

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of James Blew, of California, to be Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Department of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11:45 a.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Texas.

RUSSIAN ELECTION INTERFERENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I came to the floor to talk about the “Abolish ICE” movement and the reasons that is a misconceived idea by some on the left, but first I feel compelled to respond just briefly to some of the comments made by our friend from New York, the Democratic leader.

First of all, the Democratic leader says we need to have hearings on the matter of Russian interference in our elections. I would remind the Democratic leader that we have been doing that for a long time—ever since the intelligence community assessment was released at the end of the Obama administration documenting Russia’s meddling in the election. That assessment was released on an unclassified basis. It is on the website of the Director of National Intelligence if anybody wants to read it.

Also, I would submit to him the 29-page indictment that Robert Mueller had issued by a grand jury against 12 Russian intelligence officers. It lays out in minute detail what the Russians were doing to try to cause confusion and undermine public confidence in our elections. As a matter of fact, this afternoon the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is hearing from some Obama administration officials on why they didn’t do more to stop it back when President Obama was in office when they knew very clearly what was going on but did not do—well, did virtually nothing to stop it.

So I would say to my friend from New York, the Democratic leader, there have been a lot of hearings, and the hearings are ongoing. Obviously, Special Counsel Mueller has issued this indictment. I only wish that it was more than a name-and-shame exercise because there is no chance the Russians will extradite these intelligence officers over here for a trial. But I think it does serve a useful educational purpose by pointing out in minute detail what the Russians have been up to. They have upped their game in a way that is surprising to many people, having used everything from propaganda, to social media, to cyber theft of information like the Clinton emails and the DNC emails during the course of the last election. It has gotten very sophis-

ticated. We better be about fixing it and getting ready for the next election rather than coming to the floor and engaging in the favorite Washington pastime, which is the blame game.

Senator SCHUMER said we need to issue sanctions against Russia. Well, I have in front of me about two single-spaced pages of actions that we have taken since the beginning of the Trump administration to support our allies against Russian aggression and to punish Russian misconduct, whether it is in the elections or otherwise. I would entertain—I understand the Senator from Colorado has some additional sanctions he thinks would be appropriate, and I think that would be something that would sting.

Rather than just sending a press release or trying to message this or use it for partisan political purposes, let’s consider additional sanctions that will actually discourage and hold accountable the Russians for their election meddling and deter them, hopefully, from doing it again.

I understand the fourth thing my friend from New York said is that we need to stop criticizing the Comey FBI and the Department of Justice under the Obama administration. Well, it is pretty clear from the investigations that have occurred that something rotten was happening at the leadership of the FBI. Just to listen to Mr. Strzok—and his protestations that there was no bias associated with those investigations are patently unbelievable. It is unbelievable, not credible.

So I understand that the Democratic leader wants to focus his attention on the President. That is his prerogative, and, indeed, he has been the leader of the anti-Trump resistance since President Trump was elected.

Many of us do disagree with the President’s assessment of the intelligence, as I have suggested. I firmly believe there is solid evidence of Russian meddling in the election. I think President Putin misrepresented the facts. I am not surprised by that given who he is and how he operates. As the Democratic leader said, as a former KGB colonel, he is accustomed to dissembling and distorting, manipulating information in a way that serves his purpose.

I think we should be absolutely clear. We all support the men and women who are the professionals who make up the intelligence community in this country, many of whom expose themselves to great danger, and, indeed, many have lost their lives trying to protect this country against adversaries around the world. I think the findings of the intelligence community assessment during the end of the Obama administration provides a roadmap to what the Russians did, as did the indictment of the 12 Russian GRU intelligence officials.

We better wake up. Rather than the blame game and pointing fingers, we better get ready for the next election, the midterm election in 2018.

I think there is a lot we can do together, but as long as this becomes a political, partisan, stop-Trump-at-all-costs effort, I don’t think we are going to make much progress.

