

President of the United States of America. Nobody is fighting harder to allow drugs into this country than Democrats with this reckless and ridiculous piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I reserve the balance of my time until the gentleman yields back his time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, this War Powers Resolution would immediately end President Trump's extrajudicial boat strikes in the Western Hemisphere, which have never been approved by Congress and far exceed the President's authority.

We are a country of laws. Individuals in the streets have to abide by our laws. The President of the United States should be abiding by our laws.

In our laws, you convict somebody in court. You can't just go out and kill them. What I had to do was build a case in public, try that case, and convince a jury to unanimously convict someone so that they would go to jail. That was my job.

I think that the President of the United States cannot summarily determine that he is going to go kill someone without coming and getting authorization from this Congress.

The worst criminals have had to go to court. The fact of the matter is, we know of two such people, the worst of the worst. They sold drugs and said they were going to shove it up their noses. He wasn't killed. He shouldn't have been killed. He was tried. He was from another country. In fact, he was the President of another country.

He was tried in a court of law, and he was convicted by a unanimous jury. He is on the streets today. Why? Because the President of the United States said he deserved the pardon. No matter how many people he killed, no matter how many drugs he brought in, the President of the United States said it is okay, we are going to send him back on the streets.

There is another individual who sold drugs over the internet, killing Americans. He was not executed. He was tried and convicted unanimously in a court. He is back on the streets.

□ 1340

As a prosecutor, I would have been—and the family members of the victims, of those two, in particular, and others like them, for them to be convicted and then released by the President of the United States of America, is that justice? Is that protecting us? What kind of message is that sending to just go after the little guy in a boat who was instructed by others?

How many of the big kingpins have been brought to justice? Who is going after and building a case to prosecute them and have them locked up in jail?

This administration wants to say these strikes are about stopping drugs from entering the country. Putting aside the fact that drug smuggling is not a crime punishable by death, or

that these boats could have, per the law, been intercepted by the Coast Guard and suspected traffickers questioned and prosecuted in a U.S. court, this is not a counternarcotics operation.

The administration's actions, whether the largest military deployment to the region since the Cuban Missile Crisis, the seizure of a Venezuelan oil tanker, ordering a blockade of Venezuela, or the many public statements issued by U.S. officials, including President Trump—

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Let me just say, I see him putting up a picture.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Let me tell you about that picture. That is diplomacy before he was the President of the United States. He was a member—

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman is no longer recognized.

Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, let me put this up. I was asked to take it down for a moment. Let me take a second and put this up. I will get to it.

This resolution, plain and simple, is about telling the President he has no authority to combat terrorists in the Western Hemisphere. Those are the words of this resolution. It is not a secret. Anybody can read it.

The President doesn't have the authority to combat MS-13, Tren de Aragua, Sinaloa Cartel, take your pick. If the President says they are terrorists, and they are in the Western Hemisphere, the President can't touch them.

That is what they are trying to do. They want to tie his hands and not let him defend the United States of America.

We are not talking about street gangs. They are militarized threats. They have taken over entire apartment complexes and neighborhoods in the United States.

My colleagues say this resolution is just about putting Congress on record, so let's put Congress on record.

If you stand with protecting the United States of America against narcoterrorists, then oppose this resolution. It is plain and simple. If you stand shoulder to shoulder with MS-13, Tren de Aragua, and Sinaloa Cartel, and the dictators who work hand in hand with them, like Nicolas Maduro in this photo, then this resolution is for you. Vote for it.

We know exactly where some of my colleagues stand. You can look to see where they stand in this photo. Let's talk a little bit about that in a moment. I will touch on something else first.

Since President Trump took office, we have seen our Democrat colleagues fight to unmask agents, to dox Border

Patrol officers. We have seen them issue warnings ahead of immigration raids. They spent taxpayer dollars to keep illegal immigrants in the United States. Now, Democrats are going even further with this resolution and saying the President can't protect our country.

I am going to show you this photo. I actually thought a lot about this photo as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee because I take photos with foreign heads of state, diplomats, and other people from other countries on a daily basis. I shake hands and greet people. Whether I like them or not, I shake hands. It is something that I do, but I can tell you what I don't do. I do not let other people wrap their arms around me unless they are my kids, my friends, or my family.

That is Nicolas Maduro's hand right there. I will put a little arrow there. That is Ranking Member MEEKS, who has been arguing with me for the last little while, right here. That is his arm around the ranking member. I don't let people put their arms around me, especially not people like that.

In this photo of Nicolas Maduro, you probably also recognize John Kerry. It is sad to see that. I think it says a lot about the origination of this bill, the heart of this bill. This is not a handshake. It is an embrace of somebody with a relationship. That is what happens.

If somebody puts their arm around me, that means they have a relationship with me. To me, this says a lot about who this bill stands shoulder to shoulder with.

Do you stand shoulder to shoulder with Nicolas Maduro, with his arms wrapped around you, or do you stand shoulder to shoulder to protect the United States of America and our people from the people who are murdering us and sending their drugs over? The choice is up to you.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to the order of the House of December 16, 2025, the previous question is ordered on the concurrent resolution.

The question is on adoption of the concurrent resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

REMOVAL OF THE USE OF UNITED STATES FORCES FOR HOSTILITIES WITHIN OR AGAINST VENEZUELA

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the order of the House of December 16,

2025, I call up the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 64) to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela that have not been authorized by Congress, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of December 16, 2025, the concurrent resolution is considered read.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 64

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),

SEC. 1. REMOVAL OF THE USE OF UNITED STATES FORCES FOR HOSTILITIES WITHIN OR AGAINST VENEZUELA.

Pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1544(c)), Congress hereby directs the President to remove the use of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela, unless explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization for use of military force.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The concurrent resolution shall be debatable for 1 hour, equally divided among and controlled by Representative MAST of Florida, Representative MEEKS of New York, and Representative MCGOVERN of Massachusetts, or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST), the gentleman from New York (Mr. MEEKS), and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is weak. It is unnecessary. It is dangerous. It is also not about oversight. It is not about the Constitution. Just like the last resolution, it is about tying the President's hands, specifically in Venezuela. It is about telling President Trump that he does not have the authority to defend the United States of America.

This resolution is preemptive surrender. As written, it limits the President's ability to respond to future threats posed by Venezuela.

If Russia delivers nukes there, the President cannot respond. If Iran delivers a dirty bomb there, the President can't respond. If China delivers anthrax or some other biological weapon, like they did with COVID-19, but far more deadly, the President can't respond. No matter what the threat, the President cannot respond.

