have 62 of the 139 civilian nominees the Senate has confirmed so far been confirmed with Democrat support? Why are Trump nominees emerging from committee with bipartisan support? Is the Democrat leader suggesting that his own Members are supporting historically bad nominees?

On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman came down to the floor and asked for unanimous consent to confirm a nominee for U.S. attorney who was reported from committee by voice vote and who has the support of the two Democrat Senators from his State. Is the Democrat leader suggesting that the senior Democrat from Minnesota and the junior Democrat from Minnesota are conspiring with President Trump to put in place historically bad nominees?

I completely respect Democrats' right to dislike some or, for that matter, many of President Trump's nominees and to oppose nominees they consider to be historically bad. I have opposed more than one Democrat nominee in my time. But let's get real here. This obstruction is not about historically bad nominees. The scores of nominees who have emerged from committee with bipartisan support are not historically bad.

The U.S. attorney candidate for Minnesota, supported by the senior Democrat Senator from Minnesota and the junior Democrat Senator from Minnesota, is not a historically bad nominee, and the only reason—the only reason—the Democrat leader objected to his confirmation by voice vote Monday, along with the confirmation of a Trump nominee who had previously been nominated by President Biden, is petty partisanship—petty partisanship that is well on its way to turning the Senate from a legislative body into, in the words of the senior Democrat from Minnesota, a ''full-time employment agency.''

Before I close, I also want to mention one other complaint from the Democrat leader yesterday, and that is his claim that Republicans' attempt to restore Senate precedent on the en bloc consideration of nominees is somehow going to eliminate transparency.

To hear the Democrat leader tell it, you would think the Senate was going to start approving nominees in the dead of night, behind closed doors in the Capitol basement. I didn't notice the Democrat leader objecting to a lack of transparency when we approved packages of Biden nominees, some of which probably did happen in the dark of night, albeit in the full light of the C–SPAN cameras.

Of course, I should also mention that, before any floor consideration, all of these nominees will have gone through the committee process, which will have provided still another forum for Members to air concerns.

The amendment to the rules Republicans are proposing is an idea with a bipartisan pedigree. It would restore Senate precedent, and it would restore sanity to a confirmation process that Democrats and Republicans alike have complained is broken.

Despite their historic blockade, I think a lot of my Democrat colleagues are well aware that we can't continue as we are. So I say to those colleagues, many of whom I know do care about this institution: Join us. Let's protect decades of Senate precedent on confirmations and get this institution fully functioning again.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2748 AND H.R. 4553

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I understand that there are two bills at the desk due for second readings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2748) to establish a program to beautify the District of Columbia and to establish the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful Commission, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 4553) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceeding en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard so the items will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 2296, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2296) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2026 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Wicker/Reed amendment modified No. 3748, in the nature of a substitute.

Wicker (for Ernst) amendment No. 3427 (to amendment No. 3748), to require the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on casualty assistance and long-term care programs.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. 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. 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 Democratic leader is recognized.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, it is my honor to welcome my good friend Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman to the Senate and thank him for offering the morning's opening prayer.

Dr. Berman is president of Yeshiva University in New York and a longtime partner in the fight against anti-Semitism. We have worked together over the years to help upgrade Yeshiva's campus to remain a world-class institution. And as we approach the Jewish New Year, a time for renewal and recommitment for Jewish families around the world, I thank him for sharing his words of wisdom.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. President, now, on foreign policy, bad news for you, Donald Trump: The Nobel Prize is slipping away from your grasp. Crises over the last 24 hours have escalated to dangerous levels, and President Trump, you seem to be leading from behind.

Donald Trump promised that he would end the war in Ukraine on day one. He said he would put an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas on day one. It is so easy, he said. Well, it is now day 234, and war rages around the world. In the last 24 hours, we have seen dangerous escalation on multiple fronts. Yesterday, Israel launched a strike against Hamas in the capital city of a key American ally in the middle of cease-fire negotiations.

Despite being handed a cease-fire by the previous administration, 234 days later, a cease-fire deal is further off than ever. Meanwhile, hostages remain in captivity, and innocent Palestinian civilians in Gaza continue to suffer.

In Europe, Vladimir Putin sent drones into Poland, a NATO ally, which required NATO military action to shoot down those drones. What was the point, President Trump, of your meeting in Alaska where you snuggled up to Putin?

And Donald Trump is hesitating now to say any strong words against Putin, even after they did this. NATO safety has been at risk, and it is being put at risk even more so, and Donald Trump is leading from behind.

The latest aggression by Putin should send a shiver down the spines of every American. I warned of this scenario as the Senate debated sending more military support to Ukraine, and I warned at that point that any division, any hesitation of our resolve against Putin would be taken by him as weakness. And I fear Donald Trump's anemic weakness against Putin and other strongmen has only pushed the world closer to the brink of chaos and even war.

People don't take him seriously. People don't take Trump seriously on the world stage. That is a great danger to the United States and to peace because he bluffs and backs off. He sucks up to people, and then he doesn't do anything when they hurt him and hurt us.

I warn all Senators: History will not look kindly upon us if we stand back as Donald Trump acquiesces to Putin and cements himself as the Neville Chamberlain of our time.

TARIFFS AND THE ECONOMY

Mr. President, now, on tariffs and the bad Trump economy, yesterday, the Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on the legality of Donald Trump's tariffs as soon as next month. Legally, there is no doubt the Supreme Court should strike down Donald Trump's tariffs decisively. That is the role that the Court should play, and we hope our Supreme Court Justices realize that. They are not there just to serve Donald Trump; they are there to rein in the Executive when the Executive steps over the lines and tries to circumvent the Constitution.

And tariffs are a responsibility of the Congress in the Constitution. Not only are these tariffs the definition of Executive overreach, but the tariffs are wreaking havoc on the American people and businesses. The average American may not care who is responsible; they just don't like these tariffs, and they know Donald Trump is doing them. The longer these tariffs are in place, the more damage they will cause to our economy. So the Court must act and apply the law, which clearly states the President cannot act alone.

As a result of his economic policies, it has been several days of bad economic headlines for Donald Trump. And the deluge keeps coming.

Here, look at these. Look at these, folks. Look at these charts. From your coffee in the morning to your soup at dinner, your prices are going up because of Trump's tariffs. When the American people complain about higher costs for everyday things they always need and use and consume, here it is.

Campbell's Expects Dropoff in 2026 Earnings as Tariffs Hit Soup Cans.

The tariffs hit everything. You wouldn't think—well, soup, tomatoes; maybe they are made here in the United States. But the cans come from aluminum: Trump's tariffs.

Tariffs Are Hitting Your Morning Brew. Folgers Maker Says Prices to Rise Further.

We don't grow coffee in the United States. There is not a competition or an unfair competition, but he raised tariffs on coffee. Everyone is paying more. My morning cup of coffee costs more. I have seen the prices rise when we shop for grounds in the supermarket.

Hormel to Raise Prices, Citing Costlier Pork, Beef and Nuts.

So, again, every meal—from your coffee in the morning, to your soup at lunch, to your meat at dinner—your prices are going up because of Donald Trump and his tariffs. The headlines go on and on and on.

And here is the sad thing I say to my colleagues and the American people: It didn't have to happen. This is self-inflicted. This didn't happen because of the world economy. This happened because Donald Trump imposed an idiotic bunch of tariffs—unthought-out, chaotic—on the American people. And he loves them. He doesn't care that your price of coffee or soup or meat goes up. Somehow, he got it stuck in his head that tariffs are a good thing, and he is hurting average Americans. It is a self-inflicted wound, as I said. It is economic sabotage, orchestrated from the command center of dunderheads over at the Oval Office. Hardly any economist of repute knows what the heck they are doing and why.

Higher costs, rampant confusion, factories slowing—all because Trump's economic agenda boils down to chaos. He is like the drunk captain of a ship driving straight into an iceberg; and we, the American people, are beginning to take on water as our prices go up and up and up.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, on government funding, the clock is ticking to keep the government open, and Republicans are sleepwalking their way through another critical week. A government shutdown once again hangs over this Chamber and this country like an ugly shadow. So what are we going to do about it? Well, it is up to our Republican colleagues to decide. They are in charge.

Democrats know where we stand. We want bipartisan negotiations, input from both sides of the aisle, and we want to undo much of the damage that Trump has inflicted on the American people, particularly when it comes to healthcare. Leader JEFFRIES and I have asked Leader THUNE and Speaker JOHNSON, on multiple occasions, to sit down and talk so we can have a bipartisan agreement and avoid the Republican shutdown, but we have heard nothing for weeks. The Republican silence is concerning because if they think Democrats are going to show up at the last minute to bail them out with the clock approaching zero, that would be a big mistake on their part.

Democrats don't want to see a Republican shutdown. What we want is a bipartisan negotiation, a bipartisan bill where Democrats have input to tangibly undo the carnage Donald Trump has done to America.

And make no mistake, the carnage Donald Trump has unleashed upon this country over the last 9 or so months is devastating. He has savaged America's democratic institutions. He has defied the rule of law, defied the order of judges, and directed Russell Vought—an evil man who came up with Project 2025—to steal or cancel congressionally approved funding; hundreds of billions of dollars illegally blocked for things that Americans want—for cancer research, for programs that aid kids after school, for veterans. That and so much more gone, canceled, dead because of Russell Vought's whim and Donald Trump's desire to just do what he wants and what Vought wants.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, of course, let's talk about healthcare. It is people's livelihoods. And thanks to Donald Trump, the livelihood of tens of millions is being stolen from them in broad daylight, all so Donald Trump can pay for tax breaks for the megarich.

Donald Trump's signature achievement, the one he claims is great—he calls it the Big Beautiful Bill—well, this so-called Big Beautiful Bill—which they won't even name anymore, they are so afraid of the American people knowing what is in it—is systematic starvation of our healthcare system. Let me repeat that. The so-called Big Beautiful Bill is systematic starvation of our healthcare system. That is what Russell Vought has always stood for; that is what he said he would do; and that is what Trump is aiding and abetting him to do.

Republicans want to rebrand their bill. They say: Well, Trump said maybe it was a mistake to call it the Big Beautiful Bill. That is because they are seeing that the American people hate it. But they can change the name; it is not going to change anything. You are not going to get your healthcare back because they change the name of a bill that was so mislabeled to begin with. Because it sure ain't beautiful; it is ugly.

Well, maybe Donald Trump can call it the ''Starve and Die Act.'' That would be more accurate than big and beautiful. That is what happens when health insurance is taken away from you. That is what happens when SNAP is taken away. People starve, and it is estimated that people will actually die because if you can't get healthcare, if you can't get prevention, life expectancies of people go down.

And alarmingly soon, America, the Big Beautiful Bill is going to get even worse for you. In just a few weeks, unless Congress acts, millions of Americans will start getting letters in the mail telling them their health insurance costs are about to go through the roof; hundreds of dollars, thousands in some cases.

That is because the ACA premium tax credits will expire by the end of this year. People who get covered through the ACA—and there are tens of millions—will see their premiums spike by an average of 18 percent. There are millions, depends on how you count it.

Health insurance premiums are going up by 18 percent because of Republican inaction. We tried three times to get them to repeal it in the so-called Big Beautiful Bill, and three times they refused.

This would be a nightmare scenario for the American people on October 1 getting notice that your healthcare

costs will go up 18 percent for millions who are on ACA.

At a time of rising costs, as we have seen, at a time of a weakening job market, to then compound the injury by making you pay a lot more for healthcare, it is outrageous, and Republicans, again, blocked it three times.

We have heard plenty of lip service from Leader THUNE and the other side about doing something to preserve these tax credits, but now Leader Thune says Republicans will walk away from the table and sit on their hands as Americans' health insurance shoots by 18 percent. Every Republican in this Senate Chamber will be responsible because all we need is a handful of them to join with us in making sure it is extended and that these costs don't go up.

And this also points to a larger theme. The Republican agenda is a profoundly broken agenda. It is a stunning betrayal of the trust the American people put in Donald Trump to fight for their interests.

So I want to be clear that Republicans—our Republican Senators—in the face of so much damage to our country, cannot just expect for Democrats to bail them out and sign on the dotted line.

What we will do is stand ready to meet Republicans and the Republican leaders face to face and negotiate a way to undo so much of Donald Trump's carnage.

That means we need to have real input into undoing a lot of the carnage that has been done by this administration. It is clear that Democrats don't want a shutdown, but Republicans who say they want to keep the government open have to show they are serious through their actions and not just craft a bill in the dark of night in a room and say, take it or leave it, because that will mean there will be a Republican shutdown.

They need to show up and work with us. That is the only way to get it done and to avoid a shutdown.

AMENDMENT NO. 3849 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3748, AS MODIFIED

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New York [Mr. SCHUMER] proposes an amendment numbered 3849 to amendment No. 3748.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask consent that further reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To direct the Attorney General to make publicly available documents related to Jeffrey Epstein)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. EPSTEIN FILES TRANSPARENCY.

(a) RELEASE OF DOCUMENTS RELATING TO JEFFREY EPSTEIN.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (3), not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Attorney General shall make publicly available in a searchable and downloadable format all unclassified records, documents, communications, and investigative materials in the possession of the Department of Justice, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and each United States Attorney's Office, that relate to—

(A) Jeffrey Epstein, including all investigations, prosecutions, or custodial matters;

(B) Ghislaine Maxwell;

(C) any flight logs or travel records, including manifests, itineraries, pilot records, and customs or immigration documentation, for any aircraft, vessel, or vehicle owned, operated, or used by Jeffrey Epstein or any related entity;

(D) any individuals, including government officials, named or referenced in connection with the criminal activities, civil settlements, immunity or plea agreements, or investigatory proceedings of Jeffrey Epstein;

(E) any corporate, nonprofit, academic, or governmental entities with known or alleged ties to the trafficking or financial networks of Jeffrey Epstein;

(F) any immunity deals, non-prosecution agreements, plea bargains, or sealed settlements involving Jeffrey Epstein or his associates;

(G) any internal Department of Justice communications, including emails, memoranda, and meeting notes, concerning decisions to charge, not charge, investigate, or decline to investigate Jeffrey Epstein or his associates;

(H) any communications, memoranda, directives, logs, or metadata concerning the destruction, deletion, alteration, misplacement, or concealment of documents, recordings, or electronic data related to Jeffrey Epstein, his associates, his detention and death, or any investigative files; or

(I) any documentation of the detention or death of Jeffrey Epstein, including incident reports, witness interviews, medical examiner files, autopsy reports, and written records detailing the circumstances and cause of death.

(2) PROHIBITED GROUNDS FOR WITHHOLDING.—In carrying out paragraph (1), the Attorney General may not withhold from publication, delay the publication of, or redact any record, document, communication, or investigative material on the basis of embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity, including to any government official, public figure, or foreign dignitary.

(3) PERMITTED WITHHOLDINGS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out paragraph (1), the Attorney General may withhold from publication any record, document, communication, or investigative material, or redact any segregable portion of any record, document, communication, or investigative material, that—

(i) contains personally identifiable information from the personal or medical file of a victim or child witness, including information the publication of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;

(ii) depicts or contains child pornography, as defined in section 2256 of title 18, United States Code;

(iii) would jeopardize an active Federal investigation or ongoing Federal prosecution, if the withholding or redaction is narrowly tailored and temporary;

(iv) depicts or contains any image of the death, physical abuse, or injury of any person; or

(v) contains information that is specifically authorized under criteria established by an Executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy and is properly classified pursuant to that Executive order.

