

A couple more headlines that NPR is putting out there using your tax dollars. This headline:

Monuments and Teams Have Changed Names—

Let me say it again.

Monuments and Teams—

Presumably sports teams—

have Changed Names as America Reckons With Racism. Birds Are Next.

I don't know any birds that are racist.

Here is another headline:

Eating less beef is a climate solution.

I don't have anything against vegetarians. I am a semivegetarian myself. I eat beef, and cows eat grass. So that makes me a semivegetarian, but that is my choice.

Not on NPR.

Eating less beef is a climate solution. Here is why that is hard for some American men.

Here is a final headline. I could go on the rest of the evening.

How the Taliban adds to Afghanistan's woes when it comes to climate-fueled disasters.

Boy, I can tell you that is on the mind of every person in Afghanistan today, is climate change—and the Taliban, I can guarantee you.

I don't have a problem with these headlines. This is America. If you want to publish articles like this—which no person with a brain above a single-cell organism would call fair and balanced—if you are a news outlet and you want to publish this kind of stuff, that is your right as an American. We have freedom of the press. We have the First Amendment. You are not free in our country if you can't say what you think. You are not free in our country if you can't express yourself.

I am all for this if that is what these outlets want to do, but I am not for taking \$500 million every single year and giving it to these stations to the exclusion of everybody else so they can do it. That is immoral. That is illegal, as far as I am concerned—or should be.

Now, I am sure that there is an audience in some campus coffee shop that wants to learn about racist birds or the different ways in which cheeseburgers and the Taliban are contributing to climate change. But most American taxpayers would probably prefer that Congress spend their money on something other than these controversial points of view that appeal to only a small segment of America's population while the rest of us foot the bill.

Now, that is not just my opinion; a former editor at NPR, someone by the name of Uri Berliner, Mr. Berliner—he used to be an editor at NPR. He published a column last year, and in the column, he outlined the extreme bias at NPR. He detailed how NPR decided to censor the Hunter Biden laptop story. They wouldn't run stories about it; they said it wasn't real.

Mr. Berliner, the former editor at NPR, said that NPR told its readers:

We don't want to waste our time on stories that are not really stories, and we don't

want to waste the listeners' and readers' time on stories that are just pure distractions.

The Hunter Biden laptop is real. The FBI has it. It is there at the FBI Headquarters bigger than Dallas. Of course, we now know that the laptop was not just a distraction. Every bit of it was real. But NPR censored it using American taxpayer money.

NPR also similarly covered the COVID-19 lab leak theory as though it was a conspiracy. That is how the news coverage reads, in my opinion, that if you believe that COVID-19 originated from a lab leak, you are a conspiracy theorist.

I would point out that we are going to have to get some new conspiracy theories in America because all the old ones turned out to be true. The conspiracy theorists are up something like 37 to nothing—but not if you read NPR. They say or said that the COVID-19 lab leak theory—you had to be some kind of cone head, some kind of meathead, some kind of whack job to believe in that stuff. Now the Federal Government, the CIA, the FBI—they have stated publicly that the pandemic likely originated from—what?—a lab leak. I can't make this stuff up.

Now, other independent analysts have shown that NPR's content also leans left, and that is fine. As I say, that is fine. Many Americans lean left. I have got a lot of friends who lean left. I lean left on some issues. I think it is great. But I will tell you what isn't great: having American taxpayers spend half a billion dollars a year to fund a news service that, in turn, we all have to pay for. That is not right.

Since 1970, the U.S. Congress has given NPR more than \$14.5 billion. With all those taxpayer dollars, the NPR bought a \$201 million office space just up the road from the Capitol. It is swell office space, 200 million bucks' worth. NPR pays its hosts as much as \$532,000 a year. It pays its chief diversity officer \$320,000 a year. Pretty good work if you can get it. Not NPR's money. It came from you. You paid those salaries. Despite all the spending, NPR's audience continues to decline because they are obsolete.

Now, Congress does not send taxpayer money to the most popular podcast host in America. We don't. The anchors on FOX News, the anchors on CNN, the anchors on MSNBC, nor their stations—they don't get any taxpayer dollars, nor do any of the journalists that ask me questions every day in the hallway in this building—unless they work for NPR or PBS or their affiliates or the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Congress should not be picking winners and losers in the news media, but that is what we are doing.

The United States of America is \$36 trillion in debt. We can't afford anymore to blow half a billion dollars for public broadcasting when Americans can find the same content—and in many cases better content—online for free.

Now, if you want to support NPR and PBS or any other public media outlet, that is great. God bless you. This is America. You are free to do it. You are free to donate to those nonprofits as you see fit. Donate to them. But Congress should not compel taxpayers to fund a service that the American people don't need, especially when the content—well, you can read what the content is, and maybe you agree with it, but a whole bunch of Americans don't. A whole bunch of Americans don't think that birds are racist.

President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency is looking for fat to trim. As far as I am concerned, this gravy train, this gravy train with biscuit wheels called the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is the perfect example of a project the American people no longer need and should not fund.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. President, I have been given instructions to read this.

I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII—oh, I love this. This is great. I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII—this makes me so happy—the confirmation vote with respect to the Gabbard nomination occur at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, February 12; further, I ask that the cloture motions filed on Thursday, February 6, ripen following disposition of the Gabbard nomination; and finally, that if cloture is invoked on the Kennedy nomination—that is Mr. Robert Kennedy—the postcloture time count as if invoked at 1 a.m., Wednesday, February 12.

Thank you, Jesus.

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

Mr. KENNEDY. I yield to Senator PETERS, my good friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the nomination of former Representative Tulsi Gabbard to serve as our Nation's Director of National Intelligence.

Intelligence is absolutely fundamental to our national security. Our intelligence community, spread out all across the Federal Government, has built the world's greatest network of information gathering and analysis. This information keeps us and our community safe by providing the people who make policy decisions with a full picture to understand the current as well as potential threats to our national security, from terrorism risks to our homeland to emerging conflicts across the globe.

Spearheaded by the Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. intelligence community is responsible for monitoring terrorist activities, tracking foreign military capabilities, and even intercepting nefarious cyber attacks.

The courageous men and women in this community, stationed both here as

well as abroad, put their lives on the line to identify and neutralize espionage efforts against Americans by our foreign adversaries.

Their work is absolutely critical, particularly in today's modern digital era where information is power. But the foundation of intelligence is trust.

We must trust that our intelligence experts are providing completely unbiased, fact-driven analysis of the intelligence that our Agencies are collecting. Our experts must trust their ability to pursue intelligence that keeps Americans safe, wherever it may lead, without fear that discovery of the wrong issue might result in the end of their career. Our intelligence Agencies must trust that government officials will protect their sources and their methods to ensure that critical missions and safety of Americans all across the globe are not placed into jeopardy.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that Tulsi Gabbard has the qualifications—nor has she earned our trust—to serve as Director of National Intelligence. She has spread conspiracy theories peddled by our adversaries. She claimed that those who were investigating domestic terrorism and the deadly January 6 insurrection were “domestic enemies”—more dangerous than the individuals who violently stormed the U.S. Capitol, attacked law enforcement officers, and tried to overturn a free and fair election.

