

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:  
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“Vladimir Kara-Murza: Putin's Personal Prisoner”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman;  
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Ranking Member;  
Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Ranking Member;  
Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT);  
Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX);  
Representative Victoria Spartz (R-IN)**

**Witnesses:**

**Evgenia Kara-Murza, Advocacy Director at the Free Russia Foundation, Wife  
of Vladimir Kara-Murza;  
Meghan McCain;  
Sonya Kara-Murza, Daughter of Vladimir Kara-Murza**

**The Hearing Was Held From 2:39 p.m. To 3:42 p.m., Room 2200 Rayburn  
House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC),  
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

**Date: Wednesday, September 20, 2023**

WILSON: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm grateful to welcome everyone to this Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe organizational meeting relative to "Vladimir Kara-Murza: Putin's Personal Prisoner" – a hearing on a very important individual, and a time in history that could not be more important to raise the issue of the unjust imprisonment.

With this, I'm really grateful to my colleagues. We have Senator Richard Blumenthal here. And he was first and we're beginning late because we had votes in the House. But we're here and because this is so critical and so important. I'm very grateful Senator Roger Wicker, also a distinguished member of the Commission, and then as an indication of how bipartisan this is, Congressman Steven Cohen of Tennessee. And so – and it really is reflective today of Republicans and Democrats together in a bipartisan manner to show our appreciation for the courage of the Kara-Murza family.

With that, I'm grateful to hold a hearing to highlight a hero for human rights and democracy, Vladimir Kara-Murza. Vladimir is a Russian politician, thinker, journalist, writer, and advocate who has devoted his life to making Russia a freer, a more democratic, more pluralistic, more friendly to its neighbors, fairer place. And in the process, he made the world a better place as well. An optimist by nature, he never gave up on the principles, values of democracy and rule of law in his trust in the people of Russia. Vladimir is one of the voices that advocated for the groundbreaking Magnitsky Act. This historic act made the lives of all human rights violators in the world much more difficult, gave a tool to the victims to pursue justice that they have been denied before. Vladimir stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Boris Nemtsov, who was assassinated a few hundred feet from the Kremlin for opposing the oppressive, cruel regime of war criminal Vladimir Putin.

Vladimir was one of the very few public voices emanating from Russia who unequivocally condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and has consistently spoken out in support of Ukraine and Ukrainians. As the true hero that he is, he's paid, sadly, a dear price for his work. He was poisoned not once, but twice, and survived the assassination attempts. His wife, Evgenia, who is here today – I'm so grateful – is present and can speak to the horrors of the living minute to minute not knowing if Vladimir would survive. Thank God he did survive. He lived too, among others, to be hypercritical of the Kremlin's murderous war against Ukraine. He used every opportunity and every platform to tell the world this war is nothing but an unjustified act of aggression carried out by war criminal Putin, drunk on unchecked power.

In April of 2022, he was arrested and then convicted on bogus charges to 25 years in prison, maximum possible. His show trial was reminiscent of the Stalin-era proceedings. Throughout all of this, Vladimir only extended – or, exuded a dignity and competence in his beliefs. He publicly stood with courageous Ukrainians and Russian citizens who opposed the regime and the war. Now this hero is being transferred from a prison in Moscow to an unknown location. We do not know where he will be, or whether he will have his lawyers to have access to him. He's now spent more than 300 days in Putin's prisons.

Months ago, this past April, my colleagues and I spoke with Evgenia and we learned of Vladimir's quickly deteriorating health. We reacted swiftly and requested that he be designated

under the Levinson Act. Vladimir is a legal permanent resident whose wife and children are U.S. citizens. So it's undisputed that he can be designated. And that would energize efforts to bring Vladimir home. Yet the State Department has failed to designate Vladimir through the Levinson Act. Moreover, the undersecretary of state, who we were told in April was responsible for making the decision, did not return our urgent calls for making a decision. And she then left her job without ever personally responding to us.

For today's hearing, we invited Secretary Blinken or a State Department representative to be here to address this – now more than ever – this urgent manner. Yet, as you can see, even though the State Department is a few miles away, and Vladimir's health continues to deteriorate, they are not here. Vladimir's health and freedom are not matters that can wait for diplomatic niceties or slow bureaucratic processes.

That's why, following the lack of activity on part of the State Department, Ranking Member Representative Cohen and I today introduced the Vladimir Kara-Murza Action and Freedom Act. It will require that the Department of State designate Vladimir a wrongfully detained person in thirty days after the adoption of the bill. Or if they fail to do so, they must finally – after our months of congressional request – report their rationale for failing to use all tools to secure his release. Lastly, they will be required to report every six months until Vladimir is designated or finally free.

We have tried to engage the department in this manner in bicameral and bipartisan letters with sixty-nine members of the U.S. House and Senate, to have asked for the designation. But we've not received a clear response as to why they failed to act with a time sense of urgency and dignity. And I'd like to point out that, indeed, on the front it's signed in such a bipartisan manner with Senator Roger Wicker and Senator Ben Cardin. The so-called equal branch of government, we now move to legislate that the Department of State finally act, explaining efforts to Congress, and do everything possible to reunite Vladimir Kara-Murza with his family.

We are grateful to have with us today two extraordinary courageous witnesses and advocates for human rights and freedom – Vladimir's wife, thank you very much for being here, and Meghan Kelly (sic; McCain), the daughter of the late U.S. senator and American hero John McCain. And I thank them for their time and expertise, and now yield to the ranking member, Steve Cohen, for his opening remarks.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for holding this hearing.

