

In nations around the world that I have visited on your behalf as a Senator, people yearning for freedom and people recently free have come and spoken about how much the American example means to them.

Earlier this year, I was at a global security conference, concerned about what was happening in our Nation, about our division in the dialogue, and I heard three young parliamentarians from other countries talk about how hard they were working.

Part of our job as Senators is to ask hard questions. It is to pose challenges. It is to test the Cabinet of the President, to visit Federal facilities, to ask questions that are sometimes uncomfortable or unwelcome. Just this week, I was at three committee hearings and had three members of the Cabinet in front of me. Did they want to answer my questions? Probably not, but they did.

If a Senator of the United States who identifies himself as a Senator—in at least the video I just saw—gets handled this way, gets thrown to the ground and handcuffed, what is happening to those who have no such title or voice? If this gentle and decent and caring man is treated this way, what is happening along the margins in the dark spaces in the places we cannot see?

So I call on my Republican friends and colleagues to look hard at this moment and say: What comes next? What comes next? Are we to be at risk of arrest if we threaten to ask a question or deign to interrupt? Is our very service here as Senators hanging in the balance in this moment? As we all learn more of the facts of what happened in Los Angeles, the future of what will happen here in our country and in the world will wait on your answer.

Was this an overresponse? Was this a misuse of force? Was this a disrespect of the very Senate itself? Is this a moment when, as our Founders who wrote the Federalist Papers dreamed, my colleagues in the Senate will show their loyalty to the role, to the check and balance, to the independence of the Senate, more than they will show their loyalty to their party and their President and demand an answer, an apology, and a different path forward? Or is this a moment when all of us will watch this video of our friend—a member of the Judiciary Committee, a representative, a Senator of Los Angeles and the State of California—being roughly mishandled and say: Huh, too bad. At least it wasn't me.

If we answer this moment with silence, we will be damned, and our children and the world will say: They didn't really mean it.

The members of my family who served in the U.S. military knew that signing on that line meant being willing to give everything, and I believe and have been told that they understood that service to be in service of freedom—not in service of any particular President or party, any particular State or moment, but in service of democracy.

Democracy is a fragile flower, and around the world, people look to what we do to know what they should do. There are petty, tin-pot dictators, authoritarians, and strongmen around the world who will watch this video and be encouraged and think this is the way to silence their critics.

I can't image a Member of this Chamber who knows ALEX PADILLA, who has had the blessing of sitting with him in moments when he is asked questions or engaged in discourse, who thinks of him as anything other than a reasoned, reasonable, mild-mannered Senator. But even if he were not, even if he were outspoken, loud, aggressive, annoying, the title "Senator" and the role we have should entitle him to ask a question at a press conference. If the result is this mistreatment, heaven help us all, and heaven help our democracy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from New Jersey.

ALEX PADILLA

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I want to thank the Chair.

Clearly, the voices of my colleagues and I are calling this what it is, which is a crossroads for this body.

One of our Members—it matters not what their party—who was in their State was forcibly removed when he was asking for accountability from the executive branch. He was taken out of that room forcibly by multiple men, who then—even when he identified himself, even when he was pulled out of that room, he was then forced to the ground, pushed upon his face, his hands wrenched behind his back, and he was put in restraints.

This is a crossroads for this body. This is not a partisan issue; it is one about who we are as a body. Will we let the abuses of the executive branch physically take a Member of this body and drive them to the ground and put them in restraints?

And why? Why? Well, we are starting to get answers already. Here is Tricia McLaughlin, who is the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. This is her statement.

Senator PADILLA chose disrespectful political theatre and interrupted a live press conference without identifying himself or having his Senate security pin on as he lunged toward Secretary Noem.

Mr. PADILLA was told repeatedly to back away and did not comply with officers' repeated commands. @SecretService thought he was an attacker and officers acted appropriately.

The statement concludes that:

Secretary Noem met with Senator PADILLA after and held a 15 minute meeting.

We know this is not true because we hear with our own ears on the tape Senator PADILLA identifying himself; further "disrespectful political theatre" is not a justification to remove a U.S. Senator in their own State at a public press conference and violently

push them out of the room, drive them to the ground, put them on their stomach, and handcuff them.

