

He said beatings were the worst when he was transferred. After arriving at a penitentiary in Russia's Tver region north of Moscow, he was led into a medical examination room and ordered to strip. Guards shocked him repeatedly with a stun gun while shaving his head and beard. When it was over, he was told to yell "Glory to Russia! Glory to the Special Forces!" and then, still naked, he was ordered to sing the Russian and Soviet—and Soviet—national anthems. When he said he didn't know the words, the guards beat him with fists and batons.

This is hard to read, but what did the former guards say—Russian citizens—who thankfully have been willing to defect and come forward and tell the truth about the vicious, brutal, illegal regime of Vladimir Putin?

The former guards described a staggering level of violence directed at Ukrainian prisoners. Electric shockers were used often, especially in showers; that officers complained they were running out of batteries too fast. Can't do this anymore because the batteries have gone dead. The guards used police batons until they broke. Officers tested other materials, including insulated hot water pipes, for their ability to cause pain and damage.

This is Putin's Russia. This is the regime that some people are hoping we can somehow negotiate with in good faith and depend on them to keep up their end of the bargain.

The guards intentionally beat the prisoners at the same spot on their bodies every day, preventing bruises from healing and causing infection, and at least one person died of sepsis because of this type of brutality.

The guards enjoyed their brutality. According to these Russians who were guards at the facility and who defected rather than countenance what their own government was doing, Ukrainian former POW Andriy Yegorov recalled how guards at a prison in Russia would force prisoners to run 100 yards through the hallway, holding mattresses above their heads. The guards stood to the side and beat them on the ribs as they ran by. When they got to the end of the hall, they would be forced to do sit-ups and push-ups, and each time they came up, the guards would punch them or hit them with a baton.

I would say to my colleagues that this is not a bunch of prison guards gone rogue; this is a bunch of prison guards in Vladimir Putin's dictatorship and Vladimir Putin's illegal regime that were following orders from a high-ranking major general.

There are differences about the United States' interest in Ukraine, but I will tell you that the countries around Ukraine—in the neighborhood—know what they are facing, and they know, if Vladimir Putin succeeds in his illegal war to take over a neighbor, that it will not be the end of it. One can only listen to what we are hearing out of neighboring countries—out of

the Republic of Georgia, out of neighboring Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Russia intends and the war criminal Vladimir Putin intends to return to as much of the old Soviet Union dictatorship as he possibly can.

I hope this war ends. Frankly, I have hoped for 3 years under the Biden administration that that administration would provide the freedom fighters inside their own country to have the necessary equipment, the necessary ammunition, the necessary permission to defeat this illegal invasion. But I simply, at this point, want to alert anyone who is listening—my colleagues, anyone who is listening to the sound of my voice in any way—to the reality of the utter cruelty, of the unspeakable conditions that Russia uses in violation of every international law.

If Vladimir Putin comes to the negotiating table and agrees to a cease-fire, we need to bear in mind that he is the gentleman who has countenanced this outrage that I have barely been able to speak about today. Any negotiations we have with the Russians and with the current leadership need to be done in light of the facts as outlined in this independent report.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise to oppose the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard to be Director of National Intelligence.

In its first few days in office, the Trump administration has been remarkably cavalier and incompetent in its handling of our national security affairs—shutting off foreign aid; threatening Panama, Greenland, and Canada; calling for the mass deportation of Palestinians from Gaza. And just last week, it was reported that the CIA sent an unclassified email, listing all employees it had hired over the last 2 years, in order to comply with an Executive order from President Trump. One former Agency officer called this a "counterintelligence disaster."

The President's choices to lead our national security Agencies have also not inspired confidence.

The Director of National Intelligence, or DNI, serves a critical role in leading the intelligence community and in collecting analysis so that the President, Congress, and decision-makers across the U.S. Government have the best and most timely information for our national security. Indeed, the office was created after 9/11 to better coordinate analysis across the intelligence community. The position of DNI requires someone of great experience, character, judgment, and the confidence to speak truth to power, especially when the findings of the intelligence community differ from the policy objectives of the administration.

While I respect Ms. Gabbard's military service, including overseas deployments, she does not have a demonstrated record of experience to qual-

ify her to lead the intelligence community. As DNI, she would oversee 18 different organizations, tens of thousands of military and civilian personnel, and an annual budget of more than \$100 billion. She has never even served in an intelligence role, much less led a global intelligence enterprise.

More concerning than Ms. Gabbard's lack of experience is her record of erratic statements and actions, many of which have run counter to the interests and findings of the intelligence community.

