

If Democrats really wanted to help American families, they would be focusing on our inflation and supply chain crises and addressing the security nightmare posed by our border crisis. Instead, they are busy focusing on ways to secure their hold on power and vastly expand the reach of the Federal Government into Americans' lives. I guess we will have to see how that strategy works out for them.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 705, Max Vekich, of Washington, to be a Federal Maritime Commissioner for a term expiring June 30, 2026.

Charles E. Schumer, Christopher Murphy, Edward J. Markey, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Maria Cantwell, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Debbie Stabenow, Benjamin L. Cardin, John W. Hickenlooper, Tim Kaine, Gary C. Peters, Christopher A. Coons, Brian Schatz, Richard Blumenthal, Jacky Rosen, Jack Reed, Thomas R. Carper, Cory A. Booker.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Max Vekich, of Washington, to be a Federal Maritime Commissioner for a term expiring June 30, 2026, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. LUJÁN) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO) and the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 52 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Baldwin	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Bennet	Hirono	Sanders
Blumenthal	Kaine	Schatz
Booker	Kelly	Schumer
Brown	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cardin	Leahy	Smith
Carper	Manchin	Stabenow
Casey	Markey	Sullivan
Collins	Menendez	Tester
Coons	Merkley	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Murkowski	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Padilla	Wyden
Hassan	Peters	
Heinrich	Reed	

NAYS—45

Blackburn	Burr	Cornyn
Boozman	Capito	Cotton
Braun	Cassidy	Cramer

Crapo	Johnson	Rounds
Cruz	Kennedy	Rubio
Daines	Lankford	Sasse
Ernst	Lee	Scott (FL)
Fischer	Lummis	Scott (SC)
Graham	Marshall	Shelby
Grassley	McConnell	Thune
Hagerty	Moran	Tillis
Hawley	Paul	Toomey
Hoeben	Portman	Tuberville
Hyde-Smith	Risch	Wicker
Inhofe	Romney	Young

NOT VOTING—3

Barrasso	Blunt	Luján
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The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 45.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

UKRAINE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, before I begin, I would like to ask unanimous consent to put into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD an open letter to the Russian leadership from the Russian Congress of Intellectuals, who state:

Our position is simple: Russia does not need a war with Ukraine and the West. Such a war is devoid of legitimacy and has no moral basis.

This is a very brave statement made by Russian intellectuals.

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

[From the New York Review of Books, Feb. 4, 2022]

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP
RUSSIAN CONGRESS OF INTELLECTUALS

Our position is simple: Russia does not need a war with Ukraine and the West. Such a war is devoid of legitimacy and has no moral basis.

There is an ever-increasing flow of alarming news about a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine. Reports are emerging about stepped-up recruitment of mercenaries within Russia and the transfer of fuel and military equipment to Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In response, Ukraine is arming itself and NATO is sending additional forces into Eastern Europe. The tension is not abating, but rather mounting.

Russian citizens are becoming de facto hostages of a reckless adventurism that has come to typify Russia's foreign policy. Not only must Russians live with the uncertainty of whether a large-scale war will begin, but they are also experiencing a sharp rise in prices and a devaluation of their currency. Is this the sort of policy Russians need? Do they want war—and are they ready to bear the brunt of it? Have they authorized the authorities to play with their lives in this way?

But no one asks Russian citizens for their opinion. There is no public debate. State television presents only a single viewpoint—that of the warmongers. Direct military threats, aggression and hatred are aimed at Ukraine, the US, and the West. But the most dangerous thing is that the war is being depicted not only as permissible, but as inevitable. This is an attempt to deceive the population, to impose upon them the idea of waging a crusade against the West, rather than investing in the country's development and improving living standards. The cost of the conflict is never discussed, but the price—the huge, bloody price—will be paid by the common Russian people.

We, responsible citizens and patriots of Russia, appeal to Russia's political leader-

ship. We openly and publicly call out the Party of War that has been formed within the government.

We represent the viewpoint of those in Russian society who reject war, who consider unlawful the use of military threats and the deployment of a blackmailing style in foreign policy.

