

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided, and the majority controlling the first half.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy for up to 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I understand the time is equally divided between now and 10:30. Is there sufficient time for the Republican Senator to use 20 minutes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time would be 18 minutes on each side.

Mr. DURBIN. Then I have no objection to how the Senators choose to use that time.

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

WELCOMING PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am here this morning to engage in a colloquy with the good Senator from South Carolina. We will be joined by the Senators from New Hampshire and Kentucky and perhaps the Senator from Arizona.

The purpose of the colloquy is to welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu this morning—who will be speaking in front of Congress—and to talk about why it is so important he is joining us today.

In a few moments we will hear remarks from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the House Chamber and welcome him to Congress to affirm the friendship between the people of the United States and the people of Israel and to assess the threats facing our two democracies.

Actually, today's speech is not unusual. This is the 115th time that a foreign leader has addressed a joint session of Congress. This is the seventh time an Israeli Prime Minister will address a joint session of Congress. It is Prime Minister Netanyahu's third address to Congress.

It is not surprising we are hearing from the leader of our ally, Israel. Israel is a democracy in a neighborhood of authoritarian governments. Prime Minister Netanyahu speaks the language of freedom with us today. There can be no doubt of his passion on behalf of the people he represents and that makes us take his message very seriously.

So this joint session is not unusual nor surprising, but that does not mean that it is unimportant. In fact, today's speech is profoundly important. The partnership between the United States and Israel is critical for the security of the Middle East and the world. We need a strong U.S.-Israeli partnership to stop Iran from developing a nuclear

weapon. We need a strong U.S.-Israeli partnership to stand against the extremism that is ripping apart nations across the Middle East. We need a strong U.S.-Israeli partnership to demonstrate the value of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law for societies that are no longer satisfied with dictatorships.

For all of these reasons it is good to have Prime Minister Netanyahu here today. It is good to reaffirm the bond between Israelis and Americans, and it is good to join hands again with an ally to stand against tyranny and extremism. I look forward to hearing from the Prime Minister because views directly from Israel are extremely important.

Since its birth in 1948, Israel has faced one security threat after another. Israel's strength and vitality in the face of these threats are a testament to the ability of its people and its leaders to head off threats to security before they become impossible to overcome. There is no substitute for the Israeli view of security in the Middle East and the Iranian threat in particular.

So today represents an important moment to learn how Israel sees its own security and understand the next steps for the U.S.-Israeli partnership.

I now turn to my colleague from South Carolina and ask for his comments about this important speech from the Prime Minister of Israel today.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I appreciate being on the floor with the Senator from North Dakota who has been very involved in trying to secure America against a variety of threats.

I will get to the heart of the matter. Some people feel the Prime Minister should not be here at this time because in a couple weeks there will be an election in Israel. They have a parliamentary system. They do things differently—they vote for parties, not people—and they are having a real contest over there about who should be in charge and what coalitions will lead Israel.

I have a very simple comment: That is for Israelis to decide. They decide who they want to run their country. They can vote for the party or groups of people who they think best represent their view of Israel. That is their business, not mine. My business is to try to find out what is best for America when it comes to defending our Nation. That is why all of us are on the floor today.

I don't think I can adequately do my job if I don't hear from the Prime Minister of Israel, if he is willing to talk to me. Some people may be able to do that. God bless you.

If someone feels as though now is the time to boycott this speech, if they want to send a message about politics in Israel, be my guest. I am going to be at this speech to try to learn what to do regarding America and Israel concerning the nuclear threat.

Why do I think it is important for me to be there? I can't think of a better

voice to tell me what would happen in the region if we get a bad deal with the Iranians.

Israel is in the crosshairs of the Iranian ayatollahs—has been for decades—threatening to destroy the State of Israel. I want to hear from the people on the ground, Israel in particular, as to what a good deal would look like and what a bad deal would look like. I want to hear from the Prime Minister of Israel the consequences of a bad deal.

As to me, I do not trust this administration to negotiate a good deal, but maybe I am wrong; and the best way to find out is for Congress to look at the deal. If it is a good deal, I will vote for it, because the Arabs and Israelis will tell us if this is something we can live with. At the end of the day a good deal is a blessing for the world, and a bad deal is a nightmare.

(Mr. COTTON assumed the Chair.)

