

nearly impossible for the dive team to locate. They struggled to see through their masks and get enough air through their regulators. It was extremely dangerous.

It was soon clear that the mission would be one of recovery and not rescue.

Engineers were brought in to thin the concrete-like mud in an effort to drain the bog that swallowed this vehicle, but the water kept seeping in.

The recovery team grew by the hour, eventually reaching hundreds, comprised of 250 U.S. servicemembers, 160 Lithuanian soldiers and civilians, 50 Polish troops, and working canine teams from Estonia and Lithuania.

Soon, a team of U.S. Navy divers received urgent orders to fly from Spain to Lithuania to help connect cables to the sunken vehicle and pull it from the bog. It took hours of struggling through the thick sludge, but they secured the vehicle.

It was a mission fraught with extreme danger and challenges. It was met with ingenuity and a commitment to the underlying principle that every American servicemember must be brought home.

I spoke to the Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States and others in Lithuania who described these days as painful days when they first tried to discover what happened to the vehicle and then an even longer period of time when they tried to retrieve the vehicle and the bodies of our soldiers.

They told me that in Lithuania, virtually every newscast focused on this tragedy. People in Lithuania felt a personal attachment to our troops, as certainly we do today. The death of these four American soldiers is a tragedy, but the joint efforts to secure them show the gravity of our commitment to our allies.

We have American troops stationed in nations like Lithuania because we have a commitment to join our NATO allies in stopping Russian aggression.

These four American soldiers lost their lives safeguarding democracy, but we owe gratitude to our Lithuanian and other allies who dropped everything and faced great odds to help us, a reminder of the common defense underlying our alliance.

On April 3, the schools were closed, the schoolchildren and their families came out and stood in the streets in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania—included in their ranks was the Lithuanian President—to pay their respects to our fallen American soldiers in their procession back to the United States.

It was a devastating episode, but it illustrated the power of international cooperation, friendship between allies, and solutions in the face of great challenges.

The loss of American servicemembers is always a tragedy. I particularly want to highlight my late constituent Sergeant Duenez. He jumped at the chance to volunteer for assignments, including the fateful mission to this

bog, which he went to support even though he was not on that crew. He was a model Illinoisan and American, and he leaves behind a wife and a little boy. We should all strive to be more like Sergeant Duenez, and we owe him and his family a great debt of gratitude.

In honor of these four servicemembers, who were living examples of American values, I will be introducing a resolution recognizing their service and sacrifice to our Nation and our NATO allies. And I urge my colleagues to join me in honoring the memories of these four great soldiers and the remarkable effort that went into their recovery by passing this resolution without delay.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARKEY. 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 Massachusetts.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about a regime of censorship that is increasing by the day. It is the story of Donald Trump's relentless attacks on CBS and its flagship news program, "60 Minutes."

It is the story of how the Federal Communications Commission, an Agency with a storied history of protecting free speech—how it has been weaponized to pressure journalists to soften their coverage of President Trump.

It is a story of a campaign to turn our free press into a State-run media echo chamber, and make no mistake, it is a story that should alarm every single American, Democrat, and Republican alike.

Since leaving office and even before, Donald Trump has waged a nonstop war on the free press. He has called journalists the "enemy of the people." He has used his platform, Truth Social, to attack reporters, to smear respected news organizations, and to incite harassment and threats against those who dare to report the truth.

But recently, we have witnessed something even more dangerous, the merging of Trump's personal vendettas with the official powers of the government.

So let's start with the facts. Trump and his allies' hatred for CBS and "60 Minutes" is no secret.

Trump has repeatedly attacked "60 Minutes" on his Truth Social account. Just 2 weeks ago, for example, he said that CBS should lose its license over its reporting—even though CBS, as a network, doesn't have a license.

He then told FCC Chairman Brendan Carr to "impose the maximum fines and punishment on CBS." Earlier in February, Trump called for "60 Minutes" to be "terminated."