(B) REDACTIONS.—The Attorney General shall publish in the Federal Register and submit to Congress a written justification for each redaction under subparagraph (A).

(C) DECLASSIFICATION TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT POSSIBLE.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Attorney General shall declassify, to the maximum extent possible, any information that the Attorney General would otherwise withhold or redact as classified information under this subsection.

(ii) UNCLASSIFIED SUMMARY.—If the Attorney General determines that information described in clause (i) may not be declassified and made available in a manner that protects the national security of the United States, including methods or sources related to national security, the Attorney General shall make publicly available an unclassified summary of the information.

(D) CLASSIFICATION OF COVERED INFORMATION.—The Attorney General shall publish in the Federal Register and submit to Congress each decision made after July 1, 2025, to classify any information that would otherwise be required to be made publicly available under paragraph (1), including the date of classification, the identity of the classifying authority, and an unclassified summary of the justification for classification.

(b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 15 days after making publicly available all records, documents, communications, and investigative materials under subsection (a)(1), the Attorney General shall submit to the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate and the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives a report containing—

(1) a list of each category of records, documents, communications, and investigative materials made publicly available or withheld;

(2) a summary of the redactions made, including the legal basis upon which the redactions were made; and

(3) a list of each government official, public figure, or foreign dignitary named or referenced in the records, documents, communications, and investigative materials made publicly available, without redaction in accordance with subsection (a)(2).

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I have a cloture motion at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

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 Schumer amendment No. 3849 to Calendar No. 115, S. 2296, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2026 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Charles E. Schumer, Jeff Merkley, Cory A. Booker, Brian Schatz, Jack Reed, Angela D. Alsobrooks, Michael F. Bennet, Adam B. Schiff, Jeanne Shaheen, Richard J. Durbin, Richard Blumenthal, Peter Welch, Alex Padilla, Sheldon Whitehouse, Mazie K. Hirono, Ben Ray Luján, Catherine Cortez Masto, Tim Kaine.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The majority whip.

RULES CHANGE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, since President Trump took office, Democrats have weaponized the rules of the Senate. Regardless of qualifications, every Trump nominee has gotten the same treatment: total obstruction, total warfare. From Ambassadors to Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Democrats have filibustered each and every one of the Republican nominations.

Senate Democrats would filibuster the White House janitor if they had the opportunity. Today, President Trump is the first President in history not to have a single nominee confirmed by voice vote or unanimous consent.

The actions of the Democrats is not going to change, and yesterday the Democrats made that clear here on this floor. On this very floor, Senator CORNYN tried to bring up for consideration the Democrats' own proposal from 2023. It was offered from Senators KLOBUCHAR and Senator KING.

Senator KLOBUCHAR and Senator KING wanted to confirm nominees in a group. They claimed, at the time, the nomination process was broken. What was the status of the situation when they made that decision?

They said it was broken because Joe Biden's nominees weren't being confirmed quickly enough. So let's take a look at the data. On the day that Klobuchar-King was introduced in 2023, 62 percent of Joe Biden's nominees had been confirmed in the Senate either by voice vote or unanimous consent—62 percent.

Democrats said: Not fast enough.

So let's fast-forward to today. Zero percent—zero percent—of President Trump's nominees have been confirmed by voice vote, not a single one.

So what did the Democrats do on this very floor yesterday? They objected when Republicans proposed the very similar change to what they proposed 2 years ago. They slammed the door on even debating that proposal. Senator CORNYN put forward the very reforms that the Democrats once demanded. Democrats refused to even debate them. Senator KLOBUCHAR said in 2023 that grouping together nominees, she said, was vital for—in her words—''national security, economic success, and more.''

Well, she was right.

Yet, yesterday, Democrats opposed their own proposal. You remember the words of the former Democrat Senator and Presidential candidate John Kerry. He said he was for it before he was against it.

Democrats' hypocrisy is breathtaking. Democrats' surrender to the far-left wing of their party is now complete. Democrats created today's nomination crisis.

This week, Republicans began the process to return the Senate to its longstanding practices. The Senate has a history of allowing these sub-Cabinet nominees to be confirmed in groups. The resolution we have today formalizes what both parties have always done until now.

Senate Republicans are building on the Klobuchar-King proposal. Republicans are simply updating it to reflect Democrats' unprecedented obstruction.

Unlike the Democrats' previous version, the Republican plan is more limited. Democrats wanted to group together and confirm lifetime judicial appointments. The Republican plan doesn't include judges.

Our proposal deals only with sub-Cabinet nominees and sub-Cabinet nominees only, not judges, not Cabinet Secretaries. Those nominees will still be considered individually, many of them requiring up to 30 hours of debate.

Now modern Presidents have over 1,000 positions that need to be filled, put on the job. This includes Deputy Secretaries, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Ambassadors, and others. Those positions keep the government running. Those nominees now will be confirmed in groups just like they were for every President before President Trump.

Every committee hearing and every markup will still happen. Every FBI background check will still occur. Every ethics review will still happen. Every nominee will still appear in front of the committees. Every nominee will still be questioned by Senators. And every nominee will still be subject to a vote in the committee.

In other words, scrutiny will continue. What will end is Senator SCHUMER's ongoing, endless obstruction. The floor here is for final action; it is not for endless obstruction.

To my Senate colleagues who participated in this blockade, let me say this: You have had a chance to be reasonable. You have had a chance to work together, work with us. You have chosen obstruction instead. You demanded change at a time when 62 percent of Joe Biden's nominees were confirmed by voice vote. Yet you now reject the very changes you once championed now that a different President—President Trump—is getting zero nominees confirmed by voice vote or unanimous consent.

The hypocrisy is undeniable. Senate Republicans are putting back in place the very practice that Democrats had endorsed until today, the very customs that every Senate has followed until now.

Senate Republicans are returning to the longstanding tradition. We are ending the Schumer confirmation shutdown, and we are getting the Senate back to work on behalf of the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I was listening to the majority whip, and I have got to say, I have a little whiplash. I mean, I was here. I was negotiating. It was late July. We were passing paper back and forth between the Democratic and Republican caucus. The cloakrooms were working together, and we had a deal. That is the way you get nominations confirmed in batches.

The majority party wants to get them all done, fair enough. It is their President. And the minority party has this really unique authority in this place, which is to slow things down. And the rhythm of this place is that the majority party goes to the minority party and says: What is it going to take for us to confirm a batch of these nominees? We have got a backlog. We have got to get some of these through.

And so there are a couple of ways that that normally happens. First of all, you pair Democrats and Republicans together so that each party is getting a little bit of what they need.

The problem with pairing in the Trump era, and it is different from Trump 1.0, is that President Trump hasn't even nominated Democrats to Commissions like the SEC, the FTC, the FEC, the CFPB. All of those Agencies usually have Democrats and Republicans nominated, and then they kind of languish on the floor until we cut a deal and we confirm them all.

We had no deal space because there were no Democrats to deal out. And by the way, many Republicans with whom I talked said: Yeah, that is a fair point. Let me go and talk to the Chief of Staff of the President. Let me go talk to the White House team. We should get you some Democrats so that we can do some nominations in what they call the wrapup script, right?

Second thing is on the ambassadorships, usually, we are able to confirm a bunch of the career State Department officials, people who work in the Foreign Service who are not political at all; and then it is the donors and the friends of the President. And I think the whole process of how we decide our ambassadorships is totally bananas, but both parties do this where donors and friends of the President are the political nominees for ambassadorships. OK.

So those are the ones that we usually require a vote on. And the civil servants—the longtime, some charge d'affaires for Mozambique or whatever it is—like, we are not going to fight over that, and we just confirm that. The problem is there were, like, I think, fewer than five career State Department people nominated to these positions. And so, again, not a lot of deal space.

But, still, we found 35 that we were willing to do in exchange for things—

and we did not ask for anything that was unreasonable in the sense of something that would be objected to by large numbers of Republicans. This was NIH funding and releasing funds for—even when we did that rescissions package, now about 6 weeks ago, on the foreign aid stuff. There were a couple categories on the foreign aid that everybody said they liked.

And so we just said: Why don't you release the previously authorized and appropriated funding because people are literally dying around the world? And you guys say UNICEF, PEPFAR, the World Food Programme, you are still for that. You didn't like the stuff happening at USAID, but there are categories of foreign aid that you are still in favor of. So we found these relatively small discrete things that everybody in this place—maybe 95 of us—are in favor of in exchange for 35 nominees. Great, looks like we have got a deal. We are trending towards a deal.

Donald Trump gets on the phone with the leadership of the U.S. Senate and says: Everybody go home. Everybody go home.

And so the reason we don't have all of these nominees confirmed is the lack of the ability to conduct business in the U.S. Senate. And there are a lot of talented legislators, but what they have done is removed their frontal lobe and just substituted Donald Trump's judgment for their own. And so they don't want to cut deals with Democrats anymore.

And that goes for the Big Beautiful Bill. That goes for their approach to appropriations. That goes for their approach for basically everything.

And so it is true that we put some sand in the gears on purpose. That is what minority parties are supposed to do. That is how the U.S. Senate is supposed to work. And the way you untangle that is through the hard work of negotiating across the aisle, and they just didn't want to do it.

Like, I have been in many bipartisan negotiations over the last 3 or 4 months, and they have mostly all failed because, in the end, we can only find a handful of people who are open to a deal. And this time we had everybody saying: OK, this looks like a reasonable solution. And then Donald Trump himself blew it up. Why? Because he doesn't want expediting the Senate's consideration; he wants to adjourn. He wants this place to adjourn.

Now, why is that a big deal? Adjournment sounds like something you just kind of do to, like, OK, we will see you tomorrow. No. Adjournment for the month of August would have meant that Donald Trump himself would have been in a position to appoint whomever he wanted to any Senate-confirmed position; by the way, remove any member of the Cabinet or sub-Cabinet; and then appoint that person, and then that person could serve till the end of the Congress without the Senate ever weighing in. That is what he wants.

And, you know, it is kind of part of a piece, isn't it? He finds the Senate to be a nuisance. And I remember this, I wasn't in the Federal Government executive branch, but I was in the State government executive branch. And once you are in the executive branch, you find legislators to be annoying, to be an impediment to the kind of stuff you want to do. But the architecture of the Constitution provides that we are supposed to be annoying, we are supposed to put sand in the gears, and then we are supposed to deal with each other.

And so what is going to happen this week or next with this rules change is the result of two things: It is an abject failure of the willingness to negotiate at all, of the willingness to interact with Democrats for fear of being seen as too soft and insufficiently compliant with Donald Trump.

The other thing I would just like to say is, it is a little rich, it is a little rich that we fly out at 1:45 on a Thursday, and our first vote is at 5:30 on a Monday. And I know Senators work hard. I am not trying to say it is terrible that people go home. They should go home. They should interact with their constituents. But these are 2-hour nominations. We should probably exhaust the possibility of working Fridays and Mondays before we go through with changing the rules on a partisan basis.

We should probably consider, Do we need a 5-week home work period in the summer, or could we do a 4-week home work period and plow through nominations?

And so it is true that there is a big backlog, and it is actually true that Democrats helped to create it. What is different about this year is that there is just no effort to untangle the backlog.

When we were in the majority, I would walk over to CHUCK's nominations staffer, figure out what was stuck and walk over to the other side and try to make a deal every week to try to get some of these confirmations.

And as I had a blanket hold on State Department nominees, not a single person approached me once. Once, JIM RISCH talked to me, that is fair. But I don't know if it is a muscle memory thing or if it is a Donald Trump thing but they have simply forgotten how to work with Democrats.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority whip.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, late last week, it was reported that the Pentagon was contemplating ending critical military assistance to European partners, including the Baltic States. The program known as the Baltic Security Initiative. That is a program which I helped to create years ago to strengthen military cooperation with the Baltic States: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

NATO allies themselves with a long memory of Russian tyranny are still very much in Vladimir Putin's crosshairs. The Baltic States are some of the most vibrant, dedicated members of NATO, spending well above proposed funding targets for defense. The dangerous idea to cut this assistance came just as another deadline from President Trump for Russia to end its war in Ukraine came and went without any consequence.

In fact, Vladimir Putin responded like he always does after President Trump sets a deadline and lavishes him with a red carpet treatment in Alaska. He brazenly increased deadly attacks on Ukraine. That is right. While we were trying to get Vladimir Putin and the Russians to finally agree to a cease-fire and end of hostilities in Ukraine, he did exactly the opposite. That is what happened over the weekend, during which Russia launched one of the biggest assaults on Ukraine in the entire war and then did it again this week. During these attacks on Ukraine, Russian drones entered into NATO airspace, specifically into Poland.

Do we take that seriously in Chicago? You bet we do, because Chicago is second only to Warsaw in the percentage of Polish residents living there, people of Polish descent. Polish President Tusk said there were 19 Russian drones in the most recent incursion. Imagine if these were manned airplanes rather than drones, 19 bombers, fighters crossing into NATO territory, several of which were shot down, including with the help of allied Dutch F–35 fighters.

Now this isn't the first time Russian drones attacked a NATO territory. There was a drone crash reported in Poland a few weeks ago as well. And Russia has been behind a campaign of sabotage, assassination, and mayhem across NATO, targeting weapon supplies, infrastructure, and dissidents.

So let me say clearly to President Trump: With Putin thumbing his nose at us, violating NATO airspace, and testing American resolve, this is not the time to back away from our frontline allies. It is certainly not the time to halt bipartisan congressional support to the Baltic States. We should not be fooled. Vladimir Putin is not our friend. The Baltic States and Poland have proven that they are.

Vladimir Putin responds only to strength, and right now, he and other autocrats around the world are bonding together. They sense America is getting weak, and we here in Congress should not be fooled either. We should ensure the Baltic Security Initiative is included in the defense authorization bill and pass the Graham-Blumenthal legislation to tighten sanctions on Russia.

STRENGTHENING TRANSPARENCY AND OBLIGATIONS TO PROTECT CHILDREN SUFFERING FROM ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT ACT OF 2025

Mr. President, on a totally different topic, protecting our children is one of the most important duties of public service. When families send their kids

to school or let them play outside or allow them to go online, they should be confident that the kids are safe. But today, too many parents have a sinking feeling every time their kid logs on to a phone, tablet, or video game console.

They know that the internet has become a dangerous opportunity for predators looking to exploit the young and vulnerable. This is not a problem of the future; it is the crisis now. And Congress must act now.

In 2014, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children known as NCMEC, received approximately 1.1 million CyberTips about child sexual abuse material known as CSAM. That was in 2014, 1.1 million received tips.

By 2023, less than 10 years later, the number of CyberTips had exploded from 1.1 million to 36.2 million. Over 36 million reports in a single year. Each one of these reports represents a child being harmed, exploited, or degraded. It is sickening and shows the sheer magnitude of the crisis.

As I have learned more about the horrors of online child sexual exploitation, I have made it my mission in the Senate Judiciary Committee to do something about it. I will never forget the heartbreaking testimony of witnesses, parents who came and told the story of what happened to their sons and daughters as a result of exploitation on the internet.

