

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.

Should a President pardon a person who led an organization who orchestrated this riot after being convicted by a jury of impartial citizens and being convicted of seditious conspiracy? I say no.

Should a President pardon a person who was sentenced to more than 6 years for beating the police with a metal whip, assaulting them with bear spray—something that can cause lasting eye damage—should that person be pardoned? I say no.

Should a person who, at his own trial, said he didn't think he was subject to the laws governing the United States and who, before storming the Capitol, bragged that what the British did to DC will be nothing compared to what he does? Should that person be pardoned? I say no.

Should a person who said many of us should be hanged, should that person be pardoned? I say no.

I am very proud of the men and women of our law enforcement community, U.S. Capitol Police and DC Metropolitan Police Department who stood their positions and defended the Capitol and defended the peaceful transfer of power. And I have in mind someone who was standing over me in the Capitol when I was in the Gallery and the mob was trying to break down the doors, breaking the glass of the House Chamber, and this officer was a young man who commuted to work from about an hour away. He had two young children. He had his gun out, and I looked in his face, and I could see the last thing in the world he wanted to do was have to use that weapon. But I saw that he was going to do his job and whatever was required to protect the people who were in that Gallery.

And I just thought to myself, How is it that the people who are attacking could have such disregard for the reality of this person's life and how much it would change his life if he actually had to use that firearm?

And I am proud, too, of Officer Brian Sicknick, who lost his life; Officer Howard Liebengood; Officer Jeffrey Smith; Officer Gunther Hashida; Officer Kyle DeFreytag, all of whom died in the aftermath of January 6th.

These presidential pardons are disrespectful. They are also dangerous. They are disrespectful to the men and women who served, who suffered the violence, and are living with the consequences. And they are dangerous to the men and women of law enforcement who serve us every day. The pardons validate the violence of the mob and dishonor the service of those who protect us.

These unconscionable and appalling actions of January 6 should be repudiated by every Member of Congress. And whatever differences we have, it is vital that those differences be resolved at the ballot box and that the will of the people always be respected.

No citizen, however passionate they may be about their political beliefs, no matter how disappointed they may be

at the outcome of an election, is justified in attacking the men and women of the Capitol Police. Their actions should be condemned by each of us and by our President. Those actions should not be condoned with pardons.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. MORENO assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Connecticut.

NOMINATION OF PETER HEGSETH

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, we are in the midst of considering Peter Hegseth to be the next Secretary of Defense. I don't think there is a more important office in this country, having power and responsibility for 3.4 million Americans, most of them in uniform, many of them civilians, all of them potentially putting their lives in harm's way.

The President's choice to lead the Department of Defense is not only one of the most significant he will make but is also probably the most unqualified nominee for this position of immense authority and responsibility in recent history.

It is clear that his history of mismanagement—he drove two veterans organizations into the ground financially—makes him patently incapable of the powerfully challenging management task that he will have as Secretary of Defense. This sprawling enterprise has to be directed and guided by someone who has had some significant management responsibility in the past. I hesitate to say how much because the standard and the bar have always been extremely high under both Republican and Democratic administrations, including President Trump's first term when he appointed General Mattis.

I voted for General Mattis. He was obviously a Republican nominee, but he had the experience—not just in combat but also at the Pentagon.

Now, I know the President wants to be a disrupter and a change agent. The Pentagon may be in need of some change and disruption, but not chaos, not financial mismanagement such as characterized Pete Hegseth's service as the head of Vets for Freedom and then Concerned Veterans for America.

What can be said about his service in those two organizations is that year after year, he spent more than he raised. He had deficits year after year—not by a little bit, by hundreds of thousands of dollars. So at the end of his service at Vets for Freedom, the board did an intervention. They had a forensic study done, which showed that there were tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid debt, and they, in fact, ousted him.

He then went to Concerned Veterans for America and same pattern, roughly the same financial failings—deficits year after year, significant in their number and total amount. There again, he left under a cloud, with a nondisclosure agreement, so we don't have, necessarily, the full story.

Just as a management issue, this nomination is fundamentally flawed.

He left those two separate organizations smoldering in ruins after just a few years as their executive director.

We have documents from whistleblowers that detail a toxic workplace environment at those organizations. It was rife with alcohol abuse and sexual harassment under his leadership. Former employees have detailed that Mr. Hegseth routinely used organization funds to pursue personal pleasures, usually involving alcohol and women. His underlings referred to them as “party girls.”

These veterans service organizations ran fiscal surpluses before Mr. Hegseth's tenure, and upon his exit, their budgets were really in flames. In one case, the organization simply ceased to exist. Vets for Freedom was absorbed by another organization.

He testified that he is proud of the work he did while he was at Vets for Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America, but he made a career of advocating for policies that would, in effect, contract and even defund the Veterans' Administration and harm servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

For years, he lambasted veterans who pursued disability compensation, and he advocated for for-profit colleges that make their living preying on servicemembers and veterans. These organizations and the policies he advocated could potentially have done grave harm to our veterans.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Hegseth also refused to answer questions regarding the use of Active-Duty military within the borders of the United States.

One of the President's own former Secretaries of Defense stated unequivocally that “the option to use active-duty forces in law enforcement's role should be only used as a matter of last resort and only in the most urgent and dire of situations.” Yet the President is apparently laying down plans to use the Active-Duty military to conduct mass deportations and to quell civil unrest.

Americans don't want the military, our men and women on Active Duty, raiding restaurants and farms, looking for individuals who have overstayed their visas. If the President is unwilling to invest in ICE, it should not be the Department of Defense, the Pentagon, our Active-Duty men and women going into homes, workplaces, schools, churches, hospitals, and in effect performing the raids—the law enforcement duty—that really are specifically prohibited by statute.

Pete Hegseth will be behind these policies. Many of them he has already endorsed. Most of them, unfortunately, were not delved into in any depth in his hearing because so much of it was on the sexual improprieties and alcohol abuse and other personal issues that would be disqualifying.

Let's make no mistake. There is a lot of focus on this latest affidavit. There is significant information—not anonymous smears, significant information—