

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

and working with the staff, a full day of work the next day.

That didn't happen once in a while. That happened almost every weekend because, as those of us involved in agriculture know, it either rains too much or not enough; the Sun either doesn't shine enough or it shines too much.

The truth is, Trecia had to juggle all of those balls in the air to make sure that everything got done, to make sure that I was able to do my job as a Senator, that I was able to meet with those constituents, that I was able to meet with those trade groups that were out there, and that I was able to meet with different businesses around the State of Montana and then also have time enough to be able to operate the farm. She did it, and she did it with a smile on her face. The reason that is important is because sometimes those calls didn't come at 5 in the afternoon; sometimes those calls came at midnight Montana time, which, incidentally, is 2 in the morning here, and she always answered the phone—always—and she was always there with a solution to any problem I might have. It made life so much easier. That is why, when I hired Trecia McEvoy, it was the best hire I have ever made in my nearly 14 years in this body.

Trecia, when I hired her, was already a seasoned veteran. She spent more than 15 years scheduling for Senator Jim Jeffords before I was able to hire her. We asked her former colleagues in Jeffords' office to reminisce on their time working with Trecia. One of them was something that is perfectly Trecia McEvoy. The quote goes like this: Trecia was a fierce keeper of the gate and protector of Senator Jeffords. The staff didn't worry too much about Jim getting mad at us but, rather, Trecia getting mad at us. Whether she was protecting his time with an important dignitary, protecting his popcorn and his frozen yogurt lunches, or making sure that Jim wore his Senate softball uniform underneath his suit to hit the field after the vote, she never missed a beat.

Coincidentally, here in the Senate, she met her husband Jeff when she worked in Jeffords' office. Some of you may know Jeff. He is one of the Senate's longest serving photographers. Jeff was an Army veteran, serving from 1981 to 1989. Coming to the Senate after his retirement, where he has been ever since, he worked his way up, holding positions as official photographer, lead photographer, photographic services supervisor, and lastly, branch manager.

Jeff and Trecia still have—at least until the pandemic hit—lunch in the Dirksen cafeteria every single day. Between the two of them, they had two kids, Zach and Ian. It has been a privilege of my lifetime to watch those kids grow up, to go to an occasional hockey game—something that I know nothing about—and have Trecia tell me how the sport works.

Look, it is never easy when you have somebody who sits right outside the

door of your office—usually the first person you see when you come into the office, and it is usually the last person you see when you leave it. But Trecia was a pro. She is a pro.

Today I should feel sad, but I don't. I actually feel very happy for her because she gets to retire, and she gets to move up to New Hampshire. I think, if she is watching in Washington, DC, right now, she is probably sitting on cardboard boxes full of clothes or dishes or whatever it might be because my guess is, as of tomorrow, she will probably be in New Hampshire in short order. But the truth is, she will be able to go up there and enjoy life and look back at her time here in the Senate and understand that she has done a job well done. I would just say that the next chapter in her life, I have no doubt, will be just as exciting as the last one.

Trecia said: I remember there was a day—she told me that when she retires, she will look up at the dome and no longer feel a sense of wonder. I don't believe that is true. I think now that she is retired, she will look up at this dome that we all work under and think of the incredible stories and the incredible experiences and the incredible people, that she was able to enrich their lives and make life better for them.

Even though, Trecia, you are going to be a shot up north in New Hampshire, you will always be a part of my team, Team Tester. And I will tell you that Sharla and my kids and my staff and I thank you for everything you have done. Hopefully you won't be a stranger. Hopefully you will come back on occasion, come into the office and tell us what we are doing wrong and what we are doing right, because you are the best.

I yield my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### NOMINATION OF TAYLOR B. MCNEEL

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the nomination of Taylor Brantley McNeel for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi. We will vote in a few minutes on the first vote for this outstanding nominee, the cloture vote, and then I have every reason to believe that tomorrow, this outstanding candidate will be confirmed for elevation to the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Mississippi.

Sometimes when we vote, those confirmation votes are party-line votes. I think, happily, many times they are bipartisan. Based on conversations across the aisle, I have every reason to

believe that the vote on Taylor McNeel will, in fact, be bipartisan. I certainly hope it will be because his support back home in Mississippi is certainly bipartisan and multicultural because he is such an outstanding individual and such an outstanding attorney and an outstanding member of our State community.

Taylor McNeel's life has been marked by excellence at every point. Of course, he is a great lawyer. He is a partner in the law firm of Brunini, Grantham, Grower & Hewes, where he oversees the gulf coast office for this large law firm. Taylor McNeel has led a distinguished career in the firm, with extensive experience in both bench and jury trials in Federal and State courts. He has served as lead counsel for numerous appeals to the Mississippi Supreme Court, the Mississippi Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. His clients include individuals, government entities, and businesses covering a vast range of law.

I believe Senators should be impressed also by his work on behalf of disadvantaged members of our community back home. He maintains a strong pro bono practice, representing clients who would not normally be able to afford legal services. I think he is to be commended for that.

His academic credentials are impeccable. He was a cum laude graduate from the University of Mississippi, where he received his undergraduate degree. As an undergraduate, he was an outstanding athlete as well as leader. He was a member of the Ole Miss Rebel football team and was elected senior class president of that outstanding university.

He went on to receive his juris doctor degree cum laude from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where he served on the Mississippi Law Journal.

Taylor McNeel has been widely recognized as a young lawyer to watch. He has been named a Mid-South Rising Star in business litigation for 8 years in a row and has been listed 3 years in a row in the 40 & Under Hot List for the United States in benchmark litigation. Is it any wonder, then, that he has received a unanimous "qualified" rating by the American Bar Association? Of course, we know that the highest rating a candidate for district judge can receive is the rating of "qualified," and the fact that this was done unanimously by the committee—it just doesn't get any better than that for a candidate for district judge.

It is important to note also that Mr. McNeel is an outstanding and active member in his community and is widely respected there. He serves on the school board of the Pascagoula-Gautier School District. I might add that is a racially diverse school district. He is an elder in his church, First Presbyterian Church in Pascagoula, and he has been a member of the Rotary Club of Biloxi.

Pascagoula is in Jackson County, where he is an outstanding citizen. Biloxi is in Harrison County, and he is a