United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Ryan Wesley Bounds, of Oregon, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

Mitch McConnell, Roger F. Wicker, Steve Daines, Richard Burr, Mike Rounds, Bob Corker, Mike Crapo, Thom Tillis, Chuck Grassley, John Boozman, Johnny Isakson, Orrin G. Hatch, John Cornyn, David Perdue, John Barrasso, John Hoeven, Roy Blunt.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

The Senator from Arizona.

NATO SUMMIT

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss a matter of great import, given the events of the past few days in Europe as they relate to friends, foes, and peace. Global peace is not a zero-sum game, and global alliances ought not be subject to whim, impulse, opaque machinations, or material threats of cancellation over internal disagreements. The world relies on the United States for stable and reliable leadership, and we have in turn benefited greatly from the peace and stability for which we have been the chief guarantors. This is not a subject that is even debatable.

Lately, the President of the United States has been characterizing our most vital relationships around the world in purely transactional terms, asserting that America has been taken advantage of, and he has gone so far as to suggest that when it comes to our relationship with our NATO partners, we get nothing for our troubles.

Nothing for a stable and peaceful Europe? This is the danger in viewing these relationships as mere transactions, absent our shared values. Absent values, the world is nothing but a cruel and cold place of warring camps and territorial ambitions and no durable alliances whatsoever. To view the world this way requires a frightening unawareness of the postwar security order that we ourselves created.

This posture of antagonism and suspicion toward our partners and peace can be held only when you blot out 70 of the most consequential years of the world. Apart from our shared sacrifice and our shared security, what we have been through together over those 70 years cannot adequately be reflected on any ledger or list of petty grievances, and a seeming ignorance of the scale of that history is blundering and strange.

The mindset that comprehends a trade deficit as a grievous offense or an unfair act of aggression is the same mindset that can upend vital security relationships that have been similarly misperceived. Sometimes, if I didn't know better, I might say that we are purposefully trying to destabilize the Western alliance and to turn the world upside down. I might come to this conclusion because, by a process of elimination, no other answer would make any sense.

If this is some kind of stratagem, what good could possibly be achieved by heedlessly making friends into enemies, and who, exactly, would benefit? What would this President replace the Western alliance with? There simply is no better order that could be achieved by this destabilization.

Today, I rise to pose a few questions, and I believe there is much riding on the answers to these questions.

A couple of days ago, the President of the United States said that his upcoming meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin would likely be easier than his meeting with America's most important allies at the NATO summit. Why would a President—any President—say such a thing? The Russian President, at the very least, personally directed a propaganda campaign and an extraordinarily ambitious series of cyber attacks aimed at the integrity of our elections in 2016, and we have been told that these attacks are continuing. He has shown no signs whatsoever of changing his behavior.

The Russian President is a man schooled in treachery and espionage. He jails and murders his opponents, presides over a mafia state, and he is an enemy of democracy. Why would a meeting with Putin be easier than a meeting with the allies we rely on most to be a bulwark against him?

Vladimir Putin is not ''fine,'' as the President recently asserted. And singing his praises for no good reason sends a terrifying message to our allies, especially those countries that share a border with Russia. Flattering such a man, who has demonstrated his hostility toward us and contempt for our values and has recently annexed parts of neighboring sovereign countries, is simply bizarre. That the admiration comes from an American President—well, that is unconscionable.

The President, of course, continues to entertain Mr. Putin's denial of election interference and otherwise hardly mentions the Russian attacks on us, other than to talk about the Russia hoax or to refer to Mueller's investigation into the attacks as a ''witch hunt''—this, in spite of conclusive and overwhelming proof of Russian involvement generated from investigations conducted by his own government. Why?

Then, before the recent G7 meeting, the President called for Russia to be readmitted to the G7, in spite of the fact that Moscow continues to occupy Crimea and has shown no remorse whatsoever for its behavior toward the United States. Why?

Then, yesterday in Brussels, the President offered a twisted interpretation of how NATO works and how it is financed in order to frame a grievance against our NATO allies, supposedly on behalf of the American taxpayer. Why?

Why would an American President create such conflict? Why does the President's complaint about our closest friends on the global stage unnervingly echo the Russian position? Mr. Putin's singular foreign policy goal is to weaken democracies and destroy the Western alliance. Could we possibly be helping him any more in his quest than by baselessly attacking our own allies?

The antipathy and hostility toward our friends and allies are simply inexplicable, but it is not good enough for us just to say that. It is our job and obligation in this body to try to end it—to reassure our allies that they are still our allies.

Over the Independence Day holiday, I had the privilege to lead a bipartisan and bicameral delegation to the Nordic and Baltic states to talk to our friends whose view of the Russian threat is much more intimate than ours and to hear of the concerns of the leaders there—NATO allies and partners. We wanted to assess the threat for ourselves.

In Latvia, where 40 percent of the population is ethnic Russian, the propaganda from Moscow is strong and unrelenting: The NATO alliance is weak. It will not last. The United States is an unreliable ally.

These themes have lately become very familiar on this side of the Atlantic as well.

The people of Latvia, ethnic Russians, and otherwise, pay close attention when an American President is reported to have said things like Crimea is rightfully part of Russia because the people in Crimea speak Russian. Well, there is a lot of Russian spoken in Latvia too. Does that mean that the United States would concede to Russian aggression against Latvia on this basis?

Vladimir Putin presides dictatorially over the remains of a collapsed empire. All he has now are nationalism and territorial ambitions and nostalgic appeals to former glory. He is not a strong leader for his people, as our President has said, any more than Kim Jong Un's people love their dictator, as he has also said. If we fail to see these things clearly, then we fail the world, and we fail ourselves, and we dishonor those from our own country and from our allied countries who kept the Soviet menace at bay for half a century as the world hung in the balance.

We are now told that the President will be meeting one-on-one with Mr.

Putin. He will have no staff present, no press, no one to make a record of the event. Why? If the White House is as confused about the nature of the threat we face from Mr. Putin as it seems to be, a meeting between our President and his Russian counterpart for which there is no record could not be more concerning. It is vital that even the most private meetings between leaders not be lost to history, especially when once again the world seems to be hanging in the balance.

NATO is one of the greatest and most visionary investments our Nation has ever made, and anybody who says differently is simply wrong. Any counternarrative about NATO is willfully destructive and does real and lasting damage to us in the world.

I join my senior Senator, JOHN MCCAIN, in the sentiments he expressed just weeks ago. To our allies: Bipartisan majorities of both parties support our alliances based on 70 years of shared values. Americans stand with you.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not, here today, remind my colleagues that the only time article 5 of the NATO Charter has been invoked has been by the United States after the attacks of 9/11/2001. Our allies accompanied us into battle to defend our country and our way of life, and they paid an eternal price for their commitment to our shared security. Of the more than 3,500 casualties sustained thus far in Afghanistan, roughly a third are the sons, the daughters, the husbands, and the wives of our NATO allies. In the spirit of NATO, those casualties are our casualties. We cherish them and their sacrifices as if they were our own because they are our own. Let us honor them not just in memory but in deed—in the way we conduct ourselves here in this place, in our commitment to the values for which they died, in the clarity of our purpose, and ultimately in our basic ability to tell right from wrong no matter the cost.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that with respect to the Ney nomination, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

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

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

NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about a couple of topics. I first want to talk about Brett Kavanaugh.

