

accomplishments—although, they are great—nor do I want to focus on how much all of us in the Democratic caucus love to work with her—though, we certainly do.

And, you know, as leader, you can't do everything yourself, and I don't try. And you give jobs to different people. When you give DEBBIE STABENOW a job, she gets the job done. Every time I call DEBBIE—it is so frequent—and I ask her to do this or do that, I know it will get done and get done well because of her phenomenal dedication and ability and energy and drive. And she does it all with a smile on her face. She is just great.

But let me begin by focusing a couple of blocks down the street from DEBBIE's alma mater, Michigan State University, and an old bar called the Coral Gables. There as a college student, DEBBIE was a regular working, of all things, as a folk singer. Yes, DEBBIE sang part time to earn a little money on the side back in college. And many years later, once in the Senate, her love of folk music led her to achieve a lifelong goal of singing with Peter, Paul, and Mary, all for raising money for anti-bullying causes.

She was in a little singing group. I forgot the name of the fellow. It was DEBBIE and—I don't remember—DEBBIE and Dan or something like that. I hope she mentions it on the floor when she speaks.

Why do I mention this? Simple, for DEBBIE STABENOW, an elected leader with very few peers in this Chamber, the first woman to represent Michigan in the U.S. Senate, politics by itself has never been the end goal.

For DEBBIE, the end goal has always been her community and about building support for worthy causes, about being a constant presence in her hometown on campus in Lansing or all over the State, the kind of person who loved getting to know everyone on a first-name basis. That has always been DEBBIE at her core. Add to that a thirst for fairness, a love of complex problems, a knack in persistence for winning, and you get the senior Senator from Michigan.

Saying good-bye is heart-wrenching. Saying thank you is hardly sufficient. After two decades, there is no policy issue left that DEBBIE hasn't shaped or progressed in some meaningful way. She has authored hundreds of bills that have become law. Her work has been ahead of the curve.

Look no further than her legacy on closing the gap for mental health policy. She so cared about people's mental health. She knew that the Federal Government had to step up to the plate. It was a decade-long campaign for her, but she never gave up. It didn't matter if it was a Democratic President, Republican President, Democratic majority leader, Republican majority leader. She kept at it, kept at it, kept at it.

And when the time came ripe to add significant dollars to mental health on several different occasions, she did,

most recently on our major gun bill in 2022 where over \$14 billion was added for mental health. That wouldn't have happened without DEBBIE STABENOW. She does amazing work. Amazing work.

Of course, her true love will always be the place she calls home. It will always be the people of Michigan, from the rural farmers she has relentlessly championed through the farm bill. I never forget her devotion to the cherry farmers and reminding us that Michigan is the biggest sweet cherry State in the country. I reminded her New York is the biggest sour cherry State in the country.

Anyway, she has always fiercely protected the farmers of Michigan to the Great Lakes to the small town and working class and middle class families just trying to afford health care and prescription drugs.

When the auto industry needed saving in a moment of crisis, DEBBIE came to their rescue.

When hungry kids and hungry families needed someone to fight for their needs in the highest echelons of government, DEBBIE was their voice. There were a lot of people on the Ag Committee who didn't want to feed children, hungry children, and give them what they needed. DEBBIE knew that they needed certain things as well for their row crops. She always was able to weave together a coalition that would pass the Ag bill, help hungry children, and help the farmers.

And when our caucus needed good leaders and team players to guide us, organize us, and help us achieve our goals, DEBBIE stepped up to the plate. Just 4 years in her time into the Senate, she became the third-ranking Democrat in the caucus when she was named caucus secretary by the late Harry Reid. And for many years, she has been an expert and skillful force as chairman of the DPCC—our Democratic Policy and Communications Committee—organizing weekly lunches, providing messaging and strategy resources and organizing our caucus's yearly retreat.

At all of our Tuesday lunches, DEBBIE would get up and go over our strategy—every Tuesday—and everybody listened, and everybody followed. She would publish a list of who has helped us, giving them credit and then expanding the list of who else would help us, because they weren't on the list the previous week.

And, of course, I want to thank DEBBIE for her many, many years as leader of the Ag Committee and on the farm bill. It is a cause she dedicated herself. Together we worked on getting help for our specialty crops, our fruits and vegetables, which Michigan and New York have so much produce from. She was a champion of this legislation—all ag legislation—and I commend her for recent work in releasing a strong bill.

