

I jump at any opportunity to praise my incredible staff. I am just sorry that one natural occasion is when great people head toward the exits.

Phil Maxson of Lexington, KY, has mastered one of the toughest jobs on Capitol Hill. As chief of staff for my personal office, he oversees the operation that delivers for Kentucky families and Kentucky priorities.

Here is what that role means in our tight-knit organization. It is like being the player-coach on an old baseball team who is also a utility player at the same time. Phil wears about 10 hats each day, orchestrating a seamless operation. He has mastered policy, political strategy, messaging, and constituent services. He has budgeted and managed the office itself, and Phil is also a liaison and colleague to my leadership office here in the Capitol.

He is the linkage between the two sides of my operation, the single person most responsible for helping me harmonize home-State priorities with my national duties and keep the Commonwealth at the center of all I do. It is a tall order. It takes the best of the best, someone who is so capable that every important issue will involve them, but so humble that situations never become about them. Enter Phil Maxson—a kind, cheerful, and unbelievably confident servant leader whom I am convinced nobody in this planet dislikes.

Phil climbed the Capitol Hill ladder the old-fashioned way. He joined my team as an intern a decade ago. Actually, I think Phil may have snuck a late application into a last-minute opening. If I am right about that, then his good fortune was ours as well.

He has done every job: legislative correspondent, legislative assistant, legislative director, and then the top spot.

As one of his old bosses reminded me recently, “every time a gap in the office appeared, Phil was the natural choice” to fill it. It is not like he elbowed his way up. It is that circumstances and our needs kept pulling him up. He is that good.

For the past decade, Phil has walked into every meeting, every markup, every normal day at the office, and every grueling far-flung codel with total preparation, complete professionalism, and the score of the latest UK game.

Another former supervisor of his put it this way: “I don’t think I ever asked Phil a single question he didn’t already know the answer to, or didn’t find the answer within about 10 minutes.” That is high praise when your portfolio ranges from U.S.-Burma relations to the BUILD grants that improve our roads and everything in between.

It helps that Phil is a Kentucky thoroughbred through and through. The man really is “died in the bluegrass.” As a young man in Lexington, he found part-time work giving tours at Henry Clay’s Ashland estate. He also graduated from Henry Clay High School.

You could say the Senate was a natural destination. Here, he met UK

Coach Calipari, President Netanyahu, and families from Kentucky’s smallest towns. And they all got exactly the same attention, enthusiasm, and warmth from Phil Maxson.

He clicks with everyone. He is as affable as he is intelligent. In a town full of big egos and sharp elbows, he stands out because he doesn’t try to stand out.

For the better part of a decade, virtually every significant win we have notched for our Commonwealth has had Phil at its nucleus. But if you drop by the staff meeting the day after, what you would hear is Phil explaining why everyone else deserves more credit than he does, why it really all came down to my leadership or his peers’ efforts or the hard work of the junior folks beneath him—in other words, everyone else but him.

You would have to go to everyone else to learn that Phil was the human glue that, in fact, held it all together. It would take me all day to list every win Phil helped quarterback for our home State: a state-of-the-art chemical weapons destruction facility in Madison County, the transfer of the Rochester Dam to local ownership, a new wildlife refuge in Henderson County, environmental cleanup and health benefits for nuclear workers in Paducah, the planned construction of a new VA hospital in Louisville, Freedom to Fish and the raising of Lake Cumberland, and many, many more.

But, alas, his dedication to Kentucky is so all-encompassing that he and his wife Sarah Beth have decided they don’t want to raise their young family anywhere else.

So “Bee and Phil on Capitol Hill”—as friends have called them—plus their two boys, Barbour and Theodore, are homeward bound.

I made the same decision myself as a young man, trading in the life of a Senate staffer for a move back home. So I can’t exactly fault his decision.

Phil needs to spend fewer breakfasts and dinners with me and more with his own burgeoning clan. I get it, but I am sure sorry to see him go.

Phil is the kind of Senate all-star who deserves a full-dress curtain call. He deserves toasts and a dinner and a big farewell party. I regret that in these bizarre pandemic times, a floor speech will have to suffice, at least right now.

So, Phil, thank you for your years of dedication to the State we both love. We will miss your brain. We will miss your heart. You are leaving behind one heck of a fan club all throughout the U.S. Senate. We wish you all the best in the chapters ahead.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

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

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

DECEMBER 19

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I want to make an observation here because I have been serving for quite some time in the U.S. Senate, and a lot of the things that are said on the Senate floor are not really all that significant, and yet the Members who are delivering messages believe they are or they wouldn’t be doing it. This is what it is all about. This is a deliberative body. Some things are maybe not all that significant, but what I am about to say is significant, so I would like to have the attention of anyone who wants to know that in the midst of all of the problems that we are facing now, some good things are happening.

I want to mention something that is significant that I don’t think you have thought of, I say to the Presiding Officer; that is, tomorrow is the 354th day of the year, and that is very significant. That is December 19. People have not stopped to realize the significant things that have happened on December 19 throughout our history and the history of the world, going all the way back to December 19 of the year 1154. That is when Henry II became King of England. We haven’t really thought about what that means to us today, but we will before long.

In 1843, December 19, Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol.” That is the most watched, listened to, and sung event every Christmas. And it has been for all that time.

In 1932, December 19, the British Broadcasting Corporation—that is the BBC; we are all familiar with that—but that is when it started. On December 19, they began transmitting overseas. That was the beginning of a whole new world of knowledge and understanding.

In 1950, December 19, NATO named General Dwight D. Eisenhower as supreme commander of the Western European defense forces.

Then, in 1972, December 19, *Apollo 17*, the last of the *Apollo* moon landings, returned to Earth.

Then, in 1984, December 19—I remember this well because I was in Hong Kong when this happened—that was when China signed an accord returning Hong Kong to the Chinese sovereignty. A lot of people thought it was a good idea at the time to accept the people from Hong Kong. I was there, and look what has happened now after all these years. I would have to say that created a hysteria that has continued to this day.

Then, in 1998, December 19, U.S. President Bill Clinton was impeached. I was there for that one too. That was December 19, 1998.

The event that is more significant by a landslide is what happened on December 19 of 1959. On December 19, 1959, my wife Kay and I got married. That makes tomorrow our 61st wedding anniversary. Just look at all of the beauty that has followed us—20 kids and grandkids, all of that in a 61-year period of time.

What I want to say is the beautiful life that we are still having together—and, Kay, I love you more now than I did 61 years ago.

I say to the Senate leadership that you better get this last vote done by tonight or you will have to do it without me because I am going to be with Kay on our anniversary on Saturday, our 61st wedding anniversary.

To everyone else out there, as you celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmastime, I am going to say to you: Merry Christmas and God bless you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant minority leader.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am sorry I didn't come to the floor quickly enough to wish my friend Jim Inhofe and his wife the best. He is one of the real contributors in the U.S. Senate and has been for years. He is a special individual. He decided to take an interest in the continent of Africa. I don't know that there is another Senator who knows as much about that continent as he does. He has been there so many times. His stories, many of them, relate to countries that few people have heard of. He has made a special point to understand that continent, the people on it, in addition to his responsibilities serving the State of Oklahoma and, of course, now, as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, his responsibility for funding the Department of Defense. He and our Democratic colleague, Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island, have done a remarkable bipartisan job on that Defense authorization, let me add.

I sincerely hope that the President will sign that bill. His objections to it have nothing to do with the military or

defense of our country. They relate to issues which are thorny, political issues that shouldn't slow down these critical programs.

This authorization bill comes at an exceptional time. We have been learning over the last few weeks about a massive cyber security breach of our government, probably by the Russians. It has all the earmarks and fingerprints of Vladimir Putin project to compromise our national security and to create chaos whenever possible. We learned of it 4 years ago in the 2016 election, when every intelligence agency of our government agreed that the Russians were meddling in our election and doing their best to subvert the will of the American people.

We made strong statements in opposition to it, and we took action. Some of it has been publicly reported, and some of it has been disclosed to Members of Congress in a classified setting.

We were successful in thwarting their efforts in the 2018 election. I want to salute all of those who were responsible for that effort. In 2020, I believe the same can be said. We will know more as we sift through the evidence.

This latest disclosure is really troubling. We believe that beginning in March of this year, the Russians started compromising our cyber security network in many different ways. Every day there is a new disclosure of another agency that reports that they have somehow wheedled their way into this important, critical information. How much they know, what they have gained, how much they have compromised us, we don't know yet. It certainly is unnerving, and it deserves a very thorough—thorough—investigation as to how we failed.

You see, the United States was not taking anything for granted. We were literally spending billions—billions—of dollars for the safety of the security systems. We knew that included in those systems was information which is essential for the protection of the United States. To think that has been compromised at the hands of one of our implacable foes is certainly unnerving. I believe we should initiate a thorough and complete investigation, let the chips fall where they may, establish where we have failed from a technology viewpoint, and if any individuals are responsible, that they be held accountable.

At the same time, I have to say that I join the Presiding Officer in commenting on one particular aspect of this that I just can't understand. The White House has been virtually silent as all of these facts have unfolded by the day. I cannot understand that—why the Commander in Chief of the United States of America has not spoken out forcefully against the Russians for their involvement in this cyber security breach, why he has not likened this to a virtual invasion of the United States when it comes to our own national security. I believe that we should have been firm from the begin-

ning and honest with the American people, as well, about the nature of this threat. Instead, this President has been silent.

I recall not that long ago, a few months ago, we disclosed—we found evidence that the Russians were offering bounties on the heads of American soldiers in Afghanistan. It is an outrageous and unthinkable act. Yet the White House was silent, refused to respond to what I know—because I have seen it—was credible evidence that this was linked directly to Moscow and the operatives of the Russian Government. The attempted assassination of Navalny, the dissident in Russia, has been well documented. Yet, again, our White House, our President are silent. I don't understand it.

I am hopeful that the new President, Joe Biden, when he takes office January 20, will make it a priority to establish a new understanding and relationship with Vladimir Putin. The United States cannot be a victim of Putin over and over again without speaking out—and more. I am counting on Joe Biden to do that. I believe he will. He is a realist. I know he wants peace in the world, and I do, too, but we also must defend this country. The men and women in uniform who risk their lives every single day should be our highest priority.

I am heartened by Joe Biden's closing that he is using in all of his public speeches now. He, of course, says it more artfully than I will, but he calls on God to bless America but also God to keep our troops safe. I am sure it has special meaning to him since the death of his son Beau is a reminder of the sacrifices that not only the men and women in uniform but their families make for us every single day. I hope that continues to be the watchword of his administration.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, there is not much activity on the floor of the Senate today. I hope there will be before the end of the day. The leaders in the Senate and House—Democrat and Republican—as well as the White House, with Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, are fast at work, we are told, establishing a COVID-19 relief bill.

I was part of an effort, which the Presiding Officer also shared in. It was a volunteer activity that involved about 3 weeks of endless telephone conferences and Zoom calls. Staff supported us all the way or we couldn't have done it.

But it started off with eight of us eating dinner one night and deciding to come together as a group to see if we could break the logjam. The whole notion of COVID-19 relief was dead in the water for some reason—no action, no activity.

We remember back in March when Congress—particularly, I remember the Senate, by a vote of 96 to 0, passed, on a bipartisan basis, the largest relief bill in the history of the United States. It was over \$3 trillion in the CARES