We reject war, whereas you, the Party of War, consider it acceptable. We stand for peace and prosperity for all Russian citizens, whereas you put our lives on the line for the sake of political games. You deceive and manipulate people, whereas we tell them the truth. You do not speak in the name of the Russian population—we do. For decades, the Russian people, who lost millions of lives in past wars, have lived by the saying: "if only there were no war." Have you forgotten this?

Our position is quite simple. Russia does not need a war with Ukraine and the West. No one is threatening us, no one is attacking us. Policies based on the idea of such a war are immoral and irresponsible and must not be conducted in the name of the Russian people. Such a war is devoid of legitimacy and has no moral basis. Russian diplomacy should take no other position than a categorical rejection of such a war.

Not only does such a war not reflect Russia's interests, but it also threatens the country's very existence. The senseless actions of the country's political leadership, which is pushing us in this direction, will inevitably lead to a mass anti-war movement in Russia. Each of us will naturally play a part in it.

We will do everything in our power to prevent this war, and if it begins, to stop it.

Signed,

Lev Ponomarev, human rights activist; Valery Borshchev, human rights activist; Svetlana Gannushkina, human rights activist; Leonid Gozman, politician; Liya Akhedzhakova, actress and People's Artist of the Russian Federation; Andrey Makarevich, musician; Garri Bardin, director; Viktor Shenderovich, writer; Tatiana Lazareva, TV presenter; Andrey Zubov, historian and politician; Andrey Nechaev, politician; Alina Vitukhnovskaya, writer; Alexander Belavin, physicist; Nikolai Rozanov, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Natalia Evdokimova, executive secretary of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg; Efim Khazanov, academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Hya Ginzburg, physicist and professor; Zoya Svetova, journalist; Grigory Yavlinsky, politician; Lev Shlosberg, politician; Boris Vishnevsky, politician; Lev Gudkov, sociologist and professor; Igor Chubais, philosopher; Tatyana Voltskaya, poet and journalist; Boris Sokolov, historian and writer; Mikhail Krieger, civic activist; Veronika Dolina, poet; Vladimir Mirzoev, director; Ksenia Larina, journalist.

Andrey Piontkovsky, publicist; Mark Urnov, professor, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Mikhail Lavrenov, writer; Nikolai Prokudin, writer; Elena Panilova, poet and journalist; Grigory Mikhnov-Vaytenko, clergyman; Lev Levinson, human rights activist; Sergei Germann, member of the Writer's Union of Russia; Vladimir Alex, civil activist; Yuri Gimmelfarb, journalist; Yuri Samodurov, human rights activist; Evgeniy Tsybmal, civil activist; Vitaly Dixon, writer; Natalya Mavlevich, translator; Ashraf Fattakhov, lawyer.

Viktor Yunak, writer; Valeria Prikhodkina, human rights activist; Elena Grigorieva, children's poet; Vera Shabelnikova, editor; Mair Makhaev, philosopher and linguist; Grigory Amnuel, producer, director, publicist, and politician. Sergei Krivenko, human rights activist;

Yaroslav Nikitenko, environmental and civil activist and scientist; Tatyana Yankelevich Bonner, human rights activist; Nikita Sokolov, historian; Anatoly Golubovsky, historian; Nikolai Rekubratsky, researcher; Vitold Abankin, human rights activist; Elena Bukhareva, doctor of biological sciences; Igor Toporkov, human rights activist; Evgeniy Kalakin, director.

Liudmila Alpern, human rights activist; Nina Caterly, writer; Vladimir Zalishchak, municipal deputy; Olga Mazurova, doctor; Oleg Motkov, director; Natalya Pakhsaryan, professor at Moscow State University; Elena Volkova, philologist and culturologist; Valery Otstavnykh, director and journalist; Georgy Karetnikov, civil activist; Marina Boroditskaya, writer; Sergey Lutsenko, animation supervisor; Alexey Diveev, programmer; Tatyana Vorozheykina, lecturer at the Free University of Moscow; Tatyana Kotlyar, human rights activist.

