

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Emil Michael, of Florida, to be Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. CURTIS. Mr. President, having been a U.S. Senator for exactly 131 days, I am attempting to follow the advice of my great-grandmother. We are very proud of her. She was the first woman school board president of the Salt Lake City School District. Grandma Genevieve. We called her Nana. She said:

Listen first, speak when it matters, and let your actions carry the weight.

That may sound like it is radical in our social media-driven world here in DC, but I am committed to following her advice.

As I begin my service in the Senate, it matters to me that both what is said and what is done in this body will not just make noise but will actually make a difference for the citizens of the Nation.

Ten days ago, I invited the citizens of Utah and the Nation to join me in my preparation for this maiden floor speech today. I invited them and all of you to join me virtually and go places that speak to the heart and the soul of this Nation.

I visited four places where our bedrock strength and enduring principles are found and where I believe our bold future will begin. I have called it my "Think Before You Speak: A Pilgrimage to American Principles" tour.

I began my journey with a hike to Ensign Peak. It is a small hill just above the Salt Lake Valley. It is where my pioneer ancestors went to talk about pioneer values and visions. Just after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, my pioneer ancestors climbed that very peak. What they saw there wasn't what was but what would be.

They looked out over a barren desert—and I am talking not hardly a tree—in the Salt Lake Valley. They envisioned a home for faith and family and a crossroads not just for the West but for the world. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who is a pioneer descendant and a leader of the church, once reflected on that moment atop Ensign Peak. He said if a reporter had been there that July morning of 1847, they would have scoffed at the idea.

Imagine this: a ragtag group of exiles driven from their homes, standing in worn-out boots that they had walked 1,000 miles in, nearly 1,000 miles away from the nearest settlement. They were in an untried climate. They had never raised a crop there. They had not built a structure of any kind.

What were they thinking? Well, they didn't just dream. They came down from that peak and went to work.

As I stood at that summit, I had a strong wind against my face, and I

couldn't help but think of my pioneer ancestors, who faced those same winds with much heavier burdens. I saw them pushing forward with courage and faith, laying the foundation for the life we now enjoy.

From that hike, up there on the hill, I couldn't see beneath the green canopy. That same place where there was hardly a tree now had a green canopy. But even though I couldn't see it all, I knew the secret to Utah's success. And if you have been there, you know it too. It is the people—people known for their kindness, for their hard work, for their resilience, for their independence, and for their deep, abiding faith in God. The spirit that built this place is still alive, and it calls us all to be what our pioneer ancestors need us to be for the generations they saw.

We don't get everything right in Utah, but we built something remarkable: a strong economy, a fiscally responsible government, educational opportunities, and real upward mobility. Those aren't accidents. Washington could use a little more Ensign Peak thinking and a lot more pioneer doing.

My listening tour next took me to hallowed ground. When I visited Arlington National Cemetery, I found myself drawn to reading the names and the words on those white stones—Korea, World War I, World War II, Vietnam—and where names should have been: unknown, unknown, unknown; and occasionally, strangely, on the back of the markers, names like Ruth, Ethel, Alta, and the words "His Wife."

I paused, and I tried to hear the voices of those who rest in that sacred ground. What would they say to me, to us U.S. Senators, charged with safeguarding the Constitution and the freedom they gave their lives to defend?

Sometimes, those voices whispered gently, but sometimes they speak with striking clarity, and never, ever do they ask my political party. Those honored dead don't care if future generations have the latest gadgets or a life of ease, but they do care deeply that those generations have souls—souls with the strength forged by doing hard things; souls that cherish freedom, pursue peace, and carry the moral courage to stand for what is right.

They remind me that the Constitution was not just a clever document; it was and remains divinely inspired. President Ronald Reagan said:

Freedom is one of the deepest and noblest aspirations of the human spirit.

Those who rest beneath the white stones at Arlington didn't die just so Americans could live free. They died so that freedom could take root wherever the human spirit longs for it. Their legacy isn't just national; it is universal. Their sacrifice calls us to something higher.

Two headstones right next to each other caught my attention: William W. Kirby and William W. Kirby, Jr. The father had fought in World War I and lived 85 years. The son fought in World War II and died in combat, earning the Purple Heart, at age 20.

Then it hit me: family. I recognized that families fight for freedom. As Americans, we should all stand at Arlington as if we lost our son, our daughter, our wife, our friend—because we have. Our honored dead are indeed our brothers and sisters. So let's remember that we honor best those who have gone before by standing for freedom today.

