

Wellstone had a brother and Senator Domenici had a son who were struggling with mental illness, and they didn't have protection in their health insurance, so the Senators fought to include it.

Thank goodness they did. Because of that health law, insurance companies cannot discriminate against Stefanie's son because of his medical history. Her son just graduated college. She is thankful he can stay on her company's policy until he gets a job, and she is thankful her premiums are not higher due to her son's health needs. Stefanie is afraid that if these protections go away because of a court case that is currently pending or the actions of the Republican majority in this Senate, her son will be uninsurable or face enormous medical bills that he will be unable to pay. Stefanie wrote to me, and she said that if the Affordable Care Act were to be eliminated, they are "contemplating leaving this country to seek manageable health care."

Democrats are fighting to keep healthcare protections for people like Stefanie and her son. Because of the Affordable Care Act, people with pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied coverage or charged higher premiums. Is there anyone among us who doesn't know someone with a pre-existing condition? I have one. This protects 5 million people in Illinois who have a preexisting condition.

Insurance companies are no longer allowed to impose annual or lifetime caps on benefits or to deny coverage for mental health, substance abuse treatment, prescription drugs, or hospitalizations, and young people are allowed to stay on their parents' plan until they reach age 26.

Despite the Republican and Trump administration's continued efforts to repeal these protections both in Congress and in the courts, health insurance under the Affordable Care Act is open for business. If you are interested and want to know the policies available, healthcare.gov is the website to visit.

Open enrollment for 2020 health plans began on November 1 and ends on December 15. If you can, sign up. It is a protection that you hope you will never need, but if you need it, it is good to have it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

RUSSIA

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, beginning with Russia's interference in our 2016

national elections, to the recent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, President Trump has made multiple statements and decisions that serve only to benefit Vladimir Putin's agenda to undermine democracy and expand Russia's influence around the world.

Taken together, these actions aren't just a threat to U.S. national security, but they also undercut and diminish some of the core tenets and values of American democracy and global leadership. The U.S. Senate, as part of a co-equal branch of government, must recognize this threat and act as a body to ensure our institutions at home and interests abroad are protected. Thus far, we have not lived up to this solemn responsibility.

Let me start with a seminal news article from the Washington Post, just recently. White House reporter Anne Gearan, in her October 15, 2019, article, catalogs how the Trump administration has allowed Russia to assert dominance globally. The headline reads: "Trump's moves in Ukraine and Syria have a common denominator: Both help Russia."

Anne Gearan writes as follows, and I will quote in pertinent part.

... President Trump has taken action that has had the effect of helping the authoritarian leader of Russia.

... [The President's] actions in Syria and Ukraine add to the list of policy moves and public statements that have boosted Russia during his presidency, whether that was their central purpose or not, confounding critics who have warned that he has taken too soft a stance toward a nation led by a strongman hostile to the United States.

Anne Gearan goes on to discuss how President Trump's withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria has allowed Russia to assert a more dominant role in the region. She also discusses how the President's intimidation of Ukraine's recently elected President Zelensky has become the subject of a domestic impeachment inquiry and distracted from actual engagement and support to Ukraine as it continues to grapple with Russian aggression.

Anne Gearan also notes:

[President] Trump has publicly questioned the usefulness of NATO—the post-World War II military alliance established as a bulwark against first the Soviet Union and now Russia—as well as the utility of the European Union, a political and economic alliance Putin would love to weaken.

This is all written by Anne Gearan.

These actions have led to a growing consensus among the national security community that the President is not serving the national interest. Let me move to a second part of this.

Sadly, President Trump's recent actions with regard to Syria and Ukraine are, unfortunately, not isolated. President Trump has been consistent in taking actions that favor Russia. As early as April of 2016, then-candidate Donald Trump vowed to pursue closer ties to Russia if elected to the Presidency. Even before he took office, by way of Twitter and other platforms he was signaling to Vladimir Putin his def-

erence to a Putin-driven U.S.-Russia dynamic.

From there, the American people have only learned more about the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and Russia's interference in the 2016 Presidential election.

The intelligence community's unclassified report concluded:

We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump.

The interference with our election process by a hostile government was an attack on our democracy and a threat to our national security carried out by Russian operatives at the direction of Vladimir Putin himself.

Since Special Counsel Robert Mueller's appointment as special counsel to investigate Russia's attack, 34 indictments have been returned in connection with the investigation, including indictments against Russian individuals and Russian companies, as well as former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and deputy campaign manager Rick Gates, who were charged with "conspiracy against the United States." Special Counsel Mueller also secured guilty pleas from other campaign advisers, including George Papadopoulos and Michael Flynn.

