

term and with Republicans in the majority in the House and the Senate to look at mandatory spending programs. Unfortunately, without bipartisan support—which we are, frankly, not going to get—we can't look at salvaging or saving Medicare and Social Security, but we can look at the hundreds of billions of dollars in mandatory spending programs that are on autopilot and that have been growing at 5, 6, 7, 8 percent a year. And surely we can find some savings on those mandatory spending programs.

Just like most families and most businesses, if you think about how much money you have coming in the door, you say: Well, we have got certain things that we need, we must have—food, shelter, and the like. You have other things, maybe, that you would like—maybe a new TV, a new car, whatever. And then you have things that you simply can't afford. That is what every family in America has to do. That is what every business has to do, but not the Federal Government. Well, it is about time that we do exactly that.

And, it is also important to get spending under control to ease the historically high inflation, which has robbed every man, woman, and child in America with a hidden tax, reducing their standard of living. That comes, in large part, from excessive Federal Government spending.

And then we talked about common-sense things, which I am really happy that Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency and President Trump have talked about, things like getting Federal employees back in the office in person. What a novel concept.

And, of course, reinstating work requirements for able-bodied adults to get them back in the workforce. We have a lot of means-tested programs, that means based on your income. But if you have an able-bodied individual who is capable of working and providing for their family, why should the taxpayers have to pick up the tab? So getting able-bodied men and women back in the workforce and off of these means-tested programs is really important.

There is no secret that the American people were profoundly disappointed at the Biden administration's handling of the U.S. economy, but I have no doubt that with President Trump, Howard Lutnick, Scott Bessent, and Russ Vought on President Trump's team, we will be in good shape to get the economy and our national security back on track and usher in not only a new age of American prosperity, but also to reestablish the sort of deterrence that will prevent the young men and women in this country from ever having to fight wars that could simply be prevented by reestablishing that deterrence.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF PETER HEGSETH

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to address some of my concerns about the qualifications of the President's nominee to lead the Department of Defense, Mr. Pete Hegseth.

Like many of my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, I left Mr. Hegseth's hearing, last week, with a number of unanswered questions and some real concerns about his qualifications and abilities to serve in the role of Secretary of Defense. Now, every single nominee for Secretary of Defense, from both Democrat and Republican administrations, has met with me and other members on both sides of the aisle on the committee before their confirmation hearings, and I voted for every one of those nominees, from both Democrat and Republican administrations—Secretaries Panetta, Hagel, Carter, Mattis, Esper, and Austin. I didn't always agree with their views or their policies, but I thought they all had the qualifications and the temperament to be the Secretary of Defense. So I supported their nominations.

But Mr. Hegseth chose not to meet with me or with any other Senate Democrat except the ranking member, JACK REED, and he broke with strong, longstanding tradition to ensure that our work on national security remains free from partisanship. And I think that is the important point. We are stronger as Senators, as a Congress, and as a nation if we are acting together. The committee, unfortunately, was not afforded the opportunity to ask a number of rounds of questions. So there were a number of questions about his views, particularly regarding foreign policy and military policy, that we did not get an answer to.

I have become the ranking member on the Foreign Relations Committee. So I am very concerned about the role of the United States in the world. I think the American people expect transparency regarding Mr. Hegseth's ability to stand by our allies and partners, to uphold international agreements, to abide by rules of engagement, and—the bottom line—to support the men and women in the military in a way that not only keeps us safe but that protects them as well. The almost 3 million men and women who serve our Nation in uniform deserve a Secretary of Defense who will not needlessly throw them in harm's way or seek to divide them with partisan politics.

So I would like to address a few issues now that we were not able to get to at the hearing because we were not able to ask more than one round of questions. I want to start with the role that our alliances and that our allies

and partners play in our own national security.

