

That doesn't sound exceptional, does it? "Please keep your children close and do whatever it takes to protect them." Think about that idea. Think about the idea that you can't let your children get far away from you in Chicago today because they are not at risk of getting lost; they are at risk of being shot.

The little girl had dreams of becoming a judge. That is not something that a lot of 12-year-old girls are thinking about, but Kanari wanted to be a judge. She was described as a vivacious young girl.

I hear President Trump talk about Chicago all the time. He talks about Chicago as though he cares, but he doesn't propose anything that would reduce the trajectory of gun violence, the horror of living in neighborhoods that you can't let your child stray more than a few feet from you without fearing for their lives. He has proposed nothing to do with making that city safer.

People say Chicago has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation, yet it is one of the most violent places. Exactly, exactly: Chicago has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation. New York City has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation. They are still violent places. Why? Because the vast majority of guns in those cities, the illegal guns that spread throughout the city like poison ivy come from outside of Chicago. They come from Indiana. In New York, they come from South Carolina. They come from North Carolina. They come from places in which it is easy to buy a gun without a background check at a gun show or on the internet. They flow into these cities and become used in murder after murder.

If you don't have a Federal requirement that background checks have to be conducted wherever you buy a gun, no matter how strong the laws of Chicago are, they can't be protected; 12-year-old girls can't be protected.

This was all in February, by the way. This was all in the last 3 weeks.

On February 20, some friends got together at a local church in Pomona, CA, and all of a sudden, gunshots started firing through the windows and the walls of this church—a drive-by shooting.

You know who was dead at the end of that? An 8-year-old little boy named Jonah. He was adopted from an orphanage in Taiwan. He had been in the United States for only 3 years. His adoptive parents and his friends—you should read what they say about this kid: "He had an infectious smile and loved everyone and everything."

He was still learning English, but with his playful demeanor, he had adapted almost immediately to life in the United States. He loved wrestling with his adoptive dad, running, laughing. He loved superheroes. He was always injuring himself jumping off of something. He loved living in this country.

He was a 5-year-old in an orphanage in Taiwan, and then he was in the United States with a dad and with superhero action figures, and now he is dead because somebody fired bullets randomly into a church in Pomona, CA.

Why don't we do anything about this? We are not so coldhearted as to be unable to understand what life is like for a mom and a dad who lose an 8-year-old child. We are not so brain-dead as to not be able to comprehend the fact that every time someone is shot, there are at least 20 people whose lives are permanently altered.

The post-traumatic stress involved in one shooting has enormous ripple effects. I have talked at length on this floor about the constant grief that envelopes my town of Sandy Hook because of what happened there. It will never end.

Now, instead of defending the status quo, we are talking about making it easier for deeply mentally ill people to get guns. A bill was just introduced on the floor of the Senate this week that would allow for someone to carry a concealed weapon anywhere in the Nation, regardless of what that local State jurisdiction wanted. If you had a concealed weapon permit in Texas, you would be able to walk into Manhattan without any way for the local police to check you out. There is even an effort to make silencers legal.

Mr. President, 31,000 a year, 2,600 a month, 86 a day. I have come down to the floor I don't know how many times—certainly not as many as Senator WHITEHOUSE but many times to tell the stories of the victims. I told a few more this afternoon because if the data doesn't move you—again, only in this country; in no other country in the world does this happen—then maybe the stories of these victims will move you. Maybe being able to put yourself in the shoes of a mom who lost a child, of a husband who lost a wife way before their time, will move you to action.

This is only controversial here. Ninety percent of the American public wants us to move forward with the universal background checks. The majority of Americans think these super-powerful military weapons should stay in the hands of the military and law enforcement. Everybody out there wants to give law enforcement the tools and the funding necessary to carry out the existing law. It is not controversial out in the American public; it is only controversial here.

