

Taken together, these provisions strike me as essentially asking Senators to put more trust in VA leadership and Donald J. Trump, the same Donald Trump who publicly attacked the parents of a Muslim soldier killed in action and the same Donald Trump who nominated his wholly unqualified personal physician to run the VA. Unfortunately, this administration has already proven it can't be trusted to take care of our veterans.

I had hoped Senators would be given an opportunity to debate this bill and offer amendments that might have addressed the bill's shortcomings. The Senate majority has prevented that from happening.

So the choice before me and every other Senator this week is to oppose this bill and the good it will do or to support it with significant reservations.

After hearing from many Oregonians and from the 38 veterans and military service organizations and seven former VA Secretaries who support this bill, I have chosen the second option and will support the bill despite my concerns.

Mark my words: The ultimate success or failure of this bill will depend on whether Donald Trump and his team at the VA choose to work with Congress and put our veterans first or whether they sell out to the privatization partisans.

I hope my fears about this bill prove to be unwarranted, but as the saying goes, hope is not a strategy. After Donald Trump signs this bill into law, I will redouble my efforts to work with Senator TESTER and others to support and sustain a robust VA worthy of the millions of veterans it serves.

If the Trump administration implements any of these provisions in a way that threatens to privatize or undermine the VA as a healthcare system, I will pull out all the stops and fight it like hell.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, there are parts of the VA MISSION Act that I strongly support. The expansion of the Caregivers program to veterans of all generations will help support family members who have made enormous sacrifices for their loved ones wounded in war. Raising the limits on the Education Debt Reduction Program, an effort that I helped lead, will make it easier for the VA to attract the doctors and other medical personnel they need.

I am concerned, however, that despite some very good provisions in this bill, it continues a trend toward the slow, steady privatization of the VA. No one disagrees that veterans should be able to seek private care in cases where the VA cannot provide the specialized care they require or when wait times for appointments are too long or when veterans might have to travel long distances for that care.

The way to reduce wait times is not to direct resources outside the VA, as this bill does, but to strengthen the VA by recruiting and retaining the best

healthcare professionals to care for the brave women and men who rely on VA healthcare. The way to reduce wait times is to make sure that the VA is able to fill the more than 30,000 vacancies it currently has. This bill provides \$5 billion for the Choice program. It provides nothing to fill the vacancies at the VA. That is wrong. My fear is that this bill will open the door to the draining, year after year, of much needed resources from the VA.

Further, I am disappointed that the legislative process did not allow for votes on amendments that could have made this a stronger bill. The amendments I filed, but was prevented from offering, would have provided equal funding for the Veterans Health Administration and the Choice program, provided real money and a meaningful expansion of the Caregivers program, and established a pilot program for VA dental care in rural areas. In addition, I authored an amendment that would have struck the AIR Act provisions that could result in the closure of VA facilities and language clarifying that veterans may not be held financially liable for errors made by the VA.

It is my sincere belief that these amendments would have gone a long way to addressing the deficiencies in the bill and providing the care and benefits our veterans have earned and deserved. I hope that my colleagues on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee will work with me to make these necessary improvements in future legislation. We must do a better job in standing together against the effort to privatize the VA.

I acknowledge the work done by some of my colleagues to improve this bill, but I believe it moves us too far in the direction of privatization. That is why I will vote against it.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 840, 841, 842, and 843.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The assistant bill clerk read the nominations of Cheryl A. Lydon, of South Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the District of South

Carolina for the term of four years; Sonya K. Chavez, of New Mexico, to be United States Marshal for the District of New Mexico for the term of four years; Scott E. Kracl, of Nebraska, to be United States Marshal for the District of Nebraska for the term of four years; and J. C. Raffety, of West Virginia, to be United States Marshal for the Northern District of West Virginia for the term of four years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Lydon, Chavez, Kracl, and Raffety nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN H. KLETTE, JR.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, as our Nation pauses on Memorial Day to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice to keep our Nation safe and to protect the liberties we hold dear, I would like to join the residents of Park Hills in recognizing one distinguished Kentuckian. John H. Klette, Jr., a centenarian veteran of the Second World War, will be honored as the grand marshal in the community's Memorial Day parade.

Soon after the United States entered World War II, Klette enlisted at the age of 24 to help defeat Nazi Germany. A practicing attorney and a licensed pilot, he chose to join the Army Air Corps—the precursor of the Air Force—and passed the necessary exams that same day. After months of training, he was assigned as a pilot in the 32nd Bombardment Squadron of the 301st Bombardment Group and was sent to southern Italy. Klette's first mission to Bucharest, Romania, saw significant enemy resistance, and his aircraft suffered serious damage. That fight would