

And it is at that moment that we journeyed back from the House of Representatives here, and those beautiful wooden boxes with straps and buckles were replaced on the table here before the dais of the Senate. And then as we were in that moment of preparing to debate whether or not we would agree or disagree with the acceptance of the slate of electors from Arizona, that is when all hell broke loose. That is when rioters stormed the Senate steps, beat up the police officers, pushed through, and came into the Capitol seeking to stop the peaceful transfer of power, a moment none of us ever expected to witness in our lifetime.

In the course of that riot, more than 170 police officers were injured, and as a consequence of that day, five police officers died.

I would never believe it if I was reading a book, a novel, a fiction story about the Senate that rioters would storm the Capitol. I would never believe that this Chamber would be taken over by those rioters, that their fierce assault with flag poles and fire extinguishers and all sorts of handcrafted weapons would result in the death of a group of officers and more than 170 being injured. But it happened.

The end of that day was a good story because we returned to this Chamber, and we re-paraded over to the House and continued the counting and proceeded to establish who would be the next President of the United States of America.

But it feels particularly important today to honor those who defended this Capitol. It was certainly not within their frame of reference the degree to which that riot would be ginned up. Ginned up are the words of our then-sitting, outgoing President, President Trump, who wanted to interrupt the counting of the ballots, so he could continue to be President, break this chain of peaceful transition that had existed for 200-plus years.

It really was not within the frame of reference of any of us; it was outside the box of what we considered possible, what happened this evening 5 years ago. This is why earlier today, I was shocked to read that the plaque that we had passed a law to commemorate the service of the officers, that that plaque had been cast in bronze, but never actually displayed as required by the law that we adopted in 2022.

Here we are on the 5-year anniversary, and we have never put up this plaque. I have the plaque right here. It is incredibly elegant, a picture of the Capitol, and it says:

“On behalf of a grateful Congress, this plaque honors the extraordinary individuals who bravely protected and defended this symbol”—

The Capitol.

“this symbol of democracy on January 6, 2021. Their heroism will never be forgotten.”

And yet this plaque is forgotten—stuffed into a room, out of sight, never mounted.

How can that possibly be the case? We passed a law that this would be dis-

played. So, well, this is the night to fix that. This is the night to come, draft a simple resolution, and say: We here in the Senate, Democrats and Republicans together, want to see this plaque up on a wall.

Our leadership on both sides has already agreed to put up the plaque, but to do so in the course as required by the 2022 law requires some agreement from down the hall in the House of Representatives that, for whatever reason, hasn't been secured. But we can at least get it placed up here on the second floor of the Senate, the floor where we sat 5 years ago, the floor where the House sat 5 years ago. The Chambers are on this floor where we had the ballots from the States across the country that contained the electoral college slates.

So I drafted a resolution, and I wanted to be able to get unanimous consent tonight, but I also want it to be bipartisan. And it turns out that sometimes the gears here move more slowly, even on simple tasks, than one would like. But instead of asking for unanimous consent on this resolution tonight, instead, I am going to work with a colleague across the aisle, a colleague, a Republican from North Carolina, THOM TILLIS, who came here earlier today with the same sentiment in his heart that I have in my heart that this plaque needs to be up, needs to be up in the hallway here on the second floor.

And pending resolution of agreement with the House on where it should be, we can put it up here.

So I will read you the resolution, and here it is:

Directing the Architect of the Capitol to prominently display in a publicly accessible location on the second floor of the Senate wing of the United States Capitol, a plaque honoring the members of law enforcement responding on January 6, 2021, until the plaque can be placed in its permanent location; whereas, the United States owes its deepest gratitude to these officers of the United States Capitol Police and the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia, as well as officers from other Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies and protective entities who valiantly protected the United States Capitol, Members of Congress, and staff on January 6, 2021; whereas, section 214 of division 1 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 directed that a plaque be placed on the western front of the United States Capitol to honor the extraordinary individuals who bravely protected and defended this symbol of democracy, the United States Capitol, on January 6, 2021; and whereas their heroism should never be forgotten, now therefore be it resolved that the Architect of the Capitol shall prominently display the plaque authorized by section 214 of division 1 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 in a publicly accessible location on the second floor of the Senate wing of the United States Capitol until such time as the plaque can be placed at a permanent location on the western front of the United States Capitol.

So my colleague from North Carolina Senator TILLIS and I are carrying this sentiment in our heart; that here on the fifth anniversary, in which so many officers sacrificed so much, sustaining

injuries, five sustaining death as a result of what transpired here, this plaque needs to go up, and it needs to go up this week.

