

proud, people who will respect both sides but who will enforce the law, and people who, when it becomes time to change the law, can properly make that decision and have the guts to do it. There aren't many cases that have to be changed, however. All I can say is there are some that both sides wish would be changed, and on both sides.

All I can say is this: I hope our colleagues will treat this President's nominees with greater respect. I have always tried to treat their nominees with great respect, and I helped get them through. Justice Ginsburg had only three votes against her, if I recall correctly. It was very few votes. There are judges who are now on the bench who I couldn't support, but I didn't stop them from having a vote up or down. Frankly, there are judges on the Circuit Court of Appeals whom we allowed to come up and whom I personally would not have approved as a President or otherwise but who were picked properly by the Democratic President and who had enough good recommendations on their side to sit on the bench. I think that is what has made this country a great country—that we understand that there are different points of view, not just in politics, but with regard to the law itself. And all of us have to understand that and realize that when somebody's elected President, that person, whether he or she, deserves to have fair consideration of the judicial nominees.

It is no secret that President Obama put almost 50 percent of the Federal bench on the bench, and he had a lot of up-and-down votes on them. Yes, there were some notable differences and notable debates, but by and large, the President got whomever he wanted. And I have to say that in the past, Republican Presidents generally got whomever they wanted. But in the intervening number of years since *Roe v. Wade*, we have had nothing but big problems that I think have resulted in the denigration of the bench and which should never have occurred.

I hope my colleagues, all of whom I deeply admire and like, will take some of these things into consideration and treat Judge Gorsuch with the true and deliberate respect that he deserves. I hope they can bring themselves to vote for him because he is truly a wonderful man, a great father, a wonderful husband to his wife, a tremendous person from the West, a fly fisherman, a fellow whom every one of his law clerks deeply loves, and a person who, by any measure, is one of the brightest judges in the country today. I can't really think of anybody who would be brighter than he is or any better than he is.

So Donald Trump picked one of the best people, if not the best person in America, for this job, and I hope my colleagues on the other side will recognize that in spite of their dislike, and sometimes even hatred, for Donald Trump, this is important. And it is important that we start handling these matters with greater dignity, greater

fairness. When we really do disagree, fine; let's have a debate and battle on it, and let the chips fall where they may. But not all of these deserve to be in that category, and certainly Judge Gorsuch does not deserve to be in that category. He is an absolutely outstanding person.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

RUSSIA AND CALLING FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL PROSECUTOR

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, sovereign nations across the globe are brought together by different unifying forces. It can be a shared heritage, language, religion, or outside historical forces that led to borders drawn decades or centuries ago.

As a nation, we are unique. We are diverse in every sense of the word, but even in these polarizing times, we are overwhelmingly unified. We are unified by our belief in democracy, free enterprise, and economic opportunity. We are all entrusted in nurturing the ideas enshrined in our Constitution—the idea that our system of democratic government enables us to work toward a more perfect union. At a time when the promise of democracy is receding for far too many around the world, we must do everything we can to uphold our country's free and fair elections, the foundation of our democracy.

Our elections should serve as a global benchmark for the peaceful transition of power. As President Reagan said, we must be “the shining city upon the hill,” and we must lead by example. Our elections require a strong and steady commitment from our newly naturalized citizens; from families whose families fought in the Revolutionary War; from volunteers who cover 16-hour shifts to keep polling locations open; from country, city, and township clerks.

The preservation of free and fair elections requires a strong commitment from our highest elected official in the land. As Americans, we look to the President of the United States to safeguard our democracy from foreign adversaries.

When we are presented with clear and mounting evidence that the Russian Government, at the personal discretion of Russian President Vladimir Putin, orchestrated a campaign to undermine this most fundamental institution and interfere in our election, we should expect nothing less than a clear and forceful response from the White House that this kind of behavior is simply unacceptable. Unfortunately, what we have seen from President Trump and the White House so far amounts to little more than confusion, evasion, and a whole lot of smoke.

President Trump has spoken time and again about wanting to build closer ties with Russia. On the campaign trail, he frequently fawned over Putin's strength as a leader. In 2013, he asked his Twitter followers, “Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Mos-

cow—if so, will he become my new best friend?”

While I don't believe that Putin attended the pageant, the nature of the Putin-Trump relationship remains an open question. It confuses me and quite frankly alarms me that President Trump speaks so fondly of a man who brutally cracks down on his political opponents and journalists at home while stirring up conflict and aggressions abroad.