Additionally, this resolution to me doesn't make much sense because we are not in hostilities inside Venezuela. The Authorization for Use of Military Force process exists in Congress, but Democrats are not writing a scope of action for the President to defend the United States of America. This resolution is a blanket statement to say to the President that he cannot defend the United States of America.

□ 1350

Mr. Speaker, no matter the threat emanating from Venezuela, you cannot defend. You cannot defend me. You cannot defend our country against it.

This resolution is not stopping war. It is not stopping invasion. It is not stopping drug running. It is not stopping terrorism. It is not stopping the President. It is just stopping the President from acting decisively before Americans die. That is what it stops.

Let's be clear about who we are dealing with. Venezuela is the largest and best-funded cartel in the world. We just saw the ranking member with Nicolas Maduro. Maduro had his hand around him. He is not a legitimate head of state. He is a legitimate narcoterrorist who is poisoning Americans.

All the stuff we talked about in the last debate is Maduro. He is the head of a cartel who will abduct somebody, behead somebody, or torture somebody to support his political ends.

Both Republican and Democrat administrations agree that Maduro is an illegitimate dictator who rules through repression, fraud, and violence. He uses the Venezuelan military to move cocaine into the United States. That is not theory. This is a state-run criminal enterprise. Venezuela is not a gang. It is a cartel state. It rakes in billions, moving more than 250 metric tons of Colombian cocaine through their country every year.

The United States already has bipartisan sanctions on Venezuelan oil. President Trump supported them. President Biden kept them. Maduro is violating those sanctions. We just caught him doing it again. A ghost ship was intercepted, smuggling Venezuelan oil. Maduro admitted the oil was his.

Here is the simple question: How do we enforce sanctions if we are not allowed to stop the shipments? The answer is that we cannot. Interdicting those Venezuelan oil shipments is not war. It is sanction enforcement. It is law and order.

Given that it is the Venezuelan Government that is the cartel, the trafficker, the one moving these ships, that is why it requires the military to do so.

This resolution reads as if Maduro wrote it himself. It gives a narcoterrorist dictator a free pass to keep trafficking drugs, funding criminal networks, and killing Americans because it appears Democrats hate President Trump more than they can love America.

President Trump has the authority and the obligation to take limited and

targeted action to protect the United States of America wherever those threats emanate from.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say maybe I can teach the chairman something about diplomacy. Maybe he doesn't know anything about diplomacy.

First, let me talk about the picture he tried to show me. That was a bipartisan trip, Democrats and Republicans, working together. It was called the Boston Group. We were bringing the opposition and at that time the Chavistas together.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman suspend? Unless a Member is under recognition, they cannot display exhibits.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, we were diplomatically working together. We were trying to help the people of Venezuela.

In fact, we can also see how long ago that was. I had all-black hair at the time. I think I looked good. I got gray. I had all-black hair because that was back in 2002. I was a new Member of Congress, trying to work together with diplomacy from the very beginning.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't come here with prop photos because I am here to debate substance. I am here to find out why the President of the United States pardoned convicted drug dealers. I have not gotten an answer to that yet.

If we are talking about pictures, I could have come with pictures of President Trump with his arm around Kim Jong Un. I could have come with pictures of President Trump offering the red carpet to Vladimir Putin. I could have come with a whole lot of pictures of President Trump with Epstein. I didn't come to play games. My colleague is playing a game on the House floor.

I came because we have serious business here. This is not a game. This is about our responsibility as Members of Congress in addressing issues that should be before this body. It is about us having a debate in committee and holding the administration accountable, as we do any President. It is about us being the Representatives of people who elect us.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a game. Diplomacy is not a game. War is not a game. There are rules in war. When people violate rules in war, they have to be held accountable. When people violate rules in our cities, they have to be held accountable.

The people who are in these positions—law enforcement officers, police officers, and the President of the United States—have to be held responsible. If we close our eyes on one, our country is not the country we have said it is.

I said earlier on the floor during this debate: My War Powers Resolution to end this administration's extrajudicial strikes on boats in the Western Hemisphere, those bombs are not about drugs.

If the administration did want to stop drugs, Trump would not have pardoned the former President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernandez, or Ross Ulbricht who operated the Silk Road drug marketplace. He wouldn't seize an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela or threaten CIA operations, blockades, and strikes on Venezuela.

This is no joke. This is serious. This is not about drugs. It is about regime change. It is about being honest with the people of America. That is what the Chief of Staff of the President just did. She didn't talk about drugs. She talked about regime change. It is Trump himself saying it.

He said he wanted the oil. He said it was our oil, not Venezuela's oil. He said it is our oil and our territory. We are going to take it back. That is the tweet of the President. This is no joke. This is no game. This is serious business.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I never thought I would say this, but I am glad I am not on the Foreign Affairs Committee. I thought the Rules Committee was tough. Listening to this debate, I would go out of my mind. I couldn't follow the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

I want to correct something. This is not a Democratic resolution. It is a bipartisan resolution. Maybe that is something the chairman is not familiar with, but this is a bipartisan resolution. Democrats and Republicans have sponsored it.

In this Chamber, I guess we have all become accustomed to debating trivial issues passionately and important ones not at all. We spend a lot of time renaming post offices and passing bills that do nothing for anybody. Maybe the distinguished chairman is not used to doing big things.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that the issue of war is a big deal. It is a big deal. It should be a big deal to Democrats. It should be a big deal to Republicans.

□ 1400

It is our constitutional responsibility, and so I am here because I am deeply troubled that the President of the United States, in my view, is slowly but surely marching us toward open hostilities with Venezuela. I don't say that as a Democrat. I say it as an American who is worried about this country getting dragged into another potentially endless war.

Mr. Speaker, let me be crystal clear. I mean, that is what we are talking about. That is what we are talking about. This is not some hypothetical, abstract debate. Donald Trump has already engaged in acts that are considered hostile under U.S. law.

He has threatened to close Venezuelan airspace. He says that he plans a naval blockade against the country soon. He has warned that military strikes on Venezuela will start "very soon."

Our Constitution provides this body, the United States Congress, with the solitary authority to declare war, and the President, despite already engaging in hostile actions toward Venezuela, has neither requested nor received the authorization for the use of military force as required by the War Powers Resolution of 1973.

Mr. Speaker, American troops take an oath to protect and defend this country. It is our duty in Congress to debate and vote before they are put into harm's way.

