversations with Americans of all walks have revealed a deep desire for the United States to take a more aggressive role in protecting innocent civilians suffering from the brunt of this war, and on occasion, we have done that. I thank the Biden administration for their efforts thus far to alleviate the chokepoints and expand the flow of aid into the region.

I also think it is important that the administration agreed with the U.N. Security Council's statement that "UNRWA remains the backbone of all humanitarian response in Gaza" and that "no organization can replace or substitute UNRWA's capacity and mandate to serve Palestinian refugees and civilians in urgent need of lifesaving humanitarian assistance." However, so much more needs to and must be done.

As we enter a new Congress and a new administration takes office next year, the U.S. Government will and should continue debating the enormously complex policy and geopolitical issues that are at stake in the Middle East, but I am not here to opine on the Gordian knot of Middle East policy nor do I pretend to have cure-all solutions to the problems that have been plaguing the region for many decades.

I traveled through several States over the last 2 months and spoke with many students—Arab and Muslim Americans and many others—who are deeply concerned with the crisis. The