So to the good Senator from North Dakota, I not only welcome the Prime Minister of Israel to speak to Congress, I am looking forward to it, because I hope to learn something that would make me a better Senator regarding our own national security. The only thing I can tell the American people without any hesitation—ISIL is a threat to us, a threat to the region. They are the most barbaric terrorist organization roaming the globe today. They represent a direct threat to our homeland. But the threat they represent is a distant second to Iran having a nuclear weapon. That ought to tell you a lot about how I feel. If I can watch TV, as you do every night, and see what ISIL is doing to Christians and others throughout the region and say that is secondary to Iran, I hope that means something. It means a lot to me. Because if Iranians get a nuclear weapon, then every Arab in the region who can afford one is going to get a nuclear weapon, and we are on our way to Armageddon.

North Korea in the making is what I worry about. The same people who are negotiating this deal were negotiating the North Korean deal. Congress was absent. Now it is time for Congress to be involved and say whether this is a good deal. I have legislation with Senator CORKER and six Democrats and six Republicans asking that Congress review any deal, and I would be curious to see what the Prime Minister thinks about that.

So in summary, this would be the most important decision we make as a body, how to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat. This will be the most important issue I will deal with as a U.S. Senator, and I have been here almost 20 years. The consequence of a bad deal is an absolute nightmare.

If you were to relieve the sanctions tomorrow and gave the Iranians the money they were due under sanction relief, do you think they would build schools and hospitals or would they continue to pour money into their

military to disrupt the region and continue to build ICBMs? As I speak, without a nuclear weapon Iran is leading an offensive today in Iraq. And I know the Presiding Officer of the Senate was a ranger, an infantryman in Iraq. Could you ever imagine in your wildest dreams that the Iraqi security forces are marrying up with Shia militia and Suleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard is on the ground in Iraq leading the efforts, and we are sitting on the sidelines? You talk about a screwed-up foreign policy.

Are we going to let eight guys negotiate with Iran—the people who brought you Iraq and Syria and the mess you see in the region? You feel good enough about them doing a deal with the Iranians that you don't even look at the deal yourself? This is beyond screwed up, and the worst is yet to come. A bad deal. But, maybe the best is yet to come, a good deal. I don't know. But I want to hear what Israel believes a good deal would look like. And if you don't want to hear that, then, boy, we are on different planets as to the consequences of what is going on in the world today.

With that, I would ask a question to the Senator from New Hampshire, who has been watching the Iranian behavior on the ground throughout the Middle East and the missile program in particular, and ask her what are her concerns about Iran with extra money coming into the coffers in sanction relief?

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank the Senator from North Dakota and the Senator from South Carolina.

As I look at where we are right now—first of all, our support for Israel and our friendship with Israel—this has been a very strong bipartisan issue, and it is an issue that rightly crosses party lines because we share the same values, the relationship is very important, we share technology, we share intelligence, and we share the concern that we do not want the world's worst regime to obtain the world's most destructive weapon, and that is the Iranian regime.

So I want to welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu to the Congress and very much listen to what he has to say, because he comes to us in a very important time where the administration is negotiating a potential agreement with Iran. What we want most of all is that that agreement will end Iran's nuclear program and be a real, verifiable, transparent agreement, because a good agreement is a blessing, a bad agreement is a nightmare. We have to hear from the Prime Minister of Israel, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say today about what a good agreement looks like.

But make no mistake about why we must stop the Iranian regime from having a nuclear weapon. Because what they are doing around the world right now—they are the largest State sponsor of terrorism in the world. They have essentially destabilized the Gov-

ernment of Yemen through their support of the Houthis there. They have been supporting Hezbollah, a terrorist organization. They have been helping the Assad regime murder its own people. They have been participating in cyber attacks against our interests. This is a regime that has said they want to wipe Israel off the map. I can understand—and I want to hear from the Prime Minister of Israel—why the people of Israel would say “never again” when they hear those words.

But make no mistake, this is not just about the security of Israel; this is about our security in the United States of America. They have called us “the great Satan,” and this is an issue that represents a threat to our core national security interests, to allow state-sponsored terrorism to obtain the most destructive weapon in the world. That is a danger we cannot afford in our country. It is one of concern. It is important that we share with our strong ally, Israel. We need to do everything we can in this Congress on a bipartisan basis to ensure that never happens. That is why I am honored to be a sponsor of bipartisan legislation that would give the Congress a say on this very important issue, because we worked together to put together some of the toughest sanctions that actually brought the Iranians to the negotiating table. We should not lift the sanctions that have been put together on a bipartisan basis without ensuring that this is a good agreement that will end their nuclear program. When I say end it, I don't mean end it for a decade, I mean end it permanently, because Iran has been engaged in terrorist activity for longer than a decade. So this is something we have to make sure is a transparent, verifiable agreement.

