

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

school board to the hospital board, to mentoring young athletes, to cooking meals for teachers, charities, and even the Sand Lizard football press box, my father included.

A year into my term in the Senate, I heard that Keith was looking for a new job. I jumped at the opportunity to hire him as an agricultural adviser. I knew how much Keith cared about Arkansas farmers, foresters, and ranchers. It was one of the best decisions I made as a Senator.

Keith understood the Arkansans who lace up their boots in the morning and work with their hands, who aren't afraid to get dirty to get the job done—the men and women who shower at the end of the day, not at the beginning of it. He understood them because he was one of them. He lived on a farm. He worked in the pork and forestry industry for years, and he cultivated an encyclopedic knowledge of everything, from the crops in the fields to the beetles in the forest, to animals in the hunting season. He knew everything about Arkansas, from the soil to the people.

Keith could go into a town and within hours learn what was worrying the farmers at the feed store and exciting the cattlemen at the sale barn.

He had a way of making everyone he met feel important. Even if he was just getting a quick breakfast in a diner, he made sure to say something nice to the waitress and make the person behind the counter laugh. Keith knew kindness cost nothing, but its value is priceless.

He was often the smartest man in the room, even if he didn't admit it and usually tried to conceal it. He never bragged or drew attention from others. He was always eager to listen and give credit.

Ronald Reagan had a famous small plaque on his desk in the Oval Office that read:

There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit.

Few live by that creed. Keith embodied it.

Keith was a trusted adviser and a steady hand during difficult times. At 59, he was a bit older than most congressional aides, but his extra years of experience were on full display when it was needed most. He navigated the high-stress situations with poise, humor, and calmness.

When a tornado devastated the town of Wynne this spring, Keith was among the first people on the ground. He remained in constant communication with the mayor and other State and local officials. Anytime someone had a question about whom to contact or what was going on or what the locals needed, we knew that we could just ask Keith.

He was great at his job. But that wasn't the most important thing about Keith or the people who worked with him. To work with Keith was like being adopted into the Stokes family.

Some aides got a second father while others got a fifth grandparent.

Keith's coworkers would often get a text message in the morning from Keith just checking in, saying hello. If you didn't reply, you could be sure that he would follow up quickly, and the same thing if you were traveling overseas.

Each year, my aides crossed the State to have a Christmas party, and each year Keith would insist on barbecuing for the whole office, and each year he would cook too much and end up feeding much of the rest of the building too.

During COVID, one of Keith's coworkers had to cancel a planned wedding shower. As he drove across the State, he stopped for what he thought was an impromptu visit, only to find Keith organized a surprise wedding shower.

And for every parent in our office, Keith would get their kids' sizes and begin a one-man recruitment campaign to make them fans of the University of Arkansas. Many Razorback onesies, hats, and shirts made their way through our offices.

When one coworker lost her father and mentioned that she would miss talking to him on the phone each day, Keith began to call her every day, even on weekends. He only missed one call in 3 years. And when she was stuck in an ice storm without water and couldn't drive her car, Keith drove over 2 hours at night in the bad weather to deliver water and a smile.

When another coworker tragically lost a child, Keith was there in that time of loss to provide comfort and prayers.

When asked to describe Keith, his coworkers used words like "humble," "honest," "loving," "caring," "professional," "God-fearing," and "gentleman." One put it well when she said: They don't make them like Keith any more.

There is a reason that, when Senate staffers came to Arkansas to visit, they fought over who would get to ride in the car with Keith.

While his coworkers knew Keith as a beloved friend and colleague, most Arkansans knew Keith as the guy who raised Tusk. For those who don't know—and you all should; let's be honest—Tusk is the live mascot of the University of Arkansas. Other universities have easy, safe, cuddly mascots to raise, like the Oregon Beavers or the Georgia Bulldogs or the Minnesota Gophers—not Arkansas and not Keith. We have a razorback, a 300-pound wild boar with giant tusks and a well-deserved reputation for a bad attitude.

