

even when his decisions lacked commonsense.

When we asked about decisions where Judge Gorsuch seemed to adopt strained interpretations that narrow laws meant to protect worker safety, he said simply that he was a judge and he didn't take sides. Yet too many times, his narrow interpretations led to decisions that were on the side of big corporations and against the side of the little guy. When asked to respond, he said that if we didn't like the result, if we didn't like his decisions, it was because a statute was too limited or unclear, and that Members of Congress should do better.

We asked Judge Gorsuch about his decision in *Hobby Lobby*, which found an expansive new right to religious liberty for a corporation that employed thousands of people. He did not explain how he assessed the terrible impact this decision had for thousands of working women at the company who would now be denied access to contraceptive coverage.

When I met with Judge Gorsuch, he told me he had a heart. After 4 days of hearings, I still don't know what is in his heart. I would have liked Judge Gorsuch to have been more open so we could have had a real conversation about what the law is and who the courts protect. What we got instead were platitudes about the work of the courts that came straight from a Norman Rockwell painting.

I did agree with the judge that article III courts are there to protect minority rights. Article III of the Constitution protects the independence of the Supreme Court and the lower Federal courts and gives enormous authority to judges and Justices to determine how to apply the law to the cases before them to protect minority rights.

It is critical that before we decide to grant Judge Gorsuch a lifetime appointment to the Nation's highest Court, the Senate is able to gain an understanding of his approach to the law. At our judiciary committee hearing, I asked Jeff Perkins, the father of a young boy with autism, about the impact of Judge Gorsuch's decision on his son's education progress at and outside of his new school. The case involved the protections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, which Judge Gorsuch's decision narrowed to point that these comments under the law were deemed virtually meaningless.

The new school that Luke Perkins attended made little effort to ensure that the skills he developed in school were translating at home. As a result, Luke severely regressed. Experts in autism, psychology, and occupational therapy testified on Luke's behalf that the school was seriously neglecting his needs. An impartial hearing officer, an administrative law judge, and Federal district court all agreed Luke's regression showed that the school was not providing him with a "free appropriate public education" as required by the IDEA.

Judge Gorsuch disagreed and decided the school had "merely more than de minimis" responsibility to do better for Luke. Jeff Perkins, Luke's father, said that he knew Judge Gorsuch's decision would negatively impact thousands of families with special needs children like Luke. It broke his heart.

Judge Gorsuch's extraordinarily narrow interpretation of the IDEA was rejected unanimously by the U.S. Supreme Court last week. In his opinion for the unanimous Court, Chief Justice Roberts concluded that the minimal standard determined by Judge Gorsuch was clearly at odds with the purpose of the law for children who are not progressing along with their peers. Justice Roberts wrote:

The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives. . . . When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing "merely more than de minimis" progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all.

When asked by my colleague, Senator DURBIN of Illinois, why the judge wanted to "lower the bar so low" in his decision, Judge Gorsuch, referring to Luke's case, responded:

If anyone is suggesting that I like a result where an autistic child happens to lose, that's a heartbreaking accusation to me. Heartbreaking. But the fact of the matter is what is bound by certain precedent.

Heartbreaking or not, Judge Gorsuch still found against the autistic child. Thankfully, the Supreme Court disagreed with Judge Gorsuch's wrong decision. It was wrong because remedial legislation such as IDEA should be broadly interpreted in favor of the group being protected. And it was wrong because the courts are not innocent bystanders. Their decisions have real-world impacts for thousands or even millions of people beyond the parties in a particular case before the Court.

This is especially true of the Supreme Court, which issues decisions that don't just reach those cases in front of them—the frozen trucker, women who work at *Hobby Lobby* faced with lack of critical healthcare. They also reach millions of others impacted by interpretations of the law made by the Court in those decisions. The Supreme Court does not just interpret our laws. The Supreme Court is an affirmation of our country's values. The Supreme Court shapes our society.

When we began the hearings on Judge Gorsuch's nomination, I said the Supreme Court vacancy isn't just another position we must fill in our Federal judiciary. A Supreme Court vacancy is a solemn obligation we must fulfill for the future of our country and for our future generations. The central question for me, in looking at Judge Gorsuch and his record and listening carefully through 3 days of hearings, is whether he would be a Justice for all or Justice for some. Regrettably, I do not believe Judge Gorsuch would be a Justice for all of us.

I will oppose his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. This vacancy is simply too important for the future of America and our values to do otherwise.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

RUSSIA AND TRUMP CAMPAIGN INVESTIGATION

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, not as a member of any one committee or political party but as a gravely concerned American.

