

government funding, Speaker JOHNSON abandoned talks and rolled out a bill that includes major cuts. It cuts non-defense discretionary funding by \$15 billion in total in 2025 and hands a blank check to Trump and Elon Musk to pick winners and losers and steal from our constituents.

Make no mistake, the entire bill the House is voting on today is House Republicans' own doing, and it is a dumpster fire, so I am here to sound the alarm about that fire before it spreads. But, first, I need everyone to understand: The choice is absolutely not dumpster fire or shutdown. I should know. I introduced another option yesterday. It is a short-term CR that would give us the time to finish doing our job and negotiate bipartisan, full-year bills. There is no reason we cannot do that, and there is every reason that every single one of us should prefer actual bills that we write to help people over the bill that just empowers two billionaires who are running our government into the ground and our economy into a recession.

I really want to make sure all of my colleagues understand how bad this bill is. So if anyone thinks this bill from House Republicans is going to avoid chaos or avoid pain for our country, listen up because it is only going to add to the chaos.

This is not a "clean CR," as some Republicans claim. It cuts programs our communities rely on, and that includes a major 44-percent cut to Army Corps projects that help mitigate against floods and hurricanes and much else.

It cuts medical research into diseases and conditions affecting servicemembers and their families by more than \$1 billion. That is over 40 percent.

It leaves a massive \$280 million shortfall in NIH's budget, and that is a big cut to research that saves lives.

It leaves a shortfall for housing programs. We are talking about 32,000 fewer vouchers. And that is just scratching the surface.

It also completely lacks the basic guardrails we include in all of our funding bills, on a bipartisan basis, each and every year, to make sure that our States and our communities are taken care of and not just subject to the whims of the Trump administration or any administration to pick winners and losers.

House Republicans are not trying to responsibly fund the government; they are trying to turn it into a slush fund for Trump and Musk to wield as they see fit so that they can shift their focus entirely to tax cuts for billionaires.

Right now, we—Congress—have the power of the purse. We have that power to fight for our States, to fight for our families, to bring Federal dollars back home and build bridges and feed families and care for veterans and fight fentanyl—whatever our communities tell us they need.

We should not cede that power with this bill. That is really worth sitting with for a minute.

We all chose to be here, to be here in Congress. We chose to take on this role so we can advocate for causes and communities that we care about and work in a bipartisan manner to reach compromise, to make sure that our causes and our communities get the support they need.

House Republicans' full-year CR would instead pass the buck to Elon Musk and unelected political appointees to decide who gets funded and who doesn't. Is that not why each and every one of us was actually elected, to fight for our States and to fight for our communities as the people who know them best?

I certainly know that is true for me. I have worked for years with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that people back home who trusted us when we said we would fight for them always know Congress has their back.

So really think about that before you vote to make your voice mean less for the rest of this fiscal year because it is terrifying to think of what unelected political appointees would do.

We have already gotten an alarming preview of how Trump will threaten to cut off States and cities that might disagree with him, and Elon will totally work the government to benefit his companies and hurt his competitors.

I have to say, our bipartisan appropriations process is not always easy, but it is a heck of a lot better than handing over our decision making to this or to any administration. Voting against this bill is about standing for communities and families who actually rely on the funding and for our ability—every one of us—to be a voice for our constituents in Congress because what is going to happen when, perhaps, medical research funding gets sucked away from cancer and Alzheimer's all because a scientist worked somewhere previously and said that vaccines are safe and all of a sudden the funding is gone?

What happens when you can't get a bridge replaced because the political appointees at DOT don't like the policies your mayors advocated for?

What happens when they reduce staffing at national parks in your backyard because your Governor won't deny climate change?

The bipartisan directives we provide—we, Congress, provides—each year with our funding bills help guard against that kind of thing for any administration. And all of that is missing from this disastrous slush fund CR.

Through bipartisan compromise, we make sure our communities have a voice at the table, and our taxpayer dollars have a return on their taxes. We should reject this bill. We should pass a short-term CR to avoid a shutdown, and then we should do our job and work on full-year spending bills like we were sent here to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I am scheduled to be part of a colloquy here in just a couple minutes, but I wanted to make a comment about what the Senator from Washington has shared.

I am going to use a term that maybe some people are not familiar with. We are in a "Morton's fork"—a Morton's fork. We have heard about a fork in the road. Some people know what a Hobson's choice is. But a Morton's fork is a choice between two equally unpleasant alternatives. And if this isn't where we are right now, ladies and gentlemen, I don't know what is.

As Senator MURRAY has outlined, a long-term CR—a long-term CR—when we have already done our appropriations work and we are not able to get to that work and instead we basically give the administration the ability to direct within the funding levels but direct as they will see fit through the end of September is something that I think many of us—certainly this appropriator—do not really feel comfortable with.

I spent a lot of time within my Appropriations subcommittee, working very hard with the Department of the Interior, to make sure that we knew, whether it was funding for wildland firefighters or what we were doing within the VA or within any of the other Agencies—that we did what people asked and expected us to do. We did those bills, and I think we did a pretty good job.

Mine moved out of full committee unanimously, and then they didn't advance. So here we are sitting at a place where we have to take either the choice of a long-term CR and basically give up the work that we have done as a Congress or we move to a government shutdown, an equally untenable and equally unpleasant alternative and one that, quite honestly, we should not be in this position. We should not be in this place where we have two bad choices for our government and for the people of this country.

We can do better. I wish—I agree, Senator MURRAY—I wish that what we were able to advance was a short-term CR that would allow us to move to finish up our appropriations bills, do our work, and then start moving on to fiscal year 2026. I don't know whether it is possible between now and the end of day on March 14, but I, for one, am at a place where I am just beside myself that we are in a place where we feel that we have no good alternatives. We are in a Morton's fork.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

UKRAINE

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to be able to come to the floor today to support Ukraine. I am especially pleased that we have colleagues from both sides of the aisle who are here to support the Ukrainians in this unjust war against Russia.

Now, I understand and appreciate the desire for peace in Ukraine, and I understand why we should end the senseless killing of innocent people. I think if you ask Ukrainians, they want this war to end too. They are watching how this war is destroying their country, but the best way to make a deal here is to give Ukraine as much leverage as possible.

