

to the country. It is a good opportunity for me to come down on the floor and brag a little bit about Alaska, although my State does a really good job of selling itself anyway. It is what we refer to in my office as the Alaskan of the Week.

It is a great opportunity to talk about not just the wonderful things we have in Alaska—the wonderful mountains, oceans, and how beautiful the State is. Right now, the Sun is out again and shining high. The snow is melting. The buds are coming out and birds are coming back. It is a good opportunity for me to talk not just about the natural wonders but the people who make Alaska such a great place.

While it doesn't get as much attention as it deserves, there is an incredibly fascinating and sometimes tragic history of my State. It is a good opportunity for me to talk to my colleagues about that and the people who have worked hard and have been part of that history and have helped to heal some of the scars that have been left from that history.

Along with talking about the beauty of Alaska every week, we talk about someone who has made a difference. This week, I would like to recognize Dimitri Philemonof and all the work he has done over the decades for his community, for his State, and really for his country.

Dimitri was born in 1944 to Erena and Isaac Philemonof on the breathtaking, beautiful St. George Island, one of the two principal islands of the Pribilof Islands in Alaska. Surrounded by the Bering Sea, the Pribilofs are about 750 miles from Anchorage and about 500 miles from the Siberian Coast. The Pribilofs are really one of the Wonders of the World, particularly with the nature that is there—Steller sea lions, walruses, sea otters, and tens of thousands of fur seals. Depending on the season, more than 2.5 million seabirds call the Pribilof Islands their home. The “Galapagos of the North,” it is sometimes called because of this teeming wildlife.

You will also find in the Pribilofs the warmest, most resilient people anywhere in the world. The Pribilofs, as well as the entire Aleutian Island chain, has a storied and, to be honest, sometimes painful history in our country—a history that has shaped Dimitri's life.

First, when Alaska was a colonial possession of Russia, Russian fur seekers decimated the Aleut Native populations on these islands through warfare, disease, and, yes, even slavery. Then, 75 years after the United States purchased Alaska during World War II, Japan invaded and occupied Kiska and Attu, the westernmost islands of Alaska's Aleutian Island chain. A lot of Americans don't know that American territory was invaded and occupied by the Japanese during World War II. It was the first time since the War of 1812 that American soil had been occupied by an enemy. The Japanese dug in and

held these two islands in Alaska until mid-1943, when American forces recaptured Kiska and Attu in a brutal campaign in the cold of Alaska.

That campaign to retake Kiska and Attu resulted in the deaths of about 1,500 American servicemen. More than 600 were missing, and almost 3,500 were wounded in action. It was a major battle of World War II. Less well known is the impact this conflict had on the Aleut peoples of Alaska. As a result of the invasion, nearly 900 Aleut civilian residents of the Pribilof Islands and the Aleutian Islands in Alaska were relocated to temporary internment camps in Southeast Alaska. Among those interned were Dimitri's parents, two of his brothers, and a sister who was born in the camp. Dimitri himself jokes and laughs that, in his words, he was actually “conceived” in the camp.

The treatment of our American citizens—and these are great American citizens. They are patriotic. They serve in the military at higher rates than any other ethnic group in the country. The treatment of these American citizens in these camps is a dark spot in American history that not many Americans are aware of. Camps were basically abandoned buildings. The conditions were awful—crowded, unheated, and unsanitary. Some even died in the camps as a result of these horrendous conditions. These were our citizens in our country.

Yet, like so many Alaskan Natives who were not treated well by our government during this time, Dimitri, nevertheless, signed up when he was of age to serve his country in the military. In the 1960s, he joined the Army and served in the Pathfinder Detachment at Fort Rucker in Alabama. He was an Airborne soldier.

Eventually, Dimitri made his way back to Alaska. He met his wife Victoria and started a family. He is the proud father of five, and he began to work at the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association. He is now the President and CEO of the Association.

The association has had numerous accomplishments under his leadership. Since 1985, it has greatly expanded its programs for the people of the Pribilofs and the Aleutians, and its budget has grown from about \$2.5 million to more than \$18 million to fund these important service programs under his leadership.

