consequences. Now that goal is nowhere in sight. Neither the interim agreement currently being employed, nor the administration, nor any of the negotiating partners even refer to these resolutions or this multiyear strategy of achieving the objective we set out to accomplish. The objective was that Iran would cease enrichment of uranium, which could be used to achieve nuclear weapons capability. This goal has suddenly been totally abandoned.

The current interim agreement explicitly concedes to the Iranians their right to continue enrichment activities with only meager limitations, all of which can be reversed by the mullahs in Iran in an instant. The mullahs in Iran boast publicly of this great negotiating victory for them, which goes against everything we have been trying to do for the past 6 or 7 years.

It seems unassailable that Iran came to the negotiating table at long last directly as a consequence of the hardship that was achieved by these international economic sanctions that were imposed on this regime. They resisted coming to the negotiating table until these sanctions really started to hit home.

But what is equally clear is that the regime wants sanctions relief and has sought this interim deal to accomplish it—and unfortunately, we have given it to them. And what do we get in return? What we get in return is having negotiated away our very core purpose for doing this in the first place. Instead of using our leverage to continue the progress we had made to bring Iran to cease uranium enrichment, we blunted our very best leverage and our very best tool. Instead of pressing our long-term advantage, we have begun to relieve the pressure on Iran to cease their efforts to gain nuclear weapon capability. And why have we abandoned our goal to stop uranium enrichment? Because the Iranian negotiating team has told us they would never tolerate an end to their long, expensive path to an enrichment industry.

So here is my central conviction on this matter: If those on the other side of the table tell us in advance that our long-held conviction and purpose is asking too much, instead of meekly complying with their request, then we must increase pressure until they change their minds, not abandon our own goal because it is perceived as too tough.

So what have we bought with this interim agreement? According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, of which I used to be a part, the main practical consequence of this claimed ''freezing'' is that the time Iran now needs to produce a critical mass of highly enriched uranium—20 kilograms—with current centrifuges has gone from an estimated 59 days to 63 days. What did we gain from the agreement? Four days—four days longer that it will take Iran, once they flip the switch, to get highly enriched uranium, which allows them nuclear capability.

It seems clear that among Iran's principal objectives now is to break apart the strong international consensus we have worked so hard over so many years to forge. Prospects for Iran to do so look pretty darned good. Clearly Iran has not lived up to what they agreed to do or what we asked them to do. But there seems to be no prospect in place for our returning to sanctions unless the Senate, on a bipartisan basis—and there is bipartisan support for this—is able to impose the next round of sanctions should this interim agreement not achieve its objectives. Yet we are currently being blocked from bringing this legislation to the floor.

I repeat: This is bipartisan legislation led by Senator MENENDEZ of New Jersey and those who have been actively engaged and involved. But now we are being asked to stand down. We are not even given a chance to exercise our vote on this, which we are attempting to add to the pending legislation here. Again, delay, delay, delay is putting us in a position of essentially conceding to the Iranians what they want and giving them the opportunity to continue to pursue their quest for nuclear weapons capability.

Obviously, for them, it is just fine if they can turn the protracted uncertainty and gradual sanctions relief into a series of lesser agreements. But for us, more interim agreements will mean our allies will become accustomed to these gradual changes and the increasing commerce in Iranian oil. They will become less inclined to again reverse course almost regardless of Iranian actions. Following that prolonged process, we confront a stronger Iran but a weaker international coalition opposed to Iranian nuclear ambitions. Iranian ambitions and capabilities will grow, our efforts to halt the Iranian quest for nuclear capability will diminish, and we will then be left with a choice of containing or taking military action against a nuclear-capable, if not nuclear-armed, Iran.

The President has said repeatedly that ''containment'' is not an option. It is not for me either. Since he also said military force is an option, it seems clear to me this current course is more likely to bring us to that stark point than to a negotiated settlement.

We must be determined to do what we can in the Senate to prevent us from reaching that point. Not only must we refocus our government and other friendly governments on the need to eliminate Iran's nuclear infrastructure in any final agreement—no matter how difficult that might be—we must also oppose Iran's likely intentions to prolong the negotiation process intended to continue to weaken our coalition.

The Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act that I have cosponsored will give us great leverage in doing that. It will make it clear that the Senate will not support playing Iran's game any longer than we already have.

I deeply regret that we are not being given the opportunity to debate this issue before the American people and among ourselves, that we are not allowed to have a vote in the Senate as to whether our current policy that this administration is pursuing is the right policy to achieve the goal which we all agreed to.

The last four Presidents—two Democrats and two Republicans—have declaratively said: A nuclear-capable Iran is unacceptable. President Obama has stated that over and over. Yet here we are engaged in a process that advances that prospect.

We are put at a disadvantage, and we are giving away the one tool that has brought Iran to the negotiating table. They have trumpeted publicly about how they have outsmarted us and outnegotiated us and achieved what they wanted to achieve and diminished our opportunity to achieve what the world community wants to achieve. We will rue the day that we almost had Iran to the point where we could have achieved our goal but stepped back and conceded to their promise and commitment to continue to enrich, to continue to add centrifuges, and to continue their pursuit of nuclear weapons capability.

If Iran is armed with nuclear weapons, it will pose unimaginable consequences to us. There has been total agreement on that among the world's Nations. Yet here we stand at the moment of decision—right when we, in a sense, had them where we wanted to get them, and we conceded that.

I deeply regret that we have not been able to move forward with these additional sanctions to be employed if—in this first interim agreement—Iran does not live up to the objectives and goals which we have demanded.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1982, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: