

demonstrated by the recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders, Close Up continues to work to engage young people so they understand the political process, find their own voice, and they embrace the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which is indeed a gift, and they learn to appreciate that gift and to participate more fully in this democracy.

I commend and congratulate Close Up for 40 years of excellent service. I hope it will continue for another 40 years. I am proud to be a strong supporter of the Close Up program. I urge my colleagues, as we have an opportunity, to support the funding for this program, even in these tough budgetary times.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

IRAN'S GROWING NUCLEAR THREAT

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, we have been seized with obviously pressing issues and emergencies, and I fear we have not been paying enough attention to the issue of Iran and the growing nuclear threat posed by that country. The recent release of the report by the International Atomic Energy Commission has returned the Iran nuclear issue to the front pages and, hopefully, to the top of our list of priority issues that need to be discussed and need to be evaluated.

The IAEA nuclear watchdog, which I visited last March with a group of Members of the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, has never been an instrument of U.S. policy. In fact, it has often offered perspectives contrary to America's views or preferences and has rigorously defended its objectivity independent of individual governments. Therefore, I think this latest report has all the more weight that we should give serious consideration to. This objective organization of nuclear experts has had unrivaled access to information and sources within Iran. It has stripped away the veneer of ambiguity and uncertainty about Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran is after the bomb, and we all know it. We can see the proof in this IAEA report, including compelling detail about Iran amassing fissile material, designing explosive trigger devices, and developing delivery systems. The report details the way in which Iran has relentlessly pursued this ob-

jective over the years and from whom it has obtained assistance.

The report also shows our own intelligence community's official estimate in 2007 that Iran had suspended these activities in 2003 was wrong. The activities to design nuclear weapons soon resumed and are continuing.

Ironically, it seems efforts to slow down or halt nuclear weapons development through sanctions or even through computer viruses have only had minimal or temporary effect. Many have been unwisely comforted by such delays and, therefore, have been less focused and less determined to find real solutions to this mortal security threat.

Also, we have been mistakenly reassured by the contention that Iran has not yet made the political decision to actually assemble nuclear weapons. This could potentially be one of the most dangerous conclusions of all. As I have repeatedly said from this floor and during my tenure at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a nuclear weapons-capable Iran is nearly as dangerous as a nuclear-armed Iran. An Iran that has spent years secretly pursuing—and now we know successfully—the technologies, the expertise, and materials required to create nuclear weapons is a threat to the United States and to the world.

Facing this imminent danger now, with ample verification from the IAEA that our anxieties are well-founded, is absolutely essential. It is no longer possible to avoid the hard choices or defer to the administration's decisions. In my opinion, there are only three ways we can respond to this threat: We can accept the inevitability of a nuclear Iran and learn to live with it—to tolerate and try to contain this new Iranian power; secondly, we can reluctantly take up the military option to remove the threat—an option three Presidents have confirmed has always been on the table; or, third, we can dramatically escalate the sanctions regimes to force Iranian compliance with our collective international will.

The first option—tolerating a nuclear weapons-capable Iran—is not acceptable. As I said, three previous U.S. Presidents have unequivocally stated this. A nuclear-armed Iran would threaten the entire region and its enormous energy resources, motivate broad nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East, further destabilize a region already in turmoil, encourage radicalism and terrorism, and threaten the destruction of the State of Israel.

This last danger alone—to which Israel, as a last resort, would most certainly respond to ensure its survival—compels us to be clear-eyed and determined to find a viable solution. Tolerance, I would suggest, is not a solution.

The second option—military action, while always posed as a last resort following the failure of all other efforts—must, in my opinion, remain on the table. Our Nation and the international community as a whole must see with

vivid clarity what measures remain should our other efforts continue to fail. The Iranian regime must be especially nondelusional about those potential consequences, should it not change its behavior. Indeed, to make all our efforts to find a solution credible, the military option itself must be entirely believable.

It is also essential to note that military options are not ours alone. There is broad, open discussion now in Israel and elsewhere about whether Israel itself should act to remove this threat to the survival of their state. This also must be part of our own policy calculation.

As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a television interview this weekend: "I don't have any doubt that the Israelis will defend themselves if the Iranians look as if they really are about to cross that nuclear threshold."

If there is any remaining doubt the United States should not tolerate a nuclear Iran, I think we can assume Israel may not.

It is exactly to avoid this violent option that we must renew all our efforts at finding other ways to force the Iranian regime to change its behavior, and that includes compelling persuasion to convince our friends and allies—and China and Russia as well—that united efforts are essential.

We need a new dramatically tougher sanctions regime, and we need it now. If we don't impose it now, it may very well be too late.

I say this with some real reservations about whether any new sanctions can persuade the Iranian regime to change its policy. If we truly believe a nuclear weapons-capable Iran is unacceptable, then the only logical response is to at least prepare for a strike and send the signal that the United States is prepared to act on what has been deemed by, as I said, three Presidents as unacceptable.

I think it is contrary to U.S. interests to try to outsource this task to the State of Israel, but I also think the long-term danger is far greater than the serious but shorter term negative consequences of a strike.

Having said that, this force option needs to be carefully considered, and I think we need to continue whatever efforts we can make to prevent us from having to ultimately choose that as our only option.

So I am suggesting a new, dramatically tougher sanctions regime. It is going to have to be imposed very quickly. Publicly released information clearly indicates that Iran is much closer to nuclear weapons capability than previously acknowledged. We must use the full focused power of our diplomatic instrument not to persuade Iran—that has clearly been a total failure to date—but to persuade other nations that immediate, tough, new international sanctions are the only way to prevent us from having to go to an option which none of us wishes to go to.

