

Imagine being so far left that even the routine annual bill to reauthorize the U.S. military is some controversial thing you have to be goaded into supporting. House Democrats abandoned longstanding traditions of compromise and larded up the NDAA with partisan policy riders. For what appears to be the first time ever in either Chamber, they passed an NDAA on a pure party-line vote—the first purely partisan NDAA in 58 years. In the Senate, by contrast, Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED collaborated on a bill that passed the Senate 86 to 8. We certainly did our part to stick with an annual tradition.

Now my colleague, the Democratic leader, is moving the goalpost and enabling Speaker PELOSI's reckless strategy. Longstanding bipartisan precedent says that in order for any subject outside the Armed Services Committees' jurisdiction to travel in the final NDAA, the chairmen and ranking members of the actual committee of jurisdiction need to give bipartisan signoff. This basic test protects the Senate; it protects our committees; and it protects the NDAA from being held hostage for specific partisan ends. Every year, dozens, if not hundreds, of provisions meet that bar. Those that don't end up on the cutting room floor.

Thus far, in the Senate, Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED have worked hard to respect those norms, but this year, the Speaker of the House and my colleague the Democratic leader want to scrap this precedent, undermine the committees, and demand special treatment for partisan priorities that have no business being crammed into this essential legislation for our Armed Forces.

We are talking about a new taxpayer-funded benefit for all Federal employees and sweeping changes to U.S. foreign policy. This is what they are trying to shoehorn into the NDAA. It is not good-faith policymaking, not when these demands pour in at the eleventh hour over must-pass legislation for our servicemembers. It is just political theater that is taking precedence over our Armed Forces. So, right on cue, I am sure we will hear made-for-TV histrionics about all of the new provisions the Speaker and the Democratic leader want to shove into this bill—by-passing hearings, markups, and negotiations between chairmen and ranking members.

We will probably keep hearing the dishonest myth that the Republicans are soft on Russia—never mind that a few years ago, President Obama was mocking the Republicans for being too tough on Russia; never mind that this administration has aggressively pursued sanctions, expelled Russian operatives, provided lethal defensive weapons to Georgia and Ukraine, taken major steps to protect our elections, and more. It is just more bluster and histrionics to distract from the core fact that is crystal clear to the entire country: There is no legislation, no

matter how crucial, that the Democrats will not obstruct in order to pick fights with this President.

The very bills the Democrats are resisting are essential for our national defense strategy—for our needed investments in cutting-edge weapons, in the European Defense Initiative, in modernizing our nuclear force. They are all critical for competing with, deterring, and defending against Russia and China. If the Democrats divide Congress over nondefense issues and kill these bills, they will have played right into our adversaries' hands. If we jettison the longstanding bipartisan process for negotiating the NDAA, they will have made this basic national security requirement far more difficult in the future.

Our Democratic colleagues must understand that national security comes before "the resistance." The country cannot afford this new tactic of obsessing over impeachment and obstructing everything else. I hope this changes soon.

TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY ISAKSON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on a totally different matter, the Senate has set aside today to honor our distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from Georgia, JOHNNY ISAKSON.

It has been about 3 months since JOHNNY announced he would retire at the end of December. Since then, I think we have all been taking stock of everything our dear friend has accomplished and everything he means to so many people. I have long said, if the Senate were to hold a secret ballot popularity contest, JOHNNY ISAKSON would win in a bipartisan landslide—quite possibly in a unanimous vote.

He commands bipartisan respect and affection to a degree that is truly remarkable. Yet, if you think about it, it makes sense for a man whose personal mantra goes like this: "There are only two kinds of people: friends and future friends." For most people, that might be a noble aspiration but unrealistic. For JOHNNY ISAKSON, it is a statement of fact. Nobody is an enemy, and nobody is a stranger—just a friend and future friend. That is it. With a motto like that, it is no wonder that JOHNNY's first career was a successful stint in real estate—a field in which relationships are everything.

