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With 60% of people in the United States living paycheck to paycheck, households are turning to credit cards and retirement savings as lifelines.

That is the reality of life under Bidenomics. But you only need to listen to one of the President's speeches to know that the President isn't overly troubled by economic reality. Lately, the President has been taking credit for the recent moderation in the inflation rate. Well, that takes a lot of gall. It is a little bit like punching a hole in a boat and then taking credit for rescuing the occupants from drowning—except, in this case, the President isn't even doing the rescuing.

The rate of inflation has slowed in spite of the White House, not because of it. In fact, if the President had his way, Congress would have passed a lot more reckless spending, and inflation would likely have gotten even worse.

As it is, Americans are having to deal not only with the ongoing effects of Democrats' self-inflicted inflation crisis but with the steep rate hikes the Federal Reserve has imposed to dig us out of the Democrats' inflation mess. These rate hikes have made borrowing more expensive, putting the dream of homeownership or necessities like replacing an aging car out of reach for many Americans.

And there may be more economic pain on the way if Democrats have their way. The Democratic leader recently promised—or perhaps I should say threatened—to pass an even bigger Green New Deal bill than the Inflation Reduction Act if Democrats regain full control of Washington in the next election. I don't even want to think about how much that kind of legislation could cost taxpayers or what damage that kind of legislation could do to our economy.

The President can talk all he wants about Bidenomics as building the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. To Americans who have lived under the Biden economy, Bidenomics means something very different. Perhaps the President should check in with the 58 percent of workers who say the economy has gotten worse over the past 2 years before he gives his next celebratory speech.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise this morning to discuss the promotions of our military leaders.

During the past month, I had the opportunity, as many of my colleagues

did, to visit our troops overseas and around the country. As always, I was moved by their selflessness and courage, and I was impressed by the knowledge and skill of our military leaders.

We ask much of our servicemembers and their families, and they deserve our gratitude and support. So although I was proud to spend time with our troops and their families this past month, I was appalled by the hardship and disrespect many of them are experiencing.

While Congress had a month of recess, hundreds of military officers were denied their promotions, hundreds of military families were played as political pawns, and our national security was undermined—all because one Senator disagrees with a legal healthcare policy.

For more than 6 months, the senior Senator from Alabama has blocked every senior military promotion—now totaling nearly 300 officers—in his bid to extort the Pentagon to overturn its reproductive healthcare policy.

The Senator claims that he is not harming military readiness, but he is dangerously wrong. The Secretary of Defense and every member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have condemned his hold and described the damage he is inflicting on U.S. military leadership. Seven retired Secretaries of Defense—both Republican and Democratic—have condemned the Senator's actions and urged him to drop his hold.

Just yesterday, the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force rebuked the Alabama Senator and the damage he is causing to our military readiness. As they wrote, the Senator “has prevented the Defense Department from placing almost 300 of our most experienced and battle-tested leaders into critical posts around the world.”

Many of our most important officers are being blocked. Indeed, if you look at the photo behind me, you will see what visitors to the Pentagon encounter. Instead of a consistent group of leaders, there are notable absences. And eventually, if the Senator persists, this whole board will be full of blank spaces. We will have no effective military leadership. Three of these faces, as you noticed, are blank because of the Senator's hold. For the first time in history, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are without top leaders.

He is blocking the confirmation of Gen. Eric Smith, the next Commandant of the Marine Corps, and GEN Randy George, the next Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. Next week we will hold confirmation hearings for ADM Lisa Franchetti—the first female officer to be the Chief of Naval Operations—and Gen. David Allvin, the next Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The Senator has indicated he will block both of these nominations.

At the end of September, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, is legally required to retire. The Joint Chiefs consists of eight officers: the Chairman, the Vice Chair-

man, and the Service Chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and the Chief of the National Guard Bureau. If the Senator does not come to his senses before General Milley retires, fully half of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—our Nation's most vital military leaders—will be empty.

