

any excuse to brag about the impressive men and women we get to work alongside every single day.

Today, I will begin with the junior Senator from Arizona, MARTHA MCSALLY. For the last 2 years, Senator MCSALLY has held the seat formerly occupied by our dear friend John McCain. It is only fitting that our "Maverick" was followed by a fellow veteran and pilot who has approached her service to the people of Arizona with such unabashed pride.

By her own account, if you had asked a school-aged MARTHA MCSALLY, who was apparently both shy and prone to motion sickness, whether a career in cockpits and then politics sounded appealing, she would have looked at you like you were crazy. But, even then, the future full-bird colonel and Senator was already on her way to a life defined by service.

When MARTHA lost her father, a Navy veteran, at a young age, his final words to her were: "Make me proud." "Make me proud." With this challenge in mind, the youngest of five children took her academic and athletic talents to the U.S. Air Force Academy. The plan was to earn a trip to medical school through military service.

Back then, a ground-based career must have sounded like a sensible plan. After all, being a combat pilot wasn't an option back then for female officers, and, besides, she was on the wrong side of the height requirement for any pilot's seat. No women and no people her size were eligible at the time.

But after a ride-along training mission in an F-16 during one of her summer assignments, Cadet MCSALLY realized that flying was just too cool to pass up. Some doors were going to have to open to make it an option, but if those doors weren't open already, then, MARTHA MCSALLY was prepared to bust them down. That meant shaking off three straight rejections for a medical waiver of the height requirement. It meant inventing new tests to prove her exceptional aptitude, not only among the female candidates but the entire pool. It meant not taking "no" for an answer and ruffling as many feathers as needed until she got to serve. Of course, none of these skills and talents would sound at all familiar to us here in the Senate—not at all.

By the time our future colleague won her spot as the first woman behind the stick of a combat fighter mission, she was charting a unique course in more ways than one. Her place in the squadron had made history, and the jet she flew—the A-10 "Warthog"—had a unique place of its own.

The A-10 flies low over the battlefield. It provides close air support, hunting and destroying threats to friendly forces on the ground. It is a machinegun on wings that holds special respect among combat military.

Many seasoned soldiers have a story or two about times when pilots like MARTHA MCSALLY swooped in to get them out of a bind. So MARTHA's flight

hours were literally clearing the way for her fellow servicemembers in more ways than one.

Her trailblazing helped change the perception and treatment of women in our Armed Forces. In one instance, she took the DOD to court over unfair dress codes for female servicemembers overseas and won an important change in policy.

Pretty quickly, folks caught on to the fact that when Colonel MCSALLY put her mind to something, it got done. So, naturally, when the then-Congresswoman was sworn in here in the Senate, she dove into tracking down answers for her fellow Arizonans, solutions for American servicemembers, and the care and justice her fellow veterans deserve.

From her first day, Senator MCSALLY reminded everyone here that public service is personal, that what we do here has a direct impact on the lives of millions of Americans. So after swearing the oath on a Bible recovered from the bombing of the USS *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor, she brought her experience and expertise to solving issues that are personal to her and to others who have worn the uniform.

In solidarity with her fellow A-10 pilots and the forces they protect, Senator MCSALLY fought to preserve and fund that unique weapon. Using her role on the Senate Armed Services Committee, she let her own painful personal experiences with sexual assault in the military fuel the pursuit of justice for fellow survivors. She authored expanded protections for service academy students who experienced assault, she proposed new preservation requirements for service records to promote accountability, and she made sure each was included when the Senate passed Defense authorizations.

Her service to men and women in uniform didn't stop with those on Active Duty. Senator MCSALLY has also championed expanded care and services for our veterans as they transition back to civilian life, greater Federal support for telehealth and suicide prevention, and expanded veterans treatment courts.

So many important changes have been enacted because MARTHA MCSALLY made them happen.

Last year, it came to her attention that one remarkable 95-year-old Arizona veteran had not received the formal recognition he deserved for distinguished service back in World War II. Senator MCSALLY made sure he got that Purple Heart, hand-delivered, with dozens of young airmen on hand to honor him.

The junior Senator from Arizona has charted a singular course. She has balanced respect for tradition with an eye toward the future. She opened countless new doors for others. At every single step, our colleague has done it with dignity, faith, and a deep love of her State and her country that she cannot help but wear on her sleeve.

She departs with a long list of accomplishments and every reason to

hold her head high. Wherever life after the Senate takes her, I am confident our colleague will continue to be the most enthusiastic advocate for her State—for its people, its prosperity, and its natural wonders. That includes all the interesting creatures that she and her four-legged wingman, Boomer, meet when they are out hiking the trails.

No, I am pretty certain MARTHA MCSALLY is not through fighting yet. So, MARTHA, on behalf of not just the Senate but the Nation, thank you so much for your service to our country, in uniform and here in the Senate. We wish you all the best in the bright days to come.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

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 Taylor B. McNeel, of Mississippi, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Mississippi.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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. SCHUMER. Madam 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. Madam President, yesterday, I mentioned the several big-ticket items left on the congressional agenda before the end of the year. Over the next few weeks, the Senate must pass an appropriations bill to keep the government funded. We must pass the annual Defense bill, a piece of legislation that Congress has passed every year for nearly 60 years in a row. And a top priority as well is a major COVID relief bill.

We are in a moment of genuine national catastrophe. The rate of new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are at the highest, or near the highest, of