

Of course, the pressure on the Department has only been heightened as a result of the ongoing security and humanitarian crisis at the southern border. The Department has to balance countless complicated missions, from defending against criminal gangs and stopping the inflow of dangerous illegal drugs to protecting victims of human trafficking and providing care for the individuals they detain.

Through all of these challenges, Secretary Nielsen provided experienced and steady leadership. Her grasp of the issues and dedication were major assets for the Department and, as a result, for our country.

My colleagues and I thank her for her service, and we wish her well.

NOMINATIONS

Madam President, this week the Senate will continue its work to move well-qualified nominees off of the Executive Calendar and to give the American people the government they elected. We will do it more sensibly and efficiently thanks to last week's action to restore order to the nominations process.

As we discussed extensively last week, the past 2 years have offered a record-setting display of how comprehensively a Senate minority could prevent a President from putting his team in place, extending even to thoroughly uncontroversial nominations.

Fortunately, last week we took a big step toward restoring the sort of productive nominations process that had once been the Senate's routine. Now it is time to move forward together. This week the Senate will be able to consider a number of the President's capable nominees to positions in the executive branch and on the Federal bench.

We will begin with Daniel Domenico, named to serve as U.S. district judge for the District of Colorado. Mr. Domenico is a graduate of Georgetown University and the University of Virginia School of Law. His well-rounded legal career includes a clerkship on the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, a term as solicitor general of Colorado, as well as work in private practice. I would encourage each of my colleagues to join me in supporting Mr. Domenico's nomination.

We will follow with the consideration of Patrick Wyrick, nominated to the Western District of Oklahoma; then, Cheryl Stanton, to be Administrator of the Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division; then, General John Abizaid, to be Ambassador to Saudi Arabia; and then, Holly Brady and David Morales, to serve as district judges in Indiana and Texas, respectively.

These are six more well-qualified nominees who, among them, have passed a combined 2,364 days since the Senate received their nominations. Let me say that again. These six well-qualified nominees, among them, have passed a combined 2,364 days since the Senate received their nominations. But, most importantly, they are six of

the many nominees who will receive now more prompt consideration here on 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.

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

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

RESIGNATION OF KIRSTJEN NIELSEN

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we learned yesterday that Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen was stepping down from her position as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. I just got off the phone with her and thanked her for her service.

When the Department was first established more than a decade and a half ago, we knew that this position would be a very tough one, especially in the aftermath of 9/11—the terrible terrorist attacks. We knew that protecting the American people from the growing threat of terrorism was job No. 1. The truth is that this job has only gotten tougher as time has gone by. While counterterrorism remains a central focus for the DHS, the number of missions it is responsible for, both on the ground and in cyber space, has multiplied to include a myriad of natural and manmade threats.

Since Secretary Nielsen has taken this job, she has led the Department's response through flooding and wildfires, foreign attempts to infiltrate our election infrastructure, and the growing humanitarian crisis we continue to see unfold along the southern border.

Above all, Secretary Nielsen has been a fierce advocate for the men and women at the Department who carry out these diverse missions on a daily basis. With more than 240,000 DHS employees around the world—many of them in Texas—keeping them mission-ready is one of the most important responsibilities the Secretary has, and it is one she has taken very seriously.

I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Secretary on a number of issues but in particular on attempting to find commonsense reforms to secure our border and close loopholes that are being exploited in our immigration system. I have been consistently impressed by her deep knowledge of the issues and of her steadfast commitment to finding solutions.

America is better off for her service, and I hope we will continue to find good people like the Secretary who will be willing to contribute their service to the betterment of our country. I thank her, and I wish her well in the next chapter of her life.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Madam President, the Senate Finance Committee will continue with hearings tomorrow on the high cost of prescription drugs. I hear a lot about this back home in Texas. Whether they

are seniors who struggle to cover the costs of the prescriptions they have been taking for years or will be taking for the rest of their lives or whether they are parents who face tough financial decisions to make sure their children receive the medications they need, their stories can be heart-breaking. I have no doubt that all of my colleagues here in the Senate and in Congress hear the same things back home from their constituents.