But tonight, I am not asking unanimous consent because I want colleagues on both sides of the aisle to be able to do what is appropriate in the U.S. Senate, to be familiar with this, so that they can willingly—and, hopefully, enthusiastically—agree that this will be done.

Let not this representation of our appreciation of the sacrifice of the Capitol Police and other police departments—Federal, State, and local—that came to the defense of this Capitol, let this symbol of our appreciation not sit, stuffed into a back room, but be prominently displayed here on the second floor of the Senate wing of the Capitol because their heroism must never be forgotten.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

#### VENEZUELA

Mr. KAINES. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the invasion of Venezuela that the U.S. military carried out last weekend, which will be the subject of a War Powers Resolution vote on Thursday morning.

The news that President Trump had ordered an invasion of Venezuela on Saturday to capture Nicolas Maduro was a shock but not a surprise. Beginning with unauthorized military strikes against unknown persons on boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific starting in early September and continuing through the massing of U.S. military assets in the region over the past several months, the likelihood of this happening one day has been obvious to most observers.

In November, I forced a vote on a privileged and bipartisan War Powers Resolution to explicitly prohibit the use of the U.S. military to strike Venezuela without congressional approval. The administration, in my view, has not provided any clear rationale for the military pressure campaign, much less any legal rationale or request for congressional authorization for military action against this sovereign nation.

At that point, all Democrats supported my resolution, and two Republicans did so as well. But there were insufficient votes to pass it.

Many of my colleagues who voted against the resolution at that time told me that they did so because they viewed that President Trump was bluffing, and so they voted no for that reason.

In the aftermath of the invasion with the administration claiming it has the right to seize Venezuelan oil and “run Venezuela” under the supervision of the U.S. Secretaries of Defense and State, and with the President threatening to put boots on the ground and even conduct additional strikes to control the country, we can now agree this was no bluff.

After the administration actions over the weekend, which resulted in several injuries to U.S. servicemembers, and we are praying for them and their families for their recovery, Congress needs to tell the American public where it stands. And so on Thursday morning, I will, again, ask my colleagues to vote on a resolution specifying that we shouldn't wage military action within or against Venezuela unless Congress votes to authorize it.

We will have to vote later this week, and there will be a floor block of an hour tomorrow where a number of Senators are scheduled to speak briefly. But I wanted, for personal reasons, to speak at some length tonight about why this is such an important vote for the Senate, for the United States, and for the world.

Speaking as the lead Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee's Western Hemisphere Panel, before the Presiding Officer, who is the chairman of that panel, I know far too well the despotic nature of the Maduro rule in Venezuela, following a similarly despotic rule by Hugo Chavez. I have condemned the Maduro rule for years. I have visited the Venezuelan border in Cucuta, Colombia, and interviewed people exiting the country, from children to senior citizens leaving behind everything they have known because of this despotism.

And together with all of my colleagues in the Senate, I have advocated forcefully for a democratic transition for the electoral malfeasance of the last election where Maduro claimed victory when that was clearly not the case, and I have supported the Nobel Prize winner Maria Corina Machado's efforts, with others, to bring democracy to Venezuela.

So this discussion, this invasion, this vote is not about whether Maduro is a bad guy. He is. But here is the thing: I also speak as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, as a military dad, and as a former missionary in Latin America. The use or misuse of American troops is very personal to me, and the role that the United States plays in Latin America has been a lifelong field of both study and lived experience.

Mr. President, I know you served as a missionary in Taiwan.

I was a 21-year-old first-year student at Harvard Law School when I decided I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and that I needed to take a year away from my studies to figure it out. So I wrote a letter to Jesuit missionaries working in Honduras that had a connection to the high school I attended in Kansas City, and I offered to take a year off school and come volunteer with them.

That is how I found myself in El Progreso, Honduras, in the intense heat in early September of 1980, more than 45 years ago. And during that academic year, I ran a small technical school, teaching teenage boys carpentry and welding. I was a Harvard

Law student, but that meant nothing there. But being the son of an iron-worker who ran a welding shop, now that was a vocation that the Jesuit missionaries could put to use during my time in Honduras.

I will say that year, from September of 1980 until, essentially, May 1981, was the pivotal year in my life. It put me on a path to serve others. As a civil rights lawyer in Richmond, VA—the capital of the Confederacy—for 18 years and as an elected official for 30 years and counting that year in Honduras, that formation year, that fortified my Catholic faith. It forged my fluency in Spanish. It taught me so many lessons about myself, my country, and the circumstances under which so many people live around this world in settings far less comfortable than what I had been used to growing up. I have drawn on those lessons from that time in Honduras every day for the last 45 years.

