

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL UNDER CHAPTER 8 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION RELATING TO "NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MEASURES; ASSESSING PERFORMANCE OF THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM, GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS MEASURE"

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session and proceed to the consideration of S.J. Res. 61, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 61) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Federal Highway Administration relating to "National Performance Management Measures; Assessing Performance of the National Highway System, Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measure".

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

ISRAEL

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, it has been more than 6 months since Hamas's horrific attack on October 7 that killed 1,200 innocent Israelis and led to the capture of 240 hostages. Around 130 people are still being held hostage, and an estimated 100 are alive and remain in captivity in absolutely horrific conditions. The cruelty that has been and continues to be inflicted on them is horrendous, and obtaining their freedom becomes a more urgent priority every day.

In the past 6 months, Israel's indiscriminate bombing has obliterated most of Gaza's infrastructure. Nothing has been spared. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed. Another 7,000 are believed to be buried beneath the rubble. And among the dead are hundreds of aid workers and health workers. Nearly 2 million people have been displaced. Aid trucks are lined up for miles in Egypt waiting to get into Gaza, while the bombs and shells keep exploding. The magnitude of this calamity is staggering.

Now, 6 months into this war, Prime Minister Netanyahu has announced that a date has been set for an invasion of Rafah. Rafah today is jammed with an estimated 1 million desperate, destitute Palestinians who were ordered by the Israeli military to leave their homes in the north—homes that have since been demolished—and who are now sheltering under plastic with the few possessions they could carry and not nearly enough food.

And last week, less than a month after Jose Andres briefed me and other Senators on the daunting challenges his remarkable organization, the World Central Kitchen, faces in getting food to desperate families in Gaza, Israeli missiles destroyed three of their vehi-

cles and killed seven of their aid workers.

The descriptions and coordinates of the World Central Kitchen vehicles that were targeted had been shared with the Israeli military. There was nothing about those vehicles or the people in them that could reasonably have been confused with Hamas. The vehicles were far apart. They were labeled as World Central Kitchen vehicles. Each was targeted and destroyed separately.

The deadly attacks on aid and health workers in Gaza have become shockingly common. World Central Kitchen and other humanitarian organizations, which so many people depended on, have had to suspend operations in Gaza. This incident and the killings of other aid and health workers must be thoroughly and independently investigated. Calling it a mistake begs the question: We need to know what happened and why.

This outrageous attack on aid workers and Prime Minister Netanyahu's plans to invade the very place his government told Palestinians to go is the latest evidence that the way the Netanyahu government is conducting this war is terribly wrong. It is yet another tragic reason why a cease-fire is immediately needed.

Our priority must be to secure a cease-fire to free the hostages and get adequate food, water, and medical care to the Gazan population before more innocent people die needlessly. This was affirmed unanimously in the resolution recently adopted by the U.N. Security Council.

But rather than acknowledge Israel's responsibility to implement that resolution and secure a cease-fire, Prime Minister Netanyahu criticized the United States for allowing it to pass. He said the U.S. abstention harms both the war effort and the effort to release hostages.

I could not disagree more. After 6 months of relentless bombing, the war in Gaza has been a disaster. It has been a disaster not only for the Palestinian people but for Israel, for the United States, for the hostages, and for the cause of peace and security in the Middle East.

Last week, families of the hostages were among the tens of thousands of Israeli protesters calling for Netanyahu to resign.

We need to ask ourselves what could possibly need to happen before the United States finally stops financing a war strategy that has so disproportionately killed civilians, used food as a weapon, made Gaza unlivable, and that has no realistic vision of a peaceful future for either Palestinians or Israelis. I believe that the time has already come. Israel does not need more bombs for Gaza. The United States should stop paying for this.

What Mr. Netanyahu consistently fails to acknowledge is that the American people are paying for this war—a war that most Americans do not sup-

port. It is their tax dollars that have purchased the bombs, tanks, artillery shells, machine guns, and ammunition that have been used by Israel in what has become a war not just against Hamas but a war against the Palestinian people.

