

England and his barons—established that the Nation's people have certain rights and that even the monarch is subject to the laws of the land. Centuries later, as we cast off the British monarchy, declared our independence, and established our own form of government, our Nation's founders enshrined the rule of law in our Constitution.

Our system of checks and balances was designed to hold all levels of the Federal Government accountable but especially the President. Without the rule of law, law and order becomes merely order imposed by an unaccountable government. We know what order without the rule of law looks like. Last century it looked like the regimes of the Axis Powers. Now it looks like North Korea, Egypt, the Philippines, and, yes, Russia. These are all nations led by strongmen whom our President has praised in some manner, strongmen who hold democratic institutions in contempt and exercise disproportionate control over their nations' military, government institutions, and the media.

While the press here in the United States remains independent, we have a President who has chosen to regularly do battle with what he derides as the "fake news media." He has even called our cherished, constitutionally protected free press "the enemy of the American people."

It is often said that the news is the "first rough draft of history." While the President can attempt to wage war with the news media, none of us can truly fight history. But here in the Senate, we can help shape it. History has its eyes on our Chamber now.

Some of my colleagues across the aisle have said they are "troubled" or "disappointed" by the President's decision to fire Director Comey, but it appears that many are taking a wait-and-see approach. They are taking a wait-and-see approach to Director Comey's firing. They are taking a wait-and-see approach to how the administration replaces him. They are taking a wait-and-see approach to the ongoing investigation into the Trump campaign's potential collusion with Russia. The problem here is that this administration won't let us see anything. The Trump administration is actively working to cover up everything that we, as the independent legislative branch, need to see to get to the bottom of the Trump campaign's potential collusion with Russia.

Director Comey was investigating this potential collusion at the time that he was fired, and it has been reported that Director Comey recently asked Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein for an increase in money and personnel for this very investigation. Within a matter of days, the Deputy Attorney General wrote a memo recommending that President Trump fire Director Comey for actions he took last year. So was Director Comey fired on May 9, 2017, for his actions back in

2016? Are we to believe the President and the Attorney General were carefully weighing the merits of Director Comey's service since the inauguration, or was he fired because he was ramping up his investigation into Russian collusion? Let's not forget that this is the same collusion investigation from which Attorney General Sessions recused himself before recommending to the President that he fire Director Comey.

This is clearly a President who is more than happy to fire people, and he does so in a hasty fashion. Director Comey is not the first public servant to be fired while investigating this administration. In fact, he is in pretty good company. Acting Attorney General Sally Yates was fired while overseeing the collection of intelligence related to meetings between the Russian Ambassador and members of the Trump team. The U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York was fired while investigating HHS Secretary Price's financial investments, in addition to leading a separate investigation into corrupt Russian businessmen and officials. One firing is an incident, two is a coincidence, but three is a pattern.

The past 4 months suggests that our President thinks he can simply tweet and fire his way out of this problem, while continuing to cozy up to the Russians. Earlier today, less than 24 hours after firing Director Comey, President Trump hosted the Russian Ambassador and the Foreign Minister in the Oval Office.

I am deeply concerned that the President is unable or unwilling to grasp what the underlying problem here actually is. When the President hears Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle discuss the Russian attack on our election and the very foundations of our democracy, he hears sour grapes stemming from people who would have liked the Republican primary or the general election to have ended differently. But let me be very clear: This is not about scoring political points. This is not about winning the news cycle or the back-and-forth on Twitter. This is not the newest iteration of partisan politics.

Now is the time for all of us to put country above party. Throughout our Nation's history, Senators have come together to tackle some of the Nation's most difficult problems. Our Union has survived other challenges, and I am confident we can navigate this together, but we need to know exactly what we are up against. This is about properly diagnosing and curing a possible Russian infection in the White House and inoculating our government and elections for the future. Firing your doctor won't take your illness away, and taking a wait-and-see approach won't do that either.

We need an independent special prosecutor to diagnose potential collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. We cannot wait for the President to handpick a new FBI Director who

will owe his or her nomination for this unexpected job opening to the very people he or she will be charged with investigating.

Our democracy is resilient and our democracy is strong, but if we have a festering foreign infection that is left untreated, our democratic system will certainly weaken. We need a special prosecutor to either identify and address any malfeasance or issue this White House a clean bill of health.