I will conclude this part of my remarks by saying that I trust our intelligence community. I trust their assessment that there was Russian meddling in the election. But I also trust the investigation so far, which has shown absolutely no collusion with the Trump campaign and Russian intelligence activity leading up to the election. That is what I think has the President so spun up, because he feels as though this is an attack on him personally. I wish we could separate those two. But, indeed, our Democratic colleagues don’t want to separate them because they realize this is the best way to keep this story going for as long as they can through the next election and, who knows, through the next Presidential election as well.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about this misguided effort to abolish ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This is the operational component of the Department of Homeland Security. We have seen this movement in hashtags on Instagram, on T-shirts. We have watched protestors who showed up in California when ICE agents were trying to investigate the trafficking of children. Can you imagine these protestors interfering with an investigation into the crime of human trafficking of children? But that is not all. Some of the House Democrats have introduced legislation to eliminate ICE.

Of course, any sensible person would tell you that eliminating ICE is reckless, which is why I recently introduced a resolution with 14 of our colleagues denouncing these radical calls in the strongest of terms. This is just reckless and naive, this “Abolish ICE” movement. It is a move that would be fundamentally irresponsible.

Based on one recent poll, close to 70 percent of the American people, when asked about it, opposed the idea—and for good reason. ICE was created, after all, in 2003 in response to the discovery that many of the 9/11 hijackers had exploited holes in our immigration enforcement and overstayed their tourist visas and attended flight schools without a proper visa. We know what happened on that terrible day, 9/11/2001. We know that hundreds of thousands of foreign nationals overstay their visas every year illegally. Without ICE, those unlawfully residing in our country, in violation of their visas, would be allowed to stay indefinitely. Is that what the “Abolish ICE” movement is about—eliminating enforcement of our immigration laws and allowing people who flout those laws to succeed in staying here in the United States in violation of those immigration laws?

Of course, abolishing ICE would mean ending all of the agency’s programs and functions. It would mean allowing

dangerous criminals, including potential terrorists who are in our country, to remain here. It would mean scrapping the ICE Cyber Crime Center's investigation of child exploitation online. It would mean ending the ICE Blue Campaign to rescue human trafficking victims and provide them with a safe place to stay and other services. The Blue Campaign was just unanimously authorized by Congress, by the way, this year, and abolishing ICE would eliminate it. Abolishing ICE would mean doing away with the unit that focuses on human rights violators and war crimes. That unit is currently pursuing close to 2,000 leads. It would eliminate initiatives like Operation Community Shield, which combats the proliferation of transnational criminal gangs.

I hope our colleagues understand what they are encouraging when they say we should abolish ICE. I think it is incumbent on them to explain their rationale to the hard-working officials who are on the frontlines, fighting against human trafficking, child exploitation, and illegal immigration. What do they have to say to those people who risk their safety—perhaps even their lives—to enforce those important laws, much less to those whose jobs would be on the line?

There are some important statistics relating to Homeland Security Investigations, which is a critical part of ICE, that our Democratic friends who are encouraging the abolition of ICE should know about: 8,887, which is the number of visa applications that Homeland Security refused based on terrorist connections or other derogatory information; 904, which is the number of sexually exploited children identified and/or rescued by Homeland Security in 2017; 3,945, which is the number of cases initiated based on human smuggling last year; 4,735, which is the number of transnational gang members arrested in the United States in 2017; and 980,000, which is the number of pounds of narcotics Homeland Security Investigations seized in 2017, which included thousands of pounds of deadly drugs—like fentanyl—that help fuel the opioid crisis.

ICE plays a leading role in all of these areas. If the critics were to get their wish and if ICE were abolished, the numbers for all of these items would be zero because Homeland Security Investigations could not exist without ICE.

There is more. Think about the close to 33,000 criminal arrests made by Homeland Security Investigations last year—90 criminal arrests each day. Without ICE, these criminals would still be on the streets, endangering our communities. The \$524 million in illicit currency that was seized would be back in circulation, being used in illegal transactions. There were 7,000 pounds of heroin, 57,000 pounds of methamphetamines, and 260,000 pounds of cocaine impounded last year. That poison would all be back on the market and being sold in our communities.