The families and students that I worked with showed me how to live with grace under the most challenging conditions. And the Jesuit missionaries—Brother Jaime, Father Patricio, Father Ramon, and others—showed me how serving other people is the path to happiness. I can never repay—never repay—the good they did for me, both my students and their families and these missionaries. But my life has been an attempt to do so ever since.

Now, the lessons of my time in Honduras were not all pleasant. When I was there, Honduras was a military dictatorship, and it was also one of the poorest countries in the Americas, second poorest next to Haiti. People prayed—prayed—for the day when they might have the ability to choose their own leaders, and they also hoped that they might have a future with a path out of the grinding poverty that surrounded them.

But I learned, as a naive 21-year-old, much to my sorrow, of the many instances in which misery throughout the region was spread by actions—sometimes unintentional but sometimes intentional—of the United States.

When I was in Honduras, the military dictatorship there suppressed political opposition and dissent, and it was supported by the United States in doing so. A long history of U.S. intervention in Honduras to protect the interests of two American fruit companies has left a legacy of corruption and underdevelopment whose consequences are still felt today, 45 years later.

Toward the end of my year in Honduras, the United States began secretly funding a band of rebels in the southern part of the country to wage destabilizing military action against the Government of neighboring Nicaragua, which had been ruled for decades by the U.S.-backed Somoza family dictatorship until it was overthrown in 1979.

Another neighbor just dozens of miles away, maybe 50 miles away—El Salvador—was in the midst of a dev-

astating civil war in which a rightwing government used U.S.-trained military and security personnel to murder civilians, including Catholic bishop Oscar Romero, a few months before I arrived, and four American missionaries—Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan—a few months after I arrived. The civil war in El Salvador led to more than 65,000 civilian deaths.

Yet another neighbor not that far away, Guatemala, had a similar long-standing civil war sadly initiated after the United States engineered the overthrow of a popularly elected government in 1954. That war lasted for nearly 40 years, with as many as 200,000 deaths and nearly a million refugees chased from their homes by the civil war.

The Presiding Officer can think about his time as a young person as a missionary, and he can imagine. This was shocking to me. I had just gone to Honduras to teach carpentry and welding, but the conflicts I described were at my doorstep, with refugees from violence in neighboring countries flooding into Honduras and the murders of bishops, priests, and nuns spreading fear among the Catholic missionaries whom I worked with. And I was confronted with this very painful question: Why was the United States—my country, a nation that I loved—backing military dictatorships and death squads and the plotting of the overthrows of democratically elected governments at the expense of poor people who were just struggling so hard to feed their families?

I came home from that experience a changed person—fortified in my faith life, energized to serve others with my life, but also deeply concerned about the role that the United States was playing in Latin America. This part of our history—the part that I have given, the Reader's Digest version here in the last few minutes—isn't taught a lot at home because we have some reason to be ashamed of it, but it is remembered very clearly and very well throughout Latin America. They view a U.S. military invasion of a sovereign nation today to seize its oil as a sinister repeat of decades, generations, and even centuries of a painful past.

The Trump administration released a National Security Strategy in early December—barely more than a month ago—and it announced a clear plan for the Americas. I am going to quote from it:

After years of neglect, the United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region.

The strategy prioritizes the Western Hemisphere first among all regions of the world, and I am going to get to a complement of that toward the end of my comments.

But let's talk about the Monroe Doctrine because that is not so well-known, and when the President and his

team say that we want to reassert the Monroe Doctrine, it is really important to discuss what that is.

The Monroe Doctrine goes all the way back to the 1820s. In that doctrine, Virginian President James Monroe and his Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, declared the Americas were now off-limits to European colonization or interference. Remember, most nations in the Americas had had a pre-history after their indigenous history of European colonization. So the Monroe Doctrine was like, you know, a “No Trespassing” sign or a “Do Not Disturb” sign, where America said the Americas would now be off-limits to European colonization or interference.

While it was a foreign policy doctrine about the Americas, it wasn't fundamentally about building good relationships with nations in the Americas. Rather, it was about keeping Europe away. Initially, Latin American nations appreciated it. They appreciated the United States clearly stating that European colonizers could no longer have free rein to continue the past practices that had used the Americas as a region for plunder or slavery. But over the years, after the initial declaration in the 1820s, Latin American leaders also came to see that the Monroe Doctrine had evolved to being more about American dominance than American partnership.

In the early 1900s, President Teddy Roosevelt expanded the doctrine to also assert the right of the United States to intervene in the domestic politics of all nations in the region. It was called the Roosevelt Corollary, and it declared that economic challenges in Venezuela threatened the nation's economy—the economy of Venezuela—thereby increasing the likelihood of its default on international debts.

