

speaking, but I believe that President Trump—you can criticize him for his rhetoric, but you can't criticize him for the truth when you tease through that rhetoric. Canada, Europe, Mexico, and Panama all owe in large part their independence and their ability to be democratic nations to the United States. I think it is fair to suggest that they act like partners and treat the United States with respect.

I, for one, appreciate—although I wouldn't necessarily always use the words that President Trump does, I don't disagree with his objective, and I hope he keeps his foot on the accelerator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, first, I want to thank my colleague from North Carolina for his comments with regard to Canada, Greenland, Mexico, and the Panama Canal. We have to support the President. He is acting in the best interests of the American public.

On November 5, the American public overwhelmingly elected President Donald Trump with a very clear mandate. Democrats here in Washington don't have to like it, but it is not up to them. That is what the American people decided. Let's remember, we work for the American people. We don't work for the Democrats' special interests or radical ideologies. Democrats need to get over the fact that Donald Trump won to make government work for the American people.

President Trump has put together a great team with the needed qualifications to deliver on that clear mandate. His nominees are fully qualified, and we have the votes to get them confirmed.

Think about this: When Barack Obama got elected in 2009, he had seven nominees confirmed on the first day—seven. How many do we have? One. By day three, President Obama had 12. Today is the fourth day of President Trump's term, and because of the Democrats' obstruction, we have only two of President Trump's Cabinet nominees confirmed. That is wrong.

In 2021, Joe Biden's Defense nominee Lloyd Austin was confirmed 2 days after Biden took office, but here we are on January 23, 2025. It has been 4 days, and President Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Defense has been reported out of committee but still has not gotten a vote.

Now that President Trump has been sworn in, it is time for Democrats to put country before politics and to quit their obstructionist and stall tactics and allow votes to confirm every single Donald Trump nominee.

It is time to get to work for the American people. This starts with voting to confirm Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defense today—not tomorrow, not the next day; today. This Senate should not go home for the weekend until we vote on his confirmation.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and as a Navy veteran, I have seen clearly that we need a leader in the Pentagon who puts America's national interests above all else.

I have seen how the Biden-Harris administration pushed the Department of Defense to prioritize wokeness over being the most lethal military force in the world. They prioritized diversity quotas and bureaucracy over recruiting strong individuals who are ready to serve and protect our Nation. The Biden administration put our national security and the safety of our troops at risk, and we need someone who understands the mission and is ready to deliver.

The status quo in Washington, DC, has gone unchallenged for too long. The Pentagon, which failed seven consecutive annual financial audits, is the best example of a government that is completely unaccountable to the American taxpayer.

Pete Hegseth is a decorated combat veteran who understands the mission and what is needed to advance President Trump's agenda and reform the Department of Defense to make America's military the world's most lethal fighting force. That is what every American expects. He understands the sacrifice our military members and their families make because he has been to war. He has led his fellow service men and women into combat, and he knows individuals who have lost their lives or have been gravely injured in defending our Nation.

Pete knows how to hold people accountable, how to make sure we promote based on meritocracy, and how to get rid of the broken, woke policies implemented by the Biden administration.

After his Active-Duty service, Pete continued to stand by his fellow servicemembers here at home by leading the Concerned Veterans of America and by demonstrating a commitment to our Nation's fighters rather than to the status quo.

Although leftwing media has fixated on an anonymous whisper campaign in an attempt to discredit and dismiss his achievements during his time at the CVA, those who worked closely with him tell a different story, a positive story.

The policy priorities he championed were ultimately adopted by Congress and the Trump administration and will benefit veterans for generations to come.

The Department of Defense is one of the Federal Government's largest bureaucracies. That requires a leader who understands how to rely on a team, push for accountability, and bring needed reform.

Under President Trump and Pete's strong leadership, the U.S. military will once again become the world's most lethal fighting force that our enemies fear and our allies respect, and I will do everything I can to support their mission.

