

A few weeks ago, on this floor, Republicans refused to allow a debate on a bill that simply said government can't tell women which States they can travel to in order to receive healthcare. And yesterday, Republicans blocked proceeding to a bill that simply says that men shouldn't be able to stop women from buying birth control.

So put that all together. Do you see the pattern emerging here? Do you see what is going on? This is a pretty coordinated, industrial-scale effort to bring women under control of the State, to take away decades of rights accumulation for women, and put them back where they were in the 1940s and the 1930s.

This is a massive, coordinated effort by Republicans to put more women under government control: no more abortion services, no more divorces from your abusive spouses, no more driving your car wherever you want, no more birth control. Women are on their way back to becoming second-class citizens. That is what the cumulative agenda looks like here.

And I don't think I am paranoid. I don't think I am overreading the tea leaves. I am just picking up the pieces that Republicans keep putting down day after day after day.

I know Republicans will dispute this characterization, but if they do, we are going to continually give them the chance to prove us wrong—vote for a bill that says States can't ban birth control, vote for legislation that says States can't tell women where they can drive. What we are asking for is not an expansion of women's rights, just a protection to make sure that we don't take these big leaps backward.

Other Republicans will say that these are imagined crises; that States really aren't going to ban birth control. But just pay attention to what is happening in State legislatures right now all over the country. States are trying to restrict women from accessing contraception because many Republicans will tell you that protecting life, in their view, involves banning the use of birth control.

In Texas, the State already bans its family planning centers from distributing birth control. In Missouri, conservatives are trying to block healthcare providers who receive Federal funds from prescribing contraception. And the Supreme Court in the Dobbs decision basically briefed that it is likely to strike down the right to birth control sometime soon.

So this isn't a fake crisis; this is real. And I am not making up this new wholesale Republican effort to try to drag women back 100 years and to sideline them in a way that we thought was history. That is all real too. And we will give Republicans the chance, over and over again, to prove that wrong.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

PACT ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I want to talk just a few minutes about the circumstances we now find ourselves in, in passing what I consider to be one of the most important pieces of legislation—perhaps the most important piece of legislation that is currently pending certainly before the U.S. Senate—and that is what we have been referring to as the PACT Act.

It is legislation that we have talked about many times on the Senate floor. It is a piece of legislation that I and Senator TESTER introduced. It is a piece of legislation that follows a long line of bills coming from the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee with broad bipartisan support that have consequential outcomes for the veterans of our Nation.

We started years ago, several years ago, in regard to the MISSION Act. We followed that with the John Scott Hannon Act.

The MISSION Act provided additional opportunities for veterans to access care in settings across the country to bring medical care to veterans closer to home to make it more available.

And we followed that with the John Hannon Act, which dealt with mental health and trying to reduce and eliminate the use of suicide in veterans' lives.

And then, finally, we have this major piece of legislation that has been a long time coming—way too long—in meeting the needs of those veterans who served, now, a long time ago in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia and our veterans who more recently served in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is the subject of toxic exposure, where veterans come into contact with something that maybe not at the time created any healthcare concerns for them but over time has become a significant medical and healthcare challenge for those who served in those areas, in Iraq and Afghanistan, their location in relation to the location of a burn pit—where many things were burned and caused toxic exposure for those veterans in the vicinity—and going back to Vietnam, Agent Orange, which has been so devastating to so many people.

Veterans have waited for a long time. The process to date has been so slow. The legislative efforts, while they have occurred, were never sufficient to meet the needs of those who served our Nation.

And the actions at the Department of Veterans Affairs have delayed decisions for veterans that would make certain that those who encountered these traumatic and damaging healthcare consequences of their service to our Nation receive the medical care that they deserve and the benefits, the financial benefits, that come from being disabled as a result of military service.

I want to reiterate my support for that piece of legislation. The PACT Act needs to—as it came out of our committee by a unanimous vote. It passed

the Senate previously with 84 votes. And we need to continue the practice of taking care of our Nation's veterans in a way that is not partisan on either side of the issues.

I often tell my constituents, with some level of pride, that I serve on a committee, and, unfortunately, one of the few remaining committees in which it is difficult sometimes to tell whether there is a Republican chairman or a Democratic chairman. I have been a ranking member and the ranking member of that committee and I have been the chairman of that committee. The Senator from Montana and I have worked hard. And in many ways, because of our veterans, it is a natural occurrence that we find common ground, and our committee members have done the same.