She cannot differentiate between our adversaries and our allies, between those who seek to harm our country and those who seek to defend it. Time and time again, Ms. Gabbard has proven that she does not hold the judgment to serve as the leader of our intelligence community.

Let's start with Russia. Start with Russia. As we know, Russia engaged in a widespread disinformation campaign before its deadly invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to justify its actions and manipulate public opinion. Russia actually claimed that the United States was to blame for the war for failing to recognize Russia's “legitimate” security concerns about Ukraine's accession to NATO. Tulsi Gabbard agrees with Putin and Russia. She said that the United States was entirely to blame for the war in Ukraine. Russian propaganda efforts also push lies that the United States was supporting bio-weapons labs in Ukraine—a claim, by the way, that has been debunked by Ukraine's Government, the U.S. Government, news organizations, and independent researchers around the world. But Ms. Gabbard posted on her social media, in 2022, supporting this conspiracy and accusing the Biden-Harris administration of a coverup.

Former Republican U.S. Senator Mitt Romney called Ms. Gabbard's post treasonous, saying she was “parroting fake Russian propaganda.”

So now let's talk about Syria.

Tulsi Gabbard has a long history defending former Syrian ruler Bashar al-

Assad. In 2015, she even introduced a bill to end U.S. support to the opposition to the Assad regime. She didn't think the opposition to Assad, who is responsible for crimes against humanity and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of his own people, should be supported.

Not only did she oppose the support, Gabbard then traveled to Syria and met with Assad in 2017. Gabbard tried to justify her meeting, going as far as to say that Assad is not the enemy of the United States.

And despite U.S. intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard continued to turn a blind eye to Assad's horrific use of chemical weapons on civilians, claiming there was no real evidence linking this regime to those attacks, even though the intelligence community under the first Trump administration attributed these chemical attacks to the Assad regime.

Ms. Gabbard has promised to “end the politicization of the intelligence community,” but what we have seen in just the last few weeks from the administration—in the name of freeing our government from politicization and weaponization—should certainly give us pause.

This administration has fired dozens of prosecutors in a matter of days for doing their duty to provide justice on criminal cases stemming from the January 6 attack on our Nation's Capitol. The administration has also fired most of the senior leaders of the FBI and is trying to go after every single FBI agent who was involved investigating January 6, even if they were just doing their job as ordered by their superiors.

Let's be clear. January 6 was an attack on our Nation, our Constitution, and our democracy.

But to be a part of the Trump administration, you have to show absolute loyalty to him over anything else. Don't worry about facts; just show loyalty. And don't worry about the law; just show loyalty.

So this pattern certainly begs the question: With Ms. Gabbard at the helm, will the intelligence analysts and operatives who worked on investigations into January 6 or any other domestic terrorism plot—are they now going to be fired as well? Will Ms. Gabbard follow the lead of Trump's newly confirmed Attorney General and shut down U.S. efforts to collect intelligence on malicious foreign influences from our adversaries, like China and Russia? Will she penalize anyone who has been responsible for tracking our adversaries' misinformation and disinformation campaigns that target our elections? Will she stand up to President Trump if he seeks to use the powers of the U.S. intelligence community against the American people? Will individuals in the intelligence community who disagree with her views on Russia, Syria, or the threats of chemical and biological weapons be in danger of censorship or, worse, even retribution?

We have no reason—no reason—to trust that Ms. Gabbard will not simply

follow the lead of others in this administration and oust those who do their jobs to serve all the American people and not just Donald Trump.

But in addition to this questionable lack of judgment on who our Nation's enemies are, Tulsi Gabbard is simply, simply, unqualified. Tulsi Gabbard does not have the extensive experience needed to oversee this highly complex network of intelligence operatives and analysts—experience that Directors of National Intelligence, until this point, have all possessed because it is understood how essential this position is and why these qualifications are critical.

There is broad, bipartisan consensus that we are facing one of the most dangerous times in American history. Threats from our adversaries, like the Chinese and Russian Governments, continue to grow and evolve with every passing minute. We need the person leading our intelligence community to be the most qualified candidate available. This is the person briefing our senior leaders, all the way up to the Commander in Chief, on the real threats that face our Nation each and every day. This is the person tasked with protecting our vast network of sources and highly classified methods of collecting information.

We need someone we can trust to safeguard the tools that our intelligence Agencies need to access the darkest corners of the world, but also someone with the knowledge and understanding of this community to protect the brave Americans who are risking their lives gathering this information and intelligence firsthand, on the frontlines.

We need someone who our allies will trust to share their own intelligence, to help protect our people and our interest, because without America's utmost confidence in Ms. Gabbard's ability to do this job, where will that leave us as a country? It will leave us in the dark, vulnerable against our adversaries. It will make our allies question whether or not they should share their intelligence with us because they do not know whether the head of our intelligence community will actually share that information with our adversaries instead of our allies. It will leave us with an intelligence community that is afraid to speak truth to power, or even just do their jobs for fear of offending the Trump administration and then getting fired.

We are in unprecedented times with an administration that has shown that it is willing to break the law in order to break our government. We are in uncharted times, with an administration that would rather target our institutions than protect our people.

We are in perilous times, with foreign adversaries waiting to pounce, as the administration strips away the tools that we have used to protect ourselves.

Our national security is on the line. We cannot destroy our intelligence community and the progress that generations of Americans have built to

keep our country safe by confirming someone whom we cannot trust to act in the United States' best interest or who simply lacks the necessary experience to lead this critical organization. That is why I am voting no on Ms. Gabbard's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, almost 3 years ago, President Vladimir Putin launched a massive, illegal ground invasion of Ukraine, which has become the largest and deadliest conflict in Europe since World War II.

Now, I have stood up, again and again, with my fellow Senators—leaders of both parties—and our allies across the world to condemn Putin's war, which has killed thousands of civilians, including hundreds of children, and left millions of Ukrainians displaced. It is not a hard position to take.

But Tulsi Gabbard has repeatedly justified Putin's expansionist war. She chose to blame the United States, our NATO allies, and even Ukraine itself for Putin's war.

Now, Mr. Trump—excuse me; President Trump—wants Ms. Gabbard to be the Director of National Intelligence. The day the war started, she echoed Russian state media and said: The war could have been avoided if the U.S. and NATO had acknowledged Russia's "legitimate" security concerns.

She made baseless claims that Russia was justified in invading Ukraine because the United States had secret biolabs there. Where did she find that claim? It came directly from a Kremlin propaganda website.

The Director of National Intelligence position was created after the September 11 terrorist attacks to act as the principal adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Homeland Security Council on intelligence matters related to our national security.

It seems obvious to anyone who holds this position that they should have extensive national security experience, something Ms. Gabbard doesn't have. And somebody who holds this position should not be parroting Russian talking points.

Now, I have worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that Putin is held accountable for the atrocities that have been committed in Ukraine. It is shocking to me that we are on the cusp of confirming a Director of National Intelligence who was so quick to defend one of the United States' biggest adversaries.