I want to thank Senator JOSH HAWLEY, Republican of Missouri, for being the Republican lead on this bill, and my colleagues in the Senate Judiciary Committee, Democrats and Republicans alike, who voted unanimously to advance the bill out of committee earlier this year.

Let me pause for a moment and make sure you caught that word—unanimously. Every Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Democrat and Republican alike, voted for this legislation to move forward. Senator HAWLEY, who was in the minority at the time, voted for it; now he is in the majority, he is the lead sponsor of my bill, which is entirely appropriate, and it is a bipartisan effort.

We heard the frustration of my colleague from Hawaii about the lack of bipartisanship in the Senate. This is a notable exception. I want to recognize the extraordinary survivors and advocates who fought to make this legislation possible. Your heartbreaking stories, your testimony have made the difference.

The STOP CSAM Act takes a comprehensive approach to stemming the tide of online child exploitation. Most significantly, it establishes accountability by piercing the broad immunity granted to Big Tech by something known as section 230 of the Communications Decency Act.

The average American would flunk this quiz if you asked them what section 230 is. The advocates that come to us to support the STOP CSAM Act know exactly what it is—it lets social media off the hook for their wrongdoing.

For too long, courts have read section 230 so broadly that it has allowed companies hosting, promoting, even profiting from CSAM to be shielded from any responsibility or accountability.

That is right. They can do the wrong thing and never pay a price because of section 230. The Stop CSAM Act changes it. It opens the courthouse doors to survivors and families. I can think of no other single thing that we can do which would be more effective.

If these social media platforms can ignore parents and ignore the exploited young people and go about their business, they will have a second thought on the subject if they face the possibility of going to court. It would allow victims to sue tech platforms and app stores that promote or aid or abet online child sexual exploitation or that host, store, or make CSAM available. It puts teeth in the law.

In addition to accountability, Stop CSAM forces transparency on Big Tech. For years, Big Tech has operated in secrecy, telling parents, policymakers, and even their own users: Just trust us. But, as whistleblowers and lawsuits have shown, that trust is misplaced.

The Stop CSAM Act requires the largest technology companies to submit annual reports describing their efforts to combat child sexual exploitation on their platforms. Is that too much to ask? I don't think so.

We have all seen the headlines. Meta's own internal research showed harm to children on Instagram and in virtual reality spaces. AI and platforms like ChatGPT, Character.AI, and OpenAI are facing lawsuits for failing to prevent harmful, even deadly, conversations with minors.

This is a serious matter. The new school year is starting. In some States, in many school districts, they have drawn the line and told the kids: You don't bring your phones to school. You are going to be students here, and you are going to talk to one another instead of texting. You are going to look at the teacher and the board and what is before you as opposed to your phone night in and night out.

The Stop CSAM act also includes critical protections for survivors of child sexual exploitation. The bill bolsters privacy protections for certain child victims and witnesses in Federal court and gives judges the tools to enforce those protections.

Altogether, these reforms hold tech companies accountable, bring transparency to their practices, strengthen law enforcement tools, and put survivors and their families at the center of our bipartisan response.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has worked together on this matter unanimously, Democrats and Republicans, to advance meaningful child safety legislation. As I said earlier, the Stop CSAM Act passed unanimously out of committee. That unanimity is no accident; it reflects a shared understanding that when it comes to protecting our kids, partisanship has no place.

We have shown that Democrats and Republicans can work together to write, strengthen, and advance legislation that takes on Big Tech and prioritizes children's safety.

To my colleagues who have not yet signed on to the bill: Welcome aboard. We need you. Join us. Become a sponsor of the Stop CSAM Act.

There are advocates from all over the United States who are on Capitol Hill today knocking on the doors of Senate offices and asking colleagues to take a moment to consider cosponsoring this bill. I salute them. That is what democracy is all about, and that is what protecting our kids is all about.

The Judiciary Committee has done its job. The families in our States are watching. Survivors are waiting. Advocates are working day and night to protect kids at home and worldwide. It is time for the Senate to act.

During the course of my career in the House and the Senate, I have taken on some issues that have dealt with the security and safety of children. Years and years ago, I took on tobacco usage by kids. When I took on that particular crusade, about 25 percent of the kids in grade school across America were using tobacco products—cigarettes and chewing tobacco and that sort of thing—25 percent. Today, that figure is below 5 percent.

It is a lot of hard work and a lot of people stepping forward and saying: You can do what you want when it comes to adults, but for God's sake, protect our kids. Isn't that what this is all about, too—protecting our kids from the most insidious, destructive, and threatening element when it comes to their future and safety?

I encourage my colleagues, join us in this bipartisan effort. This is something we all should agree on.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following my remarks, the senior Senator from Texas Senator CORNYN be recognized.

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

U.S. ECONOMY

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, the numbers do not lie. The job market is practically frozen. Unemployment is at its highest level in 4 years. Inflation is rising. Homebuilding is stagnant. The manufacturing sector is shrinking.

To top it all off, Trump is raising the price of everything. Vegetables are up 40 percent; coffee, 15 percent. Everything from toothpaste, to detergent, to shoes, to video game consoles costs more. More price hikes are on the way this fall and holiday season as businesses exhaust their inventories and give up on eating billions of dollars of added costs.

This is America's golden age under Donald Trump.

If it wasn't clear before, it is abundantly clear now that unless you are a billionaire getting enormous tax cuts and generous corporate giveaways, this economy sucks. Costs are piling up, saving money is nearly impossible, and just getting by, let alone buying a home or raising a family, is a lot harder.

The worst part of it is that there was actually no reason for any of this. There is no pandemic. We are not in the middle of a war. There is no ongoing emergency. This is a crisis of the President's own making, and we are all paying the price.

Donald Trump has made shortages the cornerstone of his economic agenda, and it is working. We now have shortages of nearly everything—food, electricity, healthcare, workers. With less supply to go around, everything costs more. It does not take a genius to work that out. In fact, people have worked it out. Trump's approval rating on inflation and the cost of living is 24 points underwater. His approval rating on the economy overall is at negative 13. More than half of Americans think the economy is getting worse, and less than a quarter of Americans think it is improving.

We are on a speedrun to become Venezuela, and people can see it.

This is a deliberate economic program. There is this sense that he just wakes up in the morning and does whatever he feels like doing. And to some extent, he is improvisational, but make no mistake, he has a coherent economic theory, which is, we should shrink the supply of everything. He thinks it strengthens the dollar, he thinks it helps with manufacturing, and I think he thinks that the less there is of stuff, the more people have to go and petition the King for mercy.

This is a deliberate economic program predicated on shortages across American society. In turn, the United States is set to shrink for the first time in our history. Think about that. The United States—the greatest Nation that the world has ever known, the indispensable Nation, the leader of the free world, the leader of the world—is shrinking. We are becoming smaller and weaker in more ways than one under Trump. But in this way, we are quite literally following Donald Trump's plan, and there is no escaping the consequences.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

RUSSIA

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, since he was sworn into office on January 20 of this year, President Trump has done more for the cause of peace in Eastern Europe than the Biden administration did in the 3 previous years. This was evident last month when President Trump met with President Putin in Alaska to discuss peace in Ukraine.

President Trump is performing an important service to the West by attempting to negotiate a brokered peace. His goal is as simple as it is profound: true and lasting peace.

It is an understatement to say a lot is at stake—ending the continued suffering and loss of life, halting Putin's land grab, and restoring Ukraine's economy and territorial integrity.

While Putin has suggested that peace would ultimately equate with victory for Russia, I suggest that this war has resulted in nothing less than a strategic loss for Russia and the Russian people.

There seems to be a prevailing narrative that Putin is winning and Ukraine is losing and that the purpose of ending this war is simply to mitigate further damage to Ukraine while appeasing the aggressor, Russia. But if we consider all that has happened in the last 2½ years, a much different picture becomes apparent.

Not only has Russia failed to achieve its operational objectives, it has also suffered significant strategic setbacks that will impact that country for years to come.

In February of 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine with the goal of marching to Kyiv and reestablishing Ukraine as part of Russia, restoring that part of the Soviet Union, so to speak. Putin, at first, very nearly succeeded. The Russian army came within miles of Kyiv. But then what happened? Well, to the surprise of many, including Putin, Ukraine mounted an intense resistance, and with support from its allies and partners, it turned the tide of war and reversed Russia's gains, retaking much of that territory and at times even pushing into Russian territory.

Now, current estimates are that Russia holds approximately 20 percent of prewar Ukraine territory, but this is a far cry from Putin's prewar aspirations. Not only did the Ukrainians succeed in preventing a complete Russian victory, with support from the West, they have also dealt strategic blows to Russia, the effects of which will reverberate for decades.

Let's consider Russia's standing as a significant military force and their ability to project power before the war as compared to today. Part of Putin's plan to invade Ukraine was to demonstrate their military might. However, more than 2 years in, we see how Ukraine has significantly degraded Russia's ability to project both power at sea and in the air.

Before the war, Russia would have a significant military presence on the Black Sea and freedom of movement into the Mediterranean. But through daring and ingenuity and despite having no standing navy, Ukraine severely degraded the Russian Navy, sinking more than 26 ships, or about a third of its Black Sea Fleet, and forcing retreat to harbors closer to home and limiting their ability to influence the war.

All of this happened while the Russian fleet was already suffering from aging ships in need of repair, while Russian shipbuilding has not been able to keep up with repairing and replacing these old and damaged vessels.

More significantly, Ukraine's successful attacks on the Russian strategic bomber fleet this past June, which they carried out via Operation Spider's Web, neutralized approximately 40 Russian bombers across 5 military bases—in all, about a third of Russia's strategic bomber force.

More recently, Ukraine has successfully targeted Russian energy assets, which is the main source of revenue that it uses to fuel the war.

Now let's consider Russia's security posture in relation to Europe. In invading Ukraine, Putin sought to counter what he characterized as NATO expansionism. Yet his actions ultimately triggered the accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO—two countries which had opted to remain outside the security alliance for decades. Consequently, not only will NATO enjoy the unique arctic military capabilities that those countries possess, it will also benefit from extending the NATO border more than 800 miles with Russia, further stretching an already depleted Russian military.

Beyond pushing NATO to expand, Putin's war in Ukraine laid bare the realities of our security relationship with NATO and highlighted what President Trump has been saying for years—that the European allies need to contribute more to their collective security. This effort seems to be paying dividends, as we most recently saw NATO member states in the 2025 Hague Summit committing to increase their security-related spending to 5 percent of their GDP within the next decade.

We can also see how the war in Ukraine has undermined Russian global influence and stature. We see this in places like Armenia, where Russian influence has been waning since 2022, most recently culminating in the withdrawal of a large portion of their security forces and Armenia's potential full withdrawal from the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Additionally, whereas Russia used to be the mediator of a longstanding dispute between Armenia and its neighbor Azerbaijan, America has been able to exploit their absence most recently by President Trump's skillfully negotiated peace agreements between those long-warring nations. This agreement will cultivate political and economic relationships, increase opportunity for American investment in the energy-rich Caucasus, and facilitate regional economic integration through the establishment of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, all at the expense of Vladimir Putin.

We also see what has happened to Russia's influence in the Middle East and especially Syria. In April, Germany reported that it had expelled 40 Russian intelligence officers. Similarly, France has expelled 41 likely Russian spies. Nearly half of Russia's intelligence officers, about 400 by some

estimates, have been expelled from Europe since 2022. According to some officials, this may have reduced Russia's ability to collect intelligence against our allies in Europe by about half. This would seem to indicate, of course, a significant setback in their operations in Europe and one which would require time and resources and European good will to reestablish.

I doubt that Russia will have any of those things in the near term. But perhaps the most significant cost of this war has been the human cost. Russia has suffered immense casualties, surpassing 1 million so far. But it has become apparent that Putin doesn't care how many Russians he needs to sacrifice to his aspirations to reconstitute the Russian Empire or influence in Europe.

Ukrainian casualties have been significant, too—at least 400,000 since 2022, while upward of 20,000 Ukrainian children have simply been abducted by Russia and remain missing.

But the human cost of this war is far beyond the mere casualty count. Russia suffered from a brain drain as high-achieving Russians have fled the country in order to avoid serving in the military. The year following the invasion, Russia had nearly 1 million young workers leave the country. Those fleeing the country are highly concentrated among the young and educated. Eighty percent have a college education and 86 percent are under the age of 45. According to one account, Russia's loss of highly skilled workers may be its most significant economic damage.

Lastly, Russia has suffered severe damage to its economy as Western countries have imposed sanctions and limited their access to global markets. We have seen many European nations make efforts to wean themselves off of Russian oil and gas in order to diversify their own supplies and avoid subsidizing the Russian war effort. I am proud of the fact that the State of Texas has helped fill much of that gap. And I am hopeful that ongoing trade negotiations with India and the EU will further curtail Russia's ability to fund its war machine with the sale of fossil fuels.

Russia's shift through a wartime economy will have lasting negative consequences for a long time into the future. It has been spending as much as 40 percent of its annual expenditures on defense or offense, as is obvious here; something we know from experience is unsustainable in the long term and obviously of little benefit to the Russian people.

So all things considered, Russia has suffered a significant strategic loss by their invasion of Ukraine. Apart from failing to conquer Ukraine, they incurred enormous losses to their ability to project power and to collect human intelligence abroad. They spurred their NATO neighbors to take their security more seriously and strengthen the alliance of which Putin has been so fearful. They have been unable to support their traditional allies in the Caucasus and the Middle East, opening up opportunities for American alliances and investment. And they suffered tremendous human and financial cost that will endure for years beyond any forthcoming peace.

As we continue to support President Trump's peace efforts in this conflict, let's keep in mind that Russia has not and is not winning this war when viewed from the larger context. Putin and his country have suffered enormous losses in many different areas. But it is clear that Putin's motivation is not driven by a sober cost-benefit analysis but rather by delusions of grandeur and reestablishment of the Russian Empire.

This past April, in his annual state of the nation address, Putin said the demise of the Soviet Union ''was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.''

Putin is not a pragmatist. He is not moved by cost-benefit. He is not moved by the loss of a million Russian casualties. The best way to bring Putin to the negotiating table with a sincere desire to end this war is by making clear that he has not and cannot win this war.

We and our allies need to continue to impose greater costs in the form of additional punishing sanctions, especially on their oil production, which largely finances, as I said, the Russian war machine. Putin is not going to change his stripes and his ambitions remain unchecked. The surest way of ending the war and securing the lasting peace will be a united West showing Putin that he cannot win.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

AMENDMENT NO. 3854 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3849

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I send an amendment numbered 3854 to amendment No. 3849 to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Hawaii [Mr. SCHATZ] proposes an amendment numbered 3854 to amendment No. 3849.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To add an effective date)

At the end add the following:

SEC. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act shall take effect on the date that is 1 day after the date of enactment of this Act.

Mr. SCHATZ. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RUSSIA INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, we all have a responsibility to understand the history of our country. We have a responsibility to learn from that history, and we learn from that history so we don't repeat the failures of the past.

I am here to remind my colleagues of some of that history but also am able to fill in some details that were just recently made public as a result of some of our investigative work and the cooperation we have had from the intelligence community and from the FBI.