Right now, by placing U.S. military assets off the coast of Venezuela, this administration has them in harm's way right now. That is why, in a bipartisan way, we have introduced this resolution. It provides the House of Representatives with the simple up-or-down vote. It is a simple "yes" or "no." Do my colleagues want an unauthorized war in Venezuela or not?

Mr. Speaker, you may want a war in Venezuela. You ought to vote for it if you want it, but I do not want any war in Venezuela. I am joined on this resolution, again, by Members of Congress across the political spectrum, Democrats and Republicans who, like me, are deeply troubled by the idea of endless wars and of America spending more of its treasure on wars that are not clearly defined, that we have no idea how they will end up, at a time when we can't even provide people healthcare in this country and where we have homeless veterans.

I was here in 2002, Mr. Speaker. I voted against the war in Iraq, and Americans do not want another Iraq. If we intensify hostilities against Venezuela, we have no idea what we are walking into.

The oversight in this Congress has been almost nonexistent given what is going on. Congress has been lied to repeatedly—repeatedly by administrations from both parties who want to use our military in ill-defined and often unwinnable conflicts.

I remember the Bush administration telling us that the war in Iraq would be a cinch. It was clearly not. We spent over a decade at war. We lost American lives, civilian lives, and added trillions of dollars to our debt at the expense of the basic needs of the American people.

At least George Bush had the decency to come to Congress for approval in 2002. Don't the American people deserve that respect today?

This is about whether we want to use taxpayer dollars and risk American lives on regime change, endless wars, and costly quagmires, or whether we want to invest here in our own country and solve our own problems.

For God's sake, we live in a country where we, again, have homeless veterans, where we have hungry school kids, where seniors can't afford their medication, and families struggle to get by.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is immoral. It is not just a strategic failure but a moral failure that we have a President

beating the drums of war without so much as a vote in the House of Representatives. This is not America first.

Mr. Speaker, I know that some of my colleagues may say that war is justified. I can't for the life of me figure out that logic, but I went to the classified briefing that the administration organized yesterday. I went to other classified briefings.

I heard no justification that there was some imminent military threat from Venezuela, nothing that would justify the hostilities that the President is engaged in right now in building up troops.

To those who want to go to war and say that this is about drugs and cartels, let me just say that this administration's own Drug Enforcement Administration reports that fentanyl is overwhelmingly produced in other countries using chemicals that come from elsewhere in the world. Venezuela isn't listed as a fentanyl source or transit country in any edition of the National Drug Threat Assessment.

More fentanyl comes from China and Mexico than Venezuela. Maybe the chairman wants to go to war with China and Mexico.

By the way, as is pointed out, Donald Trump pardoned the ex-President of Honduras who was found guilty of drug trafficking. The chairman said nothing about that.

Over 3,667 people in Florida died from fentanyl, and the President of the United States pardoned one of the people who was primarily responsible for getting fentanyl into our country. He also pardoned the dark web guy who smuggled fentanyl in from China. Not a word. No oversight. Who cares because they don't want to say anything about Donald. He is the pardoner in chief. If you want to stop drugs from coming in, start by not pardoning drug dealers.

Those who want to go to war also point out that Nicolas Maduro is a tyrant. I agree that he is a tyrant. He violates the human rights of his own people. He has unlawfully detained Americans and Venezuelans as political prisoners. He is a violent, vicious, brutal dictator. Guess what, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, the globe is full of violent, vicious tyrants—in China, Russia, and North Korea. Do you want to go to war with all of them?

For God's sake, we sell weapons to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, countries that have awful human rights violations. I hate Maduro, and I condemn him all the time. While we should have a discussion about how to help the people of Venezuela, the answer is not going to war.

Congress should have the guts to at least debate this issue and vote on it and not just cede all of this power to the administration.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this is serious. It is not a joke. It is not just about pictures, but pictures tell a thousand words.

You came here to prevent the President from defending the United States of America, plain and simple. There have been deaths in Florida. There have been deaths in Representative MCGOVERN's district: 262 overdoses in the last year, people beaten by MS-13, strangled by MS-13, stabbed 32 times by MS-13. The list goes on.

That is what the President is trying to defend from happening in the United States of America. That is as serious as it gets, and it absolutely matters that Nicolas Maduro has his arm around the authors of this legislation that would prevent the President from defending against that country, their cartels, their terrorists, and the drugs coming through that country. What the President is doing in the Gulf is protecting the homeland of the United States of America, protecting the homeland.

I would give this last comment to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN): I never saw the things that I did as big or small. Risking my life for my country, I simply saw as my duty.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SELF), the chair of the Europe Subcommittee.

Mr. SELF. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this resolution, which is not necessary, as it removes our Armed Forces from hostilities against a country where there have been no hostilities. The War Powers Act has no legal bearing on actions that could happen in the future. Yet that is exactly what this concurrent resolution attempts to do.

To date, there are no confirmed U.S. servicemembers engaged in combat with Venezuela.

While I could end it there, since Democrats are turning a blind eye to the killing of Americans by illicit drugs from Venezuela, I also highlight that Venezuela has become a strategic outpost for China, Russia, and Iran, not to mention criminal and terrorist organizations.

Just yesterday, at a Europe Subcommittee hearing, I made the point that China and Russia are engaged in hybrid war against the United States today.

Not only has Maduro's regime purchased Iranian-armed drones, but they have also allowed Iran to establish production facilities for its military drones within their borders.

Terrorist organizations like Hezbollah use Caracas as a base to operate their criminal terror organizations in South America, generating revenue through narcotrafficking.

Russia, a longtime ally of the regime, still provides Venezuela with military aid while also facing the challenges of waging war in Ukraine. In fact, Venezuela opened a factory last summer to manufacture Russian Kalashnikov rifle munitions.

□ 1410

China, Russia, Iran, and Cuba use the country as a platform for intelligence operations in asymmetric warfare.

Instead of considering this resolution, which carries little or no consequences for hostilities that do not exist, this Chamber should focus on supporting the President's efforts to deter the growing national security threat from Venezuela.

Hundreds of Americans die each day due to illegal drugs. Rather than Democrats making it their life's mission to destroy Donald Trump, America would be better served by Members of this Chamber if we helped him prevent the flow of illicit drugs that are killing our citizens.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. SELF. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose this resolution.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get into these back-and-forths. I have been waiting for an answer because this is serious business. The American people want an answer that they can't quite get yet. I can't get anybody at a hearing from the administration to answer the question. I can't even get anybody from the administration, when I saw some yesterday, to answer the question. I have been waiting here. The American people want to know why a President of the United States would pardon two drug dealers. They are not just accused. They are convicted and in jail. They were, but not anymore. They are free men now.

