

who testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee last November. Bejar is a former engineering director at Facebook. He told us that Meta executives knew that millions of teens face bullying, eating disorder content, the solicitation of lethal drugs, and sexual exploitation on their platforms while they are using those platforms, but rather than raise the alarm that their platforms were endangering children, company executives withheld this damaging information from congressional oversight, rolled back safety tools, and dismantled teams responsible for children's safety. In other words, they chose to make the problem worse instead of fixing it.

Why did they do that? Because when our children are on their platforms, our children are the product. They are the product. They need money. Remember that \$270 per-teen amount that they subscribed? That is of value.

So to parents, think about this next time your child is on Instagram. Meta sees them as a \$270 profit—profit. They put the profit before the kids.

Unfortunately, this isn't just limited to Facebook and Meta. Across the board, we have seen social media platforms, including Snapchat and the Chinese-owned TikTok, become open drug markets where dealers connect with children and sell illicit drugs, including fentanyl.

We have heard from countless families from across the country who have seen their children die from suicide after facing relentless bullying on social media. And we have seen digital platforms become havens for sex traffickers and child predators who use social media to prey on the most vulnerable among us.

For years, Big Tech companies have made empty promises about how they will address the rampant abuse, the malicious content, criminal activity on their platforms. But do you know what? Nothing has changed.

Big Tech has proven they can't police themselves. They won't act. So it is imperative that Congress steps in.

Over the last 3 years, Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have crafted the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act, which would provide parents and children with the tools, safeguards, and transparency they need to protect against these online harms. This legislation, which has reached a total of 64 cosponsors, includes crucial provisions to hold Big Tech companies accountable; mandatory audits to ensure that platforms are mitigating harms to children; new tools for parents to identify harmful behavior and report abuse directly to these social media platforms; new controls for families to support their children, including to opt out of algorithmic recommendations. Perhaps most importantly, the legislation would create a duty of care for online platforms to prevent and mitigate specific dangers to minors, including the promotion of suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, and sexual exploitation.

Without real and enforceable reforms, social media companies will only continue to pay lipservice to the issue of protecting children while continuing to put profits above their safety. Yes, they need that \$270 per kid. That is what our children are worth to them.

Now is the time to bring about some real change. Now is the time—it is past time—to hold Big Tech accountable. We have to make certain, we have to ensure, our children can be free to be children again.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, when Alexei Navalny died 2 weeks ago, he had been in solitary confinement for almost 300 days. Outside his window, the Russian dissident and anti-corruption campaigner could only see a tall fence and no light.

Far above the Arctic Circle, the prison was built on the site of a Soviet gulag, a place the Kremlin has sent generations of Russian citizens to break their spirit. But despite the sub-zero temperatures, despite the months of darkness, despite the violence, Alexei Navalny never gave up. He never lost his sense of humor. He never wavered in his commitment to fight for a better Russia. And what really bothered the Kremlin: He never gave up on telling the truth about Putin. After all, he is the one who aptly described Putin's United Russia party as "the party of crooks and thieves." He saw that Putin is still the KGB agent who never turned away from the Soviet legacy that crushed rebellion in Hungary in 1956, that suppressed reforms in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and that declared martial law in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to crush Solidarity in Poland in 1981.

There was a chance for Russia to take a different path in the 1990s. Many Russians leapt at the opportunity after the collapse of the USSR. There were independent political parties. There were open elections. There was a free press. Civil society emerged. Russians connected with counterparts in Europe and around the world.

But since his rise to power at the turn of the century, Putin has turned Russia in a very different direction, ruling with a regime as repressive and corrupt as anything under Brezhnev or Khrushchev. He is old-school Soviet. Today, Putin wraps himself in an ideology of White Christian nationalism. He has cracked down on ethnic and religious minorities. He has persecuted the gay and lesbian community. He has

shut down independent media and jailed journalists like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, a Russian-born American citizen who went to visit her ailing mother, and even Americans like Evan Gershkovich of the Wall Street Journal, who was imprisoned for doing his job as a reporter.

Vaclav Havel would have recognized these Soviet tactics. He was a playwright, a dissident, and of course, later, President of the democratic Czech Republic. He wrote in the Washington Post:

I come from a country where, as late as mid-1989, while all around us totalitarian icebergs were cracking and thawing . . . I was in prison. Yet by the end of that same year, I was elected the president of a free Czechoslovakia.

Long before that, Havel wrote a famous essay, "The Power of the Powerless." In it, he explained that dictatorial regimes are mortally afraid of the courageous individual who speaks up for their rights, who tells the truth when the regime is telling lies. Havel could have been writing about Alexei Navalny.

The Putin regime is a house of cards built on corruption and violence.

I was in Germany earlier this month at the Munich Security Conference when the news of Navalny's death broke. I met with his widow, Yulia, who spoke movingly about her husband's death. I wanted to convey condolences and demonstrate solidarity with her at a painful time.

Despite Putin's continuing threats, she is not afraid, and she is committed to continuing her husband's mission. His team at the Anti-Corruption Foundation is not afraid. They still have their list of "bribe-takers and war-mongers." Navalny himself was not afraid. Even after they poisoned him and left him in critical condition, he still went back to Russia. Courage only begets more courage. That is what scares Putin: Navalny was not alone.

I want to speak briefly about another brave Russian democrat who is unjustly imprisoned in Putin's gulag. Only a few weeks after appearing before a Helsinki Commission hearing I chaired, they also poisoned Vladimir Kara-Murza. Like Navalny, he refused to be intimidated. He refused to be exiled from his homeland and returned to Russia time and again. They threw him in jail almost 2 years ago for his criticism of Putin's unjust war in Ukraine. There are others, too, like Ilya Yashin, who was sentenced to 8 years after publishing reports about the war crimes by Putin's forces in Ukraine in 2022.

We in the free world must do everything we can to lift up their voices. We must give material support to activists, both inside Russia and across the diaspora.

I was pleased to see the Biden administration levy more sanctions against Putin's regime last week, including against the warden of the prison, whom Putin promoted to the rank of colonel general 3 days after Navalny's death.

We must hold those responsible accountable, including using Global Magnitsky Sanctions. At the same time, the House of Representatives must pass the supplemental funding request to help support the Ukrainians fighting against Putin's repression.

The fight against Putin in Ukraine is also the fight against Putin in Russia. This is something Navalny clearly understood when he said:

Russia must leave Ukraine alone and allow it to develop the way its people want.

I realize there is a painful sadness for so many across the Russian community in the wake of Navalny's death. It is a terrible loss. But remember what he told us:

If they decide to kill me, it means that we are incredibly strong.

Navalny personified what Havel long ago described as "the power of the powerless." So to the friends and family of Alexei Navalny and all those in Putin's prisons, to the Ukrainian people fighting against the Russian war machine, to the Russian diaspora who still dream of returning home, don't give up hope. Have faith that we will one day see a peaceful and prosperous and democratic Russia where freedom and justice reign.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to finish my remarks before the scheduled vote.

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

#### TRIBUTE TO ROBERT WEISS

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, my colleagues, I come to the floor today to celebrate a remarkable man, a really important friend of mine, an irreplaceable member of a community that is very important to me. Monsignor Robert Weiss—more affectionately known as Father Bob—retired last month from his post at St. Rose of Lima Church in Newton, CT.

A Florida native, Father Bob was just a teenager when he heard his calling to join the priesthood. In 1968, he entered St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, NY. He was ordained 5 years later.

His first assignment led him to St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport, CT, and 26 years later, he was assigned to St. Rose in Newton, CT, what became his last job in the church. Father Bob gave his final sermon just weeks ago.

I am going to tell you the story in a moment of why Father Bob is a household name in Connecticut. He is a hero to many of us, forged by fire and tragedy. But that is not the sum of Robert Weiss because during his 50 years in the priesthood, he has brought such great joy to the people and the families he has served. He is such an easy person to talk to. You just meet him for the first time, and you see why it is no wonder that over his years of leadership, thousands and thousands of pa-

rishioners have sought out his counsel and advice, confided in him, relied upon him. He has this wonderful smile, a buoyancy to him. He will admit that a little bit of that has been robbed from him in the last 10 years, but it does just make you feel better just by being around him. He is also wise. He has a gravitas about him that he carries with him. It just makes you feel safer. It makes you feel cared for when you are around him.

He cares about his church community. He helped grow St. Rose, but he cares about the community beyond the church just as heartily. He reaches out and builds bridges between religious institutions, between church and state, between believers and nonbelievers. He isn't judgmental. He is a consensus- and community-builder. He is an exceptional leader. That is who he was before December 14, 2012. That is who he has been after December 14, 2012. But that is the day, whether he likes it or not, that defines his career.

It started out like any other day for Father Bob. He went to his favorite diner in Sandy Hook. He ordered his usual: French toast. He was going to spend the morning wrapping Christmas presents. He didn't have a mass that day. Then he got a call from the Newton Police Department: A gunman had opened fire at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

He told the administrators at St. Rose School, the school affiliated with his church, to put the students in lockdown, and then he drove to Sandy Hook. He stopped at the firehouse, where parents and teachers and kids were waiting. He went to the parking lot of the school. The State police officer on the scene asked him if he would bless the children—the 20 bodies that lay on the floor of that school—and the 6 educators who lay on the floor as well, all waiting to be identified. So he stood at the front door of that building, knowing that those children and those educators were no longer living on this Earth, and he prayed for them.

Then he went back to the firehouse, where he stayed for the rest of the day and held the hands of these parents as they waited to find out whether their child was in that school dead or somewhere alive. He had officiated the weddings of these parents. He had baptized these children. These parents had confessed their regrets and their fears to him.

By 3 p.m., Governor Malloy had alerted the families who remained at that firehouse about the fate of their children. But Father Bob's day wasn't done. He led an impromptu service at St. Rose that evening. Senator BLUMENTHAL and I were there. It was maybe the most emotional night of my life when Father Bob, with no time to prepare, stood up in front of thousands who had come to grieve that tragedy at his church—because that is where so many of the families belonged—and he told the crowd: Evil visited us today, but we have to get through it, and we have to find some good.

Even after the service, Father Bob didn't stop. From there, he joined the State police until 1 or 2 a.m. in the morning so that he could be there when the final body identifications were made and he could be there with the parents when they were given that final, awful, tragic news.

The following week, Father Bob officiated 8 of the 26 funerals. They were all students at St. Rose's religious education program. He wrote eight homilies. He picked three lessons from each of their short lives that the community could learn from.

It is hard for me to explain to you what Father Bob meant to that community in those days, in those weeks and months after. In many ways, he was the emotional sponge for that entire community, not just for his parishioners. He was so unbelievably generous with himself, with his time, and with his heart—in one-on-one time with those who were grieving; in big groups who needed to hear some spiritual guidance, who needed one of the preeminent religious leaders in the community to make sense of what happened; and on television, where Father Bob would speak for the community, relieving that burden from so many others who weren't yet ready to process and talk about what all of this meant.

He did it all: the one-on-one hand holding, the group counseling, the spokesman for the community.

The Catholic Church requires bishops retire upon their 75th birthday. But when Father Bob's 75th birthday was around the corner in September of 2021, he realized he wasn't ready to be done.

In his resignation letter, he requested a very rare extension to stay on at St. Rose of Lima for 2 more years because he wanted to mark the 10th anniversary of Sandy Hook. He wanted to see through that journey the first decade after this tragedy that had ripped a hole in the heart of the community that he loved so much.

I remember talking to Father Bob at that moment when he decided to stay on. He acknowledged what he had gone through, how much pain he had experienced, how different he was from the man that took that job. But he still knew that he had to see that finish line, at least the first decade after the tragedy.

Father Bob may have celebrated his final mass as pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church, but he will remain a pillar of this community. We will never, ever forget how in the days, weeks, and years after that tragedy in Sandy Hook, he led with his heart on his sleeve. He helped heal a broken community. More than anyone else, he bore the burden, separate and aside from the families who bore the majority of that burden.

Father Bob's career would have been remarkable even if December 14, 2012, never happened. But what he did that day, what he did in the days and the weeks and years that followed, that makes him a legend.