Around the same time, Elon Musk got in on the action. Just a few days before Vice President VANCE traveled to Germany to accuse Europe of censoring conservatives, Musk called "60 Minutes" the "biggest liars in the world" and said its journalists "deserve a long prison sentence."

So let me repeat that. The richest man in the world, with limitless authority over the Federal Government, said that "60 Minutes" journalists "deserve a long prison sentence" over their editorial decision making. That is a terrifying statement. These comments aren't idle threats. They create an environment of intimidation and fear. They send a signal: Criticize us, and you will face not just public smears but potential legal jeopardy.

The goal is clear. Trump and his allies want to turn the hard-hitting, fact-intensive journalism at "60 Minutes" into "FOX and Friends," and at the same time, as Trump and his allies have unleashed a torrent of attacks against "60 Minutes," CBS's parent company, Paramount, has been seeking regulatory approval from the FCC for an \$8 billion merger.

Although this deal has serious implications for the entertainment industry, Trump and his right-wing allies instead viewed it as a point of leverage against the news media.

For months, the Trump FCC has made clear that favorable merger treatment will come at a cost: favorable coverage or, more precisely, less critical coverage of Donald Trump.

Most notably, Chairman Carr has made clear that a frivolous, politically motivated complaint against CBS over its editorial decision-making would be a consideration in the Paramount merger review.

In fact, just yesterday, Chairman Carr said, cryptically, that "all options are on the table" in its investigation into that frivolous complaint.

It is not hard to read between the lines. CBS's news reporting—and its reporting on Donald Trump—would impact the FCC review of the Paramount merger.

It is a message intended to reverberate far beyond CBS and far beyond "60 Minutes." The FCC has become the "Federal Censorship Commission," and "Federal Censorship Commission" Chairman Carr is ready, eager, and willing to carry out Trump's crusade against the news media.

This is not regulatory oversight. This is regulatory blackmail, and it places Paramount and CBS in a difficult spot: Succumb to Trump's wishes and compromise CBS's journalism or stand strong and face the wrath of the "Federal Censorship Commission."

This position is already leading to upheaval within the companies. Last week, executive producer Bill Owens, who had worked at "60 Minutes" for over two decades, resigned, citing concerns about his ability to make independent decisions.

On Sunday night, just 2 nights ago, in a closing 1-minute statement, "60

Minutes" journalist Scott Pelley reported on Owens' resignation and called out Paramount directly. The full story inside Paramount, CBS, and "60 Minutes" remains unclear, and Pelley made clear that Paramount has not killed any "60 Minutes" stories.

But it is difficult to ignore the timing. This is how modern censorship creeps into newsrooms. It doesn't require book burning or secret raids. It requires weaponizing existing government authority to pressure the multinational corporations with diverse financial interests that run storied programs like "60 Minutes."

This is a five-alarm fire for democracy. The free press is not just another stakeholder in our public discourse; it is the check on power. And when government officials use their power to intimidate the press, to manipulate newsrooms, and silence dissent, they are not just committing an ethical breach; they are committing an assault upon the First Amendment.

So let me be absolutely clear: The FCC should never condition a merger on favorable news coverage. History teaches us that censorship rarely begins with overt tyranny. It begins with small concessions, subtle pressures, and self-censorship born of fear. But it always ends the same way: with a citizenry less informed, a democracy less vibrant, and a government less accountable.

We cannot allow that to happen in the United States of America. We must remember that freedom of the press is not a partisan issue; it is an American issue. And we must have—and always have to have—the courage to stand up, to speak out, and to say: In this country, no President will dictate the truth.

That is the promise of the First Amendment. That is the promise of our democracy. And that is the promise that we must keep.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### NOMINATION OF WARREN STEPHENS

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, today, I urge my colleagues to confirm Warren Stephens to be our next U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom. President Trump could not have chosen a more qualified or well-suited person to lead the special relationship between our two nations.

