

Why? Because we were on the verge of doing something that would have made our markets safer and cheaper for everyday, working Americans across this remarkable land. But, instead, we witnessed a disappointing display of political gamesmanship that puts partisan politics above policy and obstruction above innovation.

We could have come together as Republicans and Democrats, not in a bipartisan way but in an American way, to deliver real change for the American people, real change embedded in the passing of the GENIUS Act. But not this day.

I know that this day was supposed to be special. It was supposed to be the day that America as a nation would rise to the occasion of innovation over regulation. It was supposed to be the day where we would come together in a nonpartisan way, Republicans working with Democrats, to make this Nation work better for the blue-collar comeback. It was supposed to be that day. But not this day.

I know what those on the other side would say. Let's be brutally honest about it, though. The GENIUS Act was a bipartisan achievement at the Banking Committee. It was a bipartisan achievement because we took the time, hours upon hours. The Presiding Officer was there. We debated day in and day out for weeks and months before we ever had the hearing. We offered almost 80 amendments during the session in the Banking Committee. We voted on 40 amendments in the Banking Committee. We made the decision to make America's economy safer and cheaper for the American people.

But when the lights came on and the cameras were watching, what did we see? We saw those same Democrat colleagues who recognized the urgent need to bring stablecoins into the clear, responsible, regulatory framework—we watched them take a step back and vote against the very bill they voted for, the bill they shaped. What changed? What changed? What changed? Not the substance. They got more of what they wanted than the last five iterations of the legislation. What changed was politics. Not policy, not the legislation, not the substance—politics.

Let's be honest. What we saw today wasn't a vote against the legislation. Several iterations—the Presiding Officer's staff, my staff, and Democrats' staff spent thousands of hours working on improving the bill; up until 2 a.m. last night, staff getting phone calls from Democrats about what they needed for the bill to pass.

It was a vote against President Trump and President Trump's legislative agenda. It was a vote to stop President Trump from having a victory in the digital asset space. It was a vote against common sense—that simple.

Trump derangement syndrome has once again hijacked responsible governance in this Chamber, but unfortunately, unfortunately, it is the Amer-

ican people—they are the ones who lose. It is blue-collar, red-blooded Americans who pay the ultimate price of inaction in this Chamber brought about because of politics, not policy.

It frustrates me. It frustrates me to sit through hours of meetings. It frustrates me to watch people look me in my eyes and tell me: We are almost there; I just need one more thing. It frustrates me when my colleagues seem so sincere that they want the revolution of innovation to happen in America. It frustrates me to watch them turn their backs on the very people they say they represent. It frustrates me that the modern financial tools that make our economy not just faster but safer—safer because the blockchain technology makes it safer and more inclusive.

Entrepreneurs and developers want clarity so they can build here in the United States of America, not be pushed offshore into a regulatory environment that is confusing.

Let me close with this. The bill delivered on exactly what we all want: safety, consumer protections, AML, BSA. All the things that the Presiding Officer would want, that I would want, that they would want—we did it. We did it together. But there is something putrid.

It is hard to understand how my good friends could walk away from our priorities, that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle decided to chicken out on safety, on inclusion, and on democratization.

When the cameras were rolling and the stakes were high, we were left high and dry—not because of the policy but because the political landscape dictated, demanded that they deny the average American access on this day. This is exactly the kind of cynical Washington maneuvering that makes people sick to their stomach.

But I am proud of the work we have done. I am, frankly, proud of the work that my Democrat colleagues on the committee offered to make the bill better. I am proud of the fact that for a couple of hours in America's Capital, we put partisanship to the side. We decided we would just do the right thing. I am proud that the Republican Party stood up and stood firm on innovation, stood strong on consumer protection, and we were there for national security.

I am not finished fighting. I am frustrated, but we are not defeated. We are simply delayed. We are not finished fighting. We will continue to work on the digital asset revolution that the American people voted for, that they deserve. The need hasn't disappeared, and neither has our commitment to American leadership in the digital asset space.

To those who chose politics over progress today, the American people are watching.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

GAZA

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I want to say a few words about an issue that people all over the world are thinking about, are appalled by but, for some strange reason, gets very little discussion here in the Nation's Capital or in the halls of Congress, and that is the horrific humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in Gaza.

Today marks 68 days and counting since any humanitarian aid was allowed into Gaza. For more than 9 weeks, Israel has blocked all supplies: no food, no water, no medicine, and no fuel. Hundreds of truckloads of lifesaving supplies are waiting to enter Gaza, sitting just across the border, but are denied entry by Israeli authorities.

There is no ambiguity here. Netanyahu's extremist government talks openly about using humanitarian aid as a weapon. Defense Minister Israel Katz said:

Israel's policy is clear: No humanitarian aid will enter Gaza, and blocking this aid is one of the main pressure levers.