I believe—and we have seen it many times from the start of this Nation—that we are stronger and safer when we lead together with our allies, and we are fortunate because we have strong allies and partners. We don't see that coming from Vladimir Putin or from Xi in China, and we don't see it from the North Koreans or the Iranians. But the United States has strong allies who can stand with us.

The most important security agreement we have had, I think, any time in our Nation's history has been with NATO. NATO is a critical, indispensable part of our national security. Yet the President's nominee for Secretary of Defense wrote in his book "American Crusade" that NATO is a "relic" and that it "should be scrapped." Since his nomination, Mr. Hegseth has tried to walk back his opposition to one of our key international alliances, to NATO, and in advance policy questions from the committee, he calls NATO a "vital U.S. interest in defending Europe and American interests from Russia and Vladimir Putin." This sudden reversal is welcomed because I think it is very important that our Secretary of Defense understands how critical NATO is and that it is stronger now than it has been at any time since it was formed, probably.

We now have 32 members of NATO, but Mr. Hegseth's eleventh hour conversion to understanding the importance of our allies and partners raises questions about what he really believes. We asked in our questions for the record about NATO, and we didn't get much of a response.

Now, if I had had the opportunity, I would have also brought up Ukraine and Mr. Hegseth's head-spinning contradictions on this matter. Just as America's national security interests are not to be trifled with, neither should be our commitment to defending democracy and the international world order. Any inconsistency in that commitment—let me start that again because this is really important. Any inconsistency in our commitment to support our allies and partners, to support democracy around the world, to support the international world order is going to be seen and exploited by our adversaries.

So, again, I am puzzled as to how I should think about Mr. Hegseth's contradictory positions on a variety of national security and foreign policy issues.

For example, he was critical of the Biden administration, as have many of us been on both sides of the aisle in this Chamber, for not moving fast enough to aid Ukraine, but then he questioned the wisdom of sending any U.S. assistance to Ukraine at all.

In 2022, Mr. Hegseth called Vladimir Putin a "war criminal" and called for faster U.S. aid to Ukraine. Now he says the idea of Russia's launching a nuclear war is "overinflated" and plays

down the severity of the conflict as merely being Putin's "give me my shit back" war." Well, I don't think that our NATO allies—those in the Baltics and Poland and Eastern Europe—think about Vladimir Putin's nuclear ambitions as overinflated. They know the threat he poses to their countries and the world. To be flippant about the threat of nuclear war, I think, is beneath the Office of the Secretary of Defense, which will have to engage with our partners on a regular basis.

Now, I agree with President Trump that the American people want to see a resolution to this yearslong war, and I am sure that is true of the Ukrainians as well. But Mr. Hegseth has not, either in his hearing or in response to the questions that we submitted to him for the record, expanded on what the Department of Defense's role should be with respect to Ukraine, even though we have already invested \$66 billion in military assistance.

Again, I think it is very important that we stand by our ally Ukraine because of the message it sends not just to the Russians and Vladimir Putin but because of the message it sends to Xi in China, to the Iranians, to the North Koreans, and to anyone who is an adversary of the United States. If they think we are going to walk away from our allies, they are going to do everything they can to divide us.

On Afghanistan, Mr. Hegseth has also been inconsistent in his views of the President's foreign policy. Actually, he has been inconsistent in general on the President's foreign policies.

In the lead-up to the 2016 election, Mr. Hegseth was highly critical of then-Candidate Trump's foreign policy stances, particularly on Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Hegseth called Mr. Trump, who was a candidate at the time, "all bluster, very little substance" and an "armchair tough guy." He criticized then-Candidate Trump in 2015 for advocating for the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, but then he took the criticism back. He sharply criticized the 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal as did I, but he has failed to publicly comment on President Trump's 2020 deal with the Taliban, which is what set the date certain for withdrawal in 2021 that then the Biden administration was actually tied to.