It strikes me there could be two ways you could thrive in a business in which friendships and connections matter so much. You could be either good at faking a smile, at feigning interest in others, or you could genuinely love meeting everybody and learning how you might be able to help people. That second kind of person is exactly who Ed and Julie Isakson brought up in Atlanta, GA—warm, honest, forthright, incredibly kind. No wonder JOHNNY's neighbors jumped at the chance to hire him to be their State representative, then their State Senator, then their

Congressman, and then their U.S. Senator. So his retirement this month will cap a 45-year career in public service, packed with one significant accomplishment after another.

First and foremost in JOHNNY's long legacy is his work for our Nation's veterans. He spent 6 years in the Georgia Air National Guard as a young man, and he has spent the half century since then as one of his fellow veterans' best friends at any level of government.

Under JOHNNY's chairmanship, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs has passed literally scores of bills: more accountability at the VA, more education benefits, better community care programs, better procedures for when veterans appeal determinations, an updated GI bill with no more expiration date, and, of course, JOHNNY's landmark bill—the VA MISSION Act. It is now law. It provides many of the most significant reforms in the history of the VA by taking power away from bureaucrats and giving it back to the veterans and their doctors.

Yet, somehow, in the midst of compiling this singular record for our Nation's veterans, JOHNNY racked up countless more legislative successes that impact literally every American—from securing pension protections to reforming education policy, from regional infrastructure projects like the Savannah Harbor Expansion to combating hunger worldwide. One look at the list of laws bearing JOHNNY's fingerprints and you would be forgiven for thinking he never met a problem he could not solve.

But alas, every Senator sometimes encounters requests from back home on which he cannot deliver. Sometimes you have constituents on both sides of an issue. Sometimes a request might conflict with your principles. Whatever the reason, everybody in office eventually disappoints somebody. Yet JOHNNY's staff marvels at the fact that even when Georgians come up here to meet with him and, unfortunately, go away disappointed, they still walk out of the meetings, beaming with praise for their Senator: "Can you believe JOHNNY? He is the greatest guy ever. What a Senator"—and these are the people he just said no to.

The same traits explain why JOHNNY is just as popular under this dome as he is back home, and I don't just mean with his fellow Members. JOHNNY ISAKSON is practically an honorary member of every other Member's staff and an honorary elevator operator and an honorary Capitol Police Officer and an honorary member of Chaplain Black's team and on and on. He knows and values absolutely everybody.

I can't count how many times I would hear a peal of laughter from out in my staff bullpen and realize that JOHNNY ISAKSON had dropped by, not to see me but to chat with my team, to ask after their families, and to maybe check up on a couple of Georgia's priorities while he was there.

There is one classic story that really distills this man's character. Most people who have hung around JOHNNY and his team long enough know the famous tale of the "gin and tonic in the laundry room."

Here is the deal: Back in 2006, JOHNNY was still a new Senator. We were tackling some thorny pension issues, and thousands of Georgians stood to be affected if things didn't get hammered out. So this freshman Senator dove in. He went toe to toe with big players like Ted Kennedy and Bill Young over in the House. He didn't get a seat on the conference committee, but he basically appointed himself an honorary member. JOHNNY worked it like crazy. He sleuthed out where they would be meeting, and he spoke to everyone. Because it is JOHNNY we are talking about, we know how this ends: He delivered for Georgia.

Afterward, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution wanted to hear how this freshman Senator had pulled off this victory. Among other things, the reporter asked how JOHNNY had celebrated. Did he clear out the champagne at some beltway steakhouse?

Here is what he said:

Isakson said that after the vote, he went straight back to his Capitol Hill area apartment and celebrated—by doing his laundry. He did not want to leave dirty clothes behind for a month.

He said further: "So as I was putting coins in the machine, I had a gin and tonic in the laundry room."

This anecdote is almost the perfect encapsulation of JOHNNY ISAKSON. It starts with tenacity and a can-do spirit, propelled forward by charisma, smarts, and stubborn patience. It ends with a win for Georgians and one celebratory cocktail while being wrist-deep in laundry detergent.

Yet there is one other story, I think, that reflects this remarkable leader even more perfectly. It starts with one name—Kate Puzey.

