

Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 10:15 a.m., to conduct a hearing entitled "Sharks".

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing entitled "the semi-annual monetary policy report to the Congress".

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

The Committee on Environment and Public Works is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 9:45 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing entitled "Reducing Healthcare Costs: Eliminating excess healthcare spending and improving quality of value for patients."

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 12 p.m., to conduct a closed hearing.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a closed hearing.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my intern, Karina Ramirez Velazquez, be granted privileges of the floor for the remainder of the day.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following individual fellows in my office be granted floor privileges for the remainder of the 115th Congress: Casey Dreher, Cathleen Carlson, Nick St. Laurent, Gabe Kapchuk, Shaanan Cohny, Roberta Kienast Daghir, and Derek Southern.

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

AMENDING TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from

further consideration of H.R. 6042 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6042) to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to delay the reduction in Federal medical assistance percentage for Medicaid personal care services furnished without an electronic visit verification system, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 6042) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

ORDERS FOR WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 2018

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Wednesday, July 18; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed. I ask that following leader remarks, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Oldham nomination and that time until 2 p.m. be equally divided; that at 2 p.m., notwithstanding rule XXII, the Senate vote on confirmation of the Oldham nomination with no intervening action or debate; and that if confirmed, 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.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of our Democratic colleagues.

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

The Senator from Vermont.

TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, at the Helsinki summit yesterday, President Trump embarrassed our country, undermined American values, and openly sided with Russia's authoritarian leader Vladimir Putin against the U.S. intelligence community's unanimous assessment that Russia interfered in our 2016 Presidential election. JOHN

MCCAIN is right when he says it was "one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory. The damage inflicted by President Trump's naivete, egotism, false equivalence, and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate. But it is clear that the summit in Helsinki was a tragic mistake."

That is not BERNIE SANDERS. That is former Republican Presidential candidate Senator JOHN MCCAIN of Arizona.

Today, after a strong international backlash, Trump, in a bizarre statement, claimed he misspoke and of course blamed the media for reporting what he said. Even now he could not help but suggest that the electoral interference "could be other people also," not just Russia.

Today, we face an unprecedented situation of a President who, for whatever reason, refuses to acknowledge an attack on American democracy. Either he really doesn't understand what has happened or he is under Russian influence because of compromising information they may have on him or because he is ultimately more sympathetic to Russia's authoritarian-oligarchic form of society than he is to American democracy. Whatever the reason, Congress must act, and must act now, to demand that the President of the United States represent the interests of the American people and not Russia.

Let us be clear. Russia has been meddling not only in U.S. elections but in the elections of other democracies—the United Kingdom, France, Germany, to name just a few. Russia's goal is to advance its own interests by weakening the transatlantic alliance of democracies that arose after World War II, while also inflaming internal divisions in each of these countries.

We should also be clear that this interference is directed from the very highest levels of the Russian Government. Last week, Special Counsel Robert Mueller announced a set of indictments of 12 members of Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU. There can be no doubt that given the nature of the Russian Government, Vladimir Putin was directly involved in this effort, but our concern is not only what has already happened, it is what could happen in the future.

Last week, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, a former Republican Senator, raised the alarm on growing cyber attack threats against the United States in a range of areas, including Federal, State, and local government agencies, the military, business, and academia, saying the situation is at a "critical point." He said:

[Russia is the] most aggressive foreign actor, no question. And they continue their efforts to undermine our democracy.

Coats compared the warning signs to those the United States faced ahead of the September 11th terrorist attacks. This is a clear and present threat to our democratic system and those of our allies. Ultimately, of course, we want a

peaceful relationship with Russia. We do not want a return to the Cold War, and we surely do not seek conflict, but at the same time, we must be very clear that we oppose what Putin is doing, both in terms of his foreign policy and his domestic policy.

On foreign policy, we will not accept Russian meddling in the elections of democratic countries, stoking political tensions by promoting hatred and suspicion of immigrants and minorities and trying to undermine longstanding alliances between democratic allies.

