

most hours of the day and across the entire island.

Just think of what that means for homes, for hospitals, for schools, for factories, for farms, trash collection, and public transportation—all of the essentials of daily life. It is absolutely catastrophic. How does one produce, how does one transport, how does one refrigerate food without fuel? How do you pump and transport water? How do you power ambulances, operating rooms, incubators? You simply can't do it.

Faith-based organizations, Cuban entrepreneurs, and concerned Americans are doing their part, but it is not nearly enough. Cuba's economy is collapsing, and millions of people are suffering hunger, disease, and despair. If this continues, thousands are likely to flee the island, seeking refuge in the United States, just as they did in 1994.

For many years, people in Washington and Miami have blamed Cuba's leaders for the country's problems. That is valid—to a point. The Cuban authorities have clung to their revolutionary slogans, while other countries with communist governments—and with the support, by the way, of the international community, including the United States—transitioned to a market economy and more open society.

Cuba's centralized economy, after years of absolute mismanagement, dependence on foreign subsidies, and strangled by the U.S. embargo—that economy is in total shambles. Housing and other infrastructure are decrepit. The health system—something Cubans were proud of—is collapsing due to the very severe shortages. Basic materials and supplies are unavailable, except for those with connections to the outside world.

To quell popular anger, Cuba's leaders always blame the United States, and they harass and unjustly imprison those who speak out against the one-party system. That is wrong, and that must stop.

But let's be candid. The United States is far from blameless. For fully three-quarters of a century, during Republican and Democratic administrations and with Congress, pressed by Cuban-Americans in Florida, we have tried to overthrow the Cuban Government by armed invasion, by assassination, by financing Cuban dissidents, and by imposing a web of sanctions with extraterritorial reach that are more punitive than what we inflict on even more brutal regimes.

You know, the oil blockade now under President Trump—which, if circumstances were reversed, we would condemn as an illegal act of war—is the latest tactic that is attempting to force Cuba's leaders to capitulate to U.S. demands.

You know, much of this could have been avoided. After more than six decades of a U.S. embargo that achieved none of its goals but did hurt the Cuban people, President Obama did

change course. Supported by my predecessor Senator Leahy and others, President Obama did open travel for Americans to Cuba, supported Cuba's emerging private sector—it was working—and cooperation with Cuba on migration, public health, maritime security, and many other areas—that cooperation increased.

During those 2 years, the lives of many Cubans actually did improve—much more so than during decades of U.S. hostility and punitive sanctions.

It was 10 years ago this month that our President then, President Obama, made his historic trip to Havana and offered a new policy of positive engagement to help Cuba modernize its economy and bring new opportunities to the Cuban people. What the President then said:

I have come here to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people.

“[T]o the Cuban people.”

That official good will was reversed in 2017 when the then-Trump administration restored Cold War sanctions. The deal that the President is now seeking seeks to force Cuba's capitulation with the oil blockade, which is inflicting collective punishment on the Cuban population and creating a humanitarian emergency.

By the way, there was no progress built on what President Obama began during the Biden administration, so I don't want this to be seen as just something about one President versus another. This has been sustained policy by the United States over the course of almost 75 years, interrupted only during that moment after the historic trip by President Obama to Havana.

Political and economic change in Cuba is absolutely long overdue. That is not debatable. But the way to get there is not by causing more hardship for the everyday Cuban family. Cuba is no threat to us today, but a failed state 90 miles off our shores would be a threat to us today.

Cuban leaders have had many opportunities to show they could govern differently, and they did miss those opportunities. Today, countries that came to Cuba's rescue in the past are no longer willing to do that, leaving Cuba's leaders no choice but to negotiate with the United States.

So one thing seems certain: Cuba's Government is going to have to change its ways.

The Cuban people—90 percent of whom were born after the 1959 revolution—do want leaders who, rather than repeating tired slogans, accept the need for fundamental changes in how to govern, with greater participation of the people, greater transparency, greater freedom, and real accountability.

On Monday, in response to a question about Cuba, President Trump said:

It may be a friendly takeover, it may not be a friendly takeover. Wouldn't really matter because they're really down to . . . as they say, fumes. They have no energy, they have no money.