In 2020, Ms. Gabbard and Congressman Matt Gaetz cosponsored a resolution calling on the Federal Government to drop all charges against Edward Snowden. Snowden was a contractor who was indicted for espionage and for publicly releasing the details of some of our most sensitive intelligence efforts, including those that were conducted jointly with foreign allies and partners, before Snowden fled to Russia.

Former Deputy DNI Sue Gordon responded to Ms. Gabbard's defense of Snowden by saying:

It reflects a lack of understanding of who we are, and it reflects a lack of respect for what we do. Unauthorized disclosures of intelligence are always bad. Don't go with the good or bad, any good outcome or whether he was right or wrong. . . . He not only harmed intelligence, he harmed our allies and partners, and he harmed our businesses by what it allowed China to assume about that. There is nothing justifiable about what he's done. None.

Let me be clear: Edward Snowden's betrayal has cost American lives. He is a traitor by every definition of the word.

As the chairman of the Intelligence Committee, Senator COTTON, has said in the past, Mr. Snowden is an "egotistical, serial liar and traitor whose unauthorized disclosures of classified information have jeopardized the safety of Americans and allies around the world. Snowden's close and continual contact with Russian intelligence services speak volumes. He deserves to rot in jail for the rest of his life."

Yet, during her confirmation hearing, Ms. Gabbard was repeatedly asked whether or not she believed that Snowden was a traitor. I think colleagues on both sides of the aisle were stunned that she not only refused to do so but that she continued to defend him.

Our national security leaders consistently emphasize that the greatest advantage we have over our adversaries is our network of allies and partners, including those who share intelligence with us. If Ms. Gabbard is confirmed as DNI, I have serious concerns about whether or not our allies and partners will trust her with their nations' most sensitive intelligence given her past actions.

I am also concerned about the pattern of statements over the years by Ms. Gabbard peddling what the intelligence community has found to be Russian propaganda.

For example, at the outset of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, as eloquently described by the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Ms. Gabbard stated:

This war and suffering could have easily been avoided if [the] Biden administration [and] NATO had simply acknowledged Russia's legitimate security concerns regarding Ukraine's becoming a member of NATO, which would mean U.S. [and] NATO forces right on Russia's border.

After Ukraine bravely withstood Russia's initial assault, the Kremlin began a campaign of misinformation designed to legitimize its illegal war. These themes were repeatedly amplified by Gabbard in her public comments, including with respect to the widely disputed Russian allegation of a U.S.-funded covert biological weapons program in Ukraine.

As our former colleague Mitt Romney tweeted at the time she made these bogus claims, "Tulsi Gabbard is parroting false Russian propaganda. Her treasonous lies may well cost lives."

In reviewing Ms. Gabbard's statements, the New York Times found:

Ms. Gabbard honed her pro-Russia views on [Tucker] Carlson's show on FOX News before his program was canceled. She became a regular guest and occasionally filled in as host when Mr. Carlson was away.

Clips from her appearances on Mr. Carlson's show that repeated Kremlin talking points were quickly picked up by Russian state media.

In some cases, she echoed story lines that Russia's propagandists created, which the Russians then recycled on their own media as evidence that the conspiracy theories they had manufactured were true. For the Kremlin, it was a virtuous cycle.

Ms. Gabbard has been roundly and appropriately criticized for her unannounced 2017 trip to Syria, where she met with Syria's then-President Bashar al-Assad. She justified that trip by saying:

We've got to be able to meet with anyone that we need to if there's a possibility that we could achieve peace.

Ms. Gabbard's decision to carry out an unofficial trip to Syria in the midst of a civil war—a conflict in which Bashar al-Assad was using chemical weapons against his own people—showed incredibly poor judgment. Her visit did nothing to advance the cause of peace but, rather, helped to legitimize Assad's brutal dictatorship.

Just months later, Ms. Gabbard criticized President Trump's decision to use military force to deter further chemical weapons use by Assad and even expressed skepticism about whether Assad had actually used chemical weapons.

Madam President, it would be the height of charity to say that Ms. Gabbard has consistently demonstrated poor judgment on critical national security matters, but it is more than just that. Ms. Gabbard clings to her misjudgments even when she is shown to be wrong. That is a disturbing character flaw for this critical role.

Above all else, the DNI must be unquestionably loyal to our national interests and trustworthy with our national secrets. The intelligence they control has life-or-death consequences.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle—some of whom have indicated great discomfort with Ms. Gabbard and her troubling disregard for America's security interests—appear willing to vote for her confirmation despite their misgivings.

At this critical moment, all Senators must honestly answer these questions: Given everything you know about Tulsi Gabbard, do you trust her with life-or-death national secrets? Can you look members of our intelligence community in the eye and say that you believe Tulsi Gabbard will serve and protect them and this Nation?