In 2009, JOHNNY was reading his local paper and found an obituary for a young lady from northern Georgia who had been in Africa with the Peace Corps. She was just 24. JOHNNY didn't know Kate and didn't know her family, but he felt called to attend her funeral. He sat quietly in the very back and listened to her friends, her family, ministers, and Peace Corps colleagues.

Unassumingly, he invited the family to stay in touch if there was anything he could ever do. Only later, did they relate what wasn't in the obituary. Kate had been murdered in the dark of night after sounding the alarm on child abuse in her village in the African country of Benin.

JOHNNY ISAKSON was on the case from that day forward. Not only was he a fixture on the Foreign Relations Committee, but he was actually the ranking member on the Africa Subcommittee. So he put a framed photo of Kate on his desk and leapt into action. Senator ISAKSON flew to Benin to personally lean on its President. He

met with Peace Corps officials. He built a legislative coalition for reforms to better protect volunteers.

As I said earlier, because this is JOHNNY ISAKSON we are talking about, we know how the story ends—with results. He helped Kate's parents pursue justice, and just a couple of years after JOHNNY sat down in that pew, the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act was law.

Now, that is JOHNNY ISAKSON in one story. He starts out trying to do good for his neighbors and winds up literally changing the world.

Of course, changing the world can be grueling work. We all know JOHNNY's health has made his tireless service more and more challenging in recent months. As much as the other 99 of us hate to hear it, he has decided it is time to find new ways to serve that don't involve twice weekly air travel or winding trips through the Capitol Complex.

But we know our friend is not riding off into the sunset or kicking up his heels. I know he is bound and determined to keep putting his expertise and institutional knowledge to work on behalf of Georgians who need him. I have no doubt that he will keep on advocating for Georgians with a pen and a phone, more friends across the country than anyone can count up, and maybe a few of his eight grandchildren by his side. It sounds like a pretty enviable work arrangement, and no doubt JOHNNY has earned it. He has earned the right to a little less late night voting and a little more time with his lovely wife Dianne.

So on behalf of all of his colleagues, I will tell JOHNNY to go ahead and relax just a little and maybe find something to drink, but, this time around, he should enjoy it on the front porch with Dianne and leave the laundry until later.

We are savoring our last few weeks alongside our good friend here in the Senate. We are so lucky to have called him our colleague.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Eric Ross Komitee, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I appreciate the opportunity to be on the floor today to speak about something of significance, certainly to Kansas but to the country.

We await House action on USMCA—the trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico. It is a trade agreement that is attempting to replace NAFTA and an agreement that is of significance, as I say, to the folks back home in my State.

For the last 2 years, I have engaged in a campaign to try to elevate the importance and to make sure my colleagues, the administration, and people here in Congress understand how important exports and trade are to the United States' economy.

In Kansas, we are an export State. What we produce, what we manufacture, and what we grow in the fields of our State in many, many instances end up someplace else outside the United States.

I have spoken on the Senate floor before. I have met with the President. I have talked to his Cabinet officials. I wrote an open letter to U.S. agricultural groups, encouraging them to fully engage in support for USMCA approval. I have had speaking engagements in places across the country, trying to rally farmers and ranchers and manufacturers and others to fight to preserve our trading relationship with Canada and Mexico.

On Saturday, at home in Kansas, I was with the Kansas Farm Bureau at a townhall. It kicked off their 101st annual meeting to discuss issues facing Kansas agriculture. The topic of trade and its importance to the products that we grow was the most important and most discussed topic at that townhall meeting.

USMCA was signed over a year ago. It is time for the House to pass this important agreement, and, in order for the House to pass it, the Speaker needs to bring it up for a vote.

Canada and Mexico are Kansas's No. 1 and No. 2 export markets. They account for over one-third of exports from our State. Since 2013, unfortunately, farm income at home has fallen by 50 percent. So net farm income in Kansas is down half in the last 6 years.

Many producers are struggling. They have struggled to hang on to their operations, and when farmers aren't doing well, it means that the communities they live in and support aren't doing well. The question is often this: What business will we lose when farmers are not having financial success? What young men and women who grew up on a farm or grew up in that small town will, perhaps, even reluctantly,