

but there is nothing President Trump can do to stop the enhanced background checks or the ability of prosecutors to go after gun traffickers or the denial of weapons purchases to individuals convicted of domestic violence.

And so I don't want you to hear me say that the President is unwinding all of our progress. He is unwinding some of our progress—our bipartisan progress—but much of the statute can't be unwound.

And so I just want to give us a little pat on the back because 4 years ago, after the awful shooting in Uvalde, four Senators got together—supported by another bigger ring of bipartisan Senators—and we were able to come up with a bill that was not perfect, was not everything that I wanted or that many other Democratic Senators wanted, but it was progress.

And we have seen the impact of that bill: literally extraordinary declines in mass shootings and homicides, all happening, not coincidentally, as soon as we passed that bill.

The gun lobby has a habit of arguing that the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. The gun lobby says the answer to gun violence is more guns. Well, we proved that if you pass legislation that just makes it a little bit harder for the wrong people to get their hands on weapons—people who have serious criminal convictions, people who are mentally ill—you make it a little bit easier for prosecutors to go after the gun traffickers, you give a little bit more resources to the people who do anti-gun violence work in our communities, that you can make a big difference.

I live in one of these traditionally high-gun-violence-rate neighborhoods. I live just south of downtown in Hartford, and my home is on the route to the primary critical care hospital in the south end of Hartford—Hartford Hospital. And I will just say: There are far fewer ambulances passing my house with victims of gunshot wounds. In fact, it is an extraordinary reduction.

In 2020, I think the year that I bought that house, there were 223 shootings—223 gun violence victims being rushed to Hartford Hospital or Saint Francis Hospital. In 2025, there were 89. So I know we are often consumed with the bad news here, but that is really good news. That is really good news. And it is evidence of the fact that this place is not fundamentally broken. There are these moments when Republicans and Democrats can come together and pass laws that save lives—4 years since the passage and signature of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, something that this Senate should be proud of.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

IRAN

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, Donald Trump's Operation Epic Fury has become "Operation Epic Failure." He

started a war of choice. It turned out, Iran had a lot more leverage than he ever anticipated.

The President thought that superior weapons, a huge number of bombs would give, well, the opportunity for America to conduct a war in which Iran would unconditionally surrender. The President expected that in short order.

But not all unfolds accordingly because Iran had an ace up its sleeve: It had the ability to stop traffic on the Strait of Hormuz. And if the President had listened to any expert, they would have said: You are totally underestimating the leverage and power Iran has over the world economy.

But he didn't listen. So like a dog that got skunked, he has slunk away humiliated—"Operation Trump Humiliation"—and the American people and the world are paying the price.

I am relieved that the bombs have stopped falling, but Trump's disastrous deal has left everyone so much worse off.

The American military: a huge number of munitions expended, 13 service-members killed, hundreds wounded.

The U.S. Treasury: depleted by some \$50 billion to \$80 billion.

American families are paying a much higher price for gas and now facing year-over-year inflation of 4.2 percent because of Trump's war.

American farmers are paying so much more for fertilizer, paying so much more for diesel; bad for the farmers for sure, but that is going to mean higher grocery costs for the American family.

And in international affairs, Russia has been enriched, the Iranian hard-liners have been strengthened; the reformers in Iran have been undermined; our alliances have been deeply, carelessly damaged. Now, of course, Iranian civilians have paid the price with thousands dead and far more injured.

And Iran's highly enriched uranium? Still in exactly the same place it was before his war started.

Now, Trump has signed a 14-point framework, and it has some troubling elements. Donald Trump calls himself "Deal-maker-in-Chief," so let's look at the deal that he has struck.

What does Iran get? Access to \$24 billion in unfrozen funds, waivers that allow Iran to sell its oil at the world price, a commitment by the United States to organize a \$300 billion plan like a Marshall Plan to rebuild Iran, and a stipulation that after 60 days, Iran can work with Oman and work out fees for vessels traveling through the Strait of Hormuz.

Let's compare that to the JCPOA that President Obama negotiated. And for more than a decade, I have listened to colleagues across the aisle say President Obama did a side deal that returned \$500 million to Iran in frozen funds and interest on that \$500 million; that we had had it so long, it had stacked up to \$700 million.

All right. We are talking about less than \$2 billion. Here is Trump: \$24 bil-

lion in unfrozen funds, \$300 billion in redevelopment, waivers for your oil, and the ability to charge fees in the Strait of Hormuz—not even vaguely comparable.

And those elements, those are not an exchange for a final nuclear deal. They are an advance of one, undermining America's leverage to get a nuclear deal done. And Trump calls himself a dealmaker, giving away all the leverage up front.

