

Budd, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Roger Marshall, Eric Schmitt.

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 John Ratcliffe, of Texas, to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, 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 Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN: I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 72, nays 26, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 12 Leg.]

YEAS—72

Alsobrooks	Gillibrand	Moran
Banks	Graham	Moreno
Barrasso	Grassley	Mullin
Bennet	Hassan	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hawley	Paul
Booker	Hickenlooper	Peters
Boozman	Hoeven	Ricketts
Britt	Husted	Risch
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Rosen
Capito	Johnson	Rounds
Cassidy	Justice	Schmitt
Collins	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Coons	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Shaheen
Cotton	Kim	Sheehy
Cramer	King	Slotkin
Crapo	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cruz	Lankford	Thune
Curtis	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Lummis	Tuberville
Durbin	Marshall	Warner
Ernst	McConnell	Whitehouse
Fischer	McCormick	Wicker
Gallego	Moody	Young

NAYS—26

Baldwin	Markey	Schiff
Blumenthal	Merkley	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	Murphy	Smith
Cantwell	Murray	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Ossoff	Warnock
Duckworth	Padilla	Warren
Heinrich	Reed	Welch
Hirono	Sanders	Wyden
Lujan	Schatz	

NOT VOTING—2

Fetterman Hagerty

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 72, the nays are 26.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of John Ratcliffe, of Texas, to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

FIRST AMENDMENT

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, there is no right that is more sacred to Ameri-

cans than the First Amendment right to liberty of conscience, to liberty of worship, to liberty of free expression. These rights are more than words that are written on a piece of parchment; these rights are solemn commitments that Americans make to one another, commitments that undergird our society; that establish its moral foundation and basis; that testify to the world that we are a society built on liberty, we are a society built on conscience, we are a society built on the right of individuals to follow the call of God on their lives, to respond to that call as they feel led and as they see fit within, of course, the bounds of the law.

These rights—this foundational right to the liberty of conscience, the freedom of religious worship, the freedom to follow and respond to God—this is what establishes us most fundamentally as a free nation. This is what gives us our moral character as a nation, and it is what has defined us as a nation—the largest Christian Nation in the world—since our founding.

But I have to say, no administration in the history of this country has assaulted these rights more deliberately, more fervently, more grotesquely than the Biden administration. For 4 long years, this administration carried out one persecution after another against people of faith. It started during the COVID era with their shutdowns and lockdowns, when they targeted religious communities—evangelicals and Catholics and Orthodox Jews. It continued with their use of statutes to go after Christians and other religious believers who objected to abortion.

Mr. President, I want to draw attention today—I want to draw the attention of this body today, to draw the attention of the American people today—to the plight of just a few Americans, 20 or more Americans who are imprisoned even now because of the persecution of the Biden administration, because of their choice to violate that solemn pledge that Americans make to one another, because of their choice to target the First Amendment rights of law-abiding, freedom-loving, peaceful Americans.

I am talking about people like Mark Houck, Mark Houck from Pennsylvania—here he is with his family at mass—a man of faith, a man of family, a man of work and commitment and responsibility, whose crime—whose crime—according to the last administration, was to take one of his young sons to an abortion clinic and there to stand peacefully, to pray, to sing, to engage with those who wanted to talk about the alternatives to abortion.

What did Mark Houck do when a pro-abortionist came and shoved his young son? Mark Houck defended his son. For this, the Biden administration sent a SWAT team—an FBI SWAT team—to his door in the early morning hours. Why? Well, just to terrorize him, to terrorize these children, to send a message to religious believers and pro-lifers all over this country: Don't you

dare exercise your First Amendment rights. Don't you dare speak up in favor of life. Don't you dare take a stand.

They took his case all the way to trial, where, I am glad to report, he was swiftly acquitted, completely exonerated.

But other Americans have not been so fortunate. I think of Bevelyn Williams. Bevelyn is 33 years old. She is from Tennessee originally. She has a remarkable life story. She started a ministry that specializes in care for the homeless and for those who are living rough on America's streets. This follows from her own incredible personal transformation.