Now, cozying up to Putin would be bad enough, but, unfortunately, he is not the only autocrat that Ms. Gabbard has ties to. She also has an alarming connection to the ousted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Assad was a ruthless dictator who engaged in human right abuses, and that is a documented fact. But, inexplicably, Ms. Gabbard disputed credible accusations

that Assad used chemical weapons against his citizens, and, worst of all, she actually chose to travel in her personal capacity to Syria to meet with this dictator in person. All the while, she repeatedly cast doubts on our intelligence community's assessment of the extent of the horrors of Assad's regime.

Now, I understand the desire to seek out multiple points of view. But, again and again, Ms. Gabbard has taken healthy skepticism too far, suggesting to the American people that they can't trust our intelligence while, instead, echoing Russian and Syrian disinformation. That is just unacceptable.

President Trump claims that he wants to make America safe. He says he wants to maintain American's standing in the world. He says he wants to forge stronger ties with our allies.

Well, confirming Ms. Gabbard to be Director of National of Intelligence is in opposition to those goals. The Director of National Intelligence oversees 18 Agencies in the U.S. intelligence community, including the CIA and the NSA. The Director has the legal authority to direct intelligence gathering and choose which intelligence to share with foreign Agencies.

As Director of National Intelligence, Ms. Gabbard would have access to our most closely guarded secrets. She would know the identities of the brave men and women who gather intelligence from our foreign adversaries. There should be absolutely no question about the trustworthiness or the judgment of our Director of National Intelligence.

The Director of National Intelligence should not sympathize with autocrats, blame our allies for wars of aggression, or parrot Kremlin talking points. This is a low bar to clear.

I am here in the Senate to represent the people of Nevada. They are relying on me to work to keep them and our community safe. And I tell you what: I pledge to help keep Nevada safe by opposing Ms. Gabbard's confirmation, and I hope my colleagues follow suit.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, every one of us remembers where we were when the first plane struck the World Trade Center the morning of September 11, 2001. On that day, we watched in horror as the North and South Towers fell, terrifying debris clouds flooding the ground beneath them. We witnessed the Pentagon, the heart of our national defense, engulfed in flames as a hijacked plane crashed into it head-on, taking the lives of all the people aboard that flight and over 125 employees in the building itself. Our hearts broke as we saw yet another plane go down in an open field in Pennsylvania, after brave Americans decided to fight back and regain control of the aircraft before it reached its intended target here in this very Capitol building.

From that day forward, we pledged to never forget the nearly 3,000 Americans who lost their lives that day and the thousands more who were first responders that have died since. That pledge led us to immediately establish a bipartisan commission devoted to understanding how our Nation's intelligence Agencies could have left us vulnerable to this attack.

And the 9/11 Commission discovered that our intelligence community had received warnings about the dangers posed by al-Qaida but that a systemic lack of communication and coordination between intelligence Agencies that were effectively stovepiped off from one another had left glaring blindspots at the highest levels of our government. And to fix this, the Commission recommended that our government establish a new Cabinet-level position called the Director of National Intelligence, the DNI.

The DNI is specifically dedicated to coordinating all of our intelligence-gathering operations that protect the safety and security of the American people. For the last two decades, the Director of National Intelligence has played a vital role in every administration as the leader of our intelligence community overseen in coordinating 18 of our intelligence Agencies.

The Director of National Intelligence is also one of the main voices that any President hears from, literally, each and every day. That is because the DNI serves not only as the coordinator of our intelligence community but as the compiler and presenter of the President's daily brief. This is the daily high-level, highly classified briefing on the most pressing and sensitive national security matters. This is where all of our Presidents have gathered critical information needed to make incredibly difficult military or foreign policy decisions. And it is where our Presidents learn about potential threats from our adversaries, from nonstate terrorist organizations, and to think through how to combat those.

Put simply: Our national security depends on the person that we entrust in that role.

In fact, we need to implicitly trust that this person is relying on and providing incredible and accurate information so that our country's Commander in Chief can make the decisions that will determine our security as a nation. As a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for the last 12 years, I do not say this lightly: I do not believe that Ms. Gabbard has demonstrated the judgment to merit our trust as Director of National Intelligence.

Ms. Gabbard's statements and actions leading up to and during the confirmation process should make all of us question her qualifications for this essential national security role, and they should make us seriously question her basic judgment.

Time and again, Ms. Gabbard has elevated conspiracy theories, parroted

dictator's talking points, and repeatedly undermined our country's national security.

Let me give you some specific examples of her statements and her legislative track record. In 2017, while she was still serving in the House of Representatives, Ms. Gabbard exercised seriously questionable judgment in scheduling a foreign trip into Bashar al-Assad's pariah state of Syria. This was after Assad had committed well-documented crimes against his own people, including the use of chemical weapons, and plummeted his country into a bloody civil war and devastating humanitarian crisis.

Both before and after this trip, Ms. Gabbard undermined U.S. intelligence and echoed Russian and Syrian disinformation regarding Assad's use of chemical weapons on his own people. She has made statements that appear to defend Assad.

For example, on February 6, 2019, Ms. Gabbard claimed in an interview that:

Assad is not the enemy of the United States because Syria does not pose a direct threat to the United States.

This is a shockingly narrow view of threats to U.S. national security. During the course of Syria's civil war, Assad used chemical weapons more than 300 times against his own people, killing and wounding thousands. To this day, Syria has still not accounted for this.

The U.S. has also described Syria as being in "flagrant noncompliance" with the Chemical Weapons Convention. And there is no question that Assad's regime posed a serious threat to international peace and security.

It is mystifying to me how Ms. Gabbard could not understand this then and still, apparently, doesn't understand it today.

Ms. Gabbard's 2020 Presidential campaign website stated that she remains "skeptical" about two particular chemical weapons attacks in Syria in 2017 and 2018. Her website wrongly stated that:

Both attacks occurred in towns under the control of al-Qaeda-linked opposition forces. Both attacks resulted in multiple civilian casualties, and both were immediately blamed on the Assad government. However, there is evidence to suggest that the attacks may have been staged by opposition forces for the purpose of drawing the United States and the West deeper into the war.

Of course, there never was such evidence.

Disturbingly, Ms. Gabbard decided to take the views of a discredited professor, who was himself taken in by a Syrian Australian YouTube influencer, that somehow the opposition forces had staged these chemical weapons attacks.

As a Member of Congress, she could have taken the time to read the summary of a declassified U.S. intelligence report released the week after the 2017 attack, warning that claims shifting blame to rebel groups reflected the "false narratives" spread by Syria and its patron state, Russia.

Instead of looking to the intelligence community for answers, Gabbard sought out fake intelligence, demonstrating her distrust in the very intelligence Agencies that she could soon coordinate and oversee.

Her trip to Syria and her visit with Assad himself should be alarming to all of us. Normally, if any Member of Congress goes on a foreign fact-finding trip like this, we take precautions to not jeopardize our vital national security interests. We coordinate with the State Department. We coordinate with the Pentagon. We carefully account for our schedules. And we sure as hell make sure we are not giving a platform to state-sponsors of terrorism or terrorist leaders.