I have been waiting for an answer. I am not playing jokes. This is very serious. I am asking everybody, all of my Republican colleagues, anybody who speaks, anybody, just answer the question. We are on C-SPAN. Here is an opportunity to tell the American people why the President of the United States, for whom you say this is about drugs, would let go of two major convicted drug dealers, not small guys, but major. I just don't know why kingpins can get away with doing and pedaling drugs in the United States, but a peon in the operation must die.

Even if you survived a strike and are holding on for dear life—you have no weapons, no phone, no anything—you are still an imminent danger, so they say, to the United States.

We have pictures that will show whether or not they were a threat to the United States while holding onto that boat. The administration has decided they can show all the others, but the American people cannot see that.

I have been waiting for an answer. The American people want an answer. I will wait.

Nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ), the ranking member of the Committee on Small Business.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this War Powers Resolution.

Twenty-three years ago, I stood on this same floor as Congress debated an Authorization for Use of Military Force in Iraq.

The Bush administration relied on bad intelligence and outright lies to march America into a disastrous foreign intervention that cost trillions of dollars, took thousands of American lives, and helped destabilize the region for a generation.

Today, I fear we are watching history repeat itself. Once again, a far-right administration is using the same playbook. The justification this administration has provided to Congress and the American people is a joke.

If this were about drugs, why seize an oil tanker and threaten an illegal Navy blockade? If this were about drugs, why would the President pardon a drug-trafficking former President of Honduras?

This is not about drugs. This is about regime change and control of Venezuela's resources.

Nicolas Maduro is a dictator, and you don't have to defend him to recognize a simple truth: Venezuela does not pose an imminent threat, and a war will do nothing to make America safer.

We are sleepwalking into another disastrous foreign war, and Congress must wake up and stop this before it is too late.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1½ minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD an article from The Washington Post titled: "Trump pardons major drug traffickers despite his anti-drug rhetoric."

[From The Washington Post, Dec. 8, 2025]

TRUMP PARDONS MAJOR DRUG TRAFFICKERS
DESPITE HIS ANTI-DRUG RHETORIC

(By Meryl Kornfield and Emily Davies)

On President Donald Trump's first full day in office this year, he pardoned Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, who was convicted of creating the largest online black market for illegal drugs and other illicit goods of its time.

In the months since, he has granted clemency to others, including Chicago gang leader Larry Hoover and Baltimore drug kingpin Garnett Gilbert Smith. And last week, he pardoned former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, who had been sentenced to 45 years in prison for running his country as a vast "narco-state" that helped to move at least 400 tons of cocaine into the United States.

Overall, Trump—who campaigned against America's worsening drug crisis and promised to crack down on the illegal flow of deadly drugs coming across the border—has pardoned or granted clemency to at least 10 people for drug-related crimes since the beginning of his second term, according to a Washington Post analysis. He also granted pardons or commutations to almost 90 others for drug-related crimes during the four years of his first term, the analysis showed.

At the same time, Trump has threatened military action against Venezuela over accusations that the country's government is

supporting the drug trade and has pushed the Pentagon to conduct targeted strikes on boats suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean. The contrasting actions have come under fire from Democrats and other critics, who say Trump's broad use of clemency contradicts promises to get tough on drugs.

"President Trump is claiming to be taking action to stop the flow of narcotics into the United States," Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) said on the Senate floor Tuesday, describing the crimes of Ulbricht and Hernández. "... How does this protect Americans from the flow of narcotics entering our country?"

Asked about the contrast, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the pardon of the Honduran president doesn't make it difficult to defend the administration's lethal strikes on suspected drug traffickers.

"I think that President Trump has been quite clear, in his defense of the United States homeland, to stop these illegal narcotics from coming to our borders, whether that's by land or by sea, and he's also made it quite clear that he wants to correct the wrongs of the weaponized Justice Department under the previous administration," she told reporters last Monday.

Asked about Trump's spate of drug-related pardons and commutations, White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson told *The Post* that Trump had exercised his constitutional authority, and she attacked former president Joe Biden.

"The only pardons anyone should be critical of are from President Autopen, who pardoned and commuted sentences of violent criminals including child killers and mass murderers—and that's not to mention the proactive pardons he 'signed' for his family members like Hunter on his way out the door," Jackson said.

Trump and his aides have baselessly claimed that Biden's staffers routinely used an autopen to sign pardons and other documents without his knowledge.

Trump has wielded one of the greatest powers of the presidency, clemency, far more this year than he did in his first term. He has pardoned almost all of the approximately 1,500 Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol attack defendants. He also has pardoned about a dozen members of Congress, mostly Republicans, including most recently Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas), who was charged last year with bribery, money laundering and conspiracy.

By comparison, Trump granted clemency to more than 230 people in his first term, just two of those in his first year.

The pardon frenzy has given rise to a lucrative cottage industry. *The Post* previously reported. Public disclosures show that lobbyists have spent more than \$2.1 million this year on firms that advocate for pardons, clemency and other forms of executive relief—more than double the total spent in 2024. The records also show that individuals seeking pardons have paid up to \$1 million to hire people close to the president to plead their case.

Experts say the administration's efforts to strike boats near Venezuela have not proved effective in limiting the flow of drugs entering the country because the passage is not ordinarily used to traffic drugs to the United States. Drugs containing fentanyl, which have contributed to most recent drug deaths, are typically manufactured in Mexico and smuggled into the U.S. across the land border. The administration has not provided detailed evidence that the boats they have sunk had drugs on board and were heading for the United States.

The administration has claimed that the strikes are an effective deterrent for other drug traffickers. Defense Secretary Pete

Hegseth told reporters last week that they paused the strikes "because it's hard to find boats to strike right now, which is the entire point, right? Deterrence has to matter." However, experts say there is no available evidence to support the theory that trafficking is down.

"Drug trafficking is like water," said Regina LaBelle, a Georgetown University drug policy professor and former acting director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. "It's going to find a way to get in."

Critics of the war on drugs have also long asserted that the government has insufficiently addressed the root cause of deaths in the U.S.: addiction. Advocates have urged the government to invest more in overdose prevention measures, such as naloxone and treatment options.