I would also add we cannot have a situation where we have a splitup. There has been a discussion about a year breakout period in this agreement. I would like to hear what the Prime Minister thinks about that, because my concern about that is this will lead to the situation my colleague from South Carolina talked about, where we have a Sunni-Shia nuclear arms race in the Middle East, where everyone seeks to enrich uranium and to have a breakout period. That results in more proliferation of nuclear weapons in a way that makes the world less safe and endangers the United States of America.

So today we welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu. I very much look forward to listening carefully to what he has to say. This is a bipartisan issue. This is about the security of the United States of America. This is obviously about our strong friendship with Israel. We are aligned in ensuring that Iran does not have a nuclear weapon and ensuring that we work together to stop their support of terrorism around the world, that we work together to end their ICBM program, which the estimates are they could hit the east coast of the United States of America by 2015 if

they continue on this path. This is about us, this is about our relationship with Israel, and I very much look forward to hearing the Prime Minister today.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I wish to thank our colleague from New Hampshire and I would like to return to the Senator from South Carolina and pose a question.

I have been a supporter of the strong sanctions the Senator put in place with the Kirk-Menendez legislation the Senator from South Carolina was very involved with. During these negotiations those sanctions have been relaxed by the administration, which I think is of great concern. I think the biggest deterrent to Iran pursuing a nuclear weapon is the sanctions we put in place with our allies.

So now as the administration negotiates this agreement, my colleague from South Carolina and others on a bipartisan basis have put forward legislation requiring that that agreement would come to this body for an up-or-down vote. I would like him to describe that effort and why it is so important and why the speech today with the Prime Minister goes to the heart of that very important matter.

Mr. GRAHAM. I think the legislation the Senator from North Dakota described is the most important thing we will do this year. The sanctions against Iran, congressionally created, were 100 to 0. Every Member of the Senate believed the Iranians needed to be sanctioned for the mischief they have created and for their nuclear ambitions to stop their march toward a nuclear weapon.

The administration objected, but 100 Members of this body voted for those sanctions. If there is a deal with the Iranians, and I hope there is a good deal, the diplomatic solution to this problem is preferred by everyone. It is a simple concept. Before the sanctions Congress created can be lifted, Congress has to look at the deal and have a say. Under the 1, 2, 3 sections of the Atomic Energy Act there is a provision that allows for Congress to approve commercial nuclear deals between the United States and another country when nuclear technology is shared. We have done that 24 times, but Congress had to approve nuclear deals between the United States and other nations, including Russia, China, Argentina, and that rogue country called Canada. I can't imagine wanting to look at a deal with Canada but not wanting to take a look at a deal with Iran.

This bipartisan legislation is very simple. Any deal negotiated with the P5+1 will come to the Senate and the House to be disapproved—not approved. Now I did that to accommodate my Democratic colleagues. There is concern that with 54 Republicans that we hate Obama so much we would just reject the deal because we don't like him. Well, I am not in that camp. I don't like President Obama's foreign policy, but I hope I am smart enough to understand that a good deal is a blessing. I

would like to think I have some track record of doing what I think is best for the country. So if it is a good deal, Israel and the Arabs will tell us, and I will gladly vote to approve it. But the construct, I say to Senator HOEVEN, is that to disapprove the deal, you have to get 60 votes. That means some Democratic colleagues have to join with Republicans to say this is not good enough, go back and try again. It is not that we want to end negotiations; we don't want to legitimize an industrial-strength nuclear program that is on the verge of a breakout such as North Korea in the making. We are not going to sit on the sidelines where a deal is negotiated where they have thousands of centrifuges and the only thing between them and a nuclear breakout is the United Nations. That did not work well in North Korea. We are not going to do that again.

So we are going to look at the deal. I think every Senator should want to look at the deal, and it allows your constituents to have a say. Not one person is having any input regarding the P5+1 talks. But if it comes back to the Congress, you have a person you can call. You can pick up the phone and call your Member of the House and Senate. You can say something about the deal because you are affected. It is not just Israel that is in the crosshairs of these people, it is us, the United States.

I worry they would share the technology with a terrorist organization and it would work its way here. Name one weapon they developed that they haven't shared with terrorists. This bipartisan approach is sound. It is consistent with what we have done 24 different times with other nations, and I hope we can have an overwhelming vote here soon.