There's nobody that I hold in higher esteem than Vladimir Kara-Murza. He is, indeed, a hero of the world, and a hero of democracy, and a hero of people who stand up for free speech and for democracy. He went back to Russia, even though he'd twice been poisoned. And he told me he had to go back because he's a Russian politician, and a Russian patriot. And he wanted to see his country operate with democracy, and he thought it could. And he thought he could do that better being in Russia than being in the United States.

I'd cautioned him for his own safety, and I think others had as well. But he was indeed driven to do the right thing. That's the thing that heroes do, and people that we should admire.

They are driven by their conscience, the focus that they have in their minds of what is proper and what's right. And he did it. He went back, and he was arrested by the Russians. First, for just evading the police, whether true or not. Probably not true. And now he's looking at 25 years in prison.

We've been trying to get him designated under the Lewinsky (sic; Levinson) Act as wrongfully detained. And the State Department has not given us a reason why not. They just assured us that they've done everything within their power to get his – get him released, and to see that he's treated properly. They maintain contact with him. And all that's fine and good, but why they won't answer our question is beyond me. We are members of the United States Congress, and if we ask the secretary of state to give us a response to such an issue, the secretary of state should respond.

They made the gentleman, whose last name I can't pronounce, Paul, who was in the Hotel Rwanda, who was not an American citizen either – the same status, I believe, as Vladimir. And they made him a wrongfully detained citizen. So if they can – and he should have been. I was certainly an advocate of his cause as well. He was a political prisoner. But they should do it for Vladimir. And whether – it's not going to get him home immediately. We do this and it's not like Putin's going to say, oh, he's wrongfully detained, I should release him. That's not going to happen. But regardless, it's an arrow we could have in our quiver, and we should have every arrow that we can have in that quiver because that gives an additional ground to make our arguments.

So I'm in favor of certainly his release as soon as possible, and for the State Department to act. Why they're not acting is beyond me. Why they haven't given F-16s earlier to Ukraine, why they haven't given the ATACMS earlier to Ukraine, why they had been slow in almost everything they've done with Ukraine. We've been great with Ukraine, and we've given them lots of weapons. And all that's great and wonderful. But time is of the essence and time is of the essence in Vladimir Kara-Murza's freedom.

I yield back the balance of my time.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Cohen.

We now proceed with an opening statement by Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

WICKER: Well, let me be very brief, because we're here to hear Ms. Meghan McCain and Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza. Let me subscribe in full to the opening statements of Chairman Wilson and my friend from Shelby County, Tennessee, Mr. Cohen. Vladimir Kara-Murza will go down in history as one of the great freedom fighters in the history of Russia. He is a hero. He is heroic and courageous, spiritually, physically. And he's one of the most articulate spokesmen I've ever heard to speak on behalf of freedom and on behalf of what we aspire to for the Russian people.

It is a miracle that Vladimir Kara-Murza is alive today. And what we're hoping for now is a third miracle. Vladimir Putin is well known to have poisoned his enemies routinely in

Russia. He's well known to have imprisoned dissidents, not because of any act that they've done against the state of Russia but because of their political views in favor of freedom. And something deep inside Vladimir Kara-Murza caused him, as Mr. Cohen said, to go back, in the face of almost certain incarceration, to shine more light on the illegality, on the brutality, on the war criminality of the Putin regime.

The State Department should be listening today to the elected representatives both in the House and Senate, who once again call upon this administration to designate Mr. Kara-Murza under the Levinson Act and to heighten this case in terms of international attention. Why have they not done so, Representative Cohen? It's harder work. We are calling on the State Department to get involved at a higher level, at a more intense level in this regard. And in doing so, we may be able to effect another third miracle for Vladimir. But also in doing so, we will do as he has hoped. And that is, shine the light of international attention on the corruption, on the brutality, and on the totalitarianism of the Putin regime.

So thank you to both of our distinguished witnesses. And we appreciate you coming forward and speaking up.

WILSON: Thank you, Senator Roger Wicker.

And we've also been joined by Congressman Marc Veasey of Texas. And I was so happy to see Senator Blumenthal that I forgot to mention, I'm Joe Wilson, member of Congress from South Carolina. (Laughter.) But I was so happy. I was so impressed that he beat us here. This is unheard of. And so, but bottom line, it shows the significance of this hearing today, the members that are attending.

What we'll do is have a presentation from each of you. And we would like to keep it at five minutes each. And what we would do if there's additional comments to submit it to the record. And then we'll proceed alternating House, Senate and both political parties as we proceed. But we will begin, of course, with Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza. And just your courage is so much appreciated. Thank you.

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much, Chairman. Chairman Wilson, members of Congress, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, I'm addressing you today because almost 20 years ago I married a man of integrity. A man whose words and beliefs have always been in alignment with his actions. You all know Vladimir. And I know that you respect him for his clear and courageous voice and his principled and unequivocal stand, the sincerity of which has never raised any doubts. This man today needs my voice to continue carrying his message from a Russian prison because, having survived two assassination attacks by a team of FSB operatives in the service of the Russian state, he was unlawfully charged, tried, and sentenced to a quarter of a century in strict regime for so-called high treason.

Back in 2010, together with his friend and colleague Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir joined the campaign for the introduction of the Magnitsky legislation launched by William Browder. That campaign, born out of the determination to find justice for Sergei Magnitsky, brutally murdered in a Moscow prison in 2009, has given the world a powerful and revolutionary tool to bring to

accountability human rights violators around the world. The Russian regime fully realized the revolutionary nature of the tool that was being created and would be used against it. It also realized that those involved in the advocacy for the Magnitsky legislation would not be silenced – would not be scared into silence.

