

played some small part in inspiring our current Governor into public service.

Now as the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Mike will lead and strengthen our important diplomatic relationship with Israel with courage and conviction.

Upon selecting Mike for this critical role, President Trump said:

Mike will work tirelessly to bring peace in the Middle East.

I couldn't agree more.

Mike has been a lifelong friend of Israel's and an ardent supporter and defender of Israel's right to exist.

In 1973, Mike made his first trip to Israel as a recent high school graduate. The experience of visiting the Biblical sites at the center of history had such a profound impact on 17-year-old Mike Huckabee that he would go on to lead tens of thousands of people on similarly life-changing visits. Over the course of approximately 100 trips since 1981, Mike developed deep friendships with the people of Israel—Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike.

Mike spent his career leading fellow Christians on journeys of faith, Arkansans toward a brighter future, and pilgrims on voyages of discovery. I am confident that he will lead the United States' relationship with Israel on a path toward peace and prosperity for both of our peoples.

I urge my Senate colleagues to support his nomination and approve his nomination swiftly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I have come here today in support of President Trump's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Gov. Mike Huckabee, who was reported out of our Foreign Relations Committee recently.

For years, the previous administration wrung its hands and withheld American support for Israel in the wake of the horrendous, awful October 7 terror attack by Hamas. Despite this, Israel had the courage to confront Iran, Hamas, and its other proxies, and it has decimated them.

Now, thanks to President Trump's negotiations and Israel's courage, Iran is at its weakest point in decades and hostages are returning home.

Israel is one of America's greatest allies, a bastion of freedom in the Middle East, and our closest partner in countering Iran's destabilizing efforts in the region.

To execute on President Trump's ironclad support of Israel, we urgently need a qualified ambassador in the region. I have no doubt Governor Huckabee is that person, and he will work alongside President Trump and Secretary Rubio and our friends in Israel to bring peace to a turbulent region and ensure both American and Israeli hostages are brought home from the clutches of Hamas.

The other countries in the region, our Arab allies, our Arab friends, are desperate to see peace in the region.

They want it as badly as anyone else does.

I urge all of my colleagues to support Governor Huckabee and to fill this important national security position.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Atkins nomination.

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

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we immediately proceed to the rollcall vote.

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 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. 61, of Paul Atkins, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Securities and Exchange Commission for the remainder of the term expiring June 5, 2026.

John Thune, John Barrasso, Cindy Hyde-Smith, John R. Curtis, Rick Scott of Florida, Bernie Moreno, Pete Ricketts, Eric Schmitt, Jon A. Husted, Roger Marshall, Jim Justice, Tommy Tuberville, Bill Hagerty, Joni Ernst, James E. Risch, Marsha Blackburn, Tim Sheehy.

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 Paul Atkins, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Securities and Exchange Commission for the remainder of the term expiring June 5, 2026, 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.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN) and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 51, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 200 Ex.]

YEAS—51

Banks	Capito	Crapo
Barrasso	Cassidy	Cruz
Blackburn	Collins	Curtis
Boozman	Cornyn	Daines
Britt	Cotton	Ernst
Budd	Cramer	Fischer

Graham	Lee	Risch
Grassley	Lummis	Rounds
Hagerty	Marshall	Schmitt
Hawley	McConnell	Scott (FL)
Hoeben	McCormick	Scott (SC)
Husted	Moody	Sheehy
Hyde-Smith	Moran	Sullivan
Johnson	Moreno	Tillis
Justice	Murkowski	Tuberville
Kennedy	Paul	Wicker
Lankford	Ricketts	Young

NAYS—45

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Reed
Baldwin	Hirono	Rosen
Bennet	Kaine	Schatz
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schiff
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schumer
Booker	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Coons	Lujan	Smith
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Fetterman	Murray	Warren
Gallego	Ossoff	Welch
Hassan	Padilla	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Peters	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Gillibrand	Sanders
Mullin	Thune

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). On this vote, the yeas are 51, the nays are 45.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Paul Atkins, of Virginia, to be a Member of the Securities and Exchange Commission for the remainder of the term expiring June 5, 2026.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the Huckabee nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Mike Huckabee, of Arkansas, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the State of Israel.

VOTE ON HUCKABEE NOMINATION

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

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, 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 bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN).

The result was announced—yeas 53, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 201 Ex.]

YEAS—53

Banks	Collins	Ernst
Barrasso	Cornyn	Fetterman
Blackburn	Cotton	Fischer
Boozman	Cramer	Graham
Britt	Crapo	Grassley
Budd	Cruz	Hagerty
Capito	Curtis	Hawley
Cassidy	Daines	Hoeben

Husted	McCormick	Scott (FL)
Hyde-Smith	Moody	Scott (SC)
Johnson	Moran	Sheehy
Justice	Moreno	Sullivan
Kennedy	Murkowski	Thune
Lankford	Paul	Tillis
Lee	Ricketts	Tuberville
Lummis	Risch	Wicker
Marshall	Rounds	Young
McConnell	Schmitt	

NAYS—46

Alsobrooks	Hirono	Sanders
Baldwin	Kaine	Schatz
Bennet	Kelly	Schiff
Blumenthal	Kim	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	King	Shaheen
Booker	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Cantwell	Lujan	Smith
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Gallego	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden
Heinrich	Reed	
Hickenlooper	Rosen	

NOT VOTING—1

Mullin

The nomination was confirmed.