The rate of overdose deaths has been on the rise for decades, fueled by fentanyl since around 2015, until the end of Biden's term, when the rate declined.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I don't want to be lectured by the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs because, as I mentioned, in Florida, 3,667 people have died from fentanyl.

This President has pardoned drug dealer after drug dealer, and there has not been a peep from my friends on the other side of the aisle, who are now talking about the issue of drugs in the United States, not a peep. I don't know how you explain that to the families of those who lost their lives, number one.

Number two, the chairman made a big deal about pictures, that if you are in a picture with somebody and you touch them, that somehow you are affiliated with them.

Here is a picture of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin with a nice handshake. Does that say that Trump is somehow Vladimir Putin's friend? Here is Trump with Kim Jong-un, giving him a nice hug, another dictator that Trump seems to be enamored with. I don't even know what the hell that proves, but the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs seems to think that photos are a big deal.

Let me read our resolution to you. It says: "Pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1544(c)), Congress hereby directs the President to remove the use of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela, unless explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization for use of military force."

That is it. I can't even believe this is controversial. I can't even believe that my friends on the other side of the aisle have a problem with this. This is the most basic stuff.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. MASSIE).

Mr. MASSIE. Mr. Speaker, James Madison warned us that: "In no part of the Constitution is more wisdom to be found than in the clause which confides the question of war or peace to the legislature, and not to the executive." Madison called it the crown jewel of Congress.

The Framers understood a simple truth: To the extent that warmaking

power devolves to one person, liberty dissolves.

If the President believes military action against Venezuela is justified and needed, he should make the case, and Congress should vote before American lives and treasure are spent on regime change in South America.

Let's be honest about likely outcomes. Do we truly believe that Nicolas Maduro will be replaced by a modern-day George Washington? How did that work out in Cuba, Libya, Iraq, or Syria?

Previous Presidents told us to go to war over WMDs, weapons of mass destruction, that did not exist. Now, it is the same playbook, except we are told that drugs are the WMDs.

If it were about drugs, we would bomb Mexico, China, or Colombia, and the President would not have pardoned Juan Orlando Hernandez. This is about oil and regime change.

□ 1420

When it comes to regime change, we have already been down this road with Venezuela with nothing to show for it. In 2019, we recognized Juan Guaido. We seized their embassy here in D.C. We were told that regime change was imminent. Years later, Maduro remains in power.

Today, we are told to place our hopes in other exiled figures: Edmundo González and Maria Corina Machado. I wish them well. I do. But Congress should not express moral sympathy in the form of a blank check for military escalation and American lives.

Let's take a moment to acknowledge the contradiction at the heart of this policy. This administration tells us that the Maduro regime is made up of narcoterrorists. By escalating toward war, we would predictably create countless refugees. At the same time, this administration has moved to end temporary protected status for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans and deport them back to the very regime it condemns. So which is it?

Are we prepared to receive swarms of the 25 million Venezuelans who will likely become refugees and lose billions in American treasure that will be used to destroy and inevitably rebuild that nation? Do we want a miniature Afghanistan in the Western Hemisphere?

If that cost is acceptable to this Congress, then we should vote on it, as a voice of the people, and in accordance with our Constitution.

Yet today, we aren't even voting on whether to declare war or authorize the use of military force. All we are voting on is a war powers resolution that strengthens the fabric of our Republic by reasserting the plain and simple language in the Constitution that Congress must decide questions of war.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support for this resolution.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I will give a lecture anyway to the Speaker in reference to what Mr. MCGOVERN said.

I shake a lot of people's hands that I don't like. I definitely don't let them put their arm around me. There is a big difference. People with common sense recognize that. I wouldn't speak for him, but I suspect he would live life in the same way.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. CRAWFORD), the chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for his leadership on this initiative. I am glad somebody is showing some leadership here today.

I rise in opposition to the removal of the use of United States Armed Forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela, or the support for drug dictators act.

The United States is using a proportional force to apply pressure on narcotics terrorists who are colluding with the illegitimate leader of Venezuela, Nicholas Maduro. They have already acknowledged that.

The use of military pressure, which matches pressure that the U.S. has used in the global fight on terrorism, is a proper extension of the use of force in the Western Hemisphere where narcotics terrorists operating through and with Venezuela are creating instability and poisoning Americans in droves.

The use of measured military power is the logical step to attempt to stop narcotics terrorists from supporting Maduro.

The United States has imposed individual, financial, and sectoral sanctions on the Venezuelan Government as well as sanctions on the Maduro government and its supporters. This proposed resolution would disable the very effective tool that has been used to keep pressure on terrorist forces who have a Venezuelan nexus and are planning, plotting, and carrying out attacks against the U.S. and our interests.

The strikes on narcoterrorist cartel assets have been precise and limited. Military action of this nature does not require congressional authorization. Under Article II of the Constitution, the President has the authority—and I would say the responsibility—to protect the United States and American citizens from attack. Moreover, U.S. troops have not been put into harm's way.

Admittedly, it shocks me that we need to remind my colleagues on the other side of the aisle what we are fighting for here. The most recent CDC data shockingly reports that more than 82,000 drug overdose deaths have occurred during the 12-month period ending in January 2025. If ISIS or al-Qaida had contributed to the killing of that many Americans in a single year, our leaders would be rightfully assailed for failing to respond.

Now that President Trump is taking the fight to the terrorists who have actually contributed to our Nation's drug overdose epidemic, he is met with criti-

cism rather than the praise that he and his administration deserve.

I guarantee you that family and friends don't distinguish between the branch of terrorism that led to the death of their loved ones. They just want them defeated.

For too long, these cartels have poisoned the American people, destabilized and corrupted our neighbors, and tortured and killed thousands of innocents throughout our hemisphere.

I have traveled extensively across the Western Hemisphere and met with many of our neighbors' leaders and their forces who are also engaged in the fight against these cartels, and these terrorist organizations are some of the most vile and evil in the world.

To bar the President from using military force consistent with other counterterrorism activities, simply due to a Venezuelan nexus, is not supportable and is antithetical to his duty to protect our Nation from foreign terrorism threats.

This resolution would prevent the application of the use of force against the very narcotics terrorists cooperating with Venezuela.

How in the world is that consistent with the primary duty of the government to protect our Nation and its citizens?

I strongly recommend that my colleagues vote against this misguided resolution.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Let me just say this real quick, because the chairman keeps going on about these pictures. I am not going to keep belaboring, but I do remember something, if you want to talk about it now.

