

Frankly, we all do. As I have pointed out from this desk numerous times, NATO faces a new axis of aggressors. China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are banding together. They are banding together to help Russia in its illegal invasion of Ukraine and they are banding together to pursue their designs on the free nations of this world.

This new axis poses a set of growing, interlocking strategic threats to the United States and our allies. In their own way, they have all been supporting Russia's illegal and unprovoked war on Ukraine.

And at this moment, I would have to pause and note the shameless and vicious Russian attack just earlier this week on a children's hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine.

This act by one of the most brutal dictators that has ever walked on the face of the Earth must go answered. It cannot go unanswered. And the very idea that the free nations of this world would seek to negotiate as peers with such a brutal war criminal as Vladimir Putin, to me, is unthinkable.

What in the world makes anyone think that this person who has violated every single principle of the organization for security and cooperation in Europe would negotiate in good faith and agree to that negotiation?

So we have a bleak situation, and it highlights NATO's importance. NATO was built for such a time as this. And in meeting with the leaders yesterday afternoon on the other end of this magnificent Capitol, I was heartened to hear that principle underscored.

After the devastation of two World Wars, NATO kept the peace by deterring the Soviet Union, and thank God we did. In the post-Cold War era, the alliance's support for Ukraine has demonstrated why NATO continues to be relevant.

Most NATO members have provided substantial military, economic, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. In short, the alliance celebrates its 75th birthday from a position of strength.

But we should not interpret NATO's accomplishments in the past as a license to let down our guard now. NATO's collective strength is only as strong as its members' individual commitments.

The truth is that our allies need to spend more on defense. We need, in the United States, to spend more on defense. It is a necessity. We need to build modern, capable militaries that can stand shoulder to shoulder together in a fight against this axis of aggressors.

We need the industrial might to match that force strength. In fact, most allies are meeting their obligations. This year, 23 out of 32 NATO countries will spend at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, up from only 7 out of 32 at the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We all learned a lesson at that moment 2½ years ago.

At this point, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks prior to the scheduled roll call.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WICKER. Thank you very much to my colleagues and to the Chair.

The world has grown too dangerous for the remaining NATO members not to meet the 2-percent mark. We all must make it a priority to increase defense spending. It is shocking and unacceptable that some allies, especially some capable ones, have yet to reach the 2-percent requirement that they agreed to.

Friends can speak candidly to one another, and so I will. Our neighbor to the north, Canada, is among this group, which has not and, for several years in the future, will not reach its need.

I was able to meet with Prime Minister Trudeau just a few moments ago and was glad to hear him say that an announcement will be made from our friends in Canada, perhaps later this week, about a new plan to more quickly reach that 2-percent goal. And I call on him to fulfill that statement that he made to us in private. We look forward to that, and we congratulate him on that effort.

NATO allies shouldn't outsource security to others. But this challenge presents an opportunity, one that adds to the mandate we give the incoming Secretary General. The transatlantic industrial base has withered, and we also need to attend to that. And that should be part of Secretary General Rutte's new platform.

In the past, our friends of freedom have had to follow our lead as we pursue a "peace through strength" agenda. Today, Europe has not kept pace as it should.

The United States has begun investing heavily to rebuild its arsenal of democracy, and we need to continue doing so. But we are still waiting for the dramatic increase in European 155-mm artillery production. We have yet to see the expanded lines of long-range cruise missiles such as the Storm Shadow and the Scout.

We have heard promises of a reinvigorated defense industrial base in Europe, but those assurances have yet to be fulfilled.

So as he assumes office, Secretary General Rutte should join us in recognizing the 2-percent commitment is, in truth, insufficient in light of Russia's newly mobilized war economy. There are additional issues standing in NATO's way. Its members remain mired in their own domestic issues. They must, of course, attend to these domestic concerns, but they also remain tangled up in an alliance bureaucracy that struggles with basic expansions in munitions production capacity.

These challenges are significant, but Mr. Rutte and the elected governments of our alliance must not abide the status quo. We should consider this situation unsustainable, and we should say so.

NATO asks its members for 2 percent; in my 21st Century Peace

Through Strength report, I recommended that we in the United States spend 5 percent of GDP on national defense—as did President Reagan. My plan is primarily designed to deter the Chinese Communist Party, but it also calls for the United States to deepen commitments to Europe.

For a few examples, I recommend permanently stationing an armored brigade combat team in Poland. My plan proposes increasing our rotational deployments in Eastern Europe. We should also improve intelligence sharing and communication among allied forces.

Time and again, the United States has learned, sometimes the hard way, we cannot walk away from Europe. Together, the transatlantic alliance represents half of the world's economy. There is simply no way to contain Beijing's economic aggression without working together closely.

Likewise, a stagnant U.S. military budget and halfhearted European defense spending cannot contain Russia's antagonism.

So thank you for your indulgence.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I understand we have colleagues here and we have a vote, but I wanted to ask unanimous consent for 2 minutes prior to the vote.