On a seemingly daily—or even hourly—basis, there is a new revelation about the Trump campaign's possible ties to or even coordination with Russia's interference in our Presidential election last year. With these constant reports coming out, it can be difficult to see through all the smoke in the air.

However, what is clear is that we must get to the bottom of what exactly happened. I know that the White House and some in Congress are furiously working to sweep this under the rug, but only the truth will serve as a public means to move past this crisis for our democracy.

That is why I come to the Senate floor today, to address this issue before my colleagues and to help the American people sort through the details of what we know to be the undisputed facts. We know without a doubt, based on the assessment of credible intelligence, that the Russian Government hacked into Presidential campaign infrastructure and sought not only to damage Hillary Clinton but to try to help elect Donald Trump.

Russian intelligence operatives hacked into the email servers of both of our two major political parties. They chose to selectively leak information that damaged one Presidential candidate and favored the other. This is not a partisan political assessment. This is the plain truth as proven by credible intelligence gathered by the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, and the military's Cyber Command. In addition, 17 U.S. intelligence agencies issued a statement expressing their unanimous assessment that Moscow had penetrated State election voting centers.

During an open hearing in the Senate Intelligence Committee in January of this year, FBI Director James Comey said: "There were intrusions and attempted intrusions at the state level voter registration databases." Director Comey said that there was no evidence of activity on election day related to this voter registration data. However, this clearly demonstrates that this data may be vulnerable to future cyber attacks and manipulations by foreign hackers.

What happened in this last year's election is already disturbing enough. In testimony during the same Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said:

We have high confidence that President Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. Presidential election. The goals of this campaign were to undermine public faith in the U.S. Democratic process, denigrate Secretary [Hillary] Clinton and harm her electability and potential presidency.

He continued: "Putin and the Russian government also developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump."

That shocking revelation at the very least begged for deeper investigation and accountability to protect our democratic institutions from foreign interference moving forward. After all, Russia did not do this to help the Republican Party. Russia did this to help Russia.

I don't want foreign powers putting their thumb on the scales for Democrats or Republicans in our elections. Our democracy hinges on our ability to protect the voices of Americans to choose our own leaders. Nothing could be more fundamental in democracy.

You can see similar ongoing Russian efforts to work seeking to influence and undermine democratic elections in France, Germany, and throughout the West, in addition to the former Soviet states, which is why we have to take this seriously and to see through the latest news cycle, political commentary, or tweet and remain focused on following the facts, wherever they may lead us.

Unfortunately, the facts suggest that we not only need to hold the Russians accountable but that we also have reason to look into possible ties between key members of the Trump campaign and their connections to the Russian actors who we know meddled in our election.

The obvious question Americans are demanding an answer to is this: Did the Trump campaign cooperate—or even coordinate—with the Russians in their effort to help Donald Trump? It is a logical question that has striking implications not only for the Trump administration but also for our democracy as a whole.

The President and his senior advisers—both on the campaign and now in the administration—have vehemently denied any Russian connections whatsoever. Back in November, Hope Hicks, a Trump campaign spokesman said: "There was no communication between the campaign and any foreign entity during the campaign."

A month ago, President Trump responded to a question in a press conference about whether anyone in his campaign had been in contact with Russia, saying:

Nobody that I know of . . . Russia is a ruse. I have nothing to do with Russia.

I truly wish that that was what the facts had shown, but at nearly every turn, there is evidence—and, when forced, admission—that there were, in fact, communications and contact with the Russians that are not only unprecedented but truly hard to believe and to understand.

Contrary to denials, we know that senior leaders and surrogates in then-Candidate Donald Trump's campaign had contact with the Russian Government and actors behind the Russian cyber attacks and leaks.

One campaign adviser, Carter Page, traveled to Moscow in July of 2016 on a trip approved by the Trump campaign. During the trip, Page delivered a lecture that slammed U.S. policy toward Russia. Three days later, at the Republican National Convention, Trump campaign aides stepped in to oppose the inclusion of language in the RNC platform that called on the U.S. Government to send weapons to our ally Ukraine in response to Russian military aggression and the illegal invasion by Russia of Ukrainian Crimea.

Despite Trump campaign denials of involvement at the time, former campaign aides have since come forward to say that, yes, they were involved in defeating that language in the platform.

While this was going on, again, despite denials to the contrary, we know that senior Trump advisers met with Russian Ambassador to the United States Sergey Kislyak on the sidelines of the Republican Convention.

We know that then-Senator Sessions, a senior campaign surrogate, also met with Kislyak in his personal Senate office later in September.

