

in a world in which this carnage continues.

This isn't an accident. It isn't bad luck. It is just a choice. It is just a choice we have made to put our kids in jeopardy every single day that they go to school—for kids who live in my neighborhood, in the south end of Hartford, put them in jeopardy every day when they walk to and from school. It is a choice that we make, and we could make a different choice.

So today is a day for me that I think about all of my friends in Sandy Hook, that I think back on that day, being there at the firehouse that was serving as the emergency response hub, being outside the room as parents were told that their children were lying dead on the floor of their elementary school.

But it is also a day in which I remember that we are not helpless. This is also a day in which I recommit myself to the notion that I, as a Member of the U.S. Senate, have something to contribute to the work necessary to make sure that kids never ever, ever face this fate again.

Today, on the 11th anniversary, I have a little bit more hope than I had on the 10th or the 9th or the 8th or the 7th or the 6th or the 5th or the 4th or the 2nd or the 1st anniversary.

Why? Because last year, Republicans and Democrats came together in this Senate in the wake of another mass school shooting, tragically reminiscent of Sandy Hook—the shooting in Uvalde, TX—and we acted. We put aside our political differences. We passed the first serious gun safety measure in 30 years. Even though forces outside of this building opposed it, we decided to come together because we thought we had an obligation to make this country safer, to try to make it a little bit less likely that a parent has to wake up on a morning of the anniversary of their child's death and try to figure out how to survive it. And why, this year, I feel more hopeful and more confident is because we now have data, we now have results in the wake of the passage of last year's legislation.

Right now, as we speak, we are tracking for there to be a 12-percent reduction in gun murders in this country from 2022 to 2023. That would be the biggest ever one-year reduction in gun murders on our lifetime.

What does that mean? It means that 8 or 10 fewer people are dying every day from gun violence. What does that mean? It means that 110, rather than 120, people are dying of gun violence. That is not an acceptable result, but it is proof of concept that when we change the laws to honor the death of so many innocents, we prevent the death of innocents in the future.

So today is a day when I relive that moment 11 years ago today. It is a day when I reach out to my friends in Sandy Hook to tell them how much of my heart is with them. But this year, on the 11th anniversary, it is a day in which I have confidence that if we con-

tinue to do the hard work of changing our gun laws to make it harder for dangerous people to have weapons and harder for anybody to have the most dangerous weapons—the kind of weapons that were used to kill these kids and teachers—that we can save lives.

In 1 year, we have seen the biggest drop in gun murders in our lifetime. It is a result of legislation that we passed, and it is a signal to us of what we can achieve in the future.

I thank my colleagues for what we did last year. I thank my colleagues for making it possible to show the families in Newtown and the victims of gun violence all across this country what is possible. And on the 11-year mark of that tragedy in Sandy Hook, I compel my friends in the Senate to do more.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that we begin the noon scheduled vote immediately.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The bill 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. 304, Jerry Edwards, Jr., of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana.

Richard J. Durbin, Peter Welch, Sheldon Whitehouse, Alex Padilla, Christopher A. Coons, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tina Smith, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard Blumenthal, Mazie Hirono, Chris Van Hollen, Michael F. Bennet, John W. Hickenlooper, Mark Kelly, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tim Kaine, Patty Murray.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Jerry Edwards, Jr., of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 66, nays 31, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 344 Ex.]

YEAS—66

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Brown	Hirono	Rounds
Butler	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Cantwell	Kaine	Sanders
Capito	Kelly	Schatz
Cardin	Kennedy	Schumer
Carper	King	Shaheen
Casey	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cassidy	Lujan	Smith
Collins	Manchin	Stabenow
Coons	Markey	Tester
Cornyn	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Moran	Warnock
Durbin	Murkowski	Warren
Ernst	Murphy	Welch
Fetterman	Murray	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Wicker
Graham	Padilla	Wyden
Grassley	Peters	Young

NAYS—31

Barrasso	Fischer	Ricketts
Blackburn	Hawley	Risch
Boozman	Hoeben	Schmitt
Braun	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Britt	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Budd	Lee	Sullivan
Cotton	Lummis	Thune
Cramer	Marshall	Tuberville
Crapo	Menendez	Vance
Cruz	Mullin	
Daines	Paul	

NOT VOTING—3

Blumenthal	Hagerty	Tillis
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THE PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. KING). On this vote, the yeas are 66, the nays are 31.

The motion is agreed to.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. PETERS). The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today to ask the Senate to confirm Ron Keohane to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

In this role, Mr. Keohane will be the principal adviser to the Secretary of Defense on all matters relating to the civilian and military personnel policies. He is extremely well-qualified for this role, previously serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy.

We need someone with Mr. Keohane's sense of experience to oversee and develop policies to support our servicemembers and their families, as well as to oversee our DOD schools. Strong leadership is also essential to address our military recruiting crisis.

I recently held a hearing in my subcommittee, which the Senator from North Carolina attended, that identified a long list of areas where our military services can continue to step up to inspire more young people to serve. They need someone like Mr. Keohane to make sure that the services actually follow through.

No one is disputing Mr. Keohane's qualifications. The Senate Armed Services Committee voted unanimously to advance his nomination. The only reason that Mr. Keohane's nomination has not already been approved is because

the Senator from North Carolina is willing to play politics with our national defense.