She dropped out of high school when she was just 15 years old. She had two abortions herself and was later arrested for money laundering. Then she met Jesus Christ, became a Christian, changed her life, decided to dedicate her life to the service of others, to dedicate her life to those like the homeless, who have nowhere to turn, to those on the streets who have nowhere to go, and, yes, to those mothers who, like she did at a young age, struggled with an unexpected pregnancy, those mothers who felt, as she did at a young age, that there was no hope.

So Bevelyn founded ministries that would reach out to these young women, that would serve these young women. And what did the Biden administration do to her because she had the temerity to exercise her First Amendment rights, because she went to an abortion clinic and there sang and prayed and worshipped, because she there told women who were coming into the clinic that there really were alternatives, that life didn't have to be this way? Because she told her own personal story, she was prosecuted—prosecuted—by a Federal court and sentenced to 41 months in prison. And what was her supposed crime? She leaned on a doorway in a manner that hurt the hand of a staff member. Let me say that again. She leaned on a doorway in a manner that hurt the hand of a staff member. For this, this amazing African-American woman was sentenced to 41 months in prison—41 months.

I think of Lauren Handy. She is 31 years old. She is from Alexandria, VA. Lauren was one of two individuals who, in 2022, discovered a box of 115 fetal remains here in Washington, DC, 115 pieces of remains of aborted babies, a number of them late-term abortions—not permitted to happen under Federal law—babies who had come to term and had been killed and whose remains had then been put into boxes and then discarded like so much common trash. They came to be known as the DC Five. Lauren helped discover them.

Lauren also dedicated her life, at even her young age, to serving mothers in need, to helping those who had no hope. And what was she given in return?

In August of 2023, she was prosecuted under the so-called FACE Act. She was

sentenced to 57 months in Federal prison—57 months, the longest prison sentence of anyone under this Federal statute ever.

I think of Jean Marshall, 77 years old, nurse, lifelong nurse from Boston, MA. In her thirties, she began a ministry using her nursing skills of reaching out to mothers who were dealing with unexpected pregnancies who did not know where to turn. She took to sidewalk counseling, going and volunteering her time, standing along the sidewalks outside of abortion clinics, peacefully talking to mothers who wanted to talk, helping them find resources, helping them find alternative medical care. She was prosecuted by this last administration for exercising her First Amendment rights for nothing more than trying to save the lives of unborn children, for calling out, for fulfilling her duty as a nurse to help those in need, for doing what she had been doing for 40 long years. This administration, the Biden administration, took her to court, prosecuted her, and sentenced her to 24 months in prison—24 months.

There is Jonathan Darnel, 42 years old, from Kentucky. He is a former U.S. Army officer. He is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He started out with a computer science degree and with a promising career in front of him where he could have made a lot of money, but he decided instead to go and wear the uniform of the United States and serve this country.

And when he was finished with his service honorably, he decided to go and try to provide resources for those in need, for those experiencing crisis, to try to rescue the innocent unborn and to help their mothers who were in a period of crisis, in need, and for this, for his service to this country, for his love for the innocent unborn and the helpless in our society, he was sentenced to 34 months in prison.

There is James Zastrow from my home State of Missouri, Columbia, MO. He is 27 years old. He was protesting peacefully outside of a Nashville clinic, alongside his sister and alongside others, again, offering the women who were there alternatives, asking them if they could help in any way. He was given 3 months in prison followed by 3 years of house arrest and probation.

And then there is Eva Edl. Eva is 89 years old. She is a survivor of a concentration camp in Eastern Europe. Her mother was kidnapped by the Soviets right after the Second World War, and then she and her siblings were sent to a communist concentration camp in Yugoslavia.

Amazingly, they endured, and the hope and faith that she found in that time led her to come to this country. It led her, once here, to begin to minister to women who were in crisis. It gave her a passion for the voiceless, a passion for the innocent, a passion for those who had no one to defend them, and none more than the innocent unborn.

And so she began years and years of faithful witness to the value of life, to the hope of life, and faithful work in trying to provide for mothers in crisis help and alternatives and medical care.

