

The right to vote is sacred and a precious human right, but it has been under attack, and that is unconscionable and wrong.

This nominee represents yet another threat to the basic premise of one person, one vote because, throughout his career, he has worked to make it harder for Black Americans to vote. That is not who we are as a country, and this nominee does not deserve the privilege of a lifetime appointment on the Federal bench.

Over and over again, on the most serious and consequential questions related to our sacred right to vote, Mr. Farr has been on the wrong side of the issue.

Listen to his record: Mr. Farr defended in court a gerrymandered congressional map that was so blatantly racist that our Federal Court of Appeals judge ordered it to be redrawn. Mr. Farr defended in court State laws that were so obviously designed to suppress the Black vote that a Federal Court of Appeals ordered them to be struck down. He wasn't just a cheerleader for these discriminatory laws; he was the actual architect. He was their defender in court. He did everything he could to keep them in place.

That is why millions of Americans all over the country, including so many men and women of color, the NAACP, and the Congressional Black Caucus, are so outraged by this nomination. They are right to be so because this nomination is an insult.

This seat is the longest judicial vacancy in the country, but it did not have to be that way. Just a few years ago, a highly qualified nominee was picked to fill the seat, but she didn't even have a hearing, let alone a vote. So then another highly qualified nominee was picked to fill the seat, and she didn't receive a hearing either—or a basic vote. Now we have another nominee for the same exact seat, but this time my colleagues are practically tripping over themselves to rush him through the Senate at full speed, to push him across the finish line before the end of the year, and to hand him a lifetime appointment to the Court.

I urge my colleagues to reject this bad choice. Let's find someone better, who isn't so obviously biased on questions related to race. If his record of discrimination and bias alone isn't enough to convince you, then think about this: We cannot ignore the fact that this nomination is coming at a moment when so many Black Americans are still experiencing blatant and racist disenfranchisement every time they try to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Just look at the voter suppression that happened in Florida and in Georgia this month in their elections for Governor.

We have already seen terrible decisions from the Federal bench that have rolled back voting rights, such as when the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act. This body has done nothing to address this egregious decision, and

we should not be complicit in further eroding this precious right.

Now we want to confirm another man to the Federal judiciary who has spent his entire legal career fighting to make it harder for Black Americans to vote. What kind of awful message are we sending to our country?

We must reject this nominee. We must stand up to discrimination and racism in all its forms, not reinforce them, not encourage them.

I urge my colleagues to do the right thing and vote no.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

UKRAINE

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today, as I have many times before, to stand up for a free and independent Ukraine.

I come to the floor to unambiguously call out and condemn the Russian Government's escalation of aggression and the increasingly dangerous situation in Ukraine.

Over the weekend, Russian forces sharply escalated their campaign in Ukraine by attacking and seizing 3 Ukrainian vessels with 23 crew members and temporarily shutting down commercial shipping through the Kerch Strait. Ukrainian sailors were injured and required medical attention.

This was an outrageous violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, so I want to say this clearly and unequivocally: The Kremlin must immediately return the vessels and sailors to Ukraine. The Kremlin must not obstruct the free passage of shipping through the Kerch Strait moving forward.

We here in the United States must take the Kremlin's actions seriously in word and in deed, for the Russian Government's actions on Sunday marked a sharp escalation in Putin's ongoing assault on the international rules-based order, this time on the freedom of navigation in the high seas. Indeed, this was an act of war, and Sunday's attack comes in the context of ongoing Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine for the past 4 years.

For the past 4 years, Ukrainian forces have endured an unrelenting assault, rendering the Donbas economically shattered and ungovernable.

For the past 4 years, 1.5 million displaced people have lived lives of uncertainty, not sure when and if they will ever be able to return home.

For the past 4 years, Ukraine has struggled to rebuild its economy and reform its institutions while fighting a hot war and suffering regular casualties.

