

see our Democratic colleagues insisting that we go through all the motions and the time limits set out in the rules, when nominees are confirmed 99 to 1 or 100 to 0. In other words, these are not controversial nominees, in many cases, and there is simply no reason to drag their feet and to prevent the Senate from doing other important work, including confirming more nominees.

NOMINATION OF GINA HASPEL

We will certainly be revisiting that issue more in the coming days, but one of the important positions we are going to be taking up this week is Gina Haspel, who has been nominated to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Her confirmation hearing will be before the Senate Intelligence Committee this Wednesday. I will proudly support her to be the first female CIA Director in our Nation's history—certainly not for that reason alone but because she is an outstanding nominee.

I hope our colleagues and their ideological soulmates across the aisle will cease and desist from untruthful attacks on this talented, well-respected woman who is much revered by her fellow professionals in the intelligence community.

I still have a hard time accepting the treatment that Dr. Jackson received before he was even allowed to defend himself against the accusations made against him during his nomination process for head of the Veterans' Administration. I think, when people realize their reputation that they worked all their lives to achieve is subject to being torn down by reckless and untruthful attacks, it discourages good people from wanting to serve in the U.S. Government. That is our loss and not just theirs.

I think it is important for the country's women to see someone like Ms. Haspel leading an agency as vital to our national security as the CIA. Women everywhere will be watching this week, and Democrats should show them that ambition, good character, and hard work are always welcome and rewarded in the upper echelons of the U.S. Government.

The CIA is not a partisan agency, but some partisans are endangering our national security to treat it as such when they oppose Ms. Haspel's nomination largely on ideological grounds, with scant attention being paid to the circumstances and the difficult decisions that had to be made immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In Ms. Haspel's case, we have the benefit of the fact that she served not just for a short period of time—not just in the post-9/11 world—but, literally, for 33 years. We also have the challenge of knowing that a lot of her activities on behalf of the U.S. Government and in defense of our national security were classified. They cannot be publicly disclosed without risking lives, and, certainly, they cannot disclose the methods and the sources by which that in-

formation is obtained for the intelligence community so they can then present it to the policymakers here in Washington.

We do know Ms. Haspel joined the CIA in 1985, during the final years of the Cold War. She is a career intelligence officer and has served more than 30 years, both overseas and here in Washington. She has held various leadership roles, including Deputy Director of the National Clandestine Service. She has worked in the Counterterrorism Center, where her first day of work was—you guessed it—September 11, 2001, the day the Twin Towers fell, the Pentagon was attacked, and approximately 3,000 Americans lost their lives.

Throughout her career, Ms. Haspel has held some of the most demanding assignments in far-off reaches of the globe—places like Africa and the Middle East, which she did not seek out but which she took because she saw them as her duty. That is exactly the kind of person we need leading the Central Intelligence Agency—someone who sees that as their duty.

She has received numerous awards which lend credence to her reputation and illustrate that other accomplished professionals hold her in high regard. These awards include the Presidential Rank Award, the most prestigious award in the Federal civil service. She also received the Intelligence Medal of Merit, and several others.

Her integrity and professionalism are beyond question. Those who know her best, including high-ranking Obama-era officials, are behind her 100 percent. For example, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said he “think[s] the world of [Ms. Haspel]. She is capable, smart, very experienced, well respected by the Agency rank and file, and is a great person.”

Leon Panetta, who was former Chief of Staff to Bill Clinton when he was President, served as CIA Director and then Secretary of Defense, says that he is “glad that [we’ll] have a first woman as [the] head of [the] CIA” and that Ms. Haspel “knows the CIA inside out.”

Former CIA Director John Brennan, who also worked under President Obama, has cited her ability to “provide unvarnished, apolitical, objective intelligence to [President] Trump and to others.”

Earlier this spring, 53 former senior U.S. officials sent the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence a letter in which they expressed their wholehearted support of Ms. Haspel. This group includes people like Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, and many other distinguished Americans.