Now, I agree. I agree that that withdrawal was not what I wanted to see—I didn't support it—but they were terms that President Trump, in his first term, set with the Taliban—terms that I thought gave away the store to the Taliban because there were no concessions from them on what we were to get for the United States. The Government of Afghanistan was not at the table when the terms were negotiated, and now we are seeing the fallout from that.

I know that no one is watching for gaps in U.S. national security policy more closely than President Xi and the People's Republic of China. Mr. Hegseth identifies China as our peer

competitor—something that I think all of us on the Armed Services Committee and probably everyone in this Chamber agrees with. But if Mr. Hegseth is so concerned about China, then he should realize that nothing will encourage President Xi's aggression more than seeing America abandon our allies and partners. Mr. Hegseth sees China's ambitions as a "fait accompli." Yet he doesn't seem to recognize that his own inconsistencies on all of these foreign policy positions could contribute to this.

A question I would like Mr. Hegseth to attempt to answer is, What message would it send to our adversaries if the United States ceases its support not just for Ukraine but for the international rules and norms that underpin the global order?

I am also concerned about that with respect to the conduct of conflict. In his book "The War on Warriors," Mr. Hegseth argued:

Our boys should not fight by rules written by dignified men in mahogany rooms 80 years ago. America should fight by its own rules.

Well, the rules that he is talking about are the Geneva Conventions, which established bare minimum protections against violence, torture, and inhumane treatment. They don't just protect those people who are fighting on the battlefield. They protect American soldiers.

During his hearing, Mr. Hegseth doubled down to say "restrictive rules of engagement have made it more difficult to defeat our enemies" and that it would be his priority that "lawyers aren't getting in the way."

Well, unfortunately and dangerously, this appears to be one of the few issues that Mr. Hegseth is consistent on. He has a documented history of supporting individuals who have violated military and international law by committing war crimes. These are individuals who were turned in not by our enemies but by members of their own units. They were convicted of crimes by our own military juries—individuals for whom Mr. Hegseth lobbied to get pardons.

I don't think we can afford to entrust the safety and success of our men and women in uniform to a man who would himself disregard the laws of armed conflict and leave American credibility and moral authority in tatters on the world stage.

While embracing officers convicted of war crimes, Mr. Hegseth has stated it is his intent to review all general officers currently serving in the Department of Defense. When asked if he would remove the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mr. Hegseth responded on the record that "all senior officers will be reviewed."

Let's just think about what that means. Subjecting our general officers and our military that is not politicized to a political litmus test is not only unprecedented; it is dangerous. It will convey to the American public that their leadership is political.

One of the most important roles of the Secretary of Defense is to seek out and consider open, honest, and direct military advice from the senior officers in charge of our forces. I don't know how Mr. Hegseth expects to receive open and honest advice from his commanders when he is advocating for a purge of anyone who disagrees with him.

I am also deeply troubled by the idea that Mr. Hegseth would act as a yes-man himself, putting his own personal political interests above the well-being of our military men and women.

At Mr. Hegseth's confirmation hearing, when asked what he would do if he received orders from President Trump that he knew to be illegal or unconstitutional, Mr. Hegseth wouldn't give a straight answer. All he could do was deny that President Trump was capable of giving an illegal order. And just for the record, to be clear, in his first term, President Trump did give an illegal order that then-Secretary Esper refused to follow, and for that, Secretary Esper was fired by the President.

So I am very concerned that Mr. Hegseth lacks the consistency and the moral clarity to lead the most combat-credible military in the world, and I am very disappointed that this body would put a nominee on the floor without the due process of advice and consent that the position of the Secretary of Defense deserves. Our men and women in uniform deserve better. Therefore, for the first time since I was elected to represent the people of New Hampshire in the U.S. Senate, I plan to vote against this nominee for Secretary of Defense.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, first, I want to commend Senator SHAHEEN for a typically thoughtful and compelling speech concerning the proposed nomination of Mr. Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense. I will follow by rising to express my opposition to Mr. Pete Hegseth's nomination to be Secretary of Defense.

