

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

Last year, one of the pictures that got, again, a lot of attention was a flotilla of 11 Russian and Chinese warships off the Aleutian Islands. Just a few weeks ago, there was a new flotilla of Chinese military ships that transited the U.S. EEZ off of Alaska. We know they are not going out whale watching or looking at the glaciers. This is activity that is close to Alaska, along our shared maritime border with Russia and just beyond our sovereign territory.

But I share these because these are the events that are happening now. These are the events that are happening now, and they are capturing the attention of the country. So we need to make sure that, as we are paying attention to these current events, we have somebody whose day job it is to do nothing more than monitor, engage, work with the State Department, work with our friends and allies, and work with the administration.

We have made some good progress in recent years on infrastructure in the Arctic. We have done a lot more in partnering from a diplomatic perspective by putting a consulate there in Nuuk, Greenland. We have to do a lot more to ensure our Nation's interests and well-being in the region, and that is why it comes down to the right people in the right place—the right people in the right place.

This is why I am so strong in urging that we take up Dr. Sfraga's nomination to be the Arctic Ambassador at Large. He has over three decades of experience on Arctic issues. He is the Chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission and has been since 2021. Prior to his nomination for Ambassador at Large, he was the founding director of the Polar Institute. He was the director of the Global Risk and Resilience Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. He was a colead scholar at the State Department for the Fulbright Arctic Initiative. He has served as chair of the Committee of Visitors Review of the Section for Arctic Science, Office of Polar Programs, National Science Foundation. He earned the first Ph.D. in geography in northern studies from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks.

The guy knows the Arctic. He gets it. He is clear-eyed about the realities and the intentions of our adversaries. He understands what we need to do to advance our Nation's equities in the Arctic. He knows the people; he knows the scene. And they know him. That is really incredibly important.

They are waiting for us. They are waiting for us to confirm Dr. Sfraga's nomination. They have worked with him in the past, and they are really anxious to have him in this position.

I was at an event last week. It was the going-away for Iceland's Ambassador to the United States. Her next role is a newly created role. She will be Iceland's Ambassador to the Arctic-at-Large. We should confirm our own already.

The Arctic is where our domestic policy meets foreign policy. It is where homeland defense meets the protection of our national fisheries. It is where our changing climate meets increased resource development and shipping and trade. It is where NATO's "other flank"—its western flank—meets Russia and China. It is the most strategically important place in the world.

I know that people are looking at our calendar. They are saying that time is running short. I don't disagree. But I think it is critically important that we have somebody of Dr. Sfraga's caliber in this position. We need to have that representation. I would certainly urge the Senate to act on his nomination, hopefully, before we are able to conclude at the end of this week.

The reality is, if we want to do right by the Arctic and all of our growing interests and challenges in the region, we really can't wait any longer.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

TRIBUTE TO MATT VANKUIKEN

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to my chief of staff and dear longtime friend, Matt VanKuiken, who will be moving on to the next step in his career this week, after 16 years of outstanding service in my office.

Those of you who know Matt understand how passionate he is about golfing. We have all experienced also his witty sense of humor. Matt is a literal political pundit.

With that, Matt, I want you to know there are no ifs, ands, or putts about it. You have been a terrific chief of staff and the best, by far. I could always count on you to drive right in to solve problems, to scramble and find the best approach to any situation, and to stay the course until the job was done.

Matt, from what I understand, my phone calls to you while you were golfing really helped you improve your game over the years. So I want you to know that I have a gift for you back in the office, some golf balls and tees with my campaign colors, so that you won't ever forget about my calls when I am not calling you every day.

True story, Madam President: Matt first applied to work in my office when he was a student at Western Michigan University. We offered him an internship in my West Michigan office, and he turned us down. But, fortunately, we didn't hold that against him. Sixteen years ago, I made one of the best hiring decisions ever when I hired Matt as a legislative aide, handling energy and environmental issues, which I know, Madam Chair, you care so much about, as do I.

He went on to serve in senior roles over the years, including as my legislative director and my chief of staff, including his role now as a key member of our top leadership chiefs. He has had an incredible Senate career.

Since his early days in the office, Matt had a way of rising to the occa-

sion. A perfect example of this happened one day, a late afternoon in 2013. For reasons unknown, Matt was left alone in the office when my private incoming line rang. Unsure of exactly how to answer or transfer the call on this line, he was going to let it ring. He soon realized that the line had no voicemail, and he decided he should attempt to answer it. It was a good thing he did because it was President Obama trying to reach me.

In typical Matt fashion, he figured it out. He kept his composure. The call went off without a hitch, although he claims to this day that President Obama could hear his hand shaking through the phone.

I can point to so many big accomplishments where Matt has played an absolutely instrumental leadership role. Over and over again, he doesn't give up, and he finds creative ways to get things done in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Getting funds to address the needs of families and fix the pipes in Flint was a herculean effort. Because the crisis wasn't a natural disaster, Flint didn't qualify for certain types of disaster funding. Under Matt's leadership, we found a way to get it done. Today, almost all of the lead service pipes in Flint have been replaced, and the children and families of Flint have access to safe water.

In 2015, Matt was instrumental in getting funding to Detroit and other Michigan cities to tear down blighted homes and rebuild neighborhoods. My goal, which we thought was simple and found it wasn't, was to transfer available funds from one account in the Treasury to another account to address these critical housing issues.

Over and over again, we were told getting support to transfer the funds was impossible. In fact, multiple times, Leader Reid told us it was over. We were playing Whac-A-Mole, as one obstacle after another popped up. But, in the end, with Matt's tenacity and hard work, we succeeded, and it was worth it.

The mayor of Detroit recently told me that the actions we took created safe neighborhoods for families in Detroit a decade sooner—10 years sooner—than they would have been able to do it had they not had those funds.

So, thank you, Matt.

I could go on and on. Matt helped me get an agreement with Canada to limit trash from coming into Michigan landfills from Toronto. He helped established the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, or GLRI—which, again, Madam Chair knows about—our premier funding source to protect our precious lakes. This program has been incredibly successful in Michigan and across our entire Great Lakes region. I couldn't have done all of this and so much more without Matt's leadership and his hard work.

But Matt's legacy is more than our legislative successes. It is most reflected in my incredible staff and alumni from my office. He has been the