

So in these difficult days, when we find ourselves arrayed against the wealthiest people in the world, the most powerful people in the world, people who want to expand the power of the oligarchy, people who want to move us toward authoritarianism—I know. I know that people get discouraged that we can't take them on; that we cannot create a government that works for all and not just the few; that we cannot do what every other major country on Earth does—guarantee healthcare to all people as a human right—that we cannot raise the minimum wage to a living wage so that tens of millions of people do not earn starvation wages; that we cannot make sure that all of our kids get the quality education that they deserve; that we can't expand Social Security or lower the poverty rate among seniors. I know that, in this moment, people say: Well, that is an impossible dream; it can't be done.

But I think, if you look back on American history, you will find that, in very difficult and dark days, when people came together, they did the impossible.

This ain't going to be easy. We are taking on enormously powerful people who really do not believe in democracy or the rule of law. But if we stand together, we are going to win this fight. And not only will we save American democracy; we are going to create the kind of Nation that I think most of us know we should become.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, trust—trust is at the very center of our national security: the trust that we share with allies and partners around the world; the trust that the American people have in us and in our armed services and in our intelligence services; the trust that vital allies have that causes them to share with us information about threats, challenges, opportunities. That is the very foundation of our national security.

And today, I rise to warn my colleagues about the risks to our national security posed by the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard to be the Director of National Intelligence.

As ranking member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I have a significant involvement in our Nation's intelligence apparatus. And over the course of the confirmation hearings and the debate here on the floor about former Congresswoman Gabbard, I have concluded that she has an alarming record, revealed more fully in her confirmation hearings but also in a review of her speeches, her travels, her positions.

As a Democrat, as a Congresswoman, as a candidate for President, as a supporter of President Trump, she has gone quite a distance. She has defended Edward Snowden. Snowden is widely viewed by folks in our intelligence

community, our national security apparatus, our Armed Forces, and many here as a traitor who betrayed some of the most important secrets that are critical to keeping the United States secure.

She would not, in her confirmation hearings, answer the question: Is Edward Snowden a traitor?

Ms. Gabbard bemoaned the rise of HTS in Syria, which recently overthrew the brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad, without mentioning the fall of Assad. She talked about how tragic it was that HTS overran Damascus, without mentioning the side benefit of the fall of a brutal dictator. And in her confirmation hearings, she repeatedly dodged pointed and relevant questions about FISA and section 702, key tools for our intelligence community.

All of this is in keeping with a long-standing record as an apologist for authoritarians and even enemies of the United States. She has repeatedly blamed the United States and NATO for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

And I will tell you, as someone who is about to go to the Munich Security Conference this weekend with a broad and bipartisan delegation from this body and from the House: I will never forget being at the Munich Security Conference just before Russia invaded Ukraine broad spectrum. They had been in eastern Ukraine at that point for years. They had occupied Crimea and then launched a war into the Donetsk, the Donbas, the eastern part of Ukraine.

But it was just days after the Munich Security Conference, in February 2022, that tens of thousands of Russian troops—whole divisions—poured over the line in a broad-spectrum invasion that included brutality against civilians, bombardment of the entire nation—ultimately, cruel acts of violence against women and children, fully documented in the press and courts around the world.

And yet Ms. Gabbard blamed the United States and NATO for provoking this invasion by Russia of a sovereign nation—a nation where the United States, in writing, guaranteed its territorial sovereignty in the 1994 agreement that led to them giving up their nuclear weapons.

Ms. Gabbard visited Syria and met with Bashar al-Assad for several days, in 2017, and relied on pro-Assad sources to cast doubt on accounts of his use of chemical weapons against his own people.

She has a long history of repeating pro-Kremlin talking points and has become a favorite on Russian state media. She appears frequently because she frequently is attacking the United States in Russian state media.

Mr. President, this body will all too soon take up the confirmation of Tulsi Gabbard. We should not proceed. We should not vote for her. Our Nation faces massive threats that are growing day by day. Our Nation is facing

threats around the world—from North Korea and Iran, from China and from Russia—and we need an intelligence service equipped to respond to these challenges.