I am pleased to hear today that there is the potential for a cease-fire; that as part of that, U.S. intelligence sharing would be turned back on. I think we should also keep sanctions on Russia. I think NATO membership should be on the table for Ukraine because Vladimir Putin only understands strength.

When he invaded Crimea in 2014, a lot of people, including myself, didn't think our response was strong enough. We were concerned that Vladimir Putin couldn't be trusted to abide by negotiated agreements, and 3 years ago, of course, Putin proved us right when he directed his forces to attack Ukraine again in a full-scale invasion.

His missiles struck kindergartens and maternity wards, and they continue to strike innocent civilians. His soldiers carried out massacres in places like Bucha, where just a few weeks ago, I saw firsthand, along with Senators Bennet and Tillis, the lingering effects of trauma of what Vladimir Putin and the Russians did in Bucha.

We heard about the indiscriminate murdering of civilians, the rape and the torture of innocent bystanders. Well, Russian soldiers rushed into Ukraine from the north, from the south, and from the east. Many predicted that the country would fall within weeks, if not days. But as we stand on the floor today, Ukraine is still standing. That is thanks, in no small part, to the strong bipartisan support that Ukraine has enjoyed here in Congress.

I think that support—that strong bipartisan support—has been there because we understand that this is a fight for democracy. This is the fight to stop the overturning of the international rules-based order, to stop a dictator like Vladimir Putin from going into a country and thinking just because he wants to take it over, he can.

We know that not only are our allies watching what happens here, but so are our adversaries. North Korea is already fighting on Russia's side against the Ukrainians. Iran is providing missiles. China is providing support. They are watching what America does here.

We understand, as Republican and Democratic Senators, that to have a lasting peace in Ukraine, we need to make sure that Russia is accountable, and that we have security guarantees.

Now, there are a number of ways to do that, and they don't necessarily mean U.S. troops on the ground or even NATO troops on the ground. Europe is working through different options.

As I said, Senator TILLIS and I were recently in Ukraine, along with Senator BENNET, and we saw firsthand that

despite Russia's advantages in size and manpower, that Ukrainians are not giving up. Ukraine now has one of the most advanced militaries in the world, the most advanced in Europe.

I came away impressed by their ingenuity, their ability to innovate in the face of Russian aggression. Ukrainians are sharing those lessons from the battlefield with our U.S. military. They are helping us prepare for the wars of the future, and it is not just something that we understand in Congress is important, but my constituents in New Hampshire understand how important it is that we support the Ukrainians.

I brought with me today a poster from a community effort in New Hampshire that has raised \$4 million to support the people and children, particularly, in Ukraine. They provided 3 million-plus pounds of food, 10,000 sleeping bags, hundreds of generators, and 900 children are in trauma counseling because of their effort. They raised over \$4 million from New Hampshire to support the Ukrainians.

Americans across this country understand why this fight is important to us. It is why we are here on the floor today to reiterate that we stand with Ukraine, and I urge all of my colleagues who support Ukraine, Republicans and Democrats alike, to join us—join us in speaking up for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity; join us in pushing to strengthen Ukraine's place at the negotiating table; join us in calling on Moscow to withdraw from the Ukrainian territory that it has seized.

Thousands of Ukrainians have given their lives in this fight. They have been on the frontlines for all of us. As a group of women in the Ukrainian military said to me in the first year of the war: Give us the equipment; give us the arms so that we can fight the Russians so that you in America don't have to.

Well, they have been on the frontlines for all of us defending the international order that has served American interests since the end of World War II. I hope we will continue to support them in that effort.

Mr. President, I yield to my colleague Senator MURKOWSKI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I am pleased to be on the floor today with the Senator from New Hampshire as well as other colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support Ukraine. We are now more than 3 years into Russia's unprovoked brutal war against Ukraine.

I think we are encouraged by the news that we are seeing advance this afternoon with the talks in Saudi Arabia between the United States and Ukrainian officials as they talk about the potential for a cease-fire and potential for the United States to restore military support and intelligence sharing. These are promising developments.

I think we all want to—we all want to—arrive at a place where we see

peace. But when we talk about how the peace is gained, I think, again, the discussions that are had on this floor—those of us who have had an opportunity to go to Ukraine and see the situation on the ground ourselves, to speak with so many engaged in this effort—the stakes are not only about Ukraine's sovereignty. The stakes also include our values, our security, and our credibility as the leader of the free world.

This is not just a regional conflict on the edge of Europe. It is a global test. It is a test of whether the international community will allow borders to be redrawn by force, a test of whether democracies will continue to stand together when authoritarian regimes literally try to rewrite the rules, and, yes, it is a test; it is a test of American leadership in the 21st century.

As was stated, the Ukrainian people are not asking us to fight their war. They are doing the fighting. It is their sons, it is their daughters that are dying. What they are asking of us as the world's leading democracy is to help us with the tools, help us with the arms, the ammunition, the logistical support; help them protect them; help them with the intelligence that can be provided through satellite imaging; help them so that they can protect themselves.

I think we should be proud. We should be proud as Americans that we have helped to make a difference. We have helped Ukraine push back the Russian advance. It has prevented Kyiv from falling to Russia. It continues to help Ukrainian defenders hold the line there.

So every weapons system, every round of ammunition and radar and drone that we have helped to provide—these aren't just supplies; these are literally lifelines to the people.

When you think about the people, I think it is important to also recognize another way that we have helped in this country. Senator SHAHEEN showed a picture of the Ukrainian families and the people in her State. In Alaska, we have welcomed, we have embraced, we have helped situate Ukrainian families who have sought refuge, who are here in a place like Alaska, in a place like New Hampshire, because where they call home is not safe to be.

So how we can support them is important because when we support Ukraine, we are not just helping a nation in need, we are protecting and we are preserving the rules-based international order that has helped keep the peace for generations.

If we falter, others are watching. Others are watching the situation in Moscow, in Beijing, in Tehran, Pyongyang. So if it is seen that we are walking away from Ukraine, if we embrace appeasement, we embolden every aggressor around the globe.

More than that, it is our allies, it is our friends, our partners—they are watching this, and they are asking the question: Is the United States a country that can be depended on? Are we

seeing this alliance that we have had, that we have worked to nurture and build for 80 years—are we seeing that fray?