Despite this ample evidence of wrongdoing, the President attempted to impede the Russia probe at every step of the way. The U.S. intelligence community, the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Robert Mueller and his team of investigators have done a great service to our Nation in investigating the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and Russian interference in our election. The findings further confirm that President Trump not only benefitted from Russian interference but, as Anne Gearan wrote in the October 15 Washington Post story, President Trump "has also disputed, at times, the U.S. intelligence community's conclusion that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to boost his candidacy, and he only reluctantly signed a bill imposing sanctions on Russia for the transgression after weeks of resisting the measure, which he called, 'seriously flawed.'"

Anne Gearan is referencing the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, known by the acronym CAATSA, or C-A-A-T-S-A. That is legislation that I supported, and it passed both Houses of Congress with bipartisan support to impose sanctions on U.S. adversaries, including Russia, for its incursions into Ukraine and Syria and interference in our elections.

I believe it is likely that if CAATSA did not clearly prohibit it, President Trump would have removed preexisting Russia sanctions by now.

So the evidence is clear. By interfering in our national elections and

elevating Donald Trump's prospects for success as a candidate, Vladimir Putin was assuring that a personal ally would be installed in the White House and that that particular ally would clear the way for Putin to advance his foreign policy goals around the world.

Let me move to a second—or, I should say, a third—part of this. If it isn't bad enough that the President is himself undermining our intelligence community's findings, he has deployed Attorney General William Barr to try and discredit those findings—those findings by our intelligence community with regard to interactions with allies.

William Barr has been traveling the world chasing conspiracy theories and investigating President Trump's complaints about the origins of the government's investigation into Russian election interference. Specifically, the Attorney General is examining whether U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies acted properly when they examined possible ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, which ultimately led to Special Counsel Mueller's investigation. We have learned that this probe is now a criminal investigation, suggesting that it is focused on the unfounded allegations pushed by the President's allies about how the Russia probe was started.

Considering that Special Counsel Mueller, the intelligence community, and the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee all confirmed in great detail that Russia interfered in the 2016 election, it is entirely unclear what legal or factual predicate Attorney General Barr is even relying on to justify this criminal investigation into the origins of the government's investigation into Russia's election interference.

Attorney General Barr is pursuing these efforts, despite the fact that Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte stated that Italy's intelligence services played no role in the Russian investigation. It appears that Attorney General Barr is using the Justice Department to chase unsubstantiated conspiracy theories that could benefit the President politically and also undermine Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

The Attorney General has also demonstrated eagerness to prejudge his own investigation by already telling lawmakers in April that he believed that "spying did occur" by the FBI on the Trump campaign. So the President has dispatched a top U.S. law enforcement official around the world to pursue a biased investigation into an effort to undermine our intelligence agencies and to undermine the work of a special counsel who was appointed by the very same Justice Department that Attorney General Barr leads, with the primary goal—the primary goal—being to clear Vladimir Putin's government of wrongdoing. It is hard to comprehend or adequately articulate how disturbing that is.

Let me move to another part of the evidence with regard to how the President deals with President Putin and his government—the Helsinki summit. President Trump's dangerous deference to Vladimir Putin was most evident at the July 2018 summit in Helsinki. Putin and President Trump had a 2-hour one-on-one meeting, followed by an unprecedented press conference.

President Trump appears to overwhelmingly favor one-on-one, closed-door, direct communications with Putin on a regular basis. I have to ask at least two questions, among many we could ask. Question No. 1 is, What is he hiding? No. 2 is, Why not have experienced U.S. personnel present at such bilateral meetings?

Even more disturbing were the President's statements following the Trump-Putin meeting. Here is a brief summary of what happened at that meeting:

President Trump praised Putin and his leadership.

No. 2, he repeatedly sided with Putin over our intelligence community, asserting that Russia did not, in fact, interfere in the 2016 elections. The President repeatedly siding with Putin over our intelligence community was a grave offense by the President that made our Nation less safe—in my judgment, for sure less safe. It was one of the worst moments in any American Presidency.

No. 3 in my brief summary of that public meeting in Helsinki is that Mr. Putin was silent the whole time when this was happening.

President Trump's rambling comments over several minutes reflect not only the President's disturbing desire to flatter and to show support for Putin but also his complete failure—in that instance, his complete failure—to advance U.S. interests.

Let me move to the impeachment that is underway regarding Ukraine.

The transcript of the now-infamous July 25 phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that is the subject of the current impeachment inquiry also reflects the President's failure to prioritize U.S. national security interests when it comes to Russia.