And what else does Iran get? No restrictions on cruise missiles or drones; no restrictions on ballistic missiles; no restrictions on funding proxy groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen. Wow. Those are all important elements.

But the deal does deliver two things: America lifts its blockade of the Iranian ports, and Iran lifts its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. But those were the conditions before the war started. So the one positive thing it delivers was already in place before there was a war. So no improvement because of the war.

President Trump has recklessly squandered American lives and treasure. He has recklessly weakened America's standing in the world. He has recklessly raised costs for American families here at home.

This is absolutely the embodiment of why the Founders gave the question of war, not to the President, but to Congress. It is why we have to stand up for the constitutional vision that we swore an oath to when we became U.S. Senators.

Is there any Senator here who didn't swear that oath to the Constitution? Is there any Senator here who hasn't read the Constitution and read that the question of war was assigned to Congress, not the President?

Here is how Madison described it. He said: The Constitution supposes, what the history of all governments demonstrates, that it is the Executive most interested and most prone to war. The Constitution has accordingly, with studied care, vested the question of war in the legislative branch.

Does anyone need a clearer explanation than that, under our Constitution, a President cannot take us to war and that there was very careful reasoning that went into making that decision: because Executives are too prone to go to war, and no one person should be able to put the lives and treasure of America at risk.

That isn't to say Congress always gets it right. This Chamber and the House Chamber, they had a debate over the authorization to go to war in Afghanistan. These two Chambers, they had a debate over going to war in Iraq. I believe they got it wrong on both occasions. But there was an opportunity to seek information, to compare ideas, to wrestle with the prospect—an appropriate debate on such a monumental question.

Now, this Chamber and the House Chamber have started to exercise their

responsibility to the Constitution. Because if we turn the clock back, in the wake of Vietnam, when there was no authorization, Congress passed the War Powers Act, and the War Powers Act attempted to create a framework so that we would know how to exercise the debate for the question of war. And it said the President—unless our interests are attacked—cannot go to war unless there is authorization from both Chambers. Pretty clear. It also said the President, if we were attacked, could go to war for no more than 60 days without getting authorization from this Chamber.

Now, in this case, America had not been threatened in the fashion envisioned in the War Powers Act, but the President went to war anyway. So in that case we shouldn't have been under the 60 days. But many of my colleagues in the majority thought that applied, and so we voted time and time and time again. And time and time again my colleagues failed to honor the Constitution and say to the President: Stop and get an authorization because that is what the Constitution says.

But then the House held a vote, and the House voted to actually pass a War Powers Resolution. And it automatically came over here, and it automatically came up on the floor. And we passed it this week 50 to 48. We adopted it. And that concurrent resolution—this one right here—this says: Mr. President, stop military hostilities unless you get authorization from Congress.

Here is the exact wording:

Congress directs the President to remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

And at the close of it, it notes that action can only occur if it is "explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or a specific congressional authorization for use of military force against Iran."

So, Mr. President—and I am speaking Mr. President of the United States of America—Congress has spoken, exercising its power under the Constitution. You cannot restart hostilities against Iran unless you get an authorization.

You know, in 2015, many mocked the JCPOA. They said war is the only way to stop Iran from developing a nuclear bomb. But now here we are at this moment, and it turns out that we had the war and that diplomacy is the only way to actually stop Iran from getting a nuclear bomb.

And that JCPOA, it restricted Iran's nuclear stockpile to 300 kilograms—that is 300 kilograms of uranium—and prohibited uranium enrichment above 3.67 percent. That is a very low level, way lower than bomb level. It shipped their more highly enriched uranium out of Iran to be under the care and supervision of another country. It dismantled and removed the bulk of their centrifuges. It created vigorous—vigorous—verification by international inspectors.

There were a lot of details that were worked out to ensure that there was no path to a nuclear bomb. And, in fact, it required them to dismantle their plutonium reactor in Iran called the Arak reactor. It took 2 years to negotiate.

And our Republican colleagues cheered when Donald Trump tore up that extensive, detailed agreement blocking the path to a nuclear weapon. They cheered when President Trump tore it up.

Well, I don't hear any cheering now, when it turns out this war of choice has hurt everyone, in every possible way. More than 100 days of war, and Iran still has their enriched uranium. And because Donald Trump tore up the JCPOA, they now have 1,000 pounds of more highly enriched uranium, enriched to 60 percent, enough for 10 nuclear weapons, because Donald Trump tore up the agreement that blocked that from happening.

In return for ending the war, Iran has agreed to just 60 days of negotiating in which they will talk about maybe returning to some of the framework of the JCPOA. Pretty humiliating for Donald Trump.