Make no mistake, Vladimir Putin is no friend of the United States or of the American people. Our Nation's intelligence agencies agree with high confidence that his government orchestrated a campaign to undermine the integrity of our recent election, and Putin has sought at every turn to destabilize the international order that has kept the American people and our allies secure for decades.

Russia's interference in our election was not an isolated incident. It is part of a broader effort to undermine the NATO alliance and weaken western democracies. I heard from our French and German allies at the Munich Security Conference last month about their concerns that Russia will continue to engage in disinformation campaigns in European elections. As we aspire to be the free-market driven, democratic “city upon a hill,” Putin's government works to sow chaos globally in an effort to further consolidate power in his nationalist, self-enriching regime.

These attempts to destabilize Russia's neighbors and rivals are not limited to cyber space and computer code. These provocations involve military aircraft, ships, nuclear capable missiles, heavy artillery, drones, and efforts to redraw international borders.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I believe that the highest duty of Congress is to keep Americans safe. Russia's dangerous and unprofessional military provocations not only place American servicemembers and NATO allies at risk, they endanger civilian lives and raise the specter of escalating regional conflict.

Just last month, Russian aircraft flew within a few hundred feet of the USS Porter in international waters in a dangerous mock attack—an action the ship's captain called out as “unsafe and unprofessional.”

Last summer, while on a congressional delegation to meet with NATO allies, I heard directly from Estonian leaders about Russia's blatant disregard for their sovereignty. Russian forces kidnapped a border guard in Estonian territory and sentenced him behind closed doors to 15 years in prison, in what a top European Union official called “a clear violation of international law.”

We have seen the Russians fly reconnaissance and fighter jets in international airspace, with their transponders switched off in order to avoid detection—at one point, nearly colliding in midair with a passenger airplane. NATO has been forced to scramble jets almost 800 times—let me repeat

that: 800 times—in 2016 alone, just to respond to Russia's encroachments on NATO airspace.

As the President speaks glowingly about Putin, Mr. Putin returns the favor by deploying a dangerous new cruise missile, in clear violation of the Reagan-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Simultaneously, a Russian spy ship has been spotted lurking off the U.S. coast, trying to gather intelligence information near the Navy's primary east coast submarine base.

We are also seeing Russia undertake the largest military buildup in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War and at a pace faster than we ever, ever saw during the Soviet era.

Russia is reopening defunct military outposts and building new ones all across the polar region. There are 13 new Russian airfields that are scheduled to open by the end of this year. The Russian military recently staged an exercise in the Arctic region with well over 12,000 troops.

As the Russians build up their forces in the Arctic, the United States is falling behind. Our principal maritime force in the Arctic is the U.S. Coast Guard, but they have only one heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, that is capable of keeping Arctic shipping lanes open or conducting search and rescue missions year-round. A new icebreaker to replace the Polar Star is still a few years away.

In contrast, the Russians have over 40 icebreakers in their fleet, many of them nuclear, with plans for three new icebreakers underway. At a time when we should be investing in our Arctic capabilities, the Trump administration has been considering deep cuts to the Coast Guard's budget.

Russia's expansionist activities and military probing are not occurring in a vacuum. The numerous threats and provocations that I have outlined occur as Russia continues to wage war in eastern Ukraine in the wake of their illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilizing the opportunity for the Ukrainian people to chart their own political and economic destiny. There are 10,000 people who have lost their lives in this conflict as a direct result of Russian aggression.

Last year, as I traveled with my Senate colleagues to Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, I learned firsthand about the efforts in these countries to strengthen their civil institutions and root out corruption, build lasting partnerships, and stand up to Russian provocations. While they are doing their part, they continue to look to the United States for global leadership.

This year, U.S. troops deployed to Eastern Europe to demonstrate our ironclad commitment to our NATO allies, where they were welcomed with open arms. We are working with our partners in Iceland to enhance their capabilities to detect and respond to a recent increase in Russian submarine patrols.

I am also proud to stand with the airmen of the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard, who deployed from my State to build on their long record of successful cooperation with our partners in Latvia.

When the Kremlin is threatening our allies, buzzing our Navy warships, and meddling in foreign elections, now is not the time to call into question the commitment or the resolve of the United States of America.

