

stood at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC. She knew that serving her country was her true calling. However, she was eventually forced to end her military career because, in her words, “the Army refused to allow my husband to come back overseas to live with me.”

When she was pregnant with her child, she was forced to leave the military in order to return home to Arkansas to be with her husband to raise their children. When she was stateside, the VA denied her benefits because they were not service-connected, thus forcing her and her husband to pay the costs of maternity care and childbirth out of pocket.

She faced medical complications and developed endometriosis, a preexisting condition, and had to have a Caesarean section during delivery. After she delivered her baby, she ended up with \$500,000 in hospital debt.

This enormous debt followed Robin and her husband throughout their marriage, and it eventually left them in divorce, medical bankruptcy, and with all of the repercussions that come from extreme financial hardship. She was also blocked from accessing affordable healthcare coverage because she now had a preexisting condition and could not afford good coverage on an \$8.50-an-hour wage, so she went without care.

Robin remained uninsured for a total of 22 years, until she remarried and gained healthcare coverage under her husband's insurance. This was especially devastating because in 2007, Robin was diagnosed with cancer. Even though Robin was covered by her husband's insurance, insurance companies were not required to cover chemotherapy in 2007, and chemotherapy was too expensive for Robin and her family to pay for out of pocket. Instead, she had to choose debilitating surgeries.

After her cancer diagnosis, Robin developed severe autoimmune arthritis. Her autoimmune treatments started at \$5,000 a month and soon increased to \$14,000 a month. Insurance companies wanted Robin to pay for her medication upfront, with no guarantee of reimbursement.

As her medical costs grew and grew, Robin had to choose between her medical care and her mortgage payment. After the Affordable Care Act became law, insurance companies were mandated to cover Robin's medications and treatments. They were no longer able to refuse her the medications she needed. Her insurance premium prior to the Affordable Care Act was \$1,600 a month, which was more than her family paid for their monthly mortgage and household bills. Now she pays just \$300 a month for her entire family. There was no more redtape, constant stress, or fear that she might not be able to work—or worse, might not be able to stay alive.

Unfortunately, the coverage, relief, and peace of mind the ACA brought to Robin and her family is now under attack by congressional Republicans.

Robin is afraid that if TrumpCare becomes law, she will once again become nothing more than an uninsurable preexisting condition. She is afraid she would be considered a high-risk pool patient who will be able to have insurance but will not be able to actually afford any of her treatments. She is afraid that if Republicans push through TrumpCare, she will not be able to walk, work, and will have absolutely no quality of life.

Her dream was to serve her country in our Armed Forces. She took two oaths to serve this country, and she kept those oaths—promises that she would defend this great Nation.

Robin may not be in uniform anymore, but she certainly deserves that we in Congress and here in the Senate defend her right to access quality healthcare.

For Robin and for nearly 7 million veterans, middle-class families, our seniors, and some of our most vulnerable Americans, I urge my Republican counterparts to stop these secret negotiations, take repeal off the table, and work with Democrats to improve our healthcare system. Just like Robin, each of these Americans has a story, a family, and a valued place in society. Robin's family and all Americans deserve better than having their coverage stripped away from them behind closed doors.

I yield back.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess, following my and Senator NELSON's remarks, until 5 p.m. for the all-Senators briefing and that the time count postcloture.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized to speak on issues not associated with the present subject of debate.

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

COUP ATTEMPT IN MONTENEGRO

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, last week, the Senate voted 97 to 2 to strengthen sanctions against Vladimir Putin's Russia for its attack on America's 2016 election and its other aggressive and illegal behavior. I hope the other body will take swift action to send this legislation to the President's desk.