Mr. Hegseth is the ninth Defense Secretary nominee I have considered as a member of the Armed Services Committee. I have voted in favor of all of his predecessors, including those in the first Trump administration. While some former Secretaries and I have disagreed politically, there was always an understanding that partisanship has no place when it comes to providing for our men and women in uniform.

Indeed, the weight of this position—Secretary of Defense—is enormous. The Secretary is responsible for leading a Department of 3½ million servicemembers and civilians; an annual budget of nearly \$900 billion; and hundreds of thousands of aircraft, ships, submarines, combat vehicles, satellites, and our nuclear arsenal. They also play a powerful role with allies, partners, and adversaries abroad, having to

meet, communicate, and coordinate with a whole range of individuals from many different ethnic groups and many different religious groups. That is part of the role of Secretary of Defense.

At a bare minimum, former Secretaries of Defense have had the experience, wisdom, and character to do that job. Mr. Hegseth, however, is simply not qualified to meet the overwhelming demands to be Secretary of Defense.

Last week, the Armed Services Committee held a nomination hearing for Mr. Hegseth. During the hearing, my colleagues and I raised a number of concerning reports about him. A variety of sources, including his own writings, implicate him with disregarding the laws of war, financial mismanagement, racist and sexist remarks about men and women in uniform, alcohol abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other troubling issues.

Instead of addressing these reports, many of which are documented and on the record, he dodged and deferred. He did not attempt to alleviate the fears my colleagues and I have that there is blackmail material and a pattern of abuse in his personal history that could be used by adversaries to try to influence him, to try to deflect him from his sworn obligations and duties to the United States, and, frankly, to embarrass him as Secretary of Defense.

These reports are unlike anything we have seen for a nominee of this importance, and if they are confirmed, they would undermine his ability to be an effective leader.

As I have said for months, it is critical that the FBI and the Trump transition team carry out an exhaustive background investigation on Mr. Hegseth. In that regard, I must say that I am extremely disappointed by the investigation process.

Before Mr. Hegseth's hearing, I was briefed by the transition team on the findings of the background check. I was alarmed that investigators had neglected to contact critical witnesses and whistleblowers, and I urged them to reopen the investigation.

During my experience on the Armed Services Committee, it is unprecedented that the FBI has returned to my office two more times—as recently as last night—to provide additional information on a nominee. Frankly, I still do not believe the background investigation is complete.

Last week, after the hearing, I was made aware that an individual with disturbing information about Mr. Hegseth has been interviewed by the FBI in December as part of the background investigation. However, their testimony was not adequately included in the briefing provided by the Trump transition team. As such, I asked this individual to recount to me directly the testimony that she had provided to the FBI. I was disturbed by what I received.

Earlier this week, the Armed Services Committee received a sworn affi-

davit from Pete Hegseth's former sister-in-law that alleges specific incidents of Mr. Hegseth's alcohol abuse, threatening and abusive behavior toward his second wife, and a repeated pattern of offensive public misconduct. The affidavit was signed and sworn under penalty of perjury, and it has been made available to all Senators to review, and I hope they do. I will share a few examples from her sworn testimony, which she gave to FBI investigators.

Once, while drunk in uniform—which is a violation of military law—Mr. Hegseth was so inebriated that his brother had to carry him out of a Minneapolis strip club. This occurred during a drill weekend with the Minnesota National Guard.

The FBI was also told that Mr. Hegseth's second wife had an escape plan that involved texting a "safe word" to her friends and family to urgently request help without putting herself in more danger. This escape plan was executed on at least one occasion. On at least one occasion, his second wife hid in her closet out of fear.

In many detailed examples, the FBI was told that Mr. Hegseth regularly became so drunk that he passed out, vomited, and had to be carried out of family events and public settings, sometimes shouting sexually and racially offensive comments.