Now we know, because of what has been reported in the paper by the so-called nameless, faceless sources, that some have sought to distort and twist the historical record regarding the decisions that she and other intelligence officials had to make in the post-9/11

world. I just happened to pick up an account. This is called “Manhunt” by Peter Bergen. It is a New York Times best seller. He talks about the 10-year search for Osama bin Laden from 9/11 to Abbottabad. I think he provides useful context, talking about what the environment was here in Washington and in this country after the terrible attacks of 9/11. He says:

The urgency of finding bin Laden was underlined when the CIA discovered that he had met with retired Pakistani nuclear scientists during the summer of 2001 to discuss the possibility of al Qaeda developing a nuclear device. General Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, says that six weeks after 9/11, Bush told a meeting of his National Security Council that bin Laden “may have a nuclear device” big enough to destroy half of Washington. In fact, al Qaeda had nothing of the sort, but in the panicked aftermath of 9/11, such a threat could not be easily discounted.

Thankfully, while there did not prove to be any credence to the allegation that al-Qaida had potentially acquired a nuclear device that could destroy half of Washington, DC, it just helps us to think back about what the environment was and why it was so important to have professionals like Gina Haspel and others doing their job in accordance with the rule of law and trying their best to keep our country safe.

One of the most ironic complaints by opponents of this nomination is that they don't have enough information about Ms. Haspel and say she has hidden behind a wall of secrecy. Well, for somebody who has been involved as an intelligence officer in some of the most sensitive, secret, classified work on behalf of the U.S. Government for the last 33 years or so, what do they expect? The Agency has done a number of things to try to declassify some information through the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in order to give us some flavor and context to her background and her history, but it is ridiculous to expect somebody who has served their whole professional life in the clandestine service to have a public record that we could talk about in an unclassified setting.

At least organizations like the New York Times believe that “Ms. Haspel . . . is a known quantity in the CIA,” who “knows how to run intelligence operations.” She is seen in the Agency “as having loyally followed lawful orders” during the relevant period of time.

The other thing you hear are questions that have been repeated ad nauseam about some interrogation tactics used in the early days in the War on Terror, when our Nation was bracing itself for additional mass casualty terrorist attacks like the one I mentioned that President Bush feared if al-Qaida had gotten its hands on a nuclear device. The fact is, these questions have already been asked and answered and this is another rehash.

The program was investigated twice by career lawyers at the Justice Department—one under President Bush

and the other under President Obama. Those career lawyers, who have no partisan gain to make one way or the other, concluded both times that criminal charges were not warranted. Furthermore, the Justice Department, under President Obama, and multiple Federal courts have credited the work done overseas and the intelligence gained there as keeping our country safer.

I know we often talk about connecting the dots, but that is what intelligence operations do frequently. They get discrete pieces of information and try to put it together to paint a picture in order to understand what our adversaries around the world are trying to do. She was part of collecting those dots to create a picture to help inform the policy decisions being made by the President and Members of the Congress.

Finally, you will hear people talk about the destruction of videotapes of detainees, but the fact is, the so-called Morrell memo that was recently declassified provided the sort of transparency I think we would all want. It essentially exonerated Ms. Haspel of any wrongdoing regarding her supervisor's decision in 2005—not her decision—to destroy videotapes of interrogations. In it, Mr. Morrell says:

I have found no fault with the performance of Ms. Haspel. I have concluded that she acted appropriately in her role.

You can't get much clearer than that.

As our colleague, the junior Senator from Arkansas, has said, Haspel did not go rogue or make these policies on the fly. She dutifully executed the approved policy as determined by the Department of Justice, and she did so at one of the most dangerous moments in our history. That is precisely what our Nation asked of her, and that is exactly what she did.

Former CIA National Clandestine Service Director John Bennett has gone further, calling her "one of the most accomplished officers of her generation," which is high praise indeed.

Maybe former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said it best. She said:

If you were not in a position of authority on September 11th, you have no idea the pressures that we faced to try to make sure that this country wasn't attacked again. Walk a mile in our shoes and you'll understand some of the things that we've dealt with.

I would ask our colleagues to do just that. Walk a mile in Ms. Haspel's shoes as an intelligence officer who was sworn to defend the country, to use every lawful means in order to keep our country safe, and to remember 9/11 and the terrifying aftermath was the environment she and other people in the U.S. Government had to operate in with advice from the highest levels of legal advice provided by the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice.