Starving children to death is a weapon of war, is a clear violation of the Geneva Convention, the Foreign Assistance Act, and basic human decency. Civilized people do not starve children to death. What is going on right now in Gaza is a war crime committed openly and in broad daylight and continuing every single day.

There are 2.2 million people who live in Gaza. Today, these people are trapped. The borders are sealed, and Israel has pushed the population into an ever smaller area. With Israel having cut off all aid, what we are seeing now is a slow, brutal process of mass starvation and death by the denial of basic necessities.

This is methodical; it is intentional; it is the stated policy of the Netanyahu government.

Without fuel, there is no ability to pump fresh water, leaving people increasingly desperate, unable to find clean water to drink or to wash with or to cook properly. Disease is once again spreading in Gaza. Most of the bakeries in Gaza have now shut down, having run out of fuel and flour. The few remaining community kitchens are also shutting down.

Most people are now surviving on scarce canned goods, often a single can of beans or some lentils shared between a family once a day.

The United Nations reports that more than 2 million people out of a population of 2.2 million face severe food shortages. The starvation hits children the hardest. At least 65,000 children now show symptoms of malnutrition and dozens have already starved to death. Malnutrition rates increased 80 percent in March, the last month for which data is available after Netanyahu began the siege, but the situation has severely deteriorated since then.

UNICEF reported yesterday that "the situation is getting worse every

day” and that they are treating about 10,000 children for severe malnutrition. And severe malnutrition is not something that is cured overnight. This will have a permanent impact on the health and well-being of those kids for the rest of their lives.

Without adequate nutrition or access to clean water, many children will die of easily preventable diseases, killed by something as simple as diarrhea. For the tens of thousands of injured people in Gaza, particularly the countless burn victims from Israeli bombings, their wounds cannot heal without adequate food and clean water. Left to fester, infections will kill many who should have survived.

With no infant formula and with malnourished mothers unable to breastfeed, many infants are also at severe risk of death. Those who survive will bear the scars of what they are going through now for the rest of their lives.

And with little medicine available, easily treatable illnesses and chronic diseases like diabetes or heart disease is now a death sentence in Gaza.

What is going on there is not some terrible earthquake; it is not a hurricane; it is not a storm. What is going on in Gaza today is a man-made nightmare, and nothing in my view can justify this.

What is happening in Gaza will be a permanent stain on the world's collective conscience. History will never forget that we allowed this to happen and, for us here in the United States, that we, in fact, enabled this ongoing atrocity.

There is no doubt that Hamas, a terrorist organization, began this terrible war with its barbaric October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, which killed 1,200 innocent people and took 250 hostages. The International Criminal Court was right to indict Yahya Sinwar and other leaders of Hamas as war criminals for those atrocities.

Clearly, Israel, as any other country that was so attacked, had the right to defend itself against Hamas. But Netanyahu's extremist government has not just waged war against Hamas. Instead, they have waged an all-out barbaric war of annihilation against the Palestinian people. They have intentionally made life unlivable in Gaza.

Israel, up to now, has killed more than 52,000 people and injured more than 118,000—60 percent of whom are women, children, and the elderly. More than 15,000 children in Gaza have been killed.

Israel's indiscriminate bombardment has damaged or destroyed two-thirds of all of the structures in Gaza, including 92 percent of the housing units—92 percent of housing in Gaza has been damaged or destroyed. Most of the population now is living in tents or other makeshift structures.

The healthcare system in Gaza has been, essentially, destroyed. Most of the territory's hospitals and primary healthcare facilities have been bombed.

Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been totally devastated, including almost 90 percent of water and sanitation facilities. Most of the roads have been destroyed.

Gaza's educational system has been obliterated. Hundreds of schools have been bombed—schools have been bombed—as has every single one of Gaza's 12 universities.

And there has been no electricity in Gaza for 18 months—no electricity.

Given this reality, nobody should have any doubts that Netanyahu is a war criminal. Just like his counterparts in Hamas, he has a massive amount of innocent blood on his hands.

And now, Netanyahu and his extremist ministers have a new plan—on top of everything else that has been done, they have a new plan—and that is to indefinitely reoccupy all of Gaza, flatten the few buildings that are still standing, and force the entire population of 2.2 million people into a single tiny area where hired U.S. security contractors will distribute rations to the survivors.

Israeli officials are quite open about the goal here: to force Palestinians to leave for other countries “in line with President Trump's vision for Gaza,” as one Israeli official said this week.

Israeli Finance Minister Smotrich said this week that “Gaza will be entirely destroyed” and that its population will “leave in great numbers.”