But humiliation is not the question. I hope the President and his team will be successful in the negotiation to restore the many elements that blocked the path to a nuclear weapon. That is in the interest of all of us. I have little hope, however, that they will reach that agreement in 2 months, in 60 days.

So here is my crystal ball, JEFF's crystal ball: No detailed agreement on Iran nuclear material will be signed by mid-August when the 60 days expire. I hope I am wrong.

It is also the case that we have a law that says any nuclear deal must be submitted to Congress. So let's make sure that law is followed.

We have seen the costs in blood and treasure when a President goes it alone. We have been reminded of the wisdom of our Founders, who said the President is not allowed, constitutionally, to go it alone. We can't afford to have that happen again. And yesterday, finally, Congress passed a bill—a resolution to rein in Trump's war. Do you know that that is the first time that we have actually done that since the 1973 War Powers Act was signed—the first time that both Chambers approved a concurrent resolution directing the President to end a military conflict? It is a powerful condemnation of President Trump's war of choice.

I will tell you, I am concerned not just about how the negotiations will go, because I know how complicated they will be from how complicated they were when President Obama undertook those negotiations. Again, I hope they are successful, but I will tell you, I am worried that they won't be. And I am worried that an angry and a humiliated Donald Trump, who has slunk away from the war like a stuck dog, is going to try to distract from all of this—distract by trying to rig the November election.

In fact, today, he was here to talk to Senators of his party about how to rig the November election, that he wants his SAVE Act passed that stops American citizens from voting that he doesn't want to vote. He doesn't want college students to vote. He doesn't want Tribal members to vote. He doesn't want women to vote. He doesn't want people living in cities to vote. And he has crafted a bill to make it very hard for those people to vote because he wants to rig the election.

And I am also worried that he will create another international incident, perhaps with an attack or further action regarding Cuba, because when Trump makes one mess, he starts a new mess in order to distract from the previous mess.

Donald Trump's Operation Epic Fury has become "Operation Epic Failure," devastating for the United States of America, and all Americans should be furious at this abuse of the Constitution and all the harm that has come from it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, for every American who is wondering what on Earth the war in Iran over the past 3½ months was for, the answer is relatively simple: next to nothing.

Thirteen American servicemembers are dead. Thousands of Iranians have been killed. We spent tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer money. Gas shot up to \$5.70 in Hawaii. Grocery bills and energy bills spiked everywhere. We depleted our stockpiles of critical weapons systems. We alienated even our closest allies, who understandably wanted nothing to do with this regime-change war of choice.

And what was it all for? What did we get out of it?

Well, if you take one look at the memorandum of understanding that Donald Trump signed last week, what is plainly obvious is that not only was this war reckless and illegal and unnecessary, but it also didn't get us anything. It has made a lot of things worse.

We don't have a nuclear agreement yet, only a framework to try to reach something close to the original Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

So to be clear, pre-Trump, we had a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We had the ability for the IAEA to go into Iran and do intrusive inspections. We had the plan to dispose of the fissile material in a third-party country and to be able to verify it.

And now, what we have is an MOU to negotiate. And if we are very fortunate, if things break absolutely in every correct direction, we will get back to where we were 12 years ago.

The same regime is still in place, but now it is younger and more radical, and they have demonstrated that they have substantial leverage in the Strait of Hormuz. The opposition in Iran is weaker.

One of the hopes of this regime-change war was that they were going

to see the destruction coming from the American and Israeli military, and it would rally the opposition, and the Ayatollahs would collapse and give up, and there would be a regime change and a new era in Iran.

It has gotten worse. They are younger and more radical, and they have more leverage.

Now, I want to be really clear here. The mistake is not ending the war; it was starting it in the first place. Every day this war went on only compounded that catastrophe, and so we ought to be relieved that it may be over and that diplomacy is being given another chance, because it is the only viable path forward.

But none of that obviates the fact that we are suing for peace because it is the least bad option; that a diplomatic solution was within reach all along, before a single bomb was dropped; that after several months of a deadly and costly war, things are worse, not better.

On February 27, the day before the war started, the Strait of Hormuz was open. Oil and other commodities like fertilizers flowed freely to all of the places around the world. Now, under the MOU, the strait is open again but only for 60 days, after which Iran is reserving the right to charge a fee for ships to pass.

Do you understand how unprecedented it is in terms of international law, in terms of international commerce, in terms of the way this planet works with the freedom of navigation, that one belligerent country now gets to charge a fee if you want to move something through international waters?

That is not a “w.” That is not good for this country or regional stability.

Under the original Iran agreement that President Obama signed and Trump later ripped up, Iran promised not to develop a nuclear weapon. It was right there on the first page of the JCPOA. And what it meant was that Iran would not produce the kind of highly enriched uranium that could be used in a nuclear weapon.