In 2014, in violation of international law, Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine and annexed the Crimea region. Russia has assassinated political opponents abroad, most recently through the use of poison in Salisbury, England, on a former spy and his daughter, a chemical attack that endangered the lives of many civilians. The British Government concluded that this atrocious attack was likely carried out by Russia's military intelligence service.

Domestically, Putin has undermined democracy in Russia, crushing free speech, jailing political opponents, harassing and assassinating journalists who criticize him, and increasing persecution of ethnic and religious minorities and the LGBT community. President Trump had an opportunity to speak out on all of these issues, to confront Putin about these destabilizing and inhumane policies, but he chose not to. If the President of the United States is not going to do it, Congress must.

The Congress must make it clear that we accept the assessment of our intelligence community with regard to Russia's election meddling in our country and in other democracies. The Congress must move aggressively to protect our election systems from interference by Russia or any foreign power and work closely with our democratic partners around the world to do the same. The Congress must demand that the sanctions against Russia that were passed last year be fully implemented. The Congress must make it clear that we will not accept any interference with the ongoing investigation of Special Counsel Mueller, such as the offer of preemptive pardons or the firing of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, and that the President must cooperate with this investigation.

Finally, the Congress must make it clear to President Trump that his job is to protect the values that millions of Americans struggled for and died to defend—the values of democracy, justice, and equality.

Tweets, comments, and press conferences are fine, but we need more from Republican Senators now. It is time for the Senate to rein in the President's dangerous behavior. If their leadership will not allow votes on dealing with this extraordinarily important matter, then my Republican colleagues must join with Democrats to make it happen, or all of their words are worthless.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, the events of the last 36 hours, particularly the issue that now dominates the media coverage in America, and our political debates on the floor cause me to come today to the floor of the Senate to speak for a few minutes to my constituents in the State of Florida but also to anyone else who clearly should care about this issue across our country, for it is one that impacts our Nation in ways that I don't think have been fully vetted or are clearly understood by enough people.

The idea that the Russian Federation, at the command of Vladimir Putin, interfered in our election is something that most Americans are now familiar with. It has been a topic of ongoing conversation, discussion, debate, argument, and dispute, pretty much since the fall of 2016 and to the present day. It has morphed into something that has become domestically more of a partisan issue. It is hard to believe. If you were able to get in a time machine and go back just 5 years and tell someone that Russian interference in our election would become a partisan issue, along the lines in which we see it play out now, few would believe you.

I will spend very little time today talking about the past and saying "you guys did this on the other side of the aisle before we did" and vice versa because it isn't constructive and means nothing to the future.

It wasn't long ago, in a major Presidential debate where the Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, pointed to Russia as the greatest geopolitical challenge of the United States, that he was roundly mocked not just by President Obama, who was running for election and subsequently won, but by many in the press. I don't say that for purposes of drawing a "you guys were wrong back then" kind of argument. I say it solely for purposes of understanding how far we have come and where we are today.

By the way, I wouldn't necessarily agree with that statement. I believe, by and large, that the greatest geopolitical challenge for the United States and the world in the 21st century will be whether China's rise is peaceful and productive or not.

When the story of the 21st century is written, there will be some chapters in that book about Vladimir Putin and Russia, and it is a topic that increasingly dominates our domestic debate today in ways that I think require more careful examination and understanding if we are to make from it good public policy and good decisions for the country.

I think it begins with something that I talked about last week; that is, understanding the nature of this conflict. It begins with a man, Vladimir Putin. I don't know the man, but I know enough about him and have certainly

learned enough about him to make some pretty clear assessments that I believe in deeply. The first is that this is a man who was raised in the Cold War Soviet Union, where people were trained to be suspicious about each other, and who then went on to a career in the intelligence agency of that country, the KGB. The result is that he is, by nature and by all accounts, both a suspicious and a paranoid individual, as someone probably would be if they spent their whole life lying to other people. You begin to assume that everyone is a liar. This is a man who made his living by deceiving westerners and manipulating them.