I am concerned that the Senator does not appreciate the gravity of this situation. These positions cannot simply be filled by other officers. They can only be temporarily covered by their Vice Chiefs, who must also continue to cover their own jobs, and at this level, those jobs are 24/7. Having two 24/7 jobs is quite demanding.

These are extraordinary, challenging times, and the jobs of our Vice Chiefs are just as important and challenging as those of Chief of Staff or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Senator is flirting with disaster to force these officers to fill two enormous jobs simultaneously.

Dozens of key commanders are also being held. The Senator is blocking the nomination of the commander of Cyber Command, who also serves as the Director of the National Security Agency. We all know how much cyber has become an integral and perhaps decisive part of our military strategy. And to leave that position blank is to leave ourselves vulnerable to the cyber operations of multiple adversaries and criminal gangs and to leave us in a void when it comes to improving and looking forward for years ahead with vision to what we must do to be not only competitive but to be dominant in the cyber space.

He is blocking the nomination of the next commander of the Navy's 7th Fleet, the largest of the Navy's forward-deployed fleets, which has responsibility for the Indo-Pacific. And, again, I hear so many times my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, but particularly from the other side, arguing about how we have to do more to protect Taiwan; we have to do more to resist Chinese incursions. One thing you don't want to do is have an ad hoc arrangement in command of this fleet, and that is exactly what we have.

He is blocking the nomination of the next commander of the Navy's 5th Fleet, responsible for our naval forces in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Arabian Sea—critical, critical points.

And particularly, again, with my colleagues railing with good cause against the Iranians, if we do not have competent, consistent, confirmed leadership in that area of the world, then we are running the risk of giving an advantage to the Iranians and a disadvantage to the United States and its allies.

He is blocking the nomination of the next U.S. Military Representative to NATO, who is the senior uniformed representative to NATO, during a time when NATO continues to provide critical support to Ukraine in its war against Russia and as NATO itself is expanding to counter the threats posed by Russia.

When I traveled to Europe last month, I met with the leaders of the Security Assistance Group-Ukraine, or SAG-U, a newly established command dedicated to coordinating, tracking, and expediting security assistance to Ukraine. During my visit, I saw firsthand the tremendous job our forces are doing to train and equip the Ukrainians. However, I was disappointed to learn that the deputy commander of the SAG-U is being blocked from promotion by the Senator from Alabama. Not having a confirmed deputy for SAG-U during this highly complex and consequential situation is simply unacceptable. We are trying to assist the Ukrainians in defending their freedom but, more importantly, to send a signal throughout the entire world that autocracies will be defeated by democracies. And if that message is not successful, then you will see problems not just in Europe, which will become increasingly more dominated by Putin, but you will see it across the globe. In China, particularly, their lesson will be, if you just last long enough and let the divisions within the United States take hold, you will succeed.

Of the 852 general and flag officers in our military, we expect that 650 of them will need to pass through the Senate for promotion or reassignment by the end of this year. An additional 110 officers will be forced to perform two jobs simultaneously or will be assigned to a temporary position as a result of the Senator's holds. Thus, nearly 90 percent of our general and flag officers—our most senior military leaders—will be affected by the Senator from Alabama's holds.

He has achieved what America's enemies could only dream of: instability in the ranks of our military leadership.

The U.S. military is one of the finest meritocracies in the world. Our servicemembers swear an oath to the Constitution rather than a party or leader, and they can be confident that with hard work, skill, and character, they will be successful in their military careers.

Rising to the top of this meritocracy—to the rank of general or admiral—demands remarkable talent and leadership and a dedication to the military ethos of “service above self.” America's senior officers place faith in Congress to do its job to approve their promotions, based on merit, in a timely manner.

For the Senator from Alabama to deny these officers their hard-won, merit-based promotions for his own political gain is simply disgraceful.

After 6 months, it seems that neither reason nor any factor will sway him. Indeed, some of my colleagues, I believe, on the other side have offered him compromises and off-ramps, but he has rejected each one.