My point is this: We know that Pete Hegseth's former sister-in-law testified to the FBI about his history of abuse, alcoholism, and disgraceful public behavior; however, we know now that her testimony was not adequately included in the Trump transition team's background briefing to the Senate. This begs the question, what else is missing from the FBI report?

The Senate is not considering a low-level appointee right now; we are advising and consenting on a nominee for Secretary of Defense. We cannot risk installing a leader who may have a history that is exploitable by our adversaries, nor can we risk confirming a Secretary of Defense who has shown that he is incapable of being responsible, accountable, and law-abiding 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as that job requires.

In addition to Mr. Hegseth's troubling personal conduct, I also have grave concerns about actions he would take as Secretary of Defense.

During his nomination hearing, I asked Mr. Hegseth about disturbing efforts underway within the Department of Defense to intimidate military personnel and their families and reports that the Trump administration may implement a so-called purge board to screen senior military officers for "unfitness" to lead. This raises the chilling possibility that the Trump administration may fire officers who are deemed to have the wrong political view. I believe that the Tuesday firing of U.S. Coast Guard Commandant ADM Linda Fagan, who by all objective accounts was an admirable leader, proves that the purge is underway.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hegseth would not categorically condemn those efforts during his hearing and instead talked about "meritocracy" and "restoring accountability" within the senior ranks of the military.

If the Senate confirms Mr. Hegseth this week, who will be fired at the Department of Defense next week? I doubt very seriously it will be based upon merit or anything else other than a political agenda. That would be the beginning of the unraveling of the core element of our military. It is not political. It serves neither party nor person. It protects and defends the Constitution of the United States. If we lose that, we will have lost something that is, I think, the key to our success not only as a military force but as a nation.

Despite Mr. Hegseth's comment, the U.S. military is already one of the finest meritocracies in the world. Every member of the military is in their position because of their ability. They are chosen by boards of other senior officers who evaluate their performance, who look closely at what they have done, and render their best professional opinion of the capability of that person to move on and assume a particular job.

Every member of the military is in their position because of their ability. When there is always a possibility that you need to count on the person next to you to save your life, there is no other choice but meritocracy and value. There is no other choice that you must or can make other than to pick someone whose focus, whose heart, and whose spirit is to protect their fellow soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, guardians—not to exploit them, to make a judgment about their colleagues not based on their political affiliations but on the fact that they are a fellow soldier, sailor, or airman.

I see a dangerous, dangerous point at which we will divert from this historic and compelling approach and become a political organization. We have seen it happen in other places around the world, where militaries are undermined and subjected by political leaders who have a particular political point of view and passion, and they become essentially not an army but an extension of the political aspirations of the great leader. We can't see that here in America.

Our present servicemembers can and should be confident that with hard work and skill and character, they will be successful in their military careers. That is the key criteria.

Indeed, this very meritocracy would prevent a person like Mr. Hegseth from rising higher in the ranks of the military. The totality of his own writings and conduct would disqualify any servicemember from holding any leadership position in the military, much less being confirmed as the Secretary of Defense.

If there was evidence that a serving officer in the military was drunk in

uniform, in a strip club, if there was evidence that a senior military officer was engaged in sexual relations while married to another woman, having just fathered a child from another woman, I can guarantee you that officer's career would end swiftly, either by resignation or by court martial.

Moreover, our servicemembers, since the birth of this country 249 years ago, have taken an oath to the Constitution. Their mission is to protect the country and all of its citizens and the ideals this country was founded on, which should endure no matter who is President or what political party is in power. Mr. Hegseth's idea of meritocracy, however, seems to be that servicemembers should pledge fealty to a President who will be in power for only 4 years and fit the ideas of a party that only half of this Nation supports. There is no faster way to undermine the lethality and morale of our Nation's military—and support of the Nation's citizens for it—than to inject politics into the system. Mr. Hegseth, if confirmed, will not improve our military but destabilize it and weaken the institution.