He also grew up in a society where neighbors spied on each other and kids turned their parents in, and you never really knew who the other person you were talking to was. But if you were reported as someone who was against the government, your career, your ability to go to school and the quality of life for your family would be deeply impacted. There is no way that you grow up in a society like that and in an environment like that and, then, later on, go and work as a spy and it does not somehow frame the way you operate or think for years to come.

The other thing that is pretty clear—for reasons I don't fully understand because I don't know him, I don't know his family, and I don't know his upbringing—is that he takes everything deeply personal. Any sort of effort against Russia is not a geopolitical decision or something that he can depersonalize. He seems to absorb all these things as a personal attack on him. As a result, he, I think, has come to view himself as Russia—as the embodiment of the Russian Federation.

You add to all of that his views as a leader, and it is interesting because, if you go back to Vladimir Putin 15 years ago, he wasn't nearly as confident or as bold as he is at this moment. There are a lot of reasons for it, but this is a person who accidentally became the leader of Russia. He is kind of almost the guy who stumbled into the role because of a series of circumstances. He was hardly known before he started his career as Prime Minister but went on to the Presidency, nonetheless. He is someone who wound up in this position almost by accident, but since then, he has solidified his hold.

There is the Vladimir Putin from the first time around and the Vladimir Putin from the second time around, but one thing is abundantly clear from his public statements, and that is that he viewed the end of the Cold War as a disaster for Russia, and not for the reasons some people think. It is not an ideological rationale, but because Russia, which already has a deep and long history in its geopolitics of feeling ignored by Europe and Asia and disrespected by the world—at the end of the Cold War, Russia was a nation that faced incredible challenges.

Imagine for a moment that you are in the government or living in the Soviet Union and you oversee this incredible empire that covers all of this territory and have all these nations within your sphere of influence, and overnight, it all evaporates. Overnight, all of the countries in your periphery begin to join NATO. They start having elections. They start becoming allies of the United States. Your territory shrinks. One day, Ukraine is part of the Soviet Union; the next day, it is its own country.

Then add to that, over the next 12 to 15 years, the sort of emergence of the United States for much of that period of time as the world's sole superpower, while Russia was struggling to have an economy or even be relevant in the global discourse.

Then you come to see that Vladimir Putin viewed that period of time in world history, up to the present day, as an example of the strong America and strong West abusing a weak Russia, because this is ultimately how he views life and how he views the world. It is a battle between the weak and the strong, where the strong prey on the weak. You know who he wants to be. So because of all of that and because he is paranoid and because he is suspicious, he believes the United States, for example, was behind the protests in 2011 that broke out on the streets against his rule. He believes the United States is behind everything that is happening in Ukraine. All of this leads him to the two goals he has, and there are two goals that have become crystal clear, especially beginning his second time around as President.

A lot of people forget that he was President, he left, and his handpicked successor served for a period of time. Then he came back for the second time. It is the second Putin we are now dealing with.

Since that time, two things have become pretty clear about his goals. The first is that he wants to reestablish Russia once again as a world power, like the time when the Soviet Union was on par with the United States of America. He can't do that economically. A lot of people don't realize this, but Russia is the 9th or 10th largest economy in the world. To put it in perspective, the Italian economy—Italy is a great country—the Italian economy, with less territory, less oil, fewer people, is bigger than the Russian economy. It is about equal to the Spanish economy. I would dare say—for example, my home State of Florida has an economy now at about \$1 trillion. Russia is at \$2 trillion. There are States in this country that have a bigger economy than Russia's. So he is not a global economic superpower. The only thing that makes him a global superpower is the fact that they possess thousands of nuclear weapons and conventional military capabilities that are significant and have improved as he has invested in them. He quickly realized: The way I am going to become

relevant in the world again is not through my economic or diplomatic prowess; the way I am going to become relevant in the world again is I am going to use my conventional weapons, my conventional capabilities, along with some asymmetrical ones, to inject myself in the discussion in different parts of the world and show people that Russia and Vladimir Putin are strong again.