Finally, let me just say what a horrible message it would send to other

patriots who feel the call to serve to not swiftly confirm Gina Haspel. What a horrible message it would send to other intelligence officers who follow lawful orders and protect our country on a daily basis. It would likely make the CIA more risk averse and, in turn, put more American lives in danger.

Based on recent news reports, we know this past week Ms. Haspel even considered withdrawing her name from consideration because she feels such fierce loyalty to the CIA that she doesn't want any political theater staged during the confirmation hearing to tarnish the Agency's reputation. That is exactly the type of person she is—putting our Nation's security and her fellow intelligence officers before her own career advancement. I am glad she has reconsidered, and she is willing to fight the fight and stay to the end and be nominated and confirmed as Director of the CIA. I, for one, am glad Ms. Haspel decided to not back down based on intimidation tactics and unsubstantiated rumors and hearsay.

We have seen one Trump nominee get unfairly smeared by half-truths and innuendo and hearsay, and we can't let that happen again.

Ms. Haspel didn't ask for this fight, but if that is what it takes to get America the best and most well-qualified person to lead the CIA, we are more than willing to wage—and to win—that fight for her and the rest of the country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

PUERTO RICO RECOVERY

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I have just returned from Puerto Rico. I went there at the invitation of Governor Rossello. I spent time with his Secretary of Housing. I spent time with members of his executive staff.

I went up into the mountains to a city named "Las Piedras," a city of some 30,000 people. According to the mayor, who took me around and showed me a number of the residential neighborhoods, 30 percent of that city does not have electricity.

It has been 8 months since the two hurricanes—first Maria and then Irma—hit the island of Puerto Rico, our fellow U.S. citizens. There are still major parts of the island that do not have electricity.

In this town of 30,000 people, you go to different locations, and in one particular location farther up in the mountains, there is no electricity.

I asked the residents: How are you coping? What do you do?

They had a generator, but because of the shortage of fuel and the cost of fuel, they can't run the generator all the time. Basically, they use it for necessities, such as cooking and other chores during the day. Therefore, they have no refrigeration.

I asked: What do you do?

They showed me. A fellow had just come from the grocery store down the mountain. Every day, they have to go

get their groceries that are perishable and cook them and consume them that day because they do not have refrigeration. This is 8 months after the hurricane. Can you imagine that happening in any of our States on the mainland? Can you imagine the degree of anger and insistence that there be a full recovery? Yet this is happening to fellow U.S. citizens on the island of Puerto Rico.

They are coping. They are a very industrious and inventive people. As they recover, they are looking at new ways instead of just relying on what in the past has been a dilapidated electrical grid. Tesla has come in. I inspected this pilot project up on top of the mountain. It is an array of solar cells—the most efficient that have been produced—and that array of solar panels is supplying electricity full time to 12 houses up on the mountain. We need more of that. We need more of that as a backup to the electrical grid and in some cases a replacement for the electrical grid since it has been so unreliable in the past.

I wanted to bring this report to the Senate. Puerto Rico will make it. Although jobs are scarce, although many thousands have fled to the mainland to stay with relatives, although many of those I met—thank goodness FEMA extended the temporary housing assistance to get those families through the end of the school year, as their children would have been uprooted in the middle of final exams and their graduations would have been disrupted had that temporary assistance not been extended through the end of June. Many of them want to go back, but there is no job to go back to, and there is a home that is now completely filled with mold and mildew. So what do they have to return to? I think we will see some number of them make their new life on the mainland. Many of those, of course, have come to my State of Florida.

My report to the Senate is that we have to do more. The Army Corps of Engineers has to keep pressing on with rebuilding the electrical grid. We must also go out and try to set up as many alternate electricity projects—like Tesla—as we can, and hopefully we will see some return to normalcy. You would have thought that 8 months after a hurricane, that would have already occurred. It has not, and I am sad to report this to the Senate.

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

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

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, in a few minutes we are going to be voting on President Trump's nomination of