It is about time that we do something about this epic level of carnage that continues to plague our Nation and have some response to these voices of victims that seem endless.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to enter into a colloquy with the Senator from Delaware.

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

RUSSIA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I am here to discuss, along with the Senator from Delaware, the issue of Russia. I know it has been at the forefront of much of the debate that is ongoing in this country. I wanted to begin by commending the Vice President and Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of State for the strong message of support for NATO. That includes the President last night and their strong support, by the way, for the Transatlantic Alliance that these individuals outlined during their respective visits to the Munich Security Conference and meetings with allies in February.

At that Munich Security Conference on February 18, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said: "I hope [he means the world] will choose a democratic world order, a post-West one, in which each country is defined by its sovereignty." I think that based on recent history, it is clear that when a Russian leader says "post-West," we should interpret that as a phrase to mean post-America.

So I would ask the Senator with regard to this, what are his views with regard to Vladimir Putin's desire to establish spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East, create divisions with our allies. How should we view the Russian world view as it compares to the national interests of the United States?

Mr. COONS. I would like to thank my friend, the Senator from Florida, my colleague on the Foreign Relations Committee and on the Appropriations Committee. I would like to answer his question by saying, it seems clear to all of us on the Foreign Relations Committee who have had the opportunity to travel to Eastern Europe to visit with our NATO allies that Vladimir Putin has a world view and an agenda that is in sharp contrast with our own.

Vladimir Putin dreams of returning Russia to the days of the Russian Empire, to reexerting influence over a broad geographic region from the Baltic Sea and Poland and Ukraine to the Caucasus and Central Asia. He has internally used the West and NATO as a scapegoat for Russia's internal economic woes. He has, as we know, launched invasions or extended his influence through forces and supported illiberal and separatist fighters in Georgia and Ukraine and Moldavia, former Soviet republics, and has launched cyber attacks and propaganda campaigns and coordinated the use of all his tools of state power against our NATO allies in the Baltic region and Central and Western Europe.

All of these things suggest a very different world view, a different set of values than we have in the United States and a different set of values in a way that really worries me. As my colleague from Florida has suggested, when Foreign Minister Lavrov talks about a world order defined by sovereignty, he is challenging us. He is challenging what the West really stands for, what we in America stand for.

I believe what we stand for is the universal values on which we forged the Transatlantic Alliance more than 70 years ago, a Transatlantic Alliance that has been a force for stability and good in the world, a Transatlantic Alliance that has secured peace in Western Europe, North America ever since the close of the Second World War but a Transatlantic Alliance that is rooted in values, values of freedom of speech, freedom of press, rule of law and democracy, and in opposition to authoritarianism.

We support American leadership because a stable and prosperous world makes us safer and more economically secure. So I would ask my friend from Florida what he views as the agenda or the objective of Russia and whether we can be hopeful, in any way, that Vladimir Putin's Russia has an agenda that is harmonious with ours, that can be put in the same direction as ours or whether it is fundamentally at odds.

Mr. RUBIO. To answer that question, I would begin by reminding everyone that when we are talking about Russia, we are not talking about the Russian people. We are talking about Vladimir Putin and the cronies who surround him and their goals for the future. We have no quarrel with the Russian people, who I actually believe would very much want to have a better relationship with the United States and certainly live in a world in which their country was more like ours than the way their government now runs theirs.

The second thing I would point to is, it is important to understand history. At the end of the Second World War, Nazism had been conquered, and the Japanese Empire and its designs had also been ended, fascism defeated. The United States and the world entered this period of a Cold War, a battle between communism and the free world. The United States and our allies stood for that freedom. At the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet bloc, the fall of communism, the world we all hoped had entered into this new era, where every nation had a different system—maybe some had a parliamentary system, maybe some had a republic, such as ours—but in the end, more people than ever would have access to a government responsive to their needs.

