

the refugee program. So is it any wonder that the citizens we represent are concerned?

According to one recent survey, nearly 80 percent of Americans and 77 percent of Democrats say refugees should go through a more robust security process. President Obama seemed to suggest these Americans were motivated by some animus toward widows and orphans. I would suggest they are motivated by a love for their families and communities. I remind the President that this country has a proud tradition of compassion, and we have settled millions of refugees from around the world. Many Americans are telling us they want to continue helping others, but they want to do it in a smarter and more secure way.

So I want to say this before moving forward. In his State of the Union Address, President Obama decried the political divisions that have widened during his Presidency. He called for cooperation and a more elevated debate. He warned that “democracy breaks down when the average person feels their voice doesn’t matter.”

“Democracy,” he said, “doesn’t work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice.”

I ask him to reflect on those words. We each have a choice in this discussion. We can glibly dismiss the sincere concerns of middle-class families or we can work to unify Americans by pursuing bipartisan and balanced solutions.

Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives chose bipartisan and balanced solutions when they worked together to pass the American SAFE Act a few weeks ago. Democrats and Republicans in the Senate should choose bipartisan and balanced solutions by working together to advance the American SAFE Act today.

This bipartisan bill would allow Washington to step back, take a breath, and ensure it has correct policies and security screenings in place before moving ahead with the refugee program for Iraq and Syria. No wonder dozens of Democrats joined with Republicans to pass this balanced bill with a veto-proof majority over in the House. It is certainly worrying to hear that Senate Democrats are now being pressured to block us from even debating it. I understand the political pressure to oppose this balanced bill may be intense, but it is also intensely shortsighted, and I urge our Democratic friends to resist it.

Boosting confidence in our Nation’s vetting process is critical for our citizens, just as it is critical for every refugee who truly needs our help. Our Democratic friends know a cloud of unfair stigmatization threatens to hang over legitimate refugees so long as Democrats block commonsense safeguards to weed out ISIL sympathizers.

If our Democratic friends are serious in what they imply about promoting tolerance for widows and orphans and in strengthening security for Ameri-

cans, they will not vote to block the Senate from debating balanced, bipartisan legislation that can advance both priorities simultaneously.

Let’s work together to enact the American SAFE Act and its reforms, and then let’s work together on the root of the problem. Refugees are fleeing Syria because of a brutal civil war, and they are fleeing Iraq because the terrorist group Al Qaeda in Iraq has evolved into the largest terrorist group in history—ISIL—so the ultimate solution is to make the region somewhere they can return to.

Here is what hasn’t helped: The precipitous withdrawal of our advise and assist force from Iraq, the indecision attached to drawing and erasing red lines in Syria, mocking the genuine concerns of American citizens here at home.

Here is what will help: the administration cooperating across the aisle to finally develop a serious plan to confront ISIL. That is what the American people continue to call for, that is what the American people deserve, and it is what the administration will pursue if it is truly serious about helping both our country and the victims escaping this brutal terrorist group.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think we have the makings of an agreement here, at least the way I understood the Republican leader.

We agree that refugees should go through a robust screening process. The bill we are talking about before the Senate, though, is stressing bureaucracy and paperwork. Each refugee who comes to this country—and there are about 100 a day—would have to be signed off by three Cabinet Secretaries. That is 300 personal signatures a day. We don’t want more paperwork.

What we have said is we want four amendments to change the underlying bill. We are not going to be demanding days of debate time. We would be happy—we would be very reasonable with whatever the leader felt appropriate. We believe we should move forward with real solutions, not paperwork.

We are not saying we don’t want to get on the bill. We are willing to get on the bill. We want four amendments. That is it, four amendments. I am sure the leader will look this over and get back to me at the appropriate time, but we are willing to work on this bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I will obviously be talking to the Democratic leader on a way forward on the bill, and we will have those discussions and report back later.

Mr. REID. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMERICAN SAFE ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, similar to most Americans listening to President Obama’s State of the Union Address last week, I found his take on national security and world affairs rather surprising.

According to a poll in December, 60 percent of the American people see national security and terrorism as a major concern, and they have good reason to be worried.

As President Obama finishes his last year in office, Syria is wracked by civil war, Iraq is in turmoil, Russian aggression is growing, North Korea has tested yet another nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia and Iran are immersed in a cold war, and ISIS continues its campaign of terror. Yet, according to the President, we have nothing to worry about; America’s leadership is strong, and we are headed in the right direction.

Unfortunately, this fairytale version of our global situation stands in stark contrast with reality. In his State of the Union Address, the President did acknowledge: “The world will look to us to help solve these problems, and our answer needs to be more than tough talk.”

Well, I couldn’t agree more, but unfortunately tough talk with no action has been the hallmark of this administration. In 2011, after the onset of the Syrian civil war, both President Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated unconditionally that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had to go. The President drew a line in the sand: If Assad used chemical weapons, America would act. But when Assad flouted this red line, killing his own people—including women and children—with the large-scale use of sarin gas, the President chose to forgo a decided military response and instead pursue negotiations involving the Russians, working out a compromise that ultimately strengthened Assad’s position, and the results of the President’s decision have not been pretty.

In the wake of the negotiations, an emboldened Vladimir Putin invaded Crimea and eastern Ukraine, and the situation in Syria got worse. It appears now that the Assad administration will outlast Obama’s. Worse, our allies in the Middle East no longer trust America to come to their aid. The President’s failure to back up his tough talk with action has undermined American leadership, and this may take years, if not decades, to repair.