Brett Kavanaugh is the President's nominee to be a new Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. Yesterday, I had the chance to sit down with Judge Kavanaugh in my office and talk about his judicial philosophy, his view of the role of the courts, and how he would approach some of the tough issues the Court is likely to face. Frankly, I cannot think of anybody who is more qualified to serve as the next Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. This guy's background is incredibly impressive, as is his record, which I will get to in a minute.

As important to me is Brett Kavanaugh the person. Let me speak briefly about Brett, because I have known him for over 15 years. I have gotten to know him and his wife. I worked with him in the George W. Bush White House. I also had the opportunity to work with his wife because she was the personal assistant to President George W. Bush. They are both wonderful people. They are a great family. Brett Kavanaugh is a person I have gotten to know, not so much as a legal scholar or a judge but as a friend, and I have watched him as a father and as a husband. He is a guy with great compassion, great humility, and a big heart.

In his remarks on Monday at the White House, he talked a little bit about his life outside of being a judge.

He talked about coaching his daughter's basketball team. Many of us who have been coaches for our high school kids and grade school kids probably were able to relate to that. I am glad my kids got old enough where they could get better coaching so they wouldn't have all the bad habits I probably taught them. The fact is, that is who he is. He loves his daughters. He coaches the team. He makes that a priority.

He talked about tutoring kids, underprivileged kids. That is something he does quietly on his own time and feels strongly about.

Finally, he talked a little about the fact that he prepares and serves meals to homeless people who are connected through his church. He talked about the priest whom he works with on that. I talked to the priest afterward, and the priest said: You know, in fact, we do this regularly. In fact, we are going to be serving a meal together on Wednesday. You never heard Brett Kavanaugh talk about that. In fact, in my meeting yesterday, Brett Kavanaugh did not mention that he was going straight from my meeting with him to serve meals to the homeless. I found out after the fact when someone brought to my attention that on Twitter, there was somebody who was there and had taken a photograph of him kind of in the background with a ball cap on. It is not something he brags about. It is not something he told me about. It is not something he does because it is the right thing to do for political purposes; he does it because it is the right thing to do as a Christian and as someone who cares about his community. That is the Brett Kavanaugh I know.

I hope that others will see these sides of Brett Kavanaugh as he goes through the confirmation process because I think that as people get to know him through that, they are going to be very impressed.

People are going to differ some on judicial philosophy. With regard to what kind of person you would want to see on the Supreme Court of the United States, to look at what will be difficult issues that will come before that Court, you want somebody who has a big heart, who has compassion, and who is humble and has the humility to be able to listen. Brett Kavanaugh is a good listener.

He has a very distinguished legal record. There are some great judges out there, but I don't think anybody has qualifications better than Brett Kavanaugh's. He is clearly qualified to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Oftentimes, people call the DC Circuit the second highest court in the land. That is the court on which he already sits. There, serving on the court, he has earned the respect of justices across the spectrum—judges on the right, judges on the left. He has had a number of law clerks go through his process who end up clerking maybe for the Supreme Court or going into private practice or pro bono work or working with the government. Every one of them I have had the opportunity to know or talk to has glowing things to say about him—one who is my counsel in my own office. He has earned the respect of people whose lives he has touched, who have worked with him.

Brett Kavanaugh has a great legal education. He graduated from Yale Law School and clerked for Justice Anthony Kennedy. That is the Justice whom he would replace should he be confirmed. Anthony Kennedy is viewed as a consensus builder. Brett Kavanaugh is a consensus builder.

In his more than 300 published opinions, Judge Kavanaugh has proved time and again that he is a judge who deserves that respect because he applies the law fairly and impartially. He is independent, impartial, and smart. He interprets the law and the Constitution rather than try to legislate from the bench, which is very important. I think sometimes we forget about the separation of powers. This is where people are accountable to the voters and where we legislate. The members of the Supreme Court and the lower courts, as well, are meant to interpret those laws and take our great Constitution and faithfully interpret that as well. I think that is a very important judicial philosophy and one that I think most people want. That is what they are looking for in a judge—one who fairly and impartially applies the law and protects the rights guaranteed by our Constitution, not one who advances personal public policy goals by legislating from the bench.

Judge Kavanaugh has embodied this philosophy for his entire career as a judge.

Professor Kavanaugh, as he is known at Harvard Law School, where he has taught for 10 years, is so committed to the Constitution that his students say he carries a copy of it in his pocket. They also commented that it is a very well-worn copy, because he pulls it out. They say it is almost falling apart from the use he makes of it.

It is the Constitution he is loyal to, not partisan politics. According to one student from Harvard Law School:

> If you didn't know his background that [partisanship] wouldn't come across. You wouldn't think, ''Oh this guy's a Republican or this guy's a conservative.'' He wasn't in class to lecture us on Judge Kavanaugh's policy preferences. He was there to talk about the law. I don't see him as someone motivated by outcomes but as someone motivated in finding out what the law is and what the law says.

I think that is a big part of the reason why he is such a widely respected judge and why he is so widely cited by other courts, including the Supreme Court. They have endorsed his opinions more than a dozen times in the Supreme Court of the United States, including some of his dissents that have then become the law of the land. So they pick up his dissent at the DC Circuit and use that in the Supreme Court as the reasoning for a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court. That is highly unusual. I think that speaks to his credibility, his legal competence, and also his hard work. He is a hard worker who focuses on ensuring that he is fully prepared.

He is also a dedicated public servant. He has chosen to spend 25 of his last 28 years serving the American people in various jobs.

For all these reasons, I think he is a great pick. I think he has the experience and qualifications. I think he is someone who understands the appropriate role of the judiciary and puts that understanding into practice on the bench. He has a record to look at. Just as important to me, though, is that he is a good person.

I am proud to support Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will keep an open mind and get to know Brett Kavanaugh, as I have gotten to know him and as I hope the American people will get to know him, before they make a judgment. My hope is that Brett Kavanaugh will become a Supreme Court Justice who will make us all proud.

RESTORE OUR PARKS ACT

Mr. President, I also want to talk today about an important topic, which is our national parks. Our parks are an absolute treasure for our country. They are beautiful places, beautiful public lands. As important, they are part of our American culture and part of the history we have as a country, and it is important to preserve that legacy.

As an example, in Ohio, we have the Wright brothers' home and shop in Dayton, OH. It stands as an inspiration to anybody who dreams big dreams because that is what these two brothers did. You can see where these two Ohio brothers changed the world. Otherwise, frankly, they lived a pretty ordinary life. Preserving their home and that shop is very important to see that anybody can dream big and make a big difference. We have a responsibility to preserve that site and so many others that are important to our history for generations to come.

The National Park System includes more than 84 million acres of parks and historical sites that now attract more than 330 million visitors annually. It is an amazing system.

By the way, I was told yesterday that only one department or agency of the Federal Government has more assets than the national parks, and that is the Department of Defense, with all the military bases and all the physical assets they have. Otherwise, it is the parks. The parks have an enormous number of buildings and roads and bridges and water systems and visitors' centers and so on.