Americans elected Trump as a mandate for change, and he is building a team to deliver. Pete is the fighter we need and the right person to get the Department of Defense back on track.

We live in a very dangerous world and cannot risk the safety of this Nation any further by not having President Trump's national security nominees in office today.

I would like to encourage my Democratic colleagues to get over their loss—I am sure it is hard—and let these nominees come to the floor for a vote. They can vote however they want, but allow us to vote on these nominees.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from New Jersey.

SENATE PAGES

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I appreciate the great Senator from the State of Florida with a haircut that is almost as good as mine. Thank you, sir.

Every year, the pages come through in cycles. I shouldn't say "every year." There are multiple classes of pages. They are usually all extraordinary. This is an extraordinary class of pages. I have some issues with them, which I will air later.

But one of the traditions that we have resurrected in this new Congress is the page poetry contest. And this time, we had just a very small—a paucity of pages participated. That is an alliteration: A paucity of pages participated. And we have a number of them.

KATIE BRITT, in her eminent brilliance, and I have picked our top ones. KATIE has picked one that I will mention, but we want to give these four of the six—I feel bad for the two we have left out. We want to give them our highest honors. But, first, the runner-up in the third position is Kaija.

There you are. You are the No. 3. I would read your poem, but we don't have time. You are articulate. You are eloquent. I teared up when I read your poem. It was so powerful and prodigiously potent.

And then the No. 2—before I read the two winners, the one selected by me and then the one selected by KATIE BRITT, the No. 2 is Holden. Where is Holden? Holden is over here as well.

Holden, your poem, too, brought me to depths—depths and heights.

It was to the nadir and to the zenith. It was very poetic, sir. You have talent as well.

And then the two winners. KATIE BRITT has chosen Jake. Where is Jake? Jake, why are you sitting down?

Why can't I—why are those pages sitting down?

Pages, stand up. Be accounted for yourselves.

Jake, you are now going to forever go into the Senate RECORD. Are you prepared for this, Jake? Your work shall live forever. Here it goes.

Five months I've walked these halls of history,

Where wisdom lingers, woven in the air.

To serve the nation, humble though it be,

I've witnessed duty's weight and leaders' care.

The echoes of debates in chambers vast,
Where laws are forged and futures shaped with might,

Have shown me how the present shapes the past,

And kindled faith in government's light.

I watched as leaders certified the will,

A testament to voices heard and strong.

Though times are tense, resolve can guide us still,

A steadfast march to right what once was wrong.

This service marks the start of dreams anew,

To shape the world with honor's hue.

I am going to pause. This might be the first time the Presiding Officer has ever cried.

Is the Presiding Officer OK?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. I am going to make it.

Mr. BOOKER. He is going to make it.

Congratulations. You are one of the two poet champions of the U.S. page class—the fall page class.

(Applause.)

Yes, yes. Don't get an ego. Don't let it go to your head. Don't be like a Senator.

OK. The other one, the final champion, is Ms. Pallan. Yes.

(Applause.)

Yes. Here is your poem.

We stand on blue, carpeted floors
From AM to PM we open Senate doors
Aching heels, and curved backs
We feel our composure start to crack
But in walks a Senator, and postures correct

Pages come together, all hands on deck
Excitement overtakes persistent exhaustion

As we wait to hear debates on legislation

People of power laugh and joke

As we watch and realize they're just common folk

Against the walls we silently hear

Colleagues and officials, but most of all—friends dear

Within this room, there stands a central divide

But there exists no aisle in our hearts or minds

That was fantastic.

(Applause.)

I am grateful for the poetic effort. I am grateful for our poetry champions, who will forever live in the annals of Senatorial history.

But there are a lot of people on this floor right now who have come to anticipate how I will proceed to demonstrate that these page writings are good. But now I will show them by reciting my own original poem.

Before I do, let me make at these pages an angry poke. Dear God, you all have been here for 5 months, and you couldn't tell me one good joke? Come on. Come on. Painful. You are the worst joke tellers. Heaven knows. But I am done. I have got my poem to read. So here goes.