I understand absolutely the cause for restraint in our support—that war costs too much, that we need to be focusing on issues here at home—but, again, the fight is bigger than that. It is significant, yes, for Ukraine, but it is about democratic values and standing up for democratic values; it is about stopping the expansionist ambitions of authoritarian regimes.

I think we have to be honest here. Look at history. Russia is not going to stop at Ukraine. In 2005, in a state of the nation address, Putin said:

The demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.

He has never hidden his ambitions from that statement. When Putin says that the “ongoing collapse of Western hegemony is irreversible,” he means us. He means our allies and the broader narrative about the decline of Western influence. He wants NATO to be divided, and he wants the United States isolated. This works to his advantage. He just probably didn’t expect that America was going to do it for him.

Now, as an Alaskan, I get geography. I am acutely aware of the threat a more aggressive Russia poses just across the Bering Sea. Two miles separate the United States—Alaska’s Little Diomed and Russia’s Big Diomed. We see Russia’s military buildup when we see the Russian bombers that are flying in our area, when we see the Russian and the Chinese naval forces out in our waters. But we also know and have long known that a destabilized Europe means a more dangerous world for the United States. This conflict may seem like a continent away, a long way away, but the consequences are anything but distant.

We all want this war to end, but it cannot end on Russia’s terms. If it does, we should expect nothing more than a temporary respite before the resumption of hostilities. Why are we going to start trusting and believing Putin’s word now given his track record? We have seen this before. History doesn’t lie, and the appeasement of tyrants does not bring peace.

Russia started this conflict, and it is critical for us to stand with Ukraine to end it—not just because it is right but because it is necessary.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, thank you, and I thank my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, for coming to the floor today in support of our continued support for Ukraine.

I was heartened to hear today that President Zelenskyy is on board with the U.S. ceasefire proposal. That is good news. It does highlight that President Zelenskyy has shown time and again that he is always willing to negotiate for peace. Putin has always been

the aggressor. And that is why I believe we must stand with Ukraine.

You know, the question before us today—whether we will continue to stand with Ukraine—has immense implications for the security of the United States, of our European allies, and of world peace.

These are critical questions to get right: Should the United States stand by our 80-year-old security commitments in Europe? Should the United States stand behind the rules-based order established in the aftermath of the catastrophic World War II or should we abandon those rules despite the fact that they have served our national security interests for so long? Those are the questions.

You know, in the aftermath of the horrors of World War II, in which more than 80 million people died, the United States did establish alliances and security commitments in Europe and determined that this was the way to avoid a World War III—investments in NATO, Armed Forces in Europe, and European democracy and economic prosperity. We did not want to repeat what happened after World War I, where none of this was done, and it created the conditions for a Second World War.

Perhaps most importantly, America asserted that it would defend a Europe so borders are not changed by force, where nations cannot invade weaker neighbors with impunity.

Was that effort worth it in these past 80 years? Yes. Since some are now suggesting otherwise, I would like to mention a few of the reasons why the post-World War II order in Europe, led by the United States and enacted by a treaty in this U.S. Senate, was a success in keeping the peace.

No conflict. Europe has avoided a major war for 80 years.

The end of the U.S.S.R. Europe weathered the storm of the breakup of the Soviet Union, ushering in new countries committed to democratic values of freedom and democracy.

Yugoslavia. Europe and NATO weathered the conflict and breakup of the former Yugoslavia, demonstrating unprecedented EU-NATO cooperation and commitments in the Balkans to Western democratic values.

Our European allies have always been there for us, including in the aftermath of 9/11.

Economic values. Our commitments also ushered in the fall of communism and a vibrant European Union that is peaceful and democratic—a club that the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and now Ukraine want into.

It is a testament to the success of the painstaking efforts that Republican and Democratic administrations and Republican majority and Democratic majority of the U.S. Senate adhere to.

But these commitments to European security, to NATO, and to protecting territorial integrity weren’t only good in the past. To say that these alliances and commitments are tired or worn out says that we are tired, that we are

worn out of peace and tired of maintaining peace for our citizens here in the United States. That is a fatigue we can never succumb to—ever. Those values are needed today to protect Ukraine in Europe and the United States from a rampant, unlawful, invasive Russia.

You know, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine, along with the rest of Eastern Europe and the Balkan States, has moved rapidly to reorient its politics and policies towards the European Union, toward democracy, toward freedom. It was, in fact, Ukraine’s pursuit of a closer relationship with the EU that Putin the autocrat used as an excuse to interfere in Ukraine’s internal affairs.

The invasion of Ukraine also demonstrated the resilience of America’s security relationships with Europe and NATO. Never has the European Command of the U.S. Armed Forces—designed and built to defend Western Europe against a Soviet invasion—been called upon to coordinate the actual defense of European sovereign borders from an invasion from the east. Today, that is a reality. Europe also—very much our partner—saw the threat and rose to the occasion.

In part—and I want to acknowledge President Trump’s insistence on this—European countries have begun to increase their defense spending, as they should and as they must. They have done so, and they have stepped up by providing materiel, as we have—advanced missiles, drones, and other military technology—for Ukraine. In fact, as a percentage of the gross domestic product, Europe has given more to Ukraine in support and weapons than the United States. We are doing it together.

We cannot take for granted that we have had this peace in Europe for 80 years. We cannot take for granted that we did that. It was the result of that sustained commitment of Members of this body on both sides of the aisle and of Presidents of both parties. Our duty is to keep that alliance united at this stressful time.

If Ukraine fails, we should not assume that European security and our alliances there will survive. World War II ended 80 years ago. We have to keep it 80 more.

The Senators that ratified the establishment of NATO and our American-European commitments to peace and security on the European continent—they understood that our European alliances are critical to our own security. They would be rightly proud of their success story—of 80 years of peace, of democracy, of freedom in Europe—but they would be horrified at the threat that Putin now poses to Europe, threatening everything that we and those who came before us have worked for.

Ukraine's integration with the rest of Europe, their own right to self-determination, Ukraine's battlefield courage, and Ukraine's political commitment to democracy and freedom validate the 80 years of America's commitment to creating structures that can enforce and protect peace. Turning away from Ukraine now when it needs us most could mean the end of that 80-year success story.

