

And those whistleblowers even disclosed problematic conduct during the Trump administration, conduct which that administration actually tried to fix.

In my efforts to protect Health and Human Services' whistleblowers, my Democratic colleagues didn't join me in that effort either.

Last year, I hosted two oversight roundtables, one on the Biden administration's failure to protect unaccompanied children from trafficking, another on the Biden administration's failure to collect DNA at the border, resulting in Americans being subjected to senseless crimes from illegals.

At that roundtable, the witnesses said that Rachel Morin's murder by an illegal could have been prevented had his DNA been taken by the border people, as required under law.

At both of these roundtables, my whistleblowers testified. On both roundtables, not a single Democrat attended, even though I invited them to come.

During Trump's first term, I made a public statement that it appeared the Ukraine complaint followed whistleblower laws. I said that even though I had serious concerns about the complaint's substantive legitimacy—concerns which have been proven right over time. Now, at that particular time, Democratic groups praised me.

During Trump's first term, I investigated Russian collusion, then-Ranking Member Feinstein joined me in that effort. We and our staffs interviewed Donald Trump, Jr., and other Republicans. As we found out, there was nothing there.

And what ended up happening is the exposure of the Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee paying for the fake Steele dossier.

Yet, with overwhelming evidence of Biden family corruption, my Democratic colleagues didn't do any investigation of that matter. And when I say "overwhelming," I made bank records public proving the case, and it was still crickets from the other side.

During the Kavanaugh nomination, many alleged whistleblowers came forward. I directed my oversight and investigative staffs to dig in: 45 witnesses were interviewed, 25 written statements, and an over 400-page report.

Some of those witnesses were sent to us by my Democrat colleagues. The conclusion of that, no evidence to support the allegations that were brought forward against Kavanaugh. Indeed, what ended up happening were several criminal referrals for felonious lies from these same witnesses. This committee made four criminal referrals for materially false statements and obstruction, two of these four referrals also included criminal conspiracy.

One witness was referred to my staff by a fellow Senator who also referred that witness to a reporter. That witness's information was used to question Kavanaugh under oath. That witness later publicly admitted that they lied.

When individuals provide fabricated allegations, it diverts committee resources when other time-sensitive investigations are ongoing. Resources were diverted away from whistleblowers to handle the Kavanaugh matter. Such conduct impedes the Senate's work. During Kavanaugh, my investigative staff spent hours, days, and many weeks investigating one claim after another.

So getting back to the matter I opened with, Emil Bove, my first question to him at a public hearing was directly about the whistleblower complaint that my staff received the very single day before the hearing.

So the nominee, Mr. Bove, denied the allegations under oath. The Deputy Attorney General has denied the allegations publicly. Two high-level principals have made outright denials publicly. The whistleblower also signed papers acknowledging the Justice Department had complied with court orders. So right now that is the state of the play.

Every day my office receives many whistleblower cases. My investigative staff study them and run down the facts.

There are many government employees who need help. And just this year, I have had a lot of success with whistleblowers that were discriminated against, investigated against, maybe fired, maybe put on administrative leave. But in most cases, it was all an attempt to hurt them professionally, besides being out of a job.

So in regard to the IRS whistleblowers, they were finally helped—one of whom is a Democrat. My Department of Homeland Security whistleblowers got their guns, badges, and retirement back. On another example, I spent significant time helping FBI whistleblowers, and it appears their cases are trending in the right direction.

And guess what. One of those whistleblowers is also a Democrat.

I would always welcome more bipartisan oversight. It is just that the Democrats apparently don't want to join my efforts.

So when I read unfounded public broadsides about my operation in that political piece I have already referred to, let what I said today be a reminder of my dedication to helping the whistleblower community. And let me also remind everyone that sometimes what I do to protect whistleblowers is non-public, as it should be. And I don't care about that. All I care about are the results of helping whistleblowers and bringing attention to the wrong that the whistleblowers say are wrong within our government.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 64.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Jonathan Gould, of Virginia, to be Comptroller of the Currency for a term of five years.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 64, Jonathan Gould, of Virginia, to be Comptroller of the Currency for a term of five years.

John Thune, John Barrasso, Cindy Hyde-Smith, John R. Curtis, Rick Scott of Florida, Bernie Moreno, Pete Ricketts, Eric Schmitt, Jon A. Husted, Roger Marshall, Jim Justice, Tommy Tuberville, Bill Hagerty, Joni Ernst, James E. Risch, Marsha Blackburn, Tim Sheehy.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 261.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Whitney D. Hermandorfer, of Tennessee, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Sixth Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 261, Whitney D. Hermandorfer, of Tennessee, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Sixth Circuit.

John Thune, Lindsey Graham, Shelley Moore Capito, Ted Budd, Mike Lee, Tom Cotton, John Barrasso, Bernie Moreno, Cynthia M. Lummis, Katie Boyd Britt, Eric Schmitt, Roger Marshall, Marsha Blackburn, Markwayne Mullin, Steve Daines, Jim Banks, Chuck Grassley.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to resume Calendar No. 106.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Preston Griffith, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of Energy.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, if cloture is invoked on the Griffith nomination, all postcloture time be expired and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Bedford nomination; further, that if cloture is invoked on the Bedford nomination, all postcloture time be expired and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Griffith and Bedford nominations at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, no earlier than Wednesday, July 9; further, that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; finally, that the remaining clotures filed on July 1 ripen at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, on Wednesday, July 9.