Anatoly Barmin, pharmacist; Valentin Skvortsov, professor at Moscow State University; Lev Ingel, physicist; Mikhail Mints, historian; Leonid Chubarov, professor; Katya-Anna Taguti, artist; Elena Efros, civil activist; Anna Shapiro, director; Tatyana Dorutina, member of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg; Arkady Konikov, programmer; Sergei Pechenkin, civil activist; Anatoly Razumov, historian; Alexander Sannikov, colonel of the Russian Armed Forces (ret'd); Anatoly Tsirlin, professor; Karen Hakobyan, professor.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as I speak today Europe, for the first time in almost 80 years, is faced with the threat of a major invasion. A large nation threatens a smaller, less powerful neighbor, surrounding it on three sides with well over 100,000 troops as well as tanks and artillery.

My colleagues, as we have painfully learned, wars have unintended consequences. They rarely turn out the way the planners and experts tell us they will. Just ask the officials who provided rosy scenarios for the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, only to be proven horribly wrong. Just ask the mothers of the soldiers who were killed or wounded in action during those wars. Just ask the families of the millions of civilians who became collateral damage in those wars.

The war in Vietnam cost us 59,000 American deaths and many others who came home wounded in body and spirit. The casualties in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are almost incalculable, but they were in the millions. In Afghanistan, what began as a response to the horrific attack against us on 9-11-2001 eventually became a 20-year war, costing us \$2 trillion and over 3,500 Americans who were killed, not to mention tens of thousands of Afghan civilians.

George W. Bush claimed in 2003 that the United States had “put the Taliban out of business forever.” Well, not quite the case—the Taliban is in power today.

The war in Iraq, which was sold to the American people by stroking fear of a mushroom cloud from Iraq’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction, led to the deaths of some 4,500 U.S. troops and the wounding—physical and emotional—of tens of thousands of others. It led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, the displacement

of over 5 million people, and regional destabilization whose consequences the world continues to grapple with today.

In other words, despite all of the rosy scenarios we heard for those foreign policy and military interventions, it turned out that the experts were wrong and millions of innocent people paid the price. That is why we must do everything possible to find a diplomatic resolution to prevent what would be an enormously destructive war in Ukraine.

No one knows exactly what the human costs of such a war would be. There are estimates, however, that come from our own military and intelligence community that there could be over 50,000 civilian casualties in Ukraine, not to mention millions of refugees flooding neighboring countries as they flee what could be the worst European conflict since World War II.

In addition, of course, there would be many thousands of deaths within the Ukrainian and Russian militaries. There is also the possibility that this regional war could escalate to other parts of Europe, a continent with many nuclear weapons, and what might happen then is beyond imagination.

But that is not all. The sanctions against Russia that would be imposed as a consequence of its actions and Russia’s threatened response to those sanctions could result in massive economic upheaval with impacts on energy and gas and oil prices in our country, banking, food supplies, and the day-to-day needs of ordinary people throughout the entire world. It is likely that Russians will not be the only people suffering from sanctions. They would be felt throughout Europe. They would be felt right here in the United States and likely around the world.

And by the way—and we haven’t discussed this terribly much—at a time when the scientific community tells us that climate change is an existential threat to the planet, any hope of international cooperation to address global climate change and to address future pandemics would likely suffer a major setback.

It should be absolutely clear about who is most responsible for the looming crisis, and that is Russian President Vladimir Putin. Having already seized parts of Ukraine in 2014, Putin now threatens to take over the entire country and destroy Ukrainian democracy. There should be no disagreement that that behavior is totally unacceptable. In my view, we must unequivocally support the sovereignty of Ukraine and make clear that the international community will impose severe consequences on Putin and his fellow oligarchs if he does not change course.

With that said, I am extremely concerned when I hear the familiar drumbeats in Washington—the bellicose rhetoric that gets amplified before every war—demanding that we must show strength, demanding that we must get tough, demanding that we must not engage in appeasement.

A simplistic refusal to recognize the complex roots of the tensions in the region undermines the ability of negotiators to reach a peaceful resolution.

