

Sen. Ted Cruz NDAA Floor Speech – 06/07/2016

“Mr. President, my home state of Texas is strong and resilient. Texans aren’t people who tire easily, and we certainly don’t give up when the going gets tough. But that doesn’t mean that the State of Texas hasn’t faced its share of adversity. Over the last few weeks, the resolve of our great state has been tested with historic flooding that has taken at least 16 lives across Texas.

“Among those 16 are nine young soldiers at Fort Hood – nine soldiers whose truck was overturned while crossing a flooded creek. Their lives were ended in that flooding. Their families have been torn asunder, not by combat losses far away. When brave young men and women sign up to defend this country, they expect, they understand the threat that enemies abroad might endanger them. But they shouldn’t be losing their lives here at home in a sudden and unexpected accident that took the lives of nine soldiers in an instant. Those nine soldiers should be remembered: Spc. Yingming Sun, Staff Sgt. Miguel Angel Colonvazquez, Spc. Christine Faith Armstrong, Pfc. Brandon Austin Banner, Pfc. Zachery Nathaniel Fuller, Pvt. Isaac Lee Deleon, Pvt. Eddy Raelaurin Gates, Pvt. Tysheena Lynette James, and Cadet Mitchell Alexander Winey.

“All of us should remember those soldiers and every one of the soldiers and sailors and airmen and Marines who risk their lives for us daily. Just yesterday, on a plane flight up from Texas, I had the pleasure of meeting again a young lieutenant who I had met in the hospital at Fort Hood in 2014. He had been shot in the chest with a .45 in that tragic shooting that occurred, and I must say it was so inspirational to see this young lieutenant healed, mobile, proudly serving his country and energized. That’s the spirit of our Armed Forces, and we should never forget their commitment to freedom.

“Heidi and I right now, along with millions of Americans, are lifting up in prayer those Texans who have lost their lives, who have lost their homes, the families that are suffering due to this flooding.

“And we’re also lifting up the first responders who so bravely risk everything to keep us safe. In particular, I want to take a moment to praise the Red Cross. I had the privilege yesterday of speaking with the CEO of the Red Cross to thank them directly for their efforts on the ground – helping people who are suffering, helping people who have lost their home, who are struggling. And you know, she and I shared what we’ve seen in tragedy after tragedy after tragedy, which is in the face of disaster, in the face of adversity, Texans and Americans come together.

“There is a spirit of solidarity, a spirit of unity, that the worse the tragedy, the more we come together and help our friend and neighbor, help our sister and brother. And during these difficult times, Texans demonstrate that sharing spirit and we are thankful to the Americans across country who are lifting us up in prayer.

“As the water continues to recede and the wreckage is being cleared, my office will continue to work very closely with local and state government officials, along with the

entire Texas delegation, to help ensure a smooth recovery process, including offering, as I already have, my full support and assistance when Gov. Abbott requests federal aid for those afflicted by this disaster.

“And while Texas continues to rebound from these torrential floods, our nation is also flooded with circumstances that require the very same strength and resolve that we face in the face of tragedy.

“This week the Senate continues debating the National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation reflects our nation’s military and national security priorities. The decisions we make today will affect not only our lives, but those of future generations.

“We face serious times as a nation: our constitutional rights are under assault; we have economic stagnation; young people yearning for employment opportunities only to find none and government regulations that crush innovations; and abroad and at home, the threat growing each and every day of radical Islamic terrorism.

“In order to best ensure the future of our nation, we must make sure our America is secure. The most important constitutionally mandated responsibility of the federal government, the one authority that it must, not merely can, exercise is to provide for the Common Defense.

“And there is no better example of how egregiously we have strayed from our core function than the way in which our spending on defense has been held hostage year after year to the ever-increasing appetite for domestic spending by President Obama and his political allies.

“The programs they are forcing on the American people are not necessary to protect our lives and safety. But funding our nation’s security is necessary, and it is in this spirit that I approach my work on the National Defense Authorization Act—and I look forward to continuing this debate with colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

“My goal for the NDAA is simple: we need to make sure our military is strong, our homeland is secure, and our interests abroad are protected. The NDAA shouldn’t be a vehicle to further an agenda that has nothing to do with actually defending America.

“On the Senate Armed Services Committee, I was proud to work with my colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, in introducing and getting adopted 12 amendments, 12 amendments that were included in this legislation that covered the range of policy issues from strengthening our ability to protect ourselves through missile defense to improving our ability to stand with allies, such as the nation of Taiwan, to improving our ability to deal with the growing threats from nations like Russia and China, to prohibiting joint military exercises with Cuba, to preventing the transfer of terrorists from Guantanamo to nations that are on the State Department’s watch list.