Here is what she was doing when she was arrested. She was singing hymns in a clinic hallway from a wheelchair. That is right, she was arrested for singing hymns in a clinic hallway from a wheelchair.

This concentration camp survivor, 89 years old, immigrant to this country, was put in prison—Federal prison—by the last administration because she sang hymns from a wheelchair.

I cannot begin to express—words do not capture the injustice of what this administration has done. And when you consider who the Biden administration saw fit—saw fit—to pardon while they were prosecuting and persecuting these good Americans, Joe Biden on his final days in office commuted the death sentence of one Jorge Avila Torrez, who was convicted of strangling a naval officer in her barracks while he was serving as a marine in Arlington. He pled guilty later to sexual assault and murder of Laura Hobbs age 8, of Krystal Tobias, age 9.

This is whom Joe Biden saw fit to give pardon to; this is whom he saw fit to waive the rule of law for; or there is Kaboni Savage, a Philadelphia drug lord, who was convicted of killing 12 people, including 4 children.

When you look at the disparity between those this last administration chose to reward and those it chose to persecute, it is hard not to feel anger. To be honest, it is hard not to feel rage. This is a grotesque abuse of the conscience of this country. This is a grotesque assault on the principles of this country, and that is why I have urged President Donald Trump to pardon all of these pro-life prisoners, unjustly persecuted, unjustly targeted, unjustly imprisoned by the corrupt Biden administration, and I do mean corrupt.

From a man who used his power illegitimately to pardon his own family, to pardon his own son, to excuse his own kin of wrongful, willful illegalities, who protected drug lords and killers and murderers and kingpins and yet sent concentration camp survivors to prison because they spoke up for life, it does not get morally worse than that, morally debased any more than that.

And so this is a time to turn the page. More than that, this is a time to right a wrong. President Trump can turn the chapter on this dark period of our history. He can write the wrongs this last administration perpetrated. He can begin to restore the requirements that the conscience of our country puts in front of us.

He can, again, renew the commitment that is found right there in our Constitution, that commitment to honor liberty of conscience, to honor the right to follow God, to live out our faith peaceably, which is exactly what these pro-life prisoners, still prisoners, were doing.

And so I urge him, I urge President Trump now from this floor to pardon these Americans unjustly persecuted, unjustly prosecuted, unjustly condemned. I urge him to pardon and to provide, once again, the moral clarity and moral leadership for which this country is known and to revive that moral clarity and moral leadership without which we cannot hope to lead the free world.

I yield the floor.

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

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it seems like a long time ago that we had the general election on November 5. It seems like a lot of water under the bridge, over the transom, whatever your metaphor might be, but we do know with clarity that this election was a referendum on the policies of the Biden administration and on the direction that they had chosen for the country.

And the vast majority of Americans believed, according to public opinion polls, that the country was heading in the wrong direction. And so if you think about it, one of the great strengths of democracy in our great Republic is when people feel like the country is heading in the wrong direction, they have the power to change it, and, indeed, they did by electing President Trump and Republican majorities in the House and Senate on November 5.

Over the last 4 years, we know that people in my State of Texas and across the country have been living under the burden of high prices and high interest rates, almost exclusively caused by reckless, excessive spending by the Federal Government.

I had a chance to question Russ Vought who will be the next Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and he confirmed what Milton Friedman told us a long time ago; that inflation is almost exclusively the consequence of excess Federal spending.

And when you think about the gasoline that the Biden administration poured on the fire of inflation and what it did to decrease the standard of living for people in my State and across the country, it is a tragedy.

And then the Federal Reserve, of course, doing their job, trying to figure out how do you damp down inflation using the tools that they have. They raise interest rates, and, of course, everything became more expensive from home mortgage to buying a car. If you are a farmer or rancher, the cost of the inputs into your next crop are higher because of the cost of borrowing.

So I couldn't be more excited about President Trump's administration and this new direction for the country, what he called a new golden age of prosperity.

So I was thrilled also to happen to meet with and get to know some of the people that I did not know in his Cabinet. Fortunately, the President wisely