Now, I know it is not very popular or politically correct, I guess, in Washington, to consider the perspectives of our adversaries, but I think it is important that we do so if we are going to formulate good policy. I think it is helpful to consider this. One of the precipitating factors of this crisis—one, not the only one—at least from Russia’s perspective, is the prospect of an enhanced security relationship between Ukraine and the United States and Western Europe, including what Russia sees as the threat of Ukraine joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, a military alliance originally created in 1949 to confront the Soviet Union.

It is good to know some history.

When Ukraine became independent after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russian leaders made clear their concerns about the prospect of former Soviet states becoming part of NATO and positioning hostile military forces along Russia’s border. U.S. officials recognized these concerns as legitimate at the time. One of those officials was William Perry, who served as Defense Secretary under President Bill Clinton. In a 2017 interview, Perry said:

In the last few years, most of the blame can be pointed at the actions that Putin has taken. But in the early years I have to say that the United States deserves much of the blame.

Further:

Our first action that really set us off in a bad direction was when NATO started to expand, bringing in eastern European nations, some of them bordering Russia.

That is former Secretary of State William Perry.

Another U.S. official who acknowledged these concerns is former U.S. Diplomat Bill Burns, who is now head of the CIA in the Biden administration. In his memoir, Burns quotes a memo he wrote while serving as counselor for political affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in 1995.

Hostility to early NATO expansion is almost universally felt across the domestic political spectrum here.

Over 10 years later, in 2008, Burns wrote in a memo to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players . . . I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.

So, again, these concerns were not just invented yesterday by Putin out of thin air. Clearly, invasion by Russia is not an answer, neither is intransigence by NATO. It is important to recognize, for example, that Finland, one of the most developed and democratic countries in the world, borders Russia and has chosen not to be a member of NATO. Sweden and Austria are other

examples of prosperous and democratic countries that have made the same choice.

Vladimir Putin may be a liar and a demagogue, but it is hypocritical for the United States to insist that we as a nation do not accept the principle of spheres of influence. For the last 200 years, our country has operated under the Monroe Doctrine, embracing the principle that as the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere, the United States has the right—according to the United States—to intervene against any country that might threaten our alleged interests. That is U.S. policy. And under this doctrine, the United States has undermined and overthrown at least a dozen countries throughout Latin America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

As many might recall, in 1962, we came to the brink of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Now, why was that? Why did we almost come to the brink of nuclear war with the Soviet Union?

Well, we did that in response to the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba, 90 miles from our shore, and the Kennedy administration saw that as an unacceptable threat to national security. We said it is unacceptable for a hostile country to have a significant military presence 90 miles away from our shore.

Let us be clear. The Monroe Doctrine is not ancient history. As recently as 2018, Donald Trump's Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, called the Monroe Doctrine "as relevant today as it was the day it was written."

In 2019, former Trump National Security Advisor, John Bolton, declared "the Monroe Doctrine is alive and well."

To put it simply, even if Russia were not ruled by a corrupt, oligarchic, authoritarian leader like Vladimir Putin, Russia, like the United States, would still have an interest in the security policies of its neighbors.

I want people to think about this: Does anyone really believe that the United States would not have something to say, if, for example, Mexico or Cuba or any country in Central or Latin America were to form a military alliance with a U.S. adversary?

Do you think that Members of Congress would stand up and say, "Well, you know, Mexico is an independent country. They have the right to do anything they want"? I doubt that very much.

Countries should be free to make their own foreign policy choices, but making those choices wisely requires a serious consideration of the costs and benefits. The fact is that the United States and Ukraine entering into a deeper security relationship is likely to have some very serious costs for both countries.

I believe that we must vigorously support the ongoing diplomatic efforts of the Biden administration to deescalate this crisis. I believe we must reaffirm Ukrainian independence and sovereignty and that we must make clear

to Putin and his gang of oligarchs that they will face major consequences should they continue down their current path.

My colleagues, we must never forget the horrors that a war in the region would cause, and we must do everything possible to achieve a realistic and mutually agreeable resolution, one that is acceptable to Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and our European allies and that prevents what could be the worst European war since World War II. That approach is not weakness; it is not appeasement. Bringing people together to resolve conflicts without war is strength, and it is the right thing to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I have listened carefully to the remarks of my friend and colleague, Senator SANDERS of Vermont. I read his published article in the Guardian newspaper yesterday, and it paralleled many of the things which he said on the floor today.

