

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

any point during this awful pandemic. The economic fallout of the pandemic spreads and spreads. November saw the largest single 2-week jump in unemployment benefit applications since early April, and enhanced job benefits are only a few weeks from expiration.

The time has come for Congress to pass a bipartisan COVID relief bill that meets the needs of our workers, our families, our schools, and our businesses. The Republican leader of this Chamber knows very well that the only way to pass legislation in the Senate is with a measure of bipartisanship. But time and time again, the Republican leader's idea of action on COVID has been to bring partisan legislation to the floor and then demand everyone accept it.

Every single iteration has included poison pills designed to ensure that the bill is bad—not consensus proposals. That is not what these poison pills are at all, and he knows darn well the Democrats don't agree to them. Well, that is no way to do business around here.

The leader's view seems to be that the only things that should be considered in the next COVID relief bill are items that Republicans approve of, even if the needs of the country go way beyond what is on their narrow list. So I would plead again to the Republican leader and to my colleagues on the other side, we need to come together. Both sides—both sides—must be willing to compromise.

While the Republicans in this Chamber enjoy a majority, they must grapple with the fact that Democrats hold a majority in the House. We cannot make a law without Democrats in the House, and, frankly, Democratic votes in the Senate because there are a good number of Republicans who won't vote for any proposal.

So we need a true bipartisan bill, not another round of partisan Republican proposals put forward by the leader and then he makes take-it-or-leave-it demands, and that is it. We need to come together and come to agreement that will not satisfy any one of us completely but gets the job done. I hope that as we get closer to the end of the year, partisan posturing on the Republican side will give way to some genuine compromises.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION NOMINEES

Madam President, now, on another matter. President-Elect Biden continues to roll out an impressive slate of candidates he intends to nominate to his Cabinet and other key administrative positions. They provide an incredibly stark contrast to the caliber of the nominees the Senate considered over the past 4 years. Not only are President-Elect Biden's nominees exceptionally qualified and familiar with the institutions to which they are nominated, but they have a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. They actually look like America.

Today, I will be meeting with President-Elect Biden's intended Secretary

of State, Tony Blinken, and his intended Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, who is the first woman to be nominated to serve in that position. Like most Americans are doing these days, our "meeting" will take place over a video chat, and I am looking forward to asking both Mr. Blinken and Ms. Haines about their views on a range of issues concerning American diplomacy, foreign policy, and national security, and how to repair some of the damage to America's reputation and relationships abroad done by the past administration.

Now, after what all we went through over the past 4 years, I would expect that almost all of President-Elect Biden's nominees would be widely acceptable to the Senate. After all, Senate Republicans confirmed several Trump nominees who lacked the necessary qualifications, who were mired in ethics scandals, and who made outrageous and inflammatory comments in the past.

Republican Senators often argued that a President deserves broad deference when it comes to their Cabinet and official appointments and blew past controversies that would in almost any other time be disqualifying. President-Elect Biden's nominees, of course, are in a different universe.

Well, we are already starting to see the switch start to flip now that President-Elect Biden is the one naming the names. To take just one example, Senate Republicans reacted to the historic nomination of Neera Tanden to run the Office of Management and Budget by calling her "radioactive," a "nutjob," and expressing alarm over some critical tweets in the past.

After spending 4 years pretending they didn't see the latest insane tweet from President Trump, Senate Republicans seem to have found a newfound interest in the Twitter feeds of Biden's Cabinet selections.

With respect to the Office of Management and Budget specifically, Senate Republicans lined up to confirm the previous OMB Director, Russell Vought, after he was at the heart of the scandal that led to President Trump's impeachment: withholding security aid to an ally at war, Ukraine.

If Senate Republicans are worried about someone with a partisan background in OMB, perhaps they shouldn't have voted to confirm Russell Vought, who used to work not just at the Heritage Foundation but for its partisan advocacy arm. If Senate Republicans are concerned about someone who made controversial comments running OMB, perhaps they shouldn't have confirmed Russell Vought, who once said: "Muslims do not simply have a deficient theology. They do not know God because they have rejected Jesus Christ his Son, and they stand condemned."

That was the previous OMB Director condemning an entire religion. The Republican majority confirmed him despite these inflammatory comments, despite his conduct as interim Direc-

tor, and despite his career as a partisan warrior.

But a few critical tweets about substantive policy positions have caused Senate Republicans to label Ms. Tanden's nomination "radioactive." Spare us the hyperbole. Ms. Tanden, we all know, is an eminently qualified nominee who would be the first woman of color to ever run the Office of Management and Budget.

As Biden continues to name his team, I am sure we will hear some more of these overblown complaints from Republican Senators, but after the caliber of nominees that this Republican majority confirmed over the past 4 years, it will be impossible—impossible—to take them seriously.

The Senate committees should prepare to hold hearings on President-Elect Biden's nominees in January, immediately after the Georgia elections. Let me say that again. The Senate committees should prepare to hold hearings on President-Elect Biden's nominees in January, immediately after the Georgia elections.

That is customary for a new President. The Senate holds several hearings in January so that key Cabinet officials can be confirmed on January 20 and shortly thereafter. That is what the Senate did for President Trump and President Obama. That is what the Senate must do for President-Elect Biden as well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, yesterday drugmaker Moderna filed for an emergency use authorization from the FDA for its COVID vaccine. The FDA's Vaccine Advisory Committee is scheduled to discuss Pfizer's COVID vaccine next week and is expected to review Moderna's shortly thereafter.

That means that it is entirely possible that by the end of December the FDA will have authorized not one but two COVID vaccines that have so far shown more than 90 percent effectiveness in preventing the disease. This is very hopeful news, and it is a tribute to the innovative power of the private sector and the efforts of Congress and the Trump administration to expedite the development of COVID vaccines.

The light at the end of the tunnel looks like it is on the way. At the same time, it is essential that we not minimize what is happening with COVID right now. Cases are surging and are likely to surge further, and doctors and hospitals are struggling.

It is essential that we maintain key safety measures until those vaccines arrive. Now, more than ever, we need to keep wearing masks, wash our hands, and maintain social distance. The more responsibly we act, the more we can protect vulnerable members of the population and keep our doctors and hospitals from being overrun. Acting responsibly can also help avert further economic shutdowns, which would