Democracies are built on trust in civic institutions—a trust that has eroded in recent years, and I am deeply concerned that this erosion is accelerating. As Americans and as elected officials, we must come together and restore our constituents' trust in the Federal Government. We cannot just wait and see any longer. Now is the time for an independent special prosecutor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, this is a critical moment in our Nation's history—a moment when partisanship should be set to the side, politics should be put on hold, and every Member of this Chamber should focus on what they can do to ensure the integrity of our justice system and the integrity of our executive branch. Nothing less is at stake, and none of us here should forget that.

For months, the questions surrounding President Trump's campaign's ties to Russia—what happened, who was involved, and why—have gone unanswered. The more information that comes out, the more suspicious it all looks. And the more that President Trump tries to douse the flame by firing the people looking at where the smoke is coming from, the more we are going to keep paying attention, because the bottom line is that there are so many questions—real questions, legitimate questions—that absolutely need to be answered.

Many of us have pushed for these answers. We have called for an independent investigation. We had hoped that President Trump would resist the urge to slow them down or stop them or cover anything up. But the time for the back-and-forth is over. The time for hoping is behind us, and the time for all of us to come together and speak with one voice for truth and against any kind of coverup is now.

What happened yesterday was truly shocking, and this is coming from someone who didn't think that was possible anymore with this President.

But if anyone was wavering before, if anyone wanted to give this administration just a bit more time, I am hoping they have been paying attention to the events of the past 24 hours because it is hard to stay on the fence now.

President Trump's firing the head of the FBI like that—in such a haphazard way—in the middle of an investigation into his own campaigning activities should be the last straw for anyone. So right now it could not be more clear.

It is time for a special prosecutor who can run an independent investigation, far from the reach of President Trump and his administration, to take the case and finally get the answers the American public deserves.

At the same time, our efforts here in Congress—especially the investigation in the Intelligence Committee—have to continue, and they need to continue in an independent and bipartisan way.

As I mentioned before, this isn't about politics. It shouldn't be, anyway. This is about the integrity of our election, of our national security, of our justice system, of our Presidency, of America's standing in the world.

No Member of Congress, no matter what their political affiliation, should stand in the way of a thorough investigation, and neither should the President of the United States.

Mr. Trump may think he can bully his way to a lucrative real estate deal or bully the press or bully his way into the White House; that he can fire anyone, including the Deputy Attorney General, a U.S. attorney, or the FBI Director, if they dare to get in his way or investigate his wrongdoing, but President Trump should not—he cannot—bully his way out of an investigation, especially not when so much is at stake.

More than 100 days into his term, President Trump may have forgotten that he promised to be a voice for millions of people across our country. But I haven't forgotten whom I represent, and I stand here today to lift up the voices of so many people in my home State of Washington who are calling on us to get the answers—people who care about our country, who know we can do better, who hate to see us spiraling toward situations we have not seen since President Nixon.

As of noon today, my office had been flooded with hundreds of calls. The phones are ringing off the hook. On the other end of the line are the people we represent. They are picking up the phone and trying to get through to every one of us in the Senate. They want answers, and they deserve them.

So let's get to the bottom of this, once and for all, for the people we represent and for the integrity of our elections and our very democracy.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this is a photograph taken today of our President Donald Trump and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. This photograph was taken in the Oval Office today, where President Trump met with Mr. Lavrov. The meeting was closed to the American press. The photo was released by the Kremlin in Moscow.

The second photo is of Mr. Trump and the Russian Ambassador to the United States. His name is Sergey Kislyak. He was also in the Oval Office today to meet with President Trump, and this picture was also released by Moscow and the Kremlin.

Ambassador Kislyak's name is familiar to many Americans now—it is familiar to me—because President Trump's National Security Advisor, Michael Flynn, resigned because of communications he had with Ambassador Kislyak which he tried to keep secret and misrepresented not only to the American people but to the Vice President of the United States.

The warm smiles and hearty handshakes President Trump gave to these Russian officials stand in stark contrast to the way the White House has treated three American Department of Justice officials: Sally Yates, Preet Bharara, and James Comey.

After President Trump was elected President, he asked Ms. Yates to serve as Acting Attorney General, and he asked Mr. Bharara to stay on as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York and indicated that Mr. Comey could stay on as Director of the FBI. But then it appears that each of these three Justice Department officials were in charge of investigations that started to become a concern in President Trump's White House.

We heard on Monday from Sally Yates how she had informed the White House Counsel's office on January 26 this year that Michael Flynn, the National Security Advisor to the President of the United States, had been compromised and could be blackmailed by the Russians for lies he had told publicly. President Trump kept Michael Flynn on for 18 days after that express warning by the Acting Attorney General to the White House Counsel. He only asked for his resignation hours after the Washington Post reported on General Flynn's false statements about his Russian communications.