For the past 4 years, Ukraine has been on the frontlines of a struggle against the Kremlin's vision of a world that is not guided by Democratic values, not buttressed by fundamental freedoms, not governed by a rules-based international order but, instead, ruled by Mr. Putin and a corrupt cabal of oligarch insiders.

Despite years of aggression, Putin's latest escalation marks an even more

insidious turn. Apparently, the Kremlin no longer seeks to hide behind lies of little green men or Russian-backed separatists. The Russian Government, with no pretense or obfuscation, fully admitted to directly firing on Ukrainian forces and seizing their ships.

Beyond the military component, this attack tells us that Putin is ramping up an economic war on Ukraine. Since the spring, Russian vessels have blocked Ukrainian commercial ships from sailing through the Kerch Strait, costing Ukraine millions in lost revenue from exports and blocking imports critical to the Ukrainian economy. This weekend, Moscow opened up a new front in the war, one that could ultimately do the most damage to Ukraine's viability as a state.

Russia's actions show that its leaders are emboldened, unchastened, and on the march. Clearly our response to Russian efforts to undermine our security, our fundamental democratic values, our institutions, and the rules-based international order has thus far been inadequate.

Certainly the State and Defense Departments have taken some steps to counter Russian aggression. Ambassador Kurt Volker, who has led efforts to fully implement the Minsk agreements, has shown clear-eyed leadership in calling out the Kremlin and holding Putin to account. Our Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, Wess Mitchell, has done much of the same. Secretary Jim Mattis has consistently supported a strong military presence in Europe to counter Russian aggression. Nikki Haley, our U.S. Ambassador, issued the first statement from the administration following Sunday's attack and was appropriately firm. Come to think of it, I can't think of any player within the Trump administration who is soft on Russia—except one, of course: the President himself.

Just yesterday, when asked by reporters about Russia's escalation in Ukraine, President Trump said: "We don't like what is happening either way." In other words, he once again fell back on the same old both sides excuse he keeps in his back pocket whenever asked about Russia's bad behavior. This is not the kind of clear and unequivocal denouncement the people of Ukraine or the world needs to hear from an American President at a moment in which the international democratic order is under attack, but unfortunately it is what we have come to expect from President Trump, who repeatedly subverts his own administration's positions and efforts on Russia.

The work of Mattis, Volker, Mitchell, Haley, and countless others has been repeatedly undermined by a President who has abandoned America's interests and betrayed our core principles time and time again, from the fiasco in Helsinki to an exchange in Paris just weeks ago where he greeted Putin with a giant smile on his face.

The President has had many opportunities to restore confidence to the

American people and reclaim America's global leadership on Russia policy. While he has repeatedly failed to do so, yet another opportunity lies before him this week at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires, where he is scheduled to meet with Putin. If ever there were a time for this President to defend our country, our principles, and those of our allies, this would be it. If ever there were an opportunity for American leadership, this would be it. If there were ever a time for President Trump to find his spine on Russia, this would be it.

In the meantime, President Trump must use this week's opportunity in Buenos Aires to send a clear message to Putin that we will not tolerate its increasingly aggressive behavior in Ukraine. Here is what I believe the President must do:

First, the United States needs to increase assistance to our friends in Ukraine in the face of continued aggression in Donbass and now in the Kerch Strait. The Trump administration must immediately increase security assistance to Ukraine, including the provision of lethal maritime equipment and weapons. In addition, we must bolster intelligence-sharing with Kiev and assist Ukraine's efforts to improve its maritime domain awareness.

Second, NATO has a critical role and should consider increasing exercises and its presence in the Black Sea. The United States has maintained an active presence in the South China Sea to protect shipping lanes. NATO should move quickly to establish such a presence in the Black Sea.

Third, the United States should increase sanctions pressure on Russia immediately. This is long overdue. The President is required to impose sanctions on Russia under the CAATSA law. Several mandatory provisions of the law remain ignored. I would offer that now would be a good time to follow the law. But imposing sanctions alone does not constitute a real strategy.

