

quickly result in an end to repression or free elections. But I am confident that, in a lot less than 50 years, the Cuban people will have a lot more freedom than they have had for the past 50 years.

Consider for a moment what it would mean if we did what these Senators advocate. Not only would we have no ambassador in Cuba, to be consistent, we would have no ambassador in China, Vietnam, Russia, South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, or in any number of other countries where human rights are routinely violated, where political opponents, journalists, and human rights defenders are imprisoned and tortured, where there is no such thing as a fair trial, where civil society organizations are threatened and harassed, and where dissent is severely punished.

Is that what the Senators want, or are they just concerned about human rights in Cuba? Their argument is as illogical as it is inconsistent.

The purpose of an ambassador is to represent the interests of the U.S. Government and the American people. Appointing a U.S. Ambassador is not a reward to a foreign government, any more than their ambassadors are a reward to our government. Do the Senators think that our ambassador in Russia is a reward to President Putin, or that having an ambassador in Moscow somehow conveys that we agree with President Putin's corrupt, repressive policies? Does anyone think that Russia's ambassador is somehow a reward to the Obama administration? Or that our ambassador in Vietnam legitimizes the repressive policies of that government? Does anyone think that the Cuban Government regards its ambassador here as a reward to us?

Let's be sensible. The United States has interests in every country, even if it is just to stand up for the rights of Americans who travel, study, or work overseas. But there are many other reasons like promoting trade and investment, protecting national security and public health, and supporting educational and cultural exchange.

We could do as these Senators urge and downgrade our diplomatic presence and withdraw our ambassadors from every country where there is a repressive government. That, of course, would mean that our lower-ranking diplomats would be relegated to meeting with foreign officials of lesser rank than ambassador.

And, of course, those governments, like Cuba, they would still have their ambassadors in Washington, with access to officials of comparable rank in our government. Would that help us advocate for U.S. interests, for U.S. values, for the American people?

We either believe in diplomacy or we don't. We either empower our diplomats or we don't. The Cubans, after a year of difficult negotiations, agreed to reopen embassies. Now, with their ambassador here conducting business, we are somehow better off without an ambassador there? Of course not.

I understand that this is an emotional issue for some Cuban-American families. But after 55 years, Cuban-Americans overwhelmingly support the new policy of engagement. They want the U.S. to have an ambassador in Havana.

There is a time for family politics, and there is time for what is in the interest of the nation as a whole. Ambassadors serve the national interest, and that is what Jeff DeLaurentis would do, and he would do so as a career diplomat with years of experience.

Finally, I want to quote from Alan Gross, who as we all know, spent 5 long years in a Cuban prison. This is what Mr. Gross said about Mr. DeLaurentis's nomination: "I advocate for the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador to Cuba and I have a very high regard for Ambassador Jeff DeLaurentis. Had there been diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba in December 2008, a U.S. Ambassador could have prevented the loss of five years of my life. Any one in Congress who opposes this nomination goes against the best interests of the United States."

We should listen to Alan Gross. He suffered in Cuba, as do thousands of Americans imprisoned overseas. They depend on our ambassadors to assist and advocate for them, just as we would if it were a member of our families.

I urge these Senators to put what is in the interests of the American people over their personal interests and to not obstruct the confirmation of Jeff DeLaurentis, a superbly qualified nominee, from becoming ambassador to Cuba.

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#### TRIBUTE TO GENERAL GORDON SULLIVAN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, earlier this summer, GEN Gordon Sullivan, a man who has dedicated his life to caring for and developing world-class leaders, retired from his role as chairman of the Norwich University Board of Trustees, a position he held for 13 years. At the same time, he retired from his role as president of the Association of the United States Army, a post he held for 18 years.

General Sullivan's lifetime of service began in 1959, when he earned his degree in political science from Norwich University and assumed a commission in the Army as a second lieutenant of armor. Like so many from this prestigious Vermont institution, he went on to excel among his peers. He completed two distinguished tours in Vietnam, earning the Purple Heart. General Sullivan could have justifiably concluded his military service then, and his contributions to that point would have been impressive, but he continued to serve, and in clear recognition of his tireless devotion to soldiers, he was eventually appointed as the Army's top officer.

As the 32nd Army Chief of Staff, General Sullivan directed a post-Cold War

downsizing that spanned the administrations of two U.S. Presidents. These transitional years saw unprecedented reorganization within the Department, occurring amid ongoing, complex global peacekeeping operations. By continuing to prioritize the men and women he was tasked with leading, General Sullivan navigated this critical era with a skill and tact that few can match. In 1995, he retired from the Army to begin a new chapter.

In 1998, General Sullivan began his tenure as president of the Association of the United States Army, AUSA, the Nation's largest Army-oriented, non-profit organization. As president of the association, he was known for focusing efforts on improving conditions for soldiers and their families. General Sullivan served as head of AUSA while maintaining close ties to Norwich University, and that connection was further solidified in 2003 when he became chairman of the Norwich University Board of Trustees.

As chairman of the board, he directed and supervised countless improvements to the university, while always adhering to Norwich's core values. During his 13 years leading the board, General Sullivan assisted with the meticulous design of the school's 2019 plan. His influence helped bring about some of the most significant improvements in Norwich's history, including the expansion of student housing, academic resources, and athletic facilities. Perhaps most notably, he played an integral role in building the school's reputation as an internationally known center for education in cyber security. Like Norwich's founder, Captain Alden Partridge, General Sullivan has contributed to Vermont and our Nation's academic prosperity in so many ways.

I would like to recognize GEN Gordon Sullivan for his contributions to Norwich University, the Army, and the Nation as a whole. It gives me great pride to know that General Sullivan benefited so strongly from a Vermont-based education, and I know that our State has benefited from a longtime relationship with him. I am confident that General Sullivan's contributions will continue, and I wish him well as he further expands his already proud and accomplished legacy.

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#### CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, today we have made great progress in protecting whistleblowers and veterans at Veterans Affairs hospitals across the country by passing the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction—Veterans Affairs Appropriations Conference Agreement, which includes S. 2291, VA Patient Protection Act. This bill provides protection for the protectors of our veterans, the whistleblowers, who are shedding light on the egregious acts of some employees at VA hospitals across the country. Unfortunately, one of those hospitals is the Edwards Hines Jr. Veterans Affairs Medical Center in my State of Illinois.