Today, I visit with my colleagues to discuss two dates of significant importance: January 6, 2021, and January 6, 2017. Most of my remarks are about that date in 2017.

Regarding the 2021 date, it was a dark day in American history. The violence against our Capitol and law enforcement was, as we all know, a great national disgrace. First Amendment activity turned into something else.

The latter date, January 6, 2017, is a date many in this country may not remember or care to remember, but I think it is important that we remember. It is a day that signifies a much larger systemic attack on our Republic.

On that date, as the Obama administration planned its exit from its Presidency of 8 years, it put into motion its final traps against the incoming first Trump administration. To fully understand January 2017, we must revisit March and July of 2016.

But one could argue that it all started June 16, 2015, when Trump declared his candidacy. Around March and July of 2016, the FBI received particular intelligence information. Notably, July 2016 is the very same month that FBI Director Comey opened the discredited Crossfire Hurricane investigation. That intelligence information consisted of reports that the Clinton campaign, with Hillary Clinton's approval, created a plan to falsely tie Trump to Russia. That information was made public this year when I released the Durham annex and the Clinton annex.

The Clinton annex showed the FBI had evidence necessary to do a complete investigation into Hillary Clinton and the FBI failed to look at that very evidence and perhaps they intentionally decided not to follow up. So the FBI swept the evidence against Clinton under the rug as they planned to advance the Crossfire Hurricane against Trump. Regarding the intelligence about the Clinton campaign's plan to falsely tie Trump to Russia, the Durham annex notes that ''FBI was fully alerted to the possibility that at least some of the information it received about the Trump campaign might have its origin either with the Clinton campaign or its supporters, or alternately, was the product of Russian disinformation.''

The Durham annex concludes, in part, that ''despite this awareness, the FBI appears to have dismissed the [intelligence information] as not credible without any investigative steps actually having been taken to either corroborate or disprove the allegations.''

In other words, the FBI didn't do what the FBI should do, and that is, follow up on the facts.

So just as with the Clinton annex, where Comey's FBI didn't investigate evidence that might have been bad for Clinton, the Durham annex shows the Comey FBI didn't investigate the intelligence that the Clinton team wanted to falsely tie Trump to Russia to destroy his candidacy in favor of her candidacy. I refer to the Durham and the Clinton annexes because they were just recently declassified, so this information is available. Folks, that is what I have just described as a coverup.

So the question is, What was the main purpose of the coverup?

The answer: to weaponize the Federal Government to destroy Trump's candidacy and Presidency to favor Clinton. You see, Clinton, to the people in this town, was not a threat to the status quo, and they saw Trump as that threat.

In August 2016, President Obama and Vice President Biden met with three high-level people—or probably more than three. But the three that I name are CIA Director Brennan, Director of National Intelligence Clapper, and FBI Director Comey. They discussed the intelligence relating to the Clinton plan. They were aware of the possibility that the Clinton campaign had dirty tricks up its sleeve designed to impact the election.

So let me ask: Did that stop the Obama administration's effort against Trump?

Well, we know that it did not.

Then, on December 9, 2016—so this is after Trump had been elected—President Obama's national security team gathered. That meeting included Director of National Intelligence Clapper, CIA Director Brennan, FBI Deputy Director McCabe, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, Secretary of State Kerry, Attorney General Lynch, and others.

After that meeting, Clapper's office transmitted an email to the intelligence community leaders titled ''President of the United States Tasking on Russia Election Meddling.'' Clapper asked his personnel to create an ''assessment per the President's request.'' The new assessment was an intelligence community assessment.

Per the good investigative work of the House Intelligence Committee's report

> Unlike routine intelligence community analysis, the intelligence community assessment was a high-profile product ordered by the President, directed by senior intelligence community heads, and created by just five analysts, using one principal drafter. Production of the intelligence community assessment was subject to unusual directives from the President and senior political appointees and, particularly, the Director of the CIA.

This is from the House Intelligence Committee's report.

Again a question, Why go through all this effort to create a new product?

Well, according to the good work of Tulsi Gabbard on the House Intelligence Committee, CIA officials didn't have credible and verifiable information showing Putin wanted to get Trump elected, and the intelligence at the time showed that Putin withheld information that would have been damaging to Clinton and, therefore, would have helped Trump.

Obviously, these fixers would not do anything to hurt Clinton. So the Obama administration needed their fixers.

On December 22, 2016, the National Security Agency Director emailed Brennan, Clapper, and Comey. That email noted that the National Security Agency didn't have enough time to review the intelligence for purposes of the new intelligence community assessment Obama ordered, and they wanted to get it done very, very quickly.

So this is how Clapper responded to the National Security Agency:

> We may have to compromise on our normal modalities; [that] more time is not negotiable; [and] this is one project that has to be team sport.

In other words, we need this very quickly. Don't go through the normal process.

You will see here that the deep state wanted a new intelligence product created from the top down, not from the bottom up as is usually done, and they wanted it done so badly that they were willing to cut corners even if it put the country into chaos.

What was this new product? It was the December 30, 2016, intelligence community assessment tying Trump to Putin.

It stated, in part:

> We assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances, when possible, by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.

Him, meaning Trump.

In their partisan rush—and it was a rush—that intelligence product was published on the date that I previously referred to. It is a date that ought to be remembered: January 6, 2017.

That same day, then-Director of the FBI Comey briefed President-elect Trump on the discredited Clinton campaign-funded—that we call—famous Steele dossier. The new intelligence assessment said Putin favored Trump over Hillary Clinton even though earlier intelligence had shown Russia simply wanted to cause political chaos in the United States, and it didn't matter whether the President were a Clinton or a Trump.

The new intelligence assessment is exactly what the Durham annex said the Clinton campaign wanted to accomplish. The Durham annex also noted existing intelligence product said the Clinton campaign believed elements of the Obama administration would help them achieve their political ends against Trump. Based on the available evidence, there is no doubt the new intelligence assessment was a political hit job that had been ordered by President Obama.

Let me remind folks that Senator JOHNSON and I got Annex A to the new intelligence assessment declassified way back in 2020. Annex A was a summary of the discredited Steele dossier. Comey and Brennan worked hard to make sure it was included, even though it was unverified and didn't meet the standard for inclusion. Now, how convenient do you see that is for them?

This next part is very important.

In 2020, Senator JOHNSON and I publicly released additional information that we had been able to get declassified. That declassified information showed that the Russians knew of the Steele dossier at least as early as July 2016 and before the FBI began Crossfire Hurricane.

The declassified information also stated that the FBI received information that an individual ''central in connecting Trump to Russia'' was very likely a Russian intelligence officer.

The declassified information also showed that the FBI received an intelligence report on January 12, 2017, warning of false information in the dossier and that the material was ''part of a Russian disinformation campaign to denigrate U.S. foreign relations.''

On the very same day, January 12, 2017, the FISA warrant on Carter Page, which used the discredited dossier, was renewed for the first time.

The Steele dossier served as a gift to the Russians—a vehicle to pack false information in the hopes the Obama administration and Comey would fall for it hook, line, and sinker or that Obama and his minions saw the obvious and proceeded anyway, believing nobody would ever get all this information declassified for the public to see.

In any event, with all of these red lights flashing ''stop,'' the Obama administration went full speed ahead, and even with Trump as President, Comey gleefully ran every stop sign. The Comey FBI still used the discredited Steele dossier to get a FISA warrant and multiple renewals on Carter Page, and the political hit job continued with the Mueller special counsel investigation.

Now, with the public having seen all of this declassified information kept in the dark for all of 10 years, there is no doubt that the Mueller investigation or review was totally unnecessary. As this continued to evolve, the Mueller fiasco was just the deep state trying to get another hit job on Trump. Then the Biden administration entered the office to continue the partisan political dirty work.

For example, Senator JOHNSON and I released records relating to Arctic Frost. That is the FBI case that anti-Trump Special Agent Thibault created with the help of partisan FBI agents and Department of Justice prosecutors.

Based on emails that I have obtained from whistleblowers, we know Thibault opened and even approved the case, in violation of FBI rules.

According to Deputy Attorney General Blanche, as defense counsel for

Trump, Jack Smith and his team withheld these emails from the Trump defense team. Arctic Frost conveniently became one of Jack Smith's cases against Trump and was politically infected from the very start.

Based on more emails whistleblowers have given me, we also know that Thibault, Supervisory Special Agent Blaire Toleman, Special Agent Walter Giardina, and partisan DOJ prosecutors focused their efforts and resources on Peter Navarro.

When Department of Justice prosecutors under Merrick Garland's authority decided to prosecute Navarro, Thibault said:

Wow. Great.

You see how determined these people were to do anything underhanded to get Trump.

From the time then-Candidate Trump came down the escalator in 2015 to this very day, it has been a decade of political weaponization of law enforcement and intelligence community activities. The examples I have given today are that—examples. I could speak for days on end about my investigative work, what it has uncovered over the years, and the fact that political bias has so deeply infected this country's law enforcement and intelligence community agencies. What all that has added up to ought to shake everyone in this country to their very core.

If the government, including the Department of Justice's so-called public integrity unit and an elite FBI public corruption squad, can do that to the President of the United States, just imagine what the government can do to you, the very citizens of this country, if it decides to give you its full and undivided attention.

January 6, 2021, was a single day—a day that we shouldn't forget. January 6, 2017, was a day that was meant to topple a Presidency, and it should certainly outweigh January 6, where a ragtag mob stormed the Capitol with zero chances of succeeding.

To be intellectually honest and fair, we can't ignore the decade of weaponization by taxpayer-funded law enforcement and intelligence community agencies against Republicans, not just the President.

What is so disgusting about the Obama and Biden administrations' partisan conduct that I have just told you about is that their personnel didn't care about the longlasting damage to this great Nation, including eroded trust in American institutions. And the partisan media went right along, no questions asked. Those journalists in this town and around the country are supposed to be policing the political system to make sure that everything is aboveboard. They didn't do it in this case, and they aren't doing it today either. In this case, no questions were asked.

This behavior is an existential threat to our Republic because it creates a systemic, insidious infection that grows in the dark, behind classified walls and bureaucratic redtape, far away from the eyes of the American public and the Congress. And all this behavior was paid for by the taxpayers of this country.

I am thankful to Attorney General Bondi, Director Patel, Director Gabbard, and Director Ratcliffe for their aggressive transparency efforts. Making all these classified documents public may prevent further dangerous conspiracies from recurring again.

For my part and for ''we the people,'' my investigative work will continue to shine light on those very dark corners of government because, as I said when I opened my remarks, you have to know about the history of the country to appreciate what we enjoy today. If you don't learn from the mistakes of the past, they are going to be repeated.

So I have come to the Senate floor to tell my people what has been discussed today that was previously classified and go through the entire story so this country doesn't make the mistake again of letting all the powerful forces of the American Government—the FBI, the intelligence community, people who operate behind closed doors—that that political strength and weaponization never continue again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Senator from Vermont.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, we are 9 months into the second Trump administration, and there are two dynamics that have become very painfully clear. One is the arbitrary use and abuse of power by the Executive and two, the regrettable passivity of the U.S. Senate. It is a dangerous combination—an Executive who is doing much more than he has the legal power to do and a U.S. Senate not doing what it is constitutionally required to do.

The two very explicit examples of Executive overreach are tariffs and budgets. The U.S. Constitution, as you know, Mr. President, granted the Congress exclusive authority over setting tariffs under article I, section 8. That is because that is the taxing power that belongs to the Congress.

The point of Congress having that obligation is that we are answerable—in the House, every 2 years; in the Senate, every 6 years—to the constituents who elect us.

The power to tax is the power to kill, and we have to exercise our responsibility on the taxing authority vested in this body by the Constitution. Yet the Executive is imposing tariffs, using as a pretext emergency authorities that, under special legislation, assumed restraint in the Executive.

We have seen this in case after case after case—tariffs that are imposed on the personal decision of one person, an individual, the Executive. They can be for economic reasons. They can be for personal reasons. They can be for political reasons. It is not a policy; it is an erratic imposition of tariffs on our trading partners—in some cases, Canada, under the theory or argument that it is a ''national emergency'' when there is no threat to our national security by Canada—they are our near and dear friends; or it is for a personal reason—because the President does not like what the Brazilian Congress is doing with respect to its former President, and suddenly there is a 50-percent tariff that is imposed.

This is a tax, and as a tax, it is our obligation to be the ones to decide if, when, whether, and how a tariff will be imposed. This should not be something that we look the other way when the Executive takes that constitutional responsibility that only we have.

The second area of Executive overreach is in the budget. The power of the purse—that belongs to the Congress of the United States. Again, our Framers saw that the Congress would be the closest to the people we represent, that we would be the ones who would be making decisions about meeting their needs through the taxing and spending power vested in us. But what we now have is a situation where budgets that have been passed on a bipartisan basis by this Congress are being changed or ignored by the Executive.

We have seen this year a rolling rescission and a rolling shutdown where funds that were appropriated by Congress are not being spent by the Executive, with no explanation other than he has the power to not write the check. That is not how the Congress and the Executive are supposed to work. Congress sets the budget—we are the appropriators—and then the President implements that.

Right now, there is $410 billion in funds that have been frozen by the Trump administration, and it is funds that are really important to our communities, that bipartisan votes authorized—$3.8 billion, for instance, to support local police, victims of crime, and other criminal justice programs; $1.5 billion to help U.S. farmers to help feed hungry people around the world through the Food for Peace Program; $220 million in funding to create regional tech hubs to strengthen the U.S. economic and national security. These are future-looking investments to bolster our higher education system and critical manufacturing supply. There is $109 million to support new and beginning farmers, veterans, and farmers historically left behind; $91 million to help improve weather forecasting. The list goes on.

But the point here is that we as a Congress have the authority and the responsibility to set the budget. We did it, it was signed by the President, and now he is disregarding what the law requires him to do. So you have an Executive that is seizing the taxing power of Congress, and you have an Executive who is assuming unconstitutionally the spending power of Congress.

Now, why is it important that Congress resist this? It is important because our founding document rested on

the wisdom that there should not be a concentration of power in one branch of government—not the judiciary, not the Congress, and not the executive. The separation of powers, with three coequal branches of government, all hinged on the expectation that each branch would use the powers jealously that it was authorized to have under the Constitution and not cede those to another branch. That is an obligation that we have to the Constitution, that we have as a Republican or as a Democrat to the Constitution, and there is wisdom in that because, as we are seeing the power of Congress being seized by the Executive, with our assent, with us turning away as though it is not happening, we are failing to maintain that system of checks and balances that has served our country so well for so long.

I have a lot of objections to many of the Trump policies, but there are many here who support the Trump policies. And that is the point. It is our job to debate, and then whoever gets the votes, that policy will prevail. But whatever differences we have about policy, we have a common, shared responsibility to meet our constitutional obligations, to be the branch of government that takes responsibility for whatever taxes are imposed on our citizens. That is our job, and we don't do it when we cede that authority to the Executive.

It is also our job under the Constitution to provide for the appropriations that taxes pay for. Those are our decisions. And every single year we have debates about what are the best priorities, how to allocate the spending, what level of spending we should have. But once we make that decision, it is the limited authority of the Executive to then implement the decisions we have made.

