

Zelenskyy, together in Kyiv, standing resolutely in the face of Russian aggression.

President Biden went to neighboring Poland, where he told an enthusiastic crowd of thousands:

One year ago, the world was bracing for the fall of Kyiv. . . . I can report: Kyiv stands strong. Kyiv stands proud. It stands tall, and most important, it stands free.

That was a statement by President Biden visiting Poland. He vowed the United States and its allies will never waiver in their support of Ukraine and that NATO will not be divided, and we will not tire. I couldn't agree more with President Biden.

The same sentiments were on display at this Munich security summit that I referenced. Nearly 30 of my Senate colleagues joined us in this international conference. It was a bipartisan show of unity and resolve, with both Senator SCHUMER—the Democrat leader of the Senate—and Senator MCCONNELL—the Republican leader of the Senate—urging sustained determined support for Ukraine against Russian tyranny.

Compare these messages of transatlantic and bipartisan unity to the rambling set of manufactured grievances delivered at nearly the same time by the Russian war criminal, Vladimir Putin. The contrast could not have been starker.

Many Russian officials in attendance at Putin's speech sat stone-faced. Some even dozed off. They may have wondered what kind of nightmare had befallen the Russian people in the pursuit of one man's murderous folly.

Following the Munich Security Conference, Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN, of New Hampshire, and I had the opportunity to visit the former Soviet-dominated countries of Georgia and Romania. Both nations remember Russian tyranny all too well and have spent their decades of independence working to be part of the transatlantic community of democracies.

Georgia suffered most recently at the hands of Russian imperialism when Putin militarily seized 20 percent of the land mass of Georgia, territory still occupied illegally by the Russians today.

Georgia has so much talent and so much potential. The overwhelming majority of the people in that country see their future in Europe and the West. The Georgia military has worked closely with the United States, and we have strong cooperative relations on a wide range of issues.

It is my hope that Georgia will continue its path toward the European Union and eventual NATO membership. That is for the Georgians to decide, but I believe they would be valuable allies of the NATO alliance.

It has some serious issues to resolve, incidentally. Georgia is still facing some political questions, which the world is watching closely, and a few potentially self-inflicted setbacks to avoid, such as the proposed law on disclosure by nongovernmental organiza-

tions—a step, I am afraid, that is backward for a nation aspiring to freedom. But with the right political will and vision, these issues can be overcome in a way that ensures a better and more secure future for the Georgian people.

In the same Black Sea region, Senator SHAHEEN and I visited Romania—my first time—the Eastern European nation already firmly in the EU and NATO. What a NATO ally it is. We stopped at MK Air Base in eastern Romania, where thousands of U.S. soldiers from the legendary 101st Airborne are stationed. They are the U.S. military forces closest to the fight in Ukraine.

Nearby, we could see rows of grain ships departing Ukraine and occupied Crimea only a short distance away. That vital commerce in such a strategic area is a reminder of the importance of advancing Senators SHAHEEN and ROMNEY's bipartisan legislation to establish a U.S.-Black Sea regional strategy, legislation which I have co-sponsored.

Senator SHAHEEN and I had a chance to speak to the brave Americans serving in Romania in defense of NATO. I am proud to say—and I hope my colleague hears this too, and I am sure she will—from the home State of Illinois, we had soldiers from Danville, Forest Park, Chicago Ridge, and even Red Bud, IL—downstate—and many more. But we got to meet and have lunch with those soldiers.

We also had the chance to speak with Romanian Prime Minister Ciuca, who was clear-eyed both on the threat of Russian aggression and Romania's proud role in the larger battle. He also understood the threat Russia poses to the neighboring democracy of Moldova, where Russia already occupies some of their territory. Because of this, President Biden also met with Moldovan President Sandu while in Poland and reaffirmed strong U.S. support for her country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which I also want to reiterate here on the Senate floor.

Many of my colleagues here today know that my colleague left as a little girl from Russian-occupied Lithuania many years ago. She barely would recognize today's vibrant and free member of the EU and NATO from the country she left behind. Later this year, Lithuania will host a historic NATO summit, by which time I hope we have added Finland and Sweden to the alliance.

That thriving, peaceful, democratic future is what the Ukrainian people are still fighting for and what we must continue to support to make sure that Ukraine is secure in the future.

MOBILITY LEGISLATION

Madam President, I would like to start today by sharing a story about the value of U.S. foreign assistance.

As my colleagues in the Senate know, U.S. foreign assistance makes up less than 1 percent of the Federal budget. And yet, it can yield millions in returns—both financially and in lives

saved—by making our world safer, healthier, and more stable. It also reflects our values as Americans. Just look at the immediate offer of assistance to Turkey following its recent catastrophic earthquake. That was the right thing to do.

Sometimes, even the simplest of tools can make all the difference: mosquito nets, paste made from peanuts, and even bicycles. One NGO based in Chicago, IL, World Bicycle Relief, has distributed more than 600,000 bicycles around the world as of last year. These bicycles have helped girls in Malawi get to and from school safely, aid workers in Colombia distribute food and clean water during the COVID-19 pandemic, and farmers in Zambia make milk deliveries.

Stories like these are common around the world, showing the value of a simple, relatively inexpensive, "green," and easy-to-repair means of mobility that helps meet important development objectives. I have seen myself how a bicycle ambulance in rural Tanzania can change lives, and not long ago my staff saw World Bicycle Relief's efforts in Kenya, where nearly 50,000 sustainable rugged bicycles have been provided. These bikes are uniquely designed for their local environments. Community members are trained to maintain them with minimal and locally sourced parts, keeping them sustainable and creating jobs.

Since 2019, I have worked through the Appropriations Committee to push USAID to invest in bicycles and study how to make the programs locally sustainable. USAID has used these lessons and opportunities with increasing success, thanks to the work of so many dedicated groups around the world, including World Bicycle Relief.

This month, I introduced legislation with Representative BLUMENAUER in the House that will codify these important efforts and formalize the creation of a mobility program within USAID's Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. I look forward to seeing this bill enacted one day, to help lock in the incredible progress that can be made with even small investments and the simplest of tools, such as a bicycle.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Illinois.

REMEMBERING JOSEPH LEMENS II

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Madam President, I come to the floor today to honor my friend CWO5 Joseph Lemens II, who we lost suddenly in November.

Joe worked as hard as he laughed. He was full of energy and empty of ego. In many ways, he was the epitome of what a "Soldier," with a capital "S," should be.

He was dedicated to service—service to his most beloved and to those with whom he was barely acquainted, service to his dearest neighbors in Illinois and to total strangers throughout his four deployments to the Middle East.

Joe first enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves when he was just 17 years old

and then served continually for the next 42 years until his retirement last March. His work ethic was tireless, and sacrifices he made for his Nation were immeasurable. He was selfless and giving. He would be the first one to offer to lend a hand, and then would refuse to accept payment for his good deed.

He seemed quiet until you got to know him. Then his laugh made you laugh so hard that, eventually, you forgot why you were both laughing at all.

As a fellow pilot, I especially appreciated the way he gravitated toward machines, the way he loved having the power of an engine, whether it be a snowmobile or a Black Hawk helicopter, at his fingertips. As his commanding officer for my years as a Mad Dog, I couldn't have asked for a better maintenance test pilot, although I always questioned the sanity of anyone who would fly broken helicopters on purpose.

I considered myself lucky that Joe was a member of our battalion when we were in Iraq. Maintenance officers, you see, and especially those like Joe, are a rare commodity, and Joe was one of the best.

When we got back to U.S. soil, after I was wounded and could no longer get from point A to point B like I used to, I was even luckier to have Joe show up at my house one day with his toolbox in tow, ready to remodel my home to make it completely wheelchair accessible.

He combined the grit of a midwesterner with the grace of faith. He combined the resilience of a soldier with the brilliance of an engineer. I know he will be dearly missed. He already is. My thoughts are with his wife Kathryn and his children and his newborn grandson Joe Lemens IV, whom he was able to see. I thank them for sharing Joe with us for all those years and for their own service to our great Nation.

We will all miss Joe, but we will forever catch an echo of his larger-than-life laugh whenever we hear his favorite sound: the smooth rumble of a well-cared-for engine.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, last week, like many of us in here—many of my colleagues—I spent time meeting with a lot of great folks back in my home State of Alabama. It was great to be home. It was great to be able to share the progress my office has made in the first 2 years, as well as my vision and priorities for the 118th Congress.

I visited Huntsville, AL, and had the opportunity to meet with some of the leaders in defense, education, and business. This included stops at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center; Alabama A&M University, one of the top HBCUs in the country; and other important sites, including businesses in Madison County, AL.

But I would like to take some time today to speak specifically about one stop on my trip that opened my eyes to a subject we should talk about more often in this Chamber. The National Children's Advocacy Center in Huntsville is a global leader in services, investigations, and counseling for children who suffer physical and sexual abuse. The center's work is important, and I am proud to share that work today.

I think we can all agree that we want our kids to have access to all the opportunities that this great country provides. Unfortunately, many children in Alabama and across the country are robbed of the opportunity to thrive and pursue their dreams because of abuse and neglect.

During my visit, the center's executive director, Chris Newlin, shared that 1 in 10 American children today will be victims of abuse before the age of 18. This is horrific, it is unacceptable, and it is embarrassing to our country. These kids don't know what it is like to have a carefree childhood or loving families who support their goals. They aren't able to devote energy to school, join in team sports, or have fun because their only goal in life is just to survive. Not only are they robbed of their childhood, but many times they are robbed of their adulthood as well.

Studies show that there are several long-term effects of child abuse. These include delayed brain development, lower educational success, and limited career opportunities. Victims are also more likely to suffer from future abuse, drug usage, and medical complications. Additionally, they are less likely to own cars, buy homes, or engage in business, making them less likely to be able to support a family in the future.

Nearly 600,000 kids in the United States were abused in 2021. To repeat that, 600,000 kids in the greatest country on the face of the Earth were abused in 2021, with the most common form of abuse being neglect.

Child abuse cases in Alabama have increased throughout the years, with more than 12,000 victims reported in 2018, costing the State of Alabama \$3.7 billion. Now, that is up \$1.5 billion from just 3 years earlier. The cost is outrageous. And while we are still collecting data from the past few years of COVID—and we know how bad that was—we all know that those numbers are going to be outrageous.

We cannot allow this to continue in the United States of America. Fortunately, we have people in our State of Alabama who have made it their mission to help victims of child abuse.

Founded in 1985, the National Children's Advocacy Center, also called the NCAC, is stepping up to save lives and offer hope to thousands and thousands of young people. The NCAC in Huntsville has established more than 1,000 children's advocacy centers in the United States and in 41 countries around the world.

Their work serves thousands and thousands of kids every year, like 7-year-old Benji, who was found unconscious by his grandmother and rushed to the hospital. There, it was discovered he had broken fingers, a broken rib, countless bruises, and old bones that had been broken but never fixed. Doctors determined Benji was also sexually abused.

That night, Benji left the hospital with Julie, who would eventually become his new foster mom, and arrived at the NCAC the very next morning for evaluation. Thanks to the work of the dedicated and selfless professionals in Huntsville, Benji now has a safe and loving home. He has made tremendous strides in playing with other children and bonding with family members and their new family kitten, and trusting his adoptive mother was a huge benefit.

Benji's therapists say he continues to show more confidence and will likely graduate from therapy in just a few months. There is no telling how many Benjis there are out there in our world today.

The center's reach does not end in Alabama. It has expanded around the country and across the world. In 2021, over 30,000 child abuse professionals from 50 States and 17 countries received NCAC training, and more than 400,000 children were served. That is just in 2021. Alabama's network of children's advocacy centers now includes 47 different locations that have conducted tens of thousands of counseling sessions each year. And, thanks to their work, more abusers have been brought to justice. Communities with children's advocacy centers have seen a 196-percent increase in felony prosecutions of child sexual abuse.

I am confident their work will continue to make tremendous impacts in our local communities in Alabama and around the world.

So we all have a duty to stand up for our kids. That is our responsibility. Children are our No. 1 commodity in this country. They will become the next generation of educators, nurses, doctors, lawyers, engineers—even Senators, and maybe even President.

And if we are going to have a strong future, we must make sure we protect and empower this next generation. I commend the team of the National Children's Advocacy Center for their commitment to giving kids a fighting chance—a fighting chance—to overcome unthinkable hardships that most of us never had to realize.

By stepping up to help those who have been left behind, the Center gives kids the opportunity to dream and pursue better lives. I hope we all join this group in doing our part to rescue child abuse victims. I will continue to fight for kids in Alabama and all across our great country, because they deserve it.

And I want to thank the National Children's Advocacy Center for reminding me that we all have a part to play in protecting and serving those who need it most.