Ms. Gabbard did none of these things on this rogue trip into Assad's Syria. In fact, she sat down for an unscheduled meeting with Assad himself, not once but twice. She also met with the Grand Mufti of Syria. The Grand Mufti was appointed in 2005 to be Syria's most senior Sunni Muslim cleric. In 2011, he threatened Western countries, including the United States, against taking military actions in Syria. And he said in his speech:

I say to all of Europe, I say to America, we will set up suicide bombers who are now in your countries.

During her confirmation hearing last month, I asked Ms. Gabbard directly about this meeting with the Grand Mufti, Mr. Hassoun. She claimed that this was the first she had ever heard about Mr. Hassoun's threats to set up some suicide bombers to target America and our European allies. However, records from her congressional office suggest that almost immediately after returning from her controversial trip, she was fully aware that she had met with a leader with direct ties to terrorism.

According to recent reporting in the Washington Post that helped to unearth these records right after she returned from Syria, Ms. Gabbard and her congressional staff worked feverishly to account for her meetings and official paperwork and to contain the political fallout. In the documents that the Post reviewed, Ms. Gabbard's staff asked her:

Did you know you were meeting with people with direct ties to terrorist organizations?

And her response in those documents:

Is this question re the Mufti?

I want to be clear, I am not suggesting that Ms. Gabbard endorsed or endorses the despicable views or actions of this particular Syrian terrorist leader. What I am suggesting is that Ms. Gabbard's false denial to me in her confirmation hearing of any prior knowledge of this terrorist leader whom she personally met with should be evidence enough that we cannot trust her. And in the position that we are being asked to confirm her for, telling the whole truth accurately is the whole point.

On top of this, Ms. Gabbard has repeatedly made public statements that echo Russian justification for Putin's unjustified, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. She has blamed our NATO allies for failing to recognize Russia's "legitimate security concerns."

Those are literally her words. And she has amplified Russia and Putin's disinformation campaigns alleging Ukraine's development of bioweapons.

On February 23, 2022, Ms. Gabbard echoed Russian talking points blaming Putin's invasion of Ukraine on the Biden administration. Specifically, she tweeted:

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

As my colleague Senator BENNET said so powerfully as he pointed out at Ms. Gabbard's confirmation hearing, she sent this tweet at the very moment that Russian tanks were rolling over Ukraine's border, essentially saying that Vladimir Putin was justified invading the free nation of Ukraine.

Then-Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chair and now Secretary of State Marco Rubio tweeted in response saying, this is "simply not true," noting that the week before the invasion, Putin once again demanded NATO leave every country that joined after 1997, including Bulgaria, Romania, and 12 others.

Ms. Gabbard chose not to listen to the vice chair of the Intelligence Committee or the intelligence community itself, which had issued a declassified threat assessment two weeks prior. Ms. Gabbard decided, instead, to give the benefit of the doubt to Vladimir Putin. How can we trust that she won't do that again?

Ms. Gabbard has also repeatedly praised Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor who fled to China and then to Russia after he was charged in 2013 with illegally exposing government surveillance methods and classified information.

Ms. Gabbard has called him a "brave whistleblower" and even went so far as to introduce legislation in the House of Representatives to pardon Edward Snowden.

In 2016, the House Intelligence Committee issued a declassified, scathing report that found Snowden leaked secrets that caused tremendous damage to U.S. national security. This included leaking secrets that protect American troops and American personnel overseas. As that report made clear, Snowden was not a whistleblower; he was and is a traitor to this Nation.

Ms. Gabbard and anyone who is interested in understanding the impact of the leaked secrets has access to the declassified House Intelligence Committee report and many other public sources of information explaining the damage that Snowden caused to our national security. Yet she continues to

believe her own sources of information instead and to this day will not say that Snowden betrayed this country.

Let me be clear. Edward Snowden is not a whistleblower; he is a traitor. Ms. Gabbard should know this full well.

If we confirm her as our next Director of National Intelligence, Ms. Gabbard will be responsible for transmitting lawful whistleblower complaints to Congress. Her past statements on Snowden reveal a deficient understanding of our Nation's whistleblower laws that should be patently disqualifying for any Director of National Intelligence, much less any national security appointee.

When my colleagues on the Intelligence Committee pressed Ms. Gabbard during her confirmation hearing about whether her views had changed and if she would acknowledge that Mr. Snowden were a traitor, she refused. This is who we want to lead our intelligence community—someone who outright refuses to condemn the actions of someone who jeopardized our national security and put the lives of many members of our intelligence community and national security community at risk? It is hard to believe that we could be so reckless.

Finally, Ms. Gabbard has also advocated for a full repeal of section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA. Section 702 is one of our intelligence community's most important tools to effectively fight terrorism, disrupt foreign cyber attacks, impede drug trafficking, and protect U.S. troops serving abroad. Ms. Gabbard introduced a bill in the House that would have completely repealed section 702.

I will be the first to say that there are reforms to section 702 that we should make to ensure that this law always focuses on the communications of foreign targets abroad and is never inadvertently used in a way that threatens the privacy of innocent Americans. In the past, including just last year, I worked closely with my colleagues to advance some of these reforms. A wholesale repeal of section 702, however, is a wildly out-of-step and dangerous proposal.

Do we really want to confirm a Director of National Intelligence who has advocated for the dismantling of such a foundational source of foreign intelligence to protect our national security?

Any number of Ms. Gabbard's statements or actions would be disqualifying for a nominee to lead our intelligence community and keep our President accurately informed on pressing national security matters. But I am not alone in raising concerns about this nomination. As with many of President Trump's unqualified nominees, I have heard from many New Mexicans—from many constituents in my own State—in opposition to Ms. Gabbard's nomination, and I want to take a moment to read to you from some of these letters that I have received.

Addie from Mountainair wrote to me to share her concern about Ms. Gabbard's lack of experience to safeguard our Nation.

Addie said:

Running the DNI requires an unwavering commitment to evidence-based decision-making, national security, and independence from political or foreign influence. Tulsi Gabbard has none of that. She is completely unfit for this position.

A constituent and former intelligence officer from Santa Fe who wished to remain anonymous is concerned how Ms. Gabbard's background will impact operations critical to defending the United States from foreign threats.

This individual told me:

As a retired intelligence officer, I urge you to do everything you can to keep Tulsi Gabbard from becoming the next [DNI]. Our allies will be reluctant to share intelligence with her, as will our own intelligence professionals, given her past support for Putin and for other dictators. This is a job that needs to be filled by a serious expert in intelligence and national security policy.

Katy from Tularosa is troubled by Ms. Gabbard's past association with dictators and tyrants.

Katy wrote to me:

Tulsi Gabbard is known to have had sympathies for Russia and has met with Bashar al-Assad, the unrepentant dictator and war criminal. Her appointment threatens U.S. national security.

Gary, also from Tularosa, is a retired intelligence officer. Gary is worried about Ms. Gabbard's lack of national security experience and how it will affect efforts to safeguard the United States.