The Senate Armed Services Committee even considered legislation to repeal the Department's policy. That legislation was rejected by the committee. Right here on the floor, the

Senator had the opportunity to vote on an amendment to the NDAA that would have repealed the policy. He rejected that choice. Instead, he continues to change his demands.

At this point, one has to wonder if the Senator actually wants to achieve his demands or if he just wants to stay in the spotlight. Indeed, as he recently admitted to a rightwing podcaster, “I don't care if they promote anybody to be honest with you.”

In the same way that military officers are expected to hold each other to account, my Republican colleagues must challenge their colleague to do what they know is right. They must say publicly what they admit in private: His behavior is damaging to our national security.

Many Senate Republicans know what it means to serve in uniform. I have traveled to combat zones around the world with them, and I know they understand what our servicemembers need from Congress to achieve the missions we ask of them. It is now time for Republicans to do what is right and necessary and end this blockade.

Specifically, the Senator claims that the Pentagon's reproductive healthcare policy is illegal. He is wrong.

The Department of Justice examined the Pentagon's policy and found it to be entirely legal, consistent with 40 years of precedent through both Republican and Democratic administrations. No lawsuits have been filed against the Department because no lawyer seriously believes the policy is illegal.

Further, the Secretary of Defense and every uniformed, apolitical member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have endorsed the policy as appropriate and necessary, particularly in regard to readiness. Every institution in this country that is responsible for overseeing the Pentagon has reviewed its policy, upheld its legality, and disproved arguments to the contrary.

Finally, and most disturbing, the Senator claims that he is not harming military families. He knows that isn't true. Hundreds of military families, children, and spouses cannot move to new duty stations, enroll in new schools, or seek new jobs. Hundreds of officers are facing genuine financial stress because they have had to relocate their families or unexpectedly maintain two residences.

The Armed Services Committee has heard from many of these families. Like most other American families, August is the month when many military families move, begin new schools, and join sports teams. Regrettably, because of the Senator's hold, we know of many military students who have been disenrolled from their current schools in anticipation of a move but now cannot be enrolled in new schools. We know of many children who have already missed out on the fall sports season. We know of families who paid out of pocket to move duty stations in hopes of reuniting with their servicemember whenever the Senator sees rea-

son. We know families who are losing literally thousands of dollars a month because the officers are assuming the duties of higher positions without holding higher ranks.

Every single day the Senator continues his hold, military families suffer. He is punishing those who least deserve it. Their sacrifice and service to the Nation should be rewarded, not punished.

As the retired Secretaries of Defense wrote—and again, these are seven Secretaries of Defense from Republican and Democratic administrations—“We can think of few things as irresponsible and uncaring as harming the families of those who serve our Nation in uniform.”

The Senator from Alabama knows that he has lost his argument on the merits. He knows the policy he disagrees with is legal. He knows he has legislative tools available to try and change the policy, but he also knows he likely does not have the votes to prevail. And so he has targeted the men and women of the military itself and their families. He knows the damage he is causing to our military families and our national security. It appears he simply does not care.

The question for the Senate—really, for my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—is: How long will a single Senator be allowed to cause such damage to our military? When will my colleagues on the other side of the aisle speak out and act? Republicans must call out their colleague and end this shameful charade.

Mr. President, if this continues, most of these pictures will be blank. General Brown might remain as Chief of Staff of the Air Force, but he will not be Chairman. General Milley will depart. We can't tolerate this. Again, we all have to come together for the men and women who serve and their families.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING KEITH STOKES

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Keith Stokes, a dear friend, a beloved Arkansan, and a trusted aide.

On August 18, Keith tragically passed away from a heart attack at age 59. He is in our prayers, along with the entire Stokes family, especially his wife Julie and his children Chip and Abbey.

Keith wasn't only a colleague, though; he was a close family friend. The Cottons lived just up the road from the Stokeses in Yell County. Julie and my mother worked together in middle school for years. Keith was a pillar of the Dardanelle community, from the