In my home State of Ohio alone, we have eight of those national parks, including Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which is the 13th most visited park in the United States of America. We are very proud of Cuyahoga Valley, whether it is for biking or hiking or fishing or kayaking. I am one of those 2.7 million visitors in Ohio's national parks every year. In fact, the weekend after this weekend, I will be at Cuyahoga Valley National Park with my wife, enjoying that beautiful park.

These parks are treasures, and they have so many wonderful facilities. The problem is that over time we have allowed a maintenance backlog to build up, meaning that so many of these buildings and so much of the infrastructure—the roads, bridges, and water systems I talked about—is deteriorating to the point that some of it is actually not being used. If you go to a national park, you may see that a trail is closed or a visitors' center can't be visited. You may see that some of the facilities that provide overnight lodging aren't available anymore. Why? It is because our parks, frankly, are kind of crumbling from within. They may look great on the outside, and they are beautiful, but there is now a $12 billion backlog of deferred maintenance at our parks. This has become a real problem.

By the way, that is equal to nearly four times the annual budget of the parks. They just don't have the resources to keep up with these deferred maintenance costs, which tend to be longer term costs, which tend to be more expensive and longer term. Frankly, they are not as interesting to fund. It is not as interesting for Congress to fund the fixing of the roof on a maintenance building at Yellowstone National Park as it is to set up a new nature program for visitors. So this has become a problem.

Think about your own home. If you allow deferred maintenance to build up—if you don't take care of the roof, for instance—what happens? You get a leak in your roof. Then you find out the drywall is ruined or the paint is ruined or the floor is ruined, and the costs mount. That is what is happening in our parks right now. When maintenance projects aren't completed on time, it is called getting delayed or getting deferred, and that is what we are focused on.

By the way, nearly two-thirds of that deferred maintenance is attributable to our national parks' aging infrastructure. This would be roads and bridges and buildings and so on.

The national parks just celebrated their 100th birthday in 2016, and a lot of us were very excited about that—100 years of these beautiful national treasures. Many of the facilities across the country, therefore, are very old. A lot are more than 80 years old, and some are almost 100 years old and are very badly in need of repair.

The visitation to our parks has increased in recent years, and this has added to this burden. So it is not only that there are deferred maintenance costs, where things are being put off, but with more and more visitors, there is more and more pressure on the parks. From 2006 until 2017—in those 10 years, in that period alone—annual visitation to our national parks increased by more than 58 million people. That is a good thing. To me, it is a good thing. More people are getting outdoors, particularly families who are taking their kids outdoors. More people are enjoying the parks and are learning more about nature and about our history, but it has put more and more pressure on the parks.

The challenges of keeping up with this aging infrastructure and the increased visitation have stretched the Park Service thin and have required it to focus on just the very immediate maintenance needs it has and to postpone, to delay, these projects that can't be completed on schedule.

We can't keep our parks in peak condition with bandaids. Some of this is going to require years of work and planning to go into that, which will require certainty and consistency about funding. When you do the annual appropriations process here, as you know, it is year to year. You do not know how much money you are going to get, and sometimes we cut back. They need to know there is going to be some funding there, some certainty, to be able to make some of these much needed repairs to our parks.

Unless we take action, of course, it is just going to get worse. We talked about that. When you don't deal with deferred maintenance, it tends to build up and become worse. We are told that the $12 billion backlog is increasing at a rate of about 3 percent per year. That is because, as the experts have told us, it is a compounding issue, meaning that maintenance projects that go

unaddressed often create these other problems. They create more repair costs. The spike in visitation to national parks over recent years has put more pressure on, and the longer we wait, the more expensive it gets.

For the taxpayers, it is better to move now to address these maintenance needs than to wait as they become more and more expensive. When roads, bridges, parking lots, and pathways decay, people are not able to visit those sites often. Some are even shut down.

I mentioned that there are 330 million people a year who visit our parks. There are also 330 million people, therefore, who are spending money around our parks. It is a huge economic driver. For those who are listening who come from States like mine, where we have big national parks like Cuyahoga Valley National Park, those communities really want to be sure that we continue to have vibrant parks and that people will continue to want to visit and can visit in order to get the broader economic benefit. This is important all over the country.

In my State of Ohio alone, where we don't have the big parks like Yellowstone or Yosemite but where we have some great parks, there is more than $100 million in overdue maintenance. For Cuyahoga Valley National Park, for example, there is more than $45 million of backlog, and completing these long-overdue projects will make a huge difference for a visitor's experience. The needed maintenance includes—at Cuyahoga Valley, as an example—$875,000 for badly needed renovations to the Boston Store Visitor Center. I have been there. I have seen it. It needs the help. That includes $274,000 in renovations for a shelter and $6 million in renovations for roads and parking lots to ensure people have parking. It includes water infrastructure improvements. Water infrastructure may not be the sexiest project to support, but it is a very important one. It is very important that we ensure that we have this infrastructure in place. It is the conservative thing to do.

Helping our Park Service has long been a priority of mine, as well as dealing with this backlog. About 12 years ago, when I served as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget in the George W. Bush administration, I launched in our budget something that President Bush and Mrs. Bush were strongly supportive of, which was the Centennial Initiative. Again, in thinking the centennial was coming up in 2016—10 years later—we wanted to put in place the idea of using public-private partnerships to fund the parks. We were successful in getting some of that started.

Frankly, Congress did not pass the legislation to do it, but I continued that effort when I came here as a U.S. Senator and as cochair of the Congressional Friends of the National Park Service for its centennial. I authored a bill that we set up in 2006 that finally created this endowment fund to be able to take public-private partnerships. Part of it is in the park. Part of it is with the National Park Foundation. That bill, called the National Park Service Centennial Act, was signed into law in the year of the National Park Service's centennial anniversary. The two funds together that were codified in that law have now provided more than $200 million to address the maintenance backlog.

By the way, more than $125 million of that has been from private dollars, non-Federal dollars. The idea was to provide the Federal match to encourage more people who love the parks to contribute. We did better than the legislation required, which was a one-to-one match—$200 million total, $125 million of which came from non-Federal sources. That funding helps, and I am proud of that. Yet, frankly, as I mentioned earlier, a $12 billion maintenance backlog requires even more. As soon as we are able to do that, we need to do it because the costs are going up.

I recently authored legislation with three of my colleagues, Senators MARK WARNER, LAMAR ALEXANDER, and ANGUS KING—two Republicans, one Democrat, and one Independent. It is called Restore Our Parks Act. The bill now has eight additional cosponsors who are Democrats and Republicans, and I am hopeful that many more of my colleagues will join us. The legislation is the product of a bipartisan agreement on consensus legislation that combines two similar bills that were already introduced. One was with Senator WARNER and me, and one was with Senator ALEXANDER and Senator KING.

The Restore Our Parks Act is a commonsense solution to this $12 billion in long-overdue projects, and it ensures that we can do the maintenance to keep the parks up to speed. It creates a legacy restoration fund that will get half of all of the annual energy revenues over the next 5 years, which are not otherwise allocated, to be used for priority deferred maintenance projects. This is funding—these are royalties on offshore leases, let's say, and onshore energy projects. Some of this funding currently goes to land and water conservation funding, and it will continue to go there. These are funds that are otherwise unobligated. The bill caps deposits into the fund at $1.3 billion a year, which would provide a total of $6.5 billion for deferred maintenance projects in our parks over the next 5 years.