They have renewed that commitment in the MOU, except for a much higher price this time.

Under the JCPOA—and I remember. I was on the floor. I was a baby Senator here, and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle said: Oh, my God, you are unfreezing Iranian-sanctioned money, assets to the tune of many billions of dollars.

Can you believe how much money we are giving to Iran in exchange for this pause in the development of their nuclear program? Can you believe that you are giving money to Iran? Look at how belligerent they are in the region.

That was the argument. OK, I thought it was worth it because it was basically buying us 15 years of them not being capable to develop a nuclear weapon.

But under this—and, by the way, not in exchange for a nuclear agreement, in

exchange for reopening the Strait of Hormuz for 60 days.

So I want you to understand, what they are getting is enormous, but it is also not even for a nuclear agreement. It is for an agreement to stop choking the global economy, not only where their assets will be unfrozen, but they will be able to sell their oil freely on the open market for the first time in 30 years.

That is not some \$1.7 billion concession. That is not some \$10 billion concession. That changes generations of bipartisan policy against the Iranian regime.

One of the reasons that they were not even more belligerent, even more powerful was that we were heavily sanctioning their oil. And we are lifting it in exchange for not a nuclear agreement but just for them to take their boot off the necks of the global economy.

And so, I reiterate this point: Keep two thoughts in your head. First of all, the main error was in starting this stupid regime-change war in the first place, and that you don't have to be some member of the Foreign Relations Committee or some fancy foreign policy expert or some professor at some school that studies the Middle East to say: Hey, you know what, these same dudes keep asking for a new regime-change war in the Middle East about every decade. They usually get it, and it always fails. And they did it again, and it failed again.

And that is a different thing from me demanding that they continue this idiocy. I am not demanding that they continue this idiocy. I am glad that they are finally folding.

But make no mistake. They are folding, and they are folding because they played a terrible hand, as terribly as you could possibly play it.

And so, all I am asking—if you are an Iran hawk, if you are a dove, if you are anywhere in between—is let's have a logical foreign policy. Let's understand that Iran is a belligerent country—they are not our allies—and that almost every single time—not every time, but almost every single time—kinetic engagement without any kind of strategy doesn't work. It always backfires.

And, by the way, that is, generally speaking, true. It is, extraordinarily, predictably true in the Middle East.

And I want to make one final point: It is the same people every time. It is the same foreign policy think tanks. It is the same people in the media. It is the same nonprofits. It is the same Members of Congress.

They just look around the planet for a place to remake with force. And there may be a couple of examples in human history where you can remake a place with force, but usually it backfires spectacularly.

And it did here again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Colorado.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, as a former English major, one of the great tales in Greek mythology was the legend of King Midas.

As the story goes, Midas was granted a wish. He wished that everything he touched would turn to gold.

At first, it seemed like a blessing. Twigs became gold. Stones became gold.

Midas thought he had found true wealth. But he soon realized it wasn't much of a blessing. It was more of a curse.

Midas' food turned to gold. His water turned to gold. And, eventually, even his daughter turned to gold.

The lesson is simple: A man who mistakes gold for greatness will end up with neither.

President Trump never learned that lesson, and he corrupts pretty much whatever he touches.

Take his gold-plated ballroom. The President promised it wouldn't cost taxpayers a nickel, but those promises turned out to be fool's gold.

The cost has skyrocketed and President Trump now wants to spend \$300 million of your taxpayer money to pay for it. He is not building affordable housing in Denver, Durango; he is building a ballroom for himself and his rich friends to enjoy.

President Trump promised to drain the swamp; instead he has turned the Reflecting Pool into an algae-infested bird killer. The administration awarded a no-bid contract for this project to President Trump's neighbor, one of his donors. The renovation was supposed to cost \$1.5 million. It is now estimated at \$16 million, and the job still isn't done.

President Trump isn't working to extend the Affordable Care Act subsidies or reverse the Medicaid cuts that will kick 240,000 Coloradans off of their healthcare. His Reflecting Pool got a makeover while our insurance pool was gutted.

Now President Trump wants to build an enormous arch near Arlington Cemetery. While planning this project, he unilaterally, on his own volition, went to war with Iran, promising immediate victory, total and complete.

What he has delivered is one of the great failures in our Nation's history. He made America less safe and less secure.

He made America's economy weaker, and 14 American servicemembers lost their lives. When asked about the tragic casualties, President Trump said:

[T]here will likely be more before it ends. That's the way it is.

That's the way it is.

Our heroes deserve a Commander in Chief who looks out for them, not a