“All of those were done working closely with colleagues, Republicans and often many Democrats, and yet there are still many issues that I believe should be addressed in this legislation, and I want to highlight three of those issues, three amendments that I hope this full body will take up.

“The first is an amendment to increase spending on Israeli Missile Defense, and this is an amendment that I’ve been working very, very closely with the senior senator from South Carolina, Senator Graham.

“The second is an amendment to stop the Obama administration’s plan to give away the Internet to empower our enemies over the Internet. And on this, I have been working closely with Senator Lee from Utah and Senator Lankford from Oklahoma.

“And the third amendment I want to address is an amendment to strip the citizenship from any Americans who take up arms and join ISIS or other terrorist organizations waging jihad against the United States of America, and on this I’ve worked with a number of senators, including Chairman Grassley on the Judiciary Committee.

“Each of these amendments address different policy components of our nation’s security, but they all share the ultimate objective of ensuring that America remains the strongest nation that the world has ever known.

“The first amendment that I’ve introduced that I would urge this body to take up would increase funding for our cooperative missile defense program with Israel, to ensure that our ally, our close friend, can procure the necessary vital assets and conduct further mutually beneficial research and development efforts. This has been an ongoing partnership between Israel and the United States of America, and yet, unfortunately, the Obama administration in its request submitted to Congress zeroed out procurement for David Sling and Arrow 2 & 3, vital elements of Israeli missile defense. This is at a time when the threats are growing, the administration decided zero was the appropriate level. Respectfully I disagree. This amendment would fully fund procurement for Israeli missile defense. Now, much of this missile defense is done in partnership working closely with American corporations producing jobs here at home, but it is also vital to our national security as we see a proliferation of threats across the world, the technology of intersecting incoming threats, intersecting incoming missiles before they can take the lives of innocence is all the more important.

“We’re at a time where the administration has funneled hundreds of millions and headed billions of dollars to Iran and their despotic regime. The Administration knows, they acknowledge that substantial portions of those funds will be used to fund radical Islamic terrorists, will be used to fund efforts to murder Israelis, to murder Americans, and yet nonetheless, it is U.S. taxpayer dollars and dollars under the control of our government, billions going to the Ayatollah Khamenei who chants and pledges ‘death to America’ and ‘death to Israel.’

“As a result of the fecklessness of our foreign policy, our closest ally remains in a deeply troubling and precarious position. Israel must be prepared to defend against Hamas and Hezbollah rocket stockpiles that are being rebuilt and improved, while also being forced to counter an increasingly capable adversary in the nation of Iran intent on the destruction of Israel. We must not fail in our obligation to stand with Israel, and it is my hope that if and when this body takes up this amendment, that we will stand in bipartisan unity, standing with Israel, against the radical Islamic terrorists who seek to destroy both them and us, and in doing so we will further both Israeli national security and the safety and security of the United States of America.

“In addition to working to provide for our Common Defense and protect our sovereignty, I’ve also introduced an amendment that would safeguard our country in a very different way.

“Mr. President, I have introduced an amendment that will prohibit the Obama administration from giving away the Internet. This issue doesn’t simply threaten our personal liberties, it also has national security ramifications.

“The Obama administration is months away from deciding whether or not the United States Government will continue to provide oversight over the core functions of the Internet and continue to protect it from authoritarian regimes, who view the Internet as a way to increase their influence and suppress the freedom of speech. Just weeks ago the *Washington Post*, hardly a bastion of conservative thought, published an article entitled, “China’s scary lesson to the world: Censoring the Internet works.”

“We should not take our online freedom for granted. If Congress sits idly by and allows the administration to terminate U.S. oversight of the Internet, we can be certain that authoritarian regimes will work to undermine the new system of Internet governance and strengthen the position of their governments at the expense of those who stand for liberty and freedom of speech.

“This prospect is truly concerning given as the proposal submitted by Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). ICANN is global organization, and its latest proposal unquestionably decreases the position of the United States, while it increases the influence of over 160 foreign governments within ICANN in critical ways, foreign governments like China, foreign governments like Russia. Additionally, this proposal has the potential to expand ICANN’s historical core mission by creating a potential gateway to content regulation, and it would only further embolden ICANN’s leadership, which has a poor track record of acting in an unaccountable manner and a proven unwillingness to respond to specific questions posed by the United States Senate.

