

straightforward because this deal will not end Iran's nuclear program.

Because the President made clear his desire to secure an agreement at any cost, it became easy for the Iranians to exploit concession after concession after concession. It became possible for the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism to secure a deal that allows it to enrich uranium, to maintain thousands of centrifuges, and to become a recognized nuclear-threshold state, forever on the edge of developing a weapon. Iran was even able to secure a multibillion-dollar cash windfall that will allow it to strengthen terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, along with Assad's bloody regime in Damascus—even the President basically admits as much.

The administration is now so invested in this deal that it is likely to veto any additional sanctions passed by Congress, even those against terrorism.

Presidents are able to secure stronger, better, and more durable outcomes when they seek constructive cooperation on matters beyond the water's edge.

Republicans stood proudly for more international trade jobs just a few months ago. The President agreed with us on the policy. We all fought in the same corner as a result. It was disappointing to then hear the same President dismiss honest intellectual disagreements on the Iran deal as reflexive opposition to him personally. What nonsense.

The President made a choice to turn this into a partisan campaign instead of a serious debate. He tried to cut out the American people and Congress at every single opportunity. Because he did, he has left his country and his party with an Executive deal that has hardly any durability or popular backing. Because he handled it this way, he has left his country and his party with an Executive deal that has hardly any durability or any public support. The American people aren't sold on it. A strong bipartisan majority of the House has rejected it. A strong bipartisan majority of the Senate rejects it too.

The deal can and likely will be revisited by the next Commander in Chief, but its negative consequences promise to live on regardless and far beyond one President's last few months in office.

Those who follow in the White House and in Congress will have to deal with an Iran enriched by billions of dollars to invest in conventional weapons upgrades and further support to terrorist groups. Many of us will be here in the future, when we have the need to work with the next President to decide how best to deal with Iran's ambitions and the future of this nuclear program.

One reason Iran was able to negotiate so successfully was because of Russian support for a deal that would be antithetical to America's interests. No surprise then that just days after the deal

was accounted, the commander of Iran's Quds Force reportedly flew to Moscow to secure Russian support for their mutual ally in Syria. No surprise then that as soon as the President had seemingly succeeded in securing the votes for a veto override, we heard that Russia was constructing a forward operating base to help prop up Assad. Iran's negotiating partner, Russia, will undoubtedly use its presence in Syria to attempt to leverage the Western powers to weaken sanctions crafted in response to the invasion of Crimea. That, my colleagues, is diplomatic linkage. Russia pursued it successfully; the Obama administration did not.

The administration attempted to negotiate this deal with a singular focus on ending Iran's nuclear program. Now we already know it failed in that regard, but that myopia also has other consequences as well, leading the administration to ignore many issues that should have been linked to the negotiations in the first place—everything from Iran's support for terrorism to its aggressive behavior across the Middle East, to its harassment of shipping vessels in the Persian Gulf—but not just those issues. The administration failed to negotiate to ensure the release of American citizens being held in Iranian custody. The administration failed to negotiate to ensure Iran's recognition of Israel's right to exist. But we can do something to link the freedom of American citizens being held in Iranian custody and the recognition of Israel to sanctions relief—something the administration should have done. We can say it has to be corrected before sanctions are lifted and billions more flow into Iranian coffers to be used for terrorism. That is what today's vote is about.

When it comes to American citizens being held in Iranian custody, the Senate voted unanimously just a few months ago to call for Iranian leaders to release our American citizens. One is a journalist in prison for spreading "propaganda against the state." Another is a pastor who dared to attend a Christian gathering.

When it comes to Israel, Iran employs invective against Israel at every turn. It has already demonstrated both the will and the capability to strike out against the West and through proxies and cyber attacks at allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

What this deal will not do is alter Iran's behavior. What it will do is give Iran an even greater ability to follow through on these threats. So we cannot allow Iran to be empowered as a nuclear threshold state armed with billions in sanctions relief without at least providing some protection—some protection to Israel first, without at least demanding the release of Americans who have languished in Iranian custody for years first.