Further, during his hearing, Mr. Hegseth failed to convince me and many of my colleagues that he is capable of running any organization remotely as complex as the Department of Defense. Mr. Hegseth has been the head of two separate veterans organizations. From 2008 through 2010, he led the organization Veterans for Freedom, which had an annual budget of less than \$10 million. Each year he was in charge, outlays exceeded revenues, until the organization verged on bankruptcy and had to be merged with another group.

From 2011 until 2016, Mr. Hegseth ran the organization Concerned Veterans for America. During each of those 5 years, tax records show that the organization spent more than it raised.

If this is how Mr. Hegseth manages organizations with a comparatively small staff and budget, how can anyone have confidence that he will be able to effectively manage an organization with hundreds of multi-million- and multi-billion-dollar contracts that literally drive the economy of many parts of this country?

If confirmed, Mr. Hegseth would be the leader of millions of men and women of every race, religion, and political belief. He can only be an effective leader of an effective fighting force if he has respect for those he leads, and they trust he supports them. Unfortunately, Mr. Hegseth has shown disdain and outright hostility for many he would lead. His writings and his speeches make clear his opposition to diversity issues. He has said:

Diversity is not our strength. Unity is.

On a recent podcast, he said:

I'm straight up just saying we should not have women in combat roles.

Mr. Hegseth has also written:

The other side, the left, is not our friend. We are not esteemed colleagues, nor mere

political opponents. We are foes. Either we win or they win. We agree on nothing else.

That is not the spirit to bring to lead the men and women of our military forces.

When I joined the Army as a young officer in the 1970s, the U.S. military was rife with racial tension, women were prohibited from serving in most roles, gay servicemembers were banned, and we relied on a national draft to fill our ranks. The soldiers I served with were proud to do so, but it was certainly not the Nation's most capable military by any standard.

We have made great progress since then. Today, the Department of Defense is fully integrated, every race and religion is accepted, women serve in all combat roles and leadership positions, sexual orientation is irrelevant to service, and the All-Volunteer Force visibly reflects the Nation it protects.

Our military is more diverse than it has ever been, but, more importantly, it is more lethal than it has ever been. This is not a coincidence. This diversity and nonpartisanship is the bedrock of our military power. But Mr. Hegseth seeks to destroy that.

One other strength of the U.S. military which has made us respected around the world is the adherence to the rule of law and clear standards on the battlefield to protect civilians and treat prisoners with humanity. Once again, this nominee for Secretary of Defense, if confirmed, will put that principle in doubt. Mr. Hegseth has championed the pardoning of military members who were turned in by their fellow soldiers and SEALs as well as military contractors convicted of killing 14 Iraqi civilians without cause. He has advocated for the reinstitution of interrogation methods like waterboarding that have been defined as torture and has belittled the advice and counsel of the Judge Advocates General while on deployment.

In his book "The War on Warriors," he wrote:

Should we follow the Geneva Conventions? If our warriors are forced to follow rules arbitrarily and asked to sacrifice more lives so that international tribunals feel better about themselves, aren't we just better off in winning our wars according to our own rules?!

How can our military personnel trust each other and the partners and allies we need in this dangerous world trust the United States if such rules and conventions are tossed aside? What a bounty this would give our adversaries.

And how would we have the moral authority to criticize the North Vietnamese, for example, who tortured pilots like our colleague John McCain if our Secretary of Defense is saying waterboarding is perfectly fine?

We wouldn't. In fact, I think our pilots would be very much concerned if they felt there are no rules of the game and that, if they went down behind enemy lines, they would be just brutalized, tortured, et cetera, and we don't even have a moral objection to it.

Finally, my top priority as a U.S. Senator has always been national security, and my colleagues, I hope, know this. I don't seek partisan wins or the political spotlight. I want to do right by our men and women in uniform, and I refuse to compromise or cut corners on national security issues.