We have a very positive starting point between us. I think my record on voting to go to war may be identical to his, if not very close. Neither of us wants war—that is the last resort—and it is frightfully predictable that there will be innocent people killed, even in the best of times and in the best of military force.

Secondly, I couldn't agree with the Senator more that we should be promoting all that we can in terms of diplomacy at this moment. The other night, I had the opportunity to be in a meeting with some Senators and with the new Chancellor of Germany, Chancellor Scholz. He was on his way, soon, to Moscow; President Macron of France has been there; and others are going. I encourage that communication, that dialogue, as much as possible. I think it is hopeful that these efforts can lead to a peaceful resolution in the controversy that we are now facing in Ukraine.

The third point, which I agree with, is that it is certainly in the interest of the United States, for our values, to make it clear that we want to protect and defend—at least not in a military fashion but, let me say, in a general fashion—the notion of sovereignty when it comes to Ukraine. It is up to the Ukrainian people to chart their course and make their future.

Where I think we disagree, Senator, is on this whole question of sphere of influence. I am afraid that that suggestion is the green light for Vladimir Putin. If you will concede that he is somehow entitled because of the size of his country to reclaim Soviet Republics or to move into other theaters, I am sorry, but I have to part company with you at that point.

I was fortunate enough, 30 years ago or so, to be on the ground in the Baltics when I saw a dramatic demonstration of courage rarely seen in the world. This tiny nation of 3 million

people broke away from the Soviet Union and scheduled a free election. I was there at the time the election took place, and we knew that it was an invitation for Mikhail Gorbachev to retaliate, and he did. He moved in the Soviet tanks and started killing innocent people. Before it was all over, more than a dozen innocent Lithuanians—and several in Latvia—had given their lives because they wanted to be free again. And who would question why they would want that?

I happened to have visited that area—my mother was born in Lithuania; I must put that on the record—in 1978, and I saw what life was like in the Baltic States under Soviet rule. It was sad. It was enraging. It was disgusting. What they have done in the Soviet Union is to forcibly take those countries and others—some through the Warsaw Pact, some through the direct accession to the Soviet Union—and control every aspect of their lives with communism.

I went to the University of Vilnius, which I believe dates back to the 16th century. They took me to their Catholic chapel, which, under Soviet times, had been converted into what they called a museum in tribute of atheism. On display in the middle of this former chapel setting were showcases of boomerangs from Australia in this holy space, in which they were trying to eradicate religion by demonstrating a new materiel approach to the entity.

I only say this because, when the time came and they finally, through their courage, broke from the Soviet Union, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia came to me, knowing that I had an interest in the region, as did the Polish people, and said: We don't want to be under the thumb of Russia ever again. We want our freedom. We want to decide our future. The only way that we can achieve that is if we can ally with the United States. Can we be considered for NATO membership?

Eventually, through a lot of hard work and determination, that is what occurred. Poland and the Baltic States, along with others, joined in the NATO alliance.

It is worth noting here that the NATO alliance is a defensive alliance. The Suwalki Gap, which links Russia as it now exists in Kaliningrad with Belarus, is a gap, a land bridge, and on either side is Poland and Lithuania. It is still contested territory by the Russians, and they are concerned about it. When the Russians put tens of thousands of troops and military exercises on the Baltic border in Belarus, it is understandable they are concerned. They are small countries that could be easily pushed over. The only thing that saves them, I believe, is their NATO alliance.

Should Ukraine be part of the NATO alliance? Well, there are two decisions that must be made, and the first and most important one is by the Ukrainian people. They have to decide if they believe that it is in their best interest

for their future. We cannot decide it for them nor should we try to.

Secondly, the NATO alliance has to decide. Under article V, are we willing to risk the lives of the NATO allies if some terrible event should occur in Ukraine?

That is what the sovereign nations of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and so many other countries did when they decided to ask for membership in NATO.