It is not the whole amount now, but it is historic. We have never had this much funding being put into the parks at this time. It will provide that certainty, to know it is going to be there year after year and for this purpose only. About two-thirds of those funds will go toward buildings, utilities, visitors' facilities, and about one-third will go toward transportation projects, like roads and pathways.

Through simply using funds that the government is already taking in from these on- and offshore energy development projects and not depositing them in the General Treasury, we can cut our national parks' long-overdue maintenance backlog in half. This is exciting because about half of these projects—about $6 billion of the $12 billion—are what the Park Service calls urgent projects, urgent priorities. So we will at least have the certainty of knowing that the funding will be there for these larger projects that need to get done. It is a certainty we will never find through the annual appropriations process. We will be able to get some of these bigger long-term maintenance projects done and restore the beauty of our parks where needed.

This legislation is broadly supported. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and the Trump administration support it. I thank Secretary Zinke personally because he has really committed himself to this issue. When he went through his nomination process, we talked about the maintenance issues at the parks. Like every good fiscal conservative, he said: This needs to be addressed and addressed now; otherwise, it is going to get worse and worse and worse. Instead of adding more to the parks, instead of giving the parks more responsibilities, let's be better stewards of what we have. And I agree with that philosophy. I commend him for that, and I commend him for his support and his help in ensuring that the administration supports it.

Mick Mulvaney, the OMB Director, has also been very helpful in ensuring that we can use this funding source and that they are supportive of it. We also have support from so many outside groups. I can't name them all, but I want to mention the National Parks Conservation Association. It has been terrific, as have the Pew Charitable Trusts and so many other groups. The Outdoor Industry Association and many more have endorsed it.

Just yesterday, we had a hearing on this legislation in the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks. It was chaired by STEVE DAINES from Montana, who is, by the way, one of the cosponsors of this legislation. STEVE DAINES is a guy with a personal passion for the parks in his having grown up in the shadow of Yellowstone National Park. We had experts and conservation groups at our hearing who all voiced their support for this legislation.

The director of the Pew Charitable Trusts said it well:

> Supporting the bipartisan Restore Our Parks Act is a wise investment for a National Park System that has overwhelming support from the American public, that generates hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars for the economy each year, that provides access to world class recreation opportunities, and that preserve our nation's history.

Well said.

Deb Yandala, who is the CEO of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park and who is also the president of the national association of all of the friends' groups for the parks, said:

> Supporters of our national parks across the country are thrilled with this bill. Addressing deferred maintenance will greatly improve the visitor experience and go a long way toward protecting important historic and natural resources in our parks.

This bill makes sense, and it will help make our national parks even better for the hundreds of millions of visitors every year who take in their beauty and their history. I urge the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources to approve this bill quickly. I know that Senator MURKOWSKI, as chair of that committee, is a strong supporter of our parks, and I know she will be supportive in our moving forward. It is the same with MARIA CANTWELL, the ranking member. Then I hope the full Senate will vote on this legislation soon—vote on it now—so that we can move forward quickly.

We want to make the second 100 years of our national parks as magnificent and successful as the first 100 years have been. This bill is necessary in our being able to do that. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. President.

I wish to commend my colleague from Ohio. The national parks mean so much to us in Alaska, and I am looking forward to getting on that bill as a cosponsor. It is a very important piece of legislation. Once again, Senator PORTMAN is leading the way in the Senate on so many issues.

NATO SUMMIT

Mr. President, this afternoon, I want to say a few words about the President's visit to NATO and the NATO meeting we just had and talk about the importance of alliances and our allies. If you read the press accounts, I think you will see that this trip and the meeting of the President with all of the NATO leaders in Brussels was, overall, a good trip.

There has been this commitment by NATO members since at least 2014—but it really goes way earlier than 2014—for each country to spend 2 percent or more of their GDP on defense spending so that we share the burden of defense.

The United States has essentially always met this target—easily met this target—but a lot of other countries haven't. They have heard time and again from Presidents about this, and yet they have kind of ignored it.

The success of this trip is that it looks like for the first time in years, NATO countries are moving away from cuts in defense spending. Even in the United States, from 2010 to 2016, we were cutting our defense spending. Although it was way above 2 percent, we cut it by almost 25 percent. We saw a huge drop in readiness. We are changing that. Almost all of the NATO countries are starting to add billions of dollars to defense spending. I think the President deserves a lot of the credit for really pressing this issue. Other U.S. Presidents have pressed it, and the Europeans have kind of ignored it, and it seemed to go away. President Trump stayed focused on it, and we are starting to see a shift, and I think he deserves credit.

The President also highlighted a big national security issue that is in Europe that doesn't get a lot of attention, but that should get a lot of attention, and that is the issue of energy, particularly natural gas and how Russia feeds a lot of Europe—particularly, in this case, Germany. That undermines energy security and national security in Europe and in NATO. It is a controversial topic. A lot of countries in Europe don't like the fact that Germany is spending so much to import Russian gas when NATO is actually focused on defending Europe against Russia. I think the President also did a good job highlighting this issue and how we need to focus on this.

We are seeing some Europeans protesting the visit of our President, but I will state this—and you don't read about this a lot: There has been no Western leader who has done more to undermine Western interests and Western national security and European energy security than the former Chancellor of Germany, Gerhard Schroeder. He was the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, and when he left office, what did he do? He immediately went to work for Gazprom and Vladimir Putin to sell natural gas to European countries, including his own government and his own country, Germany.

To me, that represents a remarkable betrayal of Western values, NATO security, and European energy security. It doesn't get highlighted, but, for our German friends—and they are our good, close allies—it is one thing to protest our President, but take a look at your former Chancellor. He is doing more damage to the national security of Europe and the energy security of Germany and our allies than probably anybody else in Europe.

The bottom line is this 2 percent GDP goal and this concern that we have with Russian energy going into European capitals. These have been bipartisan concerns of Democratic and Republican administrations of the United States for decades, and I think at this NATO summit we are starting to see some good progress.

The President ended the NATO meeting by saying: The United States' commitment to NATO is very strong, remains very strong, and the spirit of countries willing to spend additional amounts of money is amazing to see. To see that level of spirit in the room of all the leaders is incredible.

That is what the President said today, and I think that was a good message with which to end this NATO leaders' summit in Brussels.

I want to emphasize another point about our alliances and about NATO. It is also important to know that NATO is not just the sum of the amount of money that countries spend. That is important. There is no doubt about it. But this alliance, which many have viewed as the most successful military alliance in history, is a lot more than just money. At its heart, it is about common values. At its heart, it is about countries coming together to defend democracy. At its heart, it is about countries that have the same core national security interests.

This is very important. At its heart, it is about shared sacrifice. There is shared sacrifice in the checkbook, yes, but it goes way beyond this. It is very important to remember article 5 of the NATO treaty, which is the treaty by which countries invoke the common defense. When you invoke article 5, that means that all of the other allies are coming to help you. All of the other allies are coming to defend you. Article 5 has been invoked in the NATO treaty, which was passed by this body in 1949, one time. It was invoked one time—one time. When was it invoked? After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Our NATO allies said: We are going to help defend America—that is really important—and they did. They did.