Gary wrote:

As a retired U.S. Air Force intelligence officer, I urge you to use all [of] your influence to block Tulsi Gabbard as the next Director of National Intelligence. She is absolutely unqualified to assume this key position in the Intelligence Community. To serve our nation, the DNI must have a deep understanding of the strengths and limitations of the broad array of civilian and military intelligence agencies. Only then can the DNI lead effectively and offer unbiased counsel to the President. Tulsi Gabbard has none of these qualifications or experience.

Walter from Santa Fe is a veteran who served as an intelligence officer as well. He wrote to me to convey his disgust with President Trump in putting individual loyalty over national security with his nomination.

Walter said:

I am appalled at President Trump putting individual loyalty above competency in his appointments. While Ms. Gabbard is a veteran, she lacks experience in the field of national security, and her playing with conspiracy theories lacking valid documentation raises serious questions about her judgment.

I agree with my constituents in New Mexico.

Ms. Gabbard's poor judgment and lack of national security experience make her wholly unqualified to serve as our next Director of National Intelligence. Confirming her to this role will make our Nation less safe. For all

of these reasons, I will not be supporting Ms. Gabbard's confirmation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here to speak in opposition to the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard to serve as the Director of National Intelligence of the United States of America.

Setting aside her lack of qualifications and setting aside her rotten judgment, her nomination strikes me as being part of a pattern of unilateral disarmament by the Trump administration against Russia. One can hazard as to why this is happening, but the fact that it is happening seems hard to deny.

In November 2024, the Washington Post wrote this:

Gabbard's planned appointment as the head of national intelligence elicited the most excitement in Russia because she has been long regarded as a darling of the propagandist Russian RT network, which amplified her sympathetic takes on Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and Putin.

Russian state TV has called Ms. Gabbard "our friend Tulsi."

The Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda published an op-ed, and it was titled "The CIA and FBI are trembling: Why Trump protégé Tulsi Gabbard will support Russia as head of National Intelligence."

So the Russians are telling us pretty plain and simple: She is with us.

If you look at some of her behavior particularly relevant to the DNI position, she has constantly opposed section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which is a key source of foreign intelligence for our national security and which—I guess I would have to say in this location—presumably is useful at getting intelligence on Russia.

She is not alone. Over at the FBI, Trump's nominee for FBI Director, Kash Patel, we just found out was paid \$25,000 by a Russian filmmaker with Kremlin ties to participate in a documentary attacking the FBI, which is an adversary of Russia's, which spends a great deal of time and effort keeping an eye on Russia's adverse intelligence activity in the United States.

To make it worse, Kash Patel has said he wants to shut down what he calls the intel shops—the part of the FBI that would go after Russian intelligence operations and Russian criminal networks in the United States. He has even said he wants to shut down the FBI building and run everybody out into the field offices around the country. Well, guess what takes place at FBI Headquarters? Our intelligence and counterterrorism operations. If you empty that place out and you move everything out to the field where people are doing regular criminal work, it is another way of saying: We are going to shut down our intelligence operations.

Just in the past week, since she has been in, Attorney General Bondi has pulled down the DOJ Kleptocracy Asset

Recovery Initiative, which has recovered billions of dollars in ill-gotten gains from foreign kleptocrats—many Russian, many close to Vladimir Putin. She shut down DOJ's Task Force KleptoCapture, which is the entity that has been working to target the Russian oligarchs around Putin, seize their assets that have been used to support Putin in his illegal, brutal invasion of Ukraine, and take those assets and provide them to the Ukrainians for their rebuilding and defense.

So a common theme here: Tulsi Gabbard wants to come in as "our friend Tulsi," according to Russian state TV, to have the CIA and FBI trembling because she will support Russia. Kash Patel is coming into the FBI, who takes money from a Kremlin-associated filmmaker and promises to shut down or at least degrade our intelligence capabilities within the FBI. And Attorney General Bondi is busy over at the DOJ taking down the anti-kleptocracy initiatives that focus on Putin's little gang of oligarchs who prop him up. It is three for three in unilateral disarmament by the United States against Russia.

There is a little history here that is worth going back to in evaluating all of this, and it includes that Russia interfered in the 2016 election through a Kremlin-linked internet research agency. There has been a good deal of reporting on that, but since that reporting, there has been a persistent, rightwing Trump narrative to pretend that never existed, that there was no Trump-Russia thing, that Trump-Russia was a hoax.

In fact, it was not a hoax. Trump-Russia was a thing, as a bipartisan report from the Senate Intelligence Committee pointed out. That bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee report found that Russian President Putin had ordered the Russian effort to hack computer networks and accounts that were affiliated with the Democratic Party and that were affiliated with the Democratic National Committee and that the purpose was to find and to leak information that would be damaging to Hillary Clinton in that election.

Here is what the committee found. I quote the report, the bipartisan report:

Moscow's intent was to harm the Clinton Campaign, tarnish an expected Clinton presidential administration, help the Trump Campaign after Trump became the presumptive Republican nominee, and undermine the US democratic process.

That was the finding of the U.S. intelligence community as well as the finding of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

It went on. You remember that famous meeting where Trump took the Russian Ambassador and the Russian Foreign Minister right into the Oval Office and divulged to them highly classified information—highly-classified information—which caused U.S. officials to warn that Trump's revelations jeopardized a key source of intel-

ligence in the Islamic State. They had to ping out to other intelligence Agencies and to our officers in the field: Look out. Classified information has just been given to these Putin officials to try to shore up and defend our sources and methods.

The Mueller report went to exhaustive effort, with all of the support of grand jury and senior FBI and Department of Justice officials, and they concluded that the Trump campaign both knew of and welcomed the Russian interference and expected to benefit from it.

It even talked about obstruction of justice by President Trump. But what they concluded in talking about obstruction of justice by President Trump is that he could not be indicted as a sitting President and therefore it would not be fair to lay out the conclusion that he had committed this crime because he wouldn't have a process by which to acquit himself and to clear the accusation. But they certainly laid out plenty of evidence that was suggestive that had he been an ordinary individual, he would have been indicted, charged, and convicted for obstruction of justice relating to this whole Trump-Russia saga.

Later, when he was asked about all this in a conversation about Vladimir Putin, he said in November of 2017 about Putin—he said: Putin "said he didn't meddle" in the election. "I asked him. . . . He said he absolutely did not meddle in our election. He did not do what they are saying he did."

Everybody in the intelligence community knew that he did, in fact, do what they are saying he did, but Trump, for some reason, some connection, some Trump-Russia connection, went with Putin rather than the U.S. law enforcement and intelligence services.

The next year in Helsinki, Trump met privately with Putin for 2 hours. We don't know what happened because they just met with their interpreters. Then they went out for a news conference, and there again, standing right next to Putin, he sided with him over our own intelligence Agencies. But the meddling was real, the meddling was documented, and the Mueller report helped document the meddling.