Disrespectful behavior? This is our democracy. You have a right to speak up. You have a right to free speech. You have a right to stand and do the job that you swore an oath in this Chamber to do, to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America. And one of your jobs is to provide a check and a balance to the administration. One of your jobs is to give accountability to the administration.

I know the other 99 Members of this body, and if disrespectful behavior is a justification for violent reprisal from the administration, how many Members of this body—how many Members of this body—would be subjected to that?

This is a farce of a justification and, therefore, we are at a crossroads. Will my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—will my Republican colleagues—justify the treatment of one of the Members of this body, justify the violence against one of the Members of this body, justify a Member of this body being thrown upon the ground and put in handcuffs—for what? For disrespectful behavior.

If you think it stops with one, you are inviting it for the all because it does not. You are inviting it for every Member of this body.

If the Obama administration or the Biden administration said that a Senator on the other side of the aisle was being disrespectful and threw that Senator violently onto the ground and put him into handcuffs, this body would be full of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle condemning what the Biden Justice Department did or the Obama Justice Department.

This should not be about partisanship; this should be about patriotism. This should not be about tribalism; it should be standing up and being a leader in this moment.

This is wrong. This violence is wrong.

But let me be more personal. I tried to understand why this particularly upset me, and I think my colleague from Delaware spoke to that because of ALEX PADILLA's reputation in this body of being a kind and gentle person. We all know him, the goodness and the decency that he has. He is not one of the louder Senators. He is not one of the performative Senators. He has a reputation, as my colleague from Delaware said, on both sides of the aisle for being a gentle man.

But I think what was really hard for me to see was that a Member of this body was driven to his knees and made to kneel before authorities. That is what got me. I think when I saw him driven to his knees forcibly, something there got me.

You see, we know ALEX PADILLA's story. It is an unusual story for this body. His family came here as Mexican immigrants. His father was a short-order cook. His mother cleaned homes. They did those jobs that don't always

come with esteem or respect. They did those jobs where, when people see them, they sometimes look down on them. They did those jobs that are often marginalized despite their dignity.

They raised their son to serve. He went to MIT. They raised their son to work hard, to show grit, to rise. They got to watch their son become a city councilperson in L.A. They got to watch their son ascend to be the secretary of state for California. They got to watch their son come to this body.

And this son of Mexican immigrants who cleaned homes and served food, this man with equal dignity in this body, today, was driven violently to his knees as if made to kneel before the authority of the executive because he was so-called disrespectful. That should offend the consciousness, not just of the other 99 Members of this body, it should offend the conscience of this country because if you can make ALEX PADILLA forcibly kneel before this executive, when does it stop?

He is a U.S. Senator. And if you can force him to kneel to his knees violently, when does it stop? What does it say to other Americans who want to speak up? What does it say to other Americans that want to exercise their constitutional duty? What does it say to other Americans this weekend when they want to peacefully protest? What does it say to other Americans from humble backgrounds who know poverty, that if a U.S. Senator who stands up to do his job can be made to heel, driven to his knees, violently handcuffed, what does it say? What message does it send?

Everybody in this body should see that this is a crossroads. They treated a Member of the U.S. Senate violently after he identified himself; dragged him out of the room, threw him upon the ground, and put him in handcuffs. Every Member of this body should object to that. Why? Because the statement was that he was disrespectful. That is unacceptable. That is offensive. That is un-American.

So why is there silence right now? Why aren't my colleagues saying—I don't care if it is a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent, when you drive a man to his knees in the United States of America, that is wrong, that is wrong, that is wrong. This is a test. This is a crossroads. This is a day in which the character of this body will be defined.

ALEX PADILLA, a man of infinite decency, generosity of spirit, who, whether you disagree with him or not, is so well-liked in this body, who today, in a time of understandable outrage in Los Angeles, went to be with his constituents to get answers. And when he walked into a room and saw a Cabinet Secretary and raised his voice to ask questions, he was met with violence. They heaped upon him indignities. They drove him to his knees and then to his face and they put him in cuffs.