Again, we talk too much about dollars, and I commend the President for what he has done, but let's talk about other shared sacrifice. The alliances we have around the world aren't just about money. Since 9/11, over 1,000 non-U.S. NATO troops have been killed in action in Afghanistan, coming to our defense after 9/11 and going after the terrorists who killed over 3,000 Americans on 9/11. Over 1,000 NATO soldiers—non-American NATO soldiers—have paid the ultimate sacrifice because of the alliance they have with the United States.

You can't put a pricetag on that. You can't put a pricetag on that. Some sacrifices are more than just dollars. Some sacrifices can't be measured in dollars, and I think it is important for all of us here in the Senate, for the Trump administration, and for all Americans to remember that.

I wish to thank the families of those over 1,000 NATO alliance soldiers who have been killed in action and the thousands and thousands more who have been wounded in Afghanistan, hunting down terrorists who killed our citizens. It is very important to remember that.

The bottom line is this when it comes to one of the most important and enduring strategic advantages we have anywhere in the world: We are an ally-rich nation, and our adversaries—

such as Russia, North Korea, and Iran—and our potential adversaries—such as China—are ally-poor. We are ally-rich. Countries trust us. Countries want to join alliances with the United States, and our adversaries and potential adversaries are ally-poor.

That system of alliances has been built for over 70 years through the hard work of Democratic and Republicans Presidents, Secretaries of State and Defense, and U.S. Senators. It has been a joint collective effort.

Here is something else that is important to know. Our adversaries and potential adversaries know that this is the most important strategic advantage we have over any other country, and that is why for years—for decades—countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea have tried to split up our alliances. We shouldn't let that happen. It is important to remember this as we continue to deal with these countries. I think this NATO summit sent a strong message that we are going to stand together for decades more to come.

When it comes to alliances, this body, pursuant to the U.S. Constitution, plays a very important role. The alliances I have talked about—including, especially this week, NATO—came to the Senate for ratification. Again, it is important as we talk about national security, we talk about 2 percent, and we talk about burden sharing. Yes, we need that from our allies, but we also need to remember that our alliances go well beyond the checkbook—common values and shared sacrifice. Sometimes that is the most important issue to remember as we continue to deepen our alliances and expand them throughout the world, which is the best way to keep peace and prosperity, not just for us but for the entire world.

TRIBUTE TO GOVERNOR BILL SHEFFIELD

Mr. President, it is Thursday afternoon, and the new pages here will hopefully see that this certainly is one of my favorite moments in the Senate, and I know it is the Presiding Officer who gets to see the ''Alaskan of the Week'' every week around this time. I guarantee the young men and women who are doing a great job as our pages are going to start to view this as their favorite time, too, because they get to hear about Alaska and great stories about Alaska. They get to hear about great and wonderful people in the great State of Alaska who are doing great things for their community, their State, and their country. We call that person our Alaskan of the week.

From the onset, we have tried to focus, generally, on people who are unsung heroes in their communities—people who have worked diligently a lot of times without a lot of recognition. With my colleagues, I get to come and tell stories about what they have done for their community or State or even for their country. At other times, we recognize someone in our State who has made the headlines, someone whose contributions are well known through all parts of the State. We just do that because we want to reemphasize it, because it is important.

Today we are going to recognize one of those people who is well known in Alaska but whom we think is worthy certainly of the title of Alaskan of the week because of all he has done. His name is Bill Sheffield. He was our State's Governor in 1982, and he has spent his adult life making Alaska a better place for all of us.

Governor Sheffield's story in Alaska embodies what many of us love about our great State. It doesn't matter where you come from or your social status, in Alaska, if you have grit, tenacity, determination, and a servant's heart, nothing can hold you back.

Governor Sheffield was born in 1928 in Spokane, Washington. When the Depression hit, his family had to grow and sell vegetables to survive. It was during this time that he saw firsthand how President Roosevelt's New Deal, passed by this body, helped people, including his father, who was struggling. The idea that government was there to help people stayed with him and turned him into a lifelong Democrat.

He joined the Air Force and, after his release, joined Sears, Roebuck and Company. In 1952 he moved to the great State of Alaska to work for the company as it expanded throughout the State. He repaired televisions and appliances and took on sales roles, excelling both in repairs and sales. He did this all while suffering from a serious, difficult stutter, one he had carried with him throughout his childhood. He said that when he was a child, he simply couldn't or wouldn't talk. ''I had to point to pictures,'' he told one interviewer. But his stutter lent him tremendous empathy, and it also steeled his determination to work hard to overcome obstacles and succeed.

And succeed he did. He got into the hotel business, eventually owning a chain of 19 hotels across Alaska, but he still wanted something more. He wanted to give back to his community. So, in 1982, as a long-shot politician, he ran for Governor. The long shot came in, and he won.

He always understood, and still does, that infrastructure is the key to creating a path for economic growth in Alaska. We are a resource-rich but infrastructure-poor State. The policies that he undertook as Governor and the projects that were built during his administration—likely more infrastructure projects than any other Governor—still have a huge impact on our State today.

Let me just mention a few of them.

The largest zinc and lead mine literally in the world, the Red Dog mine in Northwest Alaska, was made possible by his hard work and that of countless other Alaskans.

The Ketchikan Shipyard was built during the Sheffield administration.

An aggressive road and construction program was undertaken throughout the State, particularly in the city of Anchorage.

The Bradley Lake hydro project near Homer was built during his administration, along with several other hydro projects throughout Southeast Alaska.

He traveled extensively throughout rural Alaska. He went to almost every single village in our State. We have over 200 that are not connected by roads, so that was hard to do. Almost every one was visited by our Governor.

But his crowning achievement was the purchase of the Alaska Railroad. When he first became Governor, the Federal Government had owned the railroad and was threatening to shut it down, which would have been devastating to our State. There were no private buyers, so Governor Sheffield worked with the State legislature and the congressional delegation to buy the railroad from the Federal Government. Then they created a State-owned corporation designed to be operated like a private business, and that railroad, the Alaska Railroad, still serves as a critical transportation link for goods and people throughout Alaska. Since his time in office, Governor Sheffield has continued his ties to the railroad as CEO and chairman of the board.

He has also continued to serve in other public service capacities, such as the port director in Anchorage, and he has contributed to numerous causes and served on many charitable boards, like the Alaska Community Foundation board, and has received countless awards and recognition for his public service.

But what really makes Governor Sheffield so special to so many is that he is just a kind, warm person. He is always lending a hand to others. He is always there for many when he is needed. He does this without regard for political affiliation. His house is always full of Republicans, Democrats, and Libertarians. Last year, I was at a great event at his house, where he honored the Coast Guard Foundation. Many members, both current and past, from both sides of the political aisle—including from this body—have eaten wonderful dinners in his home, including my good friend Senator JOHN MCCAIN, who had dinner in Governor Sheffield's house with Senator Hillary Clinton. That is bipartisanship. When he opens his doors to his beautiful home, all are welcome.

Governor Sheffield recently celebrated his 90th birthday with a party in Anchorage. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend, but I heard it was one for the ages. Hundreds of people showed up. People from all walks of life and all political affiliations were there, all of them sharing deep affection for one of our State's giants, a man with a huge heart, who has made life better for countless Alaskans.

Governor Sheffield, from the Senate, happy 90th birthday. Thanks for your great service to our great State and all you have done. Congratulations on being our Alaskan of the Week.