Instead, what this Congress is now doing is passing a budget only to see the Office of Management and Budget, on behalf of the Executive, saying: You know what, I don't care what you appropriated; I don't care if it was bipartisan. We will do what we want. We will spend what we want or we won't.

That is a complete abdication of responsibility by this Congress, and it is very dangerous. It is dangerous because, with the taxing authority being made on the personal decisions of the Executive, you don't have a policy that anyone can count on. It is going to be damaging—it already is—to our economy. If we have passed budgets and then looked the other way when the Executive decides he is not going to spend it or spend it in the ways that we directed, it means that we have no capacity to meet the needs, as we see them, of our farmers, of our children, of our educational challenges.

This dynamic of Executive overreach and U.S. Senate passivity has got to end to protect the well-being of our democracy and the well-being of the people of the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

HONORING SERGEANT LEE SORENSEN AND OFFICER ERIC ESTRADA

Mr. CURTIS. Mr. President, Tremonton UT, is a quiet town in the Bear River Valley, known for, among other things, the Box Elder County Fair, now celebrating its 100th year. It is the kind of place where folks wave as they walk past, where neighbors look out for each other, and where life feels far from the noise and the chaos of other parts of the country.

But on Sunday, August 17, that peace was shattered. Sergeant Lee Sorensen and Officer Eric Estrada, two devoted public servants, responded to a domestic disturbance call. In the line of duty, both were shot and killed while protecting their community. Their loss has left a hole not just in the families but in Tremonton and across Utah.

Earlier today, we laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in their honor. It was a humble reminder that sacrifice, whether on foreign battlefields or the quiet streets of our towns, is what preserves our freedom.

We all know policing is never easy. Officers step into the unknown often with seconds or less to decide between life and death. Domestic calls are among the most dangerous. That night in Tremonton, Lee and Eric faced lethal fire. Yet their courage saved lives. A deputy and his K–9 were injured but survived. Others made it home because Lee and Eric did not.

Sergeant Sorensen, a 16-year veteran, was known as steady and kind. He checked on grieving neighbors, looked out for late-night grocery store employees, and every year rode his bike in the county fair parade, tossing candy with a smile.

Officer Estrada, just 31, was a husband and a father, known for his humor and compassion and for putting people at ease.

Together, these men embodied the best of Utah law enforcement: service rooted in responsibility.

To give you perspective, the Tremonton-Garland Police Department has just 17 people, officers and staff together. They didn't get to stop and grieve. They had to carry on, leaning on each other and on a community that has shown incredible kindness.

At their funeral, thousands lined the streets in the rain. Blue ribbons appeared on homes and storefronts, and money was raised for their families. That is Utah at its best: neighbors locking arms and lifting one another.

Utah has always honored sacrifice. My pioneer ancestors climbed Ensign Peak in 1847. They looked out over a barren desert and imagined what could be: a thriving home built on faith, family, and community. They didn't have much, but they had courage. They knew the future would demand hardship and unity.

Sergeant Sorensen and Officer Estrada carried that same pioneer spirit. They stood watch so others could rest. They chose duty over comfort. They walked into danger so others could walk in peace.

President Kennedy famously said:

> Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

Lee and Eric lived that creed. And as President Ronald Reagan reminded us, freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. On that quiet street in Tremonton, they stood against that extinction.

Deputy Allred, who was shot and survived, said while recovering:

> If I could ask one thing to come from this senseless tragedy, don't forget how much love and support is being handed out right now. Communities are coming together. Kindness and love are being shared. Keep this moving forward, and don't stop ever.

That is the charge before us. Our mission is to ensure Lee and Eric are remembered not as headlines but as symbols of Utah values and American courage. And our commitment should be to work for solutions to better support our law enforcement, strengthen protections for families and individuals, and bring peace of mind to our hard-working citizens. So let us pledge today: Sergeant Sorensen and Officer Estrada will not be forgotten. Their service, their laughter, their sacrifice live on in us. May we honor them not only with our words but with action worthy of their examples.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President I ask unanimous consent to use a prop.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 853

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I rise today to raise an alarming issue. The Chinese Communist Party is stealing sensitive intellectual property developed using your tax dollars.

We are all too familiar with the threat of Chinese espionage. It wasn't too long ago Iowans raised the alarm on Chinese nationals digging up our seeds and stealing our agriculture technology. Just last month, a Navy sailor was convicted after China paid him in exchange for highly classified data about Navy ships.

Unfortunately, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Loopholes in the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs, which helped develop critical technology supporting America's national security, are being exploited by China and other foreign adversaries to steal sensitive technology.

Over 40 years ago, the SBIR Program was established as America's seed fund to serve as an innovation pipeline to support our warfighters and maintain a technological edge. While the program has seen its fair share of successes, we must be honest that how it currently operates is benefiting China at the expense of our warfighters.

This summer, I released a report exposing that hundreds of millions of dollars of technology funded by your taxes through the Pentagon's SBIR Program are vulnerable to Chinese espionage. My report found that in 2023 and 2024, 835 applications for SBIR-STTR funding were flagged for having foreign risks, yet only 303 were denied for their ties to adversaries. Even worse, a lack of foreign due diligence standards across government has opened the door for exploitation. Some Agencies denied 100 percent of flagged applications, while other Agencies only denied 1 percent. Even one case is too many.

I shared my report with the Pentagon and asked them to investigate further. The Pentagon agreed with me that there are significant threats to our national security that must be addressed. My INNOVATE Act does just that by implementing foreign due diligence standards across government to ensure we unleash the golden age in America instead of serving as a subsidy for Beijing.

Another defect limiting the effectiveness of the SBIR Program is the exploitation of the program by a small number of companies often called SBIR mills. The program too often serves as a private taxpayer-funded ATM for the select few businesses. In the past decade, 25 companies in the Pentagon's SBIR Program, which is just 0.5 percent of overall award recipients, received 18 percent of the funding. That is over $2.3 billion, folks. That is a $92 million windfall for each. No wonder hard-working folks in Iowa have a hard time viewing these as truly small businesses.

Even worse, these so-called SBIR mills too often produce nothing more than policy white papers, despite many of their business models being largely dependent on your tax dollars.

Folks, as a combat veteran, let me tell you, a white paper is not supporting our warfighters. Our men and women in uniform deserve the best, most innovative technology to protect themselves, defend our Nation, and deter our adversaries.

But when it comes to protecting and defending us, what do these white papers provide? I suppose we could fold them into paper airplanes. I can't throw it on the floor of the Senate, but you get the drift. OK? We need to strengthen the program to ensure that SBIR serves a greater role than producing a paper army. The INNOVATE Act fixes these egregious uses of taxpayer funds and assures the war dollars go to the best and the brightest entrepreneurs, not grant writers who have learned how to game the system on the taxpayer's dime. My bill will reorient SBIR to its original purpose, providing merit-based support for American innovators. It course-corrects the program back to helping true American startups get off the ground. It streamlines the proposal process and establishes a new Phase IA award to attract new entrants with strong commercialization potential.

Lastly, the INNOVATE Act allows new strategic breakthrough awards of up to $30 million at the Pentagon, DOE, NASA, HHS, and NSF. These awards, with required matching funds, will move our most promising technologies out of the lab and into production for our warfighters, scientists, and other medical professionals.

Time is of the essence. The United States cannot and should not delay these reforms any longer. No more waste, no more giveaways to Beijing. Every dollar must advance innovation that keeps America strong and secure. We must act now to ensure maximum impact of every dollar invested to secure our edge against our adversaries and unleash a new golden age for America's small, resourceful innovators. Small businesses everywhere are excited about the INNOVATE Act and stand ready to deliver the technologies of tomorrow. Let's make that happen. I seek unanimous consent to pass the INNOVATE Act.

With that, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of my bill, which is at the desk. Further, I ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

Unfortunately, I cannot support the Senator from Iowa's proposed legislation.

I agree that we must reauthorize the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs before their authorizations expire at the end of this month. However, the legislation proposed by the Senator from Iowa would decimate American innovation conducted by small business and make wholesale changes to the law without proper data, full information, or appropriate vetting.

I am opposed to this bill because, one, the best research proposals will not be funded; two, technologies like the world's smallest heart pump, oxygen delivery systems for military and submarines, and technology to improve radiation threat detection in public spaces would not exist if the Senator's legislation were the law; three, successful innovative small businesses will be punished solely because they are successful in the program; four, businesses will avoid pursuing the riskier, more cutting-edge ideas that keep American innovation at the forefront, ahead of our rivals in the world; five, agencies will no longer be able to fund technology that aids their mission if that technology comes from a successful small business. And this is only a fraction of the concerns that not only I have but that the SBIR and STTR communities have raised with me.

These programs have gone above and beyond the expectations of those who enacted it. Since the program was established, more than 30,000 small businesses have provided $70 billion in research and development to the U.S. Government. For every SBIR dollar spent, the dollar returns anywhere from $22 to $33 in economic benefits. These programs work because of the merit-based competition nature of the programs.

Darwinian paranoia-inducing competition—that is what wins. Competition drives innovation, and meaningful innovation always comes from our most nimble allies—small businesses, not big corporations. It is the small businesses that innovate, and then big companies might want to purchase that breakthrough, but it never comes from those big companies.

That is why, in May, I introduced legislation to not only make these successful programs permanent but further increase their research and their efficacy.

My SBIR/STTR Reauthorization Act of 2025 would, one, make permanent the SBIR and STTR programs; two, maintain their merit-based competitive nature; three, increase research funding for small businesses and partnering research institutions; four, strengthen commercialization efforts; five, maintain the tough, bipartisan foreign due diligence program established by our predecessors Senators CARDIN and PAUL just 3 years ago, which is working; and six, dismantle barriers to increase participation from underserved populations and new entrants.

I am greatly disappointed that we have not been able to come to a bipartisan agreement on how to reauthorize these programs, though my Democratic colleagues and I have continued to show up to negotiate in good faith. However, I am glad that the House Small Business and House Science Committees sensibly came together on a bipartisan, clean 1-year extension for the programs. This extension was unanimously reported out of the House Small Business Committee just yesterday.

Should that legislation come to the Senate and the Senator from Iowa block my reauthorization legislation, I will support the House's 1-year extension. It is important that these programs do not face arbitrary, wholesale changes that would weaken American innovation and small businesses' role in it. It is also critical that these programs do not face a lapse in reauthorization as it would set the program and our innovation ecosystem back by years.

Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1573

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship be discharged from further consideration of S. 1573 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. Further, I ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Iowa.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

Ranking Member MARKEY, I continue to want to work with you to find common ground and pass the SBIR reauthorization with bipartisan reforms, but the status quo will not work. I will not continue to allow China to win and let our warfighters lose. My INNOVATE Act will stand up to Beijing, invest in the best and the brightest, and ensure that America maintains our technological advantage. It is irresponsible to put this program on autopilot through a permanent reauthorization, especially without sufficient safeguards to protect taxpayer funds from abuse.

Make no mistake, Beijing is clinking their glasses at the thought of the status quo continuing. After all, we are talking about America's national security. I am willing to work with the Senator on any of the reforms on the table in both my bill and in the Senator's to find a commonsense solution and one that will work for both sides. However, as the proposal stands, on behalf of our warfighters and our Nation's security, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator. I am happy to continue to negotiate with her. Again, in my opinion, a 1-year extension gives us the time to do that.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. RES. 382

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. President, Ashli Babbitt was a traitor. She was a traitor to this country. She was part of the violent mob that tried to overthrow our democracy. I was there on January 6, as so many of my colleagues in the House and Senate were. I remember hearing the pounding on the doors of the House Chamber and seeing my colleagues barricading the doors, with furniture, to stop the insurrectionists from breaking in and disturbing and stopping democracy's day. I remember looking around, thinking about my family, and seeing the mob and what they were willing to do.

Ashli was leading the pack. She carried a ParaForce knife, a weapon. She pushed to the front of the crowd, ignored repeated orders from Capitol Police to stop, and she pushed through a locked door and barricaded door. She was part of the mob that smashed through the windows into the Speaker's lobby, and then she tried to even force her way in.

She didn't die protecting our country; she died trying to tear it down.

Military honors are sacred. They are reserved for the men and women who swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution and the rule of law and actually lived up to it. To give them to Babbitt would be a spit in the face to all of them and to every veteran who died defending this country.

I took that very same oath 25 years ago when I joined the U.S. Marine Corps. I saw what real service and dedication and sacrifice looked like in Iraq. I saw marines dying holding the line so others may have a chance to live. And I buried brothers—brothers—who gave everything to protect others, to protect this Nation.

To pretend that Ashli Babbitt deserves the same honors is not only a betrayal of their service, of the oath that they made, but it is also a betrayal of all the oaths that we have all sworn. And it is a desecration of the sacrifices our fallen servicemembers have made.

Those who served are expected to uphold our oath and military standards, even after we are done with our service. If you violate the law and betray the oath, you forfeit honors.

Ashli Babbitt knew what she was doing when she stormed the Capitol, and she knew it was illegal. She wasn't a martyr; she was and is a traitor. She voluntarily broke into the Capitol, armed with a weapon. That is a clear violation of the law and the oath she swore to uphold during and after service.

If we equate the January 6 insurrection with genuine sacrifice, then we cheapen everything our servicemembers have fought and died for. We tell people that trying to kill fellow Americans inside the Capitol is no different than dying on the battlefield protecting them. We erode the trust Americans have in our military, and we feed the lie that January 6 was anything more than an act of treason.

That is why I am outraged that the Air Force plans to grant military funeral honors to Ashli Babbitt, the traitor. She did not die protecting Americans; she died betraying the Constitution of the United States.

Her actions disqualify her from receiving military honors, and this Senate should go on record making that clear. So let any Republican come down here and explain why someone who stormed the Capitol and tried to overturn our democracy deserves the same honors as those who have fought and died to defend it because I will tell you the truth, she doesn't. She is a traitor, and we all know it.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 382, submitted earlier today; further, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, this resolution is nothing more than a pathetic attempt to strip away the earned honors of a veteran who deployed seven times during her many years in the U.S. Air Force. Ashli Babbitt earned these funeral honors through her service to this Nation.

My colleague referenced section 985 of title X, which gives the executive branch the right to strip funeral honors away from someone who has been convicted of a capital crime. That section has nothing to do with Ashli Babbitt.

Ashli Babbitt was never charged with or convicted of a crime. She has never been found guilty of anything by a jury of her peers. In fact, the Federal Government recently settled a wrongful death lawsuit and paid $5 million to her family as part of that settlement—$5 million—which brings me to another point: Has Ashli's family not already been through enough? Are Democrats just hell-bent on piling on?

Unfortunately, Ashli is not with us any longer, so this petty resolution would serve no other purpose than to punish the Babbitt family. It is disgraceful, and it is un-American.

In case my colleague is unaware of this, the Constitution still applies, even to those you disagree with politically. This is nothing more than political grandstanding.

I ask my colleague, where are the resolutions calling to revoke the honors from veterans involved in the 2020 Black Lives Matter riots after George Floyd? How about the ones who participated in a 6-month siege of a Federal courthouse in Portland, OR, or the ones who attacked the White House in May of 2020, injuring more than 60 Secret Service agents? They don't exist because it doesn't fit the narrative from the Senator from Arizona.