Do your best job. Let us look at it. If it is a good deal, we will vote yes, and if it is a bad deal we will vote no, and try harder to get another deal.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority's time has expired.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 30 seconds to wrap up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. HOEVEN. I wish to thank my colleagues from South Carolina and New Hampshire. This is a bipartisan effort to join with the administration, and on a matter of this importance I believe Congress must be involved. So, again, we appeal to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to join with us on this effort.

I will conclude by saying we look forward very much to having the Prime Minister speak to us this morning.

Thank you, Mr. President.

APPOINTMENT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. For the information of the Senate, the Chair makes the following announcement:

The President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, pursuant to the provisions of section 201(a)(2) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, have appointed Dr. Homer Keith Hall as Director of the Congressional Budget Office, effective April 1, 2015, for the term expiring January 3, 2019.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

THE ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TO CONGRESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, at 11 a.m. this morning there will be a historic joint session of Congress. Usually a leader from some other country speaking at a joint session of Congress doesn't make history. It has happened over 100 times. I have attended many of those during the time I have served in the House and the Senate. What is historic about this session is that it was called unilaterally by the Republican Speaker of the House, JOHN BOEHNER. Usually and consistently, joint sessions of Congress have been called on a bipartisan basis and in most cases involve the administration and executive branch. In this case Speaker BOEHNER made history his own way by saying he would announce a joint session of Congress welcoming the Prime Minister of Israel.

I also checked with the Senate Historian, and it turns out there is another piece of history being made today. He can find no precedent where Members of Congress came forward from both the House and the Senate and announced publicly they would not attend a joint session of Congress, and that has happened today.

That is a personal and private decision by each Member of Congress as to whether they wish to attend the joint session this morning. I am going to attend it primarily because of my respect for the State of Israel and the fact that throughout my public career in the House and Senate, I have valued the bipartisan support of Israel which I found in both the House and the Senate.

I am proud that it was President Harry Truman—a Democrat—who was the first Executive in the world to recognize the nation of Israel. I am proud that throughout history Democratic and Republican Presidents alike have supported the State of Israel, and I have tried to do the same as a Member of the U.S. House and Senate.

This meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu comes at an awkward moment. He is 2 weeks away from a national election in Israel. Some have questioned the timing of this. I will not raise that question because I don't know the political scene in Israel. I don't know if this visit helps him or hurts him, but it is, in fact, 2 weeks away from this important election.

What we all agree on, I hope, both Democrats and Republicans, is one starting point: A nuclear Iran is unacceptable. We have to do everything we

can to stop that possibility because it would invite an arms race in the Middle East—many other countries would race to become nuclear powers, and that would be destabilizing—and also because we know the agenda of Iran. It has been engaged in terrorist activities throughout the Middle East and around the world. Putting a nuclear weapon in the hands of a country that is dedicated to terrorism is the kind of concern that I hope all of us share when we look to the future.

As Democrats and Republicans gather for the joint session, we are in common purpose: to stop the development of a nuclear Iran. What troubles me greatly is the criticisms I have heard on this floor and in the past week or two about the Obama administration and this issue. President Obama has made it clear from the start that he is opposed to having a nuclearized Iran. In fact, it was President Obama, using his power as President, who has really brought together the sanctions regime that is working to bring Iran to the negotiating table. He didn't do it alone, as one of my colleagues from South Carolina noted. There were times when Congress wanted to push harder than the President. But we have to concede the obvious: Were it not for the President's dogged determination, we would not have this alliance, this coalition imposing sanctions on Iran today that have made a difference and brought Iran to the negotiating table. Give President Obama credit for that. Whether it is Prime Minister Netanyahu or the Republicans, who are generally critical of the President, at least acknowledge the obvious. The President made his position clear that he opposes a nuclear Iran, and he made it clear that he would put his resources and energy into building a coalition to stop that possibility.

Secondly, it is this President's leadership which has created the Iron Dome defense—the missile defense—which has protected Israel. That has been a very effective defense mechanism. I know that as chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, we appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars for that protection. President Obama initiated—if not initiated, was an early supporter of this effort and has funded it throughout his Presidency, and now it has kept Israel safe. I hope the Republicans and Prime Minister Netanyahu will give the administration credit for that effort to keep their nation safe.

I will also say about negotiations that here is the reality: We have countries around the world joining us in a regime to impose sanctions on Iran in order to bring Iran to the negotiating table, and they are there. The negotiations are at a delicate moment—literally weeks away from seeing whether we can move forward. I hope they are successful. The President has said at best there is a 50/50 chance of success. It is just that challenging. But let's consider what the alternative will be if negotiations fail.