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

The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I am here today in the hope that our colleagues will join me in condemning actions taken by President Trump and Elon Musk that are devastating to the healthcare of our veterans, as well as their disability benefits under the PACT Act, and most especially, deeply harmful to mental health care and suicide prevention for veterans, and to engage in this call for action restoring the doctors, counselors, psychiatrists, all who are essential to veterans' healthcare and have lost their jobs—thousands of them.

The plain, staggering fact is that Musk and Trump are kneecapping the VA healthcare system at a time when the VA projects a 59-percent increase. That is right. In this fiscal year going to 2032, a 59-percent increase in inpatient and outpatient mental health care is projected.

Now, they have taken a wrecking ball to the VA in order to save money that then can be used for tax cuts going to people who need them least—the ultrawealthy, the billionaires and millionaires—at a time when veterans who need healthcare most will be deprived of it.

The reason is quite simply the staffing shortages that they have purposefully created—2,400 already; on the chopping block, another 83,000—without a plan or a strategy, admitted to us by the VA itself. They are making it up as they go along, but they know they want to slash and trash the VA workforce.

This kind of cruel, heartless, heart-breaking approach to the VA comes at a time when they already have 40,000 openings of exactly the kind of skilled

professionals that they are firing—40,000 openings, including 3,000 physician positions, 6,000 nurses, thousands of counselors, janitors, schedulers. And they are firing the very kind of people they are trying to recruit.

You would think that the Trump administration's top priority at the VA would be to bolster its mental health workforce at a time when 59-percent increase is projected, but they are doing just the opposite.

Since the beginning of this administration, there have been 2,400 employees unjustly and illegally terminated already, including Veterans Crisis Line employees. And the VA's newest staffing goal—that 83,000 number that I mentioned before—is going to be cutting employees at a time of ever-increasing demand, even in the short term.

All these cuts will do is to harm veterans. There is no elimination of waste or fraud or abuse. In every Agency and in every program, there is some waste, but the way to eliminate it is not to slash indiscriminately and draconian cuts as a way to do it.

While we wait for these 83,000 employees to be axed by Trump and Musk, we already see the impact. Employee assistance programs and mental health support contracts for the VA workforce have been canceled. Staff at vet centers—VA community-based counseling centers—have been fired. VA mental health staff are being forced to conduct counseling sessions in open cubicles, putting veterans' privacy at risk. World-class researchers performing research on mental health and substance abuse disorders among veterans have been terminated.

Most devastating of all, Veterans Crisis Line has seen a recent increase in call volume largely from veterans who were either terminated from the Federal workforce or who were concerned about losing their benefits or both, because at least a quarter up to a third or more of the Federal workforce are veterans, and they need that mental health care.

Amidst that flood of cruel actions taken by the administration, I am proud that my Democratic colleagues have been united in our resistance to these relentless attacks on veterans.

It is not only on mental health care, it is all healthcare. It is not only on healthcare, it is on the PACT Act for veterans who need that screening, benefits, care. And it is not a matter of eliminating waste because we know the way to eliminate waste is to go line by line, item by item carefully and thoughtfully—or as Al Lipphardt, the national commander of the VFW, told us—and he was describing a wound that he sustained while in combat during the Vietnam war:

I am thankful that the medics who treated me chose not to take my whole arm for the sake of efficiency. It took a trained eye, a skillful hand, and human intuition to fix me up and get me back in the fight. In my experience, those operating with a scalpel have a

better chance at saving limbs than those who operate with a chainsaw.

What we are seeing right now is the DOGE tech bros under Elon Musk operating with that famous chain saw that he has displayed, and they are doing it to the detriment of our veterans and to those who are being fired.

As Mr. Lipphardt said, these veterans are now being told their skills are no longer useful to the government. We are losing people who are genuinely committed to the mission and find a continued sense of purpose in what they do.

These dedicated, patriotic veterans—the ones who work at the VA, the ones who are served by the VA—are deeply disserved and damaged by these actions. As Mr. Lipphardt said, finally: We need to stop the bleeding. We need to, as he said, “apply pressure and stop the bleeding.”

I am joined on the Senate floor today by two of my colleagues who have been integral to this fight, Senator SANDERS and Senator DUCKWORTH, who will be calling for passage of their own resolutions aimed at reversing damage from the Trump/Musk attacks on veterans.

I hope that our votes on these resolutions send a message. I hope we will have unanimous support for my resolution and for theirs, that we will keep faith with our veterans, and we will leave none of them behind.

Madam President, first, I ask unanimous consent that the text of my resolution be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Whereas, on February 13, 2025, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Doug Collins, announced the termination of 1,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (in this preamble referred to as the “Department”);

Whereas, on February 24, 2025, Secretary Collins terminated an additional 1,400 employees of the Department;

Whereas, on March 4, 2025, a memorandum from the Department announced the objective of the Department to return to 2019 end-strength staffing numbers;

Whereas reduction in force will result in approximately 83,000 additional employees terminated from employment with the Department;

Whereas returning to 2019 staffing levels could mean firing approximately 18,000 nurses, 10 percent of the police force of the Department, 10,000 schedulers, and 30 percent of the staff of the Veterans Benefits Administration;

Whereas the Department projects a 59 percent increase in inpatient and outpatient mental health care demand from fiscal year 2022 to fiscal year 2032;

Whereas, even prior to such attacks on the workforce of the Department, the Department already suffered from critical mental health staffing shortages;

Whereas actions attacking and decimating the workforce of the Department will exacerbate such existing mental health staffing challenges and further jeopardize the mental health services veterans desperately need;

Whereas such actions are harming the trust of veterans in the Department and harming the ability of the Department to recruit and retain a mental health care workforce;