This week the Senate is taking up the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act, which addresses the Syrian refugee crisis—another byproduct, I might add, of the President's failure to uphold his red line. With Syria, both the United States and the European powers have had to learn a lesson the hard way: If you don't take action to solve the problem, the people who are suffering will end up on your doorstep.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been killed in this conflict. Assad continues to use chlorine bombs indiscriminately to kill his own people, and ISIS executes anyone who is not considered loyal. It is no wonder the Syrian people want out.

Yet, with the mass exodus of refugees come other security concerns, including the threat of ISIS infiltrating the refugee population. Senior and U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials have made it clear they are concerned that we don't have the ability to adequately vet Syrian refugees. As we know from reports, at least one of the terrorists responsible for the deadly attacks in Paris passed through a refugee processing checkpoint in Greece.

To quote the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, "I don't . . . put it past the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among those refugees . . . that's a huge concern of ours."

The American SAFE Act helps address this concern by requiring the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence to certify that Syrian and Iraqi refugees have been thoroughly vetted and do not pose a security risk before they are allowed to enter the country. This is a reasonable request, and if the administration wants to assure the American people that these refugees are not a threat, then it should have no problem providing such certifications.

I plan to file an amendment to this bill that would also give more authority to individual States when it comes to the resettlement of refugees. Last year, many Governors expressed a desire, shared by their constituents, that Syrian refugees not be resettled in their States. My amendment would grant Governors a presence at weekly refugee resettlement meetings within the State Department and give those Governors veto power over the resettlement of certain refugees in their States. Under my amendment, if a Governor's office is not satisfied that its security concerns have been addressed by the required security checks, the Governor can veto the resettlement question. Any refugee, once admitted to the United States, would still be free to travel from State to State as he or she pleased. This amendment would simply increase States' rights by giving Governors a say in any decisions by the Federal Government to resettle large populations of refugees in their States. This is a reasonable solution to the concerns that were raised by the

Governors of over 30 States, and I hope we can have a vote on this amendment.

Over the weekend, the world witnessed another byproduct of President Obama's failing foreign policy. Thanks to a provision of the President's flawed nuclear deal with Iran, more than \$100 billion of frozen Iranian assets and oil revenue were made available to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This means that Iran's Revolutionary Guard, including the Quds Force—which is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American soldiers in Iraq—just received a big influx of cash. Again, this is thanks to the deal President Obama considers to be perhaps the major foreign policy achievement of his Presidency.

While I am glad that the hostages held by Iran are coming home to their families, it is a mistake to think this means Iran all of a sudden will now play nice. Iran's leadership knows very well that it won the lottery with this nuclear deal, and it desperately wants Iranian assets unfrozen and sanctions lifted. Now that the Iranian leadership has received its payout, Iran will be further emboldened.

When negotiating this deal, the Obama administration assured Congress that the United States would make sure Iran kept its end of the bargain. Well, it is already clear from October's ballistic missile test that Iran is determined to test the President's resolve and flout international restrictions. We cannot let those provocations go unanswered.

President Obama is right that when conflict arises, the world looks to the United States for leadership. However, it takes more than talk to provide the leadership the world needs. In his last year in office, I hope President Obama will move beyond rhetoric and start offering realistic solutions to the growing number of security concerns that face our Nation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE IRANIAN HOSTAGE RELEASE

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I rise on January 20, 2016, on the floor of the Senate to acknowledge this day as the 35th anniversary of the return of 53 Americans by the Iranian Government to the shores of the United States of America after captivity for 444 days in Iran. As the Members of the Senate will remember, they were employees of the U.S. Embassy in Iran who were brutally attacked, sent through mock executions, subjected to beatings, sub-

jected to brainwashing, subjected to torture, and for 444 days were out of communication with their loved ones and our country. Fortunately, we successfully negotiated their release, and on January 20, 1981, they were released back to the United States.

But that release included the execution of the Algerian Accords between the United States and the Iranians, which prohibited any hostage from suing the nation of Iran for compensation for their captivity. Since that release, many Americans in the House of Representatives and the Senate, including myself, have worked hard to try to right that wrong. I am very pleased to acknowledge that under the passage of the omnibus in December, we were able to secure funding to be able to compensate those hostages as they should have been compensated 35 years ago. We were able to take money from the Paribas bank forfeiture of Iranian funds to the U.S. Government to see to it that they were compensated in some measure for the sacrifice they made for our country.

A lot of people have written: Why would you compensate people for their captivity? Why would you go to the effort for 35 years to see to it these people got some amount of money to compensate them for their captivity? Why would we not do it? There are Americans all over the world serving in very dangerous places, serving as ambassadors and diplomats through the State Department. They should know we have their backs, not just on the days they are serving but 35 years later if they were tortured, beaten or if they were held captive.

We all rejoiced to see the Americans that were released by the Iranians. We know there were Americans taken hostage in Iraq and Baghdad 2 days later. Taking Americans hostage and using them as tools of war is something that has been happening for years and years, and the Iranian Government is at the head of it. These Americans deserve fair treatment, compensation, and recompense for all they suffered, and I am proud to say that because of a bipartisan effort in the House and Senate, we were able to do so.

I want to thank Senator CORKER, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Senator CARDIN, the former chairman; Senator MENENDEZ from New Jersey; Senator REID from Nevada, who was instrumental in helping; and Senator BLUMENTHAL, my ranking member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee of the Senate, for help on this bill and for all the help they brought. I want to thank the entire body of the Senate, who in December voted unanimously to see to it that the Paribas money was made available to the survivors of the people who were taken hostage in 1979.

You might remember the show "Nightline" that we see on television started with the original report in 1979 by Ted Koppel about the hostage taking. It became a television show when