I walked into the Holocaust Museum alone, but if you have been there, you know I wasn't alone; I was surrounded by thousands of young Americans. And I found myself wondering: Do they see what I see, or do they see without seeing and hear without understanding?

This place forces us to confront the darkest chapters of human history and ask whether we have really learned the lessons. As I walked the halls, I was struck by how easily a human life can be devalued. And I kept asking: How? How did so many participate? How did others stand by? How did some serve to enable? And how have so many already forgotten?

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks once identified both the problem and the solution when he warned:

When morality is outsourced to either the market or the state, society has no substance, only systems. And systems are not enough.

Today, we are outsourcing more than just governance. We are outsourcing responsibility. Congress outsources lawmaking to the executive branch. Communities outsource compassion to agencies. Parents outsource teaching values to institutions. Citizens outsource critical thinking to curated social media. And far too often, we outsource the truth itself to voices that might be loud but not always wise.

Rabbi Sacks also said:

Morality cannot be outsourced because it depends on each of us.

The Holocaust Museum reminds us that truth, like morality, must be studied, not streamed; learned, not assigned; and understood with the weight of history, not just the opinions of the moment.

The values our Nation needs—moral clarity, historical understanding, a commitment to peace—can't be manufactured by government or mass-produced by culture. They must be grown, like they always have been, in the cottage industries of family and communities.

For my fourth visit, I went to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, because I believe unity starts with understanding. Like many Americans, I wasn't raised with firsthand experiences of the injustices faced by Black Americans, Native Americans, and others who have endured the heavy burden of prejudice, but I have come to understand that listening and learning are not one-time acts. They require humility, honesty, and a lifetime commitment.

As I walked through the museum, I found myself thinking of and hearing

the voices of my dear friend and former colleague Congresswoman Mia Love. Mia broke barriers as the first Black Republican woman elected to Congress. She used her voice to lift and to call us all to be our better angel. And now she is one.

At her funeral, her children read a final message she had written to the Nation, words that deserve to be remembered. Mia wrote:

Some have forgotten the math of America. Whenever you divide, you diminish. The goodness and compassion of the American people is a multiplier that simply cannot be measured.

She reminded us that America's greatness doesn't come from uniformity; it comes from unity. At a time when division too often drives out decency, Mia's words offer a roadmap back to our shared purpose—not based on race, status, or party, but on the simple truth that we are all Americans.

My visit to the African American Museum also reaffirmed something I deeply believe: that as long as bigotry, discrimination, and unfair treatment still exist, we cannot claim to be united. To fully heal, somehow, America must learn the delicate dance of leaving things behind and, at the same time, never forgetting them. Easy to say, hard to do, and together we must do it.

For her courage and conviction, her voice, her vision for America, Mia absolutely belongs in the African American Museum and even more in the hearts of every American.

Well, thank you for joining me on that journey. We could spend days discussing the principles of each of these locations. If we did, I am afraid I would be on this floor longer than my good friend CORY BOOKER.

I do want to thank my Senate colleagues and so many citizens who have shared their lessons from these sacred places, and I want you to know your insight will guide my service.

Now, in the very short time I have had to travel my State since becoming a Senator, I have felt something clear and consistent: Citizens want President Trump to be successful. Citizens also want Congress to work, not just show up, not just argue. They want us to succeed.

I have said many times, I want both the President and this institution, the Senate, to be wildly successful. Sometimes that desire requires us to be wildly honest, something that I think we will all agree we could use a little more of in Washington, DC.

The way I see it, the odds of Congress delivering real results for the American people go up dramatically when we start telling each other the truth, not just behind closed doors but out in the open where the public can see it, what I believe is their right to know. Honest policy conversations on issues that are vital to the fundamental of our future matter more than ever.

I have spent most of my time in Congress focused on four major priorities

that I believe deserve a fresh and honest look from all of us in the Senate.

The first, energy. So let's be honest, it is time we talk more openly about the importance of clean energy. Consumers are asking for cleaner, more responsible energy choices. At the same time, we need to be realistic about the demands of powering a modern nation. Affordability matters. Reliability matters. And we must protect, not surrender, our energy independence.

President Trump has put America back on the right path when it comes to energy. I am also convinced that a healthy economy and a healthier environment are not mutually exclusive. I actually believe they are compatible and inseparable. The simple truth is, Americans want energy that is more affordable, reliable, and cleaner. They deserve honest, commonsense policies that deliver all three.