We need strong Russia sanctions now because it has been 8 months since the U.S. intelligence community said publicly that the Russian Government directed this attack on our democracy. Yet, in the last 8 months, the Russian Government has hardly paid any price for its aggression. Thus, Vladimir Putin has been learning all over again that aggression pays. He learned that in Georgia in 2008. He learned that in Ukraine in 2014. He has learned that in Syria since 2015. So Vladimir Putin remains on the offense. This year, Russia attempted to interfere in France's election. We have already seen attempts to

influence German public opinion ahead of elections in September. And there is every expectation that Russia will do the same thing in the Czech Republic, Italy, and elsewhere in future elections.

But perhaps the most disturbing indication of how far Vladimir Putin is willing to go to advance his dark and dangerous view of the world is what happened in October 2016 in the small Balkan country of Montenegro, when Russian intelligence operatives, in league with Serbia nationalists and others, attempted to overthrow the democratically elected Government of Montenegro and murder its Prime Minister on the country's election day. Why would Vladimir Putin go this far? To answer this, one must understand why Russia was so interested in the outcome of Montenegro's election.

Russia opposes the spread of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across Europe, which is advanced by the European Union and protected by the NATO alliance. To Russia's great frustration, Montenegro's Government had committed the country to a Euro-Atlantic future and pursued membership in both the EU and NATO.

Indeed, NATO's invitation to Montenegro to join the NATO alliance in December 2015 was considered particularly insulting and threatening by Moscow. After all, Montenegro had once been part of Russia's traditional Slavic ally, Serbia. Montenegro has long been a favorite destination for Russian tourists. Russian politicians and oligarchs are reported to own as much as 40 percent of the real estate in that country. A few years ago, when it feared losing its naval base in Syria due to the civil war, Russia reportedly sought a naval base in Montenegro but was rejected. Now, if Montenegro joined NATO, the entire Adriatic Sea would fall completely within NATO's borders.

Montenegro's accession into NATO would also send a signal that NATO membership was a real possibility for other nations of the Western Balkans—Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and, according to some optimistic voices in the region, perhaps even Serbia.

That is why Montenegro's October 16 election was no ordinary one. In Russia's eyes, it was a last chance to stop Montenegro from joining NATO, to thwart Montenegro's pursuit of a Euro-Atlantic future, and to reassert Russian influence in southeastern Europe. That is why there was little doubt that Russia would exert heavy pressure on Montenegro ahead of the election. Russia had already been accused of fomenting anti-government demonstrations and funding opposition parties. Yet few would have guessed how far Russia was willing to go. But now we know.

This April, as part of my visit to seven countries in southeastern Europe to reaffirm America's commitment to the region, I visited Montenegro and was briefed by Montenegrin officials on

the status of the investigation into the coup attempt. On April 14, Montenegro's special prosecutor filed indictments against 2 Russians and 12 other people for their roles in the coup attempt. This past weekend, a Montenegrin court accepted the indictments. As a result, the evidence before the court is now public.

I believe it is critically important that my colleagues and the American people are aware of the allegations made in these indictments. Pieced together, they reveal another blatant attack on democracy by the Russian Government—an attempt to smash a small, brave country that had the nerve to defy its will. And it is another unmistakable warning that Vladimir Putin will do whatever it takes to achieve his ambition to restore the Russian Empire.

According to the indictments, the coup planning got off to a slow start in March 2016. That was when opposition leaders in Montenegro allegedly sent an emissary known as Nino to Belgrade to meet with Slavko Nikic. In the first meeting at Slavko's office, Nino said that he had been doing business for years in Russia, and he claimed that he was in contact with powerful men in Russia. He claimed that one of the men with him was a Russian FSB agent in charge of special tasks. Nino tried to enlist Slavko and his men to lead a plot to destabilize Montenegro, and Slavko indicated he was able and willing to participate. Later, Nino and Slavko met on the Pupin Bridge in Belgrade, this time with the supposed FSB agent in tow. The Russian told Slavko it would be good if he traveled to Moscow.