I have seen enough to know my answer, and I urge my colleagues to vote against this nominee.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. President, I rise today as a very new Senator, a freshman Senator, to talk about the confirmation prospects for the nominee for the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard.

I think context matters here. I am the first CIA officer to ever be elected to the U.S. Senate. Before I ran for office in Michigan, I had a career in national security. I am what is called a 9/11 baby. I happened to be in New York City on my second day of graduate school when 9/11 happened. It changed my life. I decided to go into national security.

I got recruited by the CIA right out of grad school and then was quickly sent on my first of three tours in Iraq alongside the military, providing intelligence to the U.S. military to deal with the groups that were shooting at U.S. forces and plotting against the U.S. homeland.

I worked in national security roles very proudly in both administrations, Democratic and Republican. I worked in the White House for George W. Bush, and I was there the Friday that he left office and the Monday that Barack Obama walked in. I did the same job for two very different Presidents, one for each party. I went on to be a Pentagon Assistant Secretary of Defense. But in between all of that time, one of the things I got to do was help stand up the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

I was the intelligence briefer in Baghdad for Ambassador John Negroponte, who was the first Ambassador to Iraq under the Bush adminis-

tration. I would provide him intelligence briefings early, early in the morning.

One day, he came back from a trip to Washington and said: I am going to be nominated to be the first Director of National Intelligence. It is this completely new position. It is a position that has been created because of the failures of 9/11, our failures to anticipate the attacks of 9/11, to put the pieces together between the FBI, the CIA, the military, all those who had a piece of the story but didn't have a place and a venue to combine it all together to anticipate the most devastating attacks on the U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor.

I came home and happened to be one of those first employees to set up the Director of National Intelligence. I think I was employee No. 5. I was John Negroponte's first special assistant. So I was his, you know, body person, helping him set up that office.

So when I talk about the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard, I don't do it willy-nilly. I don't do it without a background on these topics. And I believe that the people who should be taking the positions that are critical for national security should be people of competence and character.

What does the Director of National Intelligence do? The Office was created, as I said, to combine all of the different threads of information at the 17 different intelligence community Agencies that we have to prevent intelligence failures like we had on 9/11.

This is a serious position. This is a position that in the past has been in the Oval Office every morning with the intelligence briefings provided by the Agencies. This is the position that in the dead of night makes consequential decisions on the security and safety of people here.

Most Americans have no idea the number of threats we still thwart every single month against our homeland. We sleep well at night because the intelligence community is working together to prevent those threats, along with our partners and our allies and our military.

So, for me, I want to know that the person who is going to be woken up in the middle of the night to make those last-minute decisions—do we move on that intelligence? do we act based on that threat?—that they are someone, again, of competence and character, and what I have seen from Ms. Gabbard does not meet that threshold.

She has, first of all, repeatedly questioned the integrity of the intelligence community. She has gone after the intelligence community that she hopes to lead.

She has labeled tens of thousands of intelligence personnel as deep state without even a semblance of understanding of what they do every day to keep her safe.

She has questioned the findings of the intelligence community.

I think more egregious than anything, she has shown a repeated preference for our adversaries over the intelligence community and the United States of America. Most notably, a surprise trip to visit the now-ousted President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad.

Imagine the decision making that goes into planning a secret trip to visit a man who has killed thousands of his countrymen, thousands of relatives of Michiganders that I represent; a man who we know has used chemical weapons, violating international law, devastating communities; a man who has seemingly sat aside as insurgent groups, terrorist groups took territory in his area and allowed them to project attacks into neighboring states and to plot against the U.S. homeland.

She makes the decision to go and visit this man, throw flowers at his feet, do public TV with him, go publicly and show her support. Now, I don't know if she is just deeply naive. I don't know if in some twisted way, she thought that this was her way of being helpful. But whether she did it out of naivete or she did it knowing what this man has done and the implications of her actions, either way shows a complete lack of judgment.

The same goes for her seeming glorification of Vladimir Putin. It is hard to understand, coming from the country that defeated the Soviet Union in the Cold War, that we would put a woman in charge of our entire intelligence community who has shown over and over repeated interest in Vladimir Putin, taking his side of the argument, wondering what he has done right and our intelligence community has done wrong.

Can you imagine what it feels like to be a member of the intelligence community right now, with everything going on, with all of the discrediting of what they have done and what they do every single day, and now this woman is going to be in charge of this Agency? It is an insult to people who have dedicated their lives and put themselves in harm's way, to have her confirmed into this position.