I hope our colleagues who are calling for the abolition of ICE are prepared to explain their reasoning for abolishing an agency that combats illegal drug sales and online exploitation and helps protect our Nation's borders. My respectful suggestion would be that they need to spend a little more time thanking these public servants for the critical role ICE plays in keeping all of us safe. Maybe they should spend a little time getting to know the ICE officers who go to work every day and do their duty, protecting our country.

Earlier this month, Vice President PENCE talked about this. He reiterated President Trump's words of support—that the men and women of ICE are incredible people. These include the more than 20,000 investigators, field officers, special agents, and analysts, who, as the Vice President said, “stand up for the rule of law in this nation.”

Every day, ICE confronts criminal illegal immigrants who endanger our communities. They fight vicious gangs like MS-13 and stop human smugglers and child traffickers, sometimes endangering their own safety.

In 2017, the Vice President pointed out that attacks on Customs and Border Protection agents had increased by nearly 75 percent. Deliberately fostering resentment, anger, and contempt for ICE and our other law enforcement officials obviously puts our officers in additional danger. This is reckless, not to mention, again, dangerous.

ICE critics try to justify their calls by pointing out the situation at the border in which certain families were separated but are now in the process of being reunited. We all agree these families should be reunited, and I know the Presiding Officer has authored important legislation to change the law to make sure that families are kept together when they come across the border and claim asylum. But then there are cases processed in an expedited fashion in front of an immigration judge, so if they have some legitimate claim to asylum or immigration benefits, they can get that heard.

Also, one of the objectives, of course, is to eliminate the failed catch-and-release policies of the past, which have done nothing but encourage additional illegal immigration and reward criminal organizations for whom this is a business model, exploiting gaps in our immigration laws. Unfortunately, when we have Members of Congress who resist fixing those gaps, filling those gaps, and solving the problem, it does nothing but enrich these criminal organizations for whom this is gold.

It is clear that the situation at our border is a crisis. In 2014, President Obama called it a humanitarian crisis when tens of thousands of unaccompanied children came across the border, and that continues today because we haven't fixed the problem on a bipartisan basis, even though those solutions are readily available.

Those who criticize the enforcement of our immigration laws, the so-called

zero tolerance policy, have focused on separating families. So what we have tried to do, since we all agree families should not be separated, is to provide a means for those once separated to be reunited and detained in appropriate facilities and have their cases heard on an expedited basis before an immigration judge. Not fixing the problem will simply encourage more of the same.

Unfortunately, as I said, our colleagues who refuse to be part of the solution actually are part of the problem. We know who wins in this game; it is the criminal organizations who are, as one expert said, “commodity agnostic.” They will traffic in children; they will traffic in guns; they will traffic in drugs—anything that makes them a buck. This is a very, very lucrative business model for them. Unfortunately, when we don't fix the problem by plugging the holes, we are unwittingly helping to support that business model.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

TARIFFS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I particularly enjoyed the remarks of my distinguished friend from Texas, a good man, who makes a real difference around here.

I rise today to speak on the administration's recent actions regarding global tariff policy. I am one of the President's strongest supporters in most matters. I have been steadfast in working with President Trump on our shared economic agenda, especially passage of the most important piece of tax reform legislation in a generation.

Tax reform is already providing significant relief to families and businesses, large and small. Businesses across the country are now more globally competitive and are investing in their workforce through wage hikes, bonuses, and increased 401(k) contributions that are benefiting American workers, families, and their communities. But this roaring economy, which we worked together to build for American workers and businesses, is at risk because of the President's trade policies.

Tariffs against our allies and partners in Europe, Canada, Mexico, and around the world are already harming American farmers and manufacturers and raising costs for American families. If this continues, our economy will suffer.

I have long advocated for implementing enforceable international rules to level the playing field for American businesses, innovators, and entrepreneurs, and I have consistently fought to protect U.S. intellectual property rights around the globe. I have also been committed to advancing a trade agenda that serves the American people. But the administration's recent actions are misguided and will harm, rather than protect, the American people.