After these encounters in Belgrade, Nino enlisted the help of Bratislav Dikic, the former chief of Serbia's special police and someone we will meet later in this story, to use his contacts to check into Slavko's reliability. He didn't pass the test, and this original version of the coup plot was abandoned.

It was at this point that the two Russians, Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov, stepped in to take control of the plans for destabilization operations in Montenegro. Both of these men are believed to be members of the Russian military agency, the GRU.

Shishmakov in particular already had a colorful past. In 2014, Shishmakov had been serving as deputy military attache in Russia's Embassy in Warsaw, Poland. After a scandal involving a Russian spy network within the Polish Government, the Polish Government identified Shishmakov as a GRU agent, declared him persona non grata, and ejected him from Poland.

Having taken over the Montenegrin operation, Shishmakov moved quickly to contact Sasa Sindjelic. The two had first met in Russia back in 2014, when they discussed their opposition to the EU and NATO. Shishmakov even offered to help support Sindjelic's orga-

nization, the Serbian Wolves, which promotes Pan-Slavism and close relations between Russians and Serbs and opposes NATO and the Government of Montenegro.

The two met again in Moscow in 2015. This time, Shishmakov had Sindjelic submitted to a polygraph test that lasted for hours. After the test went well, he sent Sindjelic home with \$5,000 and a promise to contact him if something urgent came up. That was in the spring of 2016. Shishmakov wrote that Montenegro's Prime Minister, Milo Djukanovic, and his government must be removed immediately and that the people of Montenegro must rebel in order for this to happen.

Then in September 2016, Shishmakov told Sindjelic to urgently come to Moscow. Shishmakov even sent \$800 to Sindjelic to buy his ticket. It was no trouble for Shishmakov to send the money—after all, he sent it from a Western Union conveniently located on the same street as GRU headquarters in Moscow. Once in Moscow, Shishmakov and Sindjelic discussed the planning and operation of the plot to overthrow the Montenegrin Government, install the opposition in power, and abandon all plans for Montenegro to enter NATO. Shishmakov said opposition leaders from Montenegro had already visited Moscow a number of times and were in agreement with the plan.

In total, Sindjelic received more than \$200,000 to support the operation. He used those funds to pay personnel, acquire police uniforms and equipment, and purchase weapons, including rifles, gas masks, bulletproof vests, electrical tranquilizers, and a drone with a camera. He was also provided encrypted phones to enable secure communications between the coup plotters and GRU agents.

Sindjelic and Shishmakov stayed in close touch as preparations continued ahead of the October elections. The plan was this:

On election day, the Montenegrin opposition was planning large protests in front of the Parliament, expecting to draw nearly 5,000 people. Sindjelic and his coconspirators, including Bratislav Dikic, the former commander of the Serbian special police, would recruit as many Serbian nationalists as they could to travel from Serbia to Montenegro to join the demonstrations. They were hoping 500 would join the protests and be ready to act when called upon.

As the protests were underway, a group of 50 armed men recruited by Shishmakov and wearing police uniforms provided by Sindjelic would ambush and kill the members of Montenegro's Special Anti-Terrorist Unit to prevent them from interfering with the coup. The armed men, still wearing their police uniforms, would then proceed to the Parliament building, where they would begin shooting at members of the police defending the Parliament building. They hoped to create the impression that some mem-

bers of the police were changing sides and joining the protesters against the government. As the coup plotters saw it, this was poetic justice—reminiscent of how former Serbian President and convicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic had fallen from power.

Led by the coup plotters and the Serbian nationalists, who would wear blue ribbons to be recognizable to one another, the protesters would then storm the Parliament building and declare victory for the opposition. Within 48 hours, the new government would be formed and arrests would be made across the capital, including Prime Minister Djukanovic. If the Prime Minister could not be captured, he would be killed.