No. 2, our local communities. All right. My colleagues from the East, bear with me. It may be hard to grasp just how deeply Federal overreach affects daily life in Utah. Think about this. In some counties, over 90 percent of the land is owned and controlled not by local leaders in communities but by a distant Federal Government. That is not theoretical. It is daily life for most of us in the West.

I often say that the best environmentalists in the world are Utah's farmers and ranchers. By the way, they hate when I say that, but we live closest to the land. We know it; we care for it; and we depend on it. We don't want to be managed. We want to be trusted. We want stewardship, not control. I look forward to working with President Trump to restore local control and stewardship over the land we love.

No. 3, China. For decades, we have operated under the hope that bringing China to the economic table—even as they stole our intellectual property, cheated on labor practices, and manipulated trade—would somehow lead them toward democracy. Let's be honest. It hasn't. In fact, they have moved further away from our values.

This isn't just about trade or technology. It is about national security, economic freedom, and a commitment to the rule of law. We need fact-based policies with meaningful and measurable consequences. It is time to protect the American dream, not subsidize the Chinese one.

No. 4, debt and deficit. OK. Here is some wildly honest, equal-opportunity offender talk. We, and I mean we, Democrats and Republicans in this body, are not being honest with the American people when we pretend that Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare don't need reform. And we are equally dishonest when we weaponize fear, telling seniors and the most vulnerable that reform means abandonment. It doesn't. It never has.

If we act now, we can protect those most in need, preserve programs for future generations, and avoid the harsher consequences of doing nothing. It is

time to deliver sensible solutions and real results rather than just blame politics. Utahns understand thrift, accountability, and the value of doing hard things. It is time Congress caught up with that wisdom.

Here is our choice: We can have an honest conversation about these challenges now or we can be the ones who will have to deliver the devastating, draconian, harmful cuts that will inevitably come if we don't.

So, yes, I am convinced that honest conversations received with humility are what will make us truly successful in the U.S. Senate, and our success as a nation depends on each of us and all of us in this Chamber being unflinchingly honest and working together to make America wildly successful.

Now, hang in there. I am almost done. I have to point out one more thing. Fortunately, the Senate has provided each of us something to remind us of all the principles I have shared today. What is it? The tradition of awarding pins to the Members of the Senate began in 1965.

At first glance, these pins seem little more than a way for security to wave us through security. But as my colleague the senior Senator from Utah likes to joke, his pin is his "Sorry, Senator" pin.

When Senator LEE was first elected, he may have looked just a little bit more like a page than a Senator. Whenever security stopped him, he would simply point to his pin, and the guard would inevitably reply, "Sorry, Senator. Come on in."

Maybe it is my years in the jewelry business, but this little pin means much more. You know, it is crafted from 14-karat gold, the jeweler's favorite. Pure gold, though beautiful, is too soft. It bends under pressure, but 14-karat gold has the right balance: beauty with strength and practicality. It is a fitting symbol for our role here; strong, balanced, and practical.

Each morning as I fasten the pin to my jacket, the gold reminds me of the standard we should uphold. And the tiny diamond? In the industry, we call it a "canardly" diamond. Wait for it. That means you can hardly see it.

But even the smallest diamond reflects light. That sparkle reminds me daily of our responsibility to radiate the light of truth, to be guided not by partisan squabbles but by simple truth.

I encourage all of my colleagues to occasionally pause and examine your pin. At its heart, the official Senate seal, rich with symbolism—peace and strength, freedom protected by law, authority tempered by responsibility—all guided by the light of truth and the words "E Pluribus Unum" to remind us of unity.

And that familiar image, sticks bound together, which, by the way, it was my great-grandmother Genevieve Curtis—Nana—who established that bundle of sticks as the Curtis family's pioneer symbol, a reminder that we are stronger when bound together in unity.

I hope that each of us as individual Senators, and all of us collectively as the U.S. Senate, will strive to uphold the values reflected in this tiny yet powerful symbol, principles that have made Utah strong and America extraordinary.

Mr. President, with lessons learned from the principles found in important locations and sacred sites, let us commit to the values that unite us as a nation. To my colleagues and friends, I hope you see these principles not just in historic places but in the spaces you walk and work every day.

