

the administration was weighing in on the side of the petitioners.

Almost immediately after filing that brief, he was nominated to serve on the appellate court, sending a very clear signal to all of those in the administration that if you take a leadership role on trying to strip away protections for people with preexisting conditions, you will be rewarded—in this case, rewarded with a lifetime appointment.

So we are about to vote on the architect of this administration's legal strategy to try to undo the most popular, most important protections in the Affordable Care Act, and it represents this rare opportunity to understand where Senators stand.

It is super easy. It takes no political risk to stand up and say you support protecting people who are sick and making sure insurance companies don't jack up their rates. As it turns out, it is a little bit harder to actually back up your words with actions, but this one isn't that hard. Voting against Chad Readler isn't that difficult, in part, because Senator BROWN, who is the Senator from Ohio who did not sign a blue slip for Chad Readler's nomination, has made it clear as early as 10 minutes ago that he is willing to support and sign a blue slip for a mainstream conservative nominee.

In this case, Democrats aren't saying we want a nominee to the Sixth Circuit who isn't one who could be charitably described as a conservative nominee. We just don't want a nominee who has made his mark trying to tear down protections for sick people in this country, but that is what happens when you get rid of the blue slip. Senator MCCONNELL and Senator GRASSLEY have gotten rid of this decades-old protection to try to make sure nominees to the Federal bench, to the appellate bench in this case, have the support of their home State Senators. When you do that, you tend to get a little bit more mainstream nominees.

Now that the blue slip is gone, now that Senator BROWN has no ability to weigh in on individuals who are going to be making law in his State, you get a much more extreme nominee like this.

So let's see what happens. I hope there are some Republicans who will stand up and decide they are going to put their votes where their mouths have been on the question of protections for people with preexisting conditions, but at the very least, the American public will get to see where we all stand on this very important question in a matter of hours.

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.

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

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

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, in the 116th Congress, I am once again chairing the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, which oversees our nuclear forces.

Over the coming months, I will be coming to the floor to discuss specific components of our nuclear deterrent and their contributions to the defense of this Nation.

Today, I rise to speak about the critical role strategic bombers play in our nuclear triad. The triad is known for its flexibility and resilience, and bombers contribute to this flexibility in important ways. They are highly visible, and they can be forward deployed. They can be used to signal resolve to our adversaries and commitment to our allies.

This benefit is not theoretical. Bombers have been used in exactly this way many times, particularly on the Korean Peninsula. Bombers are also recallable and, when armed with standoff weapons, they can offer the President a variety of tailored response options in a crisis.

As the oldest leg of our nuclear triad, bombers have a long and distinguished history. In some ways, the story of the strategic bomber begins in the great State of Nebraska.

In the early 1940s, Bellevue, NE, was home to the Martin Bomber Plant, which was located on the land that is now Offutt Air Force Base. The Martin plant, with the help of thousands of Nebraska workers, built and modified the Enola Gay and Bockscar. These two B-29 bombers went on to deliver the Little Boy and Fat Man nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II and ushering in the nuclear age. The horrific destruction of these attacks established the deterrent power that has prevented conflict on a global scale ever since.

As ballistic missile technology evolved, the bomber continued to be the mainstay of our nuclear deterrent forces through the early 1970s. Although bombers carried the heavy load for many decades, today we no longer rely on them in the same way. Nuclear-armed bombers have not been on 24-hour ready alert status since the end of the Cold War in 1991, and the responsiveness that alert-status bombers provided now resides primarily with our ICBM forces.

The strength provided by the other legs of the triad have allowed us to take our nuclear capable bombers off alert and use them for conventional missions. When we send B-52 bombers to Afghanistan to complete a conventional mission, we exercise the triad's flexibility. When U.S. B-2 bombers struck targets in Libya, we utilized the triad's flexibility. These examples clearly demonstrate that the flexibility of the triad is not an abstract concept. It is something our forces use every single day.

Our current nuclear bomber force consists of 46 B-52 and 20 B-2 aircraft.

While we rely on this highly capable but aging fleet, we also look ahead to the future of the bomber force, and that is the B-21.

As the B-21 development progresses, it is important to remember the lessons learned from the last time we developed a nuclear bomber, the B-2. As the Cold War ended, nuclear tensions cooled and the need for an expensive nuclear-capable stealth bomber seemed to diminish. Even though the B-2 had already been developed and significant resources spent on research and development, Congress decided to reduce the final order from 132 aircraft to 20. In so doing, the per-unit cost of the airframe rose to \$2 billion. The Air Force has said it plans to buy at least 100 B-21s, but many in this Chamber believe more are likely required to meet the conventional mission the Nation expects our Air Force to perform.

The nuclear triad is the bedrock of our national security, and the airborne leg continues to contribute to the strength and resilience of our nuclear forces. It is our responsibility to ensure that this capability is modernized, particularly as the global security environment transitions to one of long-term strategic competition.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess under the previous order.

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:05 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and was reassembled when called to order by the Presiding officer (Mrs. CAPITO).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TRIBUTE TO RICHARD C. SHELBY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I want to start my remarks this afternoon by saying congratulations to our friend Senator RICHARD SHELBY, Alabama's longest serving U.S. Senator as of this Sunday.

Here in Washington, we know him as chairman of the all-powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, which holds the congressional purse strings, but Alabamians, from Huntsville to Gulf Shores, know him as a devoted public servant working for the good of all of his constituents and an invaluable Member of the U.S. Senate.

Senator SHELBY is a man of principles. He believes in smaller government, supports the Second Amendment, and works tirelessly for the military men and women from Alabama.