For many in Netanyahu's extremist government, this has been the plan all along. It is called ethnic cleansing.

This would be a terrible tragedy no matter where in the world it was happening or why it was happening, whatever the causes of it might be. But what makes this tragedy so much worse for us in America is that it is our government, the U.S. Government, that is absolutely complicit in creating and sustaining this humanitarian disaster. It didn't just happen; we are a significant part of creating this humanitarian disaster.

Last year alone, the United States provided 18 billion in military aid to Israel. This year, the Trump administration has approved 12 billion more in bombs and weapons. And for months, Trump has offered blanket support for Netanyahu. More than that, he has repeatedly said that the United States will actually take over Gaza after the war, that the Palestinian people will be driven, forcibly expelled, from their homeland, and the United States will redevelop it into what Trump calls “the riviera of the Middle East,” a playground for billionaires.

Think about it: 2.2 million desperate people who have been bombed and starved and driven from their homes are now about to be forcibly expelled from their territory into God knows where so that Trump and his friends can build a riviera for the billionaire class.

This war has killed or injured more than 170,000 people in Gaza. It has cost American taxpayers well over \$20 bil-

lion in the last year. And right now, as we speak, thousands of children are starving to death. And a U.S. President is actively encouraging the ethnic cleansing of over 2 million people.

Now, given that reality, one might think that there would be a vigorous discussion right here in the Senate. Do we really want to spend billions of taxpayer dollars starving children in Gaza? A real vigorous debate. I want to hear why that is a good use. We have people sleeping out on the streets of America two blocks from the Nation's Capital. You tell me why spending billions of dollars to support Netanyahu's war and starving children is a good idea. I would love to hear it.

We are not having that debate. Let me suggest to you why I think we are not having that debate and that is because we have a corrupt campaign finance system that allows organizations like AIPAC to set the agenda here in Washington with regard to what happens in the Middle East.

In the last election cycle, AIPAC's PAC and super PAC spent nearly \$127 million combined on campaign contributions. And the fact is that if you are a Member of Congress and you vote against Netanyahu's war in Gaza, AIPAC is there to punish you with millions of dollars in advertisements to see that you get defeated.

One might think that in a democracy there would be a vigorous debate on an issue of such consequence. But because of our corrupt campaign finance system, which impacts us in so many ways on this issue, people are literally afraid to stand up because if they do, suddenly, you are going to have all kinds of ads coming into your district to defeat you.

Sadly, I must confess that this political corruption works. Many of my colleagues will privately express their horror at Netanyahu's war crimes but will do or say very little publicly about it. History will not forgive our complicity in this nightmare. The time is long overdue for us to end our support for Netanyahu's destruction of the Palestinian people.

We must not put another nickel into Netanyahu's war machine. We must demand an immediate cease-fire, a surge in humanitarian aid, the release of the hostages, and the rebuilding of Gaza—not for billionaires to enjoy their Riviera there but rebuilding Gaza for the Palestinian people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUDD). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. MORENO. Mr. President, I have been in the U.S. Senate now for a total of 125 days. I have seen some outrageous comments over the last 125 days. My colleague has been here exactly 12,000 days more than I have. Let me just set the record straight.

On October 7, 2023, families, mothers, fathers were sitting at home, enjoying a peaceful existence in one of the most difficult places on Earth to live. They had a day planned of joy at a festival.

What happened? People came over and savagely—savagely—murdered children, raped women, took hundreds of hostages, killed more Jews than at any time since the Holocaust.

What you just heard for the last 15 minutes could be summarized as the absolute propaganda of Hamas. Let me just be clear. This war was started by Hamas. It could end today by Hamas if they released every last hostage, including an American citizen.

We are sitting here in the U.S. Senate and not even saying a word of the fact that there is a U.S. citizen being held hostage by a terrorist group in the Middle East. That is outrageous. That should be at the top of the agenda. Why have civilians been killed in Gaza? Because they hide weapons in hospitals, in schools, in homes.

Hamas is the enemy, not our greatest ally, which is Israel. I was just there 2 weeks ago. Two weeks ago, I was there. There is almost no Israeli that hasn't seen a mom, a dad, a son, a grandson, granddaughter that hasn't been either injured or killed to protect their country. The fact that we are disparaging our greatest ally at this level is completely outrageous.

I had plans to go home, see my wife and kids, but I rose today because I cannot stay silent after listening to that kind of nonsense spewed here in the U.S. Senate. It is a disgrace, and we should not ever forget that Israel is just fighting the war that we would otherwise fight.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if the Senator had heard my remarks, I talked about the need to release the hostages and I talked about who started the war, which is the terrorist organization called Hamas, led by war criminals. There is no debate about that.