The President fired Sally Yates, the Acting Attorney General, on January 30—4 days after she warned the White House about this connection between General Flynn and this Ambassador.

Then there was Preet Bharara, whom the President invited to Trump Tower to tell him he wanted him to stay on as

U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York. Mr. Bharara's jurisdiction, of course, included Trump Tower. The President then, in a sudden Friday evening announcement on March 10, fired all the U.S. attorneys, including Mr. Bharara. Mr. Bharara said he was blindsided. Why was he fired? We don't know. But we do know that Mr. Bharara was well known as a dogged and independent prosecutor. News reports indicate that Mr. Bharara was investigating one of President Trump's Cabinet members, HHS Secretary Tom Price, for insider trading.

Yesterday, President Trump fired FBI Director Comey while the Director was in Los Angeles giving a speech to FBI agents. The Director was not told directly of his firing. He thought initially it was a joke.

At the time he was fired, Director Comey had confirmed that the FBI was conducting an investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election and possible connections between the Russians and individuals in the Trump campaign and administration. Last night, CNN reported that Federal prosecutors have begun a new phase of this Russian investigation, issuing grand jury subpoenas to associates of Michael Flynn's, seeking business records.

Director Comey was supposed to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee later this week.

According to news reports, last week Director Comey went to the Justice Department and requested more money and resources to devote to the Russian investigation.

Sally Yates, Preet Bharara, James Comey—three Justice Department officials who led investigations that appeared to be getting close to the President and his inner circle. All three were then fired by President Trump.

President Trump's firing of Director Comey made history. Not since Watergate, on the evening of October 20, 1973—a Saturday, known affectionately as the Saturday Night Massacre—has a President dismissed the head of an investigation into his own administration. In its 190-year history, only one FBI Director had been fired. FBI Director William Sessions was dismissed for serious ethical violations, and the FBI at that time was not investigating the Clinton administration.

I have had my disagreements with Director Comey, judgments he has made, statements he has made. I am not exactly his greatest fan. But I didn't question his competence when it came to investigating. I never called on him to be fired.

There are so many questions that need to be answered: Why was Director Comey fired now, just as the FBI investigation of the Russian interference of the Presidential campaign seemed to be reaching a critical point?

Today, the White House spokesperson said that the President has been considering firing Director Comey since the day he took office. Did the President or anyone else in the White House

ask or direct the Justice Department to recommend the firing of Director Comey? Press reports quote Trump administration aides saying Attorney General Jeff Sessions was charged with coming up with the reasons why the President should fire Comey. President Trump told my colleague Senator FEINSTEIN he had asked the Justice Department to review Comey's performance. And Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Deputy Press Secretary to the President, acknowledged today that the President asked the Justice Department to put the recommendation in writing.

Why was Attorney General Sessions involved in this decision at all? Remember, Attorney General Sessions was forced to recuse himself from the investigation of Russian collusion with the Trump administration because of his close connections with the Trump campaign and communications he himself had with Mr. Kislyak and other Russian officials.

When they made the decision to fire Director Comey, was the White House aware that Director Comey had reportedly just asked the Justice Department for more resources for an adequate investigation?

Perhaps the most important question of all: When will Republicans in Congress agree to support a special prosecutor and an independent commission to get to the bottom of this Russian collusion in our last Presidential election?

November 8, 2016, is a day that will live in cyber infamy. It was that election in which the Russians set out to change the results. It is the first time we have seen an overt effort by a foreign power to do this, and many on the other side of the aisle have taken a ho-hum attitude—it is just another example of kids being kids. I don't think so. When one of our major adversaries in the world decides to try to impact the choice of the leader of the free world, the United States should stand up take notice, and fight back. Let's not forget that a week ago there was a hacking attack on another democratic election in France and that all signs point again to Russia as perpetrator.

Russia has acted with impunity since its attack on our election, in part due to the administration's refusal to acknowledge Russia's responsibility for an act of cyber war on America and to respond accordingly and the majority party's refusal to take serious actions here in Congress.

In these pictures, President Trump is shaking hands with Russians, and the Kremlin is gleefully tweeting these pictures around the world. The President kept out the American press, but it turns out the Russians got the photos they needed to send around the world.

The American people need some answers about what is going on here. When will the Republicans join us in a bipartisan effort to have an honest investigation, to follow the facts and follow the evidence wherever it may lead,

and to hold those accountable who may have been guilty of collusion with a foreign government trying to impact the outcome of an election?