Can we trust Tulsi Gabbard to lead our intelligence services and to respond to these threats? I cannot. We cannot, and we should not. This body should not vote to confirm Tulsi Gabbard as the next Director of National Intelligence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, do you remember where you were on September 11? Most Americans do. I do. I was right outside that door. I was in a meeting at 9 in the morning. And as we had the meeting, we looked down the Mall. We were watching a little television set, and we saw these planes flying into skyscrapers in New York.

Nobody could quite understand what was going on. First, we thought it was an accident, as most people probably felt the same way. Then, when the second plane hit, we knew there was more.

Then, there came a moment when somebody said: Look down the Mall.

We looked down the Mall and saw black smoke billowing across the Mall here in Washington from the Pentagon, because a plane had crashed into the Pentagon.

And there was this moment where people didn't know which way to turn, where to get answers, what was going on. Someone came racing into the room and said: Evacuate the Capitol Building. Another plane is coming directed toward this building.

We all raced out down the steps and stood on the lawn outside, didn't know which way to turn, had no idea what was going on.

Tourists were coming up to me because I had a suit and tie on and saying: Where are we supposed to go?

I told them where the Metro stations were and pointed in several directions.

That is a day you won't forget.

Most of us, I am sure, felt at that point that we had to figure out what happened first and to stop it from ever happening again.

So where did we turn? First, we turned to law enforcement, for obvious reasons. That is who you call—9-1-1—to see if they can give you any information, give you any advice, keep you safe.

But also in this town, you think: We hope our intelligence Agencies, the ones that collect information, know who those people were so we can stop them from ever doing this again.

Those intelligence Agencies are critical, not just for the security of this country but the survival of this country.

In the wake of September 11, the most historic terrorist attack in our Nation's history, we learned the hard way that Agencies within the intelligence community need to be good, effective, and coordinate what they are doing. So we embarked on several

projects—and one that I was a small part of—in rewriting the laws creating intelligence Agencies and making sure that each of our intelligence Agencies, as good as they are, speak to one another.

It seems so obvious. They need to coordinate. But they had what they called smokestacks where they kept their information to themselves and didn't share it with other Agencies. Well, that changed. It changed the whole attitude towards intelligence and coordinating information.

We created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It oversees 18 different intelligence Agencies that span the CIA, Defense Department, State Department, Energy Department, and others. It is now essential to modern safety in America. Yet the President, Donald Trump, has selected a person to run this critical Agency, coordinating 18 different intelligence Agencies, who has little or no experience leading this critical American security apparatus. Her name is Tulsi Gabbard.

During President Trump's first term, he made clear of his fondness for certain leaders in the world that were controversial, such as Viktor Orban of Hungary, Vladimir Putin of Russia, and Kim Jong Un of North Korea. So he ends up picking a person to run his intelligence network who shares a similarly terrible judgment on critical leaders.

Tulsi Gabbard, a former Congresswoman, is infamous for spending time with despots and autocratic leaders of the world, including Vladimir Putin of Russia and Bashar al-Assad of Syria, and traitors to the United States like Edward Snowden.

Her fondness for these oppressive, anti-democratic regimes does not go unreciprocated. They know her, they like her, and they say quite a few things about her. Let me show you one of these posters.

Hosts of Russian state media have cheered her nomination. Russia is cheering her nomination as Director of National Intelligence because it will "dismantle America." Some on Russian state channels have even referred to her affectionately as their "girlfriend." Russian state TV also called her a Russian "comrade" in Trump's emerging Cabinet. A pro-Putin propagandist, Vladimir Solovyov, once called Gabbard "our friend." Later, when asked if she was "some sort of Russian agent?" he replied, of course, "yes."

What is going on here? This woman wants to head up the intelligence Agencies, and she is being cheered on by the Russians?

In a glowing profile in a Russian state newspaper, it said of Tulsi Gabbard, "The C.I.A. and F.B.I. are trembling," noting that Ukrainians consider her "an agent of the Russian state."

