

local law enforcement, our first responders, our county emergency management agencies—and they stepped up. They went into action, and they moved forward immediately to start to come around individuals who were losing it all, who were fighting to find people that they feared had lost their lives.

But we know that Federal support is going to prove vital to these communities being able to stand up. They are not asking for handouts. They are asking for help and a hand up so that they can rebuild.

And, unfortunately, what we are seeing is Tennesseans are struggling to get access to these Federal programs. Just 2 weeks after Hurricane Helene struck, we had the Small Business Administration announce that it had run out of funds for its disaster loan program. Now, the fiscal year started October 1; this storm happened on September 27, and you have the SBA saying 2 weeks into the fiscal year they have used every penny of their disaster loan program. And we know this is an essential lifeline for businesses to help them to stay in operation and to keep employees on the payroll.

And after spending almost half of its disaster budget in the first week of October, FEMA also warned that it may have to restrict funding for rebuilding efforts—that includes repairs for infrastructure and water treatment facilities.

This shortfall is absolutely inexcusable. The mismanagement is inexcusable.

Just days after Hurricane Helene struck Tennessee, I joined my Senate colleagues who represent the States impacted by the storm in calling for a Federal disaster relief package to aid rescue, recovery, and rebuilding efforts. We need to address the needs of our farmers whose crop fields face devastating flooding. I have joined the entire Tennessee delegation in urging House and Senate leadership to pass agricultural disaster assistance.

So with Congress back in session, we should waste no time. And before we get to next year's agenda, we should put at the top of the to-do list: addressing the needs of those who have been so devastated—their lives, their businesses, their homes—everything devastated by these floods.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I rise today to talk about the need to right a wrong. The National Football League and the Washington Commanders must do more to honor the Commanders' Native American heritage, as powerfully symbolized by the team's former iconic logo, and they must commit to never ever again censor it or degrade it.

Here is the story. This is a photograph from the 1960s of Blackie Wetzel and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Blackie Wetzel was a member of the

Blackfeet Nation in Montana and served his people and the country in many roles throughout his life, including chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe and president of the National Congress of American Indians.

In 1971, Blackie met with George Herbert Allen, who was then the head coach and the general manager of Washington's premiere professional sports franchise, the Washington Redskins. Knowing that Coach Allen admired and supported Native Americans, Blackie Wetzel encouraged him to replace the team's "R" logo with something that represented Indian Country. Blackie brought Coach Allen pictures of prominent Native American figures, including Blackfeet Chief Two Guns White Calf, who is pictured here on this poster board beside me.

On behalf of the team, Coach Allen adopted the now legendary logo that became the symbol of this storied franchise and among one of the most popular in league history.

Make no mistake, this logo was inspired, it was envisioned by Blackie Wetzel as a tribute to Native Americans.

By the way, it is not a character. It is a depiction of pride and of strength, a depiction of courage, of honor. In fact, as Blackie Wetzel said in 2002:

It made us all so proud to have an Indian on a big-time team.

And, I will tell you, support from the Wetzel family, the White Calf family, and the Blackfeet Nation remains as strong as ever today.

In fact, the Blackfeet Nation recently expressed their "wholehearted support" for the logo and urged the NFL and the Commanders to restore it to a place of "prominence and honor."

In fact, I will never forget Don Wetzel when he came to me 3 years ago—in fact, 3 years ago this very week—to share his father's remarkable legacy and to tell me directly the logo still mattered to him and to his family even after the team stopped using it.

Now, for context, the contributions of our Nation's Native American Tribes to our country's culture and heritage is beyond dispute. And this includes their service in the Armed Forces.

Do you realize that Native Americans serve our country in uniform at the highest percentage of any ethnic group? They are warriors for our country. And we honor them, and we honor all veterans this week.

Any franchise should be proud to be associated with Native American heritage. But, unfortunately, in February of this year, the NFL deliberately censored the logo on its official X account, as you can see here. They did this when honoring previous Super Bowl winners, and the Commanders are selling a shirt even today that does the same.