If you go into the details, you see the subplots. Paul Manafort was Trump's 2016 campaign chairman. He was meeting regularly, communicating regularly with a Russian intelligence officer named Konstantin Kilimnik and with a Russian oligarch named Oleg Deripaska through the campaign.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's bipartisan report found that on numerous occasions, Manafort sought to secretly share internal campaign information with Kilimnik. This did not end well for Paul Manafort; he was indicted by a Federal grand jury for the crime of conspiracy against the United States, convicted, and sentenced to more than 7 years in prison—oh, except that Trump pardoned Manafort in late 2020.

There was the infamous Trump Tower meeting in which Donald Trump, Jr., the same Paul Manafort, and son-in-law Jared Kushner met with Russian billionaire Emin Agalarov and a Russian lawyer connected to the Kremlin right in Trump Tower. The meeting came about because Donald Trump, Jr., had been told by a contact that the Russian Government wanted to offer—and I am quoting here—"official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary." Official documents and information from the Russian Government that would incriminate Hillary.

The response:

If it's what you say I love it.

They went ahead to the meeting. Clearly, the Trump campaign's purpose for that meeting was to obtain from Russia incriminating information on Clinton to influence the election.

The special counsel decided not to prosecute the attendees in part because it couldn't determine that that information would actually have been determinative because it related to orphans, and what didn't connect with the Trump attendees at that meeting was that the interruption of the orphans being delivered to the United States for parents who wanted to adopt them was the response to sanctions against oligarchs and people around Putin, and this was an effort to get the sanctions lifted.

If you could crack the code, you would know that that is what the orphans conversation was about, because that is why the orphans blockade had been set up.

Ultimately, Russia did, in fact, hack emails—both from the DNC and from the Clinton campaign chair. Russian intelligence got their hands on those documents.

Here is what the Intelligence Committee wrote about that:

Trump and senior Campaign officials sought to obtain advanced information about WikiLeaks' planned releases through Roger Stone. At their direction, Stone took action to gain inside knowledge for the Campaign and shared his purported knowledge directly with Trump and senior Campaign officials on multiple occasions.

This wasn't just a one-off; this was information being channeled through Roger Stone to the Trump campaign. It didn't end well for Stone. He was indicted and convicted on charges of lying to Congress about what he and then-Candidate Donald Trump knew about Russian efforts to discredit Hillary Clinton's campaign and witness tampering and obstruction.

On we go to Carter Page, also associated with the campaign, who traveled to Moscow in that timeframe—July 2016—to deliver a commencement speech while working for the campaign. Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich there expressed "strong support for Mr. Trump"—"strong support for Mr. Trump and a desire to work together."

Another campaign operative, George Papadopoulos—same year, May—was



traveling and told the Greek Foreign Minister that the Russians have “dirt” on Hillary Clinton.

So you have all these pieces coming together about the Russians seeking dirt on Hillary Clinton, getting it, leaking it through WikiLeaks, and constantly having a back channel through members of the Trump campaign.

It didn’t end well for Papadopoulos either. He was arrested for lying to FBI investigators and pleaded guilty. And, of course, Trump pardoned him too. Trying to cover up his traces.

Michael Flynn in 2015 delivered remarks at a Moscow gala honoring Russia Today, RT, the same organization that Tulsi Gabbard was the darling of. He was seated at the gala next to Putin—next to Putin. He was paid \$33,750 from RT—whose darling Tulsi Gabbard was—for this one speech. He didn’t correctly report the payment. He ended up being paid more than \$67,000 by Russian companies before the 2016 Presidential election.

It didn’t end well for him either. He lied to Vice President Pence and to the FBI about communications he was having with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak about sanctions imposed by the Obama administration while President Obama was in office. Yes, the sanctions related to the orphans conversation at Trump Tower. Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about that conversation, and, of course, Trump pardoned him days before Flynn was due to be sentenced.

It is kind of an ongoing thing between Trump and Russia. A lot of us on both sides of the aisle are very concerned about what is going on in Ukraine—indeed, furious that Putin would launch his army into Ukraine and perform massive atrocities and war crimes: firing rockets into children’s hospitals, having the soldiers murder through neighborhoods. It is a foul spectacle, and it started with Russia’s invasion of Crimea, the so-called little green men.

Trump thought that was all a pretty good thing. You will remember that the way they started it was to foment riots by Russian-speaking people in Crimea to provide a justification for coming over the border—sort of 1930s Europe style tactics coming back to us here. So that kicked it off. There were these demonstrations. Putin said “Oh, my people, my people; they are being abused by those terrible Ukrainians,” and in went the little green men.

Here is how Trump praised Putin’s invasion then of Crimea:

When you see the riots in a country because they’re hurting the Russians, OK, ‘we’ll go and take it over.’ And he really goes step by step, and you have to give him a lot of credit.

And of course there is the famous comment to Russia publicly, saying:

Russia, if you’re listening—

This was during the campaign—

I hope you’re able to find the 30,000 e-mails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press.

Then there were the episodes that I mentioned earlier where he said “No, Russia wasn’t meddling in our elections” despite the fact that everybody knew they were. But he took Putin’s side in all of that.

Most recently, he refused to condemn Putin for the death of Alexei Navalny, who had been such a brave fighter, standing up against the corrupt Putin regime, and died in a penal colony at the age of 47.

For a long time, I have described the United States as being in a clash of civilizations with rule-of-law countries like ours on the one side and kleptocrats, autocrats, and governments run by criminal organizations like the narco-traffickers on the other side. Fairly simple clash—rule of law versus rule of thuggery.

There ought to be bipartisan support for making sure that the United States does not become a safe haven for kleptocrats and criminals. We should not be giving aid and comfort to our enemies by allowing them to park their funds here in our country.

We have made progress to combat the kleptocrats and the international criminals who are on the other side of this clash of civilizations. Ms. Gabbard is not on the right side of that clash, not when she is so chummy with Putin, not when she is so chummy with the murderer Bashar al-Assad, not when she is “our darling Tulsi” to Russian media channels, and not when she is lined up with Kash Patel, threatening to take down the FBI Offices that track Russia, taking money from a Russian filmmaker, and then stack that up with Attorney General Bondi taking down the kleptocracy and klepto-capture efforts at the DOJ that have been making the Russian oligarchs’ lives miserable by going after their assets.

One, two, three—all unilaterally disarming against Russia in the wake of all that time in which the Trump-Russia connection appeared over and over and over and over again. And as far as I can tell, still persists today.

I see my colleague here on the Senate floor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, today the Senate is deciding whether COL Tulsi Gabbard should be the person who, each day, makes the call on which intelligence gets in front of the President of the United States. That is what the Director of National Intelligence does. They sift through the intelligence collected and analyzed by all of our intelligence Agencies, from the CIA to the NSA, and decide what to brief the President on. This includes information about terrorists planning attacks here in the United States or on our servicemembers abroad. It includes evidence of adversaries backing cyber attacks.

Often, the intelligence is incomplete, or there are pieces that contradict one

another. It is this person’s job to cut through the noise and present the President with what he needs to know.

There can’t be any spin. There can’t be a finger on the scale to get him to do one thing or not do another. It requires impeccable judgment and sound decision making.

