

are still there. They are still in Crimea. They are still interfering with eastern Ukraine. Unless they comply with the Minsk agreement, our European allies are looking for America to say no way would we ever weaken our sanctions as long as Russia is violating its commitment in Ukraine.

Since that, they have been doing other things. I already mentioned the war crimes they are committing in Syria, but they also attacked America. They attacked us through cyber, trying to bring down our democratic system of government, free elections. I would certainly have hoped Mr. Tillerson would have shown some compassion for increasing sanctions against Russia. Instead, we asked him a question about Cuba, and Mr. Tillerson was very clear when he talked about Cuba. He said: Look, if we do business with Cuba, we are allowing a repressive regime to have greater resources. Why would we want to support a repressive regime?

Mr. Tillerson didn't show the same concern about Russia. He has no compulsion at all about doing business with Russia, even though that business is allowing the Putin repressive regime to carry out their activities of attacks against our allies, attacks against us, interfere with what is going on in Syria, and to do all the activities they are doing. I would have hoped that we were seeing a greater sense of moral clarity from our Secretary of State nominee.

There are other issues I am concerned about. I know we will have a chance to talk about it if this issue is still on the floor tomorrow, as I expect it will be. We will have a chance to talk about issues regarding his quick use of military power versus diplomacy. We asked him several times about external events and how he will respond to them. His answer was too quick about using our military and not quick enough about using our diplomacy. The use of military must be a matter of last resort. I want to make sure our next Secretary of State is very sensitive to that particular issue.

Then we get to the concern about the ethical issues. I need to mention this because when we asked him questions about his knowledge of ExxonMobil, he was less than forthcoming to the committee, not aware of ExxonMobil's lobbying on certain issues, and very unclear about how its activities were in Sudan, Syria, Iran, and other countries that have horrible human rights records. And his willingness to recuse himself from anything affecting Exxon for 1 year, not for the entire length of term that he would be Secretary of State if confirmed by the Senate—he should not deal with ExxonMobil for the entire length of his time as Secretary of State. He is a person who has substantial wealth as a result of his working at ExxonMobil. None of us criticize him for that, but it disqualifies him from dealing with ExxonMobil.

We are going to be involved in a lengthy debate on the next Secretary of State, as we should, but I just wanted to share with my colleagues my concern about Mr. Tillerson and why I am opposing his nomination. And I would just indicate that I think the events particularly over the weekend with this immigration policy really point out the need for the next Secretary of State to be willing to stand strong for American values, and I have serious questions in that regard on Mr. Tillerson.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I am pleased to rise in support of the nomination of Rex Tillerson to serve as our next Secretary of State. The proceedings in the Foreign Relations Committee for his nomination were fair, exhaustive, and in the best traditions of our committee and the Senate. Mr. Tillerson completed all of his required paperwork expeditiously, having met or exceeded the pace set by former Secretary Hillary Clinton after she was nominated in 2008. He testified in a public hearing for more than 8 hours and afterward responded to over 1,000 additional questions for the record from committee members.

Opinions and votes today on Mr. Tillerson may differ, but there is no question that the committee and the Senate have fulfilled their constitutional responsibility in carefully reviewing his nomination.

As we proceed in ensuring that the new administration has the leaders it needs to implement our Nation's foreign policy going forward, I have great confidence that Rex Tillerson will serve the United States well.

In both my private meetings with him and in the hours of public testimony he offered before the Foreign Relations Committee, it has become clear that he will be an effective leader at the State Department. Mr. Tillerson has led an exemplary and honorable life. He has been at the same company for over 40 years. As an Eagle Scout, he served as the national president of the Boy Scouts of America.

Furthermore, the nonpartisan Director of the Office of Government Ethics recently stated that Mr. Tillerson is making a clean break from Exxon and has even gone so far as to say that Tillerson's ethics agreement serves as a sterling model for what we would like to see with other nominees.