These people were seen as a direct, existential threat to the regime. In February 2015, Boris Nemtsov was assassinated on the Bolshoi Moskvotzky Bridge in Moscow. Three months after that, my husband Vladimir was poisoned for the first time. He ended up in a coma with multiple organ failure and was given a 5 percent survival chance. He beat all the odds, though. He relearned how to walk, took his cane, and went back to Russia to continue his fight.

A second attack happened in 2017, leaving him yet again in a coma with yet another multiple organ failure. Thanks to an independent investigation by Bellingcat, The Insider, and Der Spiegel, we now know not only the names but the faces of those FSB operatives, of a team of assassins in the service of the Russian state, that had been following him before the attacks. The same team that had been following Boris Nemtsov before his assassination. The same team that poisoned Alexy Navalny with Novichok.

These poisonings left Vladimir with peripheral nerve damage, which however was not an obstacle to him continuing his work. Moreover, these assassination attempts only further convinced him that his work must indeed be important and effective to attract this kind of attention from the Kremlin. Last year, after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir believed it is his duty as a Russian politician to show by his own example that giving into fear and intimidation is always a choice, even in the face of the well-oiled and increasingly cruel repressive machine of Vladimir Putin. Indeed, in the words of great American statesman, Senator John McCain, courage is not the absence of fear, but the capacity to act despite our fears.

Vladimir's speeches that served as grounds for criminal charges against him publicly denounced the war crimes committed by the Russian army, called for the creation of a Nuremberg-style tribunal to prosecute those responsible for the act of aggression against Ukraine, and raised awareness about the rising number of political prisoners in the Russian Federation, total censorship of the media, and the de facto destruction of the Russian constitution through a so-called referendum.

As Vladimir wrote from prison, and I quote, "According to the indictment, my speeches threatened the security and constitutional order of the Russian Federation, damaged the international reputation of the Russian Federation, and gave Russia an image as an aggressor state in the eyes of the international community. While flattered by the investigative committee's assessment of my influence, I must admit that Putin has done a much better job on all three counts than I ever could," end of quote.

After 18 months in detention, not to mention the time that he spent in a disciplinary cell that measured nine feet by four and a half feet, Vladimir lost almost 55 pounds and his polyneuropathy symptoms that were initially caused by the two poisonings in the past have not only returned but spread to both his feet. Under the Russian law, polyneuropathy is on the list of

medical conditions that should prevent his incarceration, because it can lead to paralysis. But of course, the Russian authorities do not seem bothered by that fact.

Quite fittingly, Vladimir was tried by Judge Sergey Podoprigrorov, sanctioned under the Magnitsky law because in 2008, as a judge at Moscow's Tverskoy Court, he unlawfully sent Sergei Magnitsky to detention to the Butryka prison. The head of Butryka prison at the time, Dmitry Komnov, ordered the use of torture and denied Sergei medical care, as the result of which Sergei died. After Vladimir's arrest, Komnov, also on the Magnitsky List, became the head of Moscow's pretrial detention center, where Vladimir was held until his transfer to a penal colony – to a strict regime penal colony in Siberia, two days before his birthday. No doubt to prevent him from receiving words of encouragement and support from all over the world, including from his own children.

Thus, two people under Magnitsky sanctions for being complicit in the murder of Sergei Magnitsky, handled the case of my husband, a fierce campaigner for the introduction of the Magnitsky legislation since 2010. And if this weren't cynical and ridiculous enough, the trial was held behind closed doors because, in the words of the prosecutor, Boris Loktionov, and I quote, "Kara-Murza wants to use the courtroom as a tribune to publicly discredit the existing regime with the help of CIA and MI6," end of quote. The entire case against my husband is an act of cynical vengeance by the Putin regime, which proves that my husband's work has indeed been important and effective. But it also shows that his life is in grave danger. They've already tried to kill him twice, and I have no reason to believe that they won't try again.

Today, Vladimir's somewhere in Siberia, about 2,000 miles away from Moscow, with no contact with his lawyers, let alone his family members. The United States has a longstanding and noble tradition of helping free Soviet prisoners of conscience, even at times of mutual bilateral animosity. Among those who owe the freedom to such advocacy are Vladimir Bukovsky, Natan Sharansky, Yuri Orlov, Alexander Ginzburg, Andrei Sakharov, Vladimir Dremlyuga. U.S. presidents of both parties didn't just save their lives, although of course there is nothing more precious than a human life. But they also sent a powerful message to the Soviet leaders that the United States realizes the inhuman nature of the Soviet regime and stands with courageous people who have a different vision of Russia.

Today, Vladimir Putin is leading two wars at the same time, against Ukraine and against Russian civil society. I'm often asked if there is an alternative to Vladimir Putin. Only a democratic Russia is the key to peace and stability in that region. And people like my husband, who are risking their freedom and very often their lives, to fight for the rule of law and respect for human rights are the face of the different Russia that everyone wants to see. I call on all of you to use all available instruments to ensure that the voices of such visionaries are heard and that their lives are saved.

People like my husband are an alternative to Vladimir Putin. Do not let Vladimir Putin destroy this alternative. I thank you very much for your attention, and for giving me all the support that you've been giving our family over the past absolutely horrendous 17, almost 18, months. And if the chairman allows it, Vladimir's and my daughter Sonya, would be very

grateful for an opportunity to say just a few words on her behalf and on behalf of her siblings. Thank you very much.

WILSON: Indeed, thank you, Evgenia, for your courage to be here today.

And just so grateful that we can proceed immediately with Meghan McCain and then proceed.