How ironic that Venezuela thus became the first use of the Monroe Doctrine to justify U.S. intervention into another nation's domestic affairs rather than just, as it had been previously, a defensive doctrine to ward off European interference. The people of Venezuela know this history very, very well even if Americans have largely forgotten it. The reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine to now allow the U.S. intervention led to escalating U.S. military intervention in the region. Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic all were affected in the first half of the 20th century. During World War II, the United States invoked the Monroe Doctrine to occupy Greenland once Germany occupied Denmark.

In more recent years, under the Monroe Doctrine and its corollaries, President Eisenhower authorized U.S. assistance for the overthrow of a democratically elected Government in Guatemala and for a coup against the Government of Brazil. President Kennedy, as we know, authorized a U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba. President Johnson authorized U.S. troops to invade the Dominican Republic. President Nixon

authorized U.S. support to assist the toppling of the democratically elected Government of Chile. President Reagan secretly funded the Contra war against Nicaragua and also authorized an invasion of Grenada, and the first President Bush authorized the invasion of Panama.

You will notice that I mention both Democratic and Republican Presidents. The Monroe Doctrine was not the fault of one party or the other. It was an attitude of the United States that stretched for nearly 200 years that we had the right to interfere with and dominate the politics of nations in our region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a few decades of relative calm in the relations of the United States and its neighbors, and we turned our attention to the Global War on Terror. But now, after many years when the phrase “Monroe Doctrine,” I am sure, was not even mentioned once on the floor of the U.S. Senate, President Trump now pledges to revitalize the doctrine of American dominance in the hemisphere and go even further.

In his own words, “[T]he Monroe Doctrine is a big deal, but we've superseded it by a lot, by a real lot. They now call it the Donroe Doctrine.”

Now, I am not sure which marketing department came up with the name “Donroe Doctrine.” It sounds sort of comical, but it is anything but humorous to Latin American nations whose history books are filled with example after example of the United States using our military to interfere in their domestic politics.

And that brings us to President Trump's invasion of Venezuela to arrest and depose its de facto leader and seize its oil.

Again, Nicolas Maduro was an incompetent and barbaric dictator who stole the last election just less than 2 years ago, which he clearly lost by every internal and international count, and he has presided over the economic collapse of a nation that was recently one of the most prosperous countries in the entire region, but multiple things can be true.

It is also true that President Trump's haphazard initiation of a unilateral war against the country of Venezuela is, in my view, a mistake of historic proportions that will make our country and our region and our world less secure. I view this invasion in the same way that many warned about the U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam or in the initiation of the war in Iraq in terms of the potential negative consequences that it will likely deliver.

I hope to convince my colleagues, whether they believe the war is a good or a bad idea, to at least stand up and support the constitutional requirement that the United States shouldn't be waging a war without a vote of Congress.

I assert that the military action against Venezuela is illegal, is confusing in its true motives, is harmful

to U.S. interests in the region, is a dangerous precedent if when followed by our adversaries is unnecessarily and suspiciously secret, is a frightening return to forever wars, is unpopular, and, finally, is profoundly disrespectful to U.S. troops.

First, the war is illegal. As I have argued on the floor of this body since I came here in 2013 and as I have asserted face-to-face with Presidents of both parties, only Congress can declare war or, in the modern phrase contained in the 1973 War Powers Resolution, “authorize the use of military force in hostilities.” That legislation was passed in response to the abuses of President Nixon both initiating war without notice to Congress, and it builds off one of the clearest parts of the Constitution: Congress and only Congress initiates war, and once initiated, the President and only the President as Commander in Chief is charged with the duty to execute the declared war.

The text of the Constitution is so clear. The Constitution has some phrases that are superclear: that you have got to be 35 years old to be President. Then there are other phrases that are a little vague. What is “due process of law”? What is “cruel and unusual punishment”? So you can put the phrases of the Constitution on a spectrum between extremely clear and somewhat ambiguous to be determined under the standards of the time.

When it comes to warmaking, the Founders of this Nation were very, very clear, and the meaning of the Constitution is not just in the text of that document. It was additionally clarified by the notes taken during the debate at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, by the Federalist Papers that were written by those involved in drafting the Constitution, and in correspondence between the Founders who were there which described what they were trying to accomplish. Congress declares war. The President executes upon that declaration.

Now, the Presiding Officer knows that the narrow exception has already been understood. The President as Commander in Chief has the power and the duty to defend the Nation for ongoing or imminent attack without asking for prior congressional approval, but any war that is offensive in nature or that would be sustained beyond that initial point of self-defense needs congressional authorization.