You might ask what I mean by "censoring the logo." Well, in the case of the NFL, they photoshopped graphics to cover up the logo on the team's helmet, as you can see here. This is John

Riggins. It is a picture of one of the great legends of Washington, DC.

And in the case of a shirt that was honoring Darrell Green, the logo is completely removed from the helmet, as if it were some sort of obscene image.

Now, this blatant censorship is outrageous, and it is offensive, not to mention hypocritical. Players wore the very same shirt in pregame warmups with one major difference. You will see here that the logo is proudly displayed, as it should be. We can see the logo. So why couldn't fans share the same enthusiasm by purchasing a shirt with a legendary player and a legendary logo?

And I have got to tell you, the censorship of honorable Native imagery certainly does not promote diversity, equity, or inclusion.

And let me be clear. Anyone who has been following this issue for the past few months knows this: I am not calling for the return of the former team name.

Let me say that again, because there are folks who twist this. I am not calling for the return of the former team name, which had become increasingly controversial, especially in Indian Country. But unlike the former name, the logo was rarely a subject of controversy; and, in fact, it was never alleged to be disparaging during the trademark disputes against the team that spanned many years.

And while some individuals might object to teams featuring any Tribal imagery, however honorable and realistic, there is no doubt in my mind that the overwhelming majority of fans in Indian Country and beyond believe that Washington's former logo is honorable, and it is a point of pride.

Look no further than the Blackfeet Nation's chairman of the Tribal council writing this letter supporting the logo. It was dated September 23, 2024. It was therefore wrong and simply unnecessary for the NFL and the team's former ownership to discard the logo and abandon its nearly 90-year connection to Indian Country.

Now, the good news is that the new Commanders owners have taken some positive steps since the May committee hearing on legislation related to RFK Stadium here in Washington. I applaud them for honoring Wetzel with a permanent memorial at Northwest Stadium. And I am told that censoring the logo on the Darrell Green shirt was an oversight, and it won't happen again when other Washington legends are featured on shirts in the future.

It is also my undersigning that the Commanders are continuing to have good-faith conversations with the Wetzel family on potentially allowing a new foundation, to be created, to use the iconic logo to draw attention to critical issues facing Indian Country.

I sincerely hope these conversations result in the team taking additional action to honor the Blackfeet Nation's contributions to the team's history and, frankly, the rich Native American

heritage surrounding our Nation's Capital.

I also strongly encourage the NFL to allow sales of vintage merchandise featuring the Native American logo where market demand exists. And if the Commanders want to occasionally wear the throwback uniform with the classic helmet, the NFL should fully support it.

Can you imagine the Cowboys star once again lined up, helmet to helmet, with the Blackfeet chief?

Now, I know enough about marketing and public relations to realize the NFL needs assistance and assurances that its corporate sponsors and media partners won't protest and create a stir were such sales to resume. So I would like to publicly call on the NFL's sponsors to hear the support of the Blackfeet Nation, to hear the support of the Wetzel family, and to hear the thunderous support of fans across the country for honoring the logo, for allowing NFL-sanctioned merchandise sales featuring it, and for supporting Indian Country along the way.

Corporate sponsors, I urge you to let the NFL know you recognize the Native American logo was never the problem and that you believe it should be celebrated, not censored moving forward.

I am not the first Senator to come to this floor to draw attention to Washington's football franchise or to make demands in the context of extending the lease for RFK Stadium. Senator Harry Reid and Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, among others, used this platform to demand that the team change its name.

Well, today on behalf of the Blackfeet Nation of Montana—and, no doubt, with the support of millions of football fans across the country—I come to the Senate floor to say our culture overcorrected in 2020. The NFL overcorrected. The team's previous ownership overcorrected. Sponsors overcorrected. And we are still seeing shocking displays of censorship of an honorable logo as a result.

But now can be the day of righting that wrong. As we celebrate Native American Heritage Month this November, what better time to do it than now? What better time to restore one of the NFL's greatest logos ever to the—as the Blackfeet Tribe wrote in their letter—"place of prominence and honor" as hoped for and called for by the Blackfeet Nation of Montana.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to complete my remarks prior to the scheduled vote.