For years, he did something that was so important that this body was involved here in the Senate. He worked closely with Alaska's congressional delegation at the time—Senator Ted Stevens, Senator Frank Murkowski, and Congressman DON YOUNG—to work on educating the Congress and the Senate about this difficult history during World War II and to help pass legislation entitled the “Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act,” which compensated surviving Aleut victims of the internment camps. Again, American citizens were sent by their government during the war to in-

ternment camps in Alaska. Not many people know that history.

Dimitri not only knew it, he lived it. His family lived it, but what he did was so powerful. He helped heal it. He helped heal it right here on the floor of the Senate.

He then helped pass the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Trust to oversee money allocated to rebuild some of the buildings and houses in this part of Alaska that were destroyed during the war—in the fierce battles that raged in my State during World War II that not many Americans are aware of.

That is a great life and service. Dimitri is also an artist helping to preserve Alaska Native culture through his beautiful drawings—particularly of Russian Orthodox Churches in the region—churches he has worked tirelessly to maintain throughout Alaska. These are beautiful churches. He also does an incredible Elvis Presley impersonation.

He is a man of faith, of perseverance, and kindness. As I have mentioned here, and tried to highlight just a little bit of his life, he has devoted his whole life to his people, to my State, and to this great Nation. In May, he will be recognized by his colleagues for 40 years of humanitarian service and for helping heal the wounds of this country that came about during World War II. We thank him for all he has done in his beloved Pribilofs, in Alaska, in America, and on the floor of the Senate.

Dimitri, I want to thank you, once again, and congratulate you on being our Alaskan of the Week.

COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, I want to give a little bit of an update on what has been happening on the Senate floor in the last few days because there is a lot going on. I think sometimes it is important to explain to people watching in the Gallery, people watching on TV, and the people watching back home in Alaska what is happening here.

We had a big vote yesterday. It was a big vote particularly for my State but also for the Presiding Officer's State of Louisiana—any coastal State. It was a vote on the Coast Guard bill yesterday. It was a strong bipartisan vote, but we just missed getting 60 Senators.

To be perfectly honest, it was a disappointment. It was certainly a disappointment to the men and women in the Coast Guard who are serving our country all over not only America but the world—exceptional service.

This body was unable to get the authorization bill that sets the policies and funding and spending for the Coast Guard. That was sad, in my view—a big disappointment. We have principled differences here in the Senate, but we have been working hard on this. We have been working very hard across the aisle.

I chair the Subcommittee on the Coast Guard. We tried to make sure we had plenty of Senators who would support this, so my team and I worked for

months on accommodating my colleagues' concerns about the bill. In certain ways, we pretty much accommodated every request for an amendment and every request for fixing the bill. So I really thought we were going to get to the point where we had way more than 60 Senators to pass this bill for the men and women of the Coast Guard, to make our waterway economic opportunities more efficient, and to put more maritime workers to work, but at the end of the day, we couldn't get to that magic number of 60, which is so critical here in the Senate. It is disappointing to say that politics got in the way. There were some people who had previously committed to make sure this got over the goal line who weren't there at the end. But we will keep working on it. It is too important for my State and too important for the country to leave the men and women of the Coast Guard and so many other important issues that were taken up in that bill not completed. That is what we call the legislative calendar—that is legislation on the Senate floor we are trying to move, and we will keep working in a bipartisan way there.

NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Now, Mr. President, I want to talk a little bit about an issue as it relates to the Executive Calendar. What do I mean when I am talking about the Executive Calendar? Well, in the Senate, under the U.S. Constitution, we are in the personnel business in addition to being in the legislative business. Under the Constitution, we have a role—the advice and consent power of the Senate to confirm the nominees who run the government. That comes from the executive branch. The White House—the President puts forward nominations, and we hold hearings and we confirm them.

I have been speaking on the floor a lot about this lately because, by any historical measure, unfortunately the Senate has slowed down, delayed, and obstructed the confirmation of individuals from the Trump administration whom we are trying to get confirmed to serve in the government. That is also sad. That is also disappointing. The statistics are very obvious.

A lot of us have tried to get the press who usually sits up there in the Gallery to write about this. They don't seem to care, but they should care. The American people should care.

Whether or not you voted for this President, once somebody wins an election and they start putting people forward—good Americans—to serve in the government, what we should be doing here is holding hearings, seeing if they are qualified, and then voting on whether to confirm them. Unfortunately, what is happening—and it is all out there—by any historical measure, my colleagues on the other side have filibustered and obstructed this administration's nominees to serve their country at a higher rate than has ever happened in U.S. history.

