

S. 3405

At the request of Mr. BLUNT, the names of the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR) and the Senator from Nebraska (Mrs. FISCHER) were added as cosponsors of S. 3405, a bill to require the Federal Communications Commission to issue a rule providing that certain low power television stations may be accorded primary status as Class A television licensees, and for other purposes.

S. 3417

At the request of Mr. BENNET, the name of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. HICKENLOOPER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3417, a bill to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities who need long-term services and supports, and for other purposes.

S. 3508

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3508, a bill to posthumously award a congressional gold medal to Constance Baker Motley.

S. 3545

At the request of Mr. MCCONNELL, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3545, a bill to require the Director of the Bureau of Prisons to be appointed by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

S. 3580

At the request of Ms. KLOBUCHAR, the names of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. HICKENLOOPER) and the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) were added as cosponsors of S. 3580, a bill to amend title 46, United States Code, with respect to prohibited acts by ocean common carriers or marine terminal operators, and for other purposes.

S. 3641

At the request of Ms. WARREN, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3641, a bill to extend protections to part-time workers in the areas of family and medical leave and pension plans, and to ensure equitable treatment in the workplace.

S. 3714

At the request of Mr. HAWLEY, the name of the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3714, a bill to prioritize United States energy independence, and for other purposes.

S. 3742

At the request of Mrs. CAPITO, the names of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN), the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH), the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KELLY) were added as cosponsors of S. 3742, a bill to establish a pilot grant program to improve recycling accessibility, and for other purposes.

S. 3755

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the names of the Senator from Wisconsin

(Ms. BALDWIN), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. LUJÁN) and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN) were added as cosponsors of S. 3755, a bill to amend the Consumer Financial Protection Act of 2010 with respect to arbitration.

S. 3822

At the request of Mr. LANKFORD, the name of the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3822, a bill to prohibit the President from promulgating new oil and gas regulations until after the Russian troops have withdrawn from Ukraine, and for other purposes.

S. CON. RES. 30

At the request of Mrs. BLACKBURN, the name of the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY) was added as a cosponsor of S. Con. Res. 30, a concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the United Nations should take immediate procedural actions necessary to amend Article 23 of the Charter of the United Nations to remove the Russian Federation as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Ms. ERNST:

S. 3836. A bill to establish within the Executive Office of the President the Taxpayer Watchdog Office; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, there are very few things that possess the power to change the course of history almost instantaneously. Information is one.

Consider, right now, citizens in Ukraine are holding one of the most ruthless, autocratic, and powerful men in the world, Vladimir Putin, accountable for his barbaric assault on their country with their firsthand accounts being live-streamed from behind the battle lines.

Putin is attempting to censor coverage of the bloody conflict by threatening to jail journalists and Russian citizens who dare use the word “war” to describe his unprovoked attack.

Even the United Nations instructed its staff not to refer to Russia’s military assault on Ukraine as a “war” or “invasion.” Yet, every day, Ukrainians are bypassing this blockade of information and exposing the Russian tyrant’s atrocities in real time by sharing images of civilians standing up to the heavily armed Russian invaders, the innocent victims and destruction caused by the bombing, and captured Russian soldiers in tears testifying that they were lied to and misled into attacking a peaceful country.

As a result, the people of Ukraine have rallied the world, including many Russians, behind their courageous struggle to preserve freedom and democracy against the largest military assault in Europe since World War II.

This is the power of information.

Authoritarians like Putin cannot hide their dirty deeds in the dark as long as light can be shined to expose the truth. It should serve as a reminder to every single American how important it is that we uphold and defend the fundamental principles of our Nation that make us so great—in particular, our First Amendment.

We should never take these American freedoms for granted. That is why it is important we celebrate the freedom of information every year during Sunshine Week. With widespread distrust in government and the media and Big Tech controlling what facts and opinions can even be shared, it has become increasingly important that each one of us has the power to access facts, unfiltered.

To arm us with information, over the past half century, a number of important laws have been passed by Congress to increase openness in government and give our citizens a right to know. These include the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, which allows access to government documents, and the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, which provides a detailed accounting of how, where, why, and by whom taxpayer dollars are being spent.

To demonstrate the importance of these laws, let me give you a relatively simple example with potentially profound implications.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I teamed up with my friends at the White Coat Waste Project to use a combination of these transparency laws to follow a trail of U.S. taxpayer dollars to China’s state-run Wuhan Institute of Virology, where they were being used to pay for dangerous research on coronaviruses. The world is now demanding to know if these studies could have been the source of the COVID-19 pandemic that shut down our planet for the past 2 years and claimed the lives of millions around the globe.

Regretfully, we still don’t know the whole truth because communist China refuses to cooperate and is, instead, destroying evidence and coercing investigators to dismiss any suggestion that the virus might have escaped from the lab. Even many within the free press of our own country, the scientific community, and Big Tech fell for the Communist misinformation campaign, smearing anyone who even suggested the lab could have been the source of the outbreak as spreading “conspiracy theories.”

We refused to be intimidated by this Communist Party’s propaganda and continued our search for the truth. We followed the science and the money and discovered the world was being told a story that was very much different from what was transpiring behind those closed doors.

Thanks, in part, to a transparency law requiring the disclosure of details on projects paid for by U.S. taxpayers, we knew NIH was funding a group

called EcoHealth to conduct experiments on coronaviruses that were obtained from bats in China and that they were doing so in collaboration with the now-infamous Wuhan Institute.

The White Coat Waste Project then used FOIA to obtain internal NIH emails, which revealed the Agency was funding controversial gain-of-function research on coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute in 2016. They also revealed Dr. Fauci was told as early as January 2020 that COVID-19 looked engineered.