This administration has advanced no credible legal basis, under either American or international law, to invade Venezuela, to depose its leadership, to seize its oil, to run its country. There is a legal analysis issued by the administration to justify military strikes against boats in international waters. The administration has been unwilling—in a very rare instance—has been unwilling to share that rationale publicly. And I know why because I have read it. It is laughably weak, and the administration knows this.

As evidence of the administration's own insecurity about its own legal rationale, in October, the U.S. military carried out a strike against a submersible in international waters, and there were two survivors. The U.S. having slaughtered struggling survivors in September made a different decision in October to rescue the two survivors.

Well, they were narcotraffickers, so we would bring them to court, right? No. After rescuing survivors, the U.S. military returned these alleged narcotraffickers to their own countries for release rather than prosecuting them. Why? Because the U.S. understood that the flimsy legal rationale allowing targeting these individuals would not stand up if scrutinized in an American court.

While I am not at liberty to share the many weaknesses of the classified legal opinion, it does not violate any rule of classification to say what is not in the opinion—what is not in that 40-page legal document. There is nothing whatsoever about the legal rationale in that document that would allow for military action against the sovereign nation of Venezuela or any sovereign nation.

Now, the assertion of the administration that this is not military action but merely a law enforcement operation doesn't pass the smell test, and it doesn't pass the laugh test. The coordinated military mission—massing of ships and aircraft, deployment of forces on land, dropping of bombs, and seizures of a country's main political leader—is the very definition of hostilities.

The Saturday operation alone involved more than 150 aircraft—fighters, bombers, surveillance platforms, drones, refueling tankers—launched from at least 20 air bases across the Western Hemisphere. The killing of untold Venezuelan civilian and military personnel—the number is 80 and climbing by the U.S. Armed Forces—is hostilities. American troops were wounded in this invasion. That is the essence of hostilities.

Deep concerns about the legality of this military operation are widespread not only in this Chamber, but in the Pentagon, where leaders have been forced into retirement for raising questions about the legality of these actions among the American public and among American allies, some of whom have stopped sharing intelligence with the United States in these operations because they do not believe they are lawful. Unless and until the invasion of Venezuela and the ongoing operation to seize its oil and run its government are authorized by Congress, it is illegal.

Second, the reason for this war is deeply confusing to the American public because of the mixed messages sent by the administration. If you listen to Secretary Rubio, it is about countering narcotrafficking. If you listen to other officials, it is about changing the Venezuelan regime. If you listen to Presi-

dent Trump, it is about seizing oil or carrying out a “Donroe Doctrine” that allows the U.S. military to smash and grab anything we want anywhere in the hemisphere.

Why can't the administration get its story straight? We know narcotrafficking is a horrible scourge responsible for massive deaths in the United States and elsewhere, but President Trump has shown, as I have earlier discussed on the floor of the Senate, by the pardons of narcotraffickers Ross Ulbricht and Juan Orlando Hernandez, that he cares little about narcotrafficking.

The charges handed down against Nicolas Maduro—if you read the charging document—are eerily similar—eerily similar—to the same charges that were successfully prosecuted beginning in Donald Trump's first term when the case initiated against Honduran former President Hernandez, using his position as a head of state to manage a massive operation smuggling narcotics into the United States. But President Trump recently pardoned Hernandez in a shocking move. That proves that fighting narcotrafficking is not the goal here.

The likely goal is President Trump's desire to seize control of Venezuela's oil reserves. That explains his admission that while he chose not to notify Congress of the invasion in advance, he did disclose his war intent to his friends at American oil and gas companies. This is a war for plunder to benefit campaign contributors, and that explains why the President did not want to seek congressional authorization for this invasion and occupation.

As the father of a marine, what American parent wants to send their son or daughter to war risking injury and death to seize the oil of another nation on behalf of billionaire oil companies?

Third, this attack endangers American influence in the region by pushing nations away from the United States and toward China. We have seen in recent years, in the Foreign Relations Committee and others, how China has ramped up investments in the Americas. They have taken advantage of our focus in the Middle East to expand their influence in our neighborhood.

Many of the Chinese investments are hollow—even predatory—and as I have dialogued with heads of state throughout the Americas, one thing they often say to me is: We would rather deal with you guys than China, but they are offering help, and you are usually nowhere to be found.

But faced with the choice between a Chinese offer of partnership of some doubtfulness and an American “Donroe Doctrine” that asserts dominance, no self-respecting sovereign nation will knuckle under and agree to be subservient. The United States has slashed USAID and other humanitarian and civil society programming in the region. We have imposed massive tariffs that hurt the American economy but also hurt the economies of our American neighbors.