Pages! With your suits so Navy, Understanding what you signed up for, some might think you were crazy. You clearly are the opposite of lazy. Up at 5 AM, your teenage brains must be hazy, taking a full load of classes, English, history, and calculus with parabolas so wavy. But that isn't the end of

your days—see. You work full-time on the job, on the floor, serving Republican Senators like Mitch and Democrats like Mazie. You man phones and open doors. You tirelessly do the Senate's unglamorous chores, in this job away from your fam, who can only see you if they join the 17 other Americans who regularly watch C-SPAN. But yet you are vital to this place, I hope you all see. In our Federal democracy, some might call you the foot soldiers of the Senate's slowly making history. And in this place, of sometimes too many partisan wars, you are this powerful, gentle nudge to all of us old dinosaurs, that we are here for you, the future of our nation. You are a constant reminder of our sacred obligation. To put country first, you are subtly telling us in this sacred space: That we are not individual athletes but actually running a relay race. Soon the baton we will place, in your hands, the next generation, to lead with honor, determination, and I pray grace. So Pages! With your suits so blue, Serving the Senate tried and true, Doing everything we asked you to do. Walking around barely awake some days, but you still made it through. Here are 3 pieces of advice I have for you. First, leap into the unknown, even if it seems scary just give it a try. Like you found out jumping here, into your Senate experience that had to petrify—leap. I know that to some of your friends that it must have stupefied. Don't play it safe, hunkering down just to fortify. Jump at tough challenges because in life it is simple: If you don't risk great falls, you'll never see how high you can fly. Second, Make friends with people who think different and with whom you don't agree. This is the very idea of our democracy. You've witnessed it here on the Senate floor. The TV often tells us that we should hate those who are different, but clearly you now know more. We are so much more than a partisan, tribal war. Compromise is essential, our founders swore. I task you to be unifiers, common ground builders, defining yourself by not who you are against but by who you are for. Take our national ideal of E Pluribus Unum and reclaim its splendor. Be an indivisible mentor—not just to preserve our democracy, but you are tasked with making it soar. And finally Pages! With your suits so . . . clean, my last piece of advice is to dream bolder dreams. I believe it, that for you there is no limitation. God, you are already living lives way behind your ancestor's greatest imagination. Past generations did great things. They took humanity to flight, took on the most awful wrongs and, incredibly, made them right. It's your turn—with grits, guts, and gumption—to dream America anew. Challenge my generation's limited assumptions. Dream America anew. Don't wait for permission. Dream America anew. This is your mission. Dream America anew—beyond what even your parents can now see. Dream an America anew and bring us to new heights of freedom, justice, and prosperity. Pages, dream America anew. Dream America anew. Dream America anew. This is my advice but also my prayer for you. Oh, and for all of history, I hereby put into the official Senate RECORD this truth, not a rumor: This Senate class, my friends, was incredible, kind, dedicated, but you lacked a sense of humor.

Mr. President, I see the extraordinary colleague here. We read her selected poem already. But I will tell you, there are 99 colleagues, but nobody is more the surrogate Senate page parent than KATIE BRITT, the Senator from Alabama.

I hope that you have learned from her the power of simple, everyday kindnesses.

Mr. President, I defer to my friend and colleague, the Senator from Alabama.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, I walked out of a meeting and got to see my dear friend and distinguished colleague from New Jersey addressing these incredible individuals behind me, in front of me, and all around the room. And so, in typical fashion, I literally ran out of the door to come and be a part of this.

First, I think you know that for my distinguished colleague from New Jersey and I, one of our favorite things that we get to do each and every semester that you are here, is to host you—host you for lunch and conversation in a way that I think America needs to see. We do it across the aisle. We have laughs, thanks to this one, and we have a good time. And we get to dive into who you are and what your questions are and what this body is about.