So for those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. President, today, we had a chance to stand with the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for this country in uniform. Ashli Babbitt is not that. She is a traitor; she will be a traitor; and

she died a traitor. And let the Halls remember that here.

My colleague from across the aisle refused to do that. Instead, he stands with the traitors of January 6. He is trying to say that an insurrectionist who broke into the Capitol with a knife deserves the same honor with the men and women who gave their lives for this country on the battlefield.

It doesn't matter how many times she went. It doesn't matter how many times she was deployed. Benedict Arnold was one of the best generals we had until he betrayed us during the American Revolutionary War. He was still a traitor. Ashli Babbitt is a traitor.

Ashli Babbitt's actions on January 6 are about as dishonorable as it gets. Giving her honors undermines the Constitution, and it undermines the real sacrifices of millions of veterans who defended our country.

My colleague just set a dangerous precedent today. He is standing with the traitors of January 6. You do not deserve that, America. The veterans of this country do not deserve that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, 20 years ago this month, Hurricane Rita hit Louisiana, and 1 year ago tomorrow, Hurricane Francine hit Louisiana.

This is damage from Hurricane Francine in Morgan City and Metairie. And our State gets ready. We are prepared. We stockpile gasoline for generators. We get water, food, medication, and, if necessary, board up windows. We secure our pets and our livestock. A friend of mine sent a video showing how she was preparing her pigs' pen for the storm. So she had to take care of her pig. I won't say that we are casual, no. We are very alert, but we also learn to be calm.

But let me point out, when Hurricane Francine made landfall on the 11th, people in Ascension, Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, and Terrebonne Parishes—and others—had significant flooding. Thankfully, no lives were lost, but a lot of damage occurred. Homes flooded, some ruined entirely. Many lost power. In total, Hurricane Francine caused more than $1.5 billion in damage across Louisiana.

Now, because of it, I have spent the last year making sure that my State receives every Federal resource possible; first, for recovery and, next, for mitigation.

One example of recovery aid I was pleased to announce was a $118 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development specifically for Hurricane Francine relief. But do you know what is even better than recovery? Not flooding in the first place. As they say, a stitch in time saves nine or a levy can prevent—a levy can prevent—millions of dollars' worth of damage.

There was a report from the National Institute of Building Sciences that $1 invested in preventing flooding can save up to $6 in flood damage.

In President Trump's first administration, he created a program called Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities—or BRIC for short—and it provided many lifesaving grants that Louisiana benefited from.

Now, this administration—President Trump's second term—has held up some of the money, but I am told, I have been assured by OMB Director Russ Vought that they are going to release those funds.

Through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, I have secured over $10 billion for Louisiana, and a lot of that has been for flood mitigation; and just weeks after Hurricane Francine, announced a separate grant of $206 million for elevating flood-prone homes in Orleans, Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, and Lafayette Parishes, and a lot in between; and also $1.5 million for the Louisiana Department of Public Safety for emergency protective measures taking care of Hurricane Francine; and then another $1.5 million in May.

In the past, I have discussed some of the worst floods in our State's history: Milton, Helene, Laura, Ida, and Katrina. I have spoken about flooding in Texas, New Mexico, and New York. This is not just a Louisiana problem; it is a Florida problem; it is a—from this, you can see it is a national problem, with the dark yellow being States that have had significant flooding, over $1 billion in National Flood Insurance Program claims, and the lighter tan States being those that had over $50 million in claims.

So every flood is a little bit different, but the message I always emphasize is the same: Americans need stability, and right now that stability is being threatened.

The National Flood Insurance Program—also called NFIP—has provided Americans with access to affordable flood insurance for the last 50 years. As we go now toward a government shutdown if the Congress doesn't act, if the government is not funded, the National Flood Insurance Program lapses, leaving the nearly 500,000 Louisianans and over 5 million Americans without coverage.

Now, hurricane season won't be over for 2 more months. Where does that leave the elderly folks in Calcasieu Parish or the young couple buying their first home in St. Charles Parish or the single mom in St. Bernard Parish providing for her child, living paycheck to paycheck? We cannot let a congressional funding fight keep them from receiving the coverage they need.

And, by the way, even if Congress averts a shutdown, we are not yet in the clear. We need a long-term solution. Congress has already passed 33 short-term extensions in the last 10 years—33. It sounds kind of like a ''Saturday Night Live'' skit. So I think we can all agree that a program which has been extended 33 times is worth reauthorizing long term. And don't you think that Congress should protect a program helping millions of Americans from California through New Mexico, all the way up to New York, and, of course, including my home State of Louisiana?

I haven't spoken to every single homeowner in America or in Louisiana enrolled in the NFIP, but I can imagine they are all wondering why can't the government get its act together.

It is irresponsible for Congress to continue to make families hold their breath and hope the rug will not be pulled out from underneath them. That is a pattern that should end. To do so, we must be sure that the government is funded so that NFIP survives September. We then need to pass a long-term extension so that NFIP policyholders can rely on the program to do what it is supposed to do: provide stability.

Let's keep the National Flood Insurance Program alive, and then let's keep it strong, reliable, and worthy of the trust that millions of American families place it in every day.

In this, we have talked about recovery from hurricanes; we have talked about how to prevent flooding, which is to say make it so that you don't have to recover because you have already built resiliency; and we have talked about the work that must be done for those on the National Flood Insurance Program.

Right now, without a promise of protection hanging in the balance, I am calling once for more stability, for certainty in a program that millions rely on. Mr. President, 500,000 in Louisiana alone should not be held hostage by short-term funding battles. We have seen what happens when the water rises. We have seen the damage. We have seen the need. Let's act now so that when the next storm comes, families don't have to wonder whether their coverage will be there.

I yield the floor.

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

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

RULES CHANGE

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, last year, Senate Democrats presented to Senate Republicans a proposal meant to fix some of the partisan gridlock that slowed down the confirmation process for both parties over the years. I rise to speak to it because of the pending action that Senate Republicans have teed up to change the rules or utilize the nuclear option to set a new precedent for how nominees are considered and/or confirmed in this body. So it is not a new conversation,

not a new effort that has come up just overnight. There have been efforts over the years to revisit this, including last year by Senate Democrats.

I reference that proposal from last year because it was intentional. It was presented at a time when nobody knew who would be elected President of the United States. It was done at a time when no one knew who would be occupying—which party would be occupying the White House and be charged with filling key positions in the Federal Government. It was done at a time when we were not sure who would be in the majority of this body. So it was an ideal time to discuss and implement reforms on a nonpartisan basis. It was a chance for the two sides to come together in a bipartisan fashion and negotiate a change to the Senate rules at a 67-vote threshold for the purpose of improving the process, improving the Senate as an institution.

Now, Democrats proposed ideas out of the interest of fairness, of reform, and of making this institution work better. Unfortunately, at the time, my understanding is the Republican response was basically: No, no, no, we are not really interested. They wouldn't play ball. They didn't want to be part of the solution because they were busy at the time obstructing Democratic nominees.

Fast-forward to today. We know that Donald Trump is in the White House. Not only is he in the White House, he is nominating historically under-qualified nominees, political hit men, loyalists, and extremists.

Surprise, surprise—guess who all of a sudden has changed their tune. Not only do Senate Republicans now want to revisit the nominations process and the confirmation process, they are doing it in a way that can have them very, very quickly confirm unlimited numbers of these nominees. They are doing so in a way without trying—not even trying to build bipartisan support for these changes. They are threatening to go nuclear once again and only require a 50-vote threshold.

So you have to wonder why. Maybe because they want to hide some of Donald Trump's most controversial nominees. Just look at who they have worked so quickly to confirm over the last several months. Let me give a couple of examples of the kinds of Republican nominees who could have qualified for mass consideration, with hardly any oversight, under this new proposed process—nominees like Kash Patel, a conspiracy theorist who made a target list of Trump's perceived enemies, who has now been elevated to serve as Director of the FBI; Dan Bongino, a far-right podcaster turned Epstein apologist confirmed as Deputy Director of the FBI; Todd Blanche, Trump's personal criminal defense lawyer who represented him when he was convicted of concealing hush-money payments to Stormy Daniels. He is now the Deputy Attorney General—and, by the way, recently paid a very high-profile visit to a certain Ghislaine Maxwell, in Federal prison for her role in the whole Epstein saga. Russell Vought, the architect of the scheme to steal hundreds of billions of dollars from the American people and illegally stop funding critical housing and food assistance programs, has now returned as OMB Director—the same Russell Vought who has publicly said and advocated for less bipartisan actions when it comes to appropriations and more partisan determinations on our Federal Government's spending plan. E.J. Antoni is slated to replace the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, whom Trump fired after he didn't like the July jobs numbers—someone who has a history of making sexually degrading attacks, homophobic remarks, promoting conspiracy theories, and lobbing crude insults at anyone critical of the President.

Look, there are dozens more nominees coming before the Senate who repeatedly denied the legitimacy of the 2020 election in order to please Trump. And it doesn't stop there. Now many of these nominees have also committed to dismantling the very Departments, Agencies, and programs they are tapped to lead.

While we are not there yet, I might add that the next Chair of the Federal Reserve will not be subject to the Cabinet-level confirmation process either.

Colleagues, this is not normal, and so that is the context for what we are debating—not truly bipartisan reform but a Republican-engineered plan to ram through Trump's unfit nominees to implement an extreme agenda.

Sadly, the truth is, it is not surprising because time and again, under this President—especially this term—we have seen Republicans in Congress give up responsibility to serve as a check and a balance on the executive branch in order to please Donald Trump. In just about every way imaginable, Republicans are inventing new ways to cede power to Trump on appropriations, on tariffs, on oversight, on foreign policy.

Today, it is not just that they are ceding power to Trump; they are going nuclear for the third time since May, changing the rules of this body unilaterally to do it, just as they did earlier this year when they revoked three of California's Clean Air Act waivers and just like they did when they abused the Budget Act with magic math to take away healthcare for millions of people and give trillions in tax cuts to billionaires.

In every instance, the arguments they made for going nuclear just don't pass muster. President Trump has actually seen more—more—of his civilian, nonjudicial nominees confirmed before the August recess in this term than he did in his first term. This year, it was 128 compared to 126 in the year 2017. He has also had 14 more of those nominees confirmed before the August recess than President Biden did by the same date—128 to 114.

So I have to say it seems like our colleagues are forgetting what it was like over the prior 4 years when many Republican Senators had blanket holds on dozens of nominees at a time: Republican Senators blocking all Department of Justice nominees for a significant time period; Republican Senators blocking all State Department nominees for a significant time period; one Republican Senator even holding up routine promotions for all Department of Defense nominees—yes, Department of Defense. Department of Defense. For nearly a year, he did so, and it was a national scandal, a national embarrassment. Dozens of military families were stuck in limbo for partisan Republican reasons that had nothing to do with their qualifications or ability to serve. Now there is this Republican outrage for nominees having to wait a couple of months to go through the process?

Did our colleagues already forget what happened just before this August recess? Senate Democrats again, despite the political climate we are in, tried to negotiate in good faith. There was a bipartisan proposal on the table to expedite some nominees. What happened to that? I will tell you what happened to that. Donald Trump said no, and he made a mockery of good-faith negotiations less than 2 months ago. He told Leader SCHUMER and Senate Democrats—and I am going to quote—he said:

Go to hell.

But that is par for the course for Donald Trump. He has contempt for bipartisan negotiations and for checks and balances—the very checks and balances in our Constitution.

That is the reason we are here today. No one is fooled about what is happening here. It is clearly yet another power grab. Republicans are prepared to go nuclear and change Senate rules once again with a simple majority vote.

I will end simply by saying once again that what goes around comes around, because at some point in time in the future, not only will there be a Democratic President back in the White House, there will be a Democratic majority in the Senate Chamber as well. And I guess we will have to abide by the new rules and new precedents that Republicans are so happy to set today. So be prepared because I know I will be.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I first note that we are horrified watching images and following the news out of Utah and we are sending all of our thoughts to Mr. Kirk, to his family, to survivors there.

Mr. President and colleagues, there are a host of ways that democracies die. Institutions like universities and the legal profession capitulate to the leaders and the regime. They stop

being forums for free speech and dissent. The legal system becomes perverted into a vehicle to punish opponents of the regime and to immunize loyalists. The press is threatened with sanction or retribution for telling the truth. They fold and they just silence criticism. Business leaders are offered lucrative deals for making loyalty agreements with the government using their economic power to back the regime.

I wish this weren't true, but all of those things are happening in America today. It is why many of us come down to this floor fairly often to talk about our belief that we are sleepwalking into some version of, at best, deeply illiberal democracy where rights and dissent are functionally irrelevant or, at worst, authoritarianism where political opposition just vanishes.

But today, I want to talk about another common part of this story about how democracies evaporate. And that is the subjugation of the legislative branch to a corrupt executive branch. Put another way, in healthy democracies, the legislature or the parliament sees itself as a check on runaway Executive power. It stands up regularly for its powers, its prerogatives, no matter who the President or the Prime Minister is.

In a disappearing democracy, the legislature effectively operates as an arm of the Executive, simply taking orders, including orders to wind down the independent power of the legislature. This is what is happening here, right now, in the U.S. Senate.

One of the most important checks on Executive power given to the Senate by the Constitution is the power of consent for nominees to high Executive Office. It prevents a President from installing in power unqualified or corrupt people. It allows the legislature—and through the legislature, the people—to make sure that the executive branch stays in its lane, executing the law—not making the law.

Yesterday, we effectively gave that power up in an extraordinary way. Senate Republicans went nuclear. That means they used their majority power to change the rules of the Senate—unilaterally, without any Democratic support—so that now, in one single vote, the Senate can confirm 50 or 100 or 1,000 Trump nominees all at once.

From the founding of our Republic until yesterday, without unanimous consent, the Senate voted on one nominee at a time. Now, the Senate can batch together dozens of hundreds of nominees in one vote, essentially obliterating our power of advice and consent.

Republicans say: Well, this was originally a Democratic proposal. But that is not true. Yes, a few Democrats, years ago, floated a proposal to Republicans to work together in a bipartisan way to batch together 10 nominees at a time, and only lower level nominees. But this Republican rule, A, involves no consultation with Democrats; B, has no limits, either with respect to how many nominees are considered and, seemingly, what level of nominee. It would effectively allow, under the actual letter of the rule, for there to be one single vote on an entire slate of Cabinet nominees.

I understand that the Republican leader will say that is not the intent of the rule; but read the rule. And there will be pressure—increasing pressure now that the rules are changed—from the President of the United States to continue to open the aperture of what this rule allows.

I will concede that our nomination process is broken. I am totally open for reasonable proposals for reform. But this is not reasonable.

What do I do as a Senator if a batch of nominees arrives for a vote and I support 58 of them but I don't support two of them? If I vote no, then I have voted against 58 qualified people. If I vote yes, then I have given my consent, possibly, for deeply dangerous people to staff key Federal Agencies. It makes no logical sense to do this, at the very least, in this open-ended way.

But it does make sense if you put yesterday's decision in context, because Senate Republicans increasingly view themselves as mere employees of their party's leader Donald Trump. They will look the other way when he violates the law. And when he asks to consolidate power, his employees grant his request without thinking twice, because this wasn't the first time congressional Republicans gladly gave up their power to make Trump's lawlessness easier.