The coup plotters obviously wanted to create chaos, and it appears they may have had someone in mind to blame for the violence. Ahead of the election, the Montenegrin opposition hired a U.S. company to provide services, including countersurveillance and planning to extract personnel from the Montenegrin capital, around the time of the election. It is still unclear, the precise nature of this outreach to the U.S. company by the Montenegrin opposition or what services the company may have ended up providing, if any. Now, this is speculation, but if I know the Russians, American security personnel—some likely to have military or intelligence background—on the ground during the coup in the Montenegrin capital would have made excellent patsies for stories on Sputnik and Russia Today.

Fortunately—one might even say luckily—the plan never got off the ground. Four days before election day, one of the coup plotters got cold feet and informed the Montenegrin authorities. On election day, Montenegrin police arrested 20 Serbian citizens, including the on-the-ground leader of the nationalist protesters, Bratislav Dikic, the former commander of the Serbian special police. News of the arrests sparked fear among others involved in the plot, many of whom retreated to Serbia.

Furious that the plot had been disrupted, Shishmakov, the Russian GRU agent, grasped at straws for new ways of bringing down the Montenegrin Government. He ordered Sindjelic to procure an assassin to kill the Prime Minister. Sindjelic did not carry out that order and later turned himself into police, fearing he would be next for assassination by the GRU.

Shishmakov also ordered a false flag attack on the opposition party headquarters to create the appearance of an attack by the government. He even hoped to entice one of the political parties that was part of the Prime Minister's coalition to leave the government with a bribe using Russian money funneled through Chechnya. Again, fortunately none of this worked.

Montenegrin police made several arrests in the aftermath of this failed coup attempt, but those arrests did not

include the alleged GRU agents, Mr. Shishmakov and Mr. Popov. They were in Belgrade, Serbia's capital. Presumably, Montenegrin authorities hoped the Serbian Government would consider expediting the pair to Montenegro as the government had done with some of the lower level coup plotters, but that did not happen, and the two Russian agents returned to Moscow.

I know that sounded a little complicated. Every American should be disturbed by what happened in Montenegro. We should admire the courage of the country's leaders who resisted Russian pressure and persevered to bring Montenegro into the NATO alliance, which finally took place officially 2 weeks ago.

If there is one thing we should take away from this heinous plot, it is that we cannot treat Russia's interference in America's election in 2016 as an isolated incident. We have to stop looking at this through the warped lens of politics and see this attack on our democracy for what it is—just one phase of Vladimir Putin's long-term campaign to weaken the United States, to destabilize Europe, to break the NATO alliance, to undermine confidence in Western values, and to erode any and all resistance to his dark and dangerous view of the world.

That is why Putin attacked our 2016 election. That is why Putin attempted to overthrow the Government of Montenegro. That is why he tried to influence the election in France and will try the same in Germany and elsewhere throughout Europe. That is why it probably will not be long before Putin attempts some punitive actions in Montenegro to show other countries in the Western Balkans what happens when you try to defy Russia.

That is why it will not be long before Putin takes interest in another American election. The victim may be a Republican. It may be a Democrat. To Putin, it will not matter as long as he succeeds in dividing us from one another, weakening our resolve, undermining confidence in ourselves, and eroding our belief in our own values.

I urge my colleagues again that we must take our own side in this fight, not as Republicans, not as Democrats but as Americans. It is time to respond to Russia's attack on American democracy and that of our European allies with strength, with resolve, with common purpose, and with action.

I would like to finally add we will be holding a hearing in the Armed Services Committee on this whole situation that took place in Montenegro.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, before the Senator from Arizona leaves the floor, he and I are very much in synco-pation on the question of what he has just eloquently addressed about the Russian attempts to interfere in other countries as well as in our country with regard to the elections.

I just wanted to pose a question to the Senator. Is the Senator aware, as he obviously is—but it is my rhetorical question—that the Russians have already intervened in the elections of other countries and indeed tried and it boomeranged against them against France and are probably in the midst of trying to interfere with the German election?