Everything we have learned about Colonel Gabbard during her confirmation process suggests that she is not the person for this job. It is that simple.

Now, I went into this process with an open mind. Colonel Gabbard and I, we had a long meeting in my office. She responded to a number of written follow-up questions that my colleagues and I had for her. And I was able to ask her questions in an open and closed hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

And after each of those steps, I became more and more concerned.

Colonel Gabbard is often dismissive and has been, at times, outright hostile towards our intelligence community and the tools that it uses to protect this country.

Now, I have a tremendous amount of respect for Colonel Gabbard’s service to this Nation, and I do think that healthy skepticism is a good thing. It is something that I always valued in my crew members at NASA, and I value it today in the Senate.

But that is not what we have seen from Colonel Gabbard. She has a track record of embracing overblown, flimsy claims that confirm her own viewpoint while easily dismissing the thorough assessments and the methods of our own intelligence community. That is not the person that we should want in this job.

Now, let’s start here with her record on Edward Snowden. Edward Snowden was a government contractor who stole and then leaked highly classified information from the National Security Agency in 2013. Snowden could have used whistleblower protections to securely and legally share concerns that he had about the legality of certain surveillance programs, but he didn’t do that. Instead, he stole millions of documents—most of which didn’t pertain to the programs that he had raised concerns about—and then he leaked them, without caring about what would the lasting damage be to our national security.

After the Department of Justice revealed charges against him for committing espionage, Snowden fled to Russia, where he was welcomed with open arms.

Edward Snowden exposed our government’s secrets to the world, including to our adversaries. He put intelligence operatives and servicemembers around the world at risk, at great risk. And he made all of us less safe, and that is true even today. He should be in prison for betraying our country.

COL Tulsi Gabbard wanted him to be pardoned. She introduced legislation calling on the Federal Government to

drop all charges against Snowden and, unsurprisingly, it failed to gain support.

This was in September of 2020, after he had been in Russia for nearly 7 years, and after the House Intelligence Committee had released a bipartisan report to the public detailing about how he had broken the law and made our country less safe. This came after that.

And she publicly lobbied President Trump to pardon Snowden during his first term. He didn't.

And on October 6 of 2020, Gabbard called Snowden a brave whistleblower. Two weeks later, Vladimir Putin gave Snowden permanent residency in Russia.

This should, obviously, be a great concern to anyone considering her for this job, and it is clear that Colonel Gabbard knew it would be an issue in her confirmation hearing. She knew that. So she came prepared with a well-practiced answer, and she used it, word for word, over and over again.

Vice Chairman WARNER's first question was whether she thinks Edward Snowden is brave. She said that Edward Snowden broke the law, but that he released information that led to reforms. She didn't mention the harm he did to our national security.

He followed up. She started with the same answer. And on and on it went. Next, with Senator KING.

Then Senator YOUNG asked if she agreed with the House Intelligence Committee report that Snowden caused damage to national security. She repeated the same answer she had given just before. At least eight times, by my count, as I sat there in the hearing room, she gave the same answer word for word.

But the real moment of truth came when Senator LANKFORD of Oklahoma asked her what he himself has publicly said was a softball question, and the question was: Is Edward Snowden a traitor?

It really should have been pretty easy. If you believe Edward Snowden broke the law and the law he broke is the Espionage Act, it is pretty clear that is exactly what he is. He is a traitor.

She wouldn't answer.

Senator BENNET gave her another opportunity. She didn't take it.

Now, Colonel Gabbard came into our confirmation hearing with a plan to give the same nonanswer over and over about Edward Snowden, and she was counting on that being enough to skate by. It wasn't for me.

And I still can't understand. To this day, I still can't figure it out, why she will not call this guy a traitor. Colonel Gabbard would be leading the men and women of our intelligence Agencies whose work and lives Edward Snowden put at risk.

I ask my Republican colleagues: How can we entrust this responsibility with someone who wanted to free Edward Snowden and still, to this day, cannot say whether or not he is a traitor?

For a lot of nominees, that would be a way big enough issue to prevent them from getting this job. That is pretty clear. But so, too, would her hostility toward FISA 702, one of the most important intelligence collection tools that we have. This is the program that enables us to monitor the communications of foreign actors outside of the United States. It has stopped terror attacks. It has protected American troops serving abroad. About 60 percent of the President's brief every single day is derived from intelligence that is gathered from this program, the very brief that Colonel Gabbard would be responsible for compiling every single day. Without it, we would be exposed. We would be less able to detect and prevent terror attacks or other attacks against the American people.

But that is exactly what Colonel Gabbard tried to do. She voted against reauthorizing this program in 2018. And in 2020, she introduced legislation to repeal it—all of it. Not just the piece—the piece of it that Congress was debating how to reform, she wanted to just get rid of the whole thing, all of it. And when she advocated for doing away with the program, she made false statements about how it works and how it impacts American citizens.

This should be a concern for anyone being considered for this job. Because while the Senate Intelligence Committee has a range of views on how this program should work, none of us on the committee, on either side of the aisle, has any interest in getting rid of it because we know how important it is, how critical it is to the safety of all of us. In fact, we came together with others in Congress to deliver reforms that further protect our civil liberties as Americans while retaining the tools our President needs to stay ahead of threats.

Once again, Colonel Gabbard knew that this would be an issue with her confirmation. And, again, she bet that she could just say as little as possible to just get by. That is why, in a written response to the committee, she said:

My prior concerns about FISA were based on insufficient protections for civil liberties . . . Significant FISA reforms have been enacted since my time in Congress to address these issues.

Sounds reasonable. Well, here is the problem. Just last year, she was on a podcast trashing those very reforms she is now saying back up her position on FISA. She said:

This legislation that was just passed recently expanded those authorities . . . in some other ways, it took an already bad problem and made it many, many times worse.

So which is it? Did these reforms fix the issues she had with FISA, as she said in her written response? Or did they make the problem worse, as she said on the podcast? It can't be both.

Colonel Gabbard was asked about this inconsistency during her confirmation hearing, and she couldn't answer

for it. In fact, she couldn't answer for what these reforms are and how they address her concerns or don't.

And, folks, this is not trivial. The Director of National Intelligence works with the Attorney General to assess compliance with the law and improve internal procedures that decide how the intelligence community will collect, use, and store foreign intelligence to combat threats like terrorism while ensuring Americans' constitutional rights are protected. That means Colonel Gabbard would be responsible for implementing these reforms and advising Congress on their effectiveness.

Finally, as we are all aware—well, all of us in the Senate, we are aware—this program is up for reauthorization in just over a year. President Trump has been all over the map on this program, but as recently as last year, he told Congress to kill FISA. The next Director of National Intelligence is going to play a critical role in advising the President and making recommendations to Congress about this program, FISA. Do we really trust that Colonel Gabbard will fight to protect this program, given her track record on this?

I know I don't. That, too, should be disqualifying for this job.