I think that we know that Kim Jong-un, who he is, et cetera. I have a quote, if you really want to talk about relationships, Mr. Chairman, that you can get directly from the President of the United States. When he was talking about Kim Jong-un, here is what he said: "We fell in love, okay? No, really. He wrote me beautiful letters, and they're great letters." We are in love.

That is Kim Jong-un. You can also talk about him and Xi, where fentanyl is coming into the United States. Those are real relationships.

Any time you are ready to answer the question about why somebody, the President of the United States, would pardon kingpins in the drug trade, I will get an answer. I have been waiting. I have been asking everybody. Not only the chairman but any Republican that wants to make a statement, if they could just explain to the American people. They don't have to explain it to me. Explain it to the American people. Just give me some explanation of why the President of the United States would pardon convicted drug traffickers.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN), the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, why did the Framers vest the power to declare war in Congress alone? It was because the kings were constantly plunging their entire nations into wars of vanity, of conceit, of caprice, of mere whimsy.

They didn't trust one man to be able to take the entire country to war. They wanted that question proposed in the representatives of the people because it is our sons and daughters who will go fight, and it is the whole country's treasure that will be put at risk.

Now, Donald Trump, buffeted by dozens of election losses all across the country from Virginia to New York to New Jersey to California to Mississippi and Georgia, sinking in the polls like a stone because of his catastrophic unconstitutional tariffs and his complete destruction of the healthcare system of the country, now wants to turn the metaphorical war on drugs into an actual, physical war on drugs.

Well, Donald Trump's real interests in supporting dictators and big-time drug dealers were made clear with a series of Presidential pardons of major drug dealers, including the former President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernandez. The guy was sentenced to 45 years in prison for bringing 40 tons—I am sorry—400 tons of cocaine into the country. Eight hundred thousand pounds of cocaine he brought into our country, and President Hernandez says: I am going to stuff the cocaine up the noses of the gringos.

President Trump pardoned him without any explanation. We eagerly await an explanation from someone on that side because they have blown up 26 vessels on the high seas which have at most, if each one has 2 tons of cocaine in it, 52 tons, and he pardoned this guy who brought in 800,000 pounds of cocaine to stuff up the noses of the gringos.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentleman from Maryland.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I urgently commend to our colleagues across the aisle the speech that President Lincoln, the founder of their party, made about the Mexican-American War. He stood in this Chamber and said: On something as important and as grave as going to war, we want to know exactly what the rationale is, exactly why we are doing it.

He got the nickname Spotty because he said he wanted to know the exact spot where American blood was shed.

Well, there is a real accounting to be done in terms of what is the factual predicate for this war that Donald Trump wants.

□ 1430

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has said some strange things today about how you interpret photographs if the people are shaking hands

or whatever, but, somehow, if your arm is around somebody that means that you are dear friends.

I am just looking at this photo of Donald Trump with his arm around Jeffrey Epstein. By the gentleman's standards, they must be in love.

This debate is not about the gentleman's personal weird code on touching. This is about war, and that is what we are here to talk about. Quite frankly, it deserves a more serious treatment from the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO), who is one of the cosponsors of this resolution.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we are at war with Venezuela. Last night, the President declared a naval blockade of Venezuela. This is an act of war.

The President has said that strikes on land are imminent. He is dragging us into a war that the American people do not want and that the Congress did not authorize.

Mr. Speaker, Americans are asking: Why?

Is it about the drugs?

It can't be about the drugs because he just pardoned one of the largest drug traffickers in U.S. history.

Is it about fentanyl?

Venezuela doesn't traffic fentanyl.

One can't say that it is because Nicolas Maduro is a dictator. He certainly is a dictator, and the Venezuelan people deserve better, but so is Mohammed bin Salman, who is a leader the President praises all the time.

Mr. Speaker, you can't say that it is about communism, because China is one of our largest trading partners.

So what is this war about?

It is about regime change, power, graft, oil, and land. Yesterday, the President told us he wants to seize the oil and the land. The President has no plans to address rising grocery prices, healthcare prices, childcare prices, and rent that is going up. Instead of attacking Venezuela, he should be attacking those high prices.

These are issues that Americans want us to focus on, but, instead, he is sending American servicemembers into an illegal war.

We have been down this path before. The vote to authorize the Iraq war came to define the legacy of every Member of the 107th Congress. That vote came to haunt many.

Your vote today will be part of your legacy. It will be part of how your service in the House of Representatives will be defined.

I urge you to vote "yes" on this bipartisan resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MEUSER). Members are reminded to direct their comments to the Chair.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, for every one of my colleagues on the other side, it is about drugs. It is about the drugs

being prevented from going into their community, like Representative CASTRO's, who had 101 people die last year from overdose and somebody murdered by Tren de Aragua on June 16, 2024. It is absolutely about preventing those things. It is about preventing those things, and they are going to allow it in.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. MCCORMICK).

Mr. MCCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I am in strong opposition to this resolution because the issue before us is not one of Presidential authority. It is whether Congress should undermine the President's ability to deter threats and protect the United States' interests in our own hemisphere.

History shows that time after time, Mr. Speaker, if you signal weakness, it emboldens your adversaries. A resolution that publicly constrains the Commander in Chief does not promote peace. What it does is it telegraphs weakness to a hostile regime like Venezuela and encourages them to test U.S. resolve.

This is not a distant theater. This is our hemisphere. Supporting the President's authority is not a blank check for war. It is a recommendation that timely, flexible military posturing is what prevents war, and in this case protects Americans against the most lethal attack ever on the American people and the population where we have lost over 250 people per day for the last 3 years.

This is not the time to act in opposition to the Commander in Chief and to oppose him from the most important obligation he has: protect the American public. That is why I oppose this.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO), who is the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, no President, Democrat or Republican, can declare war without Congress. Congress is the branch of government vested with this solemn responsibility.

President Trump has not requested or received any authorization for the use of military force against Venezuela. Yet he continues to escalate the situation by striking speedboats, seizing oil tankers, and establishing blockades, which is an act of war.

Congress must be consulted. The President is either trying to distract Americans from the fact that millions of people are going to lose their healthcare, or he believes that he is a king unbound by our laws, unbound by international law, and unbound by our Constitution.

We cannot allow him to unilaterally declare war. Congress must be consulted.

Vote "yes" on this resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded, again, to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. RAMIREZ).

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, from the start of the Trump administration, this Republican-led Congress has willingly given up our powers and authority: our power of the purse, our oversight authority, our legislative authority, and now, our war powers.