“Relinquishing our control over the Internet would be an irreversible decision. We must act affirmatively act to protect the Internet as well as the operation and security of the .gov and .mil top-level domains, which are vital to our national security.

“Mr. President, I would note for whatever reason, the Obama administration is pursuing the giveaway of the Internet in a dogged and ideological manner. It is the same naive foolishness that decades ago led Jimmy Carter to give away the Panama Canal. It is this utopian view that, even though we built it, we should give it to others whose interests are not our own. We should not have given away Panama Canal, and we should not be giving away the Internet. And if the Obama administration succeeds in giving away the Internet, that is number one, prohibited by the Constitution of the United States, which specifies that property of the United States Government cannot be transferred without the authority of Congress -- this administration is ignoring that constitutional limitation, is ignoring the law -- but if the Obama administration gives away the Internet, that will impact freedom. It will impact speech for you, for your children and your children's children.

“And I would note this body, one of the things this body is good at is inertia, is doing nothing. Right now that is what this body is doing to stop it. My amendment would say that control of the Internet cannot be transferred to anyone else without the affirmative approval of the United States Congress.

“If it is a good idea to give away the Internet that we built, that we preserve, that we keep free, that we protect the First Amendment -- if it's a good idea, and I can't imagine anyone reasonably objecting believing it is, but if it is a good idea, we ought to debate it on this floor. A decision of that consequence should be decided by Congress and not by unaccountable bureaucrats in the Obama administration. So it is my hope that colleagues in this body will come together at the very minimum to say not whether or not the Internet should be given away, but simply that Congress should decide that. There was a time this body was vigorous in protecting its constitutional prerogatives. It is my hope that this body will rediscover the imperative of doing so.

“The third amendment that I've introduced on the NDAA that I want to address is the Expatriate Terrorist Act, a bill that I introduced over a year ago, and I have now filed as an amendment to the NDAA.

“As we all know radical Islamists have been waging war against the United States since, and indeed well before, 9/11, and yet the President cannot bring himself to identify the enemy, preferring instead to use meaningless bureaucratic terms like violent extremists. The President naively believes that refraining from calling the threat what it is—radical Islamic terrorism—will somehow assuage the terrorists and discourage them from making war against us and our allies. But that hasn't stopped ISIS from promising to strike America over and over and over again. Nor did it dissuade the radical Islamic terrorists here in the United States who have committed attacks against Americans since this President first took office—the terrorist attack in Fort Hood, which the administration inexplicably tried to categorize as workplace violence; the Boston Marathon bombing; the terrorist attacks on military recruiters in Little Rock and Chattanooga; and most recently, the horrific attack in San Bernardino.

“The question for us in Congress is whether we have given the government every possible tool—consistent with our Constitution—to defeat this threat. I do not believe we have, which is why I have introduced the Expatriate Terrorist Act.

“Over the years, numerous Americans like Jose Padilla, Anwar al-Awlaki, and Faisal Shazad, just to name a few, have abandoned their country and their fellow citizens to go abroad and join radical Islamic terrorist groups. Intelligence officials estimate that more than 250 Americans have tried or succeeded in traveling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS or other terrorist groups in the region. This amendment updates the expatriate statute so that Americans who travel abroad to fight with radical Islamic terrorists can relinquish their citizenship. This allows us to preempt any attempt to re-enter the country and launch attacks on Americans who otherwise hide behind the privileges of citizenship. In this more and more dangerous world, it would be the height of foolishness for the administration to allow known terrorists, radical Islamic terrorists, those affiliated with ISIS, with Al Qaeda, with other Islamist groups, to travel back to the United States of America using a passport to carry out jihad and murder innocent Americans. This legislation should be bipartisan legislation. This legislation should be legislation that brings all of us together. We might disagree on questions of marginal tax rates as Democrats and Republicans. We might disagree on a host of policy issues, but when it comes to the simple question: should an Islamic terrorist intent on killing Americans be allowed to use a U.S. Passport to travel freely and come into America? That answer should be no, and that ought to be an issue of great agreement.

“So today I call upon my colleagues to join me in supporting these amendments, in coming together. Together these amendments strengthen our nation both at home and abroad.

“We are stronger than the obstacles we face, and by the grace of God, we will succeed. The stakes are too high to quit, and we will stand together and continue to strengthen this exceptional nation, this shining city on a hill that each and every one of us love. I yield the floor.”