

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.

Later, when he was asked by Senator SLOTKIN whether he would carry out an illegal order from Donald Trump, like using the military against civilians, he refused to give a straight answer. There are a lot of close calls when you are Defense Secretary, but whether or not to turn the military on the public, even if they are Democrats, is not a close call. That is a simple: No, I wouldn't do that. I will not carry out an illegal order. No, the United States military is not in existence for the purpose of carrying out orders against United States citizens exercising their constitutional rights.

Leading our Armed Forces is not a part-time gig. The Pentagon is not a cable news set where you can roll up on a Saturday and say clever things. You can't improv your way out of global conflicts.

The people who lace up and go into battle deserve better than that. They deserve someone who understands the world and all of its complexities and recognizes the weight of their decisions, especially when the chips are down. And Pete Hegseth is not that person.

I urge my colleagues to do the right thing and vote no on his confirmation. 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. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I realize that some Republicans were hoping we would cut this process short, but I have no problem coming to the floor and having a lengthy discussion about Mr. Hegseth's nomination to be Defense Secretary. I am eager to talk about it.

The only person who doesn't seem to want to talk about the Hegseth nomination is actually Mr. Hegseth himself, because I have been trying for weeks to schedule a meeting with Mr. Hegseth prior to his confirmation vote. I genuinely want a chance to ask him directly about my concerns with his character and fitness, yes, but also about the serious challenges facing our Nation, whether it is competition with China or aggression from Russia.

As vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I help write the bill that funds the Defense Department every year. And that bill only passes with bipartisan support. I don't think it is asking a lot to be able to meet with the person nominated to lead that Department.

I have had the opportunity to meet with 10 of President Trump's Cabinet nominees, and I look forward to meeting with more before they are confirmed by the Senate. Conducting these meetings is the absolute bare min-

imum, given the role of each Senator and the constituents they represent. But Mr. Hegseth refused to meet with me and has refused to meet with many of my Democratic colleagues.

I think most Americans would agree you shouldn't get the job if you decide you can skip the job interview. Every nominee—every nominee—should be willing to meet with Senators, regardless of their party, to answer basic questions about how they would approach their role if confirmed. It is honestly beneath the dignity of the role he aspires to for Mr. Hegseth to refuse to meet one-on-one with most Democrats.

What is he afraid of? Are the questions we have to ask really that hard? I mean, if Mr. Hegseth is afraid of me, how is he going to stand up to China?

Meeting with Members on both sides isn't just some formality. If you are confirmed, it is part of the job. So this is a serious concern and one of the many concerns I have now with Mr. Hegseth's qualifications, his positions, and his character.

Let's be perfectly clear about the stakes here. We are talking about who we will put in command of the most powerful military in the world. There is nothing on Mr. Hegseth's resume that remotely suggests he has the experience for that role. I have deep appreciation for his service to our country; I do. But let's not kid ourselves here. I don't see how being a FOX TV host prepares you to lead 3 million servicemembers and civilians. I don't see how bankrupting a veterans' nonprofit through wasteful spending qualifies you to manage a budget of nearly \$900 billion.

Moreover, we really, truly have no sense of what his understanding of military policy is or what his strategic priorities would be. Thanks to Senator DUCKWORTH, we know he is someone who can't name a single country in ASEAN. That ignorance is alarming. Senators only had 7 minutes during his confirmation hearing to ask questions. Many asked the questions we knew our Republican colleagues would not regarding Hegseth's questionable character and fitness—important questions, absolutely. But because we had to spend so much time understanding if he even could do this job at the most basic level, we had precious little time to ask him about how he would do his job.

How would Pete Hegseth ensure that our servicemembers and their families have the resources they need at home and abroad? How does he plan to reduce costs and development times for key military capabilities that are critical to our national security? How would he invest in our defense industrial base and public shipyards, like the one in my home State of Washington? How does he view the pacing threat in the Indo-Pacific? And how would he work with our partners and our allies to prepare for a potential conflict? Does he have any thoughts on that at all?

This is just not a serious candidate who has thoughtful positions on the challenges we face.

You know what position he is serious about, what he has stated over and over again?

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

He said that last November.

Or:

We need moms. But not in the military, especially in combat units.

That is infuriating and disqualifying. I don't have to try very hard to imagine how that kind of condescending attitude will go over with our women in uniform.

And after decades of comments like this—denigrating the role of women in the military in ways that simply do not square with reality—Mr. Hegseth's recent about-face on this topic is just not convincing. He has also made clear he has little regard for the Geneva Conventions.

Maybe this is a bit old-fashioned of me, but I think we should have a Secretary of Defense who is firmly against war crimes; not one who has spoken in favor of torture like waterboarding, in favor of people convicted of war crimes, and questioned whether we should follow the Geneva Conventions.

And let's not forget, in addition to having no real qualifications and many alarming positions, Mr. Hegseth has many red flags that raise serious concerns about his character and his conduct. There is the report that he and his management team pursued women on his staff. There is the report that he took his employees to a strip club and got drunk. There is the report that he got drunk in uniform and had to be carried out of a strip club. There is the report that he chanted "Kill all Muslims" while he was drunk.

And beyond reporting, there are the police records backing up the account of a woman who told the nurse she may have been drugged and then raped by Pete Hegseth. We couldn't hear from that woman because Mr. Hegseth reached a financial settlement, and he has now threatened to sue her for speaking out. And we almost didn't hear about that incident at all since he didn't even disclose it when he was vetted.

But there are other people we have now heard from. We know his mother once wrote to her son directly criticizing him as an abuser of women. We know his former sister-in-law, in a signed affidavit, has shared she saw Mr. Hegseth drink to excess and understood his ex-wife feared for her safety with him. And we know that same ex-wife told the FBI that "he drinks more than he doesn't."

That is an awful lot of smoke for us to be ignoring the fire.

There is absolutely no world where someone who has a history of running up debts at nonprofits should be responsible for overseeing half of our discretionary spending. There is no world where someone with a history of failing

to address his irresponsible alcohol use should be given one of the most stressful jobs imaginable and should be making life-and-death decisions on a daily and an hourly basis. There is no world where we should have a predator running the Department of Defense that is responsible for the well-being of millions of women and men in uniform.

I don't get how that is complicated.

Mr. President, let me just end on this. There is no world where the person in charge of our military should see his fellow Americans as the enemy. But Mr. Hegseth has made clear that is his view. Regarding Democrats and Republicans, he has written—and this is him:

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 an especially dark view of our country. Our military uniforms do not say “Democrat,” they do not say “Republican.” They just don't.

You cannot be an effective commander if your people don't trust you. But how are troops supposed to trust you to keep them safe in combat if you think half the Nation is an enemy? How are Muslim servicemembers supposed to trust you if you think their religion is a threat to our country? How are women servicemembers supposed to trust you if you think they should be at home?

I don't have an answer to that. Maybe Mr. Hegseth doesn't either. Maybe that is why he won't meet with me. Then again, maybe it is because he thinks I am his foe because I am a Democrat, or maybe he doesn't think I should have a say in the military issues because I am a woman.

Mr. President, I do have a say, and I say someone like Mr. Hegseth is grossly unqualified to take on one of the most important jobs in the world. And I will be voting against him. I urge my Republican colleagues to seriously consider the message it will send to confirm someone for Secretary of Defense who has failed time and again to meet the most basic standards of conduct our women and men in uniform are required to live up to.

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

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

#### TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been 4 days. It seems like it has been longer than that, but it has been 4 days since President Trump took the oath of office as the 47th President of the United States. We have seen a flurry of activity since that time, which you would expect from President Trump. He has been waiting for that day for

some time now and has worked really hard to get there. But from securing our borders to securing protections for women in sports, it is abundantly clear that President Trump is not letting any dust gather under his feet.

I am particularly pleased to see him dismantling the Biden-Harris administration's DEI regime throughout the Federal Government. Some people may be asking: Well, why would the President waste his time on that? What could be wrong with having a diverse workforce?

Well, the truth is that, while DEI—or diversity, equity, and inclusion—may sound like a benign or a nice thing, the dystopian reality is that there is nothing inclusive about DEI programming. On the contrary, it is quite divisive. In practice, DEI initiatives do the exact opposite of what they purport to do, and they fly directly in the face of everything that America stands for.

On Monday of this week, we celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. In what was perhaps Dr. King's most famous speech, the “I Have a Dream” speech, he said:

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but [rather] by the content of their character.

To me, that is the ideal.

At the heart of the civil rights movement was a desire for everyone, regardless of race or gender, to compete on a level, merit-based playing field.

What is so misguided about these DEI initiatives is that they do the exact opposite of what Martin Luther King spoke about. Instead of judging people on the content of their character, the DEI regime would have us assign points to people based on characteristics like skin color and gender and give preferential treatment to people on that basis. These are immutable characteristics, not something any of us can control. So it is profoundly unfair to decide that one person in a job candidate pool gets more weight put on their application because of something that was an accident of their birth. I think most people, if they understand what DEI is all about, would agree that this amounts to an unfair hiring practice. It treats people differently based on gender or the color of their skin or some other immutable characteristic.

President Trump's Executive order does not just affect Federal hiring; it also directs Agencies and Department heads to eliminate DEI practices in grants and contracts as well.

I think this would be a great opportunity for the Department of Government Efficiency to take a look at it as well, as there is a lot of room to eliminate waste and inefficiency in Federal grants and contracts.

According to the Government Accounting Office—GAO—the Federal Government spent \$759 billion on Federal contracts in 2023, which represents roughly 12.5 percent of Federal Government spending for that fiscal year. A significant number of these contracts

are for the Department of Defense. With billions of dollars and our national security on the line, it is critical that these contracts are awarded to contractors on merit, not based on some DEI-centered criteria. We owe it to the taxpayers to be selecting the best and the brightest and the most effective people for a job, not picking the consulting firm that simply racked up the most DEI points.

One of the downstream effects of DEI requirements in Federal contracts is they create an incentive structure for these divisive practices to bleed into the corporate world. This goes all the way back to then-President Richard Nixon, who implemented affirmative action requirements for private companies that contract with the Federal Government.

Since that time, there have even been instances of companies committing outright fraud in order to qualify for contracts that were prioritized for minority-owned businesses by claiming that an employee is a 51-percent owner in order to qualify for minority-owned status and thus get preferential treatment.

Now, some of the folks in the media not surprisingly are framing this action by President Trump as a reversal of the progress we have made in America in the civil rights era, but nothing could be further from the truth.

What we have to keep in mind is that the reforms of the civil rights era were enacted to address particular problems that our Nation was going through at that time; namely, segregation and widespread racial discrimination. Of course, these practices of racial discrimination that were so widespread during that time were far from our finest moments as a nation. I am thankful—thankful—that our country has been able to move forward from that era, and I applaud the men and women who went to great lengths and risked everything to help us turn the page on that chapter as a country.

But today, with rights granted to everybody, regardless of race, color, or creed, by law, we have a different situation where the law and the policies that were intended to end racial discrimination have evolved into the modern DEI apparatus, creating a new kind of discrimination—something we sought to avoid but which has now crept back into our country.

So the policies that were enacted to address one problem back during the civil rights era have been turned on their head—not to accomplish their original purpose but to do something entirely different, which is to enact preferences based on race, gender, and other immutable characteristics.

In fact, while the Civil Rights Act was being debated right here on the Senate floor, one of its architects, Senator Humphrey, expressed direct opposition to what is now part of the DEI bureaucracy. He said:

If the Senator can find in Title VII any language which provides that an employer