We must stand by Ukraine and against that unlawful invasion by Mr. Putin. We must stand by our European allies. And we must reaffirm our continued dedication to the work of those who served here before us to build the alliances and to sustain the alliances that have preserved the peace in Europe. Their future and ours depend on it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, before I begin my formal remarks, let me thank my neighbor from New Hampshire for organizing this bipartisan display of support for Ukraine.

On February 24, 2022, without justification, without provocation, Russia launched a full-scale, brutal invasion of its democratic neighbor Ukraine with missiles, air assaults, and army divisions.

As John Adams said, "Facts are stubborn things," and the facts of what happened on that terrible day are undeniable. It was Russia that started the war.

Many thought that Ukraine had no chance against the perceived might of the Russian armed forces. However, the Ukrainians fought so bravely against that initial onslaught and, since then, the West has come together with speed and clarity of purpose to support Ukraine.

Senator MCCONNELL stated it best last week by saying:

Russia's horrible invasion of Ukraine has had a unifying effect on the world's democracies.

As a result of the invasion, two nations, Sweden and Finland, joined NATO; Eastern Europe is completing a pivot away from Russia's energy sources; and NATO allies are surging to the 2 percent GDP goal for defense spending.

As for the brave Ukrainians, they pushed back the initial Russian invaders and are now doing their best to hold the line in eastern Ukraine, despite Russian soldiers, ammunition, and UAVs far outnumbering their Ukrainian counterparts. Ukraine decimated the Russian Black Sea Fleet and has forced Russia to augment its forces with North Korean soldiers and Iranian weapon systems.

But despite the successes in the past 3 years, the war drags on with devastating consequences: 390,000 Ukrainians have been wounded, with more than 46,000 deaths so far. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian families have been displaced, and estimates are that

approximately 29,000 civilian Ukrainians have lost their lives. In many cases, they were targeted by the Russians.

It is not American troops who are dying on the Ukrainian frontlines. It is the Ukrainians who are courageously defending their country, their democracy, their way of life. And their defenses directly connect to our efforts in NATO and the defense of Eastern Europe.

If Vladimir Putin is allowed to succeed in Ukraine, as several of my colleagues have pointed out, he will not stop there. He will continue to pursue his dream, his goal, of recreating the former Soviet Union. He has made that crystal clear. In my judgment, he would most likely seize Moldova next; again, invade Georgia, as he did in 2008; threaten the Baltic States; and menace Poland and Finland.

The best way to ensure that the United States is not drawn into a larger regional war in Europe, which would directly threaten American troops, is by helping Ukraine defend itself against this unprovoked invasion.

The national security supplemental appropriations package that was signed into law last year included \$15.4 billion to help Ukraine purchase American-made weapons. It is strengthening our military readiness, rebuilding our industrial base, and assisting our partners and allies at a volatile and dangerous time in world history.

For the past 3 years, we have heard repeatedly the myth that somehow the European countries were not doing their part in helping to equip Ukraine, but let's take a look at the facts. As a percentage of GDP, the United States ranks 17th—17th—in support for Ukraine. The top three countries include Denmark, Estonia, and Latvia. These NATO nations are all in on supporting Ukraine's defenses because they understand that the stakes are so high. Furthermore, NATO allies have committed \$185 billion to buy weapons and defense systems produced right here in the United States, which helps us sustain good jobs and strengthens the industrial base.

Both the Biden administration's slow-walking of the delivery of weapons to Ukraine and the Trump administration's pausing military aid and intelligence sharing sent the wrong signal to an aggressive Russia. The decision this afternoon to restart U.S. military aid and intelligence sharing are welcome steps to strengthening Ukraine's position in negotiations. With the tentative cease-fire signed by Ukraine and now up for Russia's concurrence, resumed aid and intelligence sharing with our ally Ukraine allows that country to be in a much stronger position moving forward.

History is filled with examples of well-intentioned leaders who sought to avoid war but who actually made war more likely by refusing to recognize the evil with which they were confronted. Neville Chamberlain declared

"peace in our time," trying to appease Germany before World War II. We should not make the same mistake today by appeasing Russia.

We cannot avert our eyes. We cannot leave an ally to fend for itself, and we must show resolve to deter possible future aggression by China, Iran, and North Korea.

Our adversaries are watching closely our response in Ukraine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, Putin will only stop when we stop him. That piece of wisdom was shared with me on a trip to Europe by a former colleague, Senator McCain, and it seems to me to predict what has now unfolded over the last 3 years.

Three years ago, I was in Europe with colleagues, visiting American troops training with NATO allies and partners in Poland and Lithuania, on the day that the Russians began their illegal, unjustified, full-spectrum invasion of Ukraine. As more than 100,000 combat troops poured over the border, missiles flew in the air, and jets bombed, the world recoiled in horror and watched, expecting that the Ukrainians would be overrun in just 3 days.

Instead, President Zelenskyy, the elected President of a democracy, stood firm and stayed fast and defended his country. When offered a last-minute evacuation by America, he said: I don't need a ride. I need ammunition.

And I am thrilled to be on the floor today with a bipartisan group of my colleagues. Thank you to my colleague from New Hampshire for organizing this, and to my colleague from Maine for her words, which I will agree with from beginning to end. We must deter Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

If you look at who has joined the fight alongside Russia—Iran, North Korea—this is not a team America should be on. And if we look at who has come to the defense and aid of Ukraine, it is democracies from throughout Europe and the world—more than 50 countries—that, in combination, have done more than we have, significantly, to welcome Ukrainian refugees; to support the recovery of their economy; and to arm them in this ongoing, desperate, and critical fight for freedom in Ukraine.

Who is Vladimir Putin? He is a brutal and aggressive dictator. He is a war criminal. He is someone who has used every ounce of power and resource at his grasp to shatter the peace of Europe that has lasted decades since the Second World War and to attempt to drive a wedge between the United States and our European partners and allies.

The bravery, the determination, the skill, and the capacity of the Ukrainian people to stand and fight is breathtaking. And all of us who have had the honor of visiting Kyiv, of visiting Ukraine, of spending time with those who, behind the frontline, support

their troops and those who have served and sacrificed have been forever changed.

I had the opportunity, with our former colleague and friend Senator Portman, to go to Kyiv and to present the Liberty Medal from our National Constitution Center to President Zelenskyy. And to travel through a city shattered by war and to visit with people determined to continue their fight was as inspiring to me as I know it has been to many of my colleagues who have made that same trip.