That was the growing trend around the world, up until about 7, 8, 10 years ago. We now see the opposite. We see a rising arc of the totalitarianism, and within that context is where I believe Vladimir Putin's world view is constructed. He views the values we stand

for, which some may call Western values, and perhaps that is the right terminology, but I really believe in universal values: the idea that people should have a role to play in choosing their leader, that people should have a freedom to worship as they see fit, that people should be able to express their opinions and ideas freely without fear of retribution or punishment by the government.

These are the values I think we have stood for and that our allies have stood for and that we had hoped Russia would stand for in this new era, but Vladimir Putin viewed that as a threat. In particular, over the last number of years, he has decided the best way for him to secure his place in Russian politics is through an aggressive foreign policy in which he views it as a zero-sum game.

That is not the way we view it. We actually view the world as a place where we can help rebuild Japan; we can help rebuild Germany. They are stronger, and we are stronger. It isn't one or the other.

He does not see it that way. He views the world as a place where in order for Russia to be greater, America has to be less; in order for him to be more powerful, we have to be less powerful, and it is a world in which he has to undermine democratic principles and try to expose them as fraudulent.

That is why you saw the Russian intelligence services meddle in our elections in 2016. One of the main designs they had was to create doubt and instability about our system of government and to not just discredit it here at home but to discredit it around the world.

I just returned from Europe a week ago. Germany and France, which both have upcoming elections of their own, are seeing an unprecedented wave of active measures on the part of Russian intelligence to try to influence their elections. In the Netherlands, we have seen some of the same. So this is very concerning.

Our European allies are very concerned about the weaponization of cyber technology to strategically place information in the public domain for purposes of undermining candidates, steering elections, and undermining policymaking.

I want everybody to understand this is not just about elections. The exact same tools they used in the 2016 Presidential election, they could use to try to influence the debate in the Senate by attacking individual Senators or individual viewpoints and using their control over propaganda to begin to spread that.

I will give you just one example, and that is in May of 2015, the German intelligence agencies reported an attack on the German Parliament, on energy companies, on universities. They attribute that to Russian hackers.

In Montenegro, the Prime Minister has sought membership in NATO, an action we have supported in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which

both of us serve on, but Russian intelligence has plotted at a very aggressive level to disrupt their elections late last year.

Moscow has used TV and Internet outlets like Russia Today, or RT, and Sputnik to launch propaganda campaigns to galvanize anti-EU extremists ahead of the Dutch elections. The list goes on and on. There is no shortage of them.

The point is, we are in the midst of the most aggressive, active measures ever undertaken by a foreign government to not just meddle in American policy debates and American elections but in those throughout the free world, and it is deeply concerning.

I think another matter that I would love to hear the Senator's opinion on is on the issue of human rights violations because, on top of being a totalitarian state, what goes hand in hand with totalitarianism are human rights violations. In fact, totalitarianism is, in and of itself, a human rights violation; that there can be no dictatorship, no repressive regime, no totalitarian leader who can maintain themselves in power without violating the human rights of their people.

So I would ask the Senator—I would love to have his comment on whether or not, indeed, Vladimir Putin is a serial human rights violator and what our policy should be in terms of outlining that to the world.

Mr. COONS. We have worked together on a number of bills in this area. Let me respond to my friend the Senator by saying it is clear that Vladimir Putin's Russia has been a serial human rights violator. When we talk about human rights, we talk about things that belong to everyone, and they are necessary as a check on state power. When nations break these rules, we believe they should be held accountable.

Russia continues to engage in efforts, as my colleague said, that undermine democracy in free elections throughout Europe. We have shared concerns about the upcoming elections—the Dutch elections, French, and German elections—where there are overt actions and covert actions by Russia to influence the outcome of those elections, but part of why they are doing that, part of why they are violating these norms around Europe is because they are seeking to distract from their brutal rule at home.

The reality is, many of the critics of Putin's regime end up dead or incapacitated.