Overwhelmingly, Vermonters who have contacted me, like a substantial majority of the American people, are absolutely horrified about what is happening in Gaza.

In all the years he has served as Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu has never articulated the vision for an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To the contrary, he has been on a mission—which he has confirmed publicly—to destroy any possibility of a future Palestinian state while preserving Israel as a Jewish state.

Those goals are fundamentally incompatible, if Israel is to remain a democracy. And we support the Jewish democratic State of Israel. Yet, on March 22, the Netanyahu government announced the largest seizure of land in the West Bank since 1993.

Nothing can excuse the brutality of Hamas—we all know that—which, for years, has squandered precious resources that could have been used to improve the impoverished lives of the people of Gaza.

But just as Hamas's atrocities and the Iranians and others who aid and abet them should be absolutely universally condemned, so must we recognize that there is a long history to this conflict.

For years, the United States—Republican and Democratic administrations and this Congress—has unconditionally supported increasingly extreme right-wing governments led by Mr. Netanyahu, even though he has consistently acted in ways that are directly contrary to our policies, our principles, and our national interests.

In the West Bank in the past 3 years alone, Israeli land seizures, settlement construction, demolitions of homes, and violence against Palestinians have soared, in flagrant violation of international law.

But rather than hold the Netanyahu government accountable, U.S. government officials keep repeating the same tired refrain that such actions are "an obstacle to peace." And nothing changed. And despite evidence of human rights violations by Israeli soldiers, the Leahy Law has never been applied to Israel—not by this administration or any of its predecessors. And, meanwhile, Congress has continued to approve billions of dollars unconditionally for the Netanyahu government.

I have spoken many times about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Month after month, as Gaza was being destroyed, I and others have called for greater access for aid trucks and the protection of civilians and aid workers. I have called for indefinite cease-fire. President Biden has called for a cease-fire. Vice President HARRIS has called for a cease-fire. And so has the U.N. Security Council.

And Prime Minister Netanyahu has ignored it all, the humanitarian crisis has grown steadily worse, and the war is far from being won. Netanyahu's strategy in Gaza is reminiscent of that famous quote of an unnamed U.S. major in Vietnam who said:

It became necessary to destroy the village in order to save it.

That is what is happening to Gaza. It won't work here, as it didn't work there.

Nobody—nobody—disputes Israel's right to go after the perpetrators of the October 7 massacre. But that atrocity and that security failure did not provide license for Israel to go to war against an entire population killing tens of thousands of defenseless people, targeting aid workers, preventing lifesaving aid from getting to the victims—all while the hostages remain trapped underground not knowing if they will survive another day.

This is not the Israel the American people have supported and defended—with my support—with \$300 billion since its founding 75 years ago—far more aid than we have provided to any other country.

As Jose Andres said:

Israel is better than the way this war is being waged. . . . You cannot save the hostages by bombing every building in Gaza. You cannot win this war by starving an entire population.

The words of Chef Andres.

I recognize that the Prime Minister makes his own decisions, and it is for the Israeli people to hold him accountable. But he is not—and in my view, has never been—a credible partner for the United States. Combating ruthless terrorists like Hamas is a challenge we face, Israel faces, the world faces. But this war is not making any of us safer from terrorism. It is creating the next generation of terrorists.

With an invasion of Rafah looming, the Biden administration has warned Mr. Netanyahu that unless there is a credible plan to relocate the Palestinians who are trapped there, such an invasion would cause unacceptable civilian losses. That, however, does not appear to have dissuaded Prime Minister Netanyahu.

World opinion has shifted sharply against Israel and the United States. The administration, while calling for a cease-fire and more humanitarian aid, is simultaneously sending more bombs and ammunition to Israel. It is an inconsistency that is not sustainable.

It is long past time for the U.S. to adopt a consistent policy, to stop financing a war strategy that was deeply flawed from the very beginning—a strategy of unending death and destruction without any plan for what comes next.

