

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

States. Despite a difficult fiscal situation, Costa Rica is projected to increase its investment in security by 20 percent in 2017. I commend the Obama administration's decision to donate two Island-class cutters to the Costa Rican Coast Guard, which will greatly boost Costa Rica's capacity to combat the narcotics trade. This also serves as a reminder of the strategic value of the State Department's security cooperation at a time when the Trump administration is proposing shortsighted cuts to our foreign assistance budget.

Additionally, I want to call attention to Costa Rica's collaboration with the United States in addressing the humanitarian challenges related to individuals fleeing violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of migrants from these three countries who have requested asylum in Costa Rica more than quadrupled, a dramatic increase that reflects the urgency of the situation in Central America. In a clear demonstration of President Solis's leadership on these issues, Costa Rica and the United States signed an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, to establish a relocation and processing facility in Costa Rica for up to 200 at-risk migrants at a time from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This critical screening provides immediate protection for those most vulnerable and opens opportunities for these individuals to be relocated to third countries.

Our joint agreement with UNHCR is but one example of U.S. and Costa Rican collaboration at multilateral fora. Costa Rica has consistently voted with the United States at the United Nations on critical issues related to Syria, North Korea, and Ukraine. In the past year, Costa Rica has also used its voice and vote at the Organization of American States to express concern about the growing challenges to democracy and human rights in Venezuela.

Furthermore, in August 2016, Costa Rica's commitment to human rights was on display when it became the first country to ratify the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance—an important step toward a more just and egalitarian society within the Americas. The convention reinforces international standards on all forms of discrimination, reaffirms the commitment of member states of the OAS to the complete and unconditional eradication of racism, and takes a step forward in the legal definition of contemporary forms of racism.

As a champion of environmental stewardship, Costa Rica has made great strides to develop renewable energy. Costa Rica recently set an ambitious carbon neutrality goal for 2021 and is well positioned to achieve this important objective. The country recently ran 75 days straight on renewable power, and, with continued foreign

investment and U.S. diplomatic assistance, Costa Rica is on its way to becoming a carbon-neutral nation. I am hopeful that our diplomatic mission to Costa Rica will continue to support the country's interest in being a leader in the fight against climate change. Helping Costa Rica realize innovations in its power sector helps foster a broader strategic partnership with an important neighbor in our hemisphere.

At a moment characterized by the Trump administration's isolationist rhetoric, it is critically important to recognize that the United States is safer when we cooperate with other countries in the region to fight the battle against organized crime and illegal drug-trafficking. At the same time, Costa Rica's cooperation with the United Nations to support orderly and lawful migration, its collaboration with its neighbors in the region, and its efforts to promote human rights regionally are worthy of our commendation. Costa Rica is a true partner of the United States, and it is imperative that we continue to strengthen and expand the cooperation between our two countries to promote more security, prosperity, and stability in Central America and across the hemisphere.

TRIBUTE TO BARBARA VACHON

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Barbara Vachon, who retired this March after 16 years of service to the Senate. For as long as I have been in the Senate, with just a 2-month exception, Barb has served as my executive assistant and my right hand.

Barb's service to the Senate began in 2001, when her friend Trecia called and offered her a temporary position in Senator Jim Jeffords' office. In New Hampshire at the time, Barb decided she would take a chance and try out life in Washington, DC. Barb thought she was coming down to Washington for a 2-month assignment, answering phones and staffing the front office until the office could hire someone right out of college, but Barb quickly became an invaluable member of Senator Jeffords' team. Eventually, she became the Senator's executive assistant, working alongside him every day until his retirement from the Senate in 2007.

Barb's first year in the Senate included Senator Jeffords switching parties, 9/11, and the anthrax and ricin scares. Any one of these events might have given a different person a reason to leave the Senate, but Barb stayed and worked as hard as ever. When Senator Jeffords retired in 2007, Barb helped Senator BERNIE SANDERS' office learn the ways of the Senate for 2 months, after which she joined my office.

From day 1, Barb was always the person who made the trains run on time in my office. Barb had the challenging and sometimes impossible task of keeping my day on schedule, while at the same time juggling phone calls, personal notes, briefing memos, and

any number of inquiries that came across her desk. There were even a few times where she managed to track down particularly old and rare library books at my request. No matter the task at hand, Barb approached her work with good humor and a can-do attitude that impressed everyone.

Barb's contributions in my Senate office are immeasurable, but I thought it was worth trying to quantify some of the ways in which she has served the people of Pennsylvania and our Nation. During her decade of service to Pennsylvania, Barb welcomed more than 200 ambassadors, dignitaries, and administration officials to my office, drafted more than 500 letters, and greeted over 1,000 Pennsylvanians at my "Keystone Coffees." She acted as a mentor and support system for all my staff members, and befriended everyone she worked with in the Senate. Everyone, from the Capitol Police officers she passed on her 3-block commute, to the photographers in the Senate Photo Studio who patiently waited while Barb shepherded our constituents for photos, knows how valued Barb was to our team and to me personally.

Having been in the Senate long before I was, Barb understood how to balance the everyday needs in the office with the overall goals we set for ourselves when we first began our service here. Barb provided everyone in my office, myself included, with the important perspective that is often lost here in the Senate: it is easy to get bogged down in details or small problems, but the work we do here is important, lasting, and honorable. Barb never lost sight of how fortunate we are to work in this institution, and I know our team is grateful to have always had that reminder.

It is hard to imagine my office without Barb, but I know she will enjoy her retirement, whether she is home in New Hampshire or traveling the world. I wish her and her children, Heather and Michael, well in this new chapter.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO LESLIE CARTNER

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, this week, I have the distinct honor of recognizing Leslie Cartner, commander of the Yellowstone Battalion of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps in Billings. Leslie's devotion to the Yellowstone Battalion, the only Sea Cadet organization in the State of Montana, has been outstanding. In the next few weeks, Leslie will complete her tenure as Yellowstone Battalion Commander and transfer responsibility for the Sea Cadet program to another capable Montanan.

In 1962, Congress chartered the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps. Today there are over 380 Sea Cadet units and nearly 9,000 young Americans participating in the program. In the Yellowstone Battalion, under Leslie's leadership, the