We are now at the point in which we need to make certain that the PACT Act be considered, that cloture be invoked, the difficulties we have had with whether there needs to be an amendment or amendments need to be resolved, and this issue needs to pass the U.S. Senate in short order.

Our veterans need to be reassured. I would do this to the best of my ability to reassure veterans that, for whatever is in my capabilities, I am going to be the advocate, the spokesperson, the one who is trying to make—along with my colleagues. I am not trying to single myself out as the only one who cares about this issue. But for what I can do, I am going to do it to make sure that we have success in this legislation. Success, to me, is passage by the Senate, passage by the House, and signed by the President, and a law that then can be implemented by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I have said many times that there are lots of challenges still to come. No piece of legislation that we pass is easily implemented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and we will have our work to do. But at the moment, the work before us, the work that needs to be accomplished today, now, this week, is the passage of the PACT Act so that our veterans who are encountering significant medical challenges have the care and benefits that come from being a veteran.

I am one of those who agree with the thought, the belief, that if you serve in our military, we owe you to live up to the promises we made. I am of the belief that the costs of war—they certainly come with the service. We then have an obligation not only to fund the military activities but to fund the programs and benefits that are necessary to care for those who serve who, as a result of their service, are damaged mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally.

Again, I ask the leaders of the U.S. Senate and my colleagues here to—let's get this resolved, let's get it resolved quickly, and let's make certain that our veterans, as we want to serve them, are served in the way they should be.

I just would only add that time is of the essence. This bill has been pending before the Senate for a while and, before that, in the U.S. House of Representatives. But it has been a conversation by our veterans service organizations, their members; it has been a conversation by veterans organizations across the country now for decades: Solve this problem.

We are on the cusp of doing so, and we should not let this moment pass. There are veterans who are dying every day. There are veterans who have died since this legislation was introduced. I would like to make certain that there is no veteran, even if he or she is nearing that time of the end of their life, worried about whether their children or their spouse is going to receive the care and treatment and the benefits that they earned by their service.

So, Mr. President, please, my colleagues of the U.S. Senate, please, let's make certain we do our work to honor their service.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to make sure that the plight of Russian leader Vladimir Kara-Murza is not forgotten, that the outrageous imprisonment of Vladimir Kara-Murza by the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin is not forgotten.

We remember three decades ago what hope we had for a new Russia. Russia had entered a new age of possibility some three decades ago. After more than 70 years of communist repression, the Soviet order had collapsed, and with it, the Iron Curtain that kept freedom away from millions was torn down.

As the red flags came down in Moscow, the free world watched with anticipation, hoping that democracy and the rule of law might finally take root in a free Russia. Regrettably, that has not happened. Instead of democracy and freedom, the Russian people got Vladimir Putin, a man who has used his office to murder, imprison, and force into exile anyone who threatens his grip on power, all the while enriching himself beyond anyone's wildest imagination while ordinary Russians, especially out in the countryside of Russia, live in squalid conditions.

One of his latest victims is Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian patriot and a friend I had the privilege of hosting in my office just 4 months ago. As a matter of fact, I have hosted him several times.

Today, Vladimir Kara-Murza spends his days in a prison cell, where the only thing he can see through the window is a barbed wire fence. What was his crime? He simply spoke the truth about Putin's war on Ukraine. His trial—if it can even be called a trial—was held in secret. No journalists, no diplomats, or spectators of any kind were allowed to be there. And for his offense of talking about the Russian

war against Ukraine, he now faces up to 15 years in prison.

This is not the first time the Russian dictator has tried to silence him. Mr. Kara-Murza has been poisoned twice—in 2015 and 2017—and almost died in both cases. Since then, his wife and three children have had to live abroad, although he himself has chosen to spend most of his time in Russia.

In a recent interview with National Review, his wife Evgenia explained why he insists on working in Russia:

He believes that he would not have the moral right to call on people to fight if he were not sharing the same risks.

As Mr. Kara-Murza put it in a recent CNN interview the day of his arrest, he said:

The biggest gift we could give the Kremlin . . . would be to just give up and run, and that's all they want from us.

What a contrast in character to the man currently running the Kremlin.

The National Review story goes on to describe Mr. Kara-Murza's courageous work for democracy through the eyes of his wife Evgenia, as well as the costs that he and his family have endured, along with so many other Russian dissidents.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent at this point to have printed in the RECORD the National Review story that I referred to.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the National Review, May 31, 2022]

IN DARK TIMES, A BRAVE MAN

(By Jay Nordlinger)

On March 15, Vladimir Kara-Murza gave a speech to the Arizona legislature. "These are very dark times in Russia," he said. "These are times when we have hundreds of political prisoners, and that number is only going to grow." Less than a month later, Kara-Murza himself became a political prisoner.