Vladimir Putin's world view is shaped by his time in the KGB during the Cold War. He is committed to projecting Russian strength, both at home and abroad, through intimidation and aggression. Strength is what he respects. If Putin's provocations are not met with a strong response, they will continue and likely escalate, putting American interests and the American people at risk.

Top officials in the Trump administration have been dispatched to criss-cross Europe and reassure the world of our commitments to global security. I joined Vice President PENCE and Secretary Mattis in Germany last month for the annual Munich Security Conference.

They spoke of America's commitment to NATO and the international order, which was built from the ashes of World War II, in an apparent attempt to reassure our nervous allies, but our allies are not trying to understand the aims of the Mattis administration or the Pence administration. They are trying to determine if President Trump will stand behind NATO and the institutions that have served as a counterweight to Russian aggression for decades.

The American people are also watching the White House, and they deserve to know that those who serve at the highest levels of government will always have America's best interests at heart. But every week we are faced with mounting evidence that the Trump administration and the Trump campaign have ties to Russia and are working to cover up their interactions with Russian officials.

Earlier this week, in testimony before the House Intelligence Committee, FBI Director Comey announced that the FBI was "investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian Government and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts." This bears repeating. The FBI Director has confirmed that there is an active investigation into coordination between a Presidential campaign and a foreign adversary. This is just the latest development in a long string of disturbing revelations about President Trump's associates.

Ousted campaign chairman Paul Manafort has a deep web of business and political connections to Russian interests. Other campaign advisers have backed off previous claims that they never spoke with Russian offi-

cials. In fact, the coverup of these interactions has already resulted in the first resignation from the Trump administration.

Not long after President Obama imposed sanctions on the Russian officials and military intelligence agencies that were responsible for interfering in our election, former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn had a secret, off-the-record discussion with Russian Ambassador Kislyak, in which he discussed lifting these sanctions under the incoming Trump administration.

Top officials at the Justice Department clearly warned the White House that Mr. Flynn was vulnerable to Russian blackmail. He resigned only after it became clear that he misled the public and the Vice President about the substance of these off-the-record conversations.

But it doesn't just end there.

The Attorney General, at best, misled the Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings about his record of contact with Russian officials. He testified under oath that he "did not have communications with the Russians" during the campaign. When it became clear that he had actually met with the Russian Ambassador at least twice last year, including in a one-on-one meeting in the final weeks of the campaign, he was forced to recuse himself from the Justice Department's criminal investigation into this very, very serious issue.

It has been my experience that, when people are caught covering up their meetings and contacts with someone, they usually have something to hide. If you have nothing to hide, there is no reason for a coverup.

The serious national security implications of the Trump administration's potential ties with Russia cannot be overstated. This is a time when we need to make clear that Russian aggression will not stand. Instead, the President has attempted to distract the public through unsubstantiated allegations about the wiretapping of Trump Tower—an allegation that has been refuted by FBI Director Comey and others. President Trump continues to double down by calling into question the motives of those who want assurances about integrity in our elections.

Let me be clear. This is not about partisan politics. When there is so much smoke, there is probably some fire somewhere. If another country is infiltrating our government and political institutions or if Vladimir Putin has favors to cash in from officials at the highest levels of government, that is a serious problem.

Russia has endangered our servicemembers, threatened our allies, illegally annexed Crimea, engaged in war crimes in their bombing of Aleppo, and actively worked to undermine our democracy. These revelations are only adding more smoke to the Russia fire, and it is clear we need a special prosecutor to investigate.

The American people expect this investigation to be free from any political interference or influence or bias. We need someone to cut through the smoke and clear the air. An independent special prosecutor should be appointed to examine Russia's campaign to interfere in our election as well as any association or coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia.

I also believe that the time has come to create an independent, nonpartisan commission to fully investigate Russian interference. Earlier today, I co-sponsored legislation introduced by Senator CARDIN that would create such a commission and provide it with the necessary subpoena power to get the answers that the American people clearly deserve.

This is not about Democrats or Republicans or about relitigating the 2016 election. This is about our national security. This commission, modeled after the 9/11 Commission, would provide a comprehensive report on what occurred last year and make recommendations as to how we can best defend the integrity of future elections.

This is about how we move forward together. This is about how we maintain the independence of our government from foreign influence and instill faith in Americans that the White House is truly working for them.