MCCAIN: Thank you to members of the Helsinki Commission.

WILSON: Yes. Mmm hmm.

MCCAIN: Thank you to members of the Helsinki Commission for the opportunity to speak today.

I come before you for two reasons. The first is to speak for the freedom of a warrior, a patriot, and most important a friend. Vladimir Kara-Murza is all three, and the reward for his virtue is the martyr's crown. He is imprisoned for a promised quarter of a century in a hellish confinement of Russia's vast prison system.

The other reason I speak today is to urge the United States Department of State to do the right thing for this hero – a hero who, in working on behalf of a Russia in chains, also works on behalf of peace and security for us all. It is not enough for the government of the United States to have sympathy for Vladimir Kara-Murza; it must act. (Comes on mic.) The surest path to compelling that action is for the Department of State to designate him immediately a wrongfully or illegally detained person. This designation would compel the United States to undertake specific measures to seek his freedom. And without those steps without that attention, without those demands from America to the Russian regime, Vladimir Kara-Murza faces a lifetime in chains.

Understanding why Vladimir Kara-Murza is imprisoned is understanding the plight of Russia itself. The story of that great nation across the past century-plus is a story of a people betrayed. A country sending forth to the world moral giants like Dostoyevsky and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, to say nothing of artistic titans like Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy, was a foundry of culture and civilization precisely because of a flourishing heterodoxy that arose even under an autocratic system.

Russia is never a model of good governance but it was once a nation of cultural genius that stood as a full equal and by that metric to absolutely any in the world. The dead and bloody hand of communism, followed by the iron grip of Putinism, has stripped Russia of its glory and plunged that nation into a gray winter that persists to this day.

It is a long century still unfinished of war and repression. We hear a lot about a talk of Russia's victims. There is a long list, from Poles to Balts to Georgians to Chechnyans to most especially Ukrainians. They all deserve better.



It is all true but Russia also deserves better. In the depth of winter, though, there are signs of spring and Vladimir Kara-Murza is one of those signs and that is why he is a prisoner today. You all know the story of Vladimir Kara-Murza's brave life and if you don't you ought to. In a society mostly cowed into submission by the evil repression of Vladimir Kara-Murza, Vladimir Kara-Murza had no fear of speaking.

Let me amend that. Even when he spoke, even when he felt that fear, that is the true definition of courage, I think – knowing the risk and feeling the danger and doing the right thing anyway as he has done.

Most people will go along with the path of least resistance in life because it is our nature and it is in our interest. When we think of what we hold dear – our families, our children, our homes – few can be blamed for refusing to risk them against overwhelming power, and when that power is in the hands of a dictator who does not hesitate to humiliate and to kill the rational choice of submission is immeasurably strengthened.

But Vladimir Kara-Murza is a different kind of man. He did not do the rational thing. He did the right thing. He did not love the things of life any less than the rest of us. He loved his freedom. He adores his wife and my good friend, Evgenia. He treasures his three children. This is the stuff of a good life, my friends. But he has another love too which is his nation, his people, his country, his Russia, and that love, that patriotism, is a direct reflection of his love for his family.

Vladimir Kara-Murza knows that his wife and his children and his fellow Russians will never be free until Russia is free. We've all read the biblical passage on no greater love than this. Well, Vladimir Kara-Murza suffers in a dark cell this very moment because he possesses that love, and he possesses it how he suffers.

They have persecuted him. They have pursued him. They have poisoned him twice, and they have now imprisoned him. The moment of his imprisonment after years of his public critique of the Putin regime was no accident. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a tragedy beyond itself, and beyond the battlefields of that stricken land it plunged Europe into the dark night of its own past, of fear and violence and armament.

Within Russia itself the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine provided the regime's pretext for further repression, for more suppression, for expanded tyranny. If Vladimir Putin was an autocrat in peacetime, he has become a tyrant in wartime, the tyrant to whom Vladimir Kara-Murza stood up nearly alone and denounced as the regime of murderers and was subsequently arrested within hours.

The despotism of Vladimir Putin can, it seems, withstand many blows and it can withstand international sanctions. It can withstand global ostracism. It can withstand the deaths of hundreds of thousands of its own hapless soldiers and it can withstand Ukrainian drone strikes in the heart of Moscow itself.

It cannot, however, withstand one Russian patriot who dares to tell the truth. We as Americans must now designate Vladimir Kara-Murza a wrongfully or illegally detained person under statute, not as a gesture of sympathy but as an expression of interest.

The American interest is directly and materially advanced when America stands up for the prisoners and of conscience in other lands, especially in the lands of hostile and anti-American regimes. There is no doubt that Russia now is in control by a regime deeply hostile to the United States and dedicated to the overthrow of the American place in the world.

We don't have to speculate on this point. We can simply listen to the dictator's own words. We also don't have to encounter the means of defeating that regime as some sort of mystery because the template was established a long time ago.

The United States assumed a historic role as a beacon of hope and refuge and moral sustenance for Russian patriots opposing Kremlin dictators from the late 1940s onward and the effort has worked. If we took a holiday from that role for a shortened generation after 1991 it was in good faith as we all had hoped that Russia would at least have a regime worthy of the greatness of the Russians.

But we must all live in realism and acknowledge that it does not. Set aside the historic culture and achievements of the Russian nation and the squalid-based and distinguished reality of the Russian regime. Its cruelty, its greed, and its unlimited willingness to squander the precious lives of its own citizenry speaks to its nature and its fundamental illegitimacy.