Born in 1981, he is one of the most prominent opposition figures in Russia. (Given the state of things, we should probably return to the word "dissidents.") He is a politician, journalist, and activist. A proponent of democracy. For 15 years, he worked alongside Boris Nemtsov, the opposition leader. They became the closest of friends. Nemtsov was godfather to one of Kara-Murza's children. ("In Russia," Kara-Murza once told me, "that makes you family.")

Together, they worked for passage of the Magnitsky Act in the U.S. Congress. This is the act that allows the government to sanction individual human-rights abusers rather than whole peoples or societies. Nemtsov and Kara-Murza were sitting in the gallery on November 16, 2012, when the House passed the act. Nemtsov commented, "This is the most pro-Russian law ever enacted by a foreign government." At last, the persecutors of Russians would face consequences.

On February 27, 2015, Boris Nemtsov was murdered—gunned down within sight of the Kremlin. This had a deep impact on the Russian democracy movement, and it had a deep impact on Vladimir Kara-Murza, personally. He told me, "My life is divided into before and after February 27, 2015."

His wife, Evgenia, confirms the importance of Nemtsov's murder to her husband. "He will never come to terms with it. I just know him all too well. Boris Nemtsov was his teacher, his mentor, and then he became his close friend." Plus, "he was family."

Three months after Nemtsov's murder, Vladimir Kara-Murza himself was nearly murdered. He was subject to a poison attack, of the kind for which Vladimir Putin's agents have become infamous. After he recovered, Kara-Murza kept working, not scared off. Approximately two years later—in February 2017—he was again almost murdered. Again in a poison attack.

On the floor of the U.S. Senate, John McCain made a statement about Kara-Murza, a friend: "Vladimir has once again paid the price for his gallantry and integrity, for placing the interests of the Russian people above his own interest." Congressman Ed Royce, then the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called Kara-Murza "one of the bravest people I know."

For the record, lots of people have called Kara-Murza "one of the bravest people I know." Also for the record: McCain asked Kara-Murza to serve as a pallbearer at his funeral, which he did, when the time came (September 2018).

After the second poison attack, doctors told Kara-Murza, "If there's a third one, you won't survive it."

Last year, a team of independent investigators was able to identify the exact unit of the Russian secret police that poisoned Kara-Murza—and Alexei Navalny and others. (Navalny is the current Russian opposition leader, and also a political prisoner.) The investigators pinpointed the agents who carried out the attacks.

Wrote Kara-Murza, "My emotions are difficult to express with words. It's one thing to know intellectually that someone has tried to kill you—and it's quite another to see the names and photographs of the actual people who did this."

For some years, Evgenia Kara-Murza and the couple's children have lived abroad. "Obviously, it's not an ideal situation," Vladimir told me in 2017, "but it has to be this way. I go back and forth, but I spend most of my time in Russia." He was willing to put his own neck on the line, but he was not willing to do the same with his family's.

Many people asked him, or pleaded with him, to work in the West, rather than in Russia itself. That way, he would be safer, if not entirely shielded from danger. Nemtsov was dead. Kara-Murza almost died, twice. Wasn't this enough? Hadn't he paid his dues, so to speak? Did he really need to be on Russian soil, making it easier for Putin's men? Kara-Murza rejected all entreaties, saying that he belonged in Russia.

"What does Evgenia think of all this?" I asked him in 2017. He answered, "If you ask her, she'll say, 'I knew what I was signing up for.'" Then, with a hint of a blush, he said, "I'm grateful to have such a woman in my life."

Today, Evgenia tells me the following: "When we were dating, 20 years ago, I was looking at him and thinking, 'You know, I can imagine spending my life with this man. He's smart, he's funny, he's honorable. He has so much integrity.' Later, when the poisonings and persecutions began, I thought, 'I wish our lives could be a little more boring.' But I do admire Vladimir. I've always admired and respected him for his principled stand, and I would never have him any different."

Explaining Vladimir's insistence on working in Russia, Evgenia says, "He believes that he would not have the moral right to call on people to fight if he were not sharing the same risks."

Back in 2017, I asked Vladimir whether his name would protect him. He was a friend of U.S. politicians, he had been featured on 60 Minutes, he had spoken at forums around the world. He was a bit of a celebrity. Kara-Murza looked at me and said, in effect, "Are