Well, they didn't just assault the physicality of ALEX PADILLA, they did

not succeed in assaulting his dignity. I know he rose off that ground with the same dignity he had before they threw him upon it. What they assaulted today is the dignity of this body. What is in question now is a truth of who we are and what we stand for.

This is an abuse of power. This is a violent act unjustifiably taken on a Member of this body. The question is, Who will we be as a Senate? The question is, How will we respond? Will we defend this institution or will we yield to the tactics of authoritarian, violent leaders?

I see my colleague here from Maryland. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

ALEX PADILLA

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I thank my friend and colleague from New Jersey.

It is hard to contain my emotion appropriately on the Senate floor. This is a moment that every American should be outraged about, and every American should be angry, and not only angry about what happened to Senator PADILLA but fearful for our democracy because we are at a crossroads when it comes to the rule of law and respect for our democracy and our Constitution in the United States of America.

I felt compelled to cancel the rest of my meetings this evening to come right here to the floor to join my colleagues in speaking out, not just for a fellow Senator but for the future of the rule of law and due process in the United States of America.

I had to rewind that video three or four times to see if this was really happening. And I saw the earlier video come out of him being, essentially, dragged out of the room, roughed up, and then the other video of him lying on his stomach, handcuffed with people standing around him.

Then the lies went out that the Senator from New Jersey just mentioned. I am reading this statement from the Department of Homeland Security:

Senator PADILLA chose disrespectful political theatre and interrupted a live press conference without identifying himself.

That is a lie. Just look at the video. You can see him coming in and saying: I am Senator PADILLA, the senior Senator from California. He wanted to ask a question. We all have a lot of questions. He is a U.S. Senator, he should be able to ask a question about what is happening in his State of California.

You know, we had the President of the United States, just a few weeks ago in response to a question, saying he wasn't sure if he had to comply with the Constitution of the United States. The President of the United States who is sworn to take an oath to uphold the Constitution said he wasn't sure if he had to comply with the Constitution. You have senior administration officials like Steve Miller talking about suspending habeas corpus in the United

States of America. Habeas corpus is the core to due process that makes sure that people cannot be deprived of their liberty without a fair trial and a fair hearing.

And here we have ALEX PADILLA going in to ask a question, and he is tackled; he is roughed up; he is dragged out of the room; he is put on the floor and handcuffed. This is a President who also the other day, when asked if he would arrest the Governor of California or whether his people should arrest the Governor of California, he said: Yeah, I think maybe they should.

Think about that.

This is an administration that arrested the mayor of a major city. This is lawless behavior from this administration. This is what a dictatorship looks like. This is what happens when one person tries to grab all the power, when they say: I don't know if I have to comply with the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution of the United States is designed to have checks and balances. It is designed to make sure that our liberties are protected. The Bill of Rights protects all of us. And yet you see the President of the United States and his henchmen and his henchwomen trampling over due process, trampling over the First Amendment in the country, and trampling on a U.S. Senator from California who said: Madam Secretary, I have a question.

I am looking forward to hearing about what question Senator PADILLA wanted to ask because I know Senator PADILLA, and I know he had a good question to ask of the Secretary of Homeland Security, but he didn't get a chance. This is a press conference. The Secretary of Homeland Security is taking questions. The U.S. Senator representing the people of that State elected to represent the people of that State had a question. He didn't get to ask it because he was dragged out of the room and thrown on the floor and arrested. I want to know what that question was going to be, and I know that Senator PADILLA will tell us. We will probably find out then why the Secretary of Homeland Security didn't want to hear the question, because this administration wants to shut down questions except from the journalists that they like. They belittle journalists who ask them any question that they see as critical. That is also what authoritarian leaders do; they push aside people who ask hard but meaningful questions and just call on the people who will ask them the softball question.

You have already seen this at play at the Oval Office during press conferences, the President will say: Oh, I like that reporter. Oh, that is a terrible question. What he means is, it is a question that he doesn't like. And, usually, the question he doesn't like are questions that are right on target and go to the heart of what is happening in our country.