I have come down here and talked about this a lot. I keep coming down to ask the Senate minority leader and some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle: Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?

I will give just one example. In the first not even 18 months of the Trump administration, the filibuster—that is a procedure used here in the Senate that could require much extended debate—the filibuster has been used more in the first 18 months than it was in the previous four administrations combined.

Why? I have been asking the question, why are you doing this? They don't really have an answer. I haven't heard anyone explain it. I know part of their base is very upset about the election a year and a half ago, but it is time to govern now. We have to get people in place and just vote on them. If you don't like them, if you don't think they are qualified, vote no. But time and again, we have qualified people who are being held up for 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 months for no reason, and it just doesn't make any sense.

The reason I am mentioning this is that there is now talk that it is not just in terms of a filibuster, but there is a possibility that my colleagues on the other side, as a total group, all of them, might come together and all vote against the President's most recent nominee to be the Secretary of State. That is the current CIA Director, Mike Pompeo.

I certainly didn't agree with everything the Obama administration did, but if you look at the history of the United States, particularly as it relates to nominees to head government agencies, to run national security agencies—the Department of Defense, the Secretary of State—these have typically been given a lot of leeway from the Senate.

For example, just in my relatively short career here—I sit on the Armed Services Committee—President Obama put forward a number of candidates to serve in the government at high levels in the Department of Defense to help run our national security. One was the Secretary of Defense. I didn't agree with Secretary Ash Carter on everything, but what I did was I sat down with him, had discussions with him, and we brought him up for a floor vote, and I voted to support him.

Let me give another example—Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning, put forward by President Obama. I didn't agree with everything Secretary Fanning was focused on. I sat down with him and had good discussions with him. He was actually being held up by some Republicans, and I worked to try to get him freed and confirmed.

They were well-qualified individuals.

Again, even if you don't agree with everything that an administration is doing in terms of foreign policy—there were elements of the Obama foreign policy that I supported, and there were a lot of elements that I didn't like.

When they put forward well-qualified individuals, I thought it was the duty of the Senate to sit down with them, meet with them, discuss your issues with them, and then vote on them.

Typically, in that realm, the individual had been supported, whether they are a Democrat or a Republican. Let me give a couple of examples. Secretary of State Tillerson had 55 Senators vote for him. Secretary of State John Kerry—94 Senators voted for him. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—94 Senators voted for her. Condoleezza Rice—I worked for Condoleezza Rice for a number of years. She was a phenomenal Secretary of State. Eighty-five Senators voted for her. Secretary Colin Powell—voice vote. That means essentially 100 Senators voted for Secretary Powell. Secretary Madeleine Albright—I have gotten to know Madeleine Albright over a number of years. I have a deep respect for her, a Democrat. That vote was 99 to 0. Warren Christopher, another Democrat—a voice vote. That means 100, essentially. James Baker—another Secretary of State I have gotten to know over the years—99 to 0.

You see, this is deep history where, in this body, you are not going to agree with everything with regard to a President's foreign policy, but on these kinds of nominations, the history of this body and our Nation has typically been to be supportive.

Mike Pompeo is the current Director of the CIA. My friend from Tennessee, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, BOB CORKER, gave a speech earlier today. He talked about Mike Pompeo's qualifications. They are very impressive qualifications.

He went to West Point. By the way, he graduated No. 1 in his class at West Point. He went to Harvard Law School. By the way, he was the editor of the Harvard Law Review. This is a smart guy at the top institutions in America. He served in the Army. He served in Congress. He was very involved in foreign policy when he was a Member of Congress. He was a businessman and now is the Director of the CIA. Probably in terms of an individual in Washington, DC, who has insights on what is going on around the world in terms of our national security challenges, there is probably no one who has more insights on this than Mike Pompeo right now.

There is no doubt, by any measure, by any standard, historical standard, that when you look at our previous Secretaries of State, Mike Pompeo is well qualified. He is well qualified.

There is talk—and I hope it is only talk—that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are going to, en masse, vote against him. This would be getting into some dangerous territory for the United States as a country. As I mentioned, the tradition of this body is to vote to support the President's Secretary of State, particularly if he or she is a well-qualified individual.