Now, we have watched her flip-flop on a bunch of issues, right? Issues that Democrats and Republicans have concerns with. You know, she used to have a lot of concern about what is called section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. She fought against it. Now she is somehow for it. I am not saying people can't change, but I am just saying someone who doesn't have the backbone to stand up and be clear with their principles—I am having a hard time imagining them lead in the heat of the moment, when you are in the Situation Room and consequential decisions are being made.

I think the feeling that I have about where we are in this country right now is that we are sort of in this fever dream. There is this race to discredit, to attack, to cut. And, look, I will be the first person to say that there is fat on the bone in the Federal Govern-

ment. I worked in the Federal Government. There are plenty of things that can be reformed in the Federal Government. But the double whammy of attacking the people who keep us safe every day, of trying to push them out—I just had a Republican Member on my way here say: Hey, I just heard about what is going on at CIA. Are they trying to get everyone to leave? What about people who are in sensitive positions?

Great question. But the other punch is to put someone in charge of the intelligence community that has such disdain for our allies, for our intelligence officers, and such love for our adversaries.

So I urge all of my Republican colleagues to search their soul. Play the long game. Don't live in fear of the Trump administration and Donald Trump specifically. You know in your heart that these people aren't qualified and that the life and limb of American citizens is in their hands.

So I urge all of my colleagues to vote against Tulsi Gabbard. I will be voting against her here later today.

I hope that we as American citizens can come up for air from this fever dream and remember that reform of the Federal Government does not mean slashing the people that keep us safe every day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

KIDS OFF SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss an epidemic that is affecting our Nation's youth, a crisis each and every parent should be concerned about and one that so many parents I know already are.

Our kids' worsening mental health is an emergency, and it is an emergency clearly and undeniably linked to social media. Emergency room visits among adolescents for anxiety, mood disorders, and self-harm have all risen dramatically in the years since social media apps exploded onto the scene.

Over that same time period and during the second decade of this century, rates of depression amongst teenagers more than doubled. By 2019, 20 percent of teenagers agreed with the notion that "life often feels meaningless"—almost a 100-percent increase from a decade earlier.

According to the CDC, in 2021, and buckle up for this, one in three high school—young women said she actually considered death by suicide; 25 percent of teenage girls made a plan to do so; 9 percent of high schoolers and 13 percent of teenage girls actually attempted death by suicide.

As a mom, that is beyond horrifying. I worry for my own kids. I worry for their friends. And as a Senator, I worry about the future of the next generation of Americans.

To make matters worse, social media companies know the harm their platforms create. Instagram's parent company, Meta, conducted internal re-

search that showed that one-third of teenage girls who use the app report: It makes them feel worse, but they cannot stop.

And while social media companies have taken some steps, it is clear that there is work for Congress to do. The last time a U.S. President signed a major piece of legislation addressing children and the internet was—wait for it—1998.

So you look. Almost 30 years ago, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act was signed into law. For reference, at the time that the law was signed, MySpace didn't even exist.

It is time for an update, and there is a clear place to start. Studies have shown the most damaging time for an adolescent to use social media is during their preteen years. And the 1998 law tried to address that. The law says that websites and other online services cannot collect personal information from children under 13 years old without parental consent. Now, the catch is that those websites have to know that the child is under 13.

The standard minimum age for social media platforms is 13. But current law creates an obvious incentive for companies not to verify whether their users are old enough to be on the app. And because social media companies have to know that a child is under 13 for the law to apply, they simply choose not to verify this information.

Look, anti-child-sex-abuse organization Thorn actually conducted a study in 2021 that showed that 49 percent of respondents between the age of 9 and 12 years old said that they had used Instagram; 52 percent said that they had used Facebook; 58 percent said that they had used Snapchat.

And it was just last week, in a Senate Judiciary Hearing, where I heard not one but two parents tell about their painful story where their children had died of fentanyl poisoning from a pill that they had bought on Snapchat, thinking it was something else. They thought they bought a Percocet; they thought they bought an oxycodone. It was laced with fentanyl, and now they are dead.

Sixty-nine percent of these people in this survey, between 9 and 12 years old, said that they had used TikTok.

The age limits social media companies claim they have mean absolutely nothing. That is why I introduced the Kids Off Social Media Act, alongside Senators TED CRUZ, CHRIS MURPHY, and BRIAN SCHATZ. The four of us approached this not as Democrats or Republicans, not as someone who sits on the right or the left, but as four concerned parents that are raising teenagers right now and dealing with this issue.

Our bill would set a minimum age of 13 years old for social media platforms, but that is not the only thing that it would do. The Kids Off Social Media Act would also prevent platforms from feeding targeted content picked by an algorithm to users under the age of 17.