

We are right now looking for a new police chief, and we need a good one. We need a tried and tested police chief who has experience in a big city, and we are in the process of picking a police chief.

Now, our mayor, who has 2 more years on her term, is in charge of picking the police chief. Our new police chief has to be confirmed by our city council. But, more importantly than our city council, as important as our city council is, our new police chief has to have the confidence of the people of Louisiana and the good people of New Orleans.

Our mayor, as is her right, has decided to handle the selection of the new police chief herself. She has appointed an outside, third-party group to quarterback the selection of the new police chief. That outside, third-party group says it has done a nationwide search. It had 33 applicants for police chief. Apparently—we don't know this for a fact—most of them were not interviewed. Six were. And that is all we know. That is all we know of one of the most important and maybe the most important selection in municipal government in the last decade in New Orleans. Our mayor has shared nothing else with us—nothing, zero, zilch, nada.

To her credit, our mayor has been asked why—and, by the way, that includes our city council. You would think, since the city council has to confirm the new police chief, that our city council would have been brought in from day one, but our mayor decided not to do that.

At a press conference on July 5, our mayor was asked about this secrecy, and here is what she said. I am going to quote our mayor, for whom I have great respect, because I certainly don't want to put words in her mouth. This is what she told the press.

To the press: I have to say you all have a great way of doing that to people. You know you damage people, even though you try to say you are doing it fairly. That is not what I want.

The mayor goes on to say to the press: I don't want to do that for those who look at New Orleans as a place that they want to come and serve, and I definitely do not want to do that for men and women that have responded who are currently serving.

Now, look, I get it. I know all about the gifts and the gaps of our news media. We have an opinion. But you don't have to like or dislike a free press to serve your people. And I can assure you, right now in New Orleans, parts of which look like a scene out of "Mad Max," that the people of New Orleans are vitally interested—not just the press—in who our new police chief will be.

Our mayor has 2 years left to serve. It is going to be a challenge to get a police chief to come to New Orleans and serve for 2 years—uproot wherever she or he is, come to New Orleans for 2 years with no guarantee that a new mayor will reappoint that new police chief. So it is going to be a challenge to begin with.

On top of that, we all in New Orleans have a lot of questions about crime in our city and our new police chief. I just jotted down a few. We want to know if our new police chief believes in broken-windows law enforcement. We want to know if our new police chief—how she or he is going to increase police response times.

We have got great cops in New Orleans. The morale is low. We don't have nearly enough of them. But their response times have tripled in 3 years. I am not blaming it on them, but it is a problem.

In picking a new police chief, we want to know our new police chief's opinion about whether we have enough investigators, about the Federal consent decree that we are under. Has it helped? Has it hurt? Is it time to ask to get out from under it?

We want to know if our new program called Ethical Policing Is Courageous is working. We launched it with high hopes. Is it working? What does our new police chief think about it?

We want to know what our new police chief thinks about our Adopt-a-Block Program. Is it working?

We want to know our police chief's opinion about whether police officers—we are trying hard to recruit them, but we are losing them. We lost 20 percent in the last 2 years. We want to know how our new police chief feels about requiring or not requiring police officers to live in the city. Can they live outside, in the suburbs?

We want to know what our new police chief thinks about computer analytics and camera technology and facial recognition technology.

I can keep going. These are all fair questions. And it is not just the press asking, even though the press is entitled to ask; it is the people of New Orleans because they are scared, because they love our city, because they think it is worth fighting for, because they want justice, but they understand that without order, there can be no justice.

So I say to my mayor of New Orleans with all the respect I can muster: Please, Mayor, please, Mayor, please, with sugar on top, call a press conference. Tell us who has applied. Tell us who didn't make the cut. Tell us why they didn't make the cut. Tell us the criteria that you and your team used, without an interview, to eliminate them. Tell us who the six remaining semifinalists are. Give us their names. Let us hear from them. Give us time to look at their record. Give us time to ask fair but tough questions. And let's make this decision together because we are all going to have to live with it. Please, Mayor, please, reconsider your position. Let's do this together.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I rise today to talk about a crisis in our military leadership driven by one of my Senate colleague's decision to place a blanket hold on now more than 250 apolitical nominations of senior military officers. The senior Senator from Alabama has done so. These 250 military nominations are soon to be joined by another 400 or so, which would mean that 650 individuals who volunteered to wear the uniform of this country and to defend the country, even at risk of their own lives, are being blocked in their professional advancement by a Senator punishing them for something they had nothing to do with—nothing to do with.

The Senator is concerned about a policy of the Pentagon's that would allow women servicemembers who cannot obtain reproductive healthcare where they are deployed or assigned to travel to other places to receive that care.

