

a voice here in the U.S. Senate. I congratulate him, and I express my heartfelt appreciation for his efforts on behalf of people who are unable to speak for themselves. I thank the Senator from Illinois.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 11:30 a.m. tomorrow, June 16, notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, the Senate vote in relation to the McCain-Feinstein amendment No. 1889, with no second-degree amendments in order to the McCain-Feinstein amendment prior to the vote; further, that at 2:15 p.m., the Senate vote in relation to the Ernst amendment No. 1549, followed by a vote on the Gillibrand amendment No. 1578, as under the previous order, followed by the cloture vote with respect to the McCain substitute amendment No. 1463.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I ask to modify that unanimous consent request by adding further that no second-degree amendments be in order to the Ernst or Gillibrand amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, 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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO IRAQI KURDISH PESHMERGA FORCES

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, as we continue to fight against ISIS and their radical allies, I rise to urge my colleagues to support the Ernst-Boxer amendment, which provides authority for direct assistance to a critical partner in that fight: the Iraqi Kurds.

Defeating ISIS is critical to maintaining an inclusive and unified Iraq, and the Iraqi Kurds are the key to that goal and helping to improve the humanitarian crisis in the region through their support and protection of over 1.6 million displaced persons from Iraq and Syria.

This bipartisan amendment, also cosponsored by Senators GRAHAM, TILLIS, RUBIO, and GARDNER, provides temporary authority for the President, in consultation with the Iraqi Government—and I say, again, in consultation with the Iraqi Government—to provide weapons directly to Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the fight against ISIS should the administration choose to do so.

Currently, by law, the United States must provide support to the Iraqi

Kurds through the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, which has often not been timely or adequate in the past. These delays have had a negative impact on the Kurds' ability to defend Iraqi territory and provide security for those who have sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan. The President's recent decision to expedite arms to the Kurds as a way to improve the counter-ISIS effort, I believe, speaks for itself.

Additionally, last year, Secretary of State John Kerry said to the House Foreign Affairs Committee:

You said the administration is responsible for sending all these weapons through Baghdad. No, we're not. You are. We're adhering to U.S. law passed by Congress.

Secretary Kerry continued:

We have to send it to the [Iraqi] government because that's U.S. law. If you want to change it, fix it, we invite you.

Well, this amendment does just that, and it does so in a bipartisan, bicameral fashion. It builds upon a similar bill in the House led by Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman ED ROYCE and Ranking Member ENGEL. This bill and my amendment are quite different than the House NDAA language.

My amendment provides a 3-year authorization to reduce delays and inefficiencies in arming Peshmerga forces to fight ISIS while ensuring the Iraqi Government is an integral part of the process. The amendment continues to promote a unified Iraq and enhances the ability to fight our common enemy—an enemy that ultimately seeks to bring their terror to our shores.

Furthermore, the amendment preserves the President's ability to notify the Iraqi Government before weapons, equipment, defense services or related training is provided to Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces. It ensures this emergency authorization does not construct a precedent of providing direct support to organizations other than a country or an international organization. Most important to remember, it does not require the President to act. It provides him the authorization to do so if he feels the situation warrants it.

Beginning in the first gulf war, the Iraqi Kurds and their Peshmerga security forces have played a vital role in supporting U.S. interests and fostering a free Iraq, despite limited means of doing so. Last week, they not only held their ground but made some gains against ISIS in the Kirkuk Province. There are far too few positive news stories out of Iraq recently, but when there are some, it is often the Kurds who are making that progress.

ISIS is deadly and determined, and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces—our critical partner in the fight against ISIS—need U.S. weapons as quickly as possible. We simply cannot afford future delays at this critical moment in the battle. I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting this much needed bipartisan legislation to arm the Iraqi Kurds in the fight against ISIS.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMERICA'S SPACE PROGRAM

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I wish to address the issue of America's space program.

Some very disturbing news has come out over the course of the Appropriations Committee's deliberations on the House-passed Commerce-State-Justice appropriations bill, which, it is my understanding, has passed the House. It includes the funding for NASA. What is disturbing about it is that at a time when we are recognizing that Vladimir Putin is increasingly trying to thwart the interests of the United States with his aggressiveness and invasion of Ukraine, his threats to the Baltic States, his invasion of that part of Ukraine known as Crimea, and the various other semi-threats he has made to us, it would certainly seem to be in the interests of the United States that where we have a joint shared and mutually agreed-to space program which goes all the way back to 1975 when in the middle of the Cold War an American spacecraft rendezvoused and docked with a Russian spacecraft, Soyuz—and the Apollo-Soyuz mission made extraordinary political as well as scientific history for those two crews, led by Gen. Tom Stafford on the American side and General Alexei Leonov on the Soviet side. After they docked, those two crews lived together in space for 9 days in the middle of the Cold War, 1975. That set us on the course—with the Soviet Union still in existence—of starting to cooperate. We actually had an American space shuttle rendezvous and dock with the first Russian space station, MIR. From there, we went on to build the International Space Station with the Russians as well as a dozen other nations as our partners. This space station, on orbit 250 to 325 miles high, is 120 yards long. In other words, if you sat at the 50-yard line in a football stadium, you would look from one goalpost to the other goalpost and that is how big this is, the International Space Station. There are six human beings up there. There is an international crew. There are Russians, there are Americans, and from time to time there are Italians, Germans, French, Japanese—a whole host of nations that are our partners.

So it has been that as we built this space station, the Russians would launch on their Soyuz spacecraft, to and from the International Space Station, supply and human supply, and the Americans, who had the capacity of 45,000 pounds on the space shuttle,