If we read the memo that has been prepared by Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein giving the reasons for the dismissal of James Comey, it focuses almost exclusively on Comey's treatment of Hillary Clinton in the last Presidential campaign. I am incredulous to think that some 10 months after the fact, the Trump administration took such pity on the treatment of Hillary Clinton, they couldn't wait to fire the Director of the FBI. That is the so-called good reason they are giving us, but there is a real reason. The real reason is that it seems that James Comey was engaged in an investigation into the Russian collusion in the last election; that he was looking at members of the Trump administration—specifically, General Flynn in this circumstance—and he was also looking at whether any other individuals, involved with the Trump campaign or not, were engaged in this activity. He clearly needs more resources, and he wants to get to the bottom of it, and for that, he was fired last night.

The question obviously is, What happens next? Will the American people sit still for this? Will they accept this kind of effort to close down an investigation that might reach into the President's own White House? If they are willing to step back and let that happen, then we have surrendered an important principle.

In 1973, President Nixon tried to make it clear that he could not be held accountable to the rule of law when it came to the Watergate break-in and coverup. He fired Archibald Cox. Others resigned because of that firing, and the public sentiment across America was so strong against President Nixon for trying to intervene in this legal process that ultimately he paid a heavy price for his conduct.

I don't know whether there is any involvement by President Trump in this collusion. I am not going to assume that. I shouldn't. In fairness, there should be an investigation—a credible investigation—by professionals. But shutting down the investigation by the FBI at this point closes the door to gaining valuable information so that we understand who was involved in this effort to undermine the American Presidential election.

I am not standing here in defense of James Comey as a person. I do stand here in defense of this Director of the FBI who believed, as our intelligence agencies believed, that this was a credible threat to the democracy of the United States and deserves a professional prosecutor's investigation. For that reason, Comey's efforts should continue. But, having dismissed him, let's at least hope that Mr. Rosenstein will stand up for the integrity of the Department of Justice and do two things:

First, give a public assurance that the investigation of Russian collusion

in our last Presidential election will continue, and at the time, name a Department of Justice career official who will be in charge of it until a new Director of the FBI is found.

Second, Mr. Rosenstein, as well as Senator Sessions—now Attorney General Sessions—should not be party to choosing a special prosecutor. Let's have career Department professionals choose someone from outside government, without a party label, who has demonstrated the expertise necessary to prosecute such challenging situations as this. Put them in charge, let them investigate, and let the facts lead us to a conclusion.

To try to stop this or short-circuit it by dismissing Mr. Comey is ineffective in terms of serving justice and, sadly, is a sad reflection on American ideals and values.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, as you know, last night President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. He did this in the middle of an active FBI investigation into possible links between the Trump campaign, Trump associates, and the Russian Government. This action should worry every Member of the Senate. I know it worries the people we represent. My office has been flooded with calls since this decision became public. Americans are asking why this firing happened now, why the firing happened at all—and they are right to ask.

Officially, President Trump said the FBI Director's dismissal was necessary to restore the "public trust and confidence" in the FBI. That is laughable. Anybody who knows Director Comey or knows the FBI knows that statement is completely false. I had my issues with the decisions that Director Comey had made over the past months. I never called for his removal, but I know that he did not have a negative effect on morale at the Justice Department or in the FBI.

I worked for a Deputy Attorney General of the United States. I am so disappointed in the tone of the letter written by this Deputy Attorney General—we learned this afternoon—at the request of the President of the United States. This is not a letter that came up through the chain at DOJ, but a conversation—as the public reports are tonight—that happened at the White House, where the Deputy Attorney General and the President agreed mutually that it was time for Director Comey to go.

The President, apparently, asked the Deputy Attorney General to put it in writing. Then he wrote a letter, the

type of which I have never seen come from the Deputy Attorney General's office. I worked on reports that we made with the Office of Professional Responsibility at the Department of Justice. I never saw a report like this before. But what I really find amazing about this decision—and I don't know why the decision was made; I am the first to say that I don't know—is that, having been in the Senate, having worked in the Deputy Attorney General's office at the Department of Justice, that nobody at the White House said to the President: Maybe the best thing to do is not to fire the FBI Director when he is in the middle of an investigation about ties of your campaign to Russia, because maybe that will undermine Americans' confidence in the rule of law, and maybe that will undermine Americans' confidence in this administration and worry people that the FBI isn't treating this fairly. The idea that not a single member of the administration was successful in making that case to the President is really worrisome to me tonight, and it is one of the reasons why people think the answer to why this firing occurred is simply not credible.