That is what he has done. It actually began back in 2008 with the invasion of Georgia—we now commemorate the 10th anniversary of that—but it also plays out in his intervention in Syria or the annexation of Crimea. I believe he would have moved forward into Kiev and broader Ukraine had there not been the EU and U.S. sanctions against him as a result.

The first objective is to make Russia a world power again. The second objective, which he thinks is tied to the first, is that he has to make America weak. Vladimir Putin is a strong believer in zero-sum propositions—not in the idea that somehow we can both be better off or that there can be a win-win but a true believer in the idea that in order for me to be stronger or us to be stronger, you have to be weaker.

It plays out that in order for Russia to be stronger, America, which he views as his greatest geopolitical competitor, has to be weaker. That is why they chose to interfere in the 2016 election.

Let me say this: I don't think Vladimir Putin interfered in our elections; I don't believe he interfered in our elections; I know it for a fact. By the way, so does everyone who has looked at this issue and knows anything about it. There is zero doubt about it. What I think we are missing in our debate is the why and the how.

The why is not what people think. He may have had a personal preference in an election, but his interference and his efforts to interfere in our elections began well before the President of the United States descended down those escalators in New York in the summer of 2015. They intended to do this long before that period of time.

His No. 1 objective was to ensure that no matter who was elected President of the United States, that person would assume office under a cloud of nagging and persistent controversy. He wanted to weaken them internally because, as an intelligence officer, he understood the power of being weakened from within. He understands it so much that he jealously protects his image in Russia, he guards it, disclosing very little about himself or about his personal life. He never puts himself in a position to appear vulnerable. He only shows pictures of things he wants people to see and actually allows no dissent—to the point where a substantial number of the people who opposed Vladimir Putin are not out of politics or even in jail; they are dead. Sadly, the world is littered with story after story of a Russian opposition figure found dead in his

hotel room, strangled, fell out of a window, poisoned. It happens over and over again. These things are not a coincidence.

He wanted to weaken whoever was the next President of the United States. No matter how this election turned out in November, whether the President was named Trump or Clinton, we would be dealing with a President right now under a cloud of controversy because he had it lined up either way.

The second thing he wanted to do as part of the first part is undermine confidence in our institutions—I mean all of our institutions: our elections, the media, our political figures, everything. It has extended to important institutions like the FBI and our intelligence agencies. He undermined confidence so that no one could be believed. And the President is under controversy. Divide us against each other so that there are no authorities in which we trust. Some of this, by the way, was already happening in our country, but they had the nuanced understanding of it to be able to exploit it.

The third, as part of the first and second, is to really drive divisions—not just to weaken the President and undermine confidence in our institutions but look for ways to do so by exacerbating preexisting tensions in our society.

These were the aims of the Russian interference campaign beyond everything else. It was not about electing one candidate or another; it was about these things. It would be hard to see what happened yesterday and the reaction to it and not conclude that this effort succeeded his wildest expectations. Today, the President of the United States has operated for the better part of a year and a half under a persistent cloud of controversy.

On the one side, his political opponents are intimating that his Presidency is illegitimate, that his election was not real. I heard words like “treason” thrown around yesterday.

On the other side is complete denial that there was any interference and the undermining publicly of important institutions in this our country, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which, by the way, is made up of thousands of employees, the vast and enormous majority of whom are patriotic Americans who keep us safe every single day. Undermining confidence in our institutions is tied to the point I just made, not to mention the fact that, increasingly, Americans get their news and information from someone who tells you what you already believe and confirms your bias even further, which drives our divisions.

There is no way you could see what was happening in this country over the last year and a half—which was already happening, by the way, and for which all of us in American politics are somewhat responsible—and not conclude that Vladimir Putin's plan to undermine the Presidency, no matter who it

was, to undermine confidence in our institutions, and to drive divisions in our country has been wildly successful, at a very low price.

Interestingly, yesterday one of the interviews that he did—I think it was Mr. Wallace at FOX News who asked him about this, and his response was that none of the things that were leaked are untrue, as if to almost say with a wink, even if we colluded—or not colluded—even if we hacked and even if we did all these things and interfered, so what? We didn't lie. These are all true things.