Again, this communication was uncovered despite Attorney General Sessions denying it had ever taken place.

During his Senate confirmation hearing in January, then-Senator Sessions said in response to a pointed question about how he would respond as Attorney General to any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian Government in the course of the campaign:

I'm not aware of any of those activities. I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign, and I didn't have—did not have communications with the Russians.

Then the day after the Republican National Convention, WikiLeaks posted nearly 20,000 emails hacked and stolen by Russian intelligence from the DNC server.

After this, Donald Trump, during a press conference in late July, called on Russia to hack Hillary Clinton's private email, saying:

I will tell you this—Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing. I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press.

Although Trump later claimed to be joking, we now have reason to believe that one of his friends and advisers, Roger Stone, was in contact with the Russian hackers behind the cyber attacks. Stone boasted in a speech in August 2016 that he had communicated with WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange and that more damaging documents would be forthcoming in what he called an "October surprise."

Stone also admitted to communicating via Twitter with the Russian hacker behind the breaches who went

by the moniker "Guccifer 2.0." Stone tweeted out predictions that Hillary Clinton senior campaign aide John Podesta's personal emails would soon be published, saying: "Trust me, it will soon be Podesta's time in the barrel." Stone also tweeted: "I have total confidence that WikiLeaks and my hero Julian Assange will educate the American people soon."

Soon after this, WikiLeaks released its first batch of John Podesta's stolen emails and continued releasing more on a daily basis up until election day.

In the face of these facts, the Trump administration's story has evolved from rejecting Russian influence on the election entirely to denying any connection or communication with Russian actors, to asserting that this contact was, in fact, innocent or routine and that Americans should simply trust that there was nothing more going on. But to ask the public to trust you when you have falsely denied that the communication occurred in the first place is absurd on its face and, in fact, it is a plausible reason to suspect possible coordination.

After the election, we now know that President-Elect Trump's appointed National Security Advisor, Michael Flynn, and Trump's senior aide and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had a secret meeting with Russian Ambassador Kislyak and that Flynn later conducted phone calls with Kislyak that included discussion of rolling back sanctions for Russia.

Flynn has since resigned as National Security Advisor after having lied about the content of his conversations with Kislyak.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has recused himself from the investigation into the Trump campaign's possible ties to Russia due to his undisclosed meetings with the same Russian Ambassador.

Last week, FBI Director James Comey confirmed to the public that the FBI is currently conducting a counter-intelligence investigation into possible coordination between President Trump's campaign and the Kremlin.

I will repeat that because I fear that the public is becoming desensitized to the gravity of what we are learning about. The President's campaign officials are under investigation by the FBI for possible links with the Russian Government, including whether they coordinated with one another to impact our Presidential election.

We also saw reports last week that before his time on the Trump campaign, former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort created and then sold the Russians what appears to effectively be a playbook on how to undermine Western democracy and to further the interests of the Russian Government, including here in the United States.

Manafort's reported recommendations to use political campaign tactics, establish front groups, and manipulate the press cycle are strikingly similar

to the actual tactics that we know the Russians employed to undermine the 2016 Presidential election.

The Trump administration's repeated attempts to now distance itself from its former campaign chairman, a man who played a central role in the Trump campaign, is indicative of its desperate attempts to cover up the facts.

The facts are there if we just look.

The Trump campaign denied having worked to scrub the RNC platform to be friendlier to Russia but then later had to admit to having done so.

Michael Flynn denied conversations with the Russian Ambassador and then had to resign when that turned out to be a lie.

Attorney General Sessions denied having conversations with the Russians but later recused himself from the investigation after having to admit that he secretly met on several occasions with the Russian Ambassador.

The Trump campaign and Trump's advisers denied any communications with the Russians, but it turns out they personally met with the Russian Ambassador at the RNC, communicated with Russian hackers, and appear to have had advanced notice about impending DNC and Clinton leaks.

All of this culminates with the news that the Trump campaign chairman sold the Russians a playbook on how to conduct a strikingly similar influence operation to undermine democracy and promote the Putin agenda throughout the West.

This is all a complicated web of connections that we need to piece together. As a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I am committed to finding the answers that the American people deserve and to working together with all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to put our Nation first and to make sure that we get to the bottom of this.

We need to do everything possible to get to the objective truth. That includes subpoenaing President Trump's tax returns and financial statements so that we can follow the money and determine who holds the debt behind the President's complex international business empire. That includes calling President Trump's associates, such as Paul Manafort, Carter Page, Roger Stone, Jared Kushner, Jeff Sessions, and Michael Flynn to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

But with the incredible amount of information and intelligence that we need to look through, I believe we also should be open to an independent, non-partisan commission designed solely to investigate what happened.