Having managed one of the world's largest companies by revenue, with over 75,000 employees, there is no doubt in my mind that Rex Tillerson is well qualified to lead the State Department. I encourage all of my colleagues to support his confirmation and look forward to his service as our next Secretary of State.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, THE PRESS, AND RUSSIA

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, Trump's Executive order banning Muslims from seven countries, none of which was a source of terrorists who have carried out attacks in this country, was un-American, arbitrary, inhumane, and it will likely spur an increase in violence targeting Americans. I will have plenty more to say about it and other reckless actions by this White House in the days and weeks ahead.

In the meantime, I want to say a few words about the bizarre back and forth between the Trump administration and the news media regarding attendance at the inauguration and who is telling the truth and who is not.

One might think that with all that is happening in the country and the world and the rush by the President to sign Executive orders that would dramatically affect the rights, and the priorities, of millions of Americans, the question of how many people were at the inauguration would not generate such controversy. But it turns out that this is about much more than that, as it goes to the heart of the role of a free press in this country and whether the American people can have confidence that the President is telling the truth.

We already knew that candidate and now President Trump is prone to bragging and making wildly unrealistic promises and inaccurate claims, many of which he later disavows. He frequently ignores or misstates basic facts and refuses to correct those falsehoods. So it was no surprise when he predicted that the crowd at his inauguration would be "an unbelievable, perhaps record-setting turnout."

It was also no surprise, as usually happens at inaugurations and large public demonstrations, that high-elevation photographs were used to estimate the number of participants. To anyone who attended both the Obama and Trump inaugurations, it was obvious that the number of people at President Obama's inauguration was far larger than at President Trump's inauguration, as photographs clearly showed.

President Trump, however, insisted the photographs were fabricated. The morning after the inauguration, he said he could see from the stage on the West Front of the Capitol that there were "a million" or "a million and a half" people on the Mall.

When reports clearly showed only a fraction of that, he accused news organizations of lying, calling them "among the most dishonest human beings on Earth," and warned that they would regret it.

Later that day, the President's spokesman, Sean Spicer, also accused the press of lying. He said the photographs were deceptive, and he insisted that President Trump's inauguration was "the most watched ever." That, of course, was a clever distortion of what the President actually said.

President Trump was unmistakably talking about the number of people who were actually present on the Mall when he was sworn in, which seems to matter more to him than it does to anyone else.

Mr. Spicer expanded that number by an indeterminate amount to include anyone who had watched anywhere in the world on a cell phone, television, or other electronic device.

A day later, Mr. Spicer berated the press for being unfair by reporting on this. Perhaps he had forgotten that it was President Trump who initiated the whole thing by publicly promising something that did not happen and then falsely accusing the press of lying, as did Mr. Spicer, after being proven wrong.

Mr. Spicer also may have forgotten that, shortly after President Obama was inaugurated, the Senate majority leader announced that the Republicans' No. 1 priority was to prevent him from being elected to a second term. Failing that, they spent 8 years trying to obstruct, sabotage, and discredit everything President Obama tried to do.

During much of that time, Donald Trump carried on an utterly false campaign accusing President Obama of lying about his birthplace.

Two days later and without citing any evidence—because no evidence exists—President Trump resurrected his false claim that that he lost the popular vote because 3 to 5 million “illegal immigrants” voted. Mr. Spicer echoed this same claim, citing unnamed “studies.”

This, of course, is patently false and absurd, but one can assume that it will be repeated by Republicans to justify more onerous, discriminatory voter suppression voting requirements which have been a crusade of theirs, particularly in areas with large minority populations that traditionally vote Democratic.

To add insult to injury, Kellyanne Conway, the President's counselor, announced that President Trump will not be releasing his tax returns. This after candidate Trump repeatedly promised to do so once a routine audit is completed, and he even said he looked forward to doing that. Ms. Conway—who also came up with the phrase “alternative facts”—claimed that the fact that Mr. Trump won the election is proof that no one cared about his tax returns.