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

UKRAINE

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, the United States must continue to support the people of Ukraine as they con-

tinue to defend their country from Russia's invasion. The support provided by the United States has been indispensable in thwarting Russia's advances, but Ukraine needs continued assurances today—and tomorrow—that this support will continue.

There will be policy shifts in the next Congress and with the next administration, but we can't abandon our fundamental support for Ukraine. Doing so would be existential for the Ukrainian people, dangerous for Europe, and dangerous for the United States.

Allowing a large country to invade its smaller, neighboring country with impunity clears a path for authoritarian leaders with similar aspirations, and it sends the message that these actions are acceptable. Left unchecked, these violent actions threaten America's partners and allies.

We are at an inflection point. The President-elect has praised Vladimir Putin, the man waging an unjust war against Ukraine, for being a strong leader. He called him a "genius" and "savvy" and said:

I got along with him great. He liked me. I liked him.

I struggle to find common ground or agreement with someone who gets along with one of America's most ruthless adversaries. But I hope we can all agree that America's security is inseparable from the security of Europe. Republicans and Democrats alike have always recognized that, and I want to pay tribute to many of my Republican colleagues for their stalwart continuation of support for Ukraine to defend itself.

We must all stand up against a brutal authoritarian who has sparked a war that has killed and wounded 1 million people and displaced millions more, killed dissidents, stolen children, and imprisoned journalists, civil rights advocates, and political opponents.

If the United States were to withdraw our support from Ukraine, the consequences would be severe and exactly what Russia wants.

The Ukrainian people are doing their part. They are fighting to defend their territory and Ukraine's sovereignty with every ounce of strength, in every part of Ukraine. And they have fought back against Russian aggression since 2014, when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea.

The Ukrainian people have been steadfast and resilient in protecting their land, their culture, and their heritage. But Ukraine isn't only fighting. They are also reforming and strengthening their country there. Since 2014, Ukraine has adopted anti-corruption reforms and continues to advance its efforts, including strengthening Ukraine's Constitutional Court and judicial reforms and cracking down on unauthorized trade. To date—this is really good news—there have been no credible allegations of corruption associated with international donor support.

And, in the midst of this brutal war, Ukraine's economy is tenaciously

strong. Despite the war, Ukraine's GDP growth is reportedly up 5 percent from last year. Since September, more than 60 million tons of grain and steel have been sent to the global market through the Black Sea.

The World Bank and others are developing investment plans to rebuild energy, manufacturing, and agricultural infrastructure—a reconstruction for Ukraine that will cost nearly \$500 billion.

We must be firm in our military, economic, and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine and equally unequivocal in imposing consequences for Russia's aggression.

United States, European, and global support for Ukraine must continue. As Penny Pritzker, former Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery at the Department of State and former Secretary of Commerce under President Obama, has said, "military assistance alone is not enough. We must match a hardened security umbrella with a comprehensive economic recovery framework."

I could not agree more. Putin has brought war back to Europe. Putin's imperialist invasion has brought back memories of World War II. If the United States had not stayed the course to defend Europe against the Nazis, our world would look very much different today.

The world needs a multilateral court to prosecute the crime of aggression. Sanctions must continue, and the international community must seek reparation and compensation for the victims of Putin's violence, the return of Ukrainian children to their homes and families, and the proper registration of damage that has been caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

We should also give Ukraine the flexibility it needs to use U.S.-provided weapons effectively against Russian military targets. Many European countries have already done so, and it would empower Ukraine to blunt the Russian attack and put Russian forces on the defensive.

Madam President, Putin's plan to isolate and erase Ukraine has backfired. There are more joint security commitments between the European Union and Ukraine than ever before. Finland and Sweden have joined NATO, strengthening our defense alliance. The European Union and member states have increased their support for Ukraine in military equipment, economic and humanitarian support, refugee assistance, and so many other aspects of resilience and defense.

The whole world is watching the Ukrainians fight to defend our common values, our fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The world is also watching us. We are leaders, and we must remain leaders. We are not naive to the challenges ahead for Ukraine, but if we walk away now, we may seal Ukraine's fate.

I yield the floor.