Imagine that—the person tapped to head America's intelligence commu-

nity being called a puppet of an adversary's country by that very same country. It seems too ridiculous to be true, but I am sorry to say that it is.

To merely join America's intelligence community, never mind lead it, candidates have to go through a vigorous background check and earn a security clearance. I will just tell you that based on what she has done since serving in Congress, she could not pass a routine security clearance. If Tulsi Gabbard were applying for an entry-level position, her relationship with Russia alone would disqualify her for the job. Why, then, would we trust our entire intelligence network to the No. 1 friend of our No. 1 enemy? Why, then, would we want to put that sort of person in charge?

Given the examples that abound of Tulsi Gabbard proving publicly, shamelessly, and carelessly her sympathies for nations that undermine U.S. interests and security, that is unexplainable and irresponsible.

Perhaps this is summed up best by one of her people who worked with her for years. Here is what he had to say, according to *The Atlantic* magazine:

She was willing to do or say whatever. It was [like] she had [absolutely] no moral compass.

And to head up all of our intelligence Agencies? It is as controversial as choosing Kash Patel to head up our Federal Bureau of Investigation—no experience which qualifies him, nor does she have any experience either.

You see, our allies depend on us as much as we depend on them for security and to share critical intelligence. Now they are looking at us in disbelief that we would let someone like Tulsi Gabbard, with such an appalling record, anywhere near the leadership of the intelligence community.

Intelligence professionals from Canada and the United Kingdom—members of the critical Five Eyes intelligence alliance along with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—have expressed concern about even working with her if she is in charge. In order to keep Americans safe throughout the world, we need to have the trust of our allies and their cooperation.

This position she is aspiring to at DNI does not just impact the collection of intelligence; it also impacts the action taken on it. Because of this, I have great concern about the impact Tulsi Gabbard's confirmation would have on our support of Ukraine in defending itself against Russia.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Gabbard has taken Russia's side many times, claiming, in reference to Ukraine and Russia, "Russia had legitimate security concerns." The words of Tulsi Gabbard. And then she blames NATO, our alliance—one of the most significant security alliances in the world.

Let me be clear. Supporting democracies has not historically been a partisan matter. For example, contrast Tulsi Gabbard's nonsense with former

President Ronald Reagan's clear-eyed understanding of the danger of the communist Russia empire.

Nearly 40 years ago, Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin and famously challenged the Soviet Union to "tear down this wall." Reagan understood the true nature and threat of the Russians.

We have all seen the horrific costs of Russia's war in Ukraine and increasing attacks on NATO allies. Is there a deal to be made to end this war? Perhaps. Doing so must be with the best intelligence available, a clear eye about who we are negotiating with and for, and long-term guarantees of the security of Ukraine, of Europe, and the transatlantic alliance.

One would think any American President navigating such difficult waters would want a top official to serve as the head of National Intelligence. Tulsi Gabbard fails that test. She would not be qualified for an entry-level position within the intelligence community and is certainly not qualified to lead it, period.

Some of the President's Cabinet nominees are hard to imagine because they are so unqualified, but for the position of Director of National Intelligence, putting someone unqualified in charge is not funny at all; it is life-or-death dangerous.

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. WELCH. 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 Vermont.

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I want to speak about what Elon Musk is doing to destroy the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Here is what is happening. Mr. Musk—of course an unelected billionaire who knows really nothing and cares less about how the Federal Government works—is demolishing one of the most important Agencies we have for countering Russia, China authoritarianism, and anti-American extremism around the world, all being done in the name of "efficiency."

One former State Department official said:

Disbanding U.S. aid is the strategic equivalent of scuttling the Navy.

Mr. Musk bragged about feeding USAID into a wood chipper. What he is really doing, after locking USAID's staff out of their offices and blocking their access to email, is destroying the careers of thousands of professionals who administer programs that are critical to U.S. national security, not to mention the well-being of their families.

I want to acknowledge something. Many Americans ask me and they ask