I don't understand this theory of the Senator's that, somehow, Vladimir Putin is entitled to a sphere of influence or control. That, to me, is unacceptable and inconsistent with the notion of Ukrainian sovereignty. If they are to decide their future, how can we say that Vladimir Putin has any voice in that process?

There is a way that he can find a more peaceful situation in the world, and that is if he will stop being a thug and stop sending his troops to the borders of countries and stop cutting off gas supplies to countries that he doesn't like.

I mean, his strong-arm tactics deserve a response from the United States, and I am afraid simply sending him a harsh letter is not enough anymore. So we have made it clear that he will pay a price if he invades, the NATO alliance has. The price will be a string of sanctions, and we have included some of them in the legislation that Senator MENENDEZ is working on, which I cosponsored. But that is the only way to make it clear to him that such a price will be paid.

What he has done is very obvious to me. He has united the NATO alliance in a way we didn't expect. There were some divisions within the alliance—some serious and some not serious—but he has brought us together. And we should be together in standing in defense of the territory of the NATO allies and in making it clear that if Vladimir Putin is going to try to extend his reach into Ukraine or into any other area, he will at least meet with political resistance.

I think, at a minimum, that is where it should be. I hope it doesn't go any further. I share the Senator's feeling on that. I don't want the military situation to escalate or to threaten American lives or to involve us at that level at all, but unless we are firm with him now and don't concede that he has any sphere of influence in Ukraine, I am afraid he will take advantage of the situation.

I am open to a question if you have one. I would like to have a dialogue, if possible, on this through the Chair, of course.

Mr. SANDERS. I appreciate the thoughts of my friend from Illinois. With much of what he said, I, obviously, agree. My father came from Poland as a matter of fact.

I think, maybe, the difference of opinion that we have has something to do with what we don't talk about very often openly but that, I think, everybody knows exists.

I mentioned—and I think you will not disagree with me—that, over the last many, many decades, the United States has overthrown governments throughout Latin America, Central America, and the Caribbean. There is no denying that we almost went to a nuclear war in 1962 under the Kennedy administration, which felt—and probably correctly—that Soviet missiles in Cuba, 90 miles away from us, were a threat to this country and not to be tolerated.

So I would only ask my friend from Illinois to put himself into the mindset of the Russians in that nobody here—not I, certainly—is ever talking about reclaiming other countries. You mentioned that, and it is certainly not anything that I support.

But if the United States has a right to overthrow countries throughout Latin America to protect our so-called interests and if there would be an uproar in this Chamber, perhaps from you and me as well, if Mexico, which is an independent nation, decided to form a military alliance with China or Russia, and people were to say you can't do that, should we not put ourselves a little bit in Russia's position in understanding that if we consider Latin America and Central America and the Caribbean to be within our sphere of influence and have the right to intervene, that Russia itself might have some legitimate concerns about military forces 5 miles from their border? That is the question I would pose.

Mr. DURBIN. It is a legitimate historic question.

But if you are saying that in the name of the Monroe Doctrine, to protect ourselves in this hemisphere we have done things which we are not proud of today, interfering with the sovereignty of nations—the term “banana republic” emerged from that Monroe Doctrine.

And what happened in many of these countries is that they became vassals of the U.S. economy, and I don't say that with any pride. We wouldn't want to welcome that to happen in Europe, would we, I mean, Putin invading some sphere of influence and the sovereignty of other nations?

Mr. SANDERS. No, we would not. But my point is, the Monroe Doctrine remains in existence today. It is not just history.

You and I can agree that maybe the United States should not have overthrown governments over the years. The Monroe Doctrine exists today. Two years ago, the Secretary of State said it is in existence. I don't know how many people in this Chamber would tell you that it does not exist today.

I use that example, to my friend from Illinois—if Mexico were to enter into an alliance with China, would my friend say: Well, Mexico is an independent country; they have the right to do anything they want.

Mr. DURBIN. I think that hypothetical is just that. Of course, it is only a hypothetical. But look at the re-

ality. It wasn't that long ago when Ecuador elected a new President. At the inauguration of that President were representatives of Russia, Cuba, and Iran. Now, you wouldn't put any of those countries today on a list of close American allies. And yet did we invade Ecuador? Never considered it. Never considered it.

