

Meanwhile, instead of investigating instances of genuine discrimination, the administration is laser-focused on targeting universities that do not align with its values, in hopes of suppressing free speech and banning transgender athletes from participating in women's sports.

How does closing the one Agency responsible for shaping our Nation's young people and for building the competitive workforce of tomorrow make America great?

It doesn't. Not only will closing down the Department of Education hurt millions of young people across the country and weaken our Nation's future; it is also illegal. The President does not have the power or the authority to unilaterally close these Agencies. That is being tested in court, and the President is not doing well in those tests.

I want to make sure the Department of Education is efficient, and I want to make sure it is responsive. But the notion that we are going to shift all of the student loans to the SBA is an example of someone who didn't think it through. With fewer employees at that Agency, they will be unable to do the job which they were assigned the responsibility of doing, and they will change the lives of a lot of American students in the process.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The Senator from Texas.

RUSSIA

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, for some reason, the Presiding Officer has drawn the short straw to be the Presiding Officer during my daily or frequent speeches here on the floor, though I appreciate your patience and indulgence.

This morning I come to the floor to talk about the Intelligence Committee's "Worldwide Threats" hearing that is ongoing now in the Hart Office Building. We have all the leaders of the intelligence community, including the Director of National Intelligence, there.

We hold this hearing once a year. It serves as an important reminder of where the United States stands in terms of the rest of the world and what you should be concerned about and what we should protect against.

Key among the threats that have been testified to already in open session—and we will be going to a closed, classified session here shortly—but key among the threats discussed this morning was the threat of Russia.

Russia is engaged, of course, in an ongoing hot war with Ukraine, a conflict that President Trump is rightly seeking to end. While this is perhaps

toward the forefront of many people's minds when they think about Russia, it is not the only threat Russia poses to the West, and I use the term "West" advisedly. That is not just the United States. That includes the United States, but it is far broader than that.

Some have described—and I think even the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, this morning confirmed—that Russia is engaged in a shadow war against the West.

One of the ways that they have engaged in this shadow war is through sabotage. That, again, was also confirmed by the Director of National Intelligence this morning. She said these have included attacks against transportation targets like trains, airplanes, and other vehicles, attacks against government and military targets. And some of these attacks have been directed toward critical infrastructure like pipelines, undersea fiberoptic cables, and the electric grid.

Russia has also targeted industries like defense companies and the leaders of such companies that support their adversaries. These attacks have accelerated in recent years.

Between 2022 and 2023, Russia has quadrupled its orchestrated sabotage attacks in Europe. And then they nearly tripled again in 2024.

And while this behavior has escalated in recent years, it should come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with Russian history or the history of Russian actions when it comes to their adversaries.

Given Russia's geography, it has always been part of their strategy to extend their westernmost border to provide a larger buffer and a smaller border for Moscow to have to defend. But above and beyond their history of aggressive expansionism, trying to restore, really, the now-collapsed Soviet Union, Russia also has a history of using tactics outside of conventional warfare.

These are tactics that advance Russia's strategic interests and weaken those of its adversaries but may not rise to the level that would merit countermeasures by the target of these efforts.

The Soviet Union, the predecessor to the Russian Federation, has historically heavily relied upon such tactics during the Cold War; for example, the KGB, which was the name of the premier Russian intelligence agency back during the Cold War. The KGB led a campaign to influence public opinion among certain populations to advance Soviet interests. And, of course, that has continued today under Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation.

One of the reasons the KGB and now the modern intelligence agencies of the Russian Federation use these methods is they do not necessarily trigger article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization agreement. Article 5 is the agreement that an attack against one member of NATO will be considered an attack against all, which is why it is

called a collective defense agreement. And the United States, of course, is one of the signatories to that North Atlantic Treaty Alliance.

And one of the risks of Russia triggering article 5 is that it would necessarily risk a broader war, regional or even worse. And, of course, I know we are all acutely aware of the dangers posed by any country triggering article 5 of NATO.

This is, in part, why President Trump has rightly insisted that our NATO allies increase their defense spending in line with their NATO commitments. It is just not fair or appropriate or, actually, in NATO's self-interest for those countries to depend entirely on the United States, which is why President Trump has said the 2 percent of GDP defense spending requirement is really out of date and that really NATO countries should be spending somewhere closer to 5 percent of their gross domestic product on their defense. Again, that is also to relieve the burden on the American taxpayer who has been picking up the tab for far too long.

And we see the success that President Trump has had by urging our NATO allies to provide more for their self-defense, with France and Germany leading the charge to reinvigorate their defense budgets. That is encouraging, but it takes time. But it needs to start, and it has already started.

But in any case, it is clear that Russia is concerned about anything that might trigger article 5 treaty obligations. Russia, in fact, knows that in a conventional war, it is no match for the West or NATO. And so they resort to behind-the-scenes activities to indirectly advance their own interests and harm those interests of their adversaries without triggering a reaction from the West.

Now, some of these are the reasons why—because Russia knows that it cannot win a conventional war in Europe, were one to break out, is why it continues to rattle the nuclear saber and why Putin, over and over and over again, threatens the possibility of the use of tactical nuclear weapons, which, of course, would be catastrophic for everybody involved.

Some of my colleagues may be familiar—I am sure the public is—with the analogy of a frog in boiling water. If you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out, but if you put a frog in a pot of lukewarm water, you can slowly acclimate the frog to that temperature and it will not jump out. But, of course, once the water comes to a boil again, it will kill the frog and, obviously, be too late.