Going back to Anne Gearan and the Washington Post story of October 15 of this year, she wrote: "During that call, Trump did not mention longstanding U.S. policy goals for Ukraine, including standing up to Russian pressure, and he may have tarred and weakened Zelensky and his winning anti-corruption platform by dragging him into domestic U.S. politics."

Such major omissions send a clear signal to Putin that he could expand his aggression in Ukraine beyond Crimea and to the Ukrainian people and also the message to the Ukrainian people that Zelensky is not going to be the strong leader with U.S. backing that Ukraine needs at this time.

We have already seen the impact of President Trump's abandonment of

Ukraine amid this impeachment scandal. In early October, President Zelensky was effectively backed into a corner to sign Ukraine on to the so-called Steinmeier Formula, which sets the path toward elections in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine and eventual negotiations with Russia over the future of Russian-occupied territories. He did this without achieving previously imposed preconditions of Russian troop withdrawal and security for the elections.

Zelensky was effectively shamed into pursuing this Steinmeier Formula after President Trump urged him to negotiate with Putin—with Putin—several times on camera during the United Nations General Assembly meetings in September. As Anne Gearan puts it, "The result: A country that was looking for strong U.S. backing, amid worries that Russia could seek to move its aggression beyond the annexation of Crimea, has been left to wonder about the Trump administration's commitment to its national interests."

Let me move to Syria. President Trump's latest moves in Syria only further amplify the alarm over this President's affinity for Vladimir Putin.

In early October, President Trump announced the abrupt withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, clearing the way for Turkey to pursue a military operation against Kurdish allies of the United States in northern Syria. Following an initial U.S.-brokered ceasefire, Turkish and Russian authorities have agreed to a more permanent status, sharing control of Syria's northern border.

Turkish and Russian forces are not only occupying Kurdish-held areas but also further expanding Russia's role in Syria and committing war crimes against Kurdish civilians, according to the United Nations.

Russia has already occupied U.S. military camps in the region, and Turkish President Erdogan's deepening relationship with Vladimir Putin—as evidenced by Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system—only undercuts U.S. influence in Syria, all but guaranteeing that U.S. interests will not be represented in a future Syrian political settlement.

President Trump's decision serves to benefit Vladimir Putin. Prior to withdrawal, the United States was Russia's only military equal in Syria, but Russia is now the primary and, according to some analysts, the sole power broker in Syria.

In the vacuum left by the United States, Putin will be able to return control of the country to Bashar al-Assad, exercise increased control over Turkey—a NATO ally—and return to Russia's Cold War-era dominance in the Middle East.

As Georgetown University Russia specialist Andrew Bennett put it, "[W]hat is clear is that Russia and the [Bashar al-] Assad regime that it backs have been the big winners in Trump's abrupt retreat. . . . Now, suddenly

Putin is back in the driver's seat in Syria, with leverage over all sides."

Mr. President, it is even worse than that. Let me recount some recent news with regard to actions by Vladimir Putin.

President Trump's transgression goes beyond simply allowing Russia to fill a vacuum. On October 13, just 2 days before Anne Gearan's Washington Post story, the New York Times reported that "the Russian Air Force has repeatedly bombed hospitals in Syria in order to crush the last pockets of resistance to President Bashar al-Assad."

The Times published evidence in that story that the Russians bombed four Syrian hospitals in a 12-hour period in May of this year. During the assault, the Kafr Nabl Surgical Hospital in Idlib Province was struck four times in 30 minutes. Let me say that again. A hospital was struck four times in 30 minutes. Dozens of hospitals and clinics in Idlib Province have been struck since, and Syrian medical workers live in constant fear of the next strike.

Russia continues to act with impunity. Not only did it bomb another hospital in Idlib last week, Russia is using its sway at the United Nations Security Council—where U.S. leadership has diminished significantly under this administration—to limit the scope and the impact of a U.N. inquiry into these bombings.

Such atrocities go beyond the pale of violating the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war; they demonstrate just how ruthless Putin and his regime are and the lengths they are willing to go to assert Russia's influence in the Middle East. The tragedy is, this administration is allowing it to happen. Under this administration, we have seen U.S. leadership erode and multilateral institutions deteriorate to the point where the U.N. is powerless to hold Russia accountable for these atrocities.

I cannot emphasize enough that this administration is not only failing the American people with regard to our relationship with Russia and national security interests, but it is also making us less safe by allowing unspeakable atrocities to occur against innocent civilians—all on our watch.