We live in a different time in the 21st century. I understand the Monroe Doctrine and the days of gunboat diplomacy and the days of moving a handful of troops in to take control back on the Dominican Republic. But to posit the notion that somehow there is going to be a military alliance on the border of the United States, therefore Putin is able to compromise the sovereignty of Ukraine, that doesn't follow, Senator.

Mr. SANDERS. No, it does.

All that I am saying is, 2 years ago, the Secretary of State of the United States of America said the Monroe Doctrine is alive and well.

Yes, of course, it is hypothetical. I do not believe that Mexico is going to enter into an alliance with China. But all I ask is to put what is going on in Russia into a context and to look at American policy and history as well. This is a complicated issue, and I think it is important for us to at least look at the concerns that Russia has.

There is no disagreement that if Putin were to commit the horrible, horrible blunder of invading Ukraine, count me in as somebody who will go as far as we can to make sure there are real consequences against the oligarchs and that policy. But I do think if we are going to reach a settlement in a very complicated issue, it is important for us to understand a little bit about Russia's concerns.

Mr. DURBIN. I would only disagree in this respect: I believe Ukraine has been a victim of Russian aggression for a long period of time. The leader Yanukovych who was deposed in Ukraine when the Maidan demonstrations took place was clearly a servant and vassal of Moscow.

I believe it was the Russians who invaded Crimea and reclaimed that territory for their own. It was the Russians who sent in little green men with no symbols or emblems on their uniforms to invade eastern Ukraine and continued to kill innocent Ukrainians for 8 years now. So it is clear to me that Ukraine has been a victim of Russian aggression for a long period of time.

To suggest the notion that this is somehow within Putin's sphere of influence is to rationalize Putin's conduct, to forgive his conduct. And I am not about to do that. I don't think we should.

You don't put 110,000 Russian troops on the border and prepare for war unless you believe you can pressure that country into acceding to your demands. Ukraine is not a military power. It won't last very long, sadly, if the Russians do invade. But at this moment saying spheres of influence, that the United States has made its own

mistakes in the past in the name of sphere of influence and therefore we should look the other way at what Putin is doing is just contradictory.

Mr. SANDERS. The Senator knows I am not for looking the other way. That is not a fair statement. As I have said many, many times, I am strongly supportive of major, major, major consequences if Putin invades Ukraine, and we have got to do everything we can to protect Ukrainian sovereignty.

All right, I have made my point.

Mr. DURBIN. And I thank you for it.

And I just want to close by saying that there is a—I see the Senator is waiting to speak. I close by saying that I hope very soon, in the next couple of weeks, to make a trip to Poland and to the Baltics.

And I will tell you that the people of Polish descent and Ukrainian descent and Baltic descent in the State that I represent are watching these events by the day. They lived through the Soviet takeover of their countries. They understand what happened to their basic freedoms of speech and political expression and religious belief as a result of it. They don't want to return to those days.

The United States has said we are committed to their democracy and their values, and I think we have demonstrated it, and we should continue to.

I sincerely hope Putin does not take advantage of the situation and invade Ukraine. I am not calling for a military response, but we should have a type of response that he will never forget if he does something that foolhardy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I just feel the need to just make a simple point, although it should be obvious. But let me just state to be clear that what we are witnessing in the Russian buildup at the Ukrainian border has nothing to do with Russian security. There is no Russian security interests at stake here. There is no threat to Russian security. Ukrainians could not mount a credible attack on Russia if they wanted to, and they don't want to. What this is all about entirely is an authoritarian leader of Russia who wants to reestablish hegemony over the states of the former Soviet Union. He wants to reestablish the Russian Empire. It has nothing to do with any legitimate concerns that Russia has.

I strongly feel that if he makes the outrageous mistake of invading Ukraine, that we will use the many very, very powerful tools at our disposal to ensure that he regrets that decision.

MONETARY POLICY

The reason I rise today, Mr. President, is to discuss an issue that really should be of serious concern to every Member of this body, and it goes to the heart of the very nature of accountability in a democratic republic such as ours.

