

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 5.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Scott Bessent, of South Carolina, to be Secretary of the Treasury.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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. 5, Scott Bessent, of South Carolina, to be Secretary of the Treasury.

John Thune, John Kennedy, Deb Fischer, Kevin Cramer, Ashley Moody, Rick Scott of Florida, Tommy Tuberville, Marsha Blackburn, Jim Justice, Ted Budd, Roger Marshall, David McCormick, Mike Crapo, John Boozman, John Barrasso, Jon Husted, Bill Hagerty.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to resume legislative session.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

REMEMBERING DR. NANCY LEFTENANT-COLON

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on January 8, Dr. Nancy Leftenant-Colon, one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, and the first Black woman to serve in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps after its desegregation, passed away at the age of 104 in Amityville, NY.

Known affectionately by those who loved her as “Lefty,” Dr. Leftenant-Colon always dreamed of being a nurse. Her family came to New York from South Carolina during the Great Migration with virtually nothing in their pockets. But they worked hard to

make a living that provided Nancy and her siblings with opportunity.

Dr. Leftenant-Colon graduated in 1941 from New York’s Lincoln School of Nursing in the Bronx, the first school in the country to train Black women to become nurses. But when she tried to sign up for the Armed Forces, she was told that the military was not accepting Black nurses.

Nevertheless, Dr. Leftenant-Colon persevered. In January 1945, she volunteered and was accepted into the Army Nurse Corps as a Reservist. She was given the rank of second lieutenant, and her first assignment was to Lowell General Hospital, Fort Devens, MA, where she treated wounded soldiers of World War II. In 1946, Dr. Leftenant-Colon was assigned to the 332nd Station Medical Group, Lockbourne Army Air Base—now Rickenbacker Air Force Base—in Ohio. There, she teamed up with legendary flight surgeon and Tuskegee Airman Vance H. Marchbanks, Jr., where once they delivered and saved the life of a premature baby girl nobody thought would survive.

Dr. Leftenant-Colon made history becoming the first Black woman integrated into the regular Army Nurse Corps. She was assigned at Lockbourne Army Air Field when President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, abolishing segregation in the U.S. military.

In July 1948, Leftenant-Colon was granted regular status in the Army Nurse Corps. Four years later, she became a flight nurse with the U.S. Air Force. It was in the Air Force that she married Reserve Captain Bayard Colon, who passed away in 1972.

From 1953–1955, Major Leftenant-Colon was a flight nurse with the 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group, Tachikawa, Japan. During this time, she set up hospital wards in Japan and in active war zones. She was credited with saving many lives during the wars. She had to wait five years for her certification as a flight nurse. Major Leftenant-Colon went on to an assignment as a flight nurse, evacuating French Legionnaires from the Dien Bien Pu Province, Vietnam. She was aboard the first medical evacuation flight into the defeated French outpost in Dien Bien Phu. Her final assignment was to McGuire Air Force Base, NJ, where Major Leftenant-Colon retired as chief nurse in 1965.

Upon her retirement, Major Leftenant-Colon returned home, to her alma mater, Amityville High School, as the school nurse. She held that position from for 13 years. In 2018, Amityville High School authorities announced that a new media center was being constructed to commemorate the life and military service of Major Leftenant-Colon.

Dr. Nancy Leftenant-Colon was a great American, and an outstanding, committed U.S. Army nurse who overcame unfair barriers and prejudice to help change the course of history.

Here on the floor of the U.S. Senate, I extend my sincerest condolences to the family of Dr. Leftenant-Colon. We grieve for her passing. And we share in her family’s enormous pride at everything that was accomplished by this great New Yorker and great American.

CUBA

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, in his last week in office, President Biden removed Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, a designation imposed by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the final days of the first Trump administration. That designation has caused, directly and indirectly, great hardship for the Cuban people who are currently experiencing the worst poverty in a generation. At the same time, the designation, and the other sanctions imposed by the United States, have achieved none of the intended goals. Cuba remains a one-party state where political dissent is not tolerated.

President Biden rightly determined there is no evidence that Cuba sponsors international terrorism. That has been true for many years, and his decision was long overdue. But the reaction of those who have supported the terrorism designation was predictable. When asked if Cuba is a sponsor of terrorism, now-Secretary of State Rubio answered, “Without question.”

If the facts and the law supported that claim, I would agree. But the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation has become a transparently political determination, not one based on the facts or the law.

Under the law, countries determined by the Secretary of State to have “repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism” are designated as state sponsors. There is no ambiguity. The law explicitly refers to “international terrorism.” But even those who claim Cuba belongs on the list of state sponsors have failed to produce any evidence that it supports acts of international terrorism. Instead, they cite Cuba’s harboring of American fugitives from justice, none of whom were charged or convicted of international terrorism. They cite Cuba’s support for the Maduro government in Venezuela, which has not been designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. And they cite the role that Cuba has played, like Norway, as a facilitator of negotiations between the FARC and, more recently, the ELN and the Colombian Government, which has called for Cuba to be removed from the list.

There is plenty to dislike about the Cuban Government. It represses dissidents and mismanages its economy. It consistently blames the U.S. for its own failures. But there is plenty of blame to go around, and our policy of sanctions, isolation, and hostility has unquestionably contributed to the daily hardships suffered by the Cuban people.

It is therefore very disappointing that President Trump, in an executive order on his first day in office, redesignated Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. He was once again pressured to do so, as he was during his first term, by the same vocal minority who believe that by making the lives of the Cuban people as miserable as possible they will topple the government.