Together, we can pursue a vision for America that continues to be as bold and audacious as our beginning while delivering dignity, freedom, and opportunity for all.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, it is an honor to serve with my friend JOHN CURTIS. Sharon and I love John and his wife Sue. I have known them for a long time, and he is a dear friend.

As you can tell, anyone who knows him loves him. Anyone who doesn't know him, from watching his speech, can tell that he is a man of great intellect, great conviction, and also he is a really likable person. I feel so fortunate to work with him.

Welcome to the Senate, and congratulations on absolutely a fantastic maiden speech. I am relieved you decided not to try to break CORY BOOKER's record today. We will save that one for another day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Tennessee.

(The remarks of Mrs. BLACKBURN pertaining to the introduction of S. 1748 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, not since President Ford has any President been denied at least some of his nominees unanimous consent for confirmation at this point in their Presidency. That is why I come to the floor today to advocate for one nominee who is sorely needed—her name is Jessica Kramer—to be Assistant Administrator in the Office of Water at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Jess, as we all know her given her time working on the EPW Committee, is solid and as sharp as they come. She previously served as an environmental prosecutor and defense attorney for the Wisconsin Department of Justice, as a government affairs specialist for drinking water and wastewater associations, and as deputy secretary for regulatory programs at Florida's Department of Environmental Protection. She also served in the EPA's Office of Water in the first Trump administration. Her impeccable qualifications are part of

the reason she received a strong bipartisan vote out of the EPW Committee, a 15-to-4 vote, including by Ranking Member SHELDON WHITEHOUSE. Her background check has been available for a week.

There is no reason her nomination should be delayed any longer. President Trump deserves to have his qualified people at his side, and the American people deserve to have their votes mean something.

Therefore, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 89, Jessica Kramer to be an Assistant Administrator of the EPA; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, as the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, it is my understanding that there is a pretty longstanding tradition at the EPW that we get the background check before someone comes to the vote, as my distinguished friend from Wyoming has said.

I actually voted for this nominee, and I have every confidence that she will do a good job, but I don't believe that the background check is available. If I am mistaken about that, then we can review this some other time. But as far as I know, we do not have this nominee's background check. That is a matter that I think needs to be taken up with the FBI. You all run the FBI these days. If there is a delay getting this background check completed, that delay should be addressed at the FBI, where the delay has been caused, rather than breaking a committee precedent.

So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, it is my understanding that her background check is available and has been available for a week. I would ask the Senator from Rhode Island to check with the EPW Committee, where her background check should be available.

One way Americans lose trust in government is when their expectations for that government, as expressed through their votes, are not met. You know, we often talk about how elections have consequences.

I will say that I supported many of President Biden's nominees despite disagreeing with them vehemently. Unfortunately, my friends across the aisle are abusing our constitutional role of advice and consent in unfairly denying the American people the change they just voted for last November.

There is plenty of divisiveness in our Nation right now, but rallying behind someone as qualified and supported by so many Republican and Democratic Senators as Jessica Kramer should be something this body could do.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF ERIC MATTHEW UELAND

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to Eric Ueland's nomination to be Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget.

Congress charged the Deputy Director for Management with improving the performance, integrity, accountability, and transparency of the whole of government. This role is responsible for managing the personnel who work for the government, what the Federal Government purchases, and how the Federal Government manages its money.

Given his record and views, I have serious concerns about how Eric Ueland will carry out these responsibilities.

First, I am concerned by his willingness to break the law, especially when it comes to Congress's power of the purse. He supports the administration's efforts to illegally withhold funding that Congress has passed into law.

Mr. Ueland currently serves as the Acting Chief of Staff at the Office of Management and Budget, and he has helped freeze Federal funds and grants and loans across the government—illegal actions that shut off resources for police departments, hospitals, and workforce development agencies.

Like all of my colleagues in Congress, I swore an oath to uphold and follow the law set forth in our Constitution, which affirms that Congress—and Congress alone—is responsible for deciding how Federal funds are spent, not the President or members of his administration.

Eric Ueland has also been a staunch supporter of recklessly and indiscriminately shutting down Agencies and laying off employees, with no regard for how these actions might harm the government's ability to protect our national security or provide vital services to the American people. He refused to commit to even analyzing the impact that mass firings have had on the effectiveness of the Federal workforce, let alone acknowledging the harm government services will experience as a result of these actions.

Finally, Eric Ueland has made it clear that he will ignore conflicts of interest in the government's policy and contracting decisions, letting those in charge of government use it as a tool to enrich themselves.