So to lose DEBBIE—I begged her to stay when she told me a year and a half ago that she wasn't going to run. Al-

though, true to her commitment, DEBBIE said: Don't worry, we will have a great new Senator to take my place, and I will make sure she wins. And she did, and now we have ELISSA SLOTKIN coming, who was a protege of DEBBIE's. When she makes a commitment, there it is, it gets done.

Finally, what is incredible about DEBBIE's legacy is that things could have turned out very, very differently. In fact, DEBBIE's preference growing up was to serve in a different capacity, perhaps criminal justice, perhaps social work, which she studied in college. Political life may not have been in the cards at all were it not for an incident that occurred in graduate school. Because while she was studying at Michigan State—she is a Spartan—a local county commissioner announced he was shutting down the only nursing home in town that served low-income seniors.

The decision lit a fire within DEBBIE, a deep anger at the utter callousness of the decision. What this official did was simply unfair, it was mean-spirited. So DEBBIE, then just 24 years old with no political experience, decided to run against him. The incumbent wasn't exactly respectful about a younger woman challenging his seat. But then she won. She won in a landslide. And, of course, her goal was not to win the election but to save the nursing home. And she did. And along the way, DEBBIE discovered she loved running for office because she loved people. She just has that friendly, all-embracing look, and she would meet people. She would shake hands. She would get to know the entire town on a first-name basis and, most of all, listening to what her neighbors were thinking as she met them.

So from then on, DEBBIE never looked back. Thank God for that, too, because now that time has come for us to say goodbye. DEBBIE's mom, who instilled in her a belief in political activism, just passed away but made sure she mailed her absentee ballot while she was sick. One of her last acts was to make sure she voted. That is where DEBBIE got it all. She always talks glowingly about her mom. And her mom knows, we all know, that DEBBIE STABENOW leaves our country a better, stronger, healthier place than the day she chose to save the nursing home.

So, DEBBIE, thank you, thank you, thank you. We will miss you. I certainly will miss you. You are one of my best friends and one of my best members of the team. But we are happy for you and your family, and we know you are going to continue to do great things for our country and for Michigan in the years to come.

DEBBIE, Godspeed. Godspeed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the past 4 years have been marked by increasing instability on the world stage. Over the course of the Biden administration, we

have seen an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia, China flexing its power in the Indo-Pacific and beyond and increasingly threatening the Philippines and Taiwan, Iran continuing to foment terror in the Middle East, the worst terror attack in Israel's history, and the list goes on. And while the Biden administration cannot be held solely responsible for all of these events, the lack of clear American leadership under President Biden has undoubtedly contributed to the unrest that we have seen internationally.

The President often seems incapable of staking out a firm policy position. Again and again, he seems to want to have things both ways, whether he is ordering attacks on Iran-backed terrorists while simultaneously declaring his unwillingness to escalate or drawing redlines for Israel while proclaiming U.S. support or take the war in Ukraine, where President Biden has advocated for the United States providing defense assistance while simultaneously slow-walking approval for critical combat resources, which has unquestionably contributed to the present situation.

I don't know whether the President is trying to keep all his interest groups happy or is simply afraid to fully commit, but his indecisiveness telegraphs weakness to our enemies and allies alike, just as his disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan did or his policy toward Iran.

The Biden administration began relations with Iran on a note of appeasement with an attempt to reinstate the Obama administration's flawed nuclear deal and then followed that up by unfreezing \$6 billion in Iranian assets as part of a deal to free American prisoners. Thankfully, the administration ultimately refroze those funds in the wake of Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack, but unfreezing them in the first place was a serious mistake, as were things like the Biden administration's decision to restart funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, despite long-held suspicions—since confirmed—that there were UNRWA staffers with ties to Islamist militant groups.

These types of decisions convey a message to our adversaries: a lack of firm resolve and a willingness to compromise and accommodate. And in the face of this kind of message, it is little wonder that terrorists throughout the Middle East have been emboldened and have been attacking not just our ally Israel but American assets and American soldiers in the region.