Trump has, effectively, seized the spending power from Congress. This is unforgivable because our Founding Fathers vested the spending power in Congress because they knew that a President with the unrestrained power of the purse could easily use that authority to seize full power of the government and wrest away from the people control of their government. Trump has frozen or canceled more than $400 billion in congressionally appropriated funding. Senate Republicans have done virtually nothing to counteract that extraordinary, unprecedented seizure of spending power. In fact, they have helped him take control of spending by supporting, for the first time in our Nation's history, a partisan rescissions bill that canceled billions of dollars of spending that had been appropriated through a bipartisan vote.

Congressional Republicans have also, frankly, closed down any meaningful oversight of the corruption that is happening in the executive branch. Republicans enthusiastically rooted through every corner of the Biden administration to find every morsel of alleged corruption that they could find, including harassing virtually every member of the Biden family to find facts to corroborate this bogus FOX News-driven Biden crime family narrative. Meanwhile, Donald Trump and his family have made $3.4 billion off of his Presidency. The President is using White House resources, taxpayer-funded White House resources, to market a Trump cryptocoin. He bullied a foreign government into giving him a private jet. His family is setting up companies, as we speak, to profit off government contracts. It is a massive growing corruption racket. But now, all of a sudden, Republicans have no interest in oversight.

One more example: Another power of the Constitution explicitly reserved for Congress is the power to declare war. The President cannot take military action overseas without Congress. And that is a really good thing. But Republicans have now totally outsourced to Donald Trump the decision as to whether we take military action overseas.

I am not saying the Democrats were perfect in constraining the Executive's war powers, but at least we tried. Trump just carried out an air strike on a boat off the coast of Venezuela, a blatantly illegal act. And there was one single Republican Senator who raised a concern.

History is full of examples of legislatures where, under pressure from an elected Executive who wants to convert a country from democracy to something like autocracy, they effectively close up shop. They decide to just take orders from the leader. And thus, they consent to this transition. Turkiye is no longer a healthy democracy today because the parliament supported consolidating massive new powers to the Presidency. In Sri Lanka, their democracy is in peril, in part because their legislature gave up key appointment powers to the executive. Part of the collapse, long ago, of Russia's short-lived democracy was the Duma's decision to view itself as a political arm of the Presidency.

I know that some people are going to suggest that this is hyperbole. I don't think it is. We are watching a slow-motion daily assault on democracy take place. Institutions are shuttering venues of dissent. The Judiciary is being turned into just a mechanism to harass and imprison the President's political opponents. Our media are cutting deals with the President to silence loud critics of the administration.

And now, this body will no longer get to vote on individual nominees to the administration who are likely going to carry out this campaign to undermine and, eventually, potentially destroy the rule of law.

None of this is normal. None of this, including what is happening this week in the U.S. Senate, has any historical precedent before in this country. All of it is wildly dangerous and, perhaps, fatal if we continue to refuse to join together as Republicans and Democrats to rise to the challenge and protect our democracy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. I want to thank the member of the Rules Committee for organizing this floor block of speeches. He has been a valued partner of mine on the Senate Judiciary Committee for several years and has taken on his ranking member position in the Rules Committee seriously.

Leader THUNE has set in motion a rules change that will fundamentally undermine the ability of the Senate to fulfill its constitutional duty of advice and consent.

I hope my Republican friends—I use that term specifically—I hope my friends will pause for a moment and think of a way we might solve this problem and do it in bipartisan fashion.

Before the recess, Senate Democrats worked in good faith with Senate Republicans to negotiate a package of nominations to break the deadlock and move these nominations through the Chamber in an expedited, professional, bipartisan fashion. At the very last minute, however, President Trump blew up the negotiations. Rather than stand up to him, Senate Republicans are now willing to give away the Senate's authority when it comes to advice and consent.

Senate Republicans claim they are violating Senate rules just for this set of nominees. But I am afraid this is going to open the door to rushing through more extreme nominations whose only qualifications seem to be loyalty to the Chief.

Look no further than President Trump's nominees who have been considered by the Judiciary Committee. After President Trump fired his first FBI Director, he nominated Kash Patel. As a private citizen, Mr. Patel directed the purge of honorable career public servants at the FBI and then lied about it under oath at his confirmation hearing.

Mr. Patel auditioned for the FBI job by trying to whitewash January 6, calling the rioters who stormed the Capitol harassing and beating on the local police ''political prisoners.'' The head of the FBI, Mr. Patel, produced a choir of singers, including those who were prosecuted for wrongdoing on that day and some who violently assaulted police officers. This was considered to be cute, I guess, by some of Mr. Patel's followers. But the very same men and women who would beat on the police, Capitol Police and DC police who were protecting this building, were somehow supposed to be entertaining as a choir—only in the eyes of someone like Mr. Patel.

I warned my colleagues that confirming Mr. Patel would risk our national security and public safety. The head of the FBI used to be as apolitical a position as possible for a long tenure to take it out of politics. Mr. Patel has dived headfirst into politics where we stand today. Instead, my colleagues gave a green light to use the FBI's vast surveillance and investigative party to go after President Trump's critics. That is exactly what happened.

Is this the kind of nomination that should be debated on the floor of the U.S. Senate? I don't doubt for a moment that it should. It is a powerful position and will be misused.

What about Aaron Reitz, nominated to be Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Policy? In his confirmation hearing, I asked Mr. Reitz a very simple question: Can an elected official defy a Federal court order? Mr. Reitz refused to commit that an elected official must follow a court order.

He also holds extreme views, including that the Supreme Court opinion upholding marriage equality was a ''low point'' in the history of the Supreme Court and that '''birthright citizenship' is not a thing'' despite what the Constitution says explicitly.

Senate Republicans dutifully confirmed Mr. Reitz with no questions asked, but he resigned after 3 months on the job to run for attorney general of Texas.

Senate Republicans also confirmed Jeanine Pirro as U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia. Ms. Pirro is a talented person. She has been an elected official, and she has done many interesting things, but she is another nominee who auditioned for the role in the administration by declaring her blind loyalty to the President on TV for over a decade.

Ms. Pirro's repeated lies to millions of viewers on FOX about the 2020 election forced FOX News to pay nearly $800 million to settle defamation claims brought by Dominion Voting Systems.

Like Mr. Patel, Ms. Pirro has claimed that January 6 rioters were ''hostages''—people who assaulted the Capitol, broke down the doors, defecated in the hallways, beat up the Capitol Police and the DC police, and ransacked our desks here on the floor of the Senate. In the eyes of Ms. Pirro, these people were hostages, and she argued that the prosecutors handling these cases themselves should be criminally prosecuted.

Like Mr. Reitz, Ms. Pirro reads the Constitution through a MAGA lens, wrongfully arguing that the administration can deport immigrants without due process.

I have been in this Chamber for a number of years. It has been my honor and responsibility to vote on many nominees as part of the advice and consent section of the Constitution.

Let me give you some facts about filling vacancies. As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, we filled the vacancies—before I was chairman of the committee, we filled the vacancies for U.S. attorneys. In President Donald Trump's first term, all 93 spots were filled without a single record vote. All were done by unanimous consent—all of them.

Then what happened under the Biden administration? Unfortunately, it is something that we are still living with today, and we are seeing it manifest in this procedural action.

There was a decision made by one Senator, Senator VANCE of Ohio, now our Vice President, to stop the nominations on the floor for Biden's U.S. attorneys by voice vote. He stood up and objected. He said—and quite plainly said—I want to do this to grind the Department of Justice to a halt—to grind the Department of Justice to a halt. He didn't deny that.

I came to the floor on many occasions, pleading with him to stop his effort to stop these nominations. In fact, I came to the floor on eight different occasions, asking Senator VANCE and then Republican Senators: Could you give us the same courtesy under President Biden we gave you under President Trump? And the answer was: No. We are stopping any appointments of U.S. attorneys by the Biden administration at 63.

So another 30 U.S. attorneys were not determined on the floor. It was stopped. The process was stopped.

I said at the time that this was going to come back to affect this Chamber under the next President, whoever it might be, pleading with Senator VANCE. He wouldn't change his position on this.

So we find ourselves where we are today—at a standoff when it comes to U.S. attorneys and other nominees because of this history.

There is a way out of this mess. There is a bipartisan solution to this. I plead with Senator LANKFORD of Oklahoma, who is involved in this, and with the other Republican Senators to take advantage of that opportunity to solve this problem when it comes to nominations in a bipartisan way. It is the best thing you can do not just for the Republican Party but for the Democratic Party and for both parties that serve in the U.S. Senate.

We have the right and a responsibility to ask hard questions of people who are accepting major responsibility in the Federal Government. There should never be an automatic approval. Questions should be asked, and they will be. If the questioning process is professionally done and honorably handled, we can use that to determine those rare cases where we need to have more time and an actual specific vote on a nominee. But to lump these nominees together into groups of 30, 40, and 50 and say to the Members of the Senate ''Take it or leave it'' is a dereliction of duty and an abdication of our constitutional responsibility.

There is a way to do this that is going to help this Chamber, and there is a way to do it which will be destructive. What has been proposed by the Republicans is destructive, but it can be improved, and I want to work with them in a good-faith effort to do just that.

So I thank my friend from California, the ranking member of the Rules Committee, for bringing this together and addressing an issue which goes to the heart of our responsibility in the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the Senate process and specifically the challenge we have in exercising our constitutional responsibility to provide advice and consent on nominations.

But I just heard moments ago about a shooting of a podcaster. Each and every assault on any individual is outrageous, and assaults that are motivated by suppressing viewpoints is so horrifically against the vision of our country, where we believe in the power of free speech, we believe in the power of protest, and we believe in the power of assembly. Let the best arguments win the day, not in violence to suppress any viewpoint.

So I hope the individual who—I have not heard the details yet—is going to be OK. I hope he is going to recover.

But let's all remind ourselves, as we carry on a debate and often carry on that debate passionately, that the place to decide issues is through speech, debate, and our democratic Republic, electing people to represent your viewpoints, having them cast votes in the House of Representatives down the hall and having them cast votes here in the Senate.

So let's talk a little bit about what has unfolded, basically, since 1975.

I put up this chart about something called the cloture motion. ''Cloture'' means a motion to close debate.

Early in the Senate, there was no such thing as a cloture motion, but there was the guidebook that Jefferson put forward for how the Senate should be conducted. That guidebook said do not speak superfluously. Get right to the topic. Make your point. Listen to others and get to a simple majority vote. Everyone should be heard, and then you should make a decision. And, always, it should be the majority making the decision, not the minority, because to do otherwise is to turn democracy on its head.

But along came the 1830s and tension increasing between the northern manufacturing economy and the southern slave economy, agricultural economy—particularly, the production of cotton and tobacco.

Those tensions, really, were manifested around the tariffs. The North wanted protective tariffs in order to enhance the success of their manufacturing, and the southern part of the United States was concerned about retaliatory tariffs against cotton and tobacco that would hurt the economy of the South.

This came to the point in which Calhoun called these the ''Tariff of the Abominations,'' was the phrase, like that is scary and damaging to the South that these tariffs were an abomination.

There was a concept exercised that possibly States could decide that a particular Federal bill would not apply in their State. Now, this was not some crazy theory. This, in fact, went to the tension between the United States and whether it was an association of States or it was a single Nation. Jefferson and others had argued that, in fact, States should be able to nullify Federal laws that didn't work well in their State—nullification.

So as this debate unfolded on the tariff of the abominations, South Carolina decided to actually pass a nullification law. Calhoun, who had been Vice President with Jackson, had gone back to the Senate and advocated for South Carolina to do this. But it didn't unfold as Calhoun expected because President Jackson, who was a slaveholder, who was from a slave-owning State, proceeded to say: No, nullification is not in concert with the U.S. Constitution, and, therefore, if South Carolina persists, the United States will declare war on South Carolina.

And that happened right here. The United States declared war on South Carolina; South Carolina relented; and that was the end of nullification.

But then the question became for Calhoun and others: How do we stop bills that we don't like? In the beginning, the conversation was about tariff bills, but as it unfolded over time, it became about civil rights bills because the South did not want Black Americans to be voting; thus, came the idea that really gained traction in the 1850s of talking a civil rights bill to death, continuing floor speeches until everyone was exhausted and you couldn't get to conclude debate and have a vote.

That is the beginning of the idea of a filibuster. ''Filibuster'' is a word coming from the Dutch word for ''freebooter'' or ''pirate.'' So piracy overcame the Senate; that is, you had Jefferson laying out that everyone should speak succinctly and to the issue, get to a simple majority vote; and then you had southern Senators saying: Wait. Wait. We want the opposite. We want to celebrate lengthy speeches as a victory for free speech, the First Amendment, glorification of long speeches here as a way to stop bills from getting passed.

That is where the filibuster comes from.

Why do I tell you all of this? Because that is how we came to have a motion called cloture here in the U.S. Senate because in 1917, there was a debate over putting armaments over commercial ships. And a group of Senators said we are going to talk that bill to death because that is the equivalent of declaring war, and declaring war is our responsibility under the Constitution. We haven't done it. Therefore, since we haven't done it, we shouldn't arm the ships, and honoring our constitutional responsibility, we are going to talk this bill to death.

That was a national outrage, and President Woodrow Wilson rallied the Nation to condemn that small group of Senators who were standing in the way of arming our civilian ships back in 1917.

In fact, the day after the transition from one Congress to the next—the next day, essentially—the Senate acted, and they acted and created a cloture motion to close debate.

Here, I have for you a chart for cloture motions. You can see that in the entire history from 1917, when that motion was created, on through 1974, it was only done 125 times; so less than twice a year.

The motion was thought to be an occasional way to interrupt lengthy process by a few Senators to get to a vote, and, therefore, it was created with a lot of time associated with it. Initially, you filed a motion. You have to wait 2 days to vote on it. Even if it succeeds to close debate, you debate for another 100 hours on a bill. Well, that is a very, very lengthy process. It means a single cloture motion takes up several weeks. But when it only happened once or twice a year, that was acceptable to the Senate.

But let's fast forward and realize that that started to change, and this change really began in 1965. In 1965, 1964, we passed the civil rights bill, and we passed the Voting Rights Act. And as a consequence, the cloture motion—or the filibuster, which had been used primarily to block civil rights bills, lost some of its racist tint because we finally passed a civil rights bill, and we finally passed a voting rights bill.

People started saying: Well, maybe we will talk other issues to death, not just civil rights issues. And maybe rather than just using it on final passage of bills, we will also use it on amendments and we will also use it on motions to proceed to bills and we will also use it on nominations, which brings me to this next chart.

This chart displays how the use of cloture motions on nominations has accelerated in recent years: rarely used in the past on nominations. Even when it was filed, it rarely had to be voted on. And now in the decade from 2010 to 2020, 545 times. And only halfway through the next decade, if you include the additional uses of cloture on nominations that have happened just this year, which are not on this chart, we are already exceeding the previous decade, and we are on pace to double it.

This reflects the kind of growing tension between the parties and the growing use of this tool to slow down the process in which people fill the executive branch.