Let's at least agree on that. I understand there is strong division in the Senate—a bipartisan majority opposed, partisan minority in favor—over the

broader Iranian deal. But at the very least, at the very least, we should be able to come together over the vote we will take today. So I would urge all of my colleagues to vote for it.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Senate has already spoken and made it absolutely clear that the agreement with Iran will stand. Remember, an agreement to stop Iran from having a nuclear weapon is what it is all about. The issue has been decided. Instead of focusing on the critical issue of funding our government, Senator MCCONNELL has decided to waste an entire week on something that has already been decided, twice.

First, we are voting on the McConnell amendment, which would keep the President from being able to suspend or waive sanctions on Iran unless Iran frees all Americans and formally recognizes the State of Israel. All Senators, Democrats and Republicans, want all the Americans held by Iran or who have disappeared in Iran to come back home to their families as quickly as possible. We believe that Iran should recognize the State of Israel. We believe the other countries in that area should join along. We are very happy with the arrangement between Egypt and Israel which has been going on for many, many years and has been very good for some degree of stability in the area.

What Republican colleagues are doing now is very, very cynical. They are taking serious issues and turning them into pawns on a political chess board. Here is what Senator STABENOW said yesterday. Remember, she is the Senator from Michigan. She has a person from Michigan who has been held in Iran for some time now. Here is what she said yesterday:

The Senate Republican leader is . . . playing politics with Amir's life. The imprisonment of this veteran—this American hero—is being used by the Senate majority leader in a transparent attempt to score some cheap political points . . . and it's appalling. No American should ever be used in this way.

Elaborating, she told me that his family wants us to stay out of it, progress is being made. Please stay out of it. That is what his sister said. This cynical tactic is a waste of the Senate's time. We should be focused on preventing a government shutdown. Senator MCCONNELL has decided that the Senate should vote not once, not twice, but a third time on the resolution of disapproval, which has already failed, as I mentioned before, on two separate occasions.

The results will be the same today. Yet Senate Republicans appear to be

stuck and unable to move forward even in the face of a looming government shutdown. There are just a few legislative days until the government runs out of funding. Democrats have seen this coming for months and Republicans should have seen it also. Maybe they did but just ignored it.

That is why we have called for bipartisan budget negotiations. We are running out of time. That is an understatement. Last week, the Republican leader told this body:

We only have so much floor time in the Senate. We are going to try to use it on serious proposals that have a chance of becoming law.

I am sure he should read that to himself again today, yesterday, and maybe tomorrow. But after having made the statement, instead of voting on this key priority—that is, funding the government—we are spending time on cynical show votes even though everyone knows the result. Despite the fact that a shutdown looms in a matter of days, the Republican leader is turning the world's greatest deliberative body into the "show-vote" Senate.

Ensuring that the government has the funds it needs to operate is the basic responsibility of the Senate. That Republicans have let this crisis build instead of joining Democrats at the bargaining table is an embarrassment to this institution. The Republican leader and I don't see eye to eye on all political issues, but we both support a clean bill to stop a government shutdown. That is what he wants. A clean bill is the only way to prevent a government shutdown, no riders, no tricky things in it at all.

Just yesterday, the Republican Leader said, the sequester-level spending caps should be lifted. Thank goodness he said that. I agree with him. I agree with Senator McCAIN and Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, who have talked about this on the Republican side. We all know how this ends. The Senate will pass a clean continuing resolution. I hope that is the ending we all see because that is what we should see.

When I say a clean bill, I mean no policy riders, no procedural loopholes, just a clean funding bill devoid of tricks. So what are we waiting for? Why are we dragging the country to the brink of another shutdown when the solution is staring us in the face? There is nothing to gain from delaying the inevitable and much to lose. The reality of the Senate is that the longer we wait, the more difficult the path forward will be. In the past, Republicans' inability to govern responsibly has amplified the voice of government shutdown advocates like the junior Senator from Texas. Every moment the Republican leader wastes increases the likelihood that one Senator's objection can raise enough procedural problems to force the entire government to shut down. I am not making this up, it happened 2 years ago.

