

We will keep working to confirm these nominations as quickly as we can, starting this morning with the cloture vote on the nomination of Mustafa Kasubhai to be a district judge for the District of Oregon.

For the information of Senators, we expect to vote on as many as three judges today. Members should be prepared for another late night on Wednesday to vote on the nominations I filed last night.

Voting on the President's judicial nominees is a core function of the Senate. It is one of our basic responsibilities, and we are going to carry out that responsibility as long as this majority continues.

I am very proud of the judges we have confirmed over the past 4 years under this administration. They have all been highly qualified individuals, and together they represent a wide range of experiences and areas of expertise.

For a long time, this Chamber primarily focused on confirming nominees with backgrounds as prosecutors or from big law firms. Of course, many of these individuals have gone on to serve as excellent judges, but this majority and this administration have cast a wider net. For 4 years, we have expanded the sort of backgrounds and resumes that make for a qualified nominee to the Federal bench. We have more judges from backgrounds in consumer protection and civil rights and voting rights. We have confirmed more women and people of color too. All of these individuals are highly qualified by their own merits, but their broad range of backgrounds and experiences is an additional asset to the bench.

But we are not done. There are more judges to consider and confirm. We are going to spend the rest of the week and the rest of this year focused on confirming them, and I thank all of my colleagues for their continued good work. Let us continue.

DISASTER AID

Mr. President, now, on disaster aid, yesterday, President Biden sent Congress his request for a disaster aid package to replenish a number of vital programs that help Americans recover from natural disasters. The House and Senate should respond by working together to pass a strong disaster package as soon as possible. It is a priority for me, just as it is a priority for so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

The Speaker said last month that House Republicans will focus on disaster aid when they returned this month to Congress, and yesterday he said the House is taking a look at the President's request. That is good. I urge House Republicans to work quickly to review this request so we can begin formulating a package that delivers this critically needed assistance.

To put it mildly, Federal disaster aid is currently running on fumes. It is a problem happening across the board. FEMA, SBA, Department of Agri-

culture, Department of Transportation, and so many other Agencies are running low on resources specifically aimed at helping battered communities rebuild.

One of the worst cases right now is the Small Business Administration's Disaster Loan Program. This program is a lifeline for homeowners and small businesses that need help picking up the pieces after disaster strikes. The SBA Disaster Loan Program helps Main Street businesses make repairs, cover operating expenses, and mitigate against future damage. It is also a critical source of relief for homeowners and renters to repair or replace damaged real estate.

This vital program has run out of money and is unable to provide assistance to over 100,000 people who have applied for help in the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This is just one of many programs that, if properly funded, will help rebuild our communities and infrastructure so people can get back to their daily lives. States cannot be left to fend for themselves. Communities cannot be left in the lurch. Infrastructure cannot remain damaged.

I hope that very soon we can come to a bipartisan solution to get a strong and comprehensive disaster package done. We have a great tradition in this Chamber of coming together to help our neighbors when disaster strikes. It is a hallmark of America that we look after each other in times of need, no matter where we live. With so many communities impacted by recent disasters and with Federal resources running low, we are called to help our fellow Americans once again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this week concluded the latest act in a familiar play on the world stage. It goes something like this:

First, Russia commits acts of aggression and pounds Ukrainian military and civilian targets with overwhelming force.

Then Western observers urge their leaders to equip Ukraine's defenders with decisive countermeasures.

Then, setting aside the fact that Russia is demonstrably more likely to escalate in the face of weakness than in strength, the Biden administration refuses, citing unsubstantiated fears of—you guessed it—escalation.

Next, precious opportunities for Ukraine to seize the advantage over Russian invaders come and go.

Then, after months of dithering, the Biden administration provides belated assistance or permission to use more advanced or longer range weapons on the battlefield.

Finally, administration officials brag to the media about the decision and pretend that it is not months—months—late.

In earlier acts of this tired production, the administration dragged out the authorization of HIMARS, fighter jets, and long-range artillery, to name just a few.

History will record hesitation, indecision, and cowardice as the hallmarks of this administration's Ukraine policy from the beginning.

This time, if recent press reports are true, Ukraine at long last has permission to use long-range American ATACMS weapons systems against military targets in Russia. Some of our colleagues might be conflicted about this development. I would ask them, would helping Taiwan or the Philippines defend themselves in the event of Chinese aggression be provocative? Was it escalatory to help equip the United Kingdom to defend itself against Nazi aggression before America's entry into World War II?

Needless to say, Ranking Member WICKER and I have urged the administration to authorize ATACMS strikes against Russia for months. Starting a full 6 months ago, so has the Speaker of the House. So has a chorus of policymakers on both sides of the aisle who understand that maximizing Ukraine's leverage over Putin's forces will be critical to the resolution of the conflict.

It is too early to tell just how much the Biden administration's needless delays have allowed Russia to move weapons they use to strike Ukraine's cities out of range of the ATACMS or let Russia's North Korean mercenaries take over. But one thing is certain: In Europe, as in Asia and the Middle East, the next Commander in Chief will inherit a world of threats made worse by the Biden administration's hesitation and half measures.

Next year, it will fall to the Republican government the American people elected this month to shore up America's position in the face of very real and directly linked threats to our interests. After 4 years of proposed net cuts to defense spending, it will fall on us to start investing seriously in the sort of hard power to contend with the coordinated efforts of Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China.

Consider just the most recent evidence of overlapping aims of the world's authoritarians. Reports this week indicate that in operations against Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israeli forces have uncovered caches of modern Russian weapons—the same sort of caches on which another butcher relied further east in Syria.

Russia and Iran are strategic partners. Russia is using Iranian drones

against Ukraine. It is not a mystery how these weapons made their way into terrorist hands.

So in the wake of an administration that squandered leverage over the world's most active state sponsor of terror, tied the hands of a sovereign democracy in the face of neo-Soviet imperialism, browbeat a close ally fighting to restore its security against savage terrorists, and met the looming aggression of our greatest strategic adversary with a toothless climate diplomacy, we have our work cut out for us.

Of course, an executive branch allergy to deterrence and the exercise of hard power is not our only challenge. Even after January 20, we will still have to contend here in the Senate with efforts to weaken America's commitments to our friends and constrain the authorities that keep our adversaries on their toes.

This week, we will deal with exhibit A: resolutions from the senior Senator from Vermont to ban lethal arms sales to Israel.

I could lay out yet again why Israel deserves the time, the space, and support to restore its security and why the aftermath of the deadliest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust requires moral clarity, but instead I would like to take the case Senator SANDERS made in the pages of the Washington Post yesterday and respond to just a few of its most outrageous assertions.

Our colleague began by characterizing Israel's response to the horrors of October 7 as "all-out war against the Palestinian people." There is indeed a side in this conflict waging all-out war, but it is not the sovereign democracy that issues evacuation warnings before striking targets, knowing the terrorist combatants will escape along with civilians. No, the side waging all-out war is the one for whom civilian casualties are the end goal—the side that butchered, raped, and kidnapped Israeli civilians and continues to use Palestinian civilians as human shields; the side that pilfers humanitarian aid intended for its own citizens. Recognizing this distinction isn't just important to the discussion; it ought to be the price of admission.

Let's take another of our colleague's effort to blame Israel's war on an "extremist government." Well, I suspect that would be news to the large shares of Israeli citizens across the political spectrum who have called for even more extensive operations against Hamas and Hezbollah, to the opposition leader who criticized IDF retaliatory strikes against Iran as not sufficiently aggressive, or to diverse members who have served in Israeli's war cabinet and made consensus decisions about the conduct of a war thrust upon them by genocidal terrorists.

How about another of his claims—that Israel is "becoming a pariah nation condemned by governments around the world." This one has a shred—a shred—of truth to it, but the hounding condemnations of the Jewish State are hardly news.

Since 2015, the United Nations has adopted 156 resolutions condemning Israel. By comparison, the Iranian regime that chants for Israel's extermination has attracted similar condemnation 8 times—156 condemnations of Israel; 8 of Iran—while the Syrian regime responsible for slaughtering its own citizens received 11 condemnations. Some might suggest these figures say more about the U.N. and the scourge of anti-Semitism worldwide than about Israel.

Frankly, if Israel is becoming "a pariah nation" specifically since October 7, it is because this attack on Jews unleashed a new wave of emboldened anti-Semitism all across the West. And I worry that my colleague's misplaced criticism only provides cover for disgusting anti-Semitism right here in our own country, most visibly on university campuses.

Our colleague, for some reason, seems to take the U.N. very seriously. He points out that "U.N. bodies have called for an end to the arms shipment fueling the conflict." Could it be that the senior Senator from Vermont wants us to get serious about Iran's pipeline of support to terrorist proxies? Guess again.

But as long as we are discussing international organizations, the best way for the U.N. to prevent "fueling conflict" would be to stop putting genocidal terrorists on its payroll. As long as I have anything to say about it, not a single taxpayer dollar will foot UNRWA's bills.

Our colleague's case is a maze of internal contradictions. Reasonable people have no need to grapple with it point by point. Those who mourn senseless human suffering should have no trouble assigning blame to the terrorists who exploit civilians, schools, hospitals, and mosques as cover. Those who seek peace should know better than to pretend we can achieve it with such savages holding power.

This week, obviously I hope the Senate will reject the Senator's resolutions outright.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NDA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I shouldn't need to tell anyone that the National Defense Authorization Act is one of the most important bills we consider each year. Issues may wax and wane in importance in Washington, but national security is—and must be—a perennial priority.

There is never a time when we can afford to put our national defense on the back burner or underfund our Nation's military. Unfortunately, that point

seems to be lost on the Democratic leader.

It has been 5 months—5 months—since the Senate Armed Services Committee passed the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act—5 months.

We are almost 2 months into the new fiscal year, and yet once again this week, the NDAA will not be on the floor here in the Senate.

Delays to the National Defense Authorization Act are always problematic. As I said, there is no time at which we can afford to put our national security on the back burner. But delays are especially problematic at a time when our military preparedness is lagging—and America's adversaries are flexing their muscle.

In July of this year, the bipartisan Commission on the National Defense Strategy published its final report. And I just want to read a couple of lines from that report. This is from the report summary:

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat.

Let me just repeat that. Think about that for a moment.

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat.

That is a pretty damning statement. Elsewhere, the commission notes:

The Commission finds that, in many ways, China is outpacing the United States and has largely negated the U.S. military advantage in the Western Pacific through two decades of focused military investment. Without significant change by the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor.

"Without significant change by the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor."

And from the Strategic Posture Commission report in 2023:

Today the United States is on the cusp of having not one, but two nuclear peer adversaries, each with ambitions to change the international status quo, by force, if necessary: a situation which the United States did not anticipate and for which it is not prepared.

"[A] situation which the United States did not anticipate and for which it is not prepared." In other words, we have work to do—a lot of work to do.

And that work is being inhibited by the Democrat leader's decision not to prioritize the National Defense Authorization Act and defense spending bills.

And needless to say, while the Democrat leader delays, the world isn't getting any safer. China, which has grown increasingly aggressive in the Pacific, is investing heavily in its military—and is outpacing our military in modern capabilities like hypersonic missiles.

This past week alone, China unveiled a new stealth fighter jet, along with other advanced technologies.

Russia, meanwhile, continues its war of aggression in Ukraine—most recently with a massive missile attack