A February Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that nearly 80 percent of Americans believe that the cost of prescription drugs is too high, and nearly 30 percent of adults, because of the cost, report their not taking their medications as prescribed. In other words, they are self-rationing, and it can be dangerous.

Without intervention, I don't expect these prices to drop anytime soon. In fact, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has estimated that between 2018 and 2027, consumers could expect to see their prescription drug costs increase by an average of 6.1 percent each year. That is faster than the increase in doctors' visits, hospital stays, or any other aspect of healthcare.

What exactly is behind these high prices? That is exactly what the Senate Finance Committee is going to find out. Over the last few months, we have been looking at every step a drug takes when it is en route from research and development to the bottle in your medicine cabinet, and we have been asking a lot of questions along the way. We have heard from patients, health economists, and pharmaceutical companies.

We will be talking tomorrow mainly to pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, who are the intermediaries between the manufacturers, consumers, and health plans. They negotiate with manufacturers to secure rebates, which should lower the price of the prescription drugs for patients, but many times they do not. The size of a rebate could mean the difference between a drug's being covered by your insurance or not.

There are a lot of financial incentives in healthcare and prescription drug pricing that we need to peel back, like one would the layers of an onion, so that we will know exactly what is going on. What I find so surprising is that for as big a role as PBMs play, we know surprisingly little about how they operate.

The terms of these rebates, including dollar amounts and incentives, are cloaked in secrecy. Since there is no paper trail or standard procedure on how these rebates or discounts are determined, it is nearly impossible to follow the money. I have always told people that I am not sure why prescription drug pricing is so complex. I don't know whether it is by design or if it is unintentional, but it certainly exists. This lack of transparency for the consumer is concerning, as it should not take an advanced degree to figure out

where your money is going when you buy your prescription drugs.

I am eager to question these PBMs tomorrow and to hopefully begin to remove the shroud of secrecy surrounding these rebates and prescription drug prices. Finding out what has led to these rising prices is critical to ensuring that Americans are able to receive the drugs they need at prices they can afford.

TICE FAMILY

Madam President, on a final matter, several families were in Washington this last week to advocate for the release of their loved ones by two rogue regimes. One of the men being held captive in Syria is Austin Tice.

There are many ways you can describe Austin. He is a seventh-generation Texan, a decorated Marine Corps veteran, an Eagle Scout, and an award-winning journalist. Yet, to Austin's family, he is so much more than his impressive list of accomplishments. He is their beloved son, brother, and friend whom they have not seen or heard from for 6½ years.

In the summer of 2012, Austin was getting ready to enter his final year of law school at Georgetown University. Instead of spending the summer working at a law firm, he chose to do something few were brave enough to do at the time, which was to report on the Syrian civil war from the inside. Austin always had a passion for storytelling, and he was frustrated by the lack of reporting on the impact this vicious violence was having on the Syrian people.

In demonstrating his courage and tenacity gained during his time in the Marine Corps, Austin got on a plane that May to fly to Turkey. Over the summer, his photos and stories illuminated the human cost of this conflict until one day in August of 2012 his stories abruptly stopped. The following month, a shocking video surfaced that showed Austin's having been blindfolded, bound, and surrounded by unidentified, armed men. Austin was just a few days from returning to the United States when he was abducted, and to this day, we have no specific information about his captors or the conditions for his release.

Austin's family—particularly Marc and Debra, his parents—has worked tirelessly over these last 6½ years to locate Austin and to bring him home. I have had the privilege of meeting with them multiple times, and I can only imagine what an impact this has had on them and on their entire family. I have tremendous respect for Marc, Debra, and their family. I wonder if others could stand up under this pressure as well as they have, for these many years, during their steadfast advocacy for their son's safe return. Yet they do have a sort of serene confidence that comes across when you talk to them in that one day, Austin will return home.

