

Let me repeat: Under no circumstances should anyone from Donald Trump's Department of Justice be allowed to privately interview Ghislaine Maxwell. The conflict of interest just stares you in the face, and it is unacceptable.

If you have been following this saga, and given how the White House and Speaker JOHNSON have so mishandled it—and who hasn't been following it—you know exactly why this moment is so dangerous. There is every reason to fear that Donald Trump could offer Ghislaine Maxwell a pardon in exchange for silence or, even worse, phony exoneration.

Let me be clear, Trump is sending his personal lawyer, Todd Blanche, to try to execute a corrupt coverup, potentially offering leniency to a woman who also abused the victims.

Enough. Enough. Enough with the hiding; enough with the excuses; and enough with the coverup. The American people deserve transparency. They deserve answers.

And there are massive questions here, not just for the President but for the Vice President, the Attorney General, the FBI Director, and Republican leaders in Congress. What is in the files? When did they learn about it? And how long have they been misleading the American people?

So, today, on the heels of Speaker JOHNSON fleeing town to avoid accountability and following this damning report from the Wall Street Journal, I am calling on the administration to provide a closed-door briefing to all Senators on the Epstein files. The Senate deserves to hear directly from senior administration officials about Donald Trump's name appearing in these files and the complete lack of transparency shown to date.

Let me say it again. Donald Trump can't play ignorant anymore. He was caught red-handed in a lie, as were his lackeys. He reportedly knew for months that his name was in the Epstein files. He lied about it to the press, and now the truth is coming out.

Over the past few weeks, Trump has tried to change the subject—throwing out wild accusations, attacking his critics, and calling the files a hoax run by Democrats. He has blamed “foolish” and “stupid” Republicans for taking it seriously. He even scolded the American people for caring too much.

Well, we now all know why he was so desperate to make it all disappear—because whenever Donald Trump points a finger, it is because he knows he is guilty of what he is accusing everyone else of. That is his MO. When he does something, when he knows he has done something wrong, instead of admitting it, instead of trying to make amends, he points the finger at someone else and accuses them of the very thing he has done. That is how he has lived his whole life. That is how he has conducted his Presidency. As I said, it is his MO.

Let us not forget, Donald Trump campaigned, just several months back,

on releasing the Epstein files. Donald Trump is the only President or politician to ever campaign on releasing the Epstein files. And now, very simply, Americans are demanding he honor it.

A good number of people voted for Trump because he promised to be their voice against the so-called deep state. But now they have seen he is very much a part of that deep state. He is right in the middle of it.

People believed he would drain the swamp; now he is right in the middle of the swamp. And that is why Americans across the political spectrum—right, center, left, Democrats, Republican, Independents—Americans across the political spectrum are angry with Donald Trump because they now are seeing his promise to drain the swamp was total fiction. He is in the middle of it. He is adding to it.

Trump promised transparency. He told his supporters he would expose the truth. He has done the opposite. He has smothered it more than ever before.

And meanwhile, House Republicans had the chance to show courage, to do the right thing and act, but, instead, Speaker JOHNSON ran for the exits, sending everyone home early and triggering what we now call the “Epstein recess.”

But I would say to Speaker JOHNSON, I would say to Donald Trump and his minions, I would say to all of my Republican colleagues in the Senate: This issue isn't going away. It is only getting bigger and more dangerous the longer Republicans ignore it.

Instead of focusing on appropriations or national priorities like transparency for Americans or funding the government, Speaker JOHNSON and House Republicans will be left cleaning up this mess, a mess of their own making.

Republicans cannot escape the issue—not next week, not next month, not until the American people get answers and the transparency they were promised.

NOMINATION OF EMIL J. BOVE III

Mr. President, now on the Bove cloture vote, later today, Senate Republicans will hold the first procedural vote on one of Donald Trump's nastiest Judicial nominees to date, Emil Bove.

Mr. Bove is beyond unqualified and unworthy of the Federal bench. He is an existential threat to the rule of law and our democracy as we know it.