Boris Nemtsov, a Russian politician who supported the introduction of capitalism into the Russian economy and frequently criticized Vladimir Putin, was assassinated 2 years ago, on February 27, on a bridge just near the Kremlin in Moscow.

Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian politician and journalist, was apparently poisoned last month, the second time in recent years. He had been actively promoting civil society and democracy in Russia.

Back in September of 2012, Putin threw USAID out of Russia altogether, claiming that U.S. efforts were undermining Russian sovereignty when, in fact, we had been working in Russia since the nineties, supporting human rights, independent journalism, and promoting fair elections.

Most importantly, in my view, Russia doesn't just violate the human rights of its own citizens, it exports brutality.

Russia's support for Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime and brutal war in Syria continues. Their military has targeted hospitals, schools, and Syrian first responders. They have blocked the provision of food and medicine to starving families and children. Russia's diplomats have vetoed any efforts at the United Nations to act to stop the suffering in Syria. Also, Russia, having illegally invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, continues to promote violence and instability in eastern Ukraine, in the Donbas region, leading to the deaths of thousands.

All of these human rights violations within Russia and in countries around its sphere of influence, in its region, suggest to us that they need to be held accountable for these violations of basic human rights.

Like the Senator from Florida, I led a codel to Eastern and Central Europe. Mine was not last week. It was last August, but with two Republican House Members and two Democratic Senate Members, the five of us went to the Czech Republic, to Ukraine, and to Estonia. We heard widespread concern about this record of human rights and a disrespect for democracy in Russia and about this aggressive hybrid warfare campaign that threatens Ukraine's very stability and existence, that puts Estonia, our NATO ally, on warning, and that is putting at risk Czech independence and Czech elections all across Central and Western Europe.

We have heard from Ambassadors, experts, those who have testified in front of committees on which we serve, about a Russian campaign—a brutal campaign—to undermine human rights within Russia and to undermine democracy throughout Western Europe, with a larger strategic goal of separating the United States from our Western allies and undermining the Transatlantic Alliance that has been so essential to our peace, security, and stability for 70 years. We cannot let this stand.

There is no moral equivalence between Russia and the United States. If we believe in our democracy and if we believe in our commitment to human rights, we must stand up to this campaign of aggression. So I ask my colleague what he believes we might be able to do on the Foreign Relations Committee, on the Appropriations Committee, or here in the Senate, what we might do, as voices working in a bipartisan way, to stand up to these actions undermining democracy and human rights?

Mr. RUBIO. That is the central question. The first is what we are doing now, which is an important part: shining the sunlight on all of it, making people aware of it. For example, we know in France two of the leading candidates have views that I think the Kremlin would be quite pleased with, if that became the foreign policy of France—a third, not so much. He is a very young candidate running as an independent. His last name Macron. Suddenly, as he began to surge in the polls, all these stories started appearing, ridiculous stories about his personal life, about his marriage, things that are completely false, completely fabricated. Fortunately, French society and the French press understands this and has reported it as such.

It is important for us. This is happening and is real, and it is unprecedented in its scope and in its aggression. So shining a light on the reality and understanding, as I always tell my colleagues—I said this last October, that this is not a partisan issue.

I am telling you that—to my Republican colleagues who might be uncomfortable about discussing Russian interference—this is not about the outcome of the election; this is about the conduct and what happened throughout it. And what they did last year, in the fall, in the Presidential race, they can do against any Member here. If they don't like what you are saying, if they think you are getting too far on policy, you could find yourself the target of Russian propaganda in the hopes of undermining you, perhaps even having you eliminated from the debate because they understand our political process quite well.

The second is to do no harm. There is this notion out there—and I think on paper it sounds great, right—why don't we just partner up with the Russians to defeat ISIS and take on radicalism around the world.

The problem is this: No. 1, that is what Russia claims they are already doing. Vladimir Putin claims he is already doing that. So if he is already doing it, why would we have to partner with him? He is already doing it. Obviously, the answer is because he hasn't. This has been about propping up Assad.