During the investigation of Watergate and the ensuing scandal, Congress conducted a thorough select oversight investigation at the same time that an independent special prosecutor was pursuing a case to uncover the truth. All of those avenues proved to be essential to discovering the crimes and coverup that were committed.

If we do not take this seriously, our fundamental democratic institutions

are at risk. History will judge severely those of us in this body tasked with finding the whole truth and determining conclusively whether or not associates of the Trump campaign coordinated or cooperated with this effort to undermine our American democracy.

We cannot allow political pressure or unsubstantiated distractions to get in the way of simply following the facts.

I don't think it is hyperbolic to state that the fate of our democracy depends on our ability to thoroughly and carefully get to the truth here. Until we are able to find out the full extent of Russia's operations and ensure that we set up protections against similar actions going forward, our democratic institutions will remain vulnerable.

I want my constituents in New Mexico and all of the American people to know that I remain committed to seeing this important mission through and following the facts, wherever they may lead.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO DAVID WOLK

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the enduring legacy of a champion of education and equity in my home State of Vermont, David Wolk.

For the last 16 years, Mr. David Wolk has served admirably as the president of Castleton University. David's retirement at the close of 2017 will leave a legacy of nearly 17 years of academic excellence, visionary leadership, and unmatched commitment to community. As the longest serving president in its history, David has led Castleton through an extraordinary transformation. David leaves Castleton as a vibrant, economic engine of the Green Mountain State and a trailblazer in inclusivity, entrepreneurship, and service learning.

Castleton students have often found a unique kinship with David, noting his frequency in the student dining halls and at student club events. As an avid fan of Castleton Spartan Athletics, David is proud of the accomplishments of the school's student-athletes. The university more than doubled its varsity sport offerings during David's tenure, enabling Vermont students to play Division III sports. The largest community investment was the development of the Spartan Arena, which is used by both the school and the community as an all-purpose community center and athletic space.

As a Rutland native, David has always felt a special connection to his

hometown. As president, his focus on integrating Castleton and the surrounding community has built a lasting alliance that promises regional prosperity for years to come. Most recently, Castleton has partnered with the Rutland Economic Development Corporation to open the Castleton Downtown Office, a publicly accessible space for students and community members alike. A nexus of the downtown, this space now hosts the Center for Entrepreneurial Programs, Center for Schools, Center for Community Engagement, and the Castleton Polling Institute. David's passion for the arts has also inspired a coupling of the Castleton Downtown Art Gallery and the historic Paramount Theatre.

As the needs of our students, families, and communities continue to evolve, David's legacy is his success in elevating education as a key solution to addressing our most pressing public challenges. As he transitions to his next venture, I wish David and his wife, Lyn, great success and hope they will find joy in visiting family and friends found throughout the world.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a statement issued by Castleton University be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From Castleton University]

PRESIDENT WOLK ANNOUNCES 16TH YEAR WILL BE HIS FINAL AT CASTLETON

LONGEST SERVING PRESIDENT IN UNIVERSITY HISTORY TO STEP DOWN IN DECEMBER

Castleton University President Dave Wolk announced at a campus assembly Wednesday that he will step down in December after serving for 16 years as president. Wolk came to the presidency in December of 2001 after intertwined careers in education and government, and 2017 marks his 43rd year in public service. Wolk is the longest serving president in Castleton history by more than four years.

"I have been blessed, more than I deserve, to have had so many leadership opportunities over the last 43 years, and I am especially grateful for the last 16 at Castleton. Moving on at the end of 2017 will indeed be emotionally challenging because I absolutely love our students and staff, I am lucky to be part of this exceptional community, and I bleed green, full of Spartan Pride. I will be a Spartan always and forever."

Beginning in 2018, Wolk will begin a new startup venture, Wolk Leadership Solutions, with his wife, Lyn. The Wolsks will work with CEOs and Boards of Directors in business, government, industry, schools, hospitals, universities and an array of nonprofits to find solutions to leadership challenges. The new entrepreneurial venture will specialize in coaching leaders to achieve greater success, while offering mediation and conflict resolution services.

"Our goal will be to help leaders to be more successful. We will help boards and leaders to find solutions to their challenges, and to do so in a way that will be effective and enduring over time through coaching and guiding change. I am also hoping to do some teaching and writing, including involvement in a Vermont leadership institute. Helping people to be better at what they do has always been a passion."

At his inauguration in the fall of 2002, Wolk addressed a standing room only crowd