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

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, yesterday the FTC, in a 4-to-1 decision, took action in a report, an interim staff report, that show that we should all be very concerned about the activities of PBM middlemen. These are the basic people who are supposedly getting discounts for us on drug prices but then actually pocket those discounts.

The final report, which we should be receiving—this interim report we should be receiving today basically says that market concentration and vertical integration are just giving these PBMs too much market power. The point is, are we going to do anything to stop that market power and to help the public who need better transparency on price?

It also says that PBMs are engaging in self-preferencing, meaning that they are steering those rebates back to themselves, and it is affecting pharmacies. It is affecting pharmacies in my State where now in downtown Seattle, you don't have any 24-hour pharmacies anymore, and pharmacy deserts are starting to happen.

The report also shows that PBMs may be using their market shares to force independent pharmacies into unfair contracts—that is what you get when you get a concentration of a market, and then you can basically push other people out of the market—and that PBMs and manufacturers are entering into rebate agreements that may impair or block access to lower cost drugs.

I urge my colleagues to get this report, to review it. I urge our colleagues here to take action on these PBM middlemen. This is a bipartisan effort. My colleague Senator GRASSLEY and I have legislation outlawing some of these practices at the FTC; and our colleagues Senator CRAPO and Senator WYDEN also have legislation that would help us on PBMs. So I thank my colleagues.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

I also ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture vote today, Tuesday, July 9, be waived.

I further ask that if the cloture vote is invoked on the Meriweather nomination, the confirmation vote be at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Republican leader, and the cloture vote on the Willoughby nomination occur at 5:45 p.m. today.

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

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. 380, Patricia L. Lee, of South Carolina, to be a Member of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board for a term expiring October 18, 2027.

Charles E. Schumer, Jack Reed, Alex Padilla, Debbie Stabenow, Catherine Cortez Masto, Mark Kelly, Margaret Wood Hassan, Tammy Baldwin, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Richard Blumenthal, Jeanne Shaheen, Chris Van Hollen, Richard J. Durbin, Sheldon Whitehouse, John W. Hickenlooper, Peter Welch, Mark R. Warner, Christopher A. Coons.

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 Patricia L. Lee, of South Carolina, to be a Member of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board for a term expiring October 18, 2027, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), and the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 204 Ex.]

YEAS—55

Baldwin	Hassan	Romney
Bennet	Heinrich	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Butler	Kelly	Shaheen
Cantwell	King	Sinema
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Luján	Stabenow
Casey	Manchin	Tester
Collins	Markey	Van Hollen
Coons	Merkley	Warner
Cortez Masto	Murkowski	Warnock
Cramer	Murphy	Warren
Duckworth	Murray	Welch
Durbin	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Fetterman	Padilla	Wyden
Gillibrand	Peters	
Graham	Reed	

NAYS—41

Barrasso	Hagerty	Ricketts
Blackburn	Hawley	Risch
Boozman	Hoeben	Rounds
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Britt	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Budd	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Lankford	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lee	Thune
Cotton	Lummis	Tillis
Crapo	Marshall	Tuberville
Daines	McConnell	Vance
Ernst	Moran	Wicker
Fischer	Mullin	Young
Grassley	Paul	

NOT VOTING—4

Capito	Menendez
Cruz	Rubio

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). On this vote, the yeas are 55, the nays are 41.

The motion is agreed to.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:11 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. LUJÁN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

VOTE ON LEE NOMINATION

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), and the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT) would have voted “nay.”

The result was announced—yeas 54, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 205 Ex.]

YEAS—54

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hirono	Sanders
Brown	Kaine	Schatz
Butler	Kelly	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Sinema
Carper	Luján	Smith
Casey	Manchin	Stabenow
Collins	Markey	Tester
Coons	Merkley	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Murkowski	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Fetterman	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Graham	Peters	Wyden

NAYS—41

Barrasso	Grassley	Paul
Blackburn	Hagerty	Ricketts
Boozman	Hawley	Risch
Braun	Hoeben	Rounds
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Budd	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Capito	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cassidy	Lankford	Thune
Cornyn	Lee	Tillis
Cotton	Lummis	Tuberville
Crapo	Marshall	Vance
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young
Fischer	Mullin	

NOT VOTING—5

Cramer	Menendez	Scott (FL)
Cruz	Rubio	

The nomination was confirmed. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WELCH). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the 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 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. 536, Robin Michelle Meriweather, of Virginia, to be a Judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims for a term of fifteen years.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Peter Welch, Laphonza R. Butler, Richard Blumenthal, Alex Padilla, Tim Kaine, Christopher A. Coons, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Margaret Wood Hassan, Sheldon Whitehouse, Gary C. Peters, Catherine Cortez Masto, Jeanne Shaheen, Tammy Duckworth, Tina Smith, Chris Van Hollen.

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 Robin Michelle Meriweather, of Virginia, to be a Judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims for a term of fifteen years, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.