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

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

UPCOMING MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT TRUMP AND PRESIDENT PUTIN

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, if you are like me, a Member of the Senate in the hallways this week, I think the two questions that have come up over and over again were about the NATO meeting that just transpired in the last couple of days and the upcoming meeting on Monday between Vladimir Putin and President Trump.

I had intended to come to the floor and speak about policies toward China on trade. There is a lot to cover.

There was an article this morning in the Associated Press about how the Chinese Government has turned the American business class into lobbyists. They are basically telling these guys that are doing business in China: You should go back to Washington and lobby your government to stop imposing tariffs on us or you guys are going to pay a price. But I will have time to talk about that next week. That was really my intent.

I want to focus on the meeting on Monday between President Trump and Vladimir Putin because there is a lot of hyperbole. Someone came up and asked: Are you concerned that the President will meet one-on-one with Vladimir Putin and nobody else in the room?

I said: First of all, I guarantee someone else will be in the room because Putin doesn't speak English and President Trump doesn't speak Russian. It will not be a productive meeting if one or two other people aren't there. That should be the least we should focus on.

We should take this stuff seriously. It is an important and serious meeting. I don't take a back seat to anyone in terms of being clear-eyed about Vladimir Putin, and I want to talk about that today a little bit.

I want to start out by saying: Let's all take a deep breath and be reasonable. It is not unusual for the President of the United States to meet with the President of Russia because, of the 16,000 nuclear weapons on this planet, 90 percent of them are possessed by these two countries—almost equally divided. This is the reason other Presidents have met with President Putin or whoever the leader is of the Russian Federation. And that is why those meetings are important and will continue.

That said, it is important—when we analyze these meetings, what we hope they are about, and what we hope they will produce—to understand not just who you are meeting with and what they do but to understand why they are doing it. If you do not understand what the other side wants and what motivates them, then the meetings are not nearly as productive, and neither is our analysis or the suggestions we make about our policy toward that country.

First is understanding Vladimir Putin. I have never met the man. I don't think you need to meet him to believe a couple of things about him. First, is he is a very suspicious human being himself—suspicious of others. I think his KGB background has probably influenced that. He also grew up in the Cold War in Russia in the Soviet Union when Russians didn't even trust each other.

Imagine growing up in a society where people spy on each other, and you don't know, if you say something to your friend in school, if he will report you to the authorities—not to mention the authorities themselves looking at you all of the time. Then imagine actually being a product of their intelligence services.

I think when you grow up in that era, in a place like that, you are naturally going to be suspicious of other people, and you are going to ascribe to them attributes. So that is the first thing.

By the way, I think that also informs his view of the United States. It is impossible, I believe, for someone like this to grow up in that era, in that place, working where he did, and not have deep suspicions and views—negative views—about the United States and the West at-large.

The second thing that is pretty apparent just by watching him, is this guy is competitive. He views everything as a personal thing. Personal-level dominance is important to him, but, more importantly, his relationship with the United States is a competitive one. I think, by and large, he views the world as a zero-sum game, but he most certainly views the relationship between the United States and Russia as a zero-sum game—meaning that in any sort of interaction we are having with Vladimir Putin, there is no scenario in which he envisions that we both do well. He believes there is only so much success in the world, and the more we have of it, the less he has of it. I do believe it informs all the decisions he makes. There can be only one winner.

I think he is also deeply driven by his personal image. I will tell you that he probably wouldn't last 2 weeks in American politics where people are habitually mocked, and if you run for public office or you are a public figure—whether it is social media or the like—everyone gets ridiculed, mocked, and attacked. I am not sure he could ever put up with that sort of scrutiny. He is probably sensitive about it.

The one thing you can tell by watching him is that this is a person who works very hard to control his emotions. He never wants to look angry. He never wants to look as though he is afraid of something or worried about anything. He never wants to look as though he is in doubt about anything. He is very image-driven, and that drives a lot about how he controls his emotions.

But the other thing that I think is common sense is, if you grew up as a spy in the KGB, you know how valuable personal information is and how personal information about you can be weaponized. So that is why we know very little about him as a person—his personal life, his health, or any of these things. You would never know about it other than what he allows us to see—photos of him on a horse without his shirt on or whatever else he wants to show us that day—because he wants to control the personal information that is available.

He also wants to be able to control how his image is portrayed. The image he wants to portray is twofold. No. 1, he wants an image that portrays Vladimir Putin as an important world leader, an indispensable world leader; he is the guy that matters, and in every major crisis on this planet, he is a person whose opinion, views, and positions have to be taken into account. That drives a lot of the decisions he makes. It is the reason they are in Libya right now. It is the reason they are in Afghanistan right now. It is the reason he is trying to figure out how he can finagle his way into the talks with North Korea. It is because he wants to be an indispensable world leader, and there should not be any major discussion on the planet that he is not in the middle of. So oftentimes he injects himself into these things for that reason.

That is tied to his second end goal, and that is the one that drives most of what he does. He wants to restore Russia as a great world power, equal to the United States of America. He cannot do that economically. The Russian economy's GDP is $2 trillion, which makes it roughly the size of some of our States here in the United States and also roughly the size of Italy, Spain, and other countries. So he is not an economic superpower; therefore, he can only be an asymmetrical superpower, meaning the use of things that are not traditional, such as cyber warfare, his role on the security council, and the military—the ability to project power and to threaten with nuclear weapons and also with their conventional capabilities to invade neighboring countries or to intervene in places like Syria.

Ultimately, what drives him most of all—in addition to being, personally, an indispensable leader—is that he wants Russia and the United States to be viewed as equal powers on the world stage.

I think it is pretty clear from what he has said publicly that he views the 1990s as an era of humiliation for Russia. He looks at the end of the Cold War until the time he took over just in the last few years, and he sees that Russia was weak and America was strong, and we were preying on a weak Russia.

By the way, that is probably how he views the world. He views the world as a zero-sum game, a place where the weak are preyed on by the strong. Therefore, they must be strong, and they must be seen as equal to us.

Understanding all of that and any interaction with him is critical to having a positive, productive, or, at a minimum, not damaging interaction. If we go in with any illusions that this is, somehow, someone who, if we just get along with him better or if we work on some things together, then he is going to change behavior and be less problematic, that is a fool's errand. At the end of the day, if you believe the world is a zero-sum game and if you believe that the competition between the United States and Russia is one in which every time we win, they lose, and vice versa, then it is going to be very hard to find areas of interest that we can truly work on for the mutual benefit of both countries.

That does not mean that you are unnecessarily antagonistic. The bottom line is that the United States is both economically, militarily, and diplomatically superior to the Russian Federation Government in terms of our influence and our ability to do things in the world. When you are stronger—not an image, necessarily, but in reality—it should give you a level of security to be able to figure out ways in which we can work on things that are good for our country but also not lose the wisdom of understanding that you can often fall into traps. What we do not want is to fall into traps.

