Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I am

speaking today on a very important

international foreign policy issue. That

will be the subject of my address today.

I wanted to come down here the first

day of this legislative session, this

112th Congress, and talk about the deteriorating

situation with regard to oppression

and the rule of law in Russia.

I have come to this floor a number of

times to share my concern on this subject.

I wish to begin this Congress by

once again expressing my deep concern

for what we see happening just in the

recent days in Russia.

I remember looking back in 1990 and

1991 at the hope we had, the optimism

we in the West had as we watched the

Iron Curtain fall, as we watched the

wall tumble in Berlin, and we watched

with hope that this would be a new day

for people behind the Iron Curtain and

a new opportunity for freedom and

openness in that society. Unfortunately,

year after year, month after

month, we have seen since the fall of

the Soviet Union a very regrettable

and disturbing deterioration in the rule

of law in Russia and a move back to

the authoritarian rule of old we all remember

so well. Recent events in Russia

once again cause us to believe this

problem is escalating and have caused

me to come to the floor today on this

subject.

Last month, the leadership of this

Senate pushed through, I think in

haste, the New START treaty with

Russia. I had concerns over the treaty,

and I ultimately voted against it. We

had a lot more debate that needed to

take place. We had dozens of amendments

that went undebated and unconsidered

and not voted upon by this

body, and I regret that. I always

thought nuclear arms policy and treaties

with regard to our nuclear stockpile

should be based on the security of

the American people and that the primary

issue should be what is in the

best interests of the United States.

What we saw a lot of in the debate last

month was instead an emphasis on New

START as the centerpiece of this administration’s

effort to reset relations

with Russia. I certainly support the resetting

of our relations with Russia,

but I do not believe the New START

treaty was the best way to advance

this.

But it should concern all of us, it

should concern everyone within the

sound of my voice, regardless of how

we voted on New START that within 2

weeks’ time of this body approving the

New START treaty, a Russian court

issued a second spurious guilty verdict

against Mikhail Khodorkovsky and

Platon Lebedev. Almost simultaneously,

authorities in Russia arrested

prominent Russian opposition figure,

former Deputy Prime Minister Boris

Nemtsov. These events took place

within days of each other.

What do these recent events mean?

To me, they are two other examples of

the way the current Russian leadership

does not respect universal values such

as the rule of law or freedom of expression

and assembly. The Russian Government

does not share our commitment

to international norms or fostering

modernization. Resetting U.S.-

Russian relations will be exceedingly

difficult while these differences persist.

During the last Congress, I spoke several

times on the trial of Mikhail

Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev. I

concluded my most recent remarks by

saying that I hoped Russia would

choose the right path and somehow justice

would prevail in that case. Sadly,

it did not. A Russian court issued another

politically motivated guilty verdict

against these two Russian dissidents.

This disturbing verdict reveals

that the Russian judiciary lacks independence

and that Russian authoritiesMar 15 2010 03:55 Jan 06, 2011 E:\CR\FM\A05JA6.057 S05JAPTsmartinez on DSKB9S0YB1PROD with

can act above the law at will. This latest

verdict was not only sad for Mikhail

Khodorkovsky, Platon Lebedev,

and their families, but also for all people,

for all of us who seek a more open

Russia based on the rule of law.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s

comments on the case before the verdict

was even issued were very troubling

indeed. According to the Associated

Press, Russia’s Prime Minister

said that the crimes of the former oil

tycoon have been proven—he said this

before the verdict was even issued—and

that a ‘‘thief should sit in jail.’’ Mr.

Putin said Khodorkovsky’s present

punishment is more liberal than the

150-year prison sentence handed down

in the United States to financier Bernard

Madoff.

Citing the years of advocacy and

statements from global leaders, the

very respected publication The Economist

explained that Putin’s comments

were ‘‘a humiliating slap in the face of

all those foreign dignitaries . . . who

had lobbied Dmitry Medvedev, Russia’s

president, to stop persecuting Mr.

Khodorkovsky.’’ I agree with the comments

contained in the publication The

Economist.

In a democracy, courts are independent

and the executive branch acts

as a separate branch of government

with no say in final court decisions.

Prime Minister Putin’s statement demonstrates

that this separation does not

exist in Russia.

As if the Khodorkovsky verdict did

not make it clear enough that opposition

will not be tolerated in Russia,

Russian authorities arrested opposition

leader and former Deputy Prime Minister

Boris Nemtsov on New Year’s

Eve. This took place during a reportedly

peaceful antigovernment rally in

Moscow. Approximately 70 others were

also arrested. A Moscow court sentenced

former Deputy Prime Minister

Nemtsov to 50 days in jail for allegedly

disobeying police. This arrest was a

tremendous disappointment, but it certainly

was not a surprise. The Russian

Government had recently begun granting

permission for semiregular protests.

I use the term ‘‘semiregular’’ because

it was granted only for the last

day of months with 31 days.

I met with Mr. Nemtsov last March

when he was here in Washington. He

came to my office, and we had a very

enlightening discussion about the future

of Russia. I admired his dedication

and commitment to promoting democracy

in Russia, and I hope and pray for

his safety during the remaining days in

a Moscow jail cell.

Sadly, we have learned that not all

those who opposed the Russian Government

do, in fact, return from Russian

jails. Sergei Magnitsky, who was a

young Russian anticorruption lawyer

employed by an American law firm in

Moscow who blew the whistle on the

largest tax rebate fraud in Russian history

perpetrated by high-level Russian

officials, is an example. Magnitsky was

arrested shortly after he testified to

authorities. He was held in detention

for nearly a year without trial, under

torturous conditions, and he died in an

isolation cell on November 16, 2009, in

Russia.

During the 111th Congress, I joined

Senators CARDIN and MCCAIN in cosponsoring

the Justice for Sergei

Magnitsky Act, which would freeze assets

and block visas to Russian individuals

responsible for Mr. Magnitsky’s

unfortunate death. In this, the 112th

Congress, I will continue to highlight

the treatment of opposition figures in

Russia and the regrettable erosion of

the rule of law.

I urge President Obama and Secretary

of State Clinton to make the

treatment of opposition figures a central

part of our efforts to reset relations

with Russia. In order to make

progress on other issues, Russia needs

to prove it is truly committed to the

rule of law and the human rights of all

of its citizens, including those who disagree

with the government. Without

this, our efforts to find common ground

on other issues of mutual concern will

continue to be undermined.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.