The greatest privilege I have had in my life is to lead soldiers, to understand and respect them, to do my best by example and leadership so that they would have confidence that their best interest was my sole interest. That is not what I heard from Mr. Hegseth, and that is not what he would bring to the Department of Defense.

Process is important for a nomination of this sort. Other than me, Mr. Hegseth refused to meet with any of my Democratic colleagues on the committee—an unprecedented act, a signal that he is not trying to be a non-partisan Secretary. He is, in fact, going to be very partisan—again, injecting politics into the Department of Defense, which is, in my view, fatal.

The committee was denied a second round of questioning of Mr. Hegseth, although we needed it at that time. And I should point out, historically, when Secretary Hagel was here, we had three rounds of questioning; when Secretary Carter was here, we had two rounds of questioning. So the precedent was strongly in favor of an additional round. So we have essentially been denied the kind of access that would have revealed more of Mr. Hegseth's qualities, conduct, and thoughts. And that is not appropriate.

And as I said previously, the FBI background check was inadequate—again, the first time I have ever had a background check supplemented by two additional addendums of background check. That is not the way I have experienced this.

So I would hope my colleagues are a bit alarmed and are asking themselves: Does this individual have the character and the competence and the composure to be Secretary of Defense? I, frankly, am not convinced and am stunned, in many respects, at the lack of scrutiny which too many of my colleagues are using to consider this nomination.

The lives of thousands and thousands of men and women in uniform, the security of our Nation—and, indeed, the world—is at stake. I hope we will all take time to reflect on whether we are ready to confirm Mr. Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense.

I will personally urge my colleagues to vote against this nominee.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

MR. WICKER. Mr. President, in a few moments, the Senate will vote on the confirmation of our next CIA Director, and then immediately following there will be a vote on cloture on the nomination of Mr. Peter Brian Hegseth, President Donald Trump's nominee for Secretary of Defense. I am going to

vote yes for cloture, and I expect that a majority of our Senators will do so.

Three months ago, 77 million Americans voted for change in the United States, and they sent President Trump back to the White House. It was a decisive victory and a clear mandate to focus this Nation on prosperity and peace. That work begins at the Pentagon, where we must return to a policy of peace through strength.

We are facing the most complex and dangerous global security environment since World War II. The next few years will shape the direction for the remainder of the 21st century. It could be led by the United States, a future which would lead to freedom and prosperity for all Americans and the absence of armed conflict, or it could be led by despots.

The Chinese Communist Party is working against us. Its dictator, Xi Jinping, uses military force and economic coercion to try to reshape the world order with the help of his junior partner Kim Jong-Un of North Korea. At the same time, the despot Vladimir Putin remains intent on territorial expansion. Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and their like continue to attack Israel and the United States, and ISIS remains set on killing Americans every day—every day.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration wasted precious time and significant resources pursuing divisive social policies at DOD. For instance, we just spent months organizing with the administration over whether the Defense Department should pay for hormone therapies or puberty blockers for minors out of taxpayer dollars. Seventy-one percent of Americans oppose that policy, including more than half of Democrats, so I am glad we are going to abandon that type of policy. I could go on, but let me now turn to focusing on the future.

Together, Congress and the President have a lot to do, and we don't have much time to do it. We have a broken shipbuilding industrial base to fix. We have defense manufacturing jobs to build up and munitions lines to expand. We have an ossified budgeting system to update, and we have got an audit to finish for the first time in decades. And we have a resourcing problem that needs attention.

On his way out the door, Secretary Austin now tells us we need to spend a lot more on national security. Well, thank you, Secretary Austin; it is an admission 4 years too late. We are simply falling behind our adversaries in too many ways.

So President Trump seeks to reverse this trend and bring much needed change to the Pentagon, and he has chosen a man to lead the Pentagon. His choice to spearhead these efforts is Pete Hegseth, a retired major and combat veteran in the Army National Guard.

