

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Liam P. Hardy, of Virginia, to be a Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces for the term of fifteen years to expire on the date prescribed by law.

Mitch McConnell, Shelley Moore Capito, John Hoeven, Roger F. Wicker, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Joni Ernst, Roy Blunt, Todd Young, Mike Rounds, Thom Tillis, John Cornyn, Michael B. Enzi, Lindsey Graham, Tim Scott, Mike Crapo, James E. Risch, James Lankford.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, I hope all of my colleagues had a good and fine Thanksgiving. We all know that across the country we celebrated a Thanksgiving—all of us, every American—unlike any in recent memory. Too many loved ones spent this holiday alone, unable to join with loved ones out of concern for their safety. As painful as it is to refrain from seeing family and friends, these are tough choices that we sometimes have to make, and we need to maintain our resolve more than ever.

While the hope of a vaccine shimmers on the near horizon, we are living through the worst stretch of the pandemic right now. Last Friday, for the first time, over 200,000 new cases of COVID were reported in a single day. The United States is averaging over 1 million new cases a week. Some 20 percent of all patients now hospitalized in the United States have COVID-19.

The worst and most unalterable part of this pandemic, of course, are the deaths. Since November 10, America has been losing more than 1,000 precious lives a day. On one day, November 24, we lost more than 2,000. The national death toll stands at a very sad 270,000 American souls. Families all across the country are experiencing the

unthinkable, unbearable losses of their loved ones.

As a compassionate nation, we cannot and must not ignore or become inured to this terrible reality. We must not avert our gaze. We must acknowledge the lives we are losing. We must honor the grief of the children, parents, spouses, siblings, and friends of the increasing number of Americans who are dying from COVID-19 every single day. We must redouble our efforts to flatten the curve and protect each other by wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and complying with the guidance of health officials.

As this Chamber gavel back into session, we must redouble our efforts before the end of the calendar year. As the pandemic increases in severity, so does the economic pain felt by countless working families and small business owners. In a few short weeks, several provisions of the CARES Act—including student loan forbearance, eviction moratoriums, and jobless benefits for millions of workers—will expire.

So first and foremost on the Senate's to-do list is COVID relief. Both sides should come together and negotiate a COVID relief bill in a bipartisan way that meets the needs of our businesses, our schools, our healthcare systems, our workers, and our families.

At the start of this crisis, Democrats and Republicans came together in a flurry of negotiations—I was thickly involved with them with Secretary Mnuchin—to pass a bill that truly met the moment. Now we are about to reach a new, more difficult stage of the crisis. We need to renew that spirit, that urgency, that bipartisanship.

Leader MCCONNELL's view, stated just a few minutes ago, seems to be that the only things that should be in this bill are things Republicans approve of, even if the needs of the country—the desperate needs of the country—are beyond the small list that Republicans might support. That is not real compromise.

We need to come together. Both sides must give. We have a Democratic House, and in the Senate there is a need for Democratic votes to pass any bill, so we need a true bipartisan bill—not “this is our bill; take it or leave it”—that can bring us together and solve the desperate needs of the American people, which we all very much want to solve.

Mr. President, the second item on our to-do list is Federal appropriations, which expire in 2 weeks. As we speak, appropriators from both sides in the relevant committees continue their negotiations. It is my hope and expectation that we can come to an agreement very soon.

Mr. President, third and finally, Congress should pass the annual Defense bill. As our country prepares for a peaceful transfer of power, the continuity of our national security is paramount. For nearly 60 years, Congress has never failed to pass the annual Defense bill, but this year it

seems the normally uncontroversial legislation has hit a snag. President Trump has threatened to veto the bill over a provision that would rename military bases and installations named after Confederate military leaders, men who would rend this country in half to preserve the institution of slavery, men who literally fought against this Nation's military in pursuit of an ignoble cause.

For that—a provision to rename our military bases to honor actual heroes rather than traitors to our country—President Trump is threatening to veto a pay raise for our troops. And it seems that Republicans in Congress are slow-walking the bill in hopes of finding some way to appease the outgoing President rather than just passing the bill over his rather ridiculous objection.

The provision to rename these installations was included in both the House- and Senate-passed versions of the bill, and the larger bill passed both Chambers with broad bipartisan support. There is no reason to further delay a pay raise for our living military heroes because President Trump wants to honor dead Confederate traitors.

The other provision that is at risk, shockingly, from our Republican colleagues is an amendment to assist veterans who have long suffered from their exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam war. The amendment passed this Chamber with 94 votes in favor, a rare and near-unanimous demonstration of bipartisan support.

The Trump administration's own VA advisory panel recommended this policy to improve healthcare for these veterans, but for some reason, our Republican counterparts are now reportedly trying to strip it from any final agreement. It would be an affront to a group of ailing veterans, who have suffered enough already, to strip a provision that would help provide them adequate healthcare.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION NOMINEES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on President-Elect Biden's nominees, as President-Elect Biden prepares to assume office on January 20, he is beginning to announce a slate of qualified, experienced public servants whom he intends to nominate to his Cabinet or other key administrative positions.

This morning, the President-elect announced that he has assembled his core economic team, led by another Brooklyn native, Janet Yellen, who would be the first woman to ever hold the title of Treasury Secretary. The President-elect's economic team clearly has the experience, the knowledge, and the prowess to meet the seriousness of this moment. More than that, they understand the needs of all Americans because they represent all different kinds of Americans.

They will get to work not just on rebuilding our economy but striving to

provide greater and more equitable prosperity to future generations.