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 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.

Ms. CANTWELL. 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 BRYAN BEDFORD

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak in opposition to the nomination of Bryan Bedford to serve as the FAA Administrator—the Federal Aviation Administration. Everyone knows that the FAA is at a critical point in its history. The tragic midair collision that we had in DC on January 29 took the lives of 67 people and made it clear what was at stake to all of us.

The National Transportation Safety Board, in their subsequent findings earlier this year, said that over 15,000 close calls took place around DCA over the past 3 years alone, demonstrating that we and the aviation industry have much more work to do to raise the safety bar.

The FAA and its workforce are facing historic challenges. Within weeks of the DCA crash, the Trump administration fired hundreds of FAA officials, including technical operations staff who help make it possible for air traffic controllers to do their jobs and specialists who design FAA route flight maps.

With air traffic system outages and a clear directive from Congress to implement stronger safety regulations, career officials with decades of aviation experience have been pushed to leave. Just to be clear, I am referring to the fact that we passed an FAA 5-year authorization, and we said we need stronger safety regulations, and we need more hands-on experience, not shortcuts for the individuals that are helping us implement safety plans.

As a result, senior leaders at multiple FAA lines of business have already left or are in the process of leaving, and the FAA has lost about 3 percent of its workforce—more than 1,200 employees—to the deferred resignation program.

An FAA presentation obtained by the Wall Street Journal in May revealed that the FAA is internally sounding the alarm about the impacts from those staffing shortages. The presentation warned that the Agency's ability to work on runway safety, process medical clearances for air traffic controllers, and fulfill its statutory and regulatory requirements were all at risk.

The next FAA Administrator will have an overarching mission that will be a huge challenge: ensuring the United States remains the global gold standard for aviation safety. And in order to keep 2.9 million commercial airline passengers safe each day, the next Administrator must prioritize investing in the FAA safety workforce.

These challenges underscore why we should have an Administrator who is willing to strengthen the safety standards, instead of seeking ways to get around them. When we look at the record of aviation safety, Mr. Bedford has been on the frontlines, obviously working in the aviation sector, but also in a frontline effort to roll back safety reforms and unravel the regulatory framework that has made the United States the gold standard.

Since 1999, Mr. Bedford has been the president and CEO of Republic Airways, one of the largest regional airlines in North America. And for over a decade, he has consistently fought to change the FAA's 1,500-hour rule, which is a key safety provision that was implemented in 2013 following the tragic crash of a regional jet—Colgan Air Flight 3407 near Buffalo, NY, that killed 49 people.

The rule sets strong pilot training and first officer qualification standards to ensure that both pilots have the appropriate experience to react to in an in-flight emergency. Instead of recognizing how this rule was developed through the public debate and notice and comment period, Mr. Bedford has called it arbitrary. That means the FAA went through a very big process, but Mr. Bedford thinks that was "arbitrary" and "does nothing to further the goal of increased flight safety."

Mr. Bedford has then led a trade association that spent millions of dollars lobbying against the 1,500-hour rule and other pilot training policies, including as recently as the first quarter of this year. And in 2022, Mr. Bedford's company petitioned the FAA for an exemption from the 1,500-hour rule. That effort failed, but as head of the FAA, he will be in the very job that he basically tried to lobby to say, Let's weaken safety standard rules.

The effort that Mr. Bedford tried when he was in the private sector failed, but as I said, as the head of FAA, he could hold power over the Agency to weaken what has become a very bedrock 1,500-hour to help us make sure that both pilots and copilots are appropriately trained.

My colleagues and I gave Mr. Bedford multiple chances in our Commerce Committee nomination hearing to tell us that he, if confirmed, would not weaken that rule, but he repeatedly refused to give us an answer or commitment. To me, that was the evidence that I needed to understand, if the 1,500-hour rule, which has been in place since the Colgan Air tragedy, could be at risk if Mr. Bedford were confirmed.

Mr. Bedford would not commit to recusing himself from ruling on his own company's exemption request from the 1,500-hour rule for the entirety of his 5-year term as FAA Administrator. In other words, he could decide to grant his own company an exemption, the same thing he tried to do when he was in the private sector lobbying the FAA.

Mr. Bedford's hearing testimony was so concerning that the Colgan Air Flight 3407 families have publicly opposed his nomination. These are families who have become the bedrock of safety. They move forward with their lives, but they also come to Capitol Hill each year to protect aviation safety standards.

The families said that Mr. Bedford's clear aim to weaken the 1,500-hour rule "sends the wrong message to every American passenger and every family that has ever boarded a domestic flight."

This represents, I think, a very big challenge for us right now. Too often, carriers operating under tight profit margins and resource constraints focus on reactive measures rather than proactive safety improvements. What we need is a proactive Administrator. We need somebody who is fighting for the safety improvements to prevent