There are at least two problems with that. First, it is the only way the American people can know what President Trump's assets are, what conflicts of interest may exist, whether he has been telling the truth about what he owns, and whether he is working for the American people or to enrich himself and his family. The polls indicate that today between 60 and 74 percent of the American people want President Trump to release his tax returns, including 49 percent of his own supporters.

A few days later, Stephen Bannon, the White House strategist, said the

media should “keep its mouth shut and just listen for a while.” Ignoring that democracy is impossible without a free press, Bannon called the media the “opposition party . . . that [does not] understand this country.”

There is an even more disturbing aspect to this. Besides denigrating the press, candidate and now President Trump has attacked Muslims, the CIA, Mexico, Meryl Streep, the cast of “Hamilton,” Congressman JOHN LEWIS, politicians, undocumented migrants, or whoever else he thinks of at any particular moment, for meddling in the election or for any other reason, with one glaring exception: Vladimir Putin, one of the world's worst gangsters.

Despite credible evidence that the Russian Government, at Putin's direction, actively sought to sway the outcome of the U.S. election in favor of Donald Trump, candidate and now President Trump has repeatedly expressed admiration for Mr. Putin.

Think about what this means. The unanimous conclusion of U.S. intelligence agencies is that Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent, ordered a cyber attack on our electoral system in favor of one candidate over another. Russia's goals “were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency.”

Can you imagine what the response would be from the Republican leadership if the tables were turned? They would have threatened to shut down the government until a new election was held. And if that failed they would have demanded that an independent commission be established to investigate Russia's cyber attacks. Such a commission is, in fact, what Senator DURBIN, I and others have called for and what the Republican leaders, who should care no less about the integrity of our democracy, have summarily rejected.

What was candidate and President Trump's response to Russia's acts to undermine our democracy? He continued to praise Vladimir Putin.

This should concern every American because, for years, Vladimir Putin has engaged in a systematic campaign to weaken the alliances and norms that the United States and our democratic allies have painstakingly built over the course of more than seven decades, for our national security and for global stability.

Putin would like nothing more than to discredit our democracy, weaken NATO, fracture the European Union, and in doing so deflect criticism at home and abroad of the repression and rampant corruption that have become the hallmarks of his iron-fisted rule.

While Mr. Spicer blithely spoke of the United States and Russia teaming up against ISIS, Russia has used its military power in Syria for one overriding purpose: to ensure the survival of Bashar al Assad's government, one of Russia's staunchest and most brutal allies.

We have learned that President Trump is also an admirer of Egyptian President al-Sisi and Philippine President Duterte, two populist leaders who have abused their authority to silence their critics and trample on the rights of their citizens.

If allying ourselves with the likes of Presidents Putin, al Sisi, and Duterte, bringing back black CIA detention sites and so-called “enhanced interrogation”—commonly known as torture—and declaring entire nationalities of men, women, and children fleeing war and devastation as ineligible for resettlement in this country is what the future looks like, we should think long and hard about what it will mean for our reputation as the oldest democracy and leader of the free world.

I have made a career of working across the aisle and with Republican and Democratic Presidents on legislation to help solve the country's problems. I hope to be able to continue doing so, as I learned early on that bipartisanship is the only way the Congress can succeed. I have voted to confirm several of President Trump's Cabinet nominees. I expect to vote for others, and there are several I expect to vote against.

I have never believed that we should keep doing things a certain way just because it is the way we have always done them or that the government cannot be made more efficient and more accountable to the people. Of course it can be.

But in times like this, each of us should rededicate ourselves to defending the things that made this country great in the first place because ours is a great country and a good country. I believe that above all it was, and must continue to be, the integrity of our democratic system, our free, fair, and transparent elections and the checks and balances of our three equal branches of government bolstered by a free press, and our commitment to uphold the fundamental rights of all Americans.

Donald Trump was not elected President to weaken any of that, and we in Congress have a responsibility to do our best to prevent it from happening.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Tillerson nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Rex W. Tillerson, of Texas, to be Secretary of State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 30