Alongside the President-elect's deeply experienced national security team and his soon-to-be-announced health team, his economic team will ensure that the incoming Biden-Harris administration will hit the ground running.

Everyone knows that the Senate plays a pivotal role in confirming a new President's Cabinet. In the midst of this once-in-a-century crisis, it is imperative that the next administration can count on the Senate to confirm its Cabinet without delay, so hearings on President-Elect Biden's nominees should begin in January, immediately after the Georgia runoff elections.

Let me say that again. The Senate should begin hearings on President-Elect Biden's nominees in January, immediately after the Georgia Senate elections, so that key Cabinet officials can be confirmed on January 20 and soon thereafter, which is traditional for a new President. Senate committees held hearings for President Obama's nominees and President Trump's in early January, before the inauguration. Majority and minority staff should begin preparation for those hearings as President-Elect Biden names his Cabinet.

Now, President-Elect Biden's slate of intended nominees provides a stark contrast to the caliber of nominees advanced by the current Trump administration over the past 4 years. The early days of the Trump Presidency were defined by high-level appointments of individuals who were manifestly unqualified, plagued by ethical complaints, or swimming in conflicts of interest—sometimes all three.

At the time, Republicans in the Senate lined up to confirm President Trump's appointments, arguing that a President deserves his Cabinet and broad deference on his nominees. I would hope the same deference would be extended to President-Elect Biden's nominees, especially considering the obvious gulf in quality, experience, and ethics.

Already, however, the Republicans are twisting themselves into pretzels to explain their reflexive opposition to these outstanding selections. Neera Tanden, who would be the first woman of color to ever run the OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, is so eminently qualified that some on the Republican side—grasping at straws—have taken issue with comments made on Twitter criticizing the policy positions of Republicans in Congress.

Honestly, the hypocrisy is astounding. If Republicans are concerned about criticism on Twitter, their complaints are better directed at President Trump, who has made a hobby out of denigrating Republican Senators on Twitter.

I fully expect to see some crocodile tears spilled on the other side of the aisle over the President-elect's Cabinet nominees, but it will be very tough to

take those crocodile tears seriously. Our Republican colleagues are on the record supporting some of the least qualified, most unethical, and downright sycophantic Federal nominees in recent memory.

Many defended the conduct of previous OMB Director Russell Vought, who allowed foreign aid to be held up for political reasons, resulting in the President's impeachment. Right now, Republicans in Congress are looking the other way while President Trump pardons a man who pled guilty to the FBI.

So, again, it will be impossible to take these overblown complaints over President-Elect Biden's nominees very seriously. Given the urgent need to address COVID-19 and its economic fallout, the Senate should follow precedent and promptly hold hearings on President-Elect Biden's nominees in January, immediately after the Georgia elections, before inauguration.

The American people cannot afford to wait to have its government working at full force to keep them safe, defeat the virus, and get our economy back on track.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Democratic leader.

AGENT ORANGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, before I yielded the floor, I talked about Agent Orange, maybe before he had come on the floor, and it would be outrageous—the Senator from Montana has done great work helping our veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange get the healthcare they need and deserve, and I hope that our Republican colleagues will relent and allow those provisions to stay in the NDAA bill, and I compliment him on the work he has done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I thank the minority leader. I would just say that the presumptive conditions that the fighting men and women were exposed to in Vietnam are real, and the fact of the matter is these folks are getting old enough now that these conditions are putting them in a world of

hurt healthwise. It is the right thing to do to support our Vietnam veterans when it comes to the presumptive conditions that were caused by Agent Orange, and it needs to be in the NDAA.

TRIBUTE TO TRECIA MCEVOY

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, as we come here this week, back to Washington, DC, to deal with next year's funding package and hopefully a COVID package, I want to step back for a second and talk about really what is the most important thing in this body, and that is relationships.

Now, as a U.S. Senator, we have relationships with the people who elect us and for whom we work. Some of those relationships are outstanding; some may be not so outstanding. We also have relationships with the people who work for us, and, once again, some of those relationships are outstanding; some of them could use a little work.

Today, I get to talk about somebody who is retiring from my office who has had an outstanding relationship with everybody in my office, which is a feat that not a lot of folks are able to accomplish. But she is retiring. She is my scheduler.

Her name is Trecia Bickford McEvoy. I would just say that Trecia is not here today. Hopefully, she is watching on C-SPAN. The reason she is not here is because of COVID. My wife is not here today, and my wife dearly wanted to be here today to hear this speech in person. She is not here greatly in part because of COVID.

But the bottom line is, when it comes to Trecia McEvoy—and any Senator knows this—the most difficult job in any office in the U.S. Senate is the person who schedules the Senator's time. It is tough enough to be able to get to the committee meetings on time and be able to deal with the floor schedule and make sure you are meeting with constituents all in a timely order, not holding anybody up. But in my particular case, it is even more difficult because, as the folks in this body know, I still farm. So getting back to Big Sandy, MT, to that farm 12 miles west, to be able to do the things that I need to do, whether it is planting, whether it is harvesting, whatever it is, in a timely manner is also really important.

Not only did Trecia have to deal with my schedule here in the Senate, she had to deal with a very, very uncertain schedule on the farm. Let me give an example. I may be peeling out of here on a Thursday night with full intentions to plant some peas the next day. When I call my wife Sharla and say "What is the weather like?" she will say "It is raining," to which I call back Trecia and say "Trecia, you have to schedule for me for work in the State because I can't do any farming" to which she would go to work and over the next 12 hours, starting at about 4 or 5 in the afternoon, would help schedule, working with my State schedule