By the way, on this whole point of strong versus weak, I know a number of my colleagues had the opportunity to travel to Moscow during the last recess. It is interesting how it was covered in the American media—how they portrayed the visit—and how the Russian media portrayed it. I know many of them are frustrated by this. The Russian media basically portrayed them—again, it is state-controlled media, so they are going to portray it any way they want. But they almost made it look as though weaklings from America had gone over there. They were very frustrated by this. It just tells you—it gives you insight into the way they view things in the world. That is why you will very rarely see an interaction that they couch as a meeting that is respectful. They always want to put Putin in a dominant position, and they always want to put Russia in a dominant position.

By the way, one of the tactics Putin uses to accomplish this is before meetings even happen, he announces ahead of time that a deal has been struck, almost as if to trap you into the deal. Obviously, since he is announcing the deal, it sounds as if it is something he came up with.

All of these are interesting points, but where do these conversations lead us? There are a few things I think we need to keep in mind. The first is invitations to work together. They will probably happen, and he will probably announce them before the visit. One, he will say: Why don't we work together on counterterrorism? A lot of people would say: Well, that makes a lot of sense. They don't like the terrorists; we don't like the terrorists. So why can't we work with Putin to go after the terrorists?

Ideally, the answer would be: Yes, we have strong disagreements about a lot of things. Whether it is an ISIS element or an al-Qaida element, if we have a chance to work together on it, then we should pursue it.

There is a problem, though, and this what I hope everyone is clear-eyed about. They are not very good counterterrorism partners. To begin with, their capabilities are just not very good. We have seen that in Syria. They are not targeting terrorists. They are bombing schools and hospitals, and they are—not only have they committed war crimes, but they have assisted Assad in committing war crimes.

If you were going after terrorists, you would go to the places where the terrorists are. For much of that conflict, they have largely spent their time going after nonterrorist rebels—or at least non-al-Qaida, non-ISIS rebels. They are going after those rebels instead. So they are not very good at counterterrorism. They are not very capable.

The other thing is they use that as an opportunity to spy on us. When you are cooperating together militarily, you are embedded alongside each other and sharing information, so that gives you a lot of opportunity to spy on the people you are working with. We need to be wary of that.

Any effort to work together on counterterrorism has to be real. It has to be truly about terrorists, and it has to protect the United States and our information.

The second thing they love to talk about is: Well, why don't we work together on arms control? There are two problems with arms control. It sounds good on paper. The first is they cheat and they violate it. They deny it, but they violate it. The other is that they are for arms control as long as the arms that are being controlled are the ones we have more of or as long as the arms that are being controlled are the ones we are technologically superior in. They seek to use that as an advantage.

It is difficult because if you go out and you talk to people and say ''Hey, the Russians want to work together on arms control,'' everyone says ''Well, that is a great idea.''

I understand. It sounds very good on paper, but the reality of arms control is something very different. It means this: We are going to look for opportunities to cheat on our end, and we are going to try to strictly enforce it on your end.

Remember, it is a zero-sum game. If they enter into a counterterrorism relationship with us, it will be one in which they win and we lose because Vladimir Putin does not foresee a cooperative agreement with anyone, especially the country he is in direct competition with.

If it is an arms reduction agreement, remember, it is a zero-sum game. He is motivated by the desire to win at our expense, and he will use arms control as an opportunity to do that if he can structure it appropriately.

The other thing we hear him talk about is cyber. People chuckle about that. Imagine a cyber deal with the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin. But, again, Vladimir Putin knows that the U.S. private sector and government have cyber capabilities that are superior to his. So if he could come up with some sort of cyber agreement that would create rules which take away our advantage but allow him to continue to cheat and deny they are cheating—zero-sum game—he would be able to jump on top of us. These are things we want to keep an eye on.

The other thing to keep an eye on moving forward in this relationship is the unexpected. One of the things you have seen in his behavior and the zero-sum game sort of analysis of our relationship with them is that any time he sees an opportunity to do something because we are distracted or because the world may not act, he takes advantage of it: 2007 in Georgia; 2013 and 2014 in Ukraine. We could see the Ukrainian hostilities resume. The world is focused on North Korea. We are focused on the arguments regarding NATO. We are focused on the trade situation with China, Canada, Mexico, and everyone else. Everyone is talking about something different, and Ukraine is falling off the headlines.

You could wake up one morning and all of a sudden realize that hostilities have resumed or maybe it will be a massive cyber attack. Maybe it will be ramping up their involvement in places such as Libya or Afghanistan or one morning we will wake up and realize they have deployed significant military assets to one of those two countries—or both, for that matter.

It would be very reminiscent of what we saw him do in Syria, when he saw the—and the excuses would be: The Russians were already there. We are working with the government. They have invited us to come in and bring more people to help them. You would have to foresee that.

The one thing I think we should anticipate Putin will push very strongly on is to get the United States to completely pull out of Syria. What he ideally, probably, wants is some sort of ''international process'' to resolve it but an international process in which Russia not only is a key player, but they get to stay in Syria; they get to keep their naval base; they get to keep their air assets; they get to keep a unified government in Syria that is friendly to them, all supervised by the international community. But the United States has to leave first.

He would love nothing more than an opportunity to set up that sort of scenario because in a zero-sum game situation, he foresees a world in the next 5 years in which Russia has significant

military and other assets in Syria permanently, potentially in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, and all of a sudden, the countries in the Middle East are saying to themselves: You know, Russia's Vladimir Putin is a guy who can be an interlocutor, a mediator of the disputes in this region. This is a person we should be working with. This is a person who actually is more reliable to work with in the Middle East. He would love nothing more than that, and he would be able to do it without committing 100,000 troops or 50,000 troops or a large loss of Russian personnel. It is a zero-sum game, great power politics, the notion that he wants to be equal to the United States.

Imagine if he could create a scenario in which—if he hasn't done so already—Russia and the Middle East, under Vladimir Putin, are at least as important as, if not potentially more important than, the United States, a situation in which they have permanent military assets and a friendly regime in Syria, potentially in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and other places, and the United States is pulling out of Syria, being forced to reduce its presence in Iraq and in other places. They become de facto more important in the Middle East, and he takes one step toward achieving the goal of reaching parity with the United States of America as far as being an influential global power.

By the way, these efforts to increase their influence would not be limited just to the Middle East. You could foresee them doing this in the Western Hemisphere. I read an article a few days ago. It was a big fanfare. They opened up what they call a counterdrug school in Nicaragua. I can only tell you that while it may very well be called a counterdrug school, anytime a country welcomes an unlimited number of Russian military personnel and others, they are welcoming in spies and influence agents and the ability to project power. They have long wanted permanent—or at least semipermanent—basing opportunities in the Western Hemisphere like those they had during the Cold War.

They already have intelligence facilities. They already have a presence in Cuba. They would love nothing more than to get into a place or to expand their presence in a place like Nicaragua and even potentially Venezuela, for that matter. We need to keep an eye on all of these things.

This is an important conversation, but it oftentimes gets lost in all of the rhetoric that is going on around the elections and American politics. We have to understand very clearly that we are not dealing with Belgium here. We are dealing with Vladimir Putin, who has used the world as a zero-sum game, the strong versus the weak, and who is trying to position Russia and himself as the strong versus others whom he hopes he can weaken.

There is no interaction between us and them in which he does not want to come out ahead. He does not feel there is such a thing as a mutually good deal. The only good deals for him are deals in which they win and whomever he is dealing with loses, especially if it is the United States.