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. President, I will be brief because I know I only have about 5 minutes before we have to move on, but I want to turn to some brief comments about the courageous public servants whom we have watched and will continue to watch testify before the House Intelligence Committee both last week and again this week in the impeachment inquiry.

We have heard from George Kent, Ambassador Taylor, Ambassador Yovanovitch, and today, Lieutenant Colonel Vindman and others, and my remarks go out to do justice to all those who will testify for their courage. I want to make some brief comments.

These individuals and so many others are putting their careers and reputa-

tions on the line to testify publicly in defense of U.S. national security, moral leadership, and our democratic institutions. It is outrageous—and that is an understatement—that they have been subjected to partisan attacks—public servants who have sacrificed so much for our Nation. In the case of the diplomats, the diplomats have been attacked without any support or defense from Secretary of State Pompeo or other senior Department of State officials.

We should all be inspired by these and countless other public servants who work to protect and serve the United States every day. When I reflect upon their service to our country and their integrity, I am reminded of just one line from "America the Beautiful: "O beautiful for patriot dream, That sees beyond the years." One of the dreams of a patriot, of course, is to see beyond our own circumstances, to dream about a better future by upholding our institutions and by serving the rule of law, our democracy, and our Constitution.

I will skip over all of the information we already know about the service of these Ambassadors and just conclude with some comments about what happened today.

Today, Lieutenant Colonel Vindman, before questioning by the committee Members, was going through his experience. I will go through it briefly: infantry officer, foreign area officer specializing in European and Eurasian political military affairs, political military affairs officer, serving on the National Security Council, and serving our country in combat and paying the price of being wounded in combat.

At the end of his statement today, Lieutenant Colonel Vindman talked about his father. He said:

His courageous decision [to come to this country] inspired a deep sense of gratitude in my brothers and myself and instilled in us a sense of duty and service. All three of us served or are currently serving in the military. Our collective military service is a special part of our family's story in America.

He went on to say:

I am grateful for my father's brave act of hope 40 years ago and for the privilege of being an American citizen and public servant, where I can live free of fear for mine and my family's safety.

He contrasted that with what happens in Russia. I think it is a good reminder for all of us.

Let me conclude with these thoughts. It is appalling to see individuals such as Lieutenant Colonel Vindman who dedicated their entire lives to the safety and security of the United States be smeared by the President and by his attack dogs who are more concerned about tweets and FOX News headlines than protecting our Nation's domestic foundations.

Nothing the President has said or done in his nearly 3 years as President convinces me he has any understanding of public service. Looking beyond the current impeachment inquiry, this ad-

ministration's blatant disregard and disrespect for career diplomats has had a grave impact on the State Department and our National Security Agency's ability to recruit the next generation of talented, committed public servants who promote U.S. interests abroad.

I will not allow this administration's continuing assault on our diplomats to undermine, devalue, or dishonor their service or the service of future patriots who choose to make a career of serving and protecting our Nation.

The Ambassadors and officials who testified last week, as well as today—others, including Lieutenant Colonel Vindman—have lived honorable and dutiful lives in service to the United States of America. We owe them our deepest gratitude and appreciation for their integrity and commitment to American values. These are real American heroes who, despite the President's bullying and harassment, have stood up in defense of our democratic institutions and the values the Founders fought for to guide our Nation.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

WIND PRODUCTION TAX CREDIT

MR. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to talk about the wind production tax credit. This is a subject that I've talked about before. The Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. TOOMEY, will, I believe, come soon to talk on the same subject.

The wind production tax credit is so generous with taxpayers' money that wind developers can actually give away their electricity for free and still make a profit. Let me say that again. I am talking today about the wind production tax credit, which is a tax subsidy—taxpayer dollars—given to wind developers, and it is so generous that the developers can actually, in some cases, give away their electricity for free and still make a profit.

That wind production tax credit has been extended 11 times. It has been on the books for more than 25 years. This was a tax credit that was supposed to jump-start a new industry—that's 25 years of jump-starting. Four years ago, Congress agreed to end it. We thought that was it. In doing so, Congress asked taxpayers to provide another \$24 billion, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation, to extend the wind production tax credit—\$24 billion more in subsidies for another 5 years and gradually phase out the credit. That is what we thought we did 4 years ago. We would spend \$24 billion more in exchange for phasing out and ending the wind production tax credit. This is on top of the nearly \$10 billion taxpayers paid between 2008 and 2015 and the billions more the taxpayers have paid since the wind production tax credit was created in 1992. That was supposed to be the end of the wind production tax credit 4 years ago. Remember, it