Getting to be a part of this distinguished poetry contest that you have, that is a new one for me, and it is one that I hope I continue to get to do—because, guys, you all are incredible.

When I was reading through these, it reminded me not only how special it is that we get to walk in these doors every day, how incredible this body is, and the gravity of the jobs that we do; but it showed me how phenomenal each and every one of you are for giving up your time, your energy, and your talent to make sure that this institution and our Nation are better.

So thank you—thank you, thank you—for what you have given to this country through your service here the last couple of months.

And my distinguished colleague from New Jersey has said it best, but just to add a couple of pieces of advice on your way out the door: Be unafraid to fail. Folks, I am not going to lie to you. It is not fun to fail. But without your willingness to do it, you will never achieve what is possible for you and what God has in front of you. And look, when you do fail, learn from it. Take a step back. Figure out what role you played in that, what you can do better, how you can be better, and how you can grow as a result, because I have found that everybody knows your peaks in life, but it is your valleys that actually truly define you and prepare you to climb the next hill.

Also—and I hope you have seen this on the Senate floor—you do not have to agree with someone to show them respect. And, in fact, we are counting on you to be respectful to those that you agree with and disagree with. That is what this Nation was founded on: the ability to have these conversations—challenging conversations—with people that you respect and with people you have built a relationship with that you may not agree with.

We need your generation to help us continue to bring that back. I have seen that from each and every one of

you, and I am inspired by the way that you have conducted yourselves.

And then, last but not least, get in the arena. Right? Now, everyone's arena is different. Everyone's lane is unique. And that is not just OK; it is necessary. But we need you to be unafraid to jump in and to move this Nation forward because, at the end of the day, we need you to achieve what we need to do for the American people, not only just in your communities and States but truly across the country.

You have all been given a special gift, but it is up to you to utilize that to affect as many people as you possibly can in a positive way and make the world around you better as a result of who you are and the way that you conduct yourself.

And so all of that to say: It has been an honor and a privilege to get to know you. From the bottom of my heart and on behalf of all of our colleagues, we are grateful for you. And I am grateful for my friendship with the Senator from New Jersey, and I hope that our friendship has served as an example for you of what is possible when you maybe put differences aside; you get to know each other as people; you can have tough conversations, find common ground, and move good things forward.

I yield the floor back to my distinguished colleague from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you to KATIE BRITT, the tough-as-nails Senator who will never quit, before I sit—I just can't stop myself. And thanks to Elizabeth, we should have all the poems put into the Senate RECORD.

So with that, I would like to ask unanimous consent that all six participants, including the two I didn't name—Gabriel, where is Gabriel? Solid, solid piece of work. I was splitting hairs, splitting hairs. The only thing that dissed you was:

The Capitol subway is my home.

It rides underneath the great dome.

I thought it was a lie that the subway is your home. I see you rarely on the subway. So your poetic genius was there; I dinged you because it was not truthful.

And then the other name I want to give is Xavier, where is Xavier? Where is Xavier? Xavier is not here; that is why Xavier did not get—I knew he would not be here. It is terrible. It is terrible.

That's what we pages are meant to observe.

And to learn from others the pride to serve.

I see no pride in his not being here right now. But I will say that they deserve to be in the Senate RECORD.

So, again, all six poems, all six participants will be there.

I ask unanimous consent that all six poems be printed in the RECORD.

KATIE, thank you for your kind words, and we turn the Senate back over to its usual programming. Although I do not think anything that will happen on this floor will be as fun

as the fun that KATIE and I just had. Thank you very much.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

WATCHING

BY KAIJA LEINONEN

Above watch eyes of those before
Some fierce and others kinder.
The hist'ry of our Senate floor,
Their gaze a stern reminder.
Above watch eyes of those who trust
The neighbors, friends, and envoy
To act in love and do what's just
When voting for their convoy.
Above watch eyes of all the world
Breath bated, holding plans now.
The lives and loves of boys and girls
Rest safely in your hands now.
And with those eyes now watching you
This job's not a what, but now a who.