We are here today to ask: Who are we and what will we do?

We are Americans. We have stood alongside and fought alongside those who have pursued democracy, those who have stood up for liberty, for decades, around the world, and we should not shrink from this fight. We can and should insist on a just and lasting peace.

We would all like to see this brutal war come to an end. We would all like to see the suffering stop. But to force on Ukraine a cease-fire that is really a surrender masked as a cease-fire would be to betray the sacrifice and service of so many. Asking Ukraine to willingly give up conquered territory and recognize Russian sovereignty, asking Ukraine to give up its desire for security and for integration into the West, to ask Ukraine to agree to limits on its military and its capacity to be prepared for what is a likely renewed Russian assault in the future—all of these would lead to not a neutral Ukraine but a neutered Ukraine.

We know what happens next. What happens next is that the world will look at whatever peace we can secure for Ukraine and ask: Are we reliable? Is the United States a reliable ally and partner?

Putin has already suffered a strategic defeat. NATO has already been expanded. The border between NATO and Russia has doubled. Our partners throughout the world have come to this fight, and they are committing even more, in recent weeks, as Europe has stepped up to pledge hundreds of billions of dollars more.

If we are to restore deterrence, if we are to sustain the peace, if we are to be the indispensable Nation that we have worked and fought so long to be, we must finish the job. We must deter Putin from future aggression by demanding that Ukraine be secured by a just and lasting peace.

The news today that intelligence and security cooperation has restarted is encouraging, but we have a resolution cosponsored by all the Members on the floor today that makes clear where we stand: We stand with Ukraine. We stand with democracy. We insist on a just and lasting peace in this instance, and we stand for Ukraine. "Slava Ukraini."

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, my views on America's interest in Ukraine

are well known. I spent the better part of the last 3 years, here on this floor, pointing out the glaring connections between European security and the security of America's interest all across the globe—core national security interests that determine our prosperity.

Ukraine's victory and stability in Europe is squarely in the interest of the United States—our interests. Europe is our largest trading partner. Russia is a thuggish autocracy with an economy smaller than Italy's. The Russian economy is smaller than Italy's. There is simply no equivalence. There is no grand realignment opportunity that has gone unnoticed.

So let me start with this. The most harmful possible outcome of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for U.S. interests, would be this headline: Russia wins; America loses.

Russia wins; America loses.

We can't let that be how this ends, but look at where we are right now:

On one side, fellow members of the most successful military alliance in world history, with a combined GDP of more than \$17 trillion, are openly—openly—planning for a world in which America does not call the shots and where our word no longer carries any weight. These are the closest allies and partners who have worked hand in glove with America, bought American equipment, and taken America's lead. But, if America turns its back on them, they will look elsewhere for guidance, for coordination, for weapons, and even for trade.

On the other side is Putin's Russia and its \$2 trillion GDP, where Kremlin officials now say that America's current "foreign policy configurations" now "largely align with our vision" and that hiccups in the U.S.-Ukraine relations are "useful" because they drive a wedge between America and our European allies. That is how the Russians look at this.

Well, it is not hard to imagine why they look at it that way. Freezing lethal assistance and intelligence support to Ukraine made Russia's job a lot easier. It was easier to hit Ukraine's defenders along with its schools, hospitals, and nurseries; and after 3 years of immense progress toward a stronger and more capable Transatlantic Alliance, with greater commitments to burden-sharing and European leadership, the West that had resolved to check Putin's neo-Soviet ambitions is now in danger of being consumed by internal recrimination.

What welcome news for an autocrat whose grip on power depends on the endurance of a wartime economy.

The will to force Putin to make serious concessions in the interests of lasting peace is fragmented, and too many on this side of the Atlantic seem to believe, foolishly, that his appetite will be satisfied in eastern Ukraine. His appetite will be satisfied in eastern Ukraine. This is the same mistake made by the architects of the Minsk I and Minsk II agreements. The cir-

cumstances are not crying out for a Minsk III.

Somehow, this doesn't sound like the makings of a successful deal for America. Somehow, these don't seem like the conditions for advancing America's interests in European peace and security, let alone pretending to mediate a dispute between equals.

Russia wins; America loses. It is not too late to avoid that outcome, but it will require that America and our allies operate from the same set of facts. So let's talk about actual facts.

First, the dollars and cents: America's total Ukraine-related spending comes in at \$175 billion—not \$350 billion but half that much. As a share of GDP, 11 European countries have allocated more Ukraine-related spending than the United States. In real terms, total European aid is twice—twice—U.S. spending, with more military aid than America, more budgetary assistance than America—period. Those are the actual facts.

Our allies' increasing investments have been good news for American security and the strength of our alliance. They have meant expanding arsenals and industrial capacity along with bigger defense budgets for buying American for now.

But what if—what if—even in having established the correct math, you think it is still too much to spend on helping to degrade a major American adversary without putting a single American servicemember in harm's way—not a single American servicemember in harm's way? What if you still think, somehow, we are getting a raw deal?

Consider where most of the Ukraine-related spending—\$120 billion—has actually gone: to investing in U.S. capabilities and expanding our own defense industrial capacity. We are already \$120 billion closer to restoring the sort of forces and capacity we will need to deter conflict in the Indo-Pacific than we were 3 years ago; or consider—consider—the value of the operational and tactical lessons the U.S. and our allies are drawing from Ukraine's battlefield experience. The conflict in Ukraine is a battle lab—a glimpse at the future of warfare—and our Ukrainian partners are innovating faster than American industry is often able to. Concerned about the next major conflict? We are learning how to prepare better for it. U.S.-made systems are literally feeding performance data back to us.

The American people are not getting fleeced. I am going to say it again. The American people are not getting fleeced—far from it—but if we mistake surrender for peace, we will be risking far worse.

China is watching what we do. So are America's allies and partners in Asia. To believe that we can torch our credibility in one region and not tarnish it in another is foolish. When we treat withholding assistance from Ukraine like a cudgel and insist that the victim of aggression is the side that has to

make concessions, what should we expect other partners to conclude?

Now, I have heard that Ukraine needs to be prepared to “do difficult things.” I am curious which difficult thing our frontline partners haven’t been doing for the past 3 years, like defending besieged towns and cities, like burying their sons and daughters. Will Russia be expected to do difficult things as well, like ending its onslaught? By what means are we prepared to compel them? War is hell, and the worst consequences are always borne by innocent civilians in flight and by brave soldiers holding the line.

