

reach some sort of negotiated outcome that is satisfactory to President Trump, then we need to either stay here or change the Senate rules. I believe that the status quo is unacceptable and that something has to give.

The Senate Democrats are the ones who brought us to where we are today. They are the ones responsible for the blame. But more importantly than that, the American people deserve the services of these individuals who have been nominated for these various Senate-confirmed positions. President Trump is entitled to his team, and this mindless obstruction has to come to an end now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

#### TARIFFS

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about two subjects very different in nature. I want to start with the deadline and, I believe, tomorrow's imposition of a 50-percent tariff on Brazil imports.

I really appreciate what the administration is doing, trying to get other countries on notice that we are tired of unfair balance of trade. We have probably allowed it to go on for too long. So some of the chaos that some people may think the administration is creating with these tariffs is absolutely necessary to stop the chaos of the United States being unfairly positioned with trade partners. So on that side of the ledger, I support what the administration is doing.

But as somebody who advised businesses on capital expenditures, on corporate relocations, on manufacturing facilities, those sorts of things, in my prior career, I am worried about how this 50-percent tariff on Brazil—a country that we have a trade surplus with—undermines our credibility as we are trying to negotiate these other tariffs because I met with some members of the Brazilian senate earlier this week in my office. I actually had a number of them there. It was opposition and governing party in my office.

The President has threatened a tariff on Brazil because he is not satisfied with the outcome of a judicial proceeding related to a prior leader in Brazil. I had someone who described themselves as a friend of this man who said: I am a friend of this person, and we are working to try and get that judicial outcome reversed, but we don't understand how a judicial decision of a sovereign nation would end up resulting in a tariff for a country that has a trade surplus with the United States.

I agree, and I think it really puts Brazil in an untenable situation. To avoid the tariff, they would have to disrespect their rule of law, and they would have to overturn, arbitrarily, something that has gone through their courts. Whether or not their courts live up to the standards of the United States, I don't know. I guess you could argue it