By doing so President Trump has made a mockery of the list of states that do sponsor international terrorism, like Iran and North Korea. It is not a list of pariah countries. It is not a list of countries whose governments violate human rights. Under the law, it is not even a list of countries that support domestic terrorism. Cuba does not belong on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, and by relisting Cuba, the President has ignored the law.

JUAN LOPEZ

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, 4 months ago I made a statement about the murder of Honduran indigenous environmental defender and anti-corruption activist Juan Lopez, on September 14, 2024, who at that time was the latest victim of an ongoing epidemic of vigilante violence in that country.

As I mentioned then, my office, like others in Congress, had received reports of recurring threats, attacks, arbitrary arrests, and assassinations of members of the Guapinol, Tocoa, and other communities in the Bajo Aguan region of Honduras. The crimes were intended to silence those who opposed the Los Pinares open-pit iron oxide mine and the Ecotek Thermoelectric Project in an indigenous reserve which threaten their livelihoods and the region's environment, and who challenged the companies and corrupt officials who profit from those projects.

Mr. Lopez, a winner of the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award in 2019, had been a victim of wrongful imprisonment, false prosecution, and had spoken out against corrupt officials in Tocoa.

His assassination was the latest in a pattern of similar killings that have not resulted in justice. Of the six other assassinations of members of the Guapinol water defenders, no one has been prosecuted or punished, nor for the murders of scores of other social activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in Honduras.

Last September, I urged the following steps to be taken immediately: Convene an international commission of experts to support the Honduran prosecutor's investigation, to ensure the investigation is credible, thorough, and impartial; Provide protection for human rights defenders at risk in the Bajo Aguan region; and investigate the abuses and corruption denounced by Juan Lopez and the pattern of violence against the Guapinol defenders.

In the months since Mr. Lopez was killed, the Honduran Government has said that it detained three people who

were responsible. That is encouraging. But government officials believe that the person who ordered the killing is still at large. Also, according to press reports, Honduran prosecutors formally accused company leaders and local government officials connected to the mine of illegally exploiting resources, abusing authority, and "environmental crimes" for mining in the indigenous reserve. Yet people living in the area say the mining hasn't stopped.

After the assassination in May 2016 of Berta Caceres, another Honduran indigenous leader who led protests against the construction of a hydroelectric dam and won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize, international pressure pushed the Honduran Government to arrest and prosecute one of the top officials of the construction company. But he is challenging his conviction, and it is widely believed that there may be others who were responsible and have not been charged.

Before and after her election in 2021, Honduran President Xiomara Castro pledged to combat corruption and impunity, including partnering with the United Nations to establish an international commission for this purpose. Her term ends in November 2025, when a new President will be elected in Honduras, yet there has been minimal progress toward establishing the promised commission. Corruption and impunity remain deeply entrenched in the Honduran public and private sectors.

Not only do those of us who care about justice in Honduras want to see all those responsible for the murders of Berta Caceres, Juan Lopez, and the other land and water defenders prosecuted and punished, we also want to be able to support a new Honduran commission against corruption and impunity. That would be a crucial, tangible way for President Castro to demonstrate that she not only replaced Juan Orlando Hernandez, her predecessor who was sentenced to 45 years in a U.S. prison for cocaine and weapons trafficking, but she also dismantled the criminal enterprise that enriched him, his brother, and their cronies. Otherwise, the Honduran people will continue to suffer from the spiraling poverty and violence and bear the costs and consequences of the complicity of yet another corrupt government in undermining the rule of law.

As I said last September, the people of the Bajo Aguan should not have to live in fear that powerful companies and corrupt officials will steal their land, pollute their rivers, and murder courageous leaders like Juan Lopez and Berta Caceres for peacefully defending the natural resources that are rightfully theirs.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING THE 2025 ARKANSAS AGRICULTURE HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate the newest inductees into the Arkansas Agriculture Hall of Fame for their efforts to carry on the Natural State's deep-rooted farming culture and the leadership each has demonstrated in their respective communities.

Arkansas' outsized impact on American agriculture is well-documented. That prominent role is largely the result of the hard work and expertise among our farmers, ranchers, and foresters, as well as entrepreneurs, scientists, educators, and all those who power our State's largest industry. Their dedication has continued to strengthen Arkansas agriculture even amid the tremendous challenges facing rural America and farming communities across the country right now.

This year's inductees represent individuals who support the agriculture community in different capacities.

Aubrey Blackmon of Houston, AR, grew his farm from one cow and calf to over 350 cattle at its peak. He has been involved with the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association for over 50 years and is known as the cattlemen's historian. After receiving the association's lifetime achievement award in 2023, it was renamed the "Aubrey Blackmon Lifetime Service Achievement Award."

Carl Brothers from Stuttgart has made significant contributions to Arkansas' rice production industry, including through policy efforts to create USDA marketing loans for rice farmers. His leadership at Riceland Foods over five decades helped it grow into the world's largest rice miller.

Over the course of three decades, Chuck Culver of Fayetteville served with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture and championed research to bolster farmers' ability to produce a safe, affordable, and abundant food supply. Culver also helped lead the establishment of the Dale Bumpers National Rice Research Center, as well as the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center in Little Rock and the National Agricultural Law Center in Fayetteville.

Mike Freeze of Little Rock has been a longtime champion of the aquaculture industry. Keo Fish Farms has been a catalyst for innovation in the industry under Mike's direction. He has advocated for fish farmers before the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee and served as president of the Arkansas chapter of the American Fisheries Society. Freeze was also appointed to the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and went on to serve as its chairman.

Albion, AR, resident Jack Reaper was a World War II veteran who built a diverse and commercially successful farming operation that included broilers and eggs, as well as beef cattle and