

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Madam President, on the second issue of the Supreme Court, the Republican leader of the Senate just characterized the Supreme Court as the "crown jewel" of American government. The "crown jewel," those are the words that he used.

Let me ask you if you think this reflects a crown jewel: When one Justice on the Supreme Court receives \$4 million in undisclosed gifts from billionaires, does that reflect the crown jewel of our Constitution and our government? I think not. No other Federal judge could get by with what Clarence Thomas did to receive millions of dollars' worth of travel and gifts and not report them publicly.

I don't accept that as routine. I think it is an aberration and reflects poorly on the Court and its integrity. It is time for change. President Biden is saying that today. I will study his detailed suggestion, but I certainly agree with him that the nine people serving on the U.S. Supreme Court should not be treated differently than any other Federal judges when it comes to transparency and accountability for their actions.

If the Court is going to have any credibility when it comes to its decisions, it must reflect that in its actions. Receiving and failing to report gifts of that magnitude is an embarrassment to the whole Nation. Republicans should get on board a bipartisan effort. We passed an ethics bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee. It was authored by Senator WHITEHOUSE of Rhode Island. It is pending on the calendar. It should be called this year; the sooner the better.

An ethics code on the Supreme Court that applies the same standards, laws, and procedures to the highest Court in the land as we require of every other Agency in government, including every other court.

VENEZUELA

Madam President, in 2018, I had the chance to visit Caracas, Venezuela, before they held their last Presidential election. I will never forget walking into one of the private hospitals in Caracas and seeing the shelves empty of basic medicines and hearing the stories of deprivation and political repression that led so many millions to flee that country.

I told President Maduro that if he ran a sham election, which he had scheduled, he would find the country even more isolated and the Venezuelan people enduring even more suffering. Unfortunately, that is the path he pursued, and we have seen the heartbreaking consequences—a failed state near economic collapse, millions of refugees in the region, and greater reliance on Cuba and Russia to suppress the Venezuelan public.

But yesterday's Presidential election in Venezuela offered a chance for change. It has been a perilous process, with the regime disqualifying opposition candidates and arresting key opposition supporters.

Yet, on Sunday, millions turned out to vote for a change. These are some photographs from the election experience.

You see people waiting in line, some up to six hours, for the chance to vote. Despite independent exit polls showing a wide margin for opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, Maduro's regime has, once again, tried to claim a dubious victory absent ballot evidence.

Responsible nations in the region have understandably cast serious doubts on the regime's claims and called for a full and transparent counting of the ballots. I join in that request.

With evidence so far pointing to a decisive Gonzalez victory, he should be considered President-elect unless credible evidence is provided otherwise. The Maduro regime must not be allowed to steal an election or any more of the future from the Venezuelan people.

TRUMP RALLY SHOOTING

Madam President, for years this country has suffered from a uniquely American gun violence epidemic. On July 13, campaign rally attendees in Butler, PA, became the latest victims when a gunman attempted to assassinate former President Donald Trump.

During the gunman's heinous shooting spree, he killed an innocent firefighter and injured two other people. But this assassination attempt has exposed more than just the continued threat of gun violence in America, it has also revealed unacceptable security failures in the operations of the United States Secret Service.

Despite the implementation of a security plan to secure the rally site on July 13, the shooter involved was able to fly a drone outside of the security perimeter for 11 minutes. His suspicious activity was reported twice, and he was spotted on the roof of a building prior to taking his first shot. Yet his violent plan continued unimpeded, and he was able to fire eight shots before a Secret Service counter-sniper killed him.

The implications are terrifying, when a mere 2 days after the shooting, the Secret Service needed to secure the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, and in less than a month, the Secret Service must secure the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, in our home State of Illinois.

Between now and November 5, Vice President HARRIS and former President Trump will hold countless political events with thousands of Americans across the country.

The Secret Service will need to secure all of these major events, but the Agency needs first to restore our trust in its ability to do so.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, which I chair, has jurisdiction over the Secret Service and the Federal Government investigation. I have worked closely with Senator GARY PETERS of Michigan, the chair of the Homeland Security Committee, to organize a

joint hearing tomorrow morning that will examine the security failures leading to the assassination attempt against former President Trump.