Ending the war in Ukraine is a noble aim—preventing war, even more so. But peace is different than surrender, and being honest about who is to blame doesn’t hinder lasting peace; it enables it. Why should we be less willing to call Russia out for its brutal aggression than we are to call Hamas or Hezbollah out for theirs? Would we be afraid to call Iran out if it had nuclear weapons? Is that the lesson we want the world to draw from this conflict?

Ronald Reagan epitomized peace through strength, not by just saying the words but by action. He called the Soviet Union an Evil Empire at the same time as he dealt productively with Gorbachev.

In July of 1983, he spoke to the people of the captive nations of the Soviet Union and communist regimes.

He said:

[T]o every person trapped in tyranny, whether in the Ukraine, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, or Vietnam, we send our love and support and tell them they are not alone. Our message must be: Your struggle is our struggle, your dream is our dream, and someday, you, too, will be free.

In the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine got its chance at freedom. Putin intends to extinguish it. Ukraine is serious about a just and stable peace. How do we know? We know because the Ukrainians preferred it overwhelmingly until their neighbor chose war instead again and again.

I will reserve my skepticism, my disdain, and my condescension of the authoritarian thug who treats the slaughter of innocent children like a sport, and anyone who cares about not getting played for a sucker should do the same. In the face of our hesitation, Putin has escalated. He has insulted the sincere pursuit of peace. It is a crystal-clear reminder that what he is after isn’t an end to the bloodshed. America cannot afford to get played. So let’s not.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 6 minutes, Senator TILLIS for up to 10 minutes, and Senator SANDERS for up to 20 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I would like to thank Senator MCCONNELL for his constancy over the last 3 years. We have been out on the floor together many times to speak about the need to support Ukraine.

I also want to thank my colleague Senator SHAHEEN from New Hampshire, the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for organizing this bipartisan gathering.

Senator TILLIS from North Carolina is here as well. It is nice to be here in a bipartisan way with people from both sides of the aisle to work on something of this critical importance to my State of Colorado, to the country, and to the world.

Senator MCCONNELL, not surprisingly today, talked about that very, very famous lesson that Ronald Reagan taught all of us, and that was his pursuit of peace through strength. I was on the floor talking about that last week. Today we have a corollary to Ronald Reagan’s rule of peace through strength from Senator MCCONNELL, which is, don’t mistake surrender for peace. Don’t mistake surrender for peace.

The lesson Ronald Reagan was teaching when he said “peace through strength” was a lesson that history had taught him and history had taught the free world.

Dust off your reliable 10th-grade Western civics textbook and look up President Woodrow Wilson’s attempts to achieve “peace without victory” for either side—that is how he described it—as an example of the failure that weakness invites, the kind of weakness that Leader MCCONNELL was talking about.

Before the United States even had entered World War I, President Wilson tried to force both sides to accept a peace deal they didn’t want by depriving them of weapons and depriving them of funds.

In 1916—again, before the United States was directly aiding the allies—financiers from the United States were financing the UK, which was at war, and also funding their allies in mainland Europe. So Wilson’s government cautioned U.S. investors against issuing short-term bonds to the UK and to France.

This Presidential expression of disapproval had the effect of cutting off U.S. private assistance to Europe altogether, and the record is painfully clear. President Wilson’s decision created a financial crisis in the United Kingdom, but it did nothing to end the war. Instead, Germany, in 1917, only escalated their attacks on civilian shipping from the United States, prompting Congress finally to declare war and approve a \$3 billion loan to France and to England.

By the way, just to amplify what the leader has already said this morning, that \$3 billion loan was about \$81 billion in today’s dollars, when you think about the roughly \$120 billion that we have invested in Ukraine.

In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain even more famously than Wilson tried to appease Hitler with the infamous Munich Agreement, through which the UK, France, and Italy allowed Nazi Germany to annex part of peaceful Czechoslovakia. As our history textbooks show, Hitler never stopped in Czechoslovakia but continued his war throughout Europe.

Just as Wilson and Chamberlain failed, friends of freedom in Ukraine and around the world should not pressure Ukraine into accepting an unjust peace that will never, ever last. Only with security guarantees from Europe and the United States can we have some assurance that Putin will not invade Ukraine again at a moment when he thinks the world is not watching. That is a guarantee. That is a guarantee.

I visited Ukraine last month with my friends Senator SHAHEEN and Senator TILLIS, who are both here today. We saw the courage of the Ukrainian people up close. We saw the courage they have forged to save their country and the suffering they have endured—43,000 deaths and another almost 400,000 casualties—not just on behalf of Ukraine but on behalf of Europe, the West, democracy, freedom, our national security.

In cemeteries all across Ukraine, fresh graves are piled high with dirt and flowers, testifying to the Ukrainian people’s sacrifice. To put it in American terms, Coloradoan terms, there is not a county in the entire country where somebody hasn’t lost somebody to this war.

But the Ukrainian people have not had to fight this fight alone. The American people have steadfastly and generously backed this fight to the tune of, as I mentioned, \$125 billion.

I won’t go through all the reasons why that has been good for the United States, as Senator MCCONNELL said—and that is a lot of money, but it is just about 0.53 percent of our GDP. That is about \$365 an American.

Our European allies and far-flung ones, like Australia and Japan, have stepped up as well because they know that supporting Ukraine means standing with people willing to do anything to fight for their country. They know that with American weapons and those of our allies, the American people have literally kept Putin’s army at the gates of Europe while forcing him to squander more than \$200 billion and staggering casualties of 700,000 people.

We learned while we were in Ukraine that the Ukrainians are killing more Russians today than they were 6 months ago.

We all want this war to end, which is why I was glad to see the United States commit today to resuming intelligence sharing and security assistance to Ukraine as part of the potential U.S.-brokered, 30-day cease-fire with Russia. But for the sake of Ukraine and the rest of the free world, we must not pressure Ukraine to silence their guns

unless Russia commits to doing the same. We cannot force Ukraine to accept an end to this war that is anything other than a just and enduring peace.

