

as their friends at school because a politician said they couldn't.

Coincidentally, I had a hearing on this subject in 2023. A teenager named Harleigh Walker, a 16-year-old transgender girl from the State of Alabama, spoke with an unwavering voice in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee about what it was like to be one of the children affected by these anti-transgender laws. Harleigh Walker, from the home State of Alabama, had enacted a law threatening her ability to access the care she needs to be happy and healthy. Harley told the committee:

I want all of you to look at me, here and now, and hear my words. I am a very happy 16-year-old. I have wonderful friends who accept me . . . for who I am. I'm active in my school's debate team and other extracurricular[s] . . . I'm just trying to be a teenager in America. Same as any other teen, but I keep having to jump through hoops that other people my age don't have to . . . I'm here in front of this Committee instead of enjoying summer vacation, just to try and ensure my right to exist isn't taken away.

It is that personal. It is that important, and we are going to vote here to give someone unspecified the right to physically inspect a girl or a young woman if the other opposing team accuses them of being transgender. My goodness. Is this what we are all about here in the U.S. Senate?

#### NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Madam President, on a separate topic, tomorrow night, Members of Congress and their guests will gather on the floor of the House to hear the President on the status of our Nation. This annual address traces its roots back to the Founding Fathers, but I doubt they would recognize their beloved country today.

With President Trump and Elon Musk acting unrestrained, we are barreling down a dangerous path to a constitutional crisis. In the Judiciary Committee, which you serve on, we had three witnesses last week—nominees to serve in important positions in the Department of Justice. The question that was asked to them was very basic: Would you advise a public official in the United States of America to follow a court order? Just that simple, to follow a court order. They hemmed and they hawed and they said: Generally so; generally this.

The most lucid statement was made by a Republican Senator JOHN KENNEDY of Louisiana, who said the answer is, yes, you either follow a court order, or you resign your office; it is that basic.

But if you listened to those three witnesses, there is a serious question whether that would happen. It is a question whether there is any check or balance on the executive branch if they will not live by the findings of the court. That troubles me. It continues to trouble me. It is at the heart of our concern about the future of our Constitution.

Madam President, I am going to have a guest at the State of the Union to-

tomorrow night, Dr. Elizabeth Sokol from Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. I know that hospital well. My daughter was treated there for years. I think it is one of the best on God's green Earth.

For more than a decade, Dr. Sokol has been a pediatric oncologist at Lurie Children's in Chicago. She treats young children with neuroblastoma, the leading cause of cancer death for children age 1 to 5. Dr. Sokol's work, which includes conducting clinical trials on neuroblastoma brain cancer research, is funded by the National Institutes of Health. The NIH is, quite simply, the premier medical research Agency in the world. It provides over \$38 billion in research funding to all 50 States, including yours and mine, studying everything from pediatric cancer to dementia, Alzheimer's, ALS, diabetes care, heart disease. Breakthrough research supported by the NIH has made a difference.

You know all those ads you see on television about those drugs you can hardly pronounce their names or remember—people skipping through fields of flowers, feeling better because they take the drugs—99 percent of all the new drugs in the United States, all of them—99 percent started in research at the National Institutes of Health. If they are good and they are important, you can credit taxpayers for creating an Agency that does the research. That breakthrough research has made the difference in the lives of thousands of people. Yet this is one of the Agencies—the National Institutes of Health—that President Trump is dismantling through a series of abrupt and illegal, devastating funding cuts, gag orders, and mass firings.

As a result of President Trump's actions, Dr. Sokol's work on neuroblastoma in kids—brain cancer in kids—and the lives of the kids who depend on it is in serious danger. Rather than empty rhetoric, Dr. Sokol actually does the work to make America great in offering families hope. You don't think that these families think it is great if she can find something to cure their child? Donald Trump and Elon Musk are trying to stop her. That sounds like a rash political statement, but it is true.

At the same time, Dr. Sokol's hospital, Lurie Children's, is staring down massive cuts to Medicaid for the lifesaving treatment of critically ill children. Medicaid is the lifeline for Children's Hospital. If we go through with the planned budget we hear from the House, the cutbacks of 14.5 percent in Medicaid funding will dramatically hit American hospitals. Rural hospitals will close. Children's hospitals will close. Programs will be shut down. Medicaid is their lifeline. It covers nearly half the kids in this country. If you slash Medicaid funding from Lurie Children's in Chicago, Cincinnati Children's in Ohio, and the Children's Hospital in Pennsylvania, you are harming lifesaving treatment for kids with cancer and other serious conditions.