For that reason, the University of Arkansas had long settled for a, frankly, embarrassing little pig as a live mascot, which traveled to games on a small trailer with little fanfare. But about 25 years ago, some former University of Arkansas football players decided to get a real live razorback mascot. They turned to Keith, who had ex-

perience working hogs. They also asked for his help designing a large and impressive trailer so the new mascot could travel in style.

Keith took on the challenge with his usual enthusiasm, determination, and positive attitude. Ever since, Keith and his family have raised Tusk I through Tusk V, and I doubt any animals have ever been better treated or trained.

Keith devoted thousands of hours of his time to domesticate the Tusks so they could travel and safely interact with fans. Keith would have Tusk follow him around everywhere on the farm and even raised a baby razorback in his home to acclimate it to human company.

Keith was such a good handler that young fans could safely feed grapes to these giant boars. Risk takers could put an apple in their teeth, and Tusk would gently take it from their mouth—at risk, though, of getting some slobber on them.

Keith and Tusk became celebrities in our State. Arkansans from every walk of life enjoyed seeing Keith's truck and giant trailer with the Razorback logo and Tusk riding in the back.

The Stokes family saw it as their responsibility to the State to take care of Arkansas' prized mascot. Keith selflessly gave his time to Razorback fans, patiently answering their questions about Tusk, letting them play with Tusk, even handing out Tusk autographs.

If Keith heard you hadn't attended a Razorback game, well, he got you tickets. If he heard your kid had outgrown the last Razorback shirt he sent, a replacement would soon be on the way.

He showed the same kindness and generosity to strangers. When he heard that a young fan with Down syndrome was also a fan of Tusk, Keith went out of his way to be sure that he got to pet and feed Tusk.

One former Arkansas football player said "Keith Stokes was Tusk" and that Keith gave as much to the Razorbacks as any player or coach.

But as much as Keith loved his friends, our State, and the Arkansas Razorbacks, he loved his family most of all. Keith and Julie were inseparable and brightened each other's lives for 39 wonderful years of marriage. He was always so proud of his son Chip and his daughter Abbey. He joyfully welcomed his daughter-in-law Lori and son-in-law Tanner to the Stokes family. He walked Abbey down the aisle just this summer. And, of course, he adored his grandchildren Colt and Caroline, who called him George. He loved them all dearly, and they all loved him.

Keith was a truly extraordinary man. It is hard to believe that he had time to do all the things he did. Few people who lead full and long lives do as much good and spread as much joy as Keith Stokes did in his too-short 59 years with us.

I do have to say that Keith wasn't always right. One of his common jokes was that only six people would show up

for his funeral, and they would all be the pallbearers. Well, I was there, and, boy, was he wrong. It wasn't just six or a dozen or hundreds. More than 1,200 people came to mourn Keith's loss and pay their respects to his family.

And Keith departed the funeral as he would have wanted. Instead of a traditional hearse, Keith's bright "Arkansas red" casket rested in the bed of the truck he used to transport Tusk. Attendees were encouraged to wear red and, in accordance with his wishes, the Arkansas fight song took him to his final resting place. Keith's final act was, once again, to add a small smile to his friends' and family's faces, even in the depths of their sadness.

I was blessed to know Keith, and I know he is looking down from Heaven right now, blushing from all the attention. But he deserves it, and his family and friends down here deeply miss him.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

REMEMBERING BILL R. FULLER

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the life and to mourn the passing of a Kansan whom I was privileged to know for many years and to work with for many years—Bill R. Fuller. Mr. Fuller touched lives, the lives of everyone who knew him, and he left the world and our State a better place.

He is, in many ways, a traditional, typical Kansan. He was raised on a family farm in rural Ottawa County. Bill knew—as farmers do, as kids growing up on farms know—he knew the value of hard work, he knew the value of service, and he practiced that and he preached that.

He attended Miltonvale Rural High School and graduated in 1956. He was the chapter president of his FFA chapter. He participated in band and choir, was a member of the National Honor Society, and was a member of the mile relay team that set a new record at the K-State indoor meet.

Wheat harvest, like to many Kansans, was an important part of Bill's life, an important part of his early life. And during his childhood years, his family was selected to be part of the Harvest Brigade during World War II, agreeing to follow harvest across the country with Massey-Harris Model 21 new-technology harvesting machines—something we now call the combine.