During this hearing, we will hear from Acting U.S. Secret Service Director Ronald Rowe about the security failures on July 13 and what the Secret Service is doing to rectify those issues.

We will also hear from the FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate, who will provide an update on the FBI's investigation into the assassination attempt.

This hearing follows a briefing the Secret Service and the FBI provided to members of both committees last week.

There are many questions which the American public deserves answers to including:

Why was the shooter able to conduct reconnaissance at the fairgrounds on the morning of the rally?

How and when was he able to bring an assault rifle on the premises?

Why was the building from where the gunman shot excluded from the Secret Service security perimeter, despite being within range of the AR-15, the most popular rifle in America?

Why was the gunman able to conduct reconnaissance and move about freely, even after being identified as a suspicious person, without any intervention by local and Federal law enforcement until it was too late?

What organizational and on-the-ground changes has the Secret Service implemented since this occurred to ensure better security in the future?

Which of these changes were in place in time for the Republican National Convention?

And which are still in the process of being implemented for future events such as the Democratic National Convention?

The Presiding Officer and I share concerns about tens of thousands of people coming to our beloved city of Chicago. We want them to be safe every minute of every day. We want to make certain that the Agencies, State, local, and Federal law enforcement Agencies are doing the very best job.

They have disclosed to both of us their plans, and it looks good on paper. My question is, what did you learn about Pennsylvania that is now being applied to the original plan to keep Chicago safe?

I might also say the threat or promise of Governor Abbott to send thousands of migrants on buses into this convention center in the midst of all of the visitation that is taking place is irresponsible and mean-spirited.

These people—and I have spoken to many of them coming off of buses from Texas—they are given promises of jobs and accommodations and special treatment that just aren't realistic. They are doing what they can to protect their families, but they are doing it at the expense of the government and law enforcement in the region.

When we are having the responsibility of a national convention, we

can't afford to let such a thing occur without complaining and calling the attention of the Texas Governor to the irresponsibility of this action.

What challenge does the proliferation of weapons present to the Secret Service's mission to protect current and former Presidents, Vice Presidents, and families of major candidates moving forward?

These are fundamental questions which will be asked tomorrow. There is an urgent need for bipartisan collaboration in Congress to provide these answers to the American people, as soon as possible, so that the Secret Service can begin to rebuild trust and more effectively fulfill its mission.

The work has already begun. Tomorrow's joint hearing will help bring about transparency and accountability for Secret Service failures in Butler, PA, on July 13.

I will close by saying this: The hearing is a joint hearing of the two committees, and it is bipartisan. It has been from the start.

There have been suggestions made on the floor here that there was some partisan angle to this. Partisanship has nothing to do with keeping our elected officials and those running for high office safe throughout their conduct.

We have got to do this together, both parties, for the good of our Nation. Political violence and vandalism are never, never acceptable.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL SFRAGA

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, it is Monday afternoon. We are back for what appears to be the last week of full session before we are due to go on an August recess. There is lots to do back home but clearly lots to do here in the Senate as well.

It looks that this week we are going to probably spend the end of the week wrapping up some of the nominations that are out there, and I want to speak to a nomination that I feel very, very strongly about and would hope that we will have an opportunity to weigh in as a Senate on, on a priority that I don't think enough of us as Americans think about: our role as an Arctic nation.

As we are processing nominations, I want to kind of move our attention to the top of the world, up in the Arctic.

We have a lot of hotspots in the world right now, and the last thing in the world that we need is for the Arctic to become one of those hotspots. Whether we want it to or not, whether we want to will it away or not, the Arctic is increasingly gaining attention by others for different reasons, and the

fact that the United States doesn't have that diplomatic presence, if you will, is a disservice, I believe, to us as an Arctic nation.

So I have come to urge this body to take up the nomination of Dr. Mike Sfraga. Mike is an Alaskan, but he would be our Nation's first Ambassador at Large for Arctic Affairs.

We have not had a confirmed Ambassador at Large position. We have had a Special Representative to the Arctic, but when you send a "Special Representative" to some of these dialogues, to sit at tables with other countries' Ambassadors, there is a disparity there, and I think we have recognized the importance and the role of this Ambassador at Large position.

Dr. Sfraga was nominated in February of 2023. He was reported out of the Foreign Relations Committee this March, and it is time for us to take him up and confirm him.

And I get it. I mean, there is a lot going on. I mentioned hotspots around the world. You look at what is happening in Ukraine and in Israel and in Taiwan and in China and in North Korea, and you have everything that is happening domestically. Sometimes I think the Arctic is out of sight, out of mind for many, but it is important that we not lose sight of the consequential nature of the Arctic itself. Again, we use the phrase "It is a cold place," but it is becoming its own hotspot. So what we can do, again, to assert not only our areas of oversight and overlay but also from the diplomatic perspective is something that I think is worthy of focusing on.

So why this time? Why this particular nominee?

First, we have incredible opportunities on the Arctic issues—everything from resource development to tourism, to shipping, to infrastructure. You have the people who live and work and raise their families there. Thousands of American Alaskans live in the Arctic, and their interests deserve to be taken seriously and represented in the highest councils of our government. We also have a very dynamic situation in the Arctic right now with climate change, with national security, engagement with other nations.

So let's just talk about our neighbor to Alaska's west there, and that is Russia, the largest Arctic nation. Their war on Ukraine is now in its third year, but it is being powered by their revenues from oil and from gas and now, more and more, also from seafood.

Russia is increasingly shipping its oil through the Northern Sea Route, which has the potential to threaten Alaskan waters and our marine resources. They are testing a combat icebreaker, which could give it a significant, strategic advantage that we currently lack.

The Acting President pro tempore is well aware that in this country, we lack that icebreaking capacity. We have one operational icebreaker. She is currently at dry dock and will be there for a period of months. Our medium-

strength icebreaker, the Healy—it was just reported last Thursday—had a fire aboard ship as it was going across the Northwest Passage. I have not yet received the report, but my understanding is that that vessel is not in a condition to continue with the mission they had set out on. And that is it. That is it.

We have worked through the appropriations process to authorize the icebreaking capacity to build out the fleet. We are not there. We are not even close to being there. In fact, the updates we get from the Coast Guard on this are beyond frustrating. They are to the point where we have a responsibility to ensure that the commitment we have made for the taxpayer dollars, for the infrastructure that we need, which is the icebreaker—we have to line these up, and we have to line them up quickly.

Last week was an interesting week. I know that Senator SULLIVAN and I had some pretty in-depth briefings from the head of NORAD and the head of the Alaskan Command when we saw really an unprecedented air exercise between the Russian Bear bombers—two of them—coming together, coordinating with two Chinese H-6's and coming into the Alaskan ADIZ, into our area, some close to—basically separating these aircraft by about 200 miles from our shore. They were close enough to certainly get our attention. They were operating within the rules, and they were operating safely. But, again, it is a demonstration, a show of partnership. While it may not be the first time we have seen the Russians and the Chinese flying together, we have never seen them in these northern areas. So it begs the question: Why? What is their interest up there? So making sure we are engaged has to be a priority.

I mentioned seafood. People don't necessarily think about the prospect or the reality that Russia would be engaged in economic warfare on seafood—overharvesting fisheries that are shared with Alaska, selling that overharvest to China for reprocessing to get around the sanctions that are in place, and generally throwing the global seafood markets into chaos—all to generate additional revenues for its war machine. This threatens not only the species, the seafood, but also the way of life for so many who count on the fisheries for their very existence.

In many, many areas, we are seeing the Russians and the Chinese partnering to help enhance the Chinese position in the far north. I mentioned the activity we just saw last week in the air. We are seeing the cooperation and the collaboration on Russian energy, the collaboration with the processing of Russian seafood. Now the Russian Federation's security service has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese Coast Guard to enhance maritime security cooperation in the North Pacific, in the Bering Sea, and in the Arctic.