Here is the other problem. When you partner up with someone, you have to take responsibility for everything they do and all the actions they undertake.

Senator COONS just outlined a moment ago, he said: Well, we talked about the bombing in Aleppo.

Think about it. If we had partnered with Russia in Syria and they were bombing Aleppo and they were hitting hospitals and they were killing civilians and they were our partners, we have to answer for that as well. We would be roped into that.

The third is to understand their strategic goal is not to defeat radical elements in the Middle East; their strategic goal is to have inordinate influence in Syria, with Iran, potentially in other countries at the expense of the United States.

We have had two Presidents—a Republican and a Democrat—previous to the current President who thought they could do such a deal with Vladimir Putin. Both of them fell on their face because they did not understand what they were dealing with. It is my sincerest hope that our current President doesn't make the same mistakes.

In addition to that, I know there are a number of legislative approaches that we have worked on together, as members of both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, and I would ask the Senator from Delaware if he could highlight some of those legislative matters that we have been talking about: resolutions, laws, and public policy that we have been advocating.

Mr. COONS. Well, briefly, if I could. Two bills that are currently gathering cosponsors—and which I hope our colleagues will review and consider joining us in cosponsoring—one is S. 341, the Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017, which currently has 18 cosponsors. The other is S. 94, the Counteracting Russian Hostilities Act of 2017, that has 20 cosponsors—10 Republicans and 10 Democrats. In both cases, we are proud to have a very broad range of both Republicans and Democrats engaged in this important legislation, which ensures that Russia pays a price for breaking the rules. It starts by taking action to support the sanctions against the Russian Government for its occupation, its illegal annexation of Crimea, for its egregious human rights violations in Syria, and for meddling in the U.S. election. It prevents the lifting of sanctions on Russia until the Russian Government ceases the very activities that caused these sanctions to be put in place in the first place. It supports civil society, pro-democracy, anti-corruption activists in Russia and across Europe to show that many of us are determined, as members of the Foreign Relations Committee, as members of the Appropriations Committee, as Senators—not as partisans—that we intend to fund the tools that will enable the United States and our NATO allies to push back on Russia's aggression. Most of these tools come from the international affairs budget: State Department and foreign assistance accounts.

I want to commend you, Senator, for giving a strong and impassioned speech on the floor today about the importance of our keeping all of these tools in our toolkit so that as we confront our adversaries around the world, we have the resources and the ability to partner with and strengthen our allies as well.

We have no quarrel with the Russian people, but we are here because there is nothing Vladimir Putin's regime would love more than to see his actions divide us in this Chamber and divide us in this country from our vital allies in Europe and divide the whole North Atlantic community that for seven decades has brought peace and stability to

Europe, has brought prosperity to the United States, not as an act of charity but as an investment in the best interests of security.

We are here to say with one voice that we will stand up to Russian aggression that undermines democracy and violates human rights.

I am grateful for my colleague, for the chance to join him on the floor today, and I look forward to working together with any of our colleagues who see these issues as clearly as my friend and colleague, the Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. I thank the Senator for joining me in this endeavor here today. It is important that we speak out about this.

In a moment, the majority leader will be here with some procedural matters that will, I guess, take the Senate to a different posture.

Before that happens, I wanted to close by not just thanking him for being a part of this but by making a couple more points.

The first is, I want you to imagine for a moment, if you are sitting at the Kremlin and you are watching on satellite television the debate going on in American politics today, you are probably feeling pretty good about yourself. You have one group arguing that maybe the elections weren't legitimate because the Russians interfered. In essence, there have been news reports about a tension between the President and the Intelligence Committee. You have these reports every single day back and forth. You are looking at all this chaos, and you are saying to yourself: We did a pretty good job. If what we wanted to do was to divide the American people against each other, have them at each other's throats, arguing about things, and sowing chaos and instability into their political process, I think you look at the developments of the last 6 weeks and 6 months, and if you are in the Kremlin, you say: Well, our efforts have been pretty successful with that. I think that is the first thing we need to understand.

