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| 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

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| Alsobrooks | Hirono | Sanders |
| Baldwin | Kaine | Schatz |
| Bennet | Kelly | Schiff |
| Blumenthal | Kim | Schumer |
| Blunt Rochester | King | Shaheen |
| Booker | Klobuchar | Slotkin |
| Cantwell | Luján | Smith |
| Coons | Markey | Van Hollen |
| Cortez Masto | Merkley | Warner |
| Duckworth | Murphy | Warneck |
| 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;

Whereas the mass terminations of employees of the Federal Government are damaging the mental health and economic security of veterans and their families; and

Whereas veterans and employees of the Department have expressed concerns regarding the effect of terminations and attacks on the mental health workforce already carried out by the Department, including—

(1) terminating employees of the Veterans Crisis Line established under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code;

(2) requiring employees of the Veterans Crisis Line to take calls in open cubicles intended for claims processors of the Veterans Benefits Administration;

(3) forcing mental health staff to conduct counseling sessions while in open cubicles;

(4) cutting or postponing suicide prevention training courses;

(5) terminating employees performing critical research at the Department on mental health and substance use disorders among veterans;

(6) cancelling employee assistance program and mental health support contracts for employees of the Department;

(7) terminating staff of Vet Centers (as defined in section 1712A(h) of title 38, United States Code); and

(8) an increase in call volume on the Veterans Crisis Line from veterans who were terminated from the Federal workforce, or who are concerned about losing their health care and benefits: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that—

(1) actions taken by President Trump and Elon Musk are negatively impacting mental health care and suicide prevention for veterans and should be condemned; and

(2) all mental health and suicide prevention efforts at the Department of Veterans Affairs should be fully staffed and resourced.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. As if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of my resolution, which is at the desk. Further, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, reserving the right to object, clearly, this is an important issue and one that has received attention by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and will continue to make certain that the decisions that are made by Department officials and by the administration are compatible with the well-being and best interests of those who served our Nation and are now veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs does need reform. The status quo is not acceptable. We need to make certain that every veteran, every member of our military who is now a veteran and seeks services in the Department of Veterans Affairs, that their needs are met.

It has been a longtime goal of mine to make certain that the promises that were made to those who served are promises that are kept. We know things aren't as they should be at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

All of us in this Senate have staff members who work on cases—what we call casework—to try to solve the challenges that a veteran meets in dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We all walk the streets of our home States. We have meetings and have conversations with those. And, often, it is a veteran who comes to tell us the story of what help they still need.

While I continue to believe that nearly everyone—most who work at the Department of Veterans Affairs, many of whom are veterans themselves, are working diligently to make sure their colleagues—veterans they shared that service with—are treated in a fashion that provides them with the best quality care and provides them with the benefits they have earned. Yet we know the system is still far from being able to accomplish that goal.

In fact, the Department of Veterans Affairs—so many times, we have reports from the inspector general, who outlined dramatic changes that need to be made and outlined instances in which the Department of Veterans Affairs has failed in significant ways in meeting the needs of those who served our Nation.

We have about 150-, 200,000 veterans in Kansas. They are a significant component of the nature of our State. They are respected and admired by their fellow Kansans. It is important for us to make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs is living up to its commitment. It is our job as Senators and it is our job as members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to do those things.

The Senator from Connecticut is right. We have provided the tools to the Department, new opportunities for veterans to be better served and served in more ways—combating suicide; making sure that mental health services are more readily available; providing services through telemedicine; and most recently—well, almost most recently—the PACT Act, which provided new and additional benefits, both healthcare and financial, to those who served in Southeast Asia and served in Iraq and Afghanistan in regard to toxic exposure; and even more recently than that, care for and support for caregivers, those who serve their loved ones, family members who help veterans throughout the day in their circumstances—the Elizabeth Dole Act.

So we are actively engaged in trying to make certain and hopefully making progress in making certain that more veterans receive better care at every opportunity. But the VA still needs a serious and thorough evaluation, and a component of that is workforce.

My goal is to make certain that the Department of Veterans Affairs evaluates how many people it needs to meet its mission and then adjusts accordingly, whether that is more or less, but to right-size the VA to make certain that those veterans who are in need of care, who deserve their benefits, are

well cared for and receive the care and compassion they deserve.

So I am going to offer a resolution myself, and in order to get to that point, I need to object to the Senator from Connecticut's resolution—his unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I want to respond very quickly by saying, first of all, I think we share a lot of goals, but we need action. The VA is in crisis impending right now, in real time, affecting real lives in real time, people who need mental health care now, who need the Veterans Crisis Line now, who need those counselors and psychiatrists now.

What I am asking is unanimous consent for a resolution that calls for restoring the VA workforce to meet that crisis and to doing right by our veterans. It shouldn't be partisan. It isn't partisan.

I have been critical of the VA under Democratic administrations, under General Shinseki when he was there and the delays were unacceptable, and nobody was more direct or critical than I was.

We can be bipartisan in our praise and in our criticism, but we need to stand up to the Musk-Trump slash-and-trash regime that has been so harmful to our veterans. And we can't go about it with business as usual. These draconian, indiscriminate cuts are doing harm to our veterans as we speak, and to avoid action is not only inappropriate, it is injustice to our Nation's heroes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I intend to ask for a unanimous consent agreement in regard to this issue of our care and the well-being of our veterans.

I would indicate that, to my knowledge, the Department of Veterans Affairs has 1,500 fewer employees today than it did at the beginning of the year.

While there is conversation and talk and, in fact, a stated goal about the sizing of the Department, those steps, either because they are not yet ready at the Department of Veterans Affairs to take those steps, the evaluations and understanding of what is necessary for the right-sizing of the workforce, haven't been completed or courts have put in place a stay against any reductions in the workforce. Today, we are 1,550 fewer employees at the Department than we were at the beginning of the year.

I would also remind my colleagues that in the last administration, late in the budget request by the Biden administration, there was a request for the reduction of 10,000 employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The goal that we would say in our sense of the Senate is that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should make