We must convince other reluctant nations to make different calculations about their own self-interest in this matter. If other Nations, including China and Russia, come to realize that a nuclear Iran truly will not be tolerated and that new developments bring us closer to a military solution and its unforeseeable consequences, then they will hopefully come to different conclusions about how their own interests can best be served.

Our allies and friends, once they come to accept the reality of our firm determination to neither tolerate a nuclear Iran nor remove the military option, will increase their own commitment to the sorts of sanctions regime that are now essential. This in turn will show the Iranian regime at last that they face a truly united, truly formidable, and genuinely firm coalition entirely devoted to preventing them from having nuclear weapons at their disposal. Only then will we have a chance to force the regime to change its behavior.

So far, as I said, sanctions are simply not achieving the desired result. Those who point to their modest effect actually harm the broader effort, because those effects deflect our determination to force a real change in Iranian behavior. Sanctions may have reduced Iranian GDP by one or two percentage points and may have forced the regime to find creative ways to avoid them. For example, I understand that as official banks have been subject to sanctions, many banks have miraculously privatized.

There is absolutely no evidence anywhere that these sanctions have actually forced the regime to change its behavior regarding its nuclear ambitions. And now we learn from the IAEA report that these sanctions have also not been serious obstacles to the technological, commercial, and scientific activities focused on acquiring nuclear weapons capability. We simply must do much more, and we must do it now.

I am cosponsor of a bill, S. 1048, which is intended to further tighten the noose on the Iranian regime. I will continue to support those measures. But in light of this new information from the IAEA, I am in favor of even greater sanctions pressure. I have signed a letter to the President calling on him to use his prerogatives to impose sanctions on the Iranian central bank. Many have opposed that option because it could constrict global energy supplies, increase oil prices, and would be ineffective if not supported by other nations. According to media reports, the administration itself decided just days before the release of this IAEA report to take central bank sanctions off the table for these reasons. This was, I believe, a serious mistake and those judgments, I suggest, should be reconsidered.

When the reality of this imminent threat to global security is clear, when all nations reflect on the consequences of military action against Iran, and

when a well-designed comprehensive new sanctions regime with real teeth is presented to them, we will have the determined coalition we need to avert the disastrous consequences of our failure to prevent the unacceptable.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, as I understand the current situation, we do not know whether we are on three bills or one bill. That is up to the leadership. Senator ALEXANDER and I have worked on the Energy and Water bill. We are very hopeful we can move this bill. It was unanimous in the subcommittee on Appropriations. There was only one dissent in the full committee—which is one of the largest committees in the Senate, in the Appropriations Committee. It is a significant bill. We believe we should move it as quickly as we possibly can. We have been talking. Obviously we are waiting to hear from the leadership. We are hopeful that once we hear we can move very quickly to get this bill passed by this body.

It has been a great pleasure for me to work with Senator ALEXANDER. I know he has some comments he wishes to make at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. As she usually does, the Senator from California said directly what the situation is. We on the Republican side understand that the majority leader has some important business he has to make sure the Senate finishes this week. We, as would many Democrats, want us to get to the Defense authorization bill before we go home. Senator REID wishes to do that. We respect that and we agree with that.

Senator REID wishes to make sure we have a chance to deal with the conference report that the House is expected to pass on Thursday, which contains a continuing resolution to fund the government to mid-December. We understand that as well.

That gives us a little time here, a day or two, to consider the Energy and Water appropriations bill that Senator FEINSTEIN has described. It has broad consensus here in the Senate. It has no mandatory spending in it. It has an important defense component—nuclear weapons nonproliferation. It has a great many nondefense items that are important to the growth of our country. It seems on the Republican side—I can speak for that—there is broad consensus. At Senator REID's request I checked with many of our Republican Senators, asked them how many

amendments they have and whether they thought they could bring them to the floor today or tomorrow morning so we could deal with them tomorrow, at the latest Thursday morning. So far the news has been encouraging. There have not been that many amendments and all the Senators with whom I have talked have said if they have amendments they believe there is no reason why, as long as they are given a short period of time to talk and a chance to vote on them—and they are germane, of course; they will have to be germane to fit with the rules of the Senate—they will be fine with that.

We are going to be checking tonight with all Republican offices. We do not want to encourage any more amendments but we want to know about them if there are any so I can go to Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator REID and say here are the amendments the Republican Senators want to offer, we are ready to go, we can deal with it tomorrow and Thursday and hopefully we will be able to do our basic work. Our basic work is to do appropriations work in this body. That is our constitutional responsibility.

So I thank Senator FEINSTEIN for the way she approaches this. I understand where the majority leader is, and so far, I am encouraged. I will gather information. I will make my report to you and Senator REID, and then we will see where you want to go.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Let me thank the distinguished ranking member for those comments, and I believe we are in agreement. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I would hope any Democratic amendments could come in just as quickly as possible, and we think we have a good bill. Hopefully there will not be many. I agree with what the Senator said about the Defense bill. We have a CR, and we really need to get cracking. Time is of the essence.

We have been sitting here for a couple of hours waiting for amendments. There have been none thus far, and I think the word is out: Now is the time. Please, Members, if you have amendments, please file them. We have had one amendment just filed on the Republican side and know of a couple of others, but that is about it at this stage.

Let me thank the ranking member. I guess we just sit here and wait.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I indicated, Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator ALEXANDER are working very hard to