But what the Senator did not tell us is whether or not he thinks it is a good idea for U.S. taxpayers to be spending billions of billions of dollars on an extremist government in Israel whose stated policy is to starve children; whether or not he thinks it is a good idea to cut off all humanitarian aid getting into Gaza right now—no medicine, no clean water, no healthcare facilities open.

So the issue is not who started the war. Everyone knows who started the war. The issue is whether you commit war atrocities, criminal war acts by punishing an entire people for the acts of a terrorist organization.

Did Israel have the right to defend itself? Yes, nobody denies that.

Did it have a right to kill over 50,000 people—60 percent of whom are women, children, and the elderly? No.

Did it have a right to injure 112,000 people, to destroy almost every housing unit in Gaza, to bomb hundreds of schools at every university in Gaza? No.

Israel had a right to defend itself, but it does not have the right to engage in ethnic cleansing and to starve children.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise in recognition of educators in Hawaii as well as across the Nation who are dedicating—have dedicated—their lives to the benefit of the children of our country.

This week is Teacher Appreciation Week. And as this administration attacks education and educators, it is more important than ever that we recognize our educators and thank them for all that they do on behalf of our children.

I have spoken before on the floor of this body on the fundamental importance of public education in my own life, having come here as an immigrant speaking no English from very humble beginnings.

I thank my teachers at Kaahumanu Elementary School, Koko Head Elementary School, and especially the librarian at Koko Head Elementary School who awakened my love of reading. They helped me to learn English and helped set me on a course that ultimately led to the U.S. Senate.

Today, teachers like Chayanee Brooks, an English teacher at Ka'u High School and Pahala Elementary on Hawaii Island, continue to educate and inspire Hawaii's youth. Chayanee, a Thai immigrant, is a nationally board-certified teacher. And, believe me, to become a nationally board-certified teacher, one must go through a lot of steps. But this certification indicates what an exceptional teacher she is.

She has been recognized as her complex area's Teacher of the Year, as Hawaii State teacher fellow, and as a Pulitzer Center teacher fellow. Just last month, she was recognized by the Hawaii State Teachers Association for her work to engage with and uplift the work of the voices of her students in her rural community.

Chayanee has said that her philosophy as an educator is simple:

Empower students to connect with their community and their own potential through storytelling.

Chayanee has created a welcoming space for her students to express themselves and share their stories through creative avenues like journalism and documentary storytelling, where they highlight topics such as family separation and mental health. You know that these are areas that the students not only care about but have experienced in their own lives.

In addition to supporting her own students, Chayanee helps train other teachers to use storytelling as a tool to engage students in their own classrooms.

She is just one of the many teachers in our country who go above and beyond for their students and their communities. Teachers like Chayanee do more than educate students. They are role models and mentors, providing a

safe, nurturing space for our children to learn and to grow. That is why it is so important that we support teachers and the vital—often underappreciated work—that they do.

We all remember during the COVID times that suddenly all our kids were at home. Believe me, there were a lot of people appreciating teachers particularly during that time. But it shouldn't just be at a time such as COVID. It should be all the time that we appreciate the exceptional work and commitment that so many of our teachers have to our students' education.

But Trump and his administration are hell-bent on doing everything they can to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and undermine public education in our country. He and his Republican buddies want to take away Federal support for local schools, hundreds of millions of dollars—in fact, billions of dollars—money that provides services for students and parents, supports students with disabilities, and helps keep our children fed.

Trump is also threatening to cut funding from schools that won't comply with his draconian Executive orders—his obsession to stamp out diversity, equity, and inclusion in our public schools; Executive orders that direct our schools to stop teaching entire chapters of our Nation's history like the Civil War, African-American history, and the history of immigrants in our country.

That is just a part of the obsession that this administration has to stamp out diversity, equity, and inclusion in every arena.

We heard from teachers, parents, and students in Hawaii and across the country about the consequences of Trump's actions—the firing of people, what they are trying to get our schools to not teach—and they have told us in two words: "It's chaos." Much like everything else Trump touches and does, chaos follows.

Just this week, Homeland Security agents terrorized a group of teachers from the Philippines living and working on Maui. They were invited to come to Maui to teach in our schools for a period of time. And despite these teachers being here legally in our country, the teachers were detained by Homeland Security and targeted before being allowed to go about their business. That is called terrorizing people, plain and simple. So instead of supporting teachers, Trump is making it even harder for them to do their jobs, and our children will be the ones stuck paying the price.

A strong education system is fundamental to building a strong democracy, a strong economy, and a strong middle class. At the heart of our education system is, of course, our educators. That is why I and my Democratic colleagues are committed to supporting our educators, strengthening our schools, and ensuring every child—every child—has the opportunity to