This is not good for our country to make it so difficult to debate and vote on a nomination, make it so difficult that there are more than 100 sub-Cabinet nominations awaiting action in this Chamber. It was not good when the Republican majority really initiated this strategy during the second term of President Obama, which led to a 2013 change, where we went to a simple majority to close debate on most nominations except for the Supreme Court. Fine, but that still required the cloture motion to be gone through, even with the simple majority. And it still meant significant delays.

That process kind of just has continued to increase in the tension between the parties. Now we have about 150 sub-Cabinet nominations awaiting action on the floor and dozens more that are likely to come out of committee in the next few weeks. And my Republican colleagues are saying this is unacceptable.

Indeed, if we turn the tables—if it were the Democrats in charge and the Republicans doing the same thing—it would be unacceptable. We are spending way too much time in this Chamber on nominations; way too much time that takes away from considering bipartisan bills; way too much time from addressing the fundamentals of healthcare and housing and education, investment in infrastructure, the creation of good-paying jobs, strategies to reduce pollution in our Nation. Therefore, we need to work together across the aisle to improve the process.

I and others have been in conversation with our colleagues across the aisle—my Republican colleagues—to say we understand there is a problem afflicting this body, and we are ready to work with you to accelerate the processing of sub-Cabinet nominations.

In fact, there is also a kind of sword of Damocles hanging over this body at the moment, where there has been a proposal put forward for a nuclear option that is not done in a bipartisan fashion that would severely damage the ability of this Chamber to well represent our States when it comes to nominations. And this idea—which I fiercely oppose—is to vote on big blocks of nominations.

Here is the problem with that: The bad apple gets thrown in with a pile of good apples, and there is no accountability to our constituents or to our Nation, and, therefore, we fail the test that we are placed with by being Senators of advice and consent on nominations because we don't consider the pros and cons of a particular nomination.

Second of all, if you do block nominations, that would just expand and expand. And the first thing you know, it is like 1 vote; it is 100 nominations. There is no scrutiny. And, again, we fail our constitutional test.

The third problem, if this Chamber is led by a majority as the opposite Chamber from the President, it will be tempting to use that same block process in order to extract kind of big action by the President. That use of the advice and consent as to blackmail the President, that is not healthy. That was certainly not the intent of our constitutional responsibility.

So if we look at all of those pieces, there is a better way. There is a better way. We can accelerate massively the consideration of sub-Cabinet nominations. We can consider a set of tools.

One is you don't have to go in and out of executive session to consider them. The second is, you can have a set time for consideration of a nomination or a debate period for a combination of a group of nominees. And because it is a set time, you don't need a cloture motion. If you don't need a cloture motion, you don't need an intervening day. If you don't need a cloture motion, you don't have to carry out that extra 20-minute vote.

And, in addition, we could greatly accelerate the votes that occur at the end of a debate time for a group of nominees so that those votes happen rapidly, one after the other after the other.

These are all things we could consider in dialogue. But let's have that bipartisan dialogue. Let's not have a nuclear option that blows up the responsibility of all of us as Senators under the Constitution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Democratic leader.

EPSTEIN FILES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning, I introduced a very simple amendment that directs the Attorney General to release the Epstein files. It is the same amendment as the one working its way in the House and the same one that my good friend from Oregon, who just spoke on another issue, has been so active in championing.

As soon as today—as soon as today—Republicans have a chance to take a step further in releasing the files, the same files that for years they have said they wanted released. If Republicans vote no, they will be saying to the American people: You should not see the Epstein files.

I ask my Republican colleagues: After all those years you spent calling for accountability, for transparency, for getting to the bottom of these awful crimes, why won't you vote yes?

Let me remind my colleagues of the things they have said for themselves on the Epstein issue.

Leader MCCONNELL said:

> There's no question that the accusations against Epstein are horrendous, and I think it's good news that they are being pursued further.

That is what MCCONNELL said. Whatever happened to that?

The current majority leader, Senator THUNE, said less than 2 months ago:

> Yes. We're all interested in making sure that justice is served and that there is full disclosure and there's transparency.

And what about Senator BLACKBURN, who said:

> It is imperative we figure out who was involved with Jeffrey Epstein. That is the only way we are going to break apart this $150-billion-a-year human trafficking, sex trafficking ring.

Or Senator KENNEDY, who said:

> The alleged victims are entitled to know what happened. The American people are entitled to know what happened.

Well, I could not agree more with all of them. To my Republican colleagues, I say, and to every Senator I say: This is your chance now. You can vote right now to give transparency to the American people and reveal the files or you can vote to hide the very files you have claimed to desperately want released for years.

The choice lies with our Republican colleagues today. If Republicans vote no, they will be saying the American people should not see the Epstein files. I say to my Republican colleagues again, I say to every Senator: If you vote no, you will be saying the American people should not see the Epstein files, plain and simple.

The American people deserve transparency. The American people are sick of Donald Trump's endless string of pathological lies and coverups when it comes to the Epstein files. Trump lied when he promised he would release the Epstein files. Trump lied when he said the FBI never told him if his name was mentioned in the files. Trump lied when he said he never wrote that gross, salacious letter to Epstein on his fiftieth birthday. And he lied last week when he called the whole thing nothing but a Democratic hoax.

It is not a hoax; it is real, and Americans want to get to the bottom of it. Americans want transparency.

From Trump, we are hearing one brazen lie after the other. From Trump, we are hearing a massive coverup.

Americans are wondering: What the heck is Donald Trump hiding?

Well, we can take back that veil. We can take a big step to releasing those files by voting yes on my amendment.

It is clear: Donald Trump can't be trusted to tell the truth to the American people, so it should be up to the Senate to do so. The Senate must force the issue.

And I say to my Republican friends: As long as you keep voting no, America is going to lose trust in government and lose trust in you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Tennessee.

META

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, we have known for years that Big Tech puts profit over our children's safety. Every parent will tell you this is an issue of concern for them.

Now, in the case of Meta, it has become clear that the tech giant is more interested in making a buck off of our kids than protecting them from predators, pedophiles, traffickers, and abusers.

On Tuesday, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law, which I chair, heard from two courageous, former Meta employees who spoke about a deeply disturbing culture of deception at the company. They were among six whistleblowers, including two whistleblowers who currently work for Meta. These whistleblowers are sounding the alarm, and thank goodness they are

courageous and they are stepping forward to help protect our children.

Their testimony included hundreds of pages of internal Meta documents, and this shows just how far Mark Zuckerberg has been willing to go to bury evidence showing that his platforms actually harm children. As I said, hundreds of pages of documents show us and bear out how far Mark Zuckerberg will go to bury the evidence that his platforms harm children.

Two of the whistleblowers are former safety researchers for Meta. As part of their job, they would meet with families who used Meta products, which include Facebook and Instagram. Through their research, they hoped to learn how safe these products truly are. But as soon as they conducted the interviews and went through the process of reporting, what they figured out was that Meta only hired them to check a box and appear as if the company was doing something about children's safety.

While researching children's experiences on Meta's virtual reality headsets, they spoke with a family who revealed that one of their preteen sons had been sexually propositioned numerous times by sexual predators in the company's metaverse.

Now, think about this: These predators, who were virtual strangers, were going up to this child in virtual reality, and they were trying to groom him. Can you imagine if this was allowed to occur in the physical space?

When it launched in 2021, Zuckerberg said that—I am going to quote him:

> [I]n the Metaverse, you'll be able to do almost anything you can imagine.

Apparently, that included preying on children.

For the child who is using the headset and in virtual reality, it is as if they are talking directly to the predator. We know that the physiological impact and the psychological impact on children is no different than if it occurred in person. There is plenty of research that bears this out.

This shocking information would cause any responsible company to reevaluate their product and try to figure out how to stop this from happening. But after the interview with the family, the whistleblowers' supervisor—get this—the supervisor ordered them to delete the audio recording and the written records about what the child had experienced.

The child admitted they were propositioned numerous times. Meta didn't want to know that, and they were so offended by this because it might hurt their profit that they told the researchers to delete the audio recording of the child admitting this and then to expunge the written records about what the child experienced.

Unfortunately, from what we have learned, this is not a one-off. According to the whistleblowers' testimony, this suppression of damaging information is the norm at Meta.

Starting in 2021, the whistleblowers allege that Meta directed its legal team—think about this—the C suite is ordering the legal team to review any internal research about youth safety in virtual reality. In some cases, they killed research that documented how Meta is exposing children to harm. So they know it; they don't want you to know it. How dare a parent have what they want to protect their child? So they want to just sweep it away.

The reason they did this was simple: Meta's executives wanted to eliminate any evidence that would require them to take action to protect children. In the words of Meta's lawyers, they needed to ''establish plausible deniability.''

In one case, Meta's lawyers advised that ''due to regulatory concerns,'' the researchers should avoid collecting any information about how many children were using Meta's virtual reality devices.

On paper, Meta said that children under the age of 13 were not allowed to use the devices, but in practice, employees estimated that some virtual rooms were up to 90 percent underage.

One employee documented a time where they observed three children between the ages of 6 and 7 who were ''chatting with a much older man who was asking them where they lived.'' These are babies. They have on the Oculus headset. They are in virtual reality. They have their avatar. They think they are playing, but they are chatting with an avatar that is not a child. It is not a child their age; it is an avatar that is an older man, and he is trying to figure out where they live.

Now, the employee told Meta that they knew these were young children based on the sound of their voice. Yet what did the company officials try to do? They tried to suppress this, to sweep it under the rug, to keep people from knowing this was happening. Meta executives told the researchers that they shouldn't refer to ''kids'' on the platform. Instead, they were told to refer to them as—get this—''alleged minors with young sounding voices who may be underage.'' Again, that is a direct quote.

So let me ask you this: Does this sound like a company concerned about how its platforms expose children to predators and pedophiles or does it sound like a company that is doing everything possible to cover up this horrific abuse?

With Meta and other tech platforms, we have seen this negligence over and over and over. Indeed, I have talked on this floor many times about this issue. Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have talked tirelessly about this issue, as we have held hearing after hearing.

With their algorithms that the tech firms use, that Meta is using, what they are doing is creating what one of the researchers refer to as a playground for pedophiles. That is really sad. In the physical space, you would be locked up for doing that.

With their algorithms, they connect children with pedophiles, with drug dealers, with sex traffickers, with human traffickers, with pornography, and they flood their feeds with pro-suicide content. One of the platforms even has music to commit suicide by. With their AI chatbots, they sexualize children in role-playing fantasies. With their design features, they allow children to share their precise location on a map with any predator, who can then go track them down.

This abuse of our Nation's children has absolutely got to come to an end. This has to stop. These tech companies have to be held to account. This is why Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have reintroduced the Kids Online Safety Act, which would hold Big Tech accountable and provide parents with tools, with safeguards, and with transparency to protect their children.

The legislation would create a duty of care for online platforms to prevent specific threats to minors, including sexual abuse, illicit drugs, and the promotion of suicide and eating disorders.

There is a reason this legislation was overwhelmingly bipartisan and received overwhelming bipartisan support. It passed out of the Senate last year on a 91-to-3 vote.

It is time to pass this bill. When you think about it, in the physical world, we have laws on the books. You cannot endanger children. You cannot cause harm. You cannot sell them alcohol and tobacco or expose them to pornography.

We as a society have decided that you protect children, and the laws that are on the books protect them and hold abusers, traffickers, and people that try to sell them products that will harm them—it holds them accountable. But in the virtual space, these tech companies have pushed forward with their armies of lawyers and lobbyists and deep pockets, and they have fought any regulation in the virtual space.

Why is that? Because when our children are online, our children are the product. Tech companies see our children as a profit center. It is a way to make a buck, to keep children online and on their phones. Indeed, when some of the mental health studies of our children have looked at how long a teenager spends on their phone every day—8 hours. Eight hours a day doomscrolling, going deeper into holes where they may be getting eating disorder content, pro-suicide content, or possibly even being introduced to a drug dealer, a trafficker, a pedophile.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARSHALL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHARLIE KIRK SHOOTING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I was horrified to hear moments ago that

conservative activist Charlie Kirk had died after being shot today while speaking at an event on the campus of Utah Valley University.

Political violence, which this attack seems to be, has no place in this country—none. I am deeply disturbed by the threat of violence that has entered our political life, and I pray that we will remember that every person, no matter how vehement our disagreement with them, is a human being and fellow American deserving of respect and protection.

My prayers are with Charlie Kirk's wife and children and his whole family, with the doctors and nurses who cared for him, and with all those who were present at the shooting.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

VOTE ON MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to table the Senate amendment No. 3849.

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

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 512 Leg.]

YEAS—51

Banks	Fischer	Moran
Barrasso	Graham	Moreno
Blackburn	Grassley	Mullin
Boozman	Hagerty	Murkowski
Britt	Hoeven	Ricketts
Budd	Husted	Risch
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Cassidy	Johnson	Schmitt
Collins	Justice	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lankford	Sheehy
Cramer	Lee	Sullivan
Crapo	Lummis	Thune
Cruz	Marshall	Tillis
Curtis	McConnell	Tuberville
Daines	McCormick	Wicker
Ernst	Moody	Young

NAYS—49

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Baldwin	Hirono	Sanders
Bennet	Kaine	Schatz
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schiff
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schumer
Booker	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Coons	Luján	Smith
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Fetterman	Murray	Warren
Gallego	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Paul	Wyden
Hawley	Peters	
Heinrich	Reed	

The motion was agreed to.

(Mr. HUSTED assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 3863 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3427

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] proposes an amendment numbered 3863 to amendment No. 3427.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

At the end add the following:

''This Act shall take effect 1 day after the date of enactment.''

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask that the reading be dispensed with.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3864

Mr. THUNE. I have an amendment to the text of the underlying bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] proposes an amendment numbered 3864 to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 3748.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

At the end add the following:

''This Act shall take effect 2 days after the date of enactment.''

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask that the reading be dispensed with.

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

Mr. THUNE. I ask for the yeas and nays on my amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3865 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3864

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] proposes an amendment numbered 3865 to amendment No. 3864.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

Strike ''2 days'' and insert ''3 days''

MOTION TO RECOMMIT WITH AMENDMENT NO. 3866

Mr. THUNE. I move to recommit the bill to the Committee on Armed Services with instructions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] moves to recommit the bill to the Committee on Armed Services with instructions with an amendment numbered 3866.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

At the end add the following:

''This Act shall take effect 4 days after the date of enactment.''

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask reading be dispensed with.

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

Mr. THUNE. I ask for yeas and nays on the motion to commit instructions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3867

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have an amendment to the instructions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] proposes an amendment numbered 3867 to the instructions of the motion to recommit.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

Strike ''4 days'' and insert ''5 days''

Mr. THUNE. I ask consent that the reading be waived.

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

Mr. THUNE. I ask for yeas and nays on my amendment.

Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3868 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3867

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE] proposes an amendment numbered 3868 to amendment No. 3867.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To improve the bill)

Strike ''5 days'' and insert ''6 days''

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask consent that the reading be waived.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO BARBARA CUBIN

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and celebrate Barbara Cubin, former U.S. House Representative and the Boys and Girls Club of Central Wyoming's 2025 Person of the Year.

Barbara's dedication to Wyoming runs deep. She is a voice for the values of the West. Through a distinguished career in public service, Barbara has represented Casper, Natrona County, and Wyoming at the State and Federal levels. Her selection as this year's honoree is well-deserved.