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, every indication, I would say to my friend from Florida, a most valued member of the Armed Services Committee, they will continue to try to interfere in any election they possibly can. They are spending large amounts of money. They have certainly, to some degree, undermined confidence between countries in the NATO alliance, and that, coupled with the degree of uncertainty here in Washington, has probably put as great a strain on the NATO alliance as you have seen since its very beginning. I thank my colleague from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, one further question. Has the Senator been—well, he obviously is aware, and he has obviously been briefed—but can he help convey the gravity of the situation of Russia's interference in the upcoming elections in 2018 and 2020, where not only is it a question of whether they would change the vote count by getting in and hacking, but they could change the registration records so that a voter could show up to vote on election day and suddenly the registrar says: But you are not registered.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I would just say to my colleague from Florida that when you look at their early attempts versus their latest attempts, they learn with every experience. It is a lot easier—as my colleague from Florida knows, it is a lot easier to play offense than defense.

We are going to have a hearing on this whole Montenegrin thing, and I know the Senator from Florida will play a very significant role. Every time we turn around, we have a new revelation of some of the activities that have been carried out, not just by Russian hackers but by Chinese, by Iranian, even by single individuals. This is probably the national security challenge that may not be the greatest, but I would say we are the least prepared for.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, this Senator certainly looks forward to that hearing in the Senate Armed Services Committee. I thank the chairman for his leadership in constantly bringing up and reminding the American people of the threat that is coming through cyber attacks into this Nation and others.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. President, I wanted to speak about what is going on here in this Capitol at this moment. It has been the subject of a lot of discussion last night and again as we have been in session today; that is, trying to hatch a plan to overturn the Affordable Care Act and to find something that would replace it. In fact, it is being done in secret.

I would just merely pose the question, Why is it being done in secret if it is to be something that is to help the American people more than what the existing law is? Why wouldn't that be something you would want to expose to the light of day? If it is to improve the existing law, why in the world would that not want to be done on a bipartisan basis?

Yet we find ourselves confronting a situation where the majority leader has said he is trying to cobble together 50 votes to overturn the existing law, and it must be something that is not very palatable in what it is to overturn the existing law. Otherwise, it would be done in the open and in the sunshine.

Now, the existing law is not perfect so we ought to improve it, but the existing law, as we have heard in some of these dramatic townhall meetings, is the reason some people are alive today. It is the reason some folks no longer have to worry about being denied coverage for a preexisting condition.

By the way, that requirement of not allowing an insurance company to deny you coverage because you have a preexisting condition is not applicable just to those who are on the State and Federal exchanges. That is applicable to all insurance policies.

So if you have that kind of condition, which I can tell you might be a condition such as asthma, we are not going to insure you for the rest of your life because you had asthma or, if you want to go to the extreme—and it has been done—an insurance company saying: I am not going to insure you because you have had a rash. The flip side of that is insurance companies put a lifetime limit on it so if they pay out up to a certain amount—let's say \$50,000—the insurance policy stops, no more payouts.

That is not according to the existing law. In the existing law, they can't say you are going to lose your coverage because you hit that lifetime limit cap that their payout is.

Every day I hear from Floridians who tell me how the House-passed bill would affect them and what we speculate, since we don't know, that the Senate bill that is attempting to be brought out at the last minute next week—what we suspect is going to be in it. Every day I hear from people.

So take, for example, the lady from Sebring, FL, Christine Gregory. She has allowed me to use her name.

My daughter has Juvenile Diabetes (Type 1). She was diagnosed at age 15 . . . when the Affordable Care Act was signed into law. I absolutely rejoiced about the end of all the horrible things that come along with having a pre-existing condition. She no longer had to worry about cancellation of her insurance, waiting periods, denial of coverage, annual and lifetime limits, higher premiums, and the dreaded high-risk pools.

Then she continues to write:

Fast forward to 2017. All the fear and the worry are back. Our President and Congress plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Now she has the very real prospect of having to enter a very expensive high-risk