So what have I heard in response to some of this? I will not spend a lot of time addressing some of the arguments made by the President's opponents. There is an ongoing investigation being conducted by Mr. Mueller, which I believe should reach its conclusion naturally as he continues to do his work. I have said this, and I will repeat it: It is in the best interest of the President of the United States and of our country for Mr. Mueller to do his work without interference and be able to conclude it. No matter where you line up or whom you voted for, we should all want to know the truth. That truth will ultimately have to be proven in a court of law.

From his history, I have no reason to believe that Mr. Mueller will not conduct a full, thorough, and fair investigation. Ultimately, it is truth and the light of the truth that will help us overcome a lot of these controversies we find today. Until that has happened, any accusations are unfair, unwise, and counterproductive.

But one of the arguments I have heard from people on my side of the aisle is that this is not a big deal because everybody does it. And if by "everybody does it" you mean everybody spies, yes, virtually every nation on Earth has an intelligence agency, and some do a better job than others. But do not be misled—everyone does not do what we saw in 2016. Our problem in 2016 was not that the Russians spied on Americans or that the Americans spied on the Russians or that the Chinese spied on us; our problem in 2016 is that the Russian Federation, under the command of Vladimir Putin, weaponized information. One thing is to gather information; another thing is to strategically leak it in an effort to influence the domestic politics of another country. And that is what Vladimir Putin ordered done for purposes of undermining the next President, whoever it was, and undermining confidence in our elections and our institutions.

They hacked into emails. They released these emails through a third party. It was picked up in the media, it was reported, and then we fought about it. That is what they have done. They have done it in other countries for years. They did it somewhat in the Cold War. They did it in 2016. And they will do it again. Let there be no doubt—they will do it again. Then

after they released all this stuff, they used their army of bots and trolls to drive this information online, on platforms, particularly trying to drive it to certain groups and people to divide us even further against each other.

One of the most dangerous things they did, which is now open record in the indictment issued last week by the Mueller investigation, is they probed the electoral systems of our States and counties. A lot of people are saying: They didn't get in the ballot box. Absolutely. I tell you with full confidence that the reason President Trump won had nothing to do with Vladimir Putin—nothing. But I think we are wrong if we think all we should be worried about is the ability to change votes at the ballot box because if they can somehow change people's registration and enough people on election day go to vote and are told "You aren't allowed to vote," their trolls will be ready to drive that news out there on election day. Then come election day, no matter who won, the other side will say that there were these weird things that happened down there in some county or some State, so the election is not valid.

Imagine that for a moment. Imagine an election in 2000 in my home State that was decided by less than 600 votes. Imagine that in a Republican county, a bunch of Democrats went to vote on election day and were told: You can't vote today because you are not registered. If that happened to enough people, the Russian trolls would jump all over it. They would start driving it on the news. It would be featured on cable news that day.

That night, if they lost, they would be arguing "The election was rigged. The electoral officials in the Republican county rigged the elections"—all driven by the Russians, and vice versa, by the way.

That is the danger, that we can one day potentially elect a President of the United States who swears into office with a substantial number of people believing that the election was stolen, undermining not just the President at that point but our very system of democracy. That is what they did. Anyone who tells you that everyone does that is lying. Everyone does not do that. The United States does not do these things. I am a big critic of the Chinese, but the Chinese don't do these things. I have other problems with them. The Belgians don't do this, and the Japanese don't do this. Only one country in the world has weaponized information in this way in order to interfere in an adversary's election, and that is the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin.

The other argument I have heard is: What is wrong with better relations with Russia? Nothing is wrong with better relations with Russia. I will tell you right now that the world would be a better place, a more peaceful place, and our lives would be a little easier. We would be stronger if, somehow, we

had a partner in the Russian Federation with whom we could work to deal with things like terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons and Iran and all sorts of issues—North Korea. We all wish we had that.