This requires that the United States, our allies, and Ukraine continue working together to establish terms of the peace and negotiate with Putin while the Ukrainians continue their brave fight. They are not asking to be relieved of this terrible burden.

I couldn't even imagine the other day when we were in Kyiv how cold it must have felt to people who were on the frontlines of that war. It was cold enough just in the streets of Kyiv. It was cold enough just getting on the train from Poland to go to Kyiv. But they are embracing their responsibility because they know that any cease-fire without credible security guarantees will allow Putin to rebuild his army and attack again, and they know that how this war ends will determine whether Putin sets his sites on our NATO allies like Poland and the Baltics.

To conclude that any other result is possible is to completely ignore history, is to completely ignore what Putin has said and whether dictators like China's Xi Jinping test our resolve by invading Taiwan, whether the post-World War II international order the United States and our allies created persists, and whether the United States continues to provide the leadership our parents and grandparents supplied since the end of that war. That is what Senator MCCONNELL calls on us to remember.

Throughout history, it has been too easy for some to ignore the moral responsibility we have to people who are sacrificing their lives a continent away on behalf of our shared values and interests. It is harder in these moments but important and, I would say, necessary for the living to stand for freedom and democracy and those willing to give their last breaths to make those values eternal.

We in this Chamber have to demand moral and strategic clarity by continuing to support Ukraine's fight to secure a truly just peace through strength because, as the Ukrainian-born author Vasily Grossman wrote nearly 70 years ago, "In the cruel and terrible time in which our generation has been condemned to live on this earth, we must never make peace with evil. We must never become indifferent to others or undemanding of ourselves."

With that, I thank my bipartisan colleagues again. I look forward to the day when we are out here not with 8 Senators but 80 Senators in support of freedom and in support of the fight Ukraine is leading.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, last night, I had someone reach out to me and say they heard I was going to

speak again on Ukraine on the floor, and they asked me what I was going to talk about. I said to reinforce that Ukraine needs our help, that Europe needs to step up, and that Vladimir Putin is the personification of evil. I am going to try to accomplish all of that in less than 10 minutes so we can get on with the vote.

Everybody needs to remember how this war started. Just to show you—you can believe me when I tell you that you know when Putin is lying: when his lips are moving.

Let's go back to October, before the invasion in February. He said he was just putting troops together on a training mission—thousands of troops just coincidentally near the Ukrainian border but a training mission. Then it became a military exercise. Now it has become an illegal invasion of a sovereign, democratic nation that has experienced 80,000 dead servicemembers, more than 13,000 dead civilians, 400,000 wounded servicemembers, and 30,000 injured civilians.

Let me tell you a little bit about those civilians. They are 16-year-olds who had their legs blown off because Vladimir Putin ordered the launching of dumb bombs into residential areas. He allowed drones to hit children's hospitals that we visited.

This is the carnage that the Ukrainian people are experiencing every single day—24/7, 365—since the invasion 3 years ago.

Vladimir Putin is a murderer. He has not only allowed his servicemembers—some estimated 800,000—lose their lives on the battlefield, but he has gone so far as to engage mercenaries—the Wagner Group that he had down in Africa—in Ukraine, murdering indiscriminately anybody who moves.

If you want to see the best example of that, you need to go to Bucha and hear the story we heard when we were there. Bucha is a community of a couple of hundred thousand people just outside of Kyiv. Shortly after they invaded and it was clear they weren't to achieve their objectives, they decided that they were going to invoke terror in the minds of those who were fighting and the civilians in Ukraine, so they decided to go into a community that would be similar to going to Northern Virginia. So imagine Kyiv is Washington, DC, and they go out in Northern Virginia, and they just indiscriminately start murdering people. They killed over 500 people in 33 days, all of them civilians. This isn't like urban legend; this was caught on video—people riding a bicycle, walking a dog, being murdered. Vladimir Putin ordered that. Vladimir Putin allowed that.

Ladies and gentlemen, the surprise to Vladimir Putin was that he had no earthly idea of the strength democracy and freedom have in the hearts and minds of human beings. The Ukraine people, in spite of overwhelming odds—numbers and weapons—they defended it. They have been defending it for 3 years. So we have to help them.

There is good and evil here. There is no kind of "Putin is just misunderstood." This man is a murderer. This man is a rapist. He is a rapist by virtue of allowing systematic rapes to happen in places that he invades. That is how he operates. He is evil.

Ukraine needs help. Before I talk more about that help, I want to talk about Europe having to step up.

I really appreciated what Senator COLLINS put together in terms of the contribution to the Ukraine effort. I know, Senator SHAHEEN and I—and I thank Senator SHAHEEN for having this colloquy today—spend a lot of time tracking NATO countries. Let's make sure that, on one hand, we thank Europe for stepping up and doing its part in supporting this effort, but let's not forget that our NATO partners have come up short in satisfying their obligation in NATO to the tune of over \$2 trillion over the last 20 years.

The mind races. What would have happened if all that money had been spent and that our NATO alliance was even stronger if everybody had just met the bare minimum for NATO support? Two more trillion dollars would have been spent over the last 20 years.

Would that have been enough to possibly dissuade Putin from invading Ukraine? We will never know. But what I do know is that I want Europe to not just get credit for supporting Ukraine, but Europe also has to shoulder some responsibility for NATO being more vulnerable by not living up to their commitment over the last 20 years.

Let's just get that right, folks, so that we don't have the distraction and the American people get confused between NATO members not stepping up and doing their fair share.

So why are you asking for more money for Ukraine?

The reason we are asking for more money for Ukraine is because Vladimir Putin has a plan, and we could play right into it. People need to understand: Ukraine is a doormat to Europe. It is how he gets from Russia into countries that are trying to democratize and come closer to the West. If he succeeds in Ukraine, he will move into Moldova. He is already actively causing problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As a matter of fact, Senator SHAHEEN, I don't know if you are aware, but tomorrow the Republika Srpska legislature is going to consider a resolution to separate from BiH. That is Bosnia and Herzegovina. That has got Vladimir Putin all over it. He is already getting his chess pieces around the board. If he feels like he can get some level of success in Ukraine, he is going to march right through there, folks. It is going to happen.

And then, finally, I had somebody ask me: Why are you so animated over Ukraine? Why are you so concerned with Russia?

I give them a one-word answer: China. China is supporting Putin, at

least economically. There is even an argument that ammunitions and other things are going their way.