But the last example of Colonel Gabbard's hostility toward the intelligence community is the one that should give everyone the most concern. It is for me. As I said earlier, the primary responsibility of this job is to coordinate across 18 intelligence organizations and sift through intelligence, make some sense of it, and decide what to take to the President of the United States. In her confirmation hearing, I asked Colonel Gabbard: What does a good process look like?

And her answer to this question—it was fine. She said: Build a strong team, welcome dissenting voices, and make sure the truth is reported.

That is great. But then we got into a real-life example when she had sought out the intel, claimed to be reporting the truth, and then got it wrong. That is where, for me, it was obvious she is not the right fit for this job.

Colonel Gabbard accepts the conclusion that former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own people, except for two incidents. She has publicly disputed the confident conclusion of our intelligence community and international experts that Assad used chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun in 2017 and in Douma, both in Syria, in 2018. She authored a report—this was put on her campaign website—questioning whether these attacks were staged by anti-Assad groups, despite the repeated determinations that this was yet another incident of him murdering his own citizens.

You might be asking yourself: Why? Why did Colonel Gabbard go to such great lengths to sow doubt about these two attacks, knowing that it would have to be useful to Assad's goals? Why



did she doubt our intelligence community's conclusion in these two cases, but not the others?

Well, I asked her, and here is how that answer began. This is a quote from Colonel Gabbard:

These two cases are being looked at to be used as a pretext for major military movement. And another—my fear was a repeat of the deployment of another half million soldiers like we saw in Iraq towards what was the Obama administration's goals, which was regime change in Syria.

Setting aside that Obama didn't deploy a half million soldiers to Syria, here is the problem. By her own admission, Colonel Gabbard's doubts about U.S. intelligence in these two situations began with her disagreements about how the intelligence was going to be used. She didn't want the United States and our allies to strike Syria as punishment for these chemical weapons attacks. So instead of making a strong argument on the policy, she tried to question whether the attacks happened in the first place.

Colonel Gabbard also invoked the Iraq war. She is right. We needed to learn important lessons from the lead-up to the invasion. The biggest lesson was to carefully follow the intelligence where it actually leads, rather than bending it to fit the outcome that you want, which is exactly what Colonel Gabbard did in this case.

It is that simple, folks, and it is also that dangerous, especially for someone in this job. If she has already disputed intelligence because of how it would be used, would she do it again in this position—the position of the Director of National Intelligence? She is the person deciding what the President would see.

Would she withhold information or would she seek out confirmation without regard for whom it came from or that her viewpoint was correct? Because that is what she did in this case—the report she authored questioning whether these attacks were staged relied on a professor without expertise in chemical weapons. His theories in this case were deeply flawed and have been widely debunked by experts.

I asked Colonel Gabbard if she was aware that this professor had appeared on Russian propaganda news stations. She said she had no idea.

To produce his findings, this professor relied on an Australian chemistry student with a history of defending the Assad regime. I asked her if she was aware of that. She said she was not—not at the time—but since she has been made aware.

Here is what that tells me: Colonel Gabbard was unwilling to even examine, let alone weigh, the biases and shortcomings of the sources she was seeking out and elevating. She embraced these people and their half-baked theories because they confirmed what she wanted to be true—that Assad didn't gas his own people in these two cases. She wanted it to be true so badly that, 5 years later, she says that she

was still unaware of the facts of their background—facts that me and my staff found with some rather routine searching of public information. It was not hard.

And she trusted and further publicized their claims without verification, despite our government making clear that Assad and Russia would attempt to raise these sorts of questions and theories to distract America and our allies.

Mr. President, if that is not a redflag, I don't know what is. Still, 5 years later, Colonel Gabbard came before the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee and repeated all of this as if it weren't in contention. She continues to apply less skepticism toward these sources and narratives than the assessments of American intelligence operatives, professionals who have a ton of experience at this and whom she is nominated to lead—all because they support her point of view: The United States should not have struck Syria in retaliation for their use of chemical weapons. That is why she believed the people online.

Now, that kind of reverse engineering to try to steer a policy outcome is dangerous in a job like this.

Mr. President, the next couple of years are going to be challenging for our national security. I think we all agree upon that. We face threats that grow more complicated each and every day. And our intelligence community, they are the best in the world. They are really good at gathering intelligence of all kinds. The hardest part is sifting through that information and making some sense of what it all means, making determinations. That is what this job is all about. And everything we have seen from Colonel Gabbard throughout this process suggests that she is the wrong person for this job.

She lifted up Edward Snowden as a hero and is unwilling to call him a traitor. She tried to get rid of one of the most important intelligence collection tools that we have and has contradicted herself when answering for it. And most central to this role, she has displayed poor judgment and poor decision making when assessing intelligence, especially when it comes to chemical weapons use in Syria.

Each of these—each one of them on their own—should be disqualifying for holding this job. Taken together, they paint a picture of someone who is especially ill-suited and unprepared to take on this responsibility.

I know that these concerns are shared by my Republican colleagues. So let's be honest about it. Let's say no to the political pressure. And let's put our national security first, and let's vote no on this nominee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be

in a period of morning business for debate only, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES RULES OF PROCEDURE

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, the Committee on Armed Services has adopted rules governing its procedures for the 119th Congress. Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 2, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, on behalf of myself and Ranking Member REED, I ask unanimous consent that a copy of the committee rules be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

#### UNITED STATES SENATE—COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

##### RULES OF PROCEDURE, 119TH CONGRESS

1. Regular Meeting Day—The Committee shall meet at least once a month when Congress is in session. The regular meeting days of the Committee shall be Tuesday and Thursday, unless the Chairman, after consultation with the Ranking Minority Member, directs otherwise.

2. Additional Meetings—The Chairman, after consultation with the Ranking Minority Member, may call such additional meetings as he deems necessary.

3. Special Meetings—Special meetings of the Committee may be called by a majority of the members of the Committee in accordance with paragraph 3 of Rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

4. Open Meetings—Each meeting of the Committee, or any subcommittee thereof, including meetings to conduct hearings, shall be open to the public, except that a meeting or series of meetings by the Committee or a subcommittee thereof on the same subject for a period of no more than fourteen (14) calendar days may be closed to the public on a motion made and seconded to go into closed session to discuss only whether the matters enumerated below in clauses (a) through (f) would require the meeting to be closed, followed immediately by a record vote in open session by a majority of the members of the Committee or subcommittee when it is determined that the matters to be discussed or the testimony to be taken at such meeting or meetings

(a) will disclose matters necessary to be kept secret in the interests of national defense or the confidential conduct of the foreign relations of the United States;

(b) will relate solely to matters of Committee staff personnel or internal staff management or procedure;

(c) will tend to charge an individual with a crime or misconduct, to disgrace or injure the professional standing of an individual, or otherwise to expose an individual to public contempt or obloquy or will represent a clearly unwarranted invasion of the privacy of an individual;

(d) will disclose the identity of any informer or law enforcement agent or will disclose any information relating to the investigation or prosecution of a criminal offense that is required to be kept secret in the interests of effective law enforcement;

(e) will disclose information relating to the trade secrets or financial or commercial information pertaining specifically to a given person if—