The reason that isn't happening, frankly, is not because of us. It is because of Vladimir Putin. For Vladimir Putin, better relations are not what he is interested in. He is not seeking a partnership with the United States. What he is seeking is geopolitical, perceptual equality. He wants to be viewed as being on par with America, both as a leader and his country as a whole, and he believes the only way he can do that is to pull himself up and tear us down. I, frankly, have to tell you that it is very difficult to have better relations with someone who believes that the only way for him to be better off is for you to be worse off. As long as the Russian Federation is led by someone who has total control of his government and has these views, it is going to be very difficult to have better relations.

That does not mean we don't meet with Vladimir Putin. Anyone who says that the meeting, alone, is wrong is not being wise and is being disingenuous. As 90 percent of the nuclear weapons on this planet are possessed by the United States and the Russian Federation, that alone is reason for us to engage with Vladimir Putin. We have to. We have no choice. Yet we should engage with him with clear eyes and a clear understanding of what he is up to and what he is trying to do. We should engage with a very clear understanding that this is a man who, throughout his life as leader of the Russian Federation, has never passed up an opportunity to exploit the weakness of an adversary or a competitor. Every time he sees weakness and the opportunity to gain an advantage, he will take it, and any engagement with him in which that is not understood is a dangerous one.

So I have no problem with having better relations with Russia. Frankly, I am not one of these people who is over the top on Russia to the extent of the threat it poses. It does have nuclear weapons, but we have bigger threats than Russia. Yet it is a very significant one that needs to be addressed.

Our moving forward is what, I hope, we will focus on. Mueller will continue his work, and the Intelligence Committee, which I sit on, will continue its work. Yet we are going to have an election in a few months. We are going to continue to have elections every 2 years, hopefully, forever, and there is no reason to believe that they will not try to do this again.

That is why, earlier this year, along with Senator VAN HOLLEN, I proposed the DETER Act, which is the only thing that Vladimir Putin understands—deterrence. The DETER Act says here is a list of sanctions, and these sanctions will go into effect immediately if the Director of National

Intelligence, after an intelligence assessment, determines that Russia is, once again, interfering in our elections so that before he even does it, he has a very clear understanding of what the price is going to be.

Men like Vladimir Putin operate as cost-benefit analysts. They weigh the costs against the benefits, and then they decide what action to take. There is no doubt, in 2016, he saw that the costs of what he did were very low. He thought he could hide it. He thought, by the time we would have figured it out, it would have been too late. He thought that America would be in such disarray that it wouldn't be able to get its act together and actually impose any additional sanctions. He saw the benefits as extraordinary, so he took action, and he will do it again if he doesn't think the costs are high enough.

My hope is, over the next few days and in a short period of time, we will figure out a way, in working together as Americans on this issue, to set aside all of the stuff about yesterday—that probe will continue, and our work on the Intelligence Committee will continue—and focus on the future.

No matter how you feel about 2016, who among us would say that if Russia interferes in 2018—or in any year for that matter—it shouldn't be punished? Who among us would say, if we had the opportunity to put into law strong consequences for interference that could deter such an attack, we wouldn't want to do it? That is why I hope that no matter how you may feel about the other things that are going on that the Senate can come together and work together to pass this law, because, otherwise, we are leaving our Nation vulnerable.

I will close with something I said back in October of 2016, which is that Vladimir Putin is not a Republican, and he is not a Democrat, and he is not a conservative, and he is not a liberal. Do not ascribe to him any of the attributes of American politics. He interfered in 2016 in order to create chaos and controversy, not to elect any particular party or individual. By far, that was his strongest motivator, and he will do it again.

I believe, if left unchecked, he will target Members of the Senate who he thinks are his opponents. He will target Members of Congress. Eventually, he will even target our debates outside of elections. I believe, if left unchecked, he is going to take the next step and not just leak information but will make it up. He is going to come up with 9 emails that will be real and will embed a 10th that will be fake. It will be reported, and it might cost one an election or might cost someone enough heartache that one has to resign.