That analogy, I believe, applies to the threat that Russia continues to pose to the United States and our friends and allies around the world.

This could, in fact, be the West, if we are not vigilant, because we know that the approach and the tactics and the intentions of the Russian Federation have really not changed over time.

They are slowly, however, turning up the temperature to weaken us and perhaps to lull us into complacency. But this is not the only tactic that Russia has employed in its war against the West. They also have a history of more blatant war crimes.

In 2014, Russia violated its commitments in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum by annexing Crimea, which is part of Ukraine. The Budapest Memorandum, which, again, was dated in 1994, was a treaty signed by Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Under this agreement, Ukraine, which had become newly independent after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine would dispose of its nuclear arsenal in exchange for an agreement to protect its territorial integrity and independence.

And at the time, Ukraine had the third largest nuclear weapons stockpile in the world. So it was certainly in the interest of the United States and world peace to see Ukraine dispose of that nuclear stockpile.

But then, again, in 2022, Russia violated its commitments under the Budapest Memorandum by launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These actions are a clear signal to the West that Russia has a history of reneging on its agreements and simply cannot be trusted.

And so the task at hand for the West, including the United States, is to reestablish deterrence of Russia and to make sure that we do everything we can to disincentivize them from continuing this long train of abuses.

And, of course, one of the consequences of rising feelings of insecurity in Europe is that now you have countries like Poland talking about acquiring nuclear weapons. You have the incoming chancellor of Germany saying that perhaps the UK and Germany should share its nuclear weapons with Ukraine.

Now, I had the chance to question the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and I asked whether this threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons made the world a more dangerous place. It seems like an obvious question. But, of course, he confirmed that that would be the case.

So proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe is a bad thing and something we ought to seek to avoid at all costs. So I know President Trump has a big task in front of him, and I personally will do everything I can to support his efforts.

But we need to reestablish deterrence without seeing nuclear weapons proliferate, which will, in fact, make the world more dangerous and not safer.

As I have said before, and I think is obvious to all of us, we are living in the most dangerous time since World War II. And, certainly, this morning's hearing on the world threat assessment before the leaders of the intelligence community have driven home this reality and confirmed what we already knew.

NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR DAY

Mr. President, on another related matter, today is the National Medal of Honor Day, where we honor the bravery of our military heroes who have been awarded the Medal of Honor. Last Saturday, I had the chance, along with the Presiding Officer, to attend the grand opening of the Medal of Honor Museum in Arlington, TX, where I was moved by, among other things, the words of General Rainey, the head of Army Futures Command, headquartered in Austin, TX. General Rainey reminded us:

Nobody hates war more than the men and women who served in it, but we all hope that when we find ourselves at that moment, the darkest hour of the darkest day when it is our turn to [be] tested, we hope that we will measure up to the courage and valor of these men.

So as we consider the challenges that face not only the United States, but the rest of the free world, I think the words of General Rainey can serve as a reminder in this moment. And while we may have some differences among us about our preferred approaches and tactics, we should all be united in our goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and, Heaven forbid, another reoccurrence of the world war that my dad fought in many years ago.

And hopefully, to be able to keep our young men and women out of harm's way, rather than to have them exposed to the same dangers that previous generations were exposed to in two world wars in the European continent.

Again, I applaud the efforts of President Trump and Vice President VANCE to do everything possible to wind down the current conflict in Eastern Europe in order to avoid it from morphing into a larger regional or even global conflict.

And I think those of us who believe in a higher power would do well to continue to say our prayers that that ultimately is a successful effort, and I certainly will join in that effort.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Before I yield the floor, I would ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Kratsios nomination.

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

Mr. CORNYN. I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 38, Michael Kratsios, of South Carolina, to be Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

John Thune, Tim Sheehy, Mike Crapo, Markwayne Mullin, Joni Ernst, David McCormick, Rick Scott of Florida, Bernie Moreno, Mike Rounds, Tommy

Tuberville, Katie Boyd Britt, Shelley Moore Capito, Jim Justice, John Barrasso, Steve Daines, Jon Husted.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Michael Kratsios, of South Carolina, to be Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 73, nays 25, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 138 Ex.]

YEAS—73

Baldwin	Fischer	Moran
Banks	Gallego	Moreno
Barrasso	Graham	Mullin
Bennet	Grassley	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Boozman	Hassan	Ricketts
Britt	Hawley	Risch
Budd	Heinrich	Rosen
Cantwell	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Capito	Husted	Schmitt
Cassidy	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Collins	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Coons	Justice	Shaheen
Cornyn	Kelly	Sheehy
Cortez Masto	Kennedy	Slotkin
Cotton	King	Sullivan
Cramer	Klobuchar	Thune
Crapo	Lankford	Tillis
Cruz	Lee	Tuberville
Curtis	Lujan	Warner
Daines	Lummis	Warnock
Duckworth	Marshall	Wicker
Durbin	McConnell	Young
Ernst	McCormick	
Fetterman	Moody	

NAYS—25

Alsobrooks	Merkley	Schumer
Blumenthal	Murphy	Smith
Blunt Rochester	Murray	Van Hollen
Booker	Ossoff	Warren
Gillibrand	Peters	Welch
Hirono	Reed	Whitehouse
Kaine	Sanders	Wyden
Kim	Schatz	
Markley	Schiff	

NOT VOTING—2

Hoeven Padilla

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 73, the nays are 25.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Michael Kratsios, of South Carolina, to be Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.