The second thing is, this should all be about partisanship. I am a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. It is probably known that we are undertaking an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 elections. I want everyone to know—I speak for myself and I believe almost all of my colleagues when I say, on the one hand, I am not interested in being a part of a witch hunt; on the other hand, I will not be part of a coverup. We are going to get to the truth. We want to get to the truth. We want to be able to deliver to this body and to the American people a document with truth and facts, wherever they may lead us, because this is above political party. Our system of government and this extraordinary Republic has been around for over two centuries. It is unique and it is special, and with all of its blemishes and flaws, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

I want people to think about that. The next time you wonder and say to yourself that things are so tough in America and things are going so poorly, well, with whom would you trade places? I am not saying we don't have problems, because we do, but I ask, in what country would you rather be? I promise you that you won't say China if you know anything about China. I promise you that you won't say Russia if you know anything about Russia. There is no nation on Earth we would trade places with, and there is no process of government I would trade for ours. It is not perfect.

One of the strengths of our system is our ability to stand up here in places like the Senate and discuss our differences and our problems and make continuous progress forward even if the pace is slower and more frustrating than we wish. That is what is at stake in this process and what is at stake in this debate. That is what none of us can allow to see erode because of interference by a foreign government, especially one that is a thug and war criminal in every sense of the word.

So our quarrel is not with the Russian people and it is not with Russia. I have extraordinary admiration for the Russian people. I have extraordinary admiration for the sacrifices and contributions they have made throughout history to our culture and to the world. But, unfortunately, today their government is run by an individual who has no respect for his own people and no respect for the freedom and liberty of others, and it is important for our policymakers on both sides of the aisle to be clear-eyed and clear-voiced in what we do moving forward.

I thank the Senator for being with us today and allowing us to engage in this discussion. I hope we will see more of that in the weeks and months to come so we can speak clearly and firmly in one voice that on issues involving America and our sovereignty and our system of government and decisions we must make, we will speak with one voice as one Nation, as one people, as one country.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the sesquicentennial anniversary of the founding of the University of Illinois, a nationally recognized institution of higher education with a long record of innovation and discovery and the home of the Fighting Illini.

In 1867, 150 years ago, my home State of Illinois established the University of Illinois with the purpose of fostering access to higher education for the working people. It would become one of 37 public, land-grant institutions established as a result of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln.

Over the past 150 years, the University of Illinois and those associated with it have been responsible for pushing the boundaries of human knowledge, scientific discovery, social justice, and equality.

In 1941, David Blackwell, the son of a railroad worker from southern Illinois, received his Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Illinois. In 1965, Dr. Blackwell became the first African American elected to the National Academy of Sciences, whose members advise the President and Congress on matters related to science and technology. Dr. Blackwell is regarded as the most famous African-American mathematician in history.

In 1948, the University of Illinois became, and remains to this day, the most accessible campus in the world for individuals with disabilities. Timothy Nugent founded the first comprehensive program of higher education for individuals with disabilities at the University and helped create a campus that allowed individuals with disabilities to move about freely and independently. While the availability of buses with wheelchair lifts, accessible street curbs, and comprehensive collegiate programs for those with disabilities all have become the national standard, they started at the University of Illinois.

The University of Illinois has long been a leader in groundbreaking research and innovation in science. In the early 1970s, Paul Lauterbur discovered magnetic resonance imaging—better known by its initials: MRI. For his pioneering work, he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 2003.

Today the university is one of the premier public research universities in the world. It ranks in the top 50 universities in America for research and development dollars spent in science and engineering. It is also home to one of the world's most powerful supercomputers, known as Blue Waters. Blue Waters is the fastest supercomputer located on a college campus in the world.

What began 150 years ago as a small building on the Illinois prairie between