After graduating from Kansas State University with a degree in agriculture, Bill moved his young family to Miltonvale to continue working on the family farm and to be a teacher.

Years later, he was elected in 1979 to serve in the Kansas House of Representatives, the Kansas Legislature. It is here that I first met him. He had a really close working relationship with

a Senator that I served with in the State senate—Senator Ross Doyen of Concordia. They served and worked together on issues and committees related to agriculture and livestock and where he—Bill Fuller—would later become its chairman.

After leaving the legislature, he took a position as assistant director of public affairs for the Kansas Farm Bureau. Bill was known and respected as a champion of agriculture in the halls of the Kansas statehouse and here in Congress. He was later appointed by President George W. Bush as the executive director of USDA Kansas Farm Service Agency, FSA, and there he supervised more than 500 employees, managed a \$41 million budget, and administered 30 programs for conservation, farm loans, and disaster relief and benefits to Kansas farmers and ranchers.

In 2007, he was selected to receive the Administrator's Honor Award. He served from March 12, 2001, and retired January 29—birth date of our State—in 2009. He served two full terms as FSA director.

Bill worked tirelessly to make government work better for farmers and ranchers across Kansas. And we felt it; we saw it; we enjoyed working with him on behalf of agriculture in Kansas.

Bill also took the time to mentor and inspire many young people to be involved in agriculture, both as a teacher and, later, with the Kansas Farm Bureau. Members of my staff have been students of Bill's, and I am grateful for his willingness to mentor and teach the next generation of farmers and those creating farm policy.

I know I will speak for many others when I say we will all miss his wisdom, his knowledge, but also his kindness and his caring. It is just a joy to be with him. In Kansas, we know the value of community, and we rely upon our neighbors in time of need. Bill demonstrated his connection with his neighborhood, with his community, as a member of the Lions Club, as a leader of his Lions Club, and his work as a volunteer in the rural fire department. Rural fire districts are very important in our State, and Bill understood the value and spent much of his free time repairing and constructing firefighting equipment.

Bill's life is an example of the difference that a person can make. I am glad he lived the life he lived. I am glad he made the difference that he made. And I know his legacy will live on in the agriculture community in the State that he loved. My prayers are with his wife Janice, his three children, and the entire Fuller family and all in Kansas who knew and loved him.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON JEFFERSON NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Jefferson nomination?

Mr. MORAN. 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 legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 88, nays 10, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 214 Ex.]

YEAS—88

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Peters
Barrasso	Graham	Reed
Bennet	Grassley	Ricketts
Blackburn	Hagerty	Risch
Blumenthal	Hassan	Romney
Boozman	Heinrich	Rosen
Britt	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Brown	Hirono	Rubio
Budd	Hoeben	Sanders
Cantwell	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Capito	Johnson	Schumer
Cardin	Kaine	Scott (SC)
Carper	Kelly	Shaheen
Casey	Kennedy	Sinema
Cassidy	King	Smith
Collins	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Coons	Lujan	Tester
Cornyn	Manchin	Thune
Cortez Masto	Markey	Tillis
Cotton	Marshall	Van Hollen
Cramer	McConnell	Vance
Crapo	Menendez	Warner
Cruz	Merkley	Warnock
Daines	Moran	Warren
Duckworth	Mullin	Welch
Durbin	Murkowski	Wicker
Ernst	Murphy	Wyden
Feinstein	Murray	Young
Fetterman	Ossoff	
Fischer	Padilla	

NAYS—10

Braun	Lummis	Sullivan
Hawley	Paul	Tuberville
Lankford	Schmitt	
Lee	Scott (FL)	

NOT VOTING—2

Booker	Whitehouse
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

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 the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 260, Gwynne A. Wilcox, of New York, to be a Member of the National Labor Relations Board for the term of five years expiring August 27, 2028. (Reappointment)

Charles E. Schumer, Bernard Sanders, Margaret Wood Hassan, Mark Kelly, Jack Reed, Ron Wyden, John W. Hickenlooper, Elizabeth Warren, Tammy Duckworth, Jeff Merkley, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mazie Hirono, Tina Smith, Edward J. Markey, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin.