

not only for his girls but for all other children across our State, a State that he knows and loves.

So the time was right to tackle this issue, and the time was right for another reason throughout the State. There was a more open discussion about this dark issue, this black mark on Alaska, the issue of sexual assault.

Brave women had started coming forward to tell their stories. A statewide initiative that I was part of called Choose Respect was launched over a decade ago trying to address cultural changes and then the “Me Too” movement came, and more and more people were beginning to share their stories of trauma and abuse and to have the courage to do it—because it takes courage.

Kyle not only captured many of those voices, he also began to dig into the larger issues of generational trauma and an issue that is so important in our State, the lack of law enforcement in many of these places, in so many small villages across Alaska. He did it all the while by capturing the complexities of a multitiered public safety system in Alaska. Working with ProPublica, he traveled throughout the State, dug through reams of documents, talked to dozens and dozens of survivors, perpetrators, police officers, lawyers, you name it.

Let me try to capture the breadth and depth and heartache of his 17-part series told by just a few headlines. These are some of the headlines of the stories in the Anchorage Daily News: one, “Discussing Alaska’s history of sexual violence is one step toward seeking solutions;” another headline, “Lawless: One in three Alaska villages have no local police;” another headline, “Dozens of convicted criminals have been hired as cops in rural Alaska. Sometimes, they’re the only applicants;” another headline: “She leapt from a van on the Kenai Peninsula to escape her rapist. Then she waited 18 years for an arrest.” You get the picture.

Let me summarize the opening to one of the stories, a first-person piece headlined, “Why we’re investigating sexual violence in Alaska,” and it tells Alaskans why this series is delving into this very, very difficult topic. It is a story—a horrible story—of a very young girl in one of our villages who vanished from the playground, found later sexually abused, murdered, and it rips your heart out.

These are the kinds of stories that I have certainly heard about and tried to address in my time in public service in Alaska. These are the stories that haunt us as Alaskans. They have haunted countless Alaskans: of course, survivors, victims, their families, leaders, good citizens, good people. They are difficult and shocking stories to tell, but they need to be told, they must be told, and that is what Kyle Hopkins did, and that is why he earned the Pulitzer Prize. These are the kinds of stories that Attorney General Barr

confronted when he came to Alaska last May, his first trip to any State in the country after he was confirmed as our new Attorney General.

Before his confirmation hearing, Senator MURKOWSKI and I had both invited him to come to Alaska. We talked to him in detail about these challenges, and then we did something that I think mattered, and, again, it gives a sense of why this series was so important. We started sending the Attorney General some of Kyle Hopkins’ stories of this 17-part series, the ones that he had written at this time.

So the Attorney General knew before he even got here some of the challenges because of this reporting. Attorney General Barr actually came to our State for almost 5 days—a long visit—to hear from survivors, law enforcement, lawyers, meeting dozens of Alaskans throughout the State who have worked on these issues—some without a voice, without help from the Federal Government, many Tribal members. It was a really important trip.

He was given a beautiful kuspuk as a gift, and when he left, he took a piece of Alaska with him in his heart. I am convinced of that. As a matter of fact, I talked to him about Alaska yesterday on the phone and this very series. He still wears the kuspuk, by the way. He says it makes him look trim.

Shortly after returning to DC, he began to focus with the Department of Justice on some of these big issues, declaring a public safety emergency in rural Alaska and starting to free up significant resources to improve public safety in our State’s rural communities.

So the funding helps, and it is already being put to good use, but this is a story not just about money. As a matter of fact, that is not even the important issue. The important issue is culture. We desperately need a cultural change on these issues in Alaska that have been going on for way too long, and that is another reason why Kyle’s work is so important, because you can’t change the culture if you don’t know how broken it is.

Will it work? Does he think things will change? “I wouldn’t presume to know,” he said, when my team caught up with him on Tuesday, a day after the Pulitzer Prize was announced, already hard at work on another story, by the way.

“I hope things change,” he said. “That’s one of the goals of the series . . . But if nothing changes, at least people will know about the injustice in our system . . . and if it’s going to continue, if we’re going to allow this to continue, it should be with our knowledge.” That is his quote.

“This is my place,” Kyle added, talking about Alaska. “It’s an awesome place and I don’t want to live anywhere else. But things are wrong. And it shouldn’t be for the next generation, for my girls and other girls. If there’s something we can do about it, we should do it.” That is his quote.

And of course, he is right. We should do it, and many of us in Alaska—really, thousands of us in Alaska—are committed to this cause and have been committed to the cause for a long time. I believe Kyle’s work is going to help a lot in that regard.

I want to thank the Anchorage Daily News for supporting this series, to all the staff who worked on the series, to the owners, the Binkleys. Thanks to the Pulitzer committee for recognizing the importance of this series, and thank you, Kyle, for your hard work and determination.

Congratulations, again, on winning the Pulitzer Prize, and probably even more prestigious than winning the Pulitzer Prize for the United States, congratulations on being our Alaskan of the Week.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of all nominations on the Secretary’s desk for the Coast Guard, that the nominations be confirmed, and motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

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

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

NOMINATIONS PLACED ON THE SECRETARY’S DESK

ON THE COAST GUARD

*PN1379 COAST GUARD nominations (257) beginning JASON A. ACUNA, and ending DAVID J. ZWIRBLIS, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of January 6, 2020.

*PN1571 COAST GUARD nominations (10) beginning JENNIFER J. CONKLIN, and ending GENARO A. RUOCO, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of February 13, 2020.