Admittedly, this nomination is unconventional. The nominee himself is unconventional, just like that New

York developer who rode down the escalator in 2015 to announce his candidacy for President. That may be what makes Mr. Hegseth a good choice. He is not beholden to the status quo, and he is open to new ideas.

He is intent on lethality and readiness, and shouldn't we all be? His experience in the line of fire and his servicemember advocacy make at least one thing clear: Pete Hegseth will put the men and women of our military first.

Congress has often seen defense secretaries delay and evade Congressional oversight. I think Pete Hegseth will be willing and eager to partner with us in that regard.

Last week, the Senate Armed Services Committee convened to consider Mr. Hegseth's nomination. In testimony lasting nearly 4 hours, he addressed three key audiences: our committee, the U.S. Senate as a whole, and the American people.

I think the American people liked what they saw; I know I did. He showed each of us why President Trump chose him to be the next Secretary of Defense.

First of all, he articulated a clear vision of the Pentagon, and it is clear to anyone who listened that he is going to bring energy and fresh ideas to shake up the Department's stagnant bureaucracy.

He will restore a warfighting ethos and relentlessly focus on the military's core mission: to defer conflict and, if necessary, to win a war.

Mr. Hegseth is committed to bringing a swift end to the corrosive social policies that serve to divide our servicemembers rather than unite them. And as I have pointed out earlier, the American people are behind him in this regard overwhelmingly.

He correctly stated that we need to change the way the Pentagon does business. He will restore a culture of accountability by cutting redtape, incentivizing innovation, and rebuilding the defense industrial base.

He affirmed his intent to tackle the hardest systemic problems that plague the Pentagon, challenges that previous secretaries have proven unable to fix. And I mentioned that audit. I sincerely believe we will get an audit done under his oversight.

And, importantly, he agreed that maintaining the inadequate Biden-era defense budget levels would be dangerous to our national security. And we hear, as I said, the outgoing secretary admitting that very thing.

In his testimony before our committee, Mr. Hegseth said this:

My only special interest is—the warfighter. Detering wars, and if called upon, winning wars, by ensuring our warriors never enter a fair fight. We let them win and then bring them home.

Well put, Major Hegseth. I am confident Mr. Hegseth, supported by a team of experienced top officials, will do exactly that. Pete and his family have endured numerous smears and false news stories. Less reported is the

outpouring of support this nominee has received.

Pete Hegseth has devoted his career to fighting for his fellow soldiers, and his fellow soldiers—men and women—are now speaking out on his behalf. In the past few months, a host of flag officers signed an open letter enthusiastically commending Mr. Hegseth. I thank these generals and admirals for doing so.

The Armed Services Committee has received letters from female soldiers who support Pete. We received messages from those who served alongside him on the battlefield, including a moving statement from a Medal of Honor recipient who backs Pete Hegseth to the hilt.

These men and women uniformly vouch for Pete Hegseth's leadership, tenacity, and passion for supporting the warfighter. On the day of his hearing, 100 Navy Seals marched from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the Senate office buildings. They marched together that distance, and rows of Mr. Hegseth's fellow soldiers sat behind him in solidarity for the entire 4-hour-long hearing. These patriotic Americans were willing to step forward and declare their support for Mr. Hegseth publicly—in stark contrast, I might add, to the anonymous attacks we have heard about.

In this critical moment for our national security, I believe we have the right man for the job.

I urge my colleagues to continue in their support of Mr. Hegseth's nomination to be our next Secretary of Defense.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

VOTE ON RATCLIFFE NOMINATION

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

Mr. WICKER. 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 legislative clerk called the roll.

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

The result was announced—yeas 74, nays 25, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 13 Ex.]

YEAS—74

Alsobrooks	Britt	Cotton
Banks	Budd	Cramer
Barrasso	Capito	Crapo
Bennet	Cassidy	Cruz
Blackburn	Collins	Curtis
Booker	Coons	Daines
Boozman	Cornyn	Durbin