That's why men like Vladimir Kara-Murza must stand up again and that's why the United States must step up into the role of their advocates and champions. It is not in our interest and certainly not within our capability to dictate to Russia what sort of government it has. But it is well within our interest and capability to both defend the Russians who work today – toward the day when Russians may actually rule themselves.

Designating Vladimir Kara-Murza a wrongfully or illegally detained person does not immediately change his material condition. It does not warm his cell, it does not improve his food, and it does not give him another minute with his children.

But it does improve his moral condition. In the camps and warrens of the new gulag news will filter in. When the United States stands up for him with mandated actions in addition to sympathetic words he will know. It will be strength for him in imprisonment, in which hope is as precious as bread.

But understand this. We are not just helping him in doing this. We are going to help ourselves. We help ourselves because this is America's best self, the city on a hill put into action, and the stuff of the spirit matters more than of any other factor and any calculus.

Don't believe me on this point? Ask the Americans of Valley Forge, the Alamo, Bastogne, and the Hanoi Hilton. We help ourselves too because nothing weakens the regimes of our enemies more than men like Vladimir Kara-Murza. He is at once poison to dictators and

medicine to the oppressed. In a dangerous world with America's enemies circling about we can deal one of those enemies a defeat at no real cost with a mere statement of truth.

Vladimir Kara-Murza is a wrongfully or illegally detained person. The State Department ought to say it, America ought to act upon it, and as American, as a friend, it is my honor to call you to this action right now.

Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Ms. McCain, and we appreciate your insight.

And with unanimous consent, we will invite Sonya Kara-Murza to please come forward.

And as she's coming forward, we've been joined by Congresswoman Victoria Spartz of Indiana, who has been such a valuable member of this Commission with the extraordinary insight of having been born in the Soviet Union and actually now so grateful to point out her birth and free an independent Ukraine.

So, Congresswoman, thank you for being here, and we proceed with Ms. Kara-Murza.

S. KARA-MURZA: Chairman Wilson, members of Congress, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Sonya Kara-Murza and I'm very grateful for this opportunity to say a few words on behalf of myself and my siblings.

My father has a passion. He works incredibly hard every single day trying to achieve his goal, the goal of freeing those tied in Putin's knots, the goal of a peaceful and hopeful future for Russia.

My mother, my siblings, and I are dual American-Russian citizens and my father is a green card holder, and here in the United States we lived like any other family until this was taken away from us. A nice cozy home filled with love, my family has always shown involvement and care for our community in Stanardsville, Virginia, where we've lived for the past 14 years.

We were all taught how to fluently speak, write, and understand English and we have all gone to an American public school our entire lives where every day me and my siblings arrive on a big yellow bus and are taught just like any other kid living in America.

My father also taught me a lot. When I was three, he taught me just how good Russian peenlay (ph) could taste. When I was six, he taught me how to celebrate when you win a round of dominos. This was also the year he was poisoned for the first time.

When I was eight, he taught me how to stop myself from falling while ice skating, the same year he was poisoned for the second time. Every once in a while we would go on father-daughter days where we would spend time together because although his work means so much to

him his family has his whole heart, and throughout all these years he has been teaching us the importance of bravery and also that bravery often comes at a high cost.

My younger brother Daniel is only 11 today. My father has so much that he needs to teach him, so many memories to make with him. He should not be torn away from his family because of Vladimir Putin's ego.

My father is a Russian politician and is where he is today because of his incredible courage and strength. But this has already cost our family so much. His books, his pens, his favorite chair in his home office are all collecting dust. But the worst of it all is that he is in the hands of the people who have already tried to kill him twice and now we don't even know where he is.

Loving families should not be thousands of miles apart but all together in the safety and comfort of their own home. He has already missed so much and we all miss him terribly every single day. Please bring my father back home.

WILSON: And, Sonya, thank you so much for your courage to be here today, and I know that somehow your dad's going to know that you made this appearance today and what an inspiration it will be to him and an inspiration to the Russian people, and so thank you so much.

And we will now proceed with each member of the panel having strictly enforced five minutes in terms of questions, and I'll begin and then I'll immediately defer to my good friend all the way from Memphis, Tennessee by the name of Steve Cohen.

With this in mind, I want to – Evgenia, I want you to be aware that I truly believe that we're in a culture today that's never occurred before and that is that war crimes we document today as never before. There's never been a conflict of any type that has had the ability of ordinary citizens to be present to be able to record war crimes immediately.

Additionally, we have the benefit too as you've identified too and that is facial recognition and then we have the ability of determining chain of command. And so, indeed, I believe there will be war crimes to proceed in the future and with the help of people around the world.

And then I'm really grateful, Meghan, your citing very correctly to me a great culture betrayed by war criminal Putin and it's just so sad and equally that, indeed, that Vladimir Kara-Murza is a hero for the for the Russian people. And I take it personally myself. Chelyabinsk is their sister city in my home city, Columbia, South Carolina.

I've had wonderful visits and I thought the people I met were fantastic, to St. Petersburg, to Tomsk, Omsk, Moscow itself, and then I still cherish visiting Novosibirsk where they had a sign in English as you came into the city years ago now – I think it's been removed – and that is “Welcome to Novosibirsk, the Chicago of Siberia.”

And so – and that’s the way it should be. We should note – I felt the people I met in Russia I just really hope and with Vladimir’s courage that one day they will be free. With that in mind, it really has been distressing, Evgenia, to know the medical condition and then to find out that it should be grounds for release.

What is the latest on your – on Vladimir’s medical condition?

E. KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much for your kind words and for your words of hope for a different Russia.

I believe that we will get there because I’m married to a great man who believes that and his belief is pretty contagious.

To answer your question, the last time Vladimir’s lawyers saw him was on the 28th of August. On the 4th of September when they came to visit him in the detention center in Moscow they were told that he was no longer there.

On September the 6th we received a letter – an official letter that said that he was being transferred to Siberia to the Omsk region. Now, transfers are probably one of the most dangerous periods in the life – in the lives of political prisoners in Russia because under Russian law there is no set time limit on transfers so they can last for months, and also the Russian authorities are not required by law to provide any information about a person’s whereabouts, his state of health, and any other information to either person’s lawyers or his family during transfer.

So until Vladimir reaches the final point, the final destination, that strict regime prison colony somewhere we believe in the Omsk region but, again, we cannot be sure because the Russian authorities have been notorious for lying – until he reaches that final destination we’re not going to know anything specific about him, I’m afraid, and that scares me a lot because, as I said, he’s being held by the same people who have already tried to kill him twice and now he is somewhere in Siberia with no contact with us.

WILSON: And with the assassination of Prigozhin how even the, quote, “closest persons to war criminal Putin” can be subject to assassination.

Additionally, Ms. McCain, I’ve had the honor of knowing the courage of your dad because I visited Hanoi Hilton in Hanoi, and so the imprisonment of your dad is reflective of their being friends with Vladimir. What is your view about the issues with both?

MCCAIN: I became friends with Vlad and Sonya because of my dad’s connection to Vlad when he was poisoned I believe the second time and was a huge advocate to getting him health care and then released back to the United States, and then we just became friends when my father was sick. He was a pallbearer at his funeral and we’ve just become friends.

And I think that America has to fight for prisoners who are unjustly detained overseas and it’s a very simple fact of what is right and what is American and what is wrong.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

I now refer to Congressman Steve Cohen of Tennessee.

COHEN: Is this on now? Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much.

We've been trying to get this designation and we don't know why the State Department hasn't done it. I presume you've made some personal entreaties as well. Is that correct?

E. KARA-MURZA: Yes, that is correct.

COHEN: Have they given you any rationale as to why he's not been designated under the Levinson Act as a wrongfully detained individual?

E. KARA-MURZA: I have had – I have been in contact with the State Department since – basically since Vladimir's imprisonment in April 2022 and I have had a lot of support from them. I very much appreciate the strong statement made by Ambassador Lynne Tracy in Moscow after Vladimir's conviction.

I do appreciate the fact that Vladimir is part of the Without Just Cause political prisoners campaign launched by the State Department and by them following the case of Vladimir and sending diplomats to every single hearing that Vladimir had throughout this time in Moscow.

But this designation would move Vladimir's case onto a different level and, honestly, I do not understand the rationale. I was told that – at some times I was told that Vladimir does not – that he does not meet the criteria of the Levinson Act, which is not true because he does meet seven non-inclusive conditions for a lawful or wrongful detention status under the Levinson Act.

Vladimir does have clear and very close connections to the United States. I am a U.S. citizen here. Our kids are U.S. born and Vladimir is a green card holder so he's a permanent – lawful permanent resident.

I do believe that he meets all the criteria and I do not quite understand their rationale.

COHEN: Well, I don't either and it's – I believe the situation is analogous to the Hotel Rwanda, Paul – can you now – can you pronounce his last name for me?

E. KARA-MURZA: Paul Rusesabagina.

COHEN: That's it. Yes, thank you. But it seems to be analogous situation and for some reason he was classified as such and so should Vladimir.

Before I ask Ms. McCain a question I just want to comment, which we all know because this thing speaks for itself. I know you're proud of your daughter and it was a marvelous statement that she made. So I'm happy to bring her on. Thank you.

E. KARA-MURZA: I am incredibly proud of our kids, of the way they're handling this whole absolutely atrocious situation, of the way they've been supportive of my work, of me continuing Vladimir's work, of the way they stand with me and of the way they're proud of their father and they know who their father is. Not just their daddy who teaches them how to make Russian blinis or drive a stick or, you know, but also their dad as a freedom fighter, their dad as someone who fights for human rights and democracy not just to Russia but around the world because we are all pieces of the same puzzle and the only way for Russia to stop being a threat to itself and its neighbors is for it to become a democracy.

There is no other way. For as long as an autocratic regime is allowed to survive in Russia warmongering will continue.

COHEN: Thank you.

Ms. McCain, I just want you to know I only have a couple of minor incidents where I was able to interact with your father and that was – they were cherished moments. He was a great American hero. I've had – I've been to Annapolis twice and both times I've made visits to his grave.

One of my pals runs the Rendezvous restaurant in Memphis. I don't know if you know that. It's a famous barbecue restaurant. I thought it was a little silly at first when he told me but he left some Rendezvous seasoning on the gravy. He said your father was a big fan. I saw it and I thought, yeah, he's got it there.

MCCAIN: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

COHEN: Do you have any thoughts about the Levinson Act and why – or why not Vladimir has not been designated, and if he was so and it was – what would the effect have on his incarceration?

MCCAIN: I couldn't possibly understand, but I think it's shameful and I think that it's beyond past time. And I think that there's – I don't understand it other than it – that everyone in this room is probably much more intelligent than I am.

But I think it's just shameful on the part of what's happening right now. And I think, as I said in my remarks, it would give him hope acknowledging that the United States is an ally and that, you know, we see him as a wrongfully and illegally detained person and know that there's hope for his release.

But if we leave him there without doing anything it sends a really dangerous message to our enemies and to the possible future people that Putin could capture and possibly kill in prison for fighting for freedom.

COHEN: Thank you so much for being here.

I yield back.