Information is a very powerful weapon. If you go online, you will already see the ability to produce these deepfake videos that look real, videos that only an expert could tell are fake. They are of people saying or doing

things they never said or never did. Imagine those being in the hands of a nation-state and being leaked 2 days before an election. A nation-state is going to do these things. It is going to happen if we do not deter it from happening and if we do not prepare our Nation and the American people. If you think this is chaotic, then allow that to happen without informing us and preparing us and strengthening us and putting in place a deterrent against that. Then you will know chaos—a chaos that will shake us to our core.

I hope that we can take this small but important step of coming together as Americans and protecting our elections for years to come against an adversary who is determined to tear us down in order to build himself up. This is reality. This is the world and the threat we face. The sooner we address it the safer our Nation and our people will be.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

BLUE-SLIP TRADITION

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, the nomination of Ryan Wesley Bounds is just the latest in more than a year of attacks that have been based on a strategy of converting the United States from a nation that is based and organized on and that fights for the principle of "we the people" into one that bows to the powerful and the privileged.

His nomination has already strained and degraded the Senate's blue-slip tradition as our colleagues rush to pack our courts with extremist judges to advance that vision—not of judges who call balls and strikes but of judicial activists who want to rewrite the Constitution to put down workers, to put down healthcare rights, to lay out and tear down consumer rights and women's rights—so many opportunities and empowerments diminished in the favor of the privileged and the powerful. That is what is going on with the packing of the Court.

This deed of putting forward this nomination on the floor tonight changes a 100-year tradition of comity in the U.S. Senate and the recognition that the home State Senators have something important to say about the integrity of the individual who is being put forward. At stake in this confirmation is the Senate's advice-and-consent responsibility as applied through the blue-slip tradition—a tradition that incentivizes consultation and bipartisan cooperation. When you take away the blue-slip tradition, you diminish the incentive for consultation and cooperation. This tradition has existed since 1917. It was 101 years ago when Senator Thomas Hardwick objected to President Wilson's district court nominee, and he wrote his objection on a blue slip of paper—thus, the name.

No judge until now—101 years later—has ever been confirmed by this body

having not received a single blue slip from a home State Senator. Until this administration, just five had been confirmed without both blue slips having been returned. This tradition has been honored by both parties. It has been a bipartisan tradition. When the Democrats have been in power, the Republicans have wanted it to be honored. When Republicans have been in power, the Republicans have honored it. In fact, in 2009, at the start of President Obama's term when the Democrats controlled both the Executive Office and this Chamber, my Republican colleagues wrote a letter. They wrote that they expected the blue-slip tradition to be observed evenhandedly and regardless of party affiliation. It was not just that letter from which we have heard over time. We have heard from Chairman GRASSLEY.

Chairman GRASSLEY wrote clearly about this:

For nearly a century, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee has brought nominees up for committee consideration only after both home State Senators have signed and returned what is known as a "blue slip." This tradition is designed to encourage outstanding nominees and consensus. . . . I appreciate the value of the blue-slip process and also intend to honor it.

He intended to honor it, he wrote, in 2015. Yet putting this nomination through the committee dishonored the tradition. Bringing it to the floor dishonors this tradition. It doesn't honor it because it violates it.

During the time that President Obama was in office, the Republicans used the blue slips to block 18 nominees. The nominees never progressed without the return of two of those slips.

We can turn back to the former chair of the Judiciary Committee, ORRIN HATCH, who wrote in *The Hill*:

Weakening or eliminating the blue slip process would sweep aside the last remaining check on the president's judicial appointment power. Anyone serious about the Senate's constitutional "advice and consent" role knows how disastrous such a move would be.

The current chair and the former chair were pretty clear, and now they intend to tear it down—a moment of opportunity to sacrifice a century of comity and consultation.

The clear factor is one principle when in the minority and tearing down that principle when in the majority. It is one principle for Obama's nominees and a different principle for Trump's nominees. Where has all of the honor and principle gone in this Chamber? There were no hearings for Obama's nominees without blue slips. There have been hearings for four of Trump's nominees without blue slips.

Now, the majority leader helped to drive this change. He said: Republicans now will treat a blue slip "as simply notification of how you're going to vote." That is what he said. It is simply notification. So it is up to the chair of the committee, the former chair of the Judiciary Committee, and all of