Mr. Bove is as far from the mainstream as any judicial nominee we have considered in this Chamber. He is a Trumpian henchman, the extreme of the extreme of the extreme. He is openly hostile to the rule of law. He is fundamentally opposed to democratic norms. He lacks the temperament to serve as a jurist.

Above all—above all—Bove is religiously obedient to Donald Trump. We all know that one of the only things that matter to this President is brazen, unyielding obedience to him no matter how wrong he is, no matter what lies he tells.

Mr. Bove made a name for himself by cleaning up Donald Trump's dirty laun-

dry. That is what he did—he cleaned up Donald Trump's dirty laundry. He is a devout January 6 apologist who defended Trump as his personal attorney after Trump was charged with inciting the insurrection.

At the Justice Department, he wielded his power to fire prosecutors working on January 6 criminal cases and punish FBI agents—people who dedicated their lives to our country and were simply following the law. He goes out and tries to punish them because they stopped Donald Trump's insurrection.

So instead of working to hold the January 6 rioters accountable, Bove sided with the rioters, who desecrated the building and violently attacked our police officers. Imagine Republicans going after people who attacked police officers all because Donald Trump incited an insurrection that he now lies about.

Well, that is who Mr. Bove is, and it is not even the all of it. While at the Justice Department, Mr. Bove reportedly told DOJ lawyers to ignore court orders and even deliberately mislead judges. That is what he said. That is what he reportedly told DOJ lawyers—to ignore court orders and mislead judges.

Can you believe we are trying to put this guy on the bench? How low can our Republican colleagues go in obeisance to Donald Trump when so many of them—not all of them, not all of them, but so many of them know he is wrong?

If there is even a shred of truth to these allegations, that is enough to disqualify Mr. Bove from ever holding Federal office and Federal judgeship above all.

My Republican colleagues don't seem to want to get to the facts. Republicans are so afraid of Donald Trump, so willing to do whatever he says, that many of them are going along with Bove's nomination without a whisper, without so much as a whisper of scrutiny. All the signs are pointing towards Bove being a disastrous judge who will take advantage of his power on the Third Circuit to settle scores and advance the Trump agenda.

Republicans have a decision to make. If they still have any respect left for the Senate as a check on the Executive, if they still have any respect for our judiciary and the rule of law, then Republicans should join Democrats and vote no on Mr. Bove's nomination.

HONORING DETECTIVE JOHN M. GIBSON AND
OFFICER JACOB J. CHESTNUT

Mr. President, finally, on a more solemn note, today marks 27 years since Detective John Gibson and Officer Jacob Chestnut of the Capitol Police were killed in the line of duty, defending the Capitol Building from a lone gunman.

In the face of grave danger not only to themselves but to all of us who were in the Capitol that day—I was a Congressman then—Detective Gibson and Officer Chestnut responded with extraordinary courage and heroism. Because of their sacrifice, a potentially

catastrophic situation was contained in a matter of minutes, and countless innocent lives were spared.

Today, we honor the memories of Detective Gibson and Officer Chestnut, and we thank all of our Capitol Police for doing the work they do day in and day out to keep the Capitol Complex safe and secure.

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. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the appropriations process is well underway here in the Senate. The Senate Appropriations Committee, under Chair COLLINS, released four bipartisan appropriations bills.

This week, we are doing something a bit unusual. We are bringing appropriations legislation to the floor. Why do I say that is unusual? Because last year, despite the fact that the Senate Appropriations Committee approved 11 out of the 12 yearly appropriations bills with bipartisan support, the Democratic leader never brought a single one of those bills to the floor—not one.

One of the things that I have been determined to do as leader is to restore us as much as possible to a regular-order appropriations process, to have bills move through the committees and then come to the Senate floor for debate and amendment.

That is what we are doing this week with consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill for fiscal year 2026. This legislation was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee in a robustly bipartisan vote of 26 to 3. I hope it will receive equally robust bipartisan support on the Senate floor.

The MILCON-VA appropriations bill provides critical funding for veterans' healthcare, veterans' benefits, and construction projects at military bases and installations around the globe.