Does anybody really believe that North Korea would send people to the battlefield—they have lost a few thousand since they have been there—unless China was OK with it?

And then we have Iran. Iran is sending drones to Russia to kill innocent civilians and military personnel in Ukraine.

They are the “axis of evil,” and now they have regenerated themselves. We can’t let Putin have a win in Ukraine, ladies and gentlemen. We have to step up and make sure that the American people know that it is in our national interest to support Ukraine.

And we also have to let Vladimir Putin know that we do owe him thanks in one way: Thanks for waking up Europe in understanding the grave, existential threat that he represents. Thanks for actually getting Finland and Sweden into NATO and adding 800 miles of border on the Russian border. Thank you for that.

And now I want to thank him for receding back into the cave that he should live the rest of his life in and let democratic nations be free—and free from his threats. And until we are sure of that, we should not relent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 939

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, my office and I suspect all Senate offices are getting a whole lot of calls from senior citizens who are experiencing a great deal of fear and anxiety with all of the confusion and chaos that is currently going on here in Washington.

When we have the President and my Republican colleagues talking about cutting Medicaid by some \$880 billion—let us be clear—they are not just talking about throwing millions of children and others off of the health insurance they have; they are also talking about cuts to community health centers, which receive about 43 percent of their funding from Medicaid and where millions of seniors go to get their primary care. So cutting Medicaid impacts primary care.

At a time when we have a major crisis in nursing home availability—I know that is true in Vermont; I expect it is true in almost every State in the country—let us understand that Medicaid provides approximately two out of three seniors with the funding they need to live in nursing homes. Make drastic cuts in Medicaid, and it is going to be harder for your mom, your dad to get into a nursing home or to stay in a nursing home. Cuts in Medicaid would be a disaster for seniors in nursing homes.

But it is not just Medicaid cuts that worry seniors. At a time when the Social Security Administration is already understaffed—and again, for years, I have been hearing in my office—I expect other Senators have been hearing in their offices—from seniors who tell

us they are calling up Social Security, they have got a problem, and they are not getting a response. And the result of that is that some 30,000 people a year die—die—waiting for their Social Security disability benefits.

And in the midst of all of that, in the midst of a crisis where Social Security is understaffed, when our response should be to significantly increase staffing so that Social Security can better respond to the needs of our constituents, we have Elon Musk and his minions at DOGE cutting some 2,500 of Social Security staff. And, incredibly, they are now threatening to cut up to half of Social Security Administration staffing.

And then, on top of all that, you have Mr. Musk claiming that Social Security, which has paid out every benefit owed to every eligible American for over 80 years, claiming that it is a Ponzi scheme. Social Security is not a Ponzi scheme. It has paid out every benefit owed to every eligible American for over 80 years.

And then you have the President of the United States—State of the Union—lying about millions of people: Oh, millions of people, 200 years of age, 300 years of age, imagine that, getting Social Security benefits.

Seniors understand what all of that is about. They know that Musk and Trump want us to lose faith in Social Security and that, over a period of time, they want to give that indispensable program over to Wall Street.

So let us be clear: In America today, 22 percent of Americans living who are 65 years of age are trying to survive on an income of less than \$15,000 a year. Think about that: 22 percent of seniors in America trying to survive on \$15,000 a year or less. Half of seniors are trying to get by on \$30,000 a year or less. Frankly, I don’t know how any senior living on \$15,000, \$20,000 survives. I don’t know. The high cost of prescription drugs, food, housing, keeping warm in the winter, I don’t know how they can do that.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, we now have the dubious distinction of having one of the highest rates of senior poverty compared to other wealthy nations. In America today, according to the latest OECD estimates, 23 percent of seniors are living in poverty compared to just 4 percent in Norway, 6 percent in France, and 11.5 percent in Canada.

Yes, we have more nuclear weapons than any other country; we have more billionaires than any other country, but we also have one of the highest rates of senior poverty of any country on Earth. We might want to get our priorities right.

Now, while my Republican colleagues would like to make massive cuts to Medicaid in order to provide more tax breaks to billionaires, some of us have a better idea. We think that it makes more sense to substantially improve the lives of our Nation’s seniors by ex-

panding Medicare to cover dental, vision, and hearing benefits.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare, one of the most popular and successful government programs in our Nation’s history, into law. Before the enactment—this is really quite interesting. Before the enactment of Medicare, about half of our seniors were uninsured. Today, everyone in America age 65 or older is guaranteed healthcare benefits through Medicare regardless of their income or medical condition. That is the good news.

The bad news is that, since its inception 60 years ago, Medicare has failed to cover such basic healthcare needs as hearing, dental care, and vision. The result: Millions of senior citizens have teeth that are rotting in their mouths. They are unable to hear what their children say or they are unable to read a newspaper because of failing eyesight.

This is the United States of America. We are the wealthiest country in the history of the world. Senior citizens should not be walking around with no teeth in their mouth. They should not be unable to hear conversations. They should not be unable to afford glasses so that they can read a newspaper.

The need to expand Medicare to cover dental, hearing, and eyeglasses is absolutely critical. Nobody—nobody—denies that oral health, hearing, and vision are essential parts of healthcare. We cannot continue to deny seniors these basic healthcare benefits. We can no longer tolerate the fact that 26 million seniors and people with disabilities in America have no dental insurance and no idea how they will be able to pay for the very expensive dental procedures that they need.

The results have been tragic. Nearly one out of five seniors in America have lost all of their natural teeth. Twenty percent of seniors in America have no natural teeth in their mouths. Disgracefully, 60 percent of our Nation’s seniors have untreated gum disease, which can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Further, it is not acceptable that while nearly two-thirds of seniors over the age of 70 experience hearing loss, less than 30 percent of seniors above this age have ever used a hearing aid, primarily because hearing aids are too expensive. In my view, no senior in America should face isolation from their families and friends simply because they cannot afford the extremely high price of a hearing aid.

In addition, we cannot continue to allow seniors with poor vision to go without routine eye exams or properly prescribed glasses. Poor vision can lead to injury, cognitive impairment, and depression.

Adding dental, vision, and hearing benefits to Medicare is not just good public policy; it will not only ease human suffering and improve the health of our Nation’s seniors; it is precisely what the overwhelming majority