Of course, the reason Cuba is “down to . . . fumes” is largely because of the U.S. oil blockade. But despite that—let me be clear—no American President, under any circumstances, friendly or unfriendly, should threaten to take over another sovereign nation, whether Cuba, Greenland, or anywhere else.

Rather than threats of a takeover, the United States should—should—negotiate a solution with Cuba which above all else puts U.S. national interests and, as I have said, the needs and aspirations of the Cuban people first.

I urge the Trump administration and Cuba's leaders to take the steps I have outlined to stop the suffering and repression in Cuba and finally put an end to the decades of hostility between our two countries. I believe they would receive overwhelming support from the people of both countries as well as overwhelming support here in Congress.

(The remarks of Mr. WELCH pertaining to the introduction of S. 4095 are printed in today's RECORD under “Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.”)

Mr. WELCH. I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

HONORING STAFF SERGEANT BENJAMIN N. PENNINGTON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this week we learned that a seventh American had died in the war with Iran. SSG Benjamin Pennington, U.S. Army, was a native of Glendale, KY. That is right near Fort Knox. He was deployed with the 1st Space Battalion, 1st Space Brigade, at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.

An Iranian strike mortally wounded him in the line of duty. I am confident, today, Glendale and the rest of Hardin County are surrounding Sergeant Pennington's parents Timothy and Carrie with support. Their son was, by all accounts, deeply admired by neighbors, pastors, and coaches who helped him become the man he became.

At his alma mater Central Hardin High School, Benjamin Pennington was remembered as “the quintessential all-American.” Of course, there is no amount of praise for Sergeant Pennington's character, commitment, or bravery that can fill the hole left by his loss. The knowledge that he fell pursuing a noble cause is actually small comfort, but it cannot obscure the empty seat at the dinner table.

And so my deepest sympathies are with the Pennington family today and in the difficult days that lie ahead.

IRAN AND UKRAINE

Mr. President, the sacrifices of Sergeant Pennington and six other fallen comrades in the war with Iran have not been in vain. For nearly half a century, Iran has waged war on us. In fewer than 2 weeks, U.S. and partner operations have degraded Iran's military, its missile threat, as well as its capacity to spread violence and terror. And in doing so, they have delivered a small measure of justice for the hundreds of

U.S. personnel killed over the years by the Iranian regime.

There has been plenty of discussion about where this war fits among U.S. strategic priorities. I hope the administration will be more forthcoming on that very soon.

But some critics want to evaluate the war with Iran without even acknowledging the wider context, as if combating rampant terror and violence from China's leading source of oil and Russia's leading source of attack drones has nothing, somehow, to do with peace in Europe or deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

I have called out this fiction before, and I have urged colleagues and decisionmakers in successive administrations not to overlook the ways our adversaries' threats to America's interests are actually all aligned together.

The PRC is not a neutral observer in the Middle East. Beijing has an interest in the steady flow of cheap Iranian oil to the tune of 1.4 million barrels just last year.

And as Iran's proxy wars, missile program, and nuclear ambitions taxed our attention and resources, the PRC benefited strategically as well as financially from the distraction.

Russia, they are not a disinterested party either. Moscow and Tehran, together, propped up the brutal Assad regime in Syria, allowing them to project power deeper into the Middle East and the Mediterranean. A shadow fleet has continued to help both regimes evade Western sanctions.

And needless to say, Russia's war conquest in Ukraine would look quite different without a steady supply of Iranian attack drones. Iranian drones in Ukrainian skies have already made the connections between America's adversaries crystal clear. But now, public reporting also indicates Russia may be providing intelligence for Iran's attacks all across the Gulf.

The President's all-purpose emissary Steve Witkoff has downplayed these reports and replayed Russia's strenuous denial of any such intelligence sharing. And for the sake of U.S. servicemembers, I certainly hope that is true.

However, unlike Mr. Witkoff, I am not at all inclined to "take the Russians at their word."

Instead, I have warned successive Presidents to take the Russia-Iranian axis more seriously. I urged President Biden to hold Iran to account for underwriting terror and killing Americans. But a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan emboldened Tehran and Moscow, both.

I supported a national security supplemental, even though I thought President Biden's approach to Russia and Iran was entirely too weak. I did it not only because supporting Ukraine was in our strategic interests but because these funds helped replenish American stockpiles and start restoring our own defense industrial base.