WILSON: We now recognize – thank you, Congressman Cohen.

Congressman Marc Veasey of Texas.

VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

And I appreciate you and your family being here and especially under the duress that you're facing right now with your husband and his situation. And I wanted to ask you, what type of interaction have you had directly with the Russian government? And can you give us a sense of how you feel about the safety of you and your daughter right now?

E. KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much for the question.

See, my husband has risked his life for a very long time for many years and he knows what he's fighting for. I know that, too, and I share his fight, and after his arrest I believed it my duty to step up and continue his work because he's not – he hasn't been working to promote some self-interests or to – I don't know, he was driven by this idea that Russia can be different and that millions and millions of Russians reject Vladimir Putin's regime and everything it stands for and they need a voice.

So I believe it's my duty to continue Vladimir's work. Our kids are here in the United States, all our three kids, and this was also how Vladimir wanted – has always wanted it when he realized that this work of his is going to present many dangers.

We want our kids to be in a safe place and we believe that they're safe here in the United States where they have their friends, where they have their lovely schools, where they have their support groups, and I will travel and I will continue doing Vladimir's work for as long as it takes me, for as long as it takes us all, Russian anti-war and pro-democracy forces, to stop the atrocious aggression – war of aggression against Ukraine and to do everything we can to bring closer the day when the regime in Russia collapses.

VEASEY: Thank you.

And I wanted to ask you and Ms. McCain a question. You know, one of the things that we hear often in the U.S. is, you know, we have a lot of problems of our own here. You know, the money that we're spending on any sort of overseas operations or foreign aid, it can be used to help in, you know, A, B, and C.

We've had several high-profile, you know, lawmakers say that we, you know, shouldn't be involved in what's happening in Ukraine right now, and if you could sort of give us a sense, in your opinion, and I would especially love to hear from you, Ms. McCain, also why should the U.S. be concerned about what's happening with your husband right now.

Why is this something that every American should take seriously, particularly with some of the issues that we have going on in our own country right now?



E. KARA-MURZA: Well, Vladimir Putin did not just jump out of the box. Vladimir Putin has been on the scene for 23 years committing very similar crimes against Russia's neighbors and against the Russian population, and every time he would try his hand at committing one similar crime he would look and wait for the reaction.

He invaded Georgia. Nothing happened. He aggressively squashed peaceful protests in Russia. Nothing happened. He annexed Crimea. Nothing happened. He bombed civilians in Syria. Again, nothing happened.

So in his warped logic if he can go and annex Crimea why can't he go and annex the rest of Ukraine? If he can bomb civilians in Syria, why can't he do the same in Ukraine? So the – Vladimir Putin has shown through his actions time and again that he will not stay within Russia's borders.

This is why getting Russia changed – getting Russia to become a democracy is something that is in the interests of the entire world because Vladimir Putin will continue warmongering for as long as he's allowed and this will cost more and more to the entire world, including the United States of America.

And this is the same reason I believe – the same reason why the United States should stand with those fighting for freedom in Russia because they are the people who represent an alternative to Vladimir Putin. They are those freedom fighters, those visionaries, who see Russia a democratic country based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.

And if we do not stand with them, if we allow Vladimir Putin to eradicate the dissent in the country, if we allow him to squash that – those protests that – those protests against his regime, then there will be no alternative left and we will be left with Vladimir Putin or whoever follows him.

VEASEY: If I get a second round – I'll wait for your answer. But my time has expired.

Mr. Chairman?

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Veasey.

We now proceed – and thank you for your eloquent statements, too – to Congresswoman Victoria Spartz.

SPARTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much for being here.

We have a lot of different debates and talking issues but, you know, people like you or your husband really understand what oppression is and willing to stand up and it's tough, right? You know, Ukrainians are paying a high price standing up against the government that is oppressive. And just follow up on that, I think we have a record. We know that, you know, most – you know, we've fought a lot of wars against Russian-made weapons. You know,

Americans' blood, you know, was – you know, a lot of our people being killed, it's actually because Russia supplied, you know, weapons to other side.

We know that Russia tried to destabilize the United States and tried to interfere in our elections. It uses weaknesses and dumb things we're doing here, which actually we're doing a lot of dumb things, unfortunately, and helped them.

So this is unfortunate. But one thing is – good thing about this Commission, actually, this Commission is bipartisan, this Commission is bicameral, and this Commission can demand the answer, because this Congress actually has way more power than the State Department and executive branch. If we would be doing authorizations properly – and we still didn't pass our appropriations – we have an ability to say: You know what? You are not willing to work with Congress, you're just not going to get the money. And that will get attention of the State Department. And all of these letter, they'll be responded and they will actually care what we have to say.

So I think this is a nice thing about it because we have – we can disagree a lot of issue, but we have a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on some of the issue and understanding, you know, the fight that American cannot lose, because, ultimately, these people are after us. And they're, you know, collaborating with some pretty bad people and destabilize Africa, destabilize Middle East, and a lot of other things.

But what things is important for us to know? Because I hope we will be able to do something and get an answer from the State Department. Listen, we can change. If there is some things that need to be changed in the law – (laughs) – we're, like, lawmakers here, OK? Like, we can change the policies of law. But what things is important for us to know?

And how urgent this? Because, unfortunately, we do a lot of the different grandstanding and a lot of talking, but when people's life at stake actions matter and how fast. So what would you suggest we have to know to be able to, you know, convey to the State Department maybe that they didn't get that memo?

E. KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much for your words and for your question.

Actually, I think that – I believe that the State Department has heard it all already and my arguments are very clear and unequivocal and I could not – could not think of anything else to say.