*PN1572 COAST GUARD nominations (160) beginning RYAN G. ANGELO, and ending JEFFREY S. ZAMARIN, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of February 13, 2020.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from further consideration of PN1709 and the Senate proceed to consideration of that nomination.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Brett P. Giroir, of Texas, to be Representative of the United States on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

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

The nomination was confirmed.

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.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, freedom of the press is a fundamental human right, a foundational pillar of democracy, and an indispensable check on authoritarian overreach. Over the past months, as we have collectively come to appreciate a new understanding of "essential workers," we have witnessed once again how essential the work journalists do is to maintaining our democracy. From Wuhan, China, to conflict zones in Venezuela, to cities and towns in the United States, journalists are risking their lives to report, investigate, and keep people informed on the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, responses to this global crisis have also reminds us that press freedom is under assault across the globe, including in the United States. Fearful of negative coverage of their capacity to protect their citizens and address a global health crisis, autocrats and other governmental figures around the world have focused their attention on concealing information. As journalists fight to advance truth and objectivity under dire circumstances, far too many governments have responded with verbal attacks and prison sentences. Today, we applaud the work and the courage of all those involved in bringing stories from around the world to our fingertips.

Amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries across the world from Algeria to Zimbabwe have imposed restrictions and threatened journalists for their work. As they do when credible, reliable, and timely information is an essential commodity, journalists have persisted.

In China, in an effort to educate his community and the world about its po-

tential threat, Chen Qiushi documented the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, in dozens of videos online. On February 6, 2020, Chen's family and friends lost contact with him, and he is presumed to have been disappeared by the CCP.

In Niger, journalist Kaka Touda Mamne Goni reported on a suspected COVID-19 case, was arrested by police on March 5, 2020, and faces up to 3 years in prison on charges of "dissemination of data likely to disturb the public order."

In Venezuela, a group of masked police agents detained freelance journalist Darvinson Rojas on March 21, 2020, and interrogated Rojas about his reporting on COVID-19 cases in the state of Miranda. Rojas remains in detention.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred new restrictions and harassment, these stories of abuse and resilience are nothing new in the field of journalism. Since 1992, the Committee to Project Journalists has reported 1,369 journalists killed around the world, including at least 25 killed in 2019. Last year also represented the 14th year in a row that Freedom House has noted a global decline in press freedom. As of April 20, 2020, at least 299 journalists were imprisoned for their work worldwide.

Of course, the global decline in press freedom and access is not limited to foreign lands. In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the struggle of local news organizations to stay afloat. The shuttering of local print publications has left rural populations and marginalized communities without critical sources of information and has chipped away at the foundation of the U.S. free press.

From the White House, President Trump continues to target journalists and the media, referring to journalism as "an evil propaganda machine" and the free press as the "enemy of the people." Most recently and severely, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration restricted most on-the-record access to administration officials and reportedly instructed all officials, including scientific and medical experts, to have public statements cleared through Vice President PENCE.

This episode is unfortunately the latest in an ongoing saga. Countries around the world have followed President Trump's lead in attacking journalism as "fake news." Between January 2017 and May 2019, at least 26 countries have enacted or introduced laws restricting access and media in the name of "fake news." In attacking the media, President Trump not only undermines the hard-hitting work journalists in the United States do to hold our leaders accountable and keep the public informed, but provides foreign leaders with the permission and vocabulary to do the same.

In spite of the unprecedented assault on the free press, journalists continue to take significant risks in the pursuit

of truth and transparency. In January 2020, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists revealed how Isabel dos Santos amassed one of Africa's largest fortunes in Angola, one of the world's poorest countries, through embezzlement and corruption using a network of companies and subsidiaries. In May 2019, Caixin journalists reported on business and government actions that resulted in the 2019 Jiangsu Tianjiayi Chemical Plant explosion in China that killed 78 people and injured over 600. Journalists have also continued to report on the situation of Uyghurs and other minorities held in detention centers in China's Xinjiang region, including new revelations from hundreds of pages of leaked CCP documents published by the New York Times in November 2019.

I join the international community in honoring and defending the brave journalists seeking to report on the truth and tell the stories that deserve to be told. Over 200 years ago, our Founding Fathers had the foresight to recognize the importance of a free press to a democracy, enshrining it in our First Amendment. Today, that importance cannot be overstated. Recognizing that societies where informed citizens can hold their governments accountable are more stable, secure, and prosperous, we have a responsibility to stand up for the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and a free press.

This week, I introduced a resolution commemorating World Press Freedom Day. The resolution highlights increasing threats to freedoms of the press and expression worldwide, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, reaffirms the centrality of a free and independent press to the health of democracy, and reiterates freedom of the press as a priority of the United States in promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance. On this World Press Freedom Day, I call on the Trump administration and our world leaders to recommit to advancing press freedom, protecting journalists, and embracing the important role they play in a healthy and secure society.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I rise to commemorate World Press Freedom Day, which was this past Sunday, and to celebrate the brave journalists all over the world who safeguard the values of truth, democracy, transparency, and justice through their work. Every year, we set aside this day to reaffirm our commitment to the free press. This year, however, is a little bit different. This year, we are in the midst of a brutal global public health crisis. One of the reasons that the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked so much havoc—taking hundreds of thousands of lives and devastating the economy—is that people with power have propagated misinformation about the virus. In the words of the World Health Organization, we are witnessing an "info-demic." Now, more than ever, it is vital that the public receives the truth, and that means protecting the