Members of this body have surrendered their ability to check the executive and have failed to stand up for democracy and the American people.

I say: Enough is enough. Congress must start acting as a coequal branch of government. Trump and his administration, while waging a war in our cities, are committing war crimes in the Caribbean.

While Trump lies to us about how they are going after narcotraffickers, he is pardoning convicted narcotraffickers who are probably responsible for many of the overdoses we have seen around the country.

The hypocrisy is suffocating. The administration is lying, consolidating power, and committing war crimes in order to control, to dominate, and to seize Venezuelan oil and pursue regime change for their imperialistic agenda in the Western Hemisphere. They do this all so they can extract resources, they can expand their wealth, and they can make sure that one day, should they lose their hold on power, which they will, they can be pardoned for their corruption.

It seems like Republicans love Trump and protecting pedophiles more than they love America and children. It is shameful, and it is pitiful. It is filthy, and we have to put an end to it.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this resolution. Let's take back the power and authority that rightfully belongs to Congress and put an end to the lawlessness that makes us all less safe.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded, once again, to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time I have remaining.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida has 7 minutes remaining. The gentleman from Massachusetts has 3 minutes remaining. The gentleman from New York has 4 minutes remaining.

□ 1440

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentlewoman from South Carolina (Mrs. BIGGS).

Mrs. BIGGS of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to the resolution which seeks to limit the constitutional authority of the President under Article II and micromanage the Commander in Chief during a national security crisis.

While our Nation's first priority must always be the pursuit of peace

over conflict, we cannot remain idle when an indicted drug trafficker weaponizes narcoterrorists to assault our sovereignty. Peace is maintained through strength, and it would be both unconstitutional and irresponsible to tie the hands of the President, who is protecting the American people from drug cartels and terrorist tactics.

Decades of executive branch precedent, affirmed by both parties, establish that restricted engagements involving no ground troops and limited operations do not require congressional authorization.

The President's targeted strikes on narcoterrorist vessels have been precise and targeted and have not put U.S. troops in harm's way.

Passage of this resolution would set catastrophic precedent. It would define any defensive use of force as an act of war, effectively stripping the Commander in Chief of his constitutional mandate to respond to foreign threats and to secure our borders against a criminal regime.

Mr. Speaker, the War Powers Resolution was never intended to be a tool for the legislative branch to conduct tactical oversight of military operations.

We have one Commander in Chief for a reason. Which side are we on: keeping Americans safe or protecting narcoterrorists? I urge my colleagues to vote "no."

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, does the gentleman from Florida have additional speakers? I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I have three more speakers.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GIMENEZ).

Mr. GIMENEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to this resolution.

This resolution would prohibit the use of United States Armed Forces off the coast of Venezuela without regard for the real and growing threats posed by the foreign terrorist Maduro regime.

Let's be clear-eyed about the danger that we face. The Maduro regime is a designated foreign terrorist organization, a narcoterrorist state that collaborates with other foreign terrorist organizations and violent cartels to flood our hemisphere and our communities with deadly poison.

Venezuela has been taken over. The Venezuelan people are held hostage by a foreign terrorist regime that uses their land as an operating base for international drug trafficking, fueling a crisis that has cost nearly 400,000 Americans their lives since 2021.

This resolution would have us pull back from the fight against designated terrorist regimes and cartels in our own hemisphere, just miles from our shores. It tells the foreign terrorist regime in Venezuela and its criminal allies that Congress is willing to look the other way as hundreds of thousands of Americans continue to die every single year.

We must reject this resolution and send a clear message: The United States will confront narcoterrorist regimes in our hemisphere, stand with the Venezuelan people, and never surrender to terrorist regimes that threaten our security. Too many Americans have already paid with their lives because this threat was ignored.

For the sake of our national security, our communities, and the men and women in uniform who stand the line every day, I urge a "no" vote on this resolution. I thank my colleague for yielding me the time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY).

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the War Powers Act was to prevent secret wars from happening after Vietnam. The reason why we have this is so that the administration is accountable to the people. No war should be declared and no war should be prosecuted in the name of the American people without their consent.

If the President wishes to go to war, he must come to the people, explain his rationale, and get their consent. He is not doing that now. When he doesn't do that, bad things happen. Bad things are happening today.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCLINTOCK).

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is absolutely right, the Constitution is crystal clear that only Congress can start a war. However, in their deliberations on this subject, the Founders also made clear that they were leaving the President certain limited inherent power to react to an attack. For example, he can order up defensive measures or hot pursuit of an enemy or retaliatory strikes. That is the distinction they debated when they substituted "declare war" instead of "make war" among Congress' enumerated powers.

The supporters of this resolution are correct. Congress has to initiate hostilities, but neither of these resolutions are applicable to current events. H. Con. Res. 64 orders the President to remove forces from Venezuela that are not in Venezuela. Until and unless they are, this is at best an empty partisan exercise. Worse, it could be construed to constrain his inherent powers in the event of an attack by Venezuela that requires an immediate response.

H. Con. Res. 61 orders him to cease attacks on terrorist groups, presumably the drug runners, but these are unflagged vessels carrying contraband in international waters. An attack on them is not an attack on a foreign power and, therefore, not an act of war. It is akin to firing on Somali pirates menacing international shipping.

If the President launched an unprovoked attack on Venezuela or Venezuelan-flagged vessels without

congressional declaration, we should have this debate. Until then, I think the Democrats would do well not to cry wolf on such an important matter.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. DAVIDSON).

Mr. DAVIDSON. Mr. Speaker, I would ask Mr. MCGOVERN: Is the contention that this is a present condition, that there are U.S. forces in violation of the War Powers Resolution, or is it about a hypothetical future?

I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. MCGOVERN. The first thing you said.

Mr. DAVIDSON. The contention is it is a pressing condition?

Mr. MCGOVERN. Yes.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I disagree with that. I will be voting "no."

Mr. MCGOVERN. Read the intelligence.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers. I reserve the balance of my time until the gentlemen yield back.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, I really can't believe this debate from some of my friends on the other side of the aisle. They are talking about things that have nothing to do with the underlying legislation. I mean, they are talking about fentanyl. Well, fentanyl is coming from China. That is the problem. Do you want to bomb China? Then make the case to bomb China. That is where fentanyl is coming from.

They are talking about nuclear war. I don't even know what that has to do with what we are debating here today.