Instead of prolonging this catastrophe, let's use our influence and our resources to advance a consistent policy for the Middle East—a policy that has to be grounded in the recognition that the people of Israel will never be secure without upholding the inherent

rights and dignity of the Palestinian people as well.

After 6 months of war, the situation, regrettably, in Gaza is worse than ever. Hamas is not defeated, nor do the experts that I have spoken to believe it can be. Gaza is all but destroyed. Two million Palestinians lack the basic necessities of life and have nothing to return to.

We need to change course. The hostages need to come home. The killing needs to stop. The war must end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

DOMESTIC SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, it has been more than 5 months since the President submitted a domestic supplemental appropriations request to Congress. And, among other things, it called for funding recovery efforts in communities across the country struck by disasters, including Lahaina Maui.

Every one of these affected communities in Florida, in California, in Vermont, in Mississippi, in Alabama, in Arkansas, in Alaska, in South Dakota, in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, and Tennessee need help. Each one of them is in the middle of a long and difficult process of rebuilding and getting back on its feet.

Recovering from a disaster—whether natural or manmade—it is hard, it is time-intensive, and it is incredibly expensive; surveying the damage in the immediate hours and days following the event; undertaking the complex and often dangerous process of debris removal; rebuilding homes and roads and schools and other essential infrastructure that were destroyed; providing financial assistance to people, families, and small business owners who lost their jobs and livelihoods overnight. It takes months and years and tremendous effort from thousands of people to return these communities to anything close to normal.

Today, another community is, unfortunately, confronting the colossal task of rebuilding—this time in Baltimore in the wake of the tragic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge. Our hearts go out to the families of the six men who were lost that day. They were fathers; they were husbands; they were brothers; immigrants who worked day and night to provide for their families. And their losses break our collective hearts.

As Baltimore recovers, we stand ready to support all of the communities and businesses that relied on that bridge and the Port of Baltimore every day to get around and move goods through. And as the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, I am committed to doing everything I can to help pass the necessary funding to rebuild.

As we do that, we also have a responsibility to support every other community that has been devastated by a disaster because we are all in this together. No State or county—big or

small, red or blue, wealthy or not—can shoulder the burden alone.

When a disaster is so big, so catastrophic for any one State or locality to handle, it falls on the Federal Government to step up and help. It is central to the promise of the Federal Government. We can argue about the size and the scope of the Federal Government all we like—which programs to fund, what levels to fund them at—but even the most libertarian among us can agree that helping our fellow Americans when they are in crisis, when they have lost everything, when they are desperate for support—helping them is patriotic and essential to our roles in the Congress. It is why funding disaster recovery has historically been bipartisan—because people on both sides of the aisle have recognized, rightly, that disasters do not discriminate between red and blue and purple areas. Accidents don't pick and choose their victims. Every community that has had the misfortune of being struck by a disaster needs and deserves help.

Maui is just one example of what these communities are facing. Eight months on from the devastating fires, the needs remain enormous. Thousands of people are still living out of hotels and vacation rentals, unable to rebuild their lives. Roads and water systems have yet to be repaired. Small businesses and their employees continue to struggle without tourism.

For Lahaina to recover, thousands of homes will need to be rebuilt. Critical infrastructure will need to be restored. Businesses will need to get up and running again. So Congress needs to step up and help. That includes providing funding for the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery—or CDBG-DR—Program, as the supplemental request calls for. CDBG-DR funding has long been a lifeline for families and small businesses recovering after disasters. Maui and many other communities nationwide are waiting on this aid.

It has been nearly 6 months since the President called on Congress to help communities recover from disasters. We have waited a long time, and we can't wait much longer. The disasters keep piling up and, with them, the urgent needs of the survivors. People need help.

We need to pass this supplemental and make sure all the survivors are getting the relief they need. This is not each against all; we are truly all in this together. Every community that has been hurt by a natural disaster deserves help, and Congress must provide it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

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

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