For as long as I can stand to speak, I will be standing and speaking in support of NIH funding and the work of people like Dr. Sokol. She will be my guest tomorrow night because I want my colleagues, when we sit down together for a light dinner before the Address, to meet this NIH researcher and hear from her firsthand what the cuts of Elon Musk and Donald Trump are doing to children's research in America. Surely, we are better than that.

#### NATO

Madam President, the last point I want to make is this: Today is a special day in the State of Illinois and no other State that I know of today. It is Casimir Pulaski Day.

Casimir Pulaski was a Polish patriot who decided to help America in the Revolutionary War. He came over, and his military experience led him to create the U.S. Calvary. He was in the Battle of Savannah and was severely wounded and died. He served our country as a patriot even though he was a Polish person, not an American.

Well, we take that pretty seriously in Chicago, where there are more people of Polish ancestry than any other place on Earth except for Warsaw, Poland. We are pretty proud of that fact, and, today, we are proud of the fact that the President of Poland came to Chicago. President Duda and his wife were given a warm welcome at the Polish National Museum.

I recall the time—and it really wasn't that long ago—when, finally, that Iron Curtain came down, and we had a question to ask: How are we going to protect the nations that used to be part of the Warsaw Pact or nations that used to be Soviet Republics? What is going to protect them if they want to aspire to democracy and move toward the West?

We came up with the obvious answer. There was only one alliance that could protect them—NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—because, in the 80 years now that it has been in existence, it has done its job of avoiding World War III and strengthening the countries in the alliance because we stand arm in arm next to one another. As I said today, it was a Pulaski moment. The United States and Poland stand together again for the future of both of our nations.

I believe in NATO, and I don't know what we will do without it, but now we have to consider that. This new President, just a few weeks into his Presidency, is threatening the very future and existence of NATO. If we walk away from it—if the United States disengages from NATO—the question is whether or not Europe can stand on its own feet. I think they will eventually, but in the meantime, countries like Poland, the Baltic nations, and many others are vulnerable to Putin's aggression. What he did in Ukraine 3 years ago—and even before that—he will do again. Smaller nations don't have a prayer in fighting it.

I am saddened, shocked, stunned at what happened in the Oval Office last

week with President Zelenskyy. To have that display on live television breaks my heart. This situation, such that we would humiliate our ally of Ukraine and at the same time talk about the greatness of Vladimir Putin, I just find disgusting. People are no students of history if they buy into that thinking. For the longest time, we have stood with the people of Ukraine.

Do you know what the briefing was when they invaded Ukraine? They called the Senators down, and the intelligence Agency says: Let me tell you what is going to happen when, finally, Putin pulls the trigger and invades Ukraine. Those Ukrainians will last between 3 days and 2 weeks—that was it, 2 weeks if they are good—and then there will be guerilla war.

Well, they were certainly wrong. Here we are, 3 years later, and the Ukrainians are still fighting.

How many Ukrainians have died so far? We can't come up with an accurate figure, but we know 46,000 have died—46,000 have died—in fighting Putin, who invaded their country, and this President calls the head of the Ukrainian country, Zelenskyy, a dictator and says that he actually invaded his own country.

What in the world is he talking about? These people have been fighting to the death, and millions have been displaced. They have been standing up for the values that we cherish in this country. To walk away from them and to subject their leader to what we saw last Friday in the Oval Office is disgusting, humiliating, below the dignity of the United States.

I stand behind Ukraine. Maybe that is why I am wearing this tie today. I stand behind Ukraine because I believe those people are fighting for the very values that we treasure. They have stood by the United States, and they have said “thank you” many, many times to me and to others.

We need to stand behind NATO and Ukraine and stand for the values that are important. Hitching our star to Vladimir Putin is a fool's errand. It is a disaster waiting to happen. I hope to goodness we don't reach that point.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORTS  
ACT OF 2025

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam President, I rise today in strong opposition to any attempt by the Federal Government to meddle in decisions about who can and cannot participate in school sports.