As a resident of a rural State, I am particularly pleased by the bill's funding for telehealth services as well as for the Office of Rural Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs. This funding will help reduce barriers to care for rural veterans, as will the bill's provision preventing the VA from closing hospitals—something I worked to include.

I am also pleased to see that the bill continues to fund modernization of veterans' healthcare records by providing funding to triple the number of VA sites that use electronic health records.

On the military construction front, I am happy to announce that the bill

contains funding for a number of key facilities for the new B-21 bomber—the future of our long-range bomber fleet—which will have its first home at Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota. National Guard facilities in South Dakota, like National Guard facilities around the country, will also see funding for essential construction projects thanks to this legislation.

Mr. President, considering the Military Construction-VA bill on the floor is a big step in the right direction appropriations-wise. And our work this week doesn't have to end there. As I said, the Appropriations Committee has reported a total of four appropriations bills so far. All of them have been bipartisan.

I know that the fiscal year 2026 Agriculture appropriations bill is a major priority for all of us—Democrat or Republican—who live in States that depend on agriculture. Whether it is funding for agricultural research programs, resources for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, assistance to ranchers to comply with animal disease traceability requirements, the \$223 million for the Agricultural Marketing Service to expand markets for American agriculture products, or resources for the Farm Service Agency to ensure that farmers have access to necessary capital, this year's Agriculture appropriations bill will be a key resource for farmers and ranchers.

Then there is the Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill, which, among other things, provides essential funding for Federal law enforcement officers as well as support for State and local law enforcement.

There is the fiscal year 2026 Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, which funds the work we do here in Washington for our constituents and, this year, also adds additional funding to confront growing threats to Member security.

Mr. President, I am very grateful to Chair COLLINS, Vice Chair MURRAY, and all the members of the Senate Appropriations Committee for all their work on these bills. I hope we will be able to consider some of these alongside the MILCON-VA appropriations bill this week and next.

Democrats have indicated they want a bipartisan appropriations process, and we are giving it to them. I hope we will see bipartisan passage of appropriations bills on the Senate floor.

It was disturbing to see the Democratic leader implicitly threatening to shut down the government in his July "Dear Colleague" letter, but I am hopeful he does not represent the views of Senate Democrats as a whole. Members of both parties should have a strong interest in a regular-order, bipartisan appropriations process, and I am pleased that we managed to begin on a bipartisan basis this week. I hope the process will continue in a bipartisan way as we move toward September's deadline.

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.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to mark an important milestone in this new administration. Senate Republicans have now confirmed more than 100 nominees in President Trump's second term.

This is significant progress in filling critical government positions. It took relentless procedural battles to accomplish this. It included full days and long nights. Why? Because Democrats are waging a coordinated campaign of obstruction.

Under the Constitution, the Senate is meant to provide advice and consent. We do it on Presidential nominations. We do it on a number of things. Specifically, with regard to nominations, this means an honest evaluation of qualifications, and it means a vote in the U.S. Senate. Now, for more than 6 months, Senate Democrats have turned advice and consent into automatic opposition. It doesn't just delay President Trump; it damages the country.

Democrats have filibustered all but one of President Trump's nominees, and he was the very first nominee, Marco Rubio to be Secretary of State. He was confirmed on day one of the administration. Since then, it has been a wall of obstruction. Democrats have filibustered positions requiring confirmation that have never before even had a rollcall vote in the U.S. Senate; they have gone by unanimous consent. Democrats filibustered the Chief of Protocol for the State Department—the Chief of Protocol. Democrats filibustered the Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security. They filibustered the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. Today, 138 nominees who have already been approved by a full vote in the Senate committees are caught here—in Senate floor purgatory.

Democrats in the Senate seem to have a new litmus test: If President Trump nominates you, Democrats are against you—period, end of story. Yesterday, the Senate confirmed four nominees: the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information, the Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Crimes, a district judge for the Eastern District of Missouri, and the Assistant Administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency—all qualified, all vetted, all experienced. Each and every one was filibustered. The Democrats forced the Senate to burn every minute of available time before the Senate was permitted to vote.

When Democrats delay nominations and nominees—people specifically