So if the Senate receives a request for supplemental appropriations, I hope

our colleagues who oppose the President's use of force against Iran will still see an overdue opportunity to invest in urgent and strategic defense priorities.

Weakness invites challenge, but our adversaries have sought to weaken and undermine America regardless of who the Commander in Chief is.

I have underscored American's interest in a just and lasting end to Russia's war many times before. But let's say for the sake of argument that you are still inclined to treat the outcome of the largest land war in Europe since 1945 as somebody else's concern.

Well, Russia's support for Iran is not somebody else's concern. Russia is aiding Iranian attacks against Americans. That is very much our concern. If you believe that the U.S. role in the war in Ukraine is as a neutral mediator between equally culpable belligerents, this development might be tough to square; likewise with the fact that Ukraine was the first foreign government to voice unequivocal support of U.S. and Israeli strikes against Iran.

Unlike Moscow, Kyiv is not asking that we just take its word. Let's look at the actions.

Right now—right now—teams of Ukraine's top experts in drone warfare are on the ground in the Gulf helping us—helping American allies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—defend against Iranian drone attacks. Many of the Ukrainian systems that Gulf allies are eager to procure were first offered to the United States many months ago.

Unfortunately, until death began to rain from the skies over U.S. facilities in the Gulf 12 days ago, it was my understanding that these discussions had gone nowhere fast.

So administration officials were right to identify Ukraine as the "Silicon Valley of warfare." But other officials have slowed or paused assistance to these same brave innovators and have missed opportunities to apply Ukraine's technology and tactics to our own planning.

The previous administration, too, failed to adapt and harvest Ukraine's lessons.

The past is behind us. To learn from the world's foremost experts in drone warfare, we have to go beyond words. Our security assistance to Ukraine is a critical tool to help end Russia's war on terms favorable to the West. It is an investment in tapping cutting-edge technological and industrial capacity, and the return on investment is totally worth it.

America is stronger, America is more secure when we stand with our friends and stand up to our enemies.

This is not murky; it is not ambiguous. It is an opportunity for moral clarity and strategic wisdom. No better friend, no worse enemy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I wanted to come down and make a few

remarks on a couple of important topics, but I wanted to begin by just letting the American people know—and my constituents back home in Alaska—what just happened here, just a couple of minutes ago, on the Senate floor. We voted again to fund the Department of Homeland Security, and I am down here, like a lot of Senators. By the way, it was a bipartisan Senate vote to fund Homeland Security, but it didn't pass.

And, you know, I have kind of moved through my anger phase more to my sadness phase with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. This is the fourth time that we have come down to the Senate floor to vote on a bipartisan, bicameral agreement. The House and the Senate got together several weeks ago—Democrats and Republicans—and agreed to fund the Department of Homeland Security. The House passed the bill—bipartisan, by the way. The agreed-to bill was going to come over here. It did come over here.

And, all of a sudden, my Democratic colleagues on the other side of the aisle—not all of them, Senator FETTERMAN has been voting with us—said: You know what; we are not going to keep that promise. We are going to not fund Homeland Security.

Now, it is really frustrating because they are saying, well, they don't want to do it now because they want to reform ICE. Now, I am a little skeptical of that claim because the White House and Republicans in the Senate have been waiting for weeks for any proposal from the Democrats on their reforming ICE.

The White House and others have put forward: Hey, here is our proposal.

They haven't responded once.

So if they want to reform ICE, they should at least give people in the administration or in the Congress, here on the Republican side, their ideas for reforming ICE. They haven't. It has been weeks.

By the way, the press is not reporting that. I wish they would because it is very bad faith when you are not negotiating at all.

It is one thing to be far apart on "hey, I have this proposal; you have this proposal." They haven't put forward one proposal.

So in the meantime, when we have a very dangerous world out there—we have been briefed in classified hearings that we should anticipate that the Iranian Quds Force, the lead terrorist organization in Iran, is looking for attacks in our homeland. And they won't fund Homeland Security.

Now, one of the things that I am a little concerned about is that this is kind of from the old Biden-Majority Leader SCHUMER playbook to defund the police and have open borders.

Now, what do I mean? We know that, during the Biden administration, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—many of them—and certainly the Biden administration, they had as policies: We are going to defund law enforcement, and we are going to have open borders.