There is an awful lot in our culture, in our country, that has been politicized and polarized—we all know that—even sports, certainly news, maybe even music, and definitely our government. We have seen that manifested in many way, including a recent debate over the filibuster. But there are some things that Congress has tried hard to keep from being at least overly politicized in our government, and one of those is monetary policy.

I think it is exceptionally important that we try the best we can, to the maximum extent we can, to not let politics infuse our monetary policy because that is going down a very bad and dangerous road. Unfortunately, I would suggest that we have started to see that encroachment. We started to see politics at the historically independent Federal Reserve.

In the past month, the Banking Committee has held nomination hearings for five of President Biden's nominees for the Fed: Jerome Powell for Chairman of the Fed, Lael Brainard for Vice Chair of the Fed, Sarah Bloom Raskin for Vice Chair for Supervision at the Fed, and Lisa Cook and Philip Jefferson for Fed Governors.

What I think about this slate of nominees, so to speak—and I have different views on the different candidates, but one thing is clear: This moment where we are going to decide whether or not to confirm these nominees is not just about the qualifications of the individuals; it is really a referendum on the role that the Fed is going to play in our country and whether it is going to remain an independent entity.

Let me explain what I mean. I know there are folks on the left, including within the Biden administration—certainly some within the Biden administration—who are openly advocating that the Fed use its enormous supervisory powers over financial institutions to resolve some very complex but essentially political issues, like what we should do about global warming; even social justice; even, in some cases, education policy.

Let me be clear. These are very important issues. These are big challenges for our country. But they are entirely unrelated to the Fed's limited statutory mandates and expertise, for that matter.

Addressing these challenging issues of climate and social justice and education policy—all of them necessarily involve making tradeoffs and some tough decisions. In a democratic society, those tradeoffs must be made by elected representatives, the people who actually report to the American people. That is us. It is a legislative body. These big, tough policy decisions should not be made by unelected and unaccountable central bankers.

The question is not about the importance of these issues. It is not about the specific policies. It is about who should decide—who should decide—how we proceed on these.

Just take the case of global warming. We could decide to limit domestic oil and gas production. If we do that, energy prices will rise. Americans will pay more at the pump to accomplish the intended goal of decreasing emissions. Well, how much of that is appropriate? To what degree should we pursue that policy? If we move aggressively to limit energy production but other countries don't, then scientists tell us that global warming won't change in any significant way. Well, should we do it anyway? And how much of a change in the projected temperature of the planet should we insist on for any given amount of economic pain that we inflict on the American people?

Look, I am not here to debate the answer to those questions. Those are tough questions, it seems to me. It is not about whether you think those are important questions. I think they are very important questions. My point is that they are difficult choices, and they have to be made by the accountable representatives of the American people through a transparent and deliberative legislative process. That is how we ought to make big decisions in this country.

My concern about the Fed is it is wandering away from its mandate, it is overreaching, and there are some who are advocating that it use its enormous powers to make some of these decisions that the American people should be making through their elected representatives.

By the way, this is not just a hypothetical; I have a number of examples. I will just share one example where the Fed is clearly exceeding its mandate, engaging in political advocacy—the Minneapolis Fed.

The Minneapolis Fed—the leader, the President of the Minneapolis Fed—with apparently the full support of the board of the Minneapolis Fed, is actively lobbying to change Minnesota's Constitution and specifically to change it with respect to K-12 education policy. Does anybody think that how we pursue primary and secondary education is the role of the Fed to decide? I can assure you, it is not.

By way of warning, if this kind of political activism by what is supposed to be an independent central bank—if this is tolerated, then the potential for abuse is endless. Again, you don't have to take my word for it. I would argue that three of President Biden's five nominees—Ms. Brainard, Ms. Raskin, and Professor Cook—have made a number of concerning statements that tell us exactly what they think the Fed should do outside of their mandated areas.

Let's start with Governor Brainard. Now, to her credit, she has chosen her words much more carefully than, say, Ms. Raskin has, but Ms. Brainard has nonetheless urged the Fed to take an activist role on global warming.

According to the New York Times, she has "endorsed the use of supervisory guidance—the Fed's recommendations to banks—to encourage