I think what is clear is my Republican friends are basically covering up for the President, who is sleepwalking us right into a war in Venezuela. That is the issue here.

The President, by his own words, has said that he wants to block the airspace in Venezuela. He has talked about troops in Venezuela. He is stationing American forces around Venezuela. Under U.S. law, those are acts of hostility.

I have seen this movie before, where my Republican friends get up and they talk tough: Let's go to war, let's go to war. Then we go to war, and it becomes a catastrophe. Then they say: Well, I never voted for a war. Oh, I didn't do that. That is not me.

Well, under the Constitution, we have a responsibility to declare war. We have a responsibility to debate war. Quite frankly, this Congress, given what is going on in Venezuela, ought to be doing more oversight and ought to be debating this issue. That it is somehow controversial or undercuts our attempts to stop drugs from coming into this country is ridiculous. It is ludicrous.

I have been around for a while. The one thing I can tell you with certainty, it is easy to get into a war. It is hard as hell to get out of war. I have been around long enough to hear Presidents of both parties talk about war as something simple: You can get into it, you get out of it easy, no big deal. That has never happened. That has never happened.

□ 1450

Even the Pentagon says it will be very complicated to topple Maduro, and what might result might be more violence, more chaos. It could be a quagmire.

All we are saying here is, let's do our job. If you don't want to do the job, I don't know why the hell you are here, seriously. The Foreign Affairs Committee ought to be taking the lead on this. This shouldn't be controversial.

My resolution is a bipartisan resolution. It deserves bipartisan support. This is the least we can do. This is the least we can do.

When we go to war, our troops have no choice but to follow the orders that are given to them. The bottom line is, we have a responsibility to make sure they don't get sent into a mess, that we know what the hell we are doing, that there is a clearly defined mission, and that this is the right thing to do.

It is the wrong thing to do, in my opinion. We have homeless veterans. We can't provide people in this country with healthcare. People don't have adequate housing. People are hungry.

You want to spend billions and trillions of dollars on another war. Well, I don't want any part of it. Please vote for this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I am not going to talk to my colleagues because they are not going to answer the question of why two convicted people, not just indicted, were pardoned by the United States President.

Mr. Speaker, I will address my fellow Americans. Congress would need to pass an Authorization for Use of Military Force if President Trump wanted to put boots on the ground or conduct military strikes in Venezuela to abide by the law.

For that, Republicans in Congress would need to cast their vote on whether to commit U.S. Armed Forces to an open-ended conflict that their constituents, the American people, certainly do not want.

Trump ran on ending forever wars, but now he has forgotten what they are, what his own Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, characterized as "interventionism, undefined wars, regime change . . . and feckless nation building." Yet, with Venezuela, Trump is provoking a new war right in our backyard and threatening to destabilize the entire region.

Let's be clear: Claiming a war with Venezuela will be quick and easy is a

fantasy. Maduro is by no means a good guy. He lost the last election and has violently repressed the Venezuelan people to stay in power against their democratic will. To think that if the U.S. military just chases him out, then Venezuela's military and armed groups around the country will welcome democracy with open arms is naive at best.

This administration has no plan for the day after. It has no strategy. If Members do not vote for Mr. McGovern's War Powers Resolution, they are signing their name to everything that comes after, a forever war in our own hemisphere, a quagmire the likes of Vietnam in a country twice the size of Iraq for a length of time that is completely unknown.

How many billions of dollars of taxpayers' money would be spent so Pete Hegseth can play a wartime general? How many U.S. servicemembers would make the ultimate sacrifice so Donald Trump can do in Latin America what Vladimir Putin does in Europe?

The power over matters of war and peace belongs to the United States Congress. It is our most solemn duty given in the Constitution of the United States, and votes like this are our most consequential. They are literally about life and about death.

If history has taught us anything, it is that wars are easy to start, but they are incredibly difficult to end. The choice you make on this vote will carry a long, a very long, a very long part in this history.

Mr. Speaker, I will end with this. Let me just tell you, the cameras of history are rolling. What will be the downstream effects of destabilizing the country, an entire region? Anyone who tells you they know, they are lying.

What we do know is that the American people don't want this. That is unequivocal. Even President Trump's supporters do not understand why he would do this.

I ask you, let's vote in this House for Mr. McGovern's bill. It is the right thing to do. Vote so the American people know how you stood at this point in history.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

The defense of America is what is on the table here. The questions are simple: Does the President have the authority to defend the United States of America against these cartels, against their drugs, their beheadings, their murders? Does he or does he not?

My Democrat friends are arguing that he does not have the authority to defend our country, to protect the people of the United States of America, to protect the people in their communities. That is their argument.

The fact of the matter is, the President has the authority to defend our country, and he has the duty to defend our country.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "no," and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to the order of the House of December 16, 2025, the previous question is ordered on the concurrent resolution.

The question is on adoption of the concurrent resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

PROTECT CHILDREN'S INNOCENCE ACT

Mr. MOORE of Alabama. Madam Speaker, Pursuant to House Resolution 953, I call up the bill (H.R. 3492) to amend section 116 of title 18, United States Code, with respect to genital and bodily mutilation and chemical castration of minors, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BICE). Pursuant to House Resolution 953, the amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on the Judiciary, printed in the bill, is adopted and the bill, as amended, is considered read.

The text of the bill, as amended, is as follows:

H.R. 3492

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Protect Children's Innocence Act".

SEC. 2. GENITAL AND BODILY MUTILATION OF A MINOR; CHEMICAL CASTRATION OF A MINOR.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 116 of title 18, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"§116. Genital and bodily mutilation of a minor; chemical castration of a minor

"(a) GENITAL OR BODILY MUTILATION.—Except as provided in subsection (g), whoever, in any circumstance described in subsection (d), knowingly performs, or attempts to perform, genital or bodily mutilation on another person who is a minor, shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both.

"(b) CHEMICAL CASTRATION OF A MINOR.—Except as provided in subsection (g), whoever, in any circumstance described in subsection (d), knowingly chemically castrates a minor shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both.

"(c) CERTAIN OFFENSE RELATED TO FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION.—Except as provided in subsection (g), whoever, in any circumstance described in subsection (d), knowingly—

"(1) facilitates or consents to female genital mutilation of a minor; or

"(2) transports a minor for the purpose of the performance of female genital mutilation on such minor, shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both.

"(d) CIRCUMSTANCES DESCRIBED.—For the purposes of subsections (a) and (b), the circumstances described in this subsection are that—