As we all know by now, the Senator from North Carolina disagrees with the Department of Defense's policy to help members of the military and their families access healthcare, specifically reproductive healthcare. Republican Senators claim they wanted a vote on DOD's policy on abortion; but just this week, they lost a vote to move forward toward overturning that policy. So if they can't get it on a straight-up vote, they are now blocking Mr. Keohane out of spite.

Last week, after months of undermining our national security, the Senator from Alabama backed down with nothing to show for his nearly yearlong blockade of promotions for hundreds of senior military officials—nothing to show, that is, except for the long-term damage he inflicted on our military personnel, on their families, and on our military readiness.

So now the Senator from North Carolina is stopping well-qualified nominees. He has no specific objection to this nominee. In fact, the Senator serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee that unanimously advanced Mr. Keohane's nomination. But the Senator from North Carolina now blocks the confirmation of Mr. Keohane.

We need leaders at the Department of Defense. Blocking these confirmations is corrosive to our national security.

Our Nation cannot continue to hold key national security officials hostage. We must put the safety and well-being of our servicemembers first. Our greatest strength as a nation is our people, and we need a confirmed leader like Mr. Keohane to make sure that our servicemembers have everything they need to succeed.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 109, Ronald T. Keohane, of New York, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; and that, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Reserving the right to object.

Mr. President, Mr. Keohane has been nominated to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, which is the senior leadership role in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This is the very office responsible for the Department of Defense's abortion travel policy.

I have been very clear with the Pentagon since the day that I placed a hold on Mr. Keohane that I would be happy to release it if Secretary Austin would rescind this abhorrent policy.

This policy has been politicized. It has politicized the military. It has harmed the institutional norms of our country.

Beyond the clear violation of basic morality, Congress never authorized the Department to use taxpayer funds to facilitate elective abortions. Now for the Biden administration to begin such a policy and use taxpayer resources to aid in the taking of unborn life, it defies the will of Congress. And it violates the spirit—if not the letter—of the law. Now taxpayers—many of whom have deeply held religious and moral objections to abortions—they are on the hook to facilitate the very abortions that they fundamentally oppose.

Worse yet, the Pentagon's stated reason for issuing the policy was that the Supreme Court Dobbs decision had "readiness, recruiting, and retention implications." This is total nonsense. The Pentagon was, and is still able, to provide any data or evidence to support their claim. For the administration to cling to this policy is just wrong.

At the end of the day, whether it was the hundreds of holds from my colleague from Alabama or my hold on Mr. Keohane, the reason to resolve and the power to resolve this situation, it begins and ends with the power of one man, and that is Secretary Lloyd Austin. With the stroke of a pen, Secretary Austin can fix this situation and end the impasse. It is time for him to do the right thing and to rescind the policy now.

I object.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I think what the Senator from North Carolina has just said is he doesn't like the abortion policy that the Department of Defense has adopted.

He is right. It is a new policy. It is a policy that was made necessary because an extremist Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade* with the Dobbs opinion and forced the military to have to decide how to deal with access to healthcare, access to abortions for people who were now involuntarily stationed in States where that care was no longer available.

The Senator, and all of the Republicans, were offered a vote on the Department of Defense's policy. And we voted just this week on a measure that would move toward that vote. And it failed. In other words, the Republicans who oppose this policy simply don't have the votes.

So instead of yielding to the will of the majority and letting this policy go through without a problem, instead, they play politics with the people who are trying to serve our Nation.

That Mr. Keohane gets caught in this—someone who is willing to serve our Nation and, most importantly, right now, to help our servicemembers live their best opportunities in the

military at a time when we are having recruiting challenges, is just putting politics ahead of the defense of the United States; it is putting politics ahead of our servicemembers and putting politics ahead of our servicemembers' families.

I think this is fundamentally wrong. They had a vote; they lost; they don't like it; and they are holding Mr. Keohane just out of spite.

I yield the floor.

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.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3533

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I want to talk a few minutes about seafood.

In many respects, at least in terms of our physical health, we are what we eat, and Americans have been eating a lot more seafood, which is good for you.

A lot of people don't know this. I didn't until I researched. Ninety-four percent of the seafood sold in the United States is imported—94 percent. That is a pretty extraordinary figure. Of the various types of seafood, shrimp represents the highest volume of imports of total edible fishery products.

Given that this seafood is imported, we have to be careful. For that reason, Congress created what we call the Seafood Import Monitoring Program. I am going to call it SIMP, S-I-M-P. So if I say "SIMP," you will know what I am talking about. SIMP's job is to make sure that these foreign imports are safe—safe to eat for the American people.

SIMP has jurisdiction over 13 different species groups and about—well, over 1,100 unique species. As I said, that includes shrimp and red snapper but almost all forms of seafood that are grown overseas, are produced overseas and imported—or exported, I should say, to the United States.

Now, this sounds simple, but it is not. SIMP's job is to ask questions. SIMP wants to know how the seafood was caught. SIMP wants to know the conditions under which the seafood was farmed, if it is a domestic product. If the seafood has been processed, SIMP wants to know how it was processed, what the final form was supposed to look like and what it actually does look like.

SIMP is supposed to keep us safe. Part of the way that SIMP keeps us safe is to inspect the product—not just look at the reporting requirements that the foreign producers give to SIMP but actually look at the product, whether it is the raw seafood or whether it is processed. SIMP inspects it.

In fiscal year 2020, SIMP—once again, the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, SIMP—and its auditing team