That is currently the way we treat members of the military. If they are assigned at a base in the United States or elsewhere and they need medical care that they cannot obtain where they are assigned, they are able to travel to seek that care. But because the Pentagon, in the aftermath of the Dobbs decision, has said that longstanding policy allowing travel would also apply to women troops seeking reproductive healthcare, the Senator from Alabama has taken the drastic, radical, extreme, unusual step of saying he will block confirmation and approval of now hundreds of our military officers.

I am a member of the Armed Services Committee. I have a child who is a U.S. marine. I want to take the floor today to talk about how destructive this policy is and ask the Republican minority in the Senate to drop this opposition, stop punishing people who are patriotically serving this country.

To be clear, my colleague who has placed a hold on these individuals has stated no challenge with their qualifications. And to be clear, my colleague who has placed a hold on these nominations has never suggested that they had anything to do with the policy he disagrees with. He is just using them as targets because he is dissatisfied with the way the Pentagon is operating.

There is a right way and a wrong way to do this. Before I get to the right way to raise the issue, let me talk about what this means when you are a member of the military and you have your career delayed because a Member of this body decides to hold you up so that you cannot be promoted.

Many of the promotions and appointments in the military that we are obligated to vote on in the Senate occur during the summer. The transition times occur during the summer. Why? Because this is the time, when someone

gets a promotion and they move, where they can move with their families—sometimes across the country, sometimes across the world—at a time when they can then maybe look for a new place to live or a new school for their children to attend.

When you are held up in a promotion or advancement, you don't know what to do. You might have sold a house, but you don't yet have orders where you can take a new position. Your children might be in a school, but you are not yet sure what you can do to try to find the next school they should go to.

Remember, these senior military officers—many of them have deployed not once or twice or moved three or four times in their careers; they have moved dozens of times—5, 10. We had a military leader before us recently whose family, during the course of his career—who is up for one of these positions, who is being blocked—has moved 20 times. It is not easy on a family to do that.

Blocking them from planning and moving and accepting an appointment is not just keeping them from an advancement that they have merited, that they have earned, but it is also hurting their families. What have they done to deserve it? I mean, they volunteered to wear the uniform of this country. They volunteered to risk their lives for this country. Why do they deserve to be punished? Why do they deserve to be disrespected? Why do they deserve to have their careers blocked?

Let me give you an example of a couple of the people—the positions that are being blocked by this. As of Monday, for the first time in 164 years, the United States of America does not have a confirmed Commandant of the Marine Corps. The proud Marine Corps is lacking a confirmed Commandant for the first time since the 1850s. That interregnum was caused because of the death of a Commandant when there was no successor confirmed. So obviously there was a brief period where there was no confirmed Commandant.

This one, we have seen coming for months. General Berger had an announced retirement date that was Monday. There should have been a Commandant in place. Yet there is not a confirmed Commandant because of this block.

Eric Smith can't take over as Commandant of the Marines. It impacts the Marine Corps' ability to develop and implement long-term plans and policies. It is especially damaging because, as those of us know who have been on the Armed Services Committee and are working with our marines, they are in the midst of a force design transformation that is midstream right now. We don't need a gap in leadership in the Marine Corps.

It goes deeper in the Marine Corps. Forgive me for being a little Marine Corps centric, with a marine in the family, but it goes deeper in the Marine Corps. The hold is also impacting the leadership of the I Marine Expedi-

tionary Force, which is in California, and the III Marine Expeditionary Force, which is based in Okinawa, Japan. The I Expeditionary Force is the Marine Corps' combat power focused on the Indo-Pacific.

We are spending all this time talking about the challenges of the Indo-Pacific, the challenges of China, but the leadership of this critical Marine Expeditionary Force is now not in place because of this hold.

The III Marine Expeditionary Force is our standing force that would be called upon if there were any challenges in the first island chain in the Indo-Pacific.

So these holds are affecting these critical units just in the Marine Corps Commandant and the leadership of key expeditionary forces that the Nation needs for defense and to protect allies.

I have been working on a really exciting initiative of President Biden's, the AUKUS partnership, which would combine the military capacities of the United States, the UK, and Australia to do submarine construction and other work. These are nuclear subs managed by naval reactors.

The appointment for the current Director of Naval Reactor expires next month. The hold that has been used by the Senator from Alabama would block our ability to put someone into this key position, challenging not only the AUKUS advance, but our nuclear submarines are one of the most important capacities that we have to promote security all around the world and protect this country.

I said there is a right way and a wrong way to do this. I am on the Armed Services Committee. I will be honest, there are things in the Pentagon I am not happy with, and every year I have a chance to do something about it.

Just 3 weeks ago, in the committee—and the Senator from Alabama sits on that committee with me—we had an opportunity to mark up the Defense authorizing bill, and any of us could advance any policy change we wanted. If we wanted something in Pentagon policy that wasn't there, we got to make our case. If we wanted to take something out of Pentagon policy that we didn't like, we got to make our case.

I have done this year after year after year. I have a pretty good batting average when I offer an amendment, but I know when I offer one, if I can't convince a majority of my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, I am not going to win. When I don't win, I am disappointed, but never would it even occur to me to offer an amendment to my committee colleagues, to fail to persuade them, and then take my disappointment and use it as a weapon to block the promotion of hundreds of military officers.

Indeed, the Senator from Alabama had that opportunity, and he exercised that opportunity. In the debate—we had a very full debate—every Member

gets to offer any amendment they want, and there was an amendment specifically drawn and designed to change the Pentagon policy with which he disagrees. He lost the amendment vote. He lost the amendment vote. He couldn't convince a majority of the committee that this was a Pentagon policy that should be changed. That is the right way to go about this. If you don't like a Pentagon policy, convince your colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, convince your colleagues in the U.S. Senate to change the policy. But if you fail, if you fall short, if you are not persuasive enough to convince your colleagues to change the policy, that is on you.

When I lose amendment votes in the committee, I don't take it out on people who have had nothing to do with the policy. I try to work with my colleagues, come up with a better argument, change it, shape it, do something so that, if it matters to me, I might find some success in the future. But it shocks me because it never would have occurred to me—every time I have lost an amendment vote in working on 10 or 11 Defense authorizing bills, it never occurred to me: I know what I am going to do. I did not get my way on the committee, and so what I am going to do is I am going to punish hundreds of people who have volunteered to serve this country and risk their lives in doing so. That is what I am going to do.

I will conclude and just say that we are facing recruiting challenges in the military right now and particularly in the Army.

We had the hearing this morning for General George, who is the nominee to be the new Secretary of the Army. He is the Vice Chief right now—not Secretary; he would be the Service Chief for the Army. He is Vice Chief right now.

We have been talking about some of the recruiting challenges that the Army is facing. In the last fiscal year, they had a goal of trying to get about 60,000 people in, and they fell 20,000 short—40,000. The good news is, they have upped their goal to 65, and they will probably come in at about 53 this year. They are still not getting what they need, but they are kind of closing that gap.

But we talked about, well, what is it that makes recruiting into the military hard? And the Army, to their credit, has done a really good job of kind of surveying what it is that makes it hard to recruit people into the military, and I was surprised at this. I would have guessed that the No. 1 obstacle would have been people thinking: It is dangerous. I might risk my life. I might see something bad happen to somebody I care about.

But, you know, that wasn't the top reason. People coming into the military are patriotic, and they are willing to be patriotic even to the point of risking their lives. The No. 1 reason that was cited by people for being reluctant to join our volunteer military,

which just celebrated 50 years of being an All-Volunteer Force, is their belief that if they do so, they will have to put a lot of their lives on hold, that others who don't join the military will move ahead while they might find themselves limited or put on hold by conditions beyond their control.

What message does it send to someone who is thinking about going into an ROTC Program and being an officer, going to a service academy; what message does it send to someone who might be a young officer who is thinking "Do I make this a career or do I leave and go somewhere else?" when a single Member of this body has decided to take it upon himself to punish hundreds of officers and block their professional advancement because of something they had nothing to do with?

We should be sending a message to these officers that we are proud of them. We should be sending a message to them that we are thankful to them for the sacrifices they and their families have made. We should not be sending a loud message that we are going to hold their careers hostage, disrespect them, delay or postpone their appointments.

I would urge my colleague from Alabama, but what I really want to urge is I want to urge the Republican minority in this because I don't want to see Members of this body enable this kind of behavior because where do we stop? All the hundred Members of this body could find things in the Pentagon they are not happy about. It might be the travel policy for Senator TUBERVILLE. It might be cluster munitions for someone else. It might be whether the military is doing enough to battle sexual harassment for somebody else. We can all find things in the Pentagon that we are not wild about, and to the extent that we do, we should be trying to persuade our colleagues to make the policies better. But when we make that effort in good faith and fall short, the last thing we should do—the last thing we should do—is take our own disappointment out on and punish people who are serving this country who have had nothing to do with the policy we disagree with.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### MANHATTAN PROJECT

Mr. HAWLEY. Madam President, today, there are new revelations, new evidence about the extent of the radioactive contamination that has plagued the St. Louis area since the forties.

Where did this radioactive contamination come from? Simple, it came from the Federal Government. Beginning in the forties in the Manhattan

Project, St. Louis was a center of development for uranium. But what did the Federal Government do when the Manhattan Project concluded? Well, we know more today after 15,000 pages of documents that had previously not been released were obtained by a parents' rights group in St. Louis and shared with news organizations.

Here is what we learned. The Federal Government gave this radioactive waste, fobbed it off, onto companies in the region—who did what?—who poisoned the water, who poisoned the soil, who poisoned the air, and the government knew about it. Oh, yes, they knew about it. They knew about it for decades, and for year upon year upon year, they played down the threats. They tried to hide the evidence. They told the people of St. Louis: Oh, everything is fine. Don't be worried. Don't worry at all. It is all fine.

Meanwhile, kids were playing along a creek filled with radioactive waste. Kids were going to school in buildings contaminated by the waste. Residents were coming out to houses, building homes in areas contaminated.

And then the government wonders why the levels of cancer and autoimmune diseases and rare genetic disorders have spiked in the St. Louis region. Oh, we know. We know. It is because of the radioactive material from the Federal Government dumped into the St. Louis water and air and soil.

Let's just review what we have learned. We now know that as early as 1949—that is right, 1949—the Federal Government paid a contractor—a private contractor—to dispose of waste. But instead, that contractor left the radioactive waste in steel drums sitting out in the open in the elements, right next to a creek called Coldwater Creek, familiar to just about everybody who lives in the St. Louis region.

It is familiar because whole housing developments and neighborhoods and—oh, yeah—schools have been built along Coldwater Creek. As early as the forties, that radioactive waste begins to leech out of those steel drums into the water.

And it gets worse. The same Federal Government paid another contractor to dispose of other waste. And what did they do? Rather than dispose of it, they drove it to a public landfill. And in the early seventies, they just dumped the waste right into the landfill. They dumped it right into the landfill.

"How did this happen?" you might ask. Well, as it turns out, that is a violation of Federal law.

You think?

But what did the Federal Government do about it in the seventies, when they learned that this government-paid contractor had carried out this illegal act? Did they prosecute him? Did they fine him? Did they at least have a hearing and ask some questions? No, no, and no. They did nothing. So the waste seeped into the soil, spread into the soil, and all the time the people of St. Louis were told: Don't worry. Don't worry. It is all going to be fine.

In 1976, government tests—government tests—revealed that the levels of radiation in the creek water were at extremely dangerous levels—1976. Here we sit in 2023, and we are told by the same Federal Government—the EPA, Department of Energy, Army Corps—that the cleanup of Coldwater Creek won't be done until at least 2038.

Earlier this year, the school alongside Coldwater Creek, an elementary school, had to close, apparently permanently, because of radioactive contamination found inside the school. In response to that, this body took action and passed my bill to mandate Federal cleanup of the school and, if it can't be cleaned up, a new school to be built.

I thank my colleagues for their unanimous support for that activity, but that is not going to be enough. No, it is clear today that further action is needed because the Federal Government has caused this harm. I want to be crystal clear about this. This is not the people of St. Louis saying that we had a weather incident, which would be bad enough. It is not a natural disaster, which would be terrible. No, no, no, this is their government using them, essentially, as human guinea pigs. This is their government dumping radioactive material into their water, into their soil, and then lying to them about it, not even for a year or 2 years but for three-quarters of a century.

And it still continues today. As I stand here, the Army Corps of Engineers insists there needs to be no further testing either around the elementary school, which is now closed, or anywhere else in the St. Louis region. And, at the same time, the EPA is admitting that the radioactive contamination of the soil has spread further than they previously admitted.

I mean, what is it going to take to get some basic justice for the people of St. Louis? We are talking about working people. These are people who moved to these regions of the city in search of a quiet neighborhood, a good school for their kids, an opportunity for a better future. These are parents who allowed their kids to play in the creek because wasn't it awesome to have a creek right by their neighborhood. These are parents who sent their kids to the school trusting they would get a great education. And what did they get instead? Exposure to radioactive contamination.

This shouldn't happen in this country. When it does happen, the Federal Government should make it right. That is what needs to happen now. I am sick to death of hearing the excuses from this government for decades on end. I am sick of the lies that they have told to the people of St. Louis, to working people from neighborhoods all across the city, that everything is just going to be fine: Just trust us; it is all going to work out.

I am tired of this administration, which has still refused to answer my repeated pleas—repeated—to mount a cleanup effort at Jana Elementary