This is about moving past months of coverups and finally extinguishing this smoldering Russian fire or proving that all of this smoke is, truly, just a series of misunderstandings.

This issue shakes the foundations of our democracy, but our Union has survived harder challenges than this.

At a time when the public's trust in government is called into question, we must do everything we can to restore faith in the integrity and the impartiality of our institutions.

Just as we, as Americans, are unified in our faith in democracy and economic opportunity, we are unified in our belief in the rule of law. Just as we must show strength abroad through our military and our alliances, we must show strength at home by rooting out corruption and protecting our democratic process.

All of us—Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the White House, our diplomats and our military—must send a clear, unified message to authoritarian leaders in Moscow and everywhere else that threats levied against the United States will never be tolerated and that there will be a price to pay for making them.

The American people expect us to keep them safe while strengthening our Republic against enemies, both foreign and domestic. It is our duty to prove that we are up to the job.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO IVORY GERHARDT CYRUS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as my colleagues know, I have been coming to the floor week after week to recognize an Alaskan who has made a difference in his or her community. As I have said repeatedly—I am a little biased, of course—I have the honor of living in the most beautiful State in the country, but it is our people who truly make it special. They are resilient, kind, and giving. And it is the next generation that is going to continue to make my State the best place in the world to live.

This week I would like to introduce my colleagues to 18-year-old Ivory Gerhardt Cyrus, this week's Alaskan of the Week. Ivory lives in Kiana, a beautiful, close-knit Inupiat village of less than 400 people on the banks of the Kobuk River in Northwest Alaska. Like many villages in Alaska, there are no roads in and out. People travel to Kotzebue, which is the closest hub city—it is not very much of a city but a big village—about 40 miles away by plane or snow machine, boat, or sometimes dog team. That is where Ivory was raised—in Kiana—and where, against many odds, she has strived.

Ivory was born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which made getting through school a challenge. She was at times misunderstood, at times bullied, and many didn't know how to deal with her properly.

About 120 kids each year are diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in Alaska. When she was in middle school, Ivory began committing herself to helping them by speaking out about her own experiences and by advocating the way students with behavioral issues are treated in school. She was an advocate for them.

Now she is an honor roll high school senior, graduating this spring, and along the way, she has become a State of Alaska trainer for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. She gave a presentation at an international conference recently on disability and diversity, and she was named one of five recipients of the 27th annual Women of Achievement and Youth Awards in Alaska.

This is what I find most impressive about Ivory: She is passing a message of hope and service on to her peers. She started a group, encouraging the members of the group to do one positive thing each day. The name of the group is appropriately entitled "One Positive Thing," or "OPT." That message has spread throughout her community, and now villages in Kiana are remembering to do one positive thing each day for themselves, their families, and their community. Last year, she held her first OPT conference in Kiana for youth all across the region. This year, that conference—the next OPT conference, One Positive Thing—will be held on April 7 and 8.

Ivory is an exceptional young woman. She is going to go on to do exceptional things. Next fall, she plans on attending the University of Alaska Anchorage where she plans to continue to do one positive thing each day and will bring that positive attitude to the students at UAA. She is going to continue to encourage others to do that as well.

I congratulate her for all of her accomplishments, for being our Alaskan of the Week, and congratulations to her parents, Jean and Tom, for the wonderful job they have done in raising this exceptional young lady.

Ivory gives us all hope for the future.

Mr. President, 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. SULLIVAN. 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. SULLIVAN. 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.

UNITED STATES-COSTA RICA
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the productive partnership between the United States and Costa Rica. I recently had the chance to meet with President Guillermo Solis, and I can attest that this is a bilateral relationship strengthened by Costa Rica's unwavering support for democracy and human rights, comprehensive economic relations, and a deep-rooted commitment to security and the environment. Since 1851, the United States has enjoyed formal diplomatic relations with Costa Rica, one of Latin America's most enduring democracies, and the close cooperation between our two countries is an example of how international engagement consistently advances U.S. national interests and national security.

In recent years, Costa Rica has become one of the United States' most strategic security partners in Central America. In 2016, in response to the challenges of increasing cocaine trafficking in the region, President Solis's administration developed a security strategy that sets aggressive goals to expand its capacity to control Costa Rica's sovereign airspace and maritime territory. Last year, Costa Rica seized more than 24,000 kilos of cocaine that were ultimately bound to the United