Warren Stephens is a family man, a businessman, a philanthropist, and a patriot who is a pillar of his community and his family-owned financial firm, Stephens Inc.

Founded on a handshake by his father Jack and his uncle Witt, Warren become president and CEO of Stephens

when he was only 29 years old. In the four decades since, Warren has built a global presence for Stephens, including in London, where he has spent a considerable amount of time.

Warren's signature style of cordial, interpersonal, and dedicated leadership won him friends across America and the Atlantic, and, of course, in our home State of Arkansas.

For many years, Warren and his wife Harriet have also served our Arkansas community with their time, talents, and generosity. They led a major, multiyear fundraising campaign that transformed the Arkansas Arts Center into the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. Because of their tireless efforts and dynamic vision, the museum is now a place for neighbors, friends, and families to gather, learn, and enjoy amazing works of art.

Warren is also an active advocate for young generations of American students and athletes. Warren generously supports numerous universities and schools, including his alma mater, Washington and Lee, and the Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock.

Additionally, he is the chairman and founder of the Jackson T. Stephens Cup, which showcases collegiate golfers from NCAA Division I schools, historically Black colleges and universities, and the U.S. service academies on the Nation's preeminent golf courses.

I have had the privilege to know Warren and his family for a long time, and I can tell you that Warren has always wanted to serve his country. After decades of serving others in our Arkansas community, Warren now has answered the call to serve our country as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

He is the right person to lead our strong, special relationship with the United Kingdom. I am pleased to support his nomination, and I urge all of my colleagues to confirm Warren so he can get to work on this critical job.

#### WAIVING QUORUM CALLS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls with respect to the Stephens and Barrack nominations be waived.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

#### NOMINATION OF DAVID PERDUE

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in support of our friend David Perdue's nomination to be Ambassador to China. This is certainly one of the most important nominations and appointments that will come across this floor, and the President is to be commended for picking David Perdue for this position.

China, as we all know, is the largest, the most significant, probably the longest lasting foreign policy challenge that the United States of America has, and it is going to continue to be for some time.

Today, we have seen, over the last recent decades, China move from a third-world country to a near peer to the United States. Their economy is growing rapidly, and they have done it the old fashion way: They have stolen every good idea that we have and used it to their own devices, which has brought them to the challenging position they are in for the United States. And they are a very different country than the United States is.

The world, I think, is very quickly developing into a bipolar position, where, on the one hand, you have democracies and semi-democracies like the United States, made of up of free people, of capitalism, of free markets, of entrepreneurs, and of people who very much value human rights and value the individual way, ahead of the state. On the other hand, you have countries like China that are communist. They are socialists. They are not free market or capitalist motivated. And they have no regards for human rights. The best example of that is the genocide that they commit against the Uighur Muslims in China, and the world pretty much looks the other way while they do human rights abuses that are way over the top.

So, Senator Perdue—David—you have your work cut out for you. This is going to be a challenge as we go forward, particularly over the next 4 years.

In addition to that, China has done everything it can to infiltrate the United States. Most people in America have no understanding about the tremendous amount and the millions of dollars that the Chinese Government pumps into our colleges and universities here in the United States. I myself and others have long been trying to put a stop to this. No foreign government can come into our political system and use money to influence our political system, and yet a foreign government like China can go into our colleges and universities and pump in millions of dollars and use the influence of that money to influence the colleges and universities. We don't allow this in our political system because we don't want foreign influence in our political system, nor should we allow this kind of influence in the institutions that make up the education system for future Americans.

We need to put a stop to this, and all of us, I hope, will be glad to partner with our friend David Perdue as he confronts these issues from Beijing.

In this administration and in his first term, President Trump demonstrated that he will be tough on China. He has to be.

We need a strong leader like David Perdue at the front of our fight with the Chinese Government to execute on President Trump's vision, and I hope my colleagues will join me today in supporting Mr. Perdue to be Ambassador to China.

Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that we commence the vote on the nomination.