And I have to wonder whether bodies like the International Criminal Court, which recently attempted to put Israeli leaders in the same class as Hamas terrorists by unlawfully issuing warrants for their arrest, have also been emboldened by the Biden administration's waffling.

As China flexes its muscle, Iran continues its proxy war on Israel, and North Korean soldiers join Russia's

war on Ukraine, it is time for a return to clear American leadership on the world stage, and that doesn't mean an America that intervenes in every conflict or dictates terms to everyone. We neither can nor should attempt to become the world's policeman. But it does mean an America that speaks clearly and doesn't equivocate, that condemns evil and doesn't accommodate, and an America that projects and can deliver strength, the kind of strength that will make our adversaries think twice before tangling with us or our allies.

President Trump has made an excellent choice for Secretary of State with our colleague MARCO RUBIO. He is one of our strongest and clearest voices on national security. And between him and President Trump and other future members of the Trump administration, America's adversaries should be on notice. I think there has already been something of a shift in the air, and I am hopeful that in the weeks to come we will finally see movement on freeing the remaining Americans and other hostages who were captured by Hamas in its October 7, 2023, attack. It is incredible that these individuals are facing their second—second winter—in Gaza. And President Trump's statement Monday about his commitment to freeing these hostages immediately should be a warning to Hamas that the United States will no longer tolerate the captivity of her citizens.

The last few years have shown us what a world without clear American leadership looks like. I am confident that the next 4 years will show us what the world looks like with it.

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. 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.

TRIBUTE TO GEORGE WILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for just a few minutes, I would like to call our colleagues' attention to a rather rarified milestone in Washington and in our national political discourse—50 years of columns from George Will of the Washington Post.

Perhaps in some other biography of some other figure approaching George's intellectual stature, the eye might be drawn to the doctorate in political science. Among the credentials of some impressive journalists, you might notice above all a Pulitzer Prize. But in the story of George Will, the most remarkable thing is the consistent, unrelenting rhythm.

Twice a week for half a century, he has commanded a place in the most consequential conversations; twice a

week, inviting and sometimes insisting that the most powerful city in the most powerful Nation on Earth actually consider a well-reasoned argument.

Of course, George Will's columns are usually a great deal more than airtight, logical cases; they are full of historical trivia, sharp wit, delicious sarcasm, and more often than not, allusions to or outright lessons in America's pastime.

Like Buckley and Reagan, George Will quite evidently enjoys his vocation as a happy warrior. He clearly relishes every chance to gently remind readers that the answers to the biggest questions of the day so often lie in the wisdom and traditions of the past.

In his own reflections on 50 years at the Post, George remarked that the great luxury of a columnist is assuming that the mental pantries of one's readers are well stocked with baseline knowledge. Well, the mental pantries of George's loyal readers, in fact, overflow—in no small part thanks to his consistent deposits of earnest produce.

As always, we look forward to reading what he has to say next.

ISRAEL

Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, it has been a week since Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a cease-fire. War is hell, and I hope sincerely that this marks a durable end to the immediate conflict. But hope is not a strategy, and I know better than to expect honest dealings from hardened terrorists. It would be naive enough a year and a half ago to believe that Iran and its proxies had suddenly decided to accept Israel's right to exist. But in light of the horrors of October 7 and the sustained campaign of terror since then, it is more likely that Iran and its proxies mean to alleviate the pressure of Israel's successful operations and give Hezbollah—the A-team of international terrorism and the vanguard of Iran's axis of anti-Semitic violence—simply a chance to catch its breath.

In the weeks and months to come, the strength of this cease-fire will be tested repeatedly. Will it prevent Iran from resupplying and regenerating Hezbollah's capacity to wage terror? Will it enable Lebanon's political leaders to chart a new path out of Hezbollah's stranglehold of their country? Will it allow residents of northern Israel to feel safe enough to return home?

It is important to remember why Israel faced this terror in the first place: Despite chapter 7 U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding compliance, the cease-fire agreement that ended hostilities in 2006 was never enforced.

Even with Lebanese Armed Forces and U.N. peacekeepers on the ground, Hezbollah rearmed and Iranian influence reached deeper into Lebanon. Such a tragic farce must not be allowed to repeat itself.

This cease-fire is not a solution. If regional powers want peace, they need to act.