Was this project, paid for with your tax dollars, somehow related to the release of the COVID-19 pandemic, which just happened to begin in the vicinity of the lab in Wuhan?

EcoHealth might know the truth or even provide some clues, but the group's president refuses to answer questions. In fact, he organized a disinformation campaign to discredit scientists who dared to ask that question.

EcoHealth also evaded a number of Federal transparency laws requiring the disclosure of how our tax dollars are being spent. As a result, we still aren't even entirely sure how much of our money was sunk into subsidizing the unsafe, state-run lab in communist China.

Folks, we really deserve the answers, and if EcoHealth won't cooperate voluntarily, then that information will be obtained with subpoenas when Republicans are back in control of Congress. You can mark my words.

This troubling situation demonstrates both the power and the shortcomings of transparency laws. Armed with information, citizens can uphold the government and make it accountable and expose malfeasance but only if the laws are followed, and, right now, many of these laws are all bark and no bite.

So what can a civic-minded Iowan do to get answers from inside the DC beltway bureaucracy?

Well, you know what they say: If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.

That is why I have introduced the Watchdog Act, which will establish within the White House a new Director of Openness—yes, you have got it, D-O-G—Director of Openness in Government, who will be the taxpayers' best friend. This top dog will hound our government bureaucrats to fetch the facts for our taxpayers. Agencies that would not provide information in a complete and timely manner would be dogged until they do.

In contrast to Russia, where the government controls and censors information, my bill creates a transparency czar to open government and spread information.

Folks, we can't have gatekeepers of truth in a free society. That is why, under my bill, those who censor information, rather than those who share it, will be held accountable.

The best way to restore trust in our public institutions and to discredit

misinformation campaigns is by shining a light on what is really going on in Washington, and with the Sun now setting an hour later every day, we are all reminded what a big difference a little bit of sunshine can make.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 546—EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE CONDEMNING THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN, MEMBERS OF THE RUSSIAN SECURITY COUNCIL, THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES, AND RUSSIAN MILITARY COMMANDERS FOR COMMITTING ATROCITIES, INCLUDING ALLEGED WAR CRIMES, AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE AND OTHERS

Mr. GRAHAM (for himself, Mr. COONS, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. KING, Ms. ERNST, Mr. TILLIS, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. CORNYN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. MORAN, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. BOOKER, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. MARSHALL, Mr. WICKER, Mr. HOEVEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. BRAUN, Mr. KELLY, Mrs. SHAHEEN, and Mr. DURBIN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 546

Whereas the United States of America is a beacon for the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights across the globe;

Whereas there are several universal declarations and treaties promoting human rights, laws of war, and upholding the dignity of individuals;

Whereas the United Nations Charter Preamble states that member nations "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights [and] in the dignity and worth of the human person";

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Preamble states that "Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms";

Whereas the Russian Federation joined as an original member of the United Nations as the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on October 24, 1945, and as such has a duty to abide by the conditions of the United Nations Charter and pledges reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Whereas the International Criminal Court (ICC) is an international tribunal that seeks to uphold the rule of law, especially in areas where no rule of law exists, by investigating and trying individuals charged "with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression";

Whereas grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions constitute war crimes, including "wil[l]ful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, wil[l]fully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health... and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly";

Whereas other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict can constitute war crimes,

which can include intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities and intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives;

Whereas President Vladimir Putin, members of the Russian Security Council, and President Putin's military commanders have severely undermined the international rule of law through their various actions;

Whereas, prior to the most recent invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation has a long history of committing acts of aggression, human rights violations, and acts that constitute war crimes within the Russian Federation and around the globe, including in Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria;

Whereas, beginning in 1999, the Russian Federation engaged in the indiscriminate use of force against the people of Chechnya, including the use of cluster munitions against civilians, resulting in 50,000 Chechens, mostly civilians, dead or missing;

Whereas, during the Russian Federation's invasion of Georgia in 2008, Russian Armed Forces engaged with cluster munitions in indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks that resulted in the death of civilians;

Whereas, since 2014, President Vladimir Putin has violated the sovereignty of Ukraine and used military force to seize control and unlawfully occupy Crimea, and installed Russian separatist-backed forces in eastern Ukraine, resulting in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians since 2014;

Whereas the Russian military was deemed responsible for shooting down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, which resulted in the death of 298 civilians;

Whereas rebel forces supported by the Russian Federation were deemed responsible for a missile attack on January 24, 2015, in Mariupol, Ukraine that indiscriminately killed and injured civilians, resulting in the death of at least 30 and injuring many more;

Whereas, in 2016 and 2017, Russian aircraft deployed "bunker-busting" and incendiary bombs capable of destroying military installations on civilian structures in Aleppo, Syria, resulting in the death of hundreds of civilians;

Whereas President Vladimir Putin is complicit in war crimes and human rights violations in Syria through his continuing political, financial, and military support for President Bashar al-Assad;

Whereas intelligence assessments have concluded Vladimir Putin and his regime have destroyed the rule of law in Russia and engaged in countless atrocities, including ordering the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, and the false imprisonment and torture ultimately leading to the death of Sergei Magnitsky;

Whereas President Vladimir Putin, in February 2022, initiated a premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified, and unlawful war against the sovereign nation of Ukraine;

Whereas, since February 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin and Russian Federation forces reportedly killed more than 500 civilians, to include children, while invading Ukrainian urban centers, causing chaos and fear among Ukrainian citizens;

Whereas, on February 28, 2022, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States, Oksana Markarova, claimed President Vladimir Putin ordered the deployment of thermobaric weapons and cluster munitions to be used in the northeastern towns of Okhtyrka and Karkhiv, in populated, urban areas;

Whereas Ukraine has twice submitted to the jurisdiction of the ICC for the purposes