Captains of chaos want nothing more than for the Republican leader to twid-

dle his thumbs. Every day we wait increases the leverage of those who want to shut down the government. We have seen this drama before. It happened 2 years ago. The Republican leader will need to file cloture at least twice if any single member of the caucus objects.

So if the Republican leader wants to avoid a government shutdown, he should start the process of bringing a bill to the floor by Thursday at the absolute latest. Time really is running out. Next week, Pope Francis will address Congress. We expect half a million people to come for the Pope's visit to Capitol Hill. The President of China will make his visit the very next day to the Nation's capital. It will be his first visit.

So there will be 3 or 4 days in session next week at the most. We are ready to move forward. There is no reason to wait any longer. It is time for Republicans to skip the manufactured drama, pass a clean funding bill today, and get something done around here for the American people. For months, Democrats have been clear about our priorities: First, any appropriations measure cannot be hijacked for ideological or special-interest riders. Second, any funding increase for the Pentagon must be matched by at least a dollar-for-dollar increase for domestic programs, including domestic anti-terror programs.

These are commonsense principles that should form the basis of any budget agreement, but Republicans have refused to negotiate. They are now focused on scoring political points at the expense of the American people. We voted twice. Why waste this time again on another vote? There will only be a few days of session next week.

When we return the following Monday, we will have just 3 days before the government funding expires. That is October 1. We should act now, pass a clean continuing resolution preventing a government shutdown, and then responsibly negotiate a compromise. It should be a short-term CR. Any other decision is a waste of precious time that we do not have.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

Mr. REID. Finally, the number of Americans without health insurance dropped dramatically last year. All the press yesterday and this morning are reporting this, but this comes as no surprise. The good news happened as the Affordable Care Act's major coverage provisions took effect. This is further evidence the Affordable Care Act is working. The share of people without coverage dropped in every State in the Union in 2014. That is the first time in the history of the Census reports that every State has improved.

States that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act did better than those that did not. States that adopted the new law's Medicaid expansion had a 3.5-percentage-point drop in their uninsured rate. That is about 1½ times the 2.3-percentage-point decline in States

that did not expand the program. Overall, the national uninsured rate dropped by 2.9 percentage points.

Now, all these numbers mean that the uninsured rate is now at the lowest in the history of our country—the lowest ever. Once again, the Affordable Care Act, ObamaCare, is working.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 61, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 61) amending the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Pending:

McConnell amendment No. 2640, of a perfecting nature.

McConnell amendment No. 2656 (to amendment No. 2640), to prohibit the President from waiving, suspending, reducing, providing relief from, or otherwise limiting the application of sanctions pursuant to an agreement related to the nuclear program of Iran.

McConnell amendment No. 2657 (to amendment No. 2656), to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 2658 (to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 2640), to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 2659 (to amendment No. 2658), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell motion to commit the joint resolution to the Committee on Foreign Relations, with instructions, McConnell amendment No. 2660, to prohibit the President from waiving, suspending, reducing, providing relief from, or otherwise limiting the application of sanctions pursuant to an agreement related to the nuclear program of Iran.

McConnell amendment No. 2661 (to the instructions) amendment No. 2660), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell amendment No. 2662 (to amendment No. 2661), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11 a.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, my calculation is there are about 36 minutes remaining before the vote. I ask unanimous consent on the Democratic side that I be given 3 minutes, Senator CARDIN 5 minutes, Senator MENENDEZ of New Jersey 5 minutes, Senator CARPER of Delaware 5 minutes—Senator CARPER 3 minutes, and Senator Kaine 2 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Would the Senator please restate those.

Mr. DURBIN. Yes, 3 minutes for myself, 5 minutes for Senator CARDIN of