

I will continue to ensure that the Senate works as quickly as possible to get President Trump's team in place.

MARCH FOR LIFE

Mr. President, before I close, I also want to mention the March for Life, which will be held today in Washington, DC. As they do every year, tens of thousands of Americans from all across the country will flood the streets of Washington to witness the goodness and value of every human life.

The March for Life is just one small facet of the pro-life movement, but it is a key facet because we need this public witness. Abortion happens behind closed doors, and so it can be all too easy to forget that it is happening, to forget that every day in this country, babies are being killed by abortion.

The pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute reports that there were more than 1 million abortions in 2023 alone—1 million. That is a lot of lives lost, it is a lot of love lost, and we need to be reminded of this.

So I am tremendously grateful for the tens of thousands of marchers in Washington, DC, today who are here to remind us of the terrible cost of abortion and of the infinite value and worth of every human being. I am looking forward to addressing the March for Life in person later today. I want to give a special shout-out to those who have traveled from South Dakota to be here in Washington.

To all pro-lifers, those here in Washington today and those around the country, I want to say thank you. There is no greater work than standing up for those who cannot stand up and defend themselves. I am grateful for everything you do for moms and for their babies.

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.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, a few days ago—I think you were in the chair, and I was here—we saw the minority leader stand at that podium and pledge to cooperate with Republicans when nominees, he said, were highly qualified and bipartisan. It took less than 72 hours for the minority leader to violate that pledge.

Senate Democrats seem to be back to their old, tired habits of obstructing and opposing. Look at the confirmation process that we finished yesterday for the Central Intelligence Agency Director, John Ratcliffe.

Senator MARK KELLY of Arizona, a Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, gave Director Ratcliffe a ringing endorsement. Director Ratcliffe "is qualified for the job. He's

a serious guy, and he's got the background. I've got confidence he'll do a good job."

Yet Senator SCHUMER held up the confirmation process for 2 solid days.

Despite the delay, the Senate overwhelmingly confirmed this highly qualified Director—Director Ratcliffe—by a vote of 74 to 25. Twenty-one Democrats voted in favor of his confirmation, yet a 2-day delay.

I want every American to know what is happening here in the Senate. The far-left Members of the Democrat caucus are intentionally delaying the confirmation of President Trump's national security team. It is not advice and consent. It is the Democrats' playbook for trying to deny President Trump his Cabinet.

The Senate is preparing to vote this weekend on more highly qualified nominees. One of them is South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem.

Governor Noem is the nominee to be Secretary of Homeland Security. She will secure the border.

In the first 3 days of the Trump administration, illegal encounters dropped nearly 35 percent compared to the final 3 days of the Biden administration. Nearly 4,000 illegal immigrants tried to cross in President Biden's final days in office. Under President Trump, the numbers plummeted, and they will continue to plummet. The impact of the Trump policies is real, and this is only the beginning.

Working with Kristi Noem, the Senate is going to secure the border. Governor Noem understands what is needed to tackle the border crisis. As she said in her hearing, she will ensure our Border Patrol agents and our Immigrations and Customs Enforcement group have all the tools, the resources, and the support that they need to carry out their mission efficiently and effectively.

As Governor, she sent South Dakota National Guard troops to Texas to help secure the border—Governor, National Guard troops to help in Texas. Oh, she is going to be aggressive in her mission to stop this flood of illegal immigrants.

I believe she is an excellent and well-qualified choice. After a thorough vetting process, Governor Noem received bipartisan support in the Homeland Security Committee. There are 15 members of the committee. Thirteen voted in favor of her; only two opposed. That is overwhelming and bipartisan.

Senator GARY PETERS of Michigan—he is the lead Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee—he voted yes. Will Senator SCHUMER needlessly slow down a confirmation vote that his lead Democrat supports, just to obstruct President Trump?

When it comes to confirming Governor Noem, there is no time to waste. Few Agencies are more important to this Nation, to our safety, and to our security than the Department of Homeland Security. Any delay denies our country a Homeland Security Secretary at a time when open borders en-

danger every American in this country today—potential risk to their safety as well as their security.

Here in the Senate, Senate Republicans are working around the clock to confirm qualified nominees like Kristi Noem, like Scott Bessent for Treasury, like Sean Duffy. We will be in the Senate voting as long as it takes. How long it takes in the Senate is up to the Democrats to decide.

Our committees are approving additional nominees on a bipartisan basis and at a rapid clip. We need to confirm them on the Senate floor without delay, and that is what Republicans intend to do.

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.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democrat leader is recognized.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Well, Mr. President, yesterday, 51 Republican Senators voted to advance one of the most erratic, unqualified, and unfit Cabinet nominees we have ever seen in modern times. Pete Hegseth is possibly just a few hours away from becoming the next Secretary of Defense, overseeing the greatest military in the world. He has neither the character, the experience, or the judgment required by the job.

If there is one word that should never describe a Secretary of Defense in this important position, it is "erratic," but that is the one word that describes Mr. Hegseth best.

Before we vote today, I hope my Republican colleagues think carefully, one last time, about the risks to the American people and, particularly, to the men and women in our Armed Forces, of confirming somebody like Mr. Hegseth. I hope my Republican colleagues understand the danger of entrusting our military to someone whose background has not been fully vetted.

We know much of his past remains uninvestigated. We know Mr. Hegseth refused to meet with Democrats on the Armed Services Committee, save for the ranking member. How can that be? It is such an important job and he is afraid to meet with Democrats on the committee? He is going to have much tougher adversaries than that in places like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. How could he avoid that?

We know that new allegations keep coming up—as recently as last night—compounding the word "erratic" when it describes his behavior.

This is not the way to vet a nominee in such an important position as Secretary of Defense. When you are the one responsible for leading our Armed

Forces, erratic behavior isn't just a character flaw. It could mean the difference between entering or avoiding a military conflict, between life and death for our troops. We all want what is best for our troops.

We all know that voting for Secretary of Defense is one of the most important votes we are going to take all year. It mystifies me that of all the people President Trump could have nominated as Secretary of Defense, he picked someone as flawed—as deeply flawed—as Mr. Hegseth.

Is Pete Hegseth really the best we have to lead the greatest military in the world? Is this man with a history of excessive drinking really the guy you want on the other end of the phone at 2 a.m. in a crisis in control of the nuclear codes? Is this man with a mile-long list of allegations of abusing, degrading, and harassing women the one we want leading our men and women into battle? Is this man who failed to manage the finances of veterans' nonprofit groups, who drove his organizations into debt to the point where he could not even pay creditors, the person we want in charge of the Pentagon's budget?

I want this last point to sink in.

DOD is a colossal organization. It is a workforce of 3 million people, an annual budget of over \$850 billion. Is Pete Hegseth really the person we want overseeing an organization as complex as DOD? A man who couldn't even manage the finances of a small nonprofit, yet they pick him. It is unbelievable.

He was pressured to resign from these small nonprofits. And now he is supposed to run the Department of Defense with its millions of people under his jurisdiction and billions and billions of dollars.

The odds are not low that he would mismanage the Pentagon's budget if he mismanaged small organizations.

Worst of all, his erratic behavior can rear its ugly head because we know when people who have a history of erratic behavior go into high-pressure situations, it often makes them more, not less, erratic.

I refuse to believe that Pete Hegseth is the best the Republicans can come up with for Secretary of Defense. There are surely other individuals—plenty of others—the President could nominate that would be conservative voices. We would disagree with their views, but at least we would have to admit they are qualified.

I can think of some Republican Senators who would certainly make a much stronger candidate than Mr. Hegseth.

I hope my Republican colleagues think carefully today about the consequences of this vote. I hope they do the right thing and recognize there are much, much better choices for Secretary of Defense than Hegseth. The credibility of the Senate—I think the credibility of the Republican majority—is on the line with today's vote.

The well-being of our troops stationed around the world is on the line with today's vote. The very security of the American people, of our kids and families and neighbors and friends, is on the line with today's vote.

In short, we should not, cannot, must not elevate someone as erratic as Pete Hegseth to Secretary of Defense. We can and must—must—do better. I urge my colleagues to vote no.

Finally, I want to turn briefly to the subject of Mr. Vought. No nominee is more threatening or antithetical to the needs of working people than this godfather of the ultraright—Russell Vought is the godfather of the ultraright—chief cook and bottle washer of Project 2025.

When Americans voted for Donald Trump, they were very clear they want inflation to go down. They want more affordable prescription drugs. They do not want Project 2025 running the show. But that is precisely what will happen when the vote comes to Director of OMB.

If you are one of the tens of billions who benefits from Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Russell Vought is a nightmare scenario. If you want lower drug prices, you can forget about it if Russell Vought is running the show at OMB. If you want lower energy costs, if you want the U.S. to stand up to China, if you want America to create better clean jobs, Russell Vought is very, very bad news.

If you are part of the ultrarich in this country, if you are an oil executive or own a drug company, Russell Vought is your golden ticket. If there is any golden age coming under Donald Trump, Russell Vought proves it is only a golden age for those at the very, very top. As for everyone else, Donald Trump and Russell Vought say you are on your own.

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.

MR. SCHATZ. 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

MR. SCHATZ. Mr. President, Pete Hegseth is just not qualified to be in charge of the Department of Defense. He would oversee almost 3 million employees around the world and an annual budget of over \$800 billion. But his only management experience today is running two very small veterans' organizations with, let's just say, mixed results.

Even if he had done extraordinarily well in that job, you do not put a person in charge of a small shop suddenly in charge of 3 million employees. He ran organizations with just a few dozen employees and tiny little budgets and neither of them were anything like the Defense Department in size and scale.

And so on what basis are we supposed to trust that Pete Hegseth can manage not just the largest employer in the country but one of the largest employers on the planet?

Much like the rest of Donald Trump's Cabinet, the main criteria for Hegseth's nomination was his loyalty to Donald Trump. I am not saying loyalty to the President is some sort of disqualifier. You want your Cabinet to be loyal. But it can't be the only thing. You also have to be good at this. It is not like you couldn't have found a MAGA world person that was a three-star or a four-star or someone who had run a big enterprise or someone who had been a Governor or someone who had done big things and demonstrated they could run big complex organizations. That is what this is.

This isn't about woke or not woke or foreign policy. This is about: Gosh, this is a big job; and to the extent that the U.S. Senate is in the personnel business to provide our advice and then our consent to a President providing us with a nominee, it is very hard to get to yes on someone who has just never run anything particularly large or complicated.

In 2017—and this is his main qualification—he says:

I think President Donald Trump is the final defensive line for America.

And as Trump ran for reelection, he said that there would be a “national divorce” if Democrats won and that “the military and police . . . will be forced”—“the military and the police . . . will be forced to make a choice [and] yes, there will be some form of civil war.”

This is the guy we want to run the Defense Department who a couple of years ago suggested if Democrats win, there might be a civil war.

It is not just that Hegseth is a Trump acolyte getting a plum job in the administration. There is plenty of that happening. It is also that he has no real understanding substantively of the job that he would be doing. Leading the Department of the Defense is not just a bureaucratic exercise. Day in and day out, month after month, you are issuing billions of dollars in contracts and making decisions that are not at all obvious and super complex and sensitive. There are tradeoffs and compromises, and you have to know how, as they say, the building works.

So your knowledge and your experience really matter here, which is why it was so alarming that he wasn't able to name a single member of ASEAN when asked by my colleague Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH. It wasn't a “gotcha” question. That is pretty basic stuff. ASEAN, which stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is an essential part of the strategy in the Indo-Pacific. These are key partners the Defense Secretary directly engages with. Hegseth didn't even know the first thing about them and named a bunch of countries that don't even belong to the organization.