BY HOLDEN DEMAINE

It's work and it's school; democracy alive
It's ambition and passion and wakeups at five
Doors and water orders—that's what we do
Check your TV and find us, right on C-SPAN 2!
Dirksen and roll call; caucus and quorum
Look at the suits; think back when I wore 'em
The Rotunda at midnight and English at sunrise
There's always more; that's where the fun lies
The challenges we face are both great and are numerous
Yet we can beat them together: it's me, you, and us
Being a Page is something worth praising
I'm sad that it's over; it's honestly crazy
I've loved you so much, Class of Fall '24
It's been madness and memories and so, so much more

BY GABRIEL RHODES

As I close my eyes, I feel the whoosh!
I take a seat and feel it move
We speed off with a big swoosh
I am getting in the groove
The seal is emblazoned on the wall
The red carpet cushions our shoes
Just make sure you do not fall!
When we start moving it quells my blues
The Capitol subway is my home
A place to meet and greet
It rides underneath the great dome
This is the place to accomplish the great feat

BY XAVIER CARRASCO COOPER

I am often asked what all do I do
No answer has ever covered it through
Don't want to be seen as mediocre
Don't want to lie and look like a joker
I used to think the government was few
A small club of people always on view
Leading our country by virtual decree
Only the few fought for us to be free
I have seen how terribly wrong I was
I've met those who work outside of the buzz
Without recognition, fame or applause
Those who take pride in serving a great cause

That's what we Pages are meant to observe
And to learn from others the pride to serve

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

JANUARY 6 PARDONS

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, in the United States, we believe in the peaceful transfer of power. In the United States, we believe that the people—not elected politicians—decide who is their President.

And both of those principles have served our democracy very well

through thick and thin, through strife and turmoil, for the past 248 years.

Both of those principles were challenged on January 6, 2021. A mob that was incited by then-President Trump attacked the Capitol for the explicit purpose of using violence to overturn the peaceful transfer of power.

They were trying to intimidate elected politicians to substitute their judgment, their preferred candidate for President, instead of acknowledging the will of the people that they represented.

But our democracy endured. That is the very good news. And in testament to that, we just witnessed a renewal of America's commitment to the peaceful transfer of power with the inauguration of Donald Trump as our 47th President.

However, I speak today, sadly, about one of the first actions of President Trump, and that, of course, is pardoning 1,600 people and commuting sentences of 14 very dangerous criminals who were involved in that violent attack on January 6.

Speaking for myself, I condemn that action by President Trump. I was there that day. Many of us were. I was in the Gallery of the House of Representatives. It is a day I won't forget, but America will never forget. It has had a deep impact on our country, the citizens, the folks who work here, and that honorable tradition of the peaceful transfer of power.

You know, I was very amazed and proud to see officers—men and women—who withstood this assault. More than 150 officers from the U.S. Capitol Police and the DC Metropolitan Police Department were injured that day. Five officers died in the aftermath, and there was severe damage to the Senate Chamber, the House Chamber, the office buildings, and the Capitol Rotunda, where we just had another inauguration only a few days ago.

Blood, feces, glass, and other debris from the mob's attack was everywhere at a cost of close to \$3 million.

So how is it that one of the first acts of our President, who wants to be a unifier, was to pardon those people who acted with such violence, such anger, and such contempt?

President Trump has tried to erase this attack and rewrite the history of what happened on January 6, calling the insurrectionists, including those who fought with the police, patriots and hostages. They were neither.

Should the President of the United States pardon a person who was sentenced to 57 months in Federal prison for stealing a police riot shield from an officer and then using it to assault officers?

Should a person who is affiliated with the neo-Nazi group and who was serving a sentence for breaking the law in Charlottesville in 2017 and who quoted Hitler before assaulting law enforcement in the U.S. Capitol, should that person be pardoned? I say no.