I believe it is in the interest of the United States and of the democratic – of the global democratic community to stand with those people who oppose autocratic regimes around the world because we now see in the world a global fight of autocracies against democracies, and by standing with those who wants to change the regimes in their countries and make their countries into democracies we would make democracy worldwide stronger.

And I believe that such visionaries as my husband who have a clear understanding of what needs to be changed in Russia is for Russia to stop being a threat to itself and its neighbors, I believe that standing with such visionaries is very important.

SPARTZ: Well, I appreciate it. Honest, no, listen, I wish we would have done a better job help some of these democratic institutions that were – (laughs) – try to develop in the times, you know, that Russia would have been democratic country. I wish it would have happened. I wish some of the elitists would take a different course, because it would have definitely less headaches for us. So I agree with you.

But how urgent this issue is and important? Because, you know, we do a lot of things here. Do you believe there is a very significant urgency that we really need to act much faster? Because we also have a bureaucracy and a lot of things here, but sometimes you have to go cut through the clutter when you have real life at stake.

E. KARA-MURZA: Absolutely. Well, there is urgency because Vladimir's health is deteriorating. Under the Russian law, as I already said, polyneuropathy, the medical condition that he has because of the two poisonings in the past, is on the list of conditions that should prevent incarceration because it can lead to paralysis.

I do realize that behind bars Vladimir will not receive the medical attention that he needs. I do realize that he has already lost over 55 pounds over this year. I understand that his medical condition is only going to deteriorate and I understand that he's being held by the same people who tried to kill him twice, literally.

So I have no reason to believe that they won't try again, especially now that he's been transferred to somewhere in Siberia and we don't know about his whereabouts. We don't know anything about his state of health. So this is urgent and it is a matter of life and death.

SPARTZ: Thank you. Thank you for being here.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congresswoman Spartz.

And we have – by unanimous consent, I'm happy to recognize Congressman Veasey for another question.

VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

I wanted to ask Ms. McCain a follow-up on the question I asked earlier. Why do you think that Americans should be concerned about what's happened to Mr. Murza? I would love to just hear your –

MCCAIN: I understand the criticism and I – this is not directed at you personally but when people ask me that it's like asking why should I care about Nelson Mandela during the apartheid. Because people that are fighting for freedom in the face of true evil should be recognized and supported by the greatest democracy and beacon of freedom in the United States

and I truly believe in my heart and my soul and my brain that Vlad is the Nelson Mandela of this moment, and if the State Department continues to not recognize the urgency in which getting him released and at least at the very least getting him recognized as a wrongfully or illegally detained person it will be a blemish on their record right now.

I truly believe history will be unkind to those who do not recognize him in this moment, and it will embolden Putin even further. And as Evgenia so eloquently put it, what it means globally is catastrophic. Thank you.

VEASEY: Yeah. Thank you very much.

I wanted to ask you in closing, do you have hope that upon Putin's demise, whenever that is? Whenever that happens, do you think that his successor will be a better leader for Russia? Is there hope? Do you have hope? Does your family have hope?

E. KARA-MURZA: We absolutely do have hope because, again, as I said, I am sharing my life with a true visionary, with a true patriot, and I do have a lot of hope. But also we understand that in Russia we're not looking to replace a bad president with a good one.

We understand that Russia has to become a parliamentary republic and has to go through a very deep process of federalization because Russia has been a federation only on paper and we need to change a lot in Russia for it to become a democracy.

But, yes, I do have hope because I hear of arrests and detentions every day and I hear of absolutely atrocious instruments – repressive instruments used against those who oppose their regime and that shows that there is protests in the country, that there are a lot – that there is a lot of dissent in the country because if there hadn't been any dissent those atrocious methods would not have been used by the regime.

They are used against those people, against thousands and thousands of Russians who stand up and say no – no to the war, no to Putin's regime. And they are also Russia. So when you say – when I hear politicians say, like, Russia does this and Russia does that I always have this little thing – you know, little thought in the back of my head, my husband is also Russia.

All those Russians who've risked their lives going into the streets and opposing the regime openly they're also Russia and this is – this is why I do have hope and I will continue having hope and I will fight for those people. I will stand with them for as long as it takes me.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Veasey.

And thank both of you for being here today. And, Evgenia, thank you so much for referencing, indeed, we're in a worldwide conflict between dictators' rule of gun opposing democracies' rule of law.

This is not a conflict we sought. But it began on February 24th, 2022, and it's not something as – that we can just stand back and ignore. And so, ultimately, we'll – with the

dictatorships of Putin, the Chinese Communist Party, the regime in Tehran, they make it very clear – death to America, death to Israel. I don't know how clearer they can make it.

A final point. I'm an optimist like you, and that is as I see Meghan McCain here I'm thinking that we had a war with Vietnam within the lifetime of many other people, not everybody here, and now I visited Hanoi to see American and Vietnamese troops working together for MIA recovery, to see as we saw last week the affection actually for the president of the United States, of all places, in Hanoi.

And so times can improve. And then yesterday we celebrated 120 years of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Bulgaria, and times change. As we recognize the warm relationship and partnership we have with Bulgaria today, a member of NATO, a member of the EU, just a dynamic country – well, actually over the last 120 years we had to – as I did a resolution commending I left out that we were at war – World War I, World War II, the Cold War. And so times can change and I share the same hope for the people of Russia.

As we conclude I'd like also to invite you – we'd like to get a picture with you, and so if you will stay seated, and particularly want Sonya to be in the picture. With that, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

[Whereupon, at 3:42 p.m., the hearing ended.]