Simply put, it is not the Federal Government's place to tell State and local sports leagues across this country how to do their jobs. This is a decision

for local communities, where players and parents can participate in that discussion at the local level.

This is a decision for sports leagues to thoughtfully craft policy that actually takes seriously what is best for all players, not blanket mandates that will undoubtedly have unintended consequences for the safety of all students.

I, for one, trust our States, our leagues, and our localities to make these decisions without interference from Congress or the President. For years, we have seen them do it thoughtfully and carefully. They have done what is best for the children, in consultation with parents, teachers, coaches, and community members. This is exactly how this type of policy should be created.

But Republicans are now saying that they actually know better than these local sports leagues. The President is saying that he knows better than parents what is good for their children. President Donald Trump and my Republican colleagues have inserted themselves into this discussion, tying the hands of leagues that are actually focused on the best interest of our children. And as far as I can tell, it is just to score political points and stir the pot of the culture wars.

I will close with this. Too often in this debate, it gets lost that we are talking about real people. It is clear that my Republican colleagues, when they casually dehumanize trans Americans in their attack ads, forget or simply do not care that they are talking about real people—often youth, often children—who already do not feel welcome in their communities.

This legislation tries to send the message that certain kids are not welcome in Little League or on the basketball court, and, really, that they are not welcome in school at all, beside their peers—what a heartbreaking message to tell a child. No American, especially those who are already vulnerable, should be demonized and picked on so that politicians can win elections—period, full stop.

At the end of the day, while Republicans are focused on playing politics with children's sports leagues, I am focused on issues that I hear about from my constituents every day. I am focused on lowering household costs and taking on the big corporations that are price-gouging families at the grocery store and at the pharmacy.

I am focused on growing our made-in-America economy and making sure that everyone has a fair chance to get a good-paying job. I am focused on ensuring that people can access high-quality healthcare and protecting Medicaid. I am focused on the people of Wisconsin and their needs, not stepping on their right to decide what is best in their own local communities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

NOMINATION OF LINDA MCMAHON

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I got my start in politics as a mom in

tennis shoes fighting to protect a preschool program, and I still wear that label proudly. I am a former preschool teacher. I am also a former community college educator, and I am also a former school board member. So I don't mess around when it comes to making sure every single one of our students, in every corner of our country, has access to quality public education, one that leaves them prepared for the future and opens the doors of opportunity wide. It is not a responsibility I take lightly; it never will be.

Our kids are the future of this country, and the Department of Education is really at the heart of how we make sure they are set up for success. But Donald Trump and Elon Musk want to rip the heart out of public education in America and abolish the Department of Education—well, not if I can help it.

That is why I believe we need a leader at the Department of Education who actually believes in the mission of the Department of Education. We need a Secretary of Education with a really deep understanding of how to use this crucial position to strengthen educational opportunities and outcomes for every student in this country. We need a Secretary of Education who will put students first, not billionaires; who will stand up for our kids—every single one of them—even if it means standing up to Donald Trump and Elon Musk.

On each of these counts, Linda McMahon fails to make the grade. I have had concerns from the outset about whether Mrs. McMahon has the experience we should expect from an Education Secretary, and I am sorry to say my concerns have not been alleviated—far from it.

I asked her in our confirmation hearing about the Every Student Succeeds Act. That is the law I negotiated with Republicans to finally fix No Child Left Behind and to provide more flexibility to our States and schools, while ensuring accountability for our tax dollars. She couldn't name a single requirement of that law—not one. How is she supposed to enforce our education laws when she didn't even bother to study up before her Senate confirmation hearing?

On fighting for public schools, it is painfully clear that McMahon's plan for our students and schools is in lock-step with Trump's pro-billionaire agenda. They are going to let public schools get robbed blind as the richest people in the world suck money out of our schools and communities that need it the most. They are going to cut off funding that directly supports our students and teachers and send it straight to the pockets of unaccountable private and for-profit K through 12 schools.

And on standing up for our students, standing up to President Trump, Linda McMahon got it backward. When I asked her, at the hearing, about making sure schools get the money that we—Congress—pass, even if Trump and Musk try to block it, and making sure