President Trump, unlike some, has repeatedly praised Director Comey over the past months. He said he had guts. He said: "I respect him a lot." Now, overnight, based on a completely nonroutine letter written at the request of the President, he has turned 180 degrees.

The American people deserve an explanation for this unprecedented action. They deserve an explanation tonight. They deserved one this afternoon. They know this isn't how our government is supposed to work. I think the reason why people in Colorado and in other parts of the country, I am sure, are concerned is that this dismissal is not the first action the President has taken that raised concerns about his commitment to the rule of law or his commitment to the independent judiciary or to the freedom of the press under the First Amendment when he doesn't like the scrutiny he or his administration are getting from a free press. He does not have a fundamental appreciation for the basic institutions and traditions of this country.

It is a great irony, I think, at this moment in our politics, that the President represents a radical view of American history and American traditions. It is my hope that this Senate—Republicans and Democrats working together—can express together a conservative view of those traditions, a view that says: We need to preserve the sanctity of the rule of law. We need to preserve and elevate the idea that the judicial branch is an independent judiciary, separate from the legislative branch, separate from the executive branch.

The Founders knew that when they wrote the Constitution. One of their biggest concerns was that somehow the

judiciary and the executive branch might reach some sort of unholy alliance that would all of a sudden call the rule of law into question.

I think that is why people are worried. They are worried because they remember this President slandered a judge because of his ethnicity and said that he wouldn't be able to decide a case fairly because of where his parents came from. They remember his attacks on the free press, as well, when he doesn't like their reporting, and his resorting to talking about fake news when he doesn't like the reporting.

I have had to talk with so many high school students and middle school students in Colorado over the last 4 or 5 months about this whole question of fake news and what the importance of edited content is to our society and, again, to our commitment to the rule of law—the importance that middle school students and high school students place on edited content and on curated content; their ability to distinguish between something that is science or something that is real, something that is edited versus somebody shooting their mouth off on the internet.

The President has a hard time making that distinction, as well. He has shown little regard for the traditions and norms that our Founders established when they created this separation of powers.

So I say to my colleagues tonight, the Senate must stand firm and speak with one voice—Democrats and Republicans. We now have a vacancy in the FBI Director, and we need to make sure that whoever that is, whoever replaces James Comey, pledges to continue the ongoing investigation and reinforce the FBI's independence from undue influence from the White House. That needs to be nonnegotiable. In my view, that is the least that must happen.

In order for the American people to learn the full truth, the Deputy Attorney General must immediately appoint an independent special prosecutor to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election, which, by the way, everybody I know up here believes happened. But the President continues to say: Maybe it was the Chinese; maybe it wasn't the Russians. No intelligence agency in America believes that. No Senator believes that.

The President, who has access to all of that intelligence, is saying: It might not have been the Russians; it might be the Chinese.

We need to know. I am not prejudging the result, but we need to know what these links were, if there were links, between the Trump campaign and the Russian Government. These are serious questions that need answers. I worry a lot about what the President has said about our allies in Europe, what the President has said about NATO, what the President has said about the European Union—none of which serves the national security

interests of the United States but is an invitation to the Russians to continue to meddle in elections, not just here but in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe as well. It is hard for me to see how that is in anybody's national security interest, except for the Russians or President Putin.

Our intelligence agencies have been crystal clear to the Members of Congress that the Russian Government tried to influence the 2016 election in President Trump's favor. The American people deserve to know what the truth is. What is the extent of these relationships? It goes to the core of our security. It goes to the heart of our democracy. That is why preserving this investigation's integrity is so vital.

I can tell you that the American people are not going to relent. I understand there will be some time here when people want to collect their thoughts and gather their thoughts. The American people are not going to relent. They are going to want an independent investigation here. For all Americans and, I would say, most of the time, but certainly at moments like this—this is a moment in the course of our politics when they say to us: Partisanship needs to give way to patriotism. This is one of those moments.

I urge every Member of this body, every Member of Congress, to rise above the pressure of the moment and see this not as just another skirmish in our endless and often pathetic feuding but as a test of the resilience of these institutions and of our Republic, a test of whether we as Congress stand for something more than winning praise from our base in a cable news cycle or in the next election or whether we take seriously our oaths to put our institutions, our security, and our country first.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

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.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTION

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I oppose this blatant giveaway to the oil and gas industry at the expense of public health and the environment. We are now at the eleventh hour of expedited consideration of resolutions to overturn Obama-era rules, and the majority is bringing forward this legislation to overturn a Bureau of Land Management rule on methane waste.