Once again, I join the Tice family in calling on Austin's captors to release

him immediately. I also continue to call on the administration to make sure that Austin is kept in mind when there are any discussions with the Syrian Government and future decisions to remove U.S. forces from Syria. I assure Austin's family that our resolve has not weakened; it has only grown stronger. I will do everything possible to press for his release, and I will continue to urge the administration to do the same.

CITGO 6 FAMILIES

Madam President, sadly, Austin is not the only American being held captive by a rogue government regime today. In fact, he isn't even the only Texan.

In November of 2017, days before Thanksgiving, six Citgo executives were summoned to Venezuela for meetings with Citgo's parent company, Venezuela's state-owned PDVSA. During the final meeting, these men were detained by the Venezuelan Government, and for the past 16 months, they have been held captive beneath a military intelligence compound in Caracas. They have been denied contact with the State Department. They have been held without a trial. They have been unable to receive humanitarian aid. As the already horrible situation in Venezuela continues to worsen, their conditions are likely deteriorating even further.

In February, the children of two of these men wrote an op-ed in the Houston Chronicle that detailed the suffering of their fathers and that all six families have faced. They wrote: "In their isolation, our fathers have bonded together over a shared purpose: to stay strong in body, mind and spirit in anticipation of their eventual return to their families."

I assure these families that we will continue to stand alongside them in this fight. I call on the Maduro regime to immediately release these Americans and to allow them to return home. I have continued and will continue to urge the administration to make sure this remains a top priority.

Just as we have worked closely with the Tice family over the last 6 years in advocating for the release of Austin, their son, we will continue to do the same for these six men. The heartbreak felt by these families is unfathomable. Their spouses, children, and grandchildren are desperate to have their loved ones returned home. Together, we should do everything in our power to make that a reality.

Madam President, 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.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING FRITZ HOLLINGS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today I wish to start off by just sharing a few words about our former colleague, Senator Fritz Hollings—Ernest F. Hollings, to be precise—of South Carolina. He passed away this weekend at his home in Isle of Palms.

With Fritz Hollings, the people of South Carolina, the Senate, have lost a giant. Hollings was the longest serving junior Senator in American history—behind, of course, Strom Thurmond—representing his constituents for 38 years in the Senate.

Before that, he was a Governor, State legislator, and World War II veteran. Public service was his life's calling. He championed education reform, increasing teachers' pay, a national voice in the fights against hunger and poverty.

He was brought up in the old Jim Crow days, with a great deal of segregation, but as he went through South Carolina, he realized how terrible that was and began to move in the opposite direction.

He was an original. You could always go over to Fritz Hollings. Even when I was a younger legislator, he would pay attention, and he would have something very interesting to say.

Everyone talks about the days of blow-dried, look-alike Senators. Fritz Hollings certainly wasn't one of them. He was an original, and we were all much better for it.

So Fritz, we will miss you, and our thoughts go with your family, as do our prayers and well wishes.

DISASTER RELIEF FOR PUERTO RICO

Now, on another matter, Puerto Rico. Last week, Senator LEAHY and I offered this Chamber a chance to pass a natural disaster funding package that would have addressed everyone's concerns in the Senate.

The "all of the above" solution we presented contained \$16.7 billion in relief for all Americans affected by natural disasters. I would add, I see my two friends from Iowa on the floor today, one in the President's chair, one ready to speak. That would have included far more money for the Midwest than the Republican bill because the Republican bill that was on the floor, while it added 2019 to disaster relief, didn't add in any more money despite the devastation in Iowa and Missouri and Nebraska.

Well, our bill added an additional—\$2.5 billion in funding for the disasters of 2019, and the vast majority of that would go to Iowa, to Missouri, and to Nebraska, but it also provided much needed aid for the people of Puerto Rico and other territories. They need the help, too, and they are Americans citizens as well.

Let's face the music, folks. Everyone knows what is going on here. Democrats and Republicans had agreed, as we always do, when there is a disaster, we help. The original bill that was put together had aid for Puerto Rico, as