And now, after slashing humanitarian programs and after imposing tariffs, we assert the right to invade at will to seize the assets of sovereign nations in the Americas. We will find ourselves—if we pursue this path—with less and less influence in the region closest to our shores, and our chief adversary is likely to grow stronger.

As evidence of this, the Chinese Government put out a Latin America strategy document just last month, focusing on how American overreach and dominance is opening up opportunities for China in the Americas. This invasion plays right into China's hands.

Another downside of the attack is this: Increased chaos and instability always leads to more migration. Attacking Venezuela and, as President Trump has suggested, other nations in the region is likely to lead to even more desperate people crossing borders to immigrate, including to the United States. This has happened throughout history and will only continue and accelerate if the United States continues to carry out these military operations.

Fourth, the invasion of Venezuela by American troops to topple its leadership and seize its oil sets a dangerous precedent in the world that will be used by power-hungry dictators who are adversaries of the United States. If the U.S. can invade Venezuela, what is wrong with Russia invading Ukraine? What is wrong with China invading Taiwan? If the U.S. gets to dominate the Western Hemisphere, what is wrong with Iran trying to dominate Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen? If we can interfere to destabilize Venezuela's leadership, is it acceptable for foreign nations to interfere without consequence in American domestic politics?

The entire international legal order that the U.S. has led in the construction since World War II has been based on respect for the sovereignty of nations and the objection of those who would violate that principle. That respect has worked wonders for the U.S. economy and our national security, and it has also helped advance our interests across the world. The United States—as I have indicated—we have not been perfect in upholding the principle—and others certainly haven't either—but the principle is worth upholding.

The U.S. plays a leadership role for good or bad by our actions. There is no nation whose leadership example is as closely watched and followed as the U.S. example. The invasion of Venezuela under these circumstances has given a green light to more invasions by others in a way that is bad for the world and will harm U.S. interests as well.

Fifth, the invasion of Venezuela and the boat strikes preceding it have been suspiciously secret, with critical details shielded by public scrutiny by either Congress or the American public. The first boat strike occurred on September 2. So we are now more than 4

months into this operation, close to 200 people have been killed in dozens of strikes on open waters and the Venezuelan invasion.

American troops have been injured. The administration has removed the head of state, intends to seize its oil assets, proclaim that we will run Venezuela for an indeterminate future, weighed in on who should and shouldn't be entrusted with leading the Venezuelan Government. And yet there has not been a single public hearing—not been a single public hearing—in the House or Senate about this major military campaign. This is shocking. The administration has only been willing to offer limited information on occasion to Members in classified settings. It has offered next to nothing to the American people.

Because I can review material in classified settings, I know that the legal rationale for the boat strikes is deeply inadequate and flawed. But I can't fully explain why, even to Virginians whose kids are deployed in this military operation, because the rationale is only available to a limited number of Members in a classified setting.

I have had sessions in the SCIF about the targeting criteria for who gets bombed in international waters. And I would say that those criteria contain at least one critical flaw that I believe would be shocking to the American public, but I can't describe it because I only know about it from review of classified material.

The United States, at the President's say-so, has declared war against a number of groups. I can't say what the number is, and I can't say who the groups are because that has never been made public and it has only been made available in classified settings.

That is pretty important because, when the U.S. declares war publicly against an enemy, those connected to ISIS or al-Qaida are on notice that if they act with those groups, the U.S. has put a military target on them.

But if we declare war against a secret list of organizations whose identity can only be known by a tiny handful of people who have privileges to visit a classified facility in the U.S. Capitol, then many people are carrying out activities in their lives without knowing—with any knowledge—that the U.S. has put a target on them and rendered them eligible for attack.

The Presiding Officer may have seen this as well. I have seen the video of America striking shipwrecked sailors on September 2, who didn't even know that President Trump had placed them on a secret list to be targeted. But I can't fully describe it because the administration, while proudly and immediately displaying the video of the first strike on that boat, the strike that destroyed their ship, chose to hide the fact of that second strike and hide the video of the murder of those two shipwrecked sailors, even from Congress, and from the American public for nearly 2 months and continues to hide that

shocking evidence from public scrutiny, which raises the question: If the administration believes this cause is so righteous, is so legal, is so necessary, is so in the national interest, what is it afraid of?

Put the facts before Congress and the American public in a public setting where they can be subjected to the questions that should precede U.S. involvement in a military campaign of this kind.

And if my colleagues in this body believe these actions are justified, well, what are they afraid of? Why haven't the Armed Services or Foreign Relations or Intelligence committees in either House, under the Republican leadership of those committees, called for even a single public hearing on this important matter?

They have been repeatedly asked to do so. They have been repeatedly urged to do so and have, thus far, resisted.