I will wrap up by saying that, with all of this in mind, I would not diminish the threat that Russia continues to pose to our electoral system, to our society, and to our politics. The No. 1 objective of Russian efforts in 2016—and it would be their No. 1 objective moving forward—is encouraging infighting in our politics. They have a clear understanding of American politics and its nuances—our societal divisions, the things we like to fight over, how we fight over them, and where we fight over them, and they have figured out and have gotten even better at being able to drive those narratives.

When people ask ''What was the real goal of those efforts in 2016?'' beyond anything else, it was not electing one person or another. His No. 1 objective—No. 1 objective—was to leave a country, the United States, deeply divided, at each other's throats, constantly fighting. No matter who won that election, that is the result he wanted, and that was the result we were going to get. Those efforts continue.

The second effort that I think they have as a priority, by the way, is to create pro-Russia constituencies in the United States. What I mean by that is there are people in American politics who actually take the Russian side or the Putin side of a debate. You have already seen the early phases of that in some places. It is still a minority thought process, but it is not unusual in many cases these days because it has gotten wrapped up in other things that are going on.

It is not outside the realm of the possible that you could see the growth of some pro-Putin element. It is maybe not like what you see in Europe or in Russian-speaking parts of Europe—but some pro-Russian types of constituencies in the United States. Whether that is somehow wrapped up around partisanship or the like, these remain their goals. Remember what I told you earlier. They cannot compete with us economically, but if they can divide us from within, it weakens us, at least in his mind. It is one of the things he can point to and say: Look how weak America is. All they do is fight with each other. Their democracy is a fraud, and look how strong we are because there is no dissent, there is no infighting going on in my Russia.

Obviously, what he doesn't tell you is that whoever fights against him winds up dead or in jail and that there is no press by which people can fight with him anyway. So these are the things to keep in mind as we move forward because the tools that remain at his disposal are still very significant. For example, I could foresee the time or day where—a lot of times there is a lot of focus in America about what if they go into the ballot box and change the votes. That is probably much harder to do because of the way we conduct elections in this country—so decentralized.

Here is what a cyber actor could do. They could change party registration. They could go into the database and suddenly erase a bunch of voters. Imagine if they do so by being able to use analyticals to identify here are the people in this town who we think are likely to vote for this candidate or that candidate. We are going to knock out a bunch of them so that on election day, a bunch of people who support certain candidates go vote, and they are told they are not registered. If you get enough people to do that and enough of those people complain to the press, we are going to see stories saying: Guess what. Supporters of candidate X or Y were not allowed to vote in the election. Fraud. Democracy is dead. We could foresee that at some point in the future. It is a real threat.

We could see Vladimir Putin taking the next step and doing here what he has done in parts of Europe; that is, creating an enemies list, politicians he believes are anti-Russia and targeting those individuals, targeting them with information he steals by hacking their emails, disclosing documents, even doctoring fake documents; perhaps doing something like deepfake, which is something we will be talking a lot about next week. That basically is off-the-shelf technology you can buy right now where you can produce a video that without the proper technology, you could not tell it is fake, where a person is saying something they never said or is doing something they didn't do—a doctored video that looks real. Imagine that, on the eve of an election, a video pops up online—and the media starts to report it—of a candidate saying something offensive they never said or taking a bribe because of a doctored video that looks real, and unless you are a technical expert, you can't tell. It is called a deepfake. They are not that hard to make, and they are not that hard to make for someone with off-the-shelf technology.

Imagine if a nation state decides to use it. You could foresee them targeting specifics races.

They have, as I said, a pretty good understanding of American politics. You could foresee where they would say: There is a congressional race or a Governor's race or a Senate race somewhere in the country that is going to be a really big deal. It has an outsized influence on American politics, and that is the race we are going to interfere in. We are going to do something to impact the outcome of it because we think that will further our narrative one way or the other.

We have to be clear-eyed on all of these things as we go into this.

I would say, perhaps, the greatest goal Vladimir Putin would have in the short term is weakening NATO, not just limiting its expansion but weakening its resolve. NATO, at the end of the day, beyond military hardware

that is a part of it, is no better than the true commitment of a nation to a member of NATO to live up to the organizing documents and commitments we make to one another; meaning that we have a commitment, along with our partners in NATO, that if one of us is attacked, we have all been attacked. That has only been invoked one time in its history, and that was after September 11, 2001.

If he somehow could not just keep us from expanding NATO but begin to undermine it from within, it would be an enormous victory because, again, for him, it would be a sign that America is diminishing, that the threats against him are diminishing, and his influence and Russia's role in the world has increased.

So this is an important meeting. It probably will not be the last time they meet, but more important than the meeting are the issues at play between the leader in Russia who views everything as a zero-sum game, in which either he wins or America wins, but it can't be mutually beneficial.

We have to deal with him. He possesses a significant percentage of the world's nuclear weapons. Between the United States and Russia, we have 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons in these two countries. We do have to talk to him, but we need to be very clear-eyed; that is, that it is a complicated but important relationship, and we should clearly understand what motivates him and what motivates his decision making and what their ultimate goals are in any conversation we have.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 912.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Kelly Higashi, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Higashi nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 913.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Emory A. Rounds III, of Maine, to be Director of the Office of Government Ethics for a term of five years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Rounds nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 924.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Georgette Mosbacher, of Florida, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Poland.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Mosbacher nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for 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.

HONORING THE FALLEN OF THE ''YANKY 72'' CRASH

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Mr. President, I would like to call attention to a special event occurring this Saturday in Mississippi to honor 16 brave servicemembers who lost their lives a year ago in a tragic military aircraft crash.

I look forward to joining family members, Marine Corps leaders, and the people of Leflore County, MS, to honor the 15 marines and one Navy corpsman who died on July 10, 2017, when their Marine Corps KC–130T ''Yanky 72'' crashed near Itta Bena, MS.

We have a responsibility to ensure we preserve the memory of those who gave that last full measure of devotion for our Nation. Those we lost last July include: Cpl Daniel Baldassare, SSgt Robert Cox, Capt. Sean Elliott, Maj. Caine Goyette, GySgt Sergeant Mark Hopkins, GySgt Brendan Johnson, Sgt Julian Kevianne, SSgt William Kundrat, Sgt Chad Jenson, Sgt Talon Leach, Sgt Owen Lennon, Sgt Joseph Murray, Cpl Collin Schaaff, Sgt Dietrich Schmieman, SSgt Joshua Snowden, and PO 2 Class Ryan Lohrey.

Immediately after the accident and since then, first responders and the citizens of Mississippi rallied in support of the fallen. The unveiling of a permanent monument will culminate a significant effort in Mississippi and across the Nation to memorialize these brave young men.

I am proud of the people of my State for their commitment to remember the fallen and to support their families. A recent Greenwood Commonwealth editorial thoughtfully expresses the significance of this work.

I ask unanimous consent that the July 11, 2018, Greenwood Commonwealth editorial titled ''Open arms for families of the fallen'' be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Greenwood Commonwealth, July 11, 2018]

OPEN ARMS FOR FAMILIES OF FALLEN

This weekend promises to be a highly emotional one for the families of the 16 servicemen who lost their lives a year ago when the transport plane on which they were flying fell out of the sky for reasons still not publicly disclosed.

It also could be a very meaningful weekend for the greater Greenwood community,