Fourth, Sunday's events present an important opportunity for American engagement with like-minded allies across Europe. Now is the time for serious diplomacy and coalition-building in the face of this threat. Our European friends spoke out in full opposition to Russia's attack on Sunday. Now let's see if we can work together to turn words into action and deter such Kremlin attacks in the future.

Finally, as the situation in Ukraine grows more perilous, we in the Senate must also live up to our national security responsibilities. Following the President's failures in Helsinki, Senator GRAHAM and I, along with others, introduced the Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act, known as DASKAA. This legislation is more than another sanctions bill; it charts a comprehensive way forward for how the United States can better defend its interests and those of our close allies against Putin's unrelenting

assault on our values, security, economic interests, and the rules-based international order.

After months of Senate hearings on the legislation, we have nothing to show for it, as both the Senate Foreign Relations and Banking Committees have refused to mark up new legislation to respond to the Kremlin threat. What are we waiting for? What are we waiting for? The alarm bells are ringing. Yet the Senate Republican leadership is sound asleep. They are asleep as Trump concedes more ground to the Kremlin in Ukraine and cyber space; asleep while Russian ships ram Ukrainian vessels in international waters and injure brave Ukrainian sailors; asleep while Vladimir Putin pounds away at our points of vulnerability.

The American people deserve a vote on DASKAA before we leave for the holidays. Anything less would be a mark of shameful abdication of our responsibility to protect and defend our national interests.

I hope this Chamber will wake up to this growing threat. Perhaps Sunday's attack will be a ringing alarm clock that compels this body and the international community to act.

Finally, the American people cannot afford a weak performance by President Trump at the G20 summit, like we saw in Helsinki—cannot afford such a performance.

President Trump, this is your opportunity to finally show American leadership in defense of our principles and our close allies across Europe.

The time is now. It is critical. We are waiting to see that in fact the President can rise to the moment.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Finally, on another matter, I want to address breaking news of the day on a related matter. Yesterday, we learned from an exclusive report in the Guardian that former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort repeatedly held secret talks with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange within the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. These revelations reported publicly in the Guardian, if true, raise serious, new questions about the Trump campaign's possible relationship with WikiLeaks, including the timed release of hacked emails orchestrated to inflict maximum damage on Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential campaign.

According to the published report, Manafort visited in 2015 and then again in the spring of 2016—just in time for Trump to name him the RNC convention manager. Sources in Ecuador say Manafort's meetings with Assange may have been purposefully kept off the Embassy's official visitor log. It is essential that Ecuador's current government publicly and swiftly confirm whether former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa and his administration allowed these meetings to take place.

Given that Secretary Pompeo met with Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Valencia yesterday morning—the day before this report came out—the State

Department and the intelligence community must immediately brief the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Mr. Manafort's interaction with Mr. Assange, as well as the Ecuadorian Government's role in any meetings. This is critical for us to know, and I hope it won't take other actions to get clarity.

I am already concerned that tomorrow we are having an all-Members briefing on what happened with Saudi Arabia and the murder of Mr. Khashoggi, and there won't be anybody from the intelligence community there. Where is Gina Haspel, the head of the CIA? She went and listened to the tapes. Her Agency is reported to have come up with conclusions that said, yes, the Crown Prince knew and was involved, yet we are going to have a briefing without anybody from the intelligence community. It is an affront to the Senate, which has responsibilities—oversight and otherwise—to understand what is the appropriate action of this body as it relates to U.S. foreign policy and this particular ally. But we are not going to have anybody from the intelligence community. To me, that is the ultimate coverup.

So I want to know what happened and whether this Guardian report is true. I want to know from the intelligence community what their determination is. I don't want to hear it characterized by someone else; I want to hear it directly from them. Only then can we actually act in a way that is both concerted and with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions on critical U.S. foreign policy.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to 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.

WITHDRAWAL OF NOMINATION HOLDS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, the Finance Committee has worked with the Treasury Department to ensure proper responsiveness to committee inquiries. We are continuing to review these matters to determine what further oversight is required.