But America and Americans shouldn't tolerate a war waged in the dark in which oil executives get better notice of our military actions than Members of Congress or everyday Americans.

Sixth, the invasion of Venezuela represents a dangerous slide to the kind of forever wars, or permanent war footing, that this President specifically campaigned against. In the first year of his second term in office, President Trump has carried out unilateral and unauthorized military hostilities against or within Iran, Nigeria, Venezuela, and boats in international waters.

And the Venezuela invasion comes with a pledge to occupy the country, seize its oil, for some indeterminate future. But that is not all. The President has also strongly suggested the possibility of using the American military against other nations: Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Greenland, and our NATO ally Denmark. Where does this end? If this President, or any President, can wage war on multiple continents in secret and without congressional notice, consultation, debate, or vote, we will have transformed the United States from the world's chief diplomat—an important position that we achieved when President Teddy Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize for brokering the end of the Russo-Japanese War.

Since that time, the United States has been viewed as the chief diplomatic nation in the world. But if we can now wage war on Presidential say-so in secret, without congressional authorization, anywhere in the world, we will have transformed the United States from the world's chief diplomat into the world's chief bully. Is that what the American people want?

Seventh, the invasion of Venezuela without congressional authorization is deeply unpopular in Virginia and the Nation. Polling suggests that even after the exemplary performance of American troops, 63 percent of Americans do not believe the United States

should have invaded Venezuela without congressional approval.

I have had conversations around Virginia, a very pro-military State, about this very topic, and in those conversations what I have noticed is this: The opposition to war in Venezuela without congressional authorization is not about article I versus article II powers; it is not about a constitutional abstraction or theory of government; it is about an instinctive wisdom among the American people that says war should be a last resort, and it shouldn't be entered into upon the say-so of one person—it is too big a decision for one person—but instead should only proceed after careful deliberation by a President and by the people's elected Congress.

And let's be clear, the American people are not asking for more wars right now. They are telling us that housing costs too much, that food costs too much, that healthcare costs too much, that childcare costs too much, that energy costs too much. They want us to fix the American economy, stop the tariffs and the chaos, make everyday life better for them.

This endless foreign adventurism, which was precisely what President Trump campaigned against, is very likely helping his own pockets and helping out oil companies and cronies and donors, but it is doing nothing for everyday folks. Instead, they are seeing higher costs, fewer jobs, slower growth, and a distracted President focused on air strikes and ballrooms.

It is long past time for the President and all of us to work on what he promised as a candidate instead of dismissing everyday folks' affordability concerns as a hoax.

Finally, the invasion of Venezuela and threats of unilateral military action against others is profoundly disrespectful of our Nation's military. Our troops aren't a palace guard to be used by a President in chaotic ways around the globe or deployed against Americans at home. That is not what they are for.

The juvenile decision to rebrand the Department of Defense as the Department of War, completely without legal authority and sure to be abandoned as soon as this administration exits the stage, sends a loud message to our troops and their families. People like my oldest son volunteer to serve because they love this country and they want to defend it against all enemies, foreign and domestic. They take that oath just as we do.

People of integrity don't see military service as measured by how much they wage war against others; they see it as a patriotic commitment to defend the United States and our allies. And a nation committed to ill-conceived and secretive wars, waged without adequate debate and consideration, will see over time a decreased willingness to serve as our military leadership.

I am not aware of any military service in Donald Trump's family. I wish he

would come to Virginia and talk to military families about what it means to wonder whether your kid or your spouse might get sent to war tomorrow. I have had those conversations with Virginians, both as Governor, where I was the titular commander of the Virginia Guard as we deployed thousands and thousands to Iraq and Afghanistan between 2006 and 2010, and, in the years since, family members repeatedly deployed during the 20-year global war on terror. These families are now hoping for some respite.

I have had these conversations with Virginians serving on warships in the Red Sea while getting fired on by Houthi militias, and I have had these conversations with Virginians whose families are part of the military assets now deployed in the Caribbean and Pacific and poised to strike Venezuela and other Latin American nations.

Just at church recently, somebody came up to me and said: Don't let this President send my kid to war.

Our military signs up for a tough job. When they volunteer in this all-volunteer military, they are signing up for a tough job, and they are always ready to do it. And when we ask them to do it, they always do it in ways that are so impressive. But they deeply want civilian leadership of this Nation to be wise in decision-making about how to use military force, wise when making the decision about when or how to put their lives on the line. And wise decision-making requires careful deliberation and debate, not impulsive action such as this Venezuelan invasion, where we now find it hard to answer even the most basic questions about what comes next: How long will we be there? What is the goal? Who will be in charge?

If we can't answer those questions, do we have a right to order these young men and women to risk their lives in military actions without a real plan?

Let me conclude with a positive message—positive message—about President Trump's national security strategy and a final plea to my Senate colleagues. I believe that this Trump national security strategy, which I believe was issued on the first Thursday in December, is right in placing the Americas as the top priority. If you read both the introduction and then the portions of the strategy that really get into the regions of the world, this is the only strategy that has been produced during the entire time in the Senate that puts the Americas and the Western Hemisphere as item No. 1, rather than the last item. And I think the President is right, and I applaud him and his team because we have ignored our own neighborhood for so long—for so long. And when we have focused on it, it has usually been more about keeping other nations away than it has been about building the partnerships that will really strengthen the Americas.

The Trump administration's decision to make the Americas the top priority

makes it unique among any recent administration that I have been familiar with, and if it is done correctly, I believe it offers us a great path forward to deepen the ties among the more than 1 billion people who are Americans—North, South, or Central—who live in this hemisphere.

And as the chair and ranking member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, I say getting this right is critical to American well-being because today certainly, but even going forward, how can we match up economically with nations like China or India, each with more than a billion citizens?

The productivity of the more than 340 million Americans is second to none, but at some point—at some point—the scale of our chief competitors becomes really hard for us to match. But if you think about the Americas with 1-plus billion and if we strengthen ties throughout the Americas—let's call it an “Americas First” policy—strengthening ties in security and education and trade and diplomacy and humanitarian assistance and democracy promotion, we can more than match the might of the world's most populous countries, even our fiercest competitors like China.

But we won't achieve it—we won't achieve it—through dominance or invasion. We have tried it before. We tried it for 200 years, and it hasn't worked. It produces hostility, suspicion, resistance. It chases nations that could be friends, that should be friends, into the arms of adversaries. But we can achieve much through respectful partnerships and by giving the attention to our America neighbors that we have often reserved solely for nations in Europe or the Middle East.

We have tried throughout our history this positive approach on brief occasions—FDR's Good Neighbor Policy, President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress—but we have too often tried it for a short period and then lapsed back into a failed Monroe Doctrine mindset.

President Trump's instinct to prioritize the Americas is the right one; it is the right one. But doing it the right way and not repeating the mistakes of the past is the key to making it a success.

And finally, a plea to my Senate colleagues: The vote we will have Thursday on our bipartisan resolution to say no to war in Venezuela without congressional authorization is actually a vote about many things. It is a short resolution, like a page and a half, but it is a vote about many things. It is about Venezuela. It is about war. It is about the use of U.S. troops. It is about our complicated history in the region. It is about the example we set and our position in the world. But it is also, ultimately, about what it is to be a U.S. Senator.

In recent months, this body has rejected my resolutions saying that the Senate should have a role, if we go to

war, with Iran or Venezuela or launch strikes on unknown boats in international waters.

I have put those votes on the table, and we have had votes on them. And the Senate has opposed my resolutions. The Senate has actually voted in favor of its own irrelevance, saying that it didn't need to be consulted about war.

We have the opportunity to change this. We have the opportunity to say forcefully: Mr. President, you are the article II Commander in Chief of this country, and we want you to inhabit every square centimeter of power the Constitution gives you. But we are the article I branch, and the Constitution demands that you need to consult us before taking America to war.

So cast a vote in accordance with the Constitution, and that honors the relevance of the U.S. Senate. If you believe that a war to topple the Venezuelan Government and seize its oil is justified, you should be willing to vote to support it. You should be willing to introduce an authorization for use of military force, put it on the floor, and advocate for it. And if you don't believe a war against Venezuela is a good idea—as I don't—you should be willing to vote against it. But don't outsource this power, carefully vested in the article I branch by our Founders, to this President or to any President.

We were all sent here for a reason. We were all sent here to show courage. We were sent here to stand up for our constituents and our troops and the Constitution, and there is no more important power for Congress to maintain than the power to send our sons and daughters into war.

I yield the floor.

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#### ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 11:15 A.M. TOMORROW

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 11:15 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:32 p.m., adjourned until Wednesday, January 7, 2026, at 11:15 a.m.

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#### CONFIRMATIONS

Executive nominations confirmed by the Senate January 6, 2026:

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
SARA BAILEY, OF TEXAS, TO BE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY.

#### IN THE ARMY

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT AS VICE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY AND APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY TO THE GRADE INDICATED WHILE ASSIGNED TO A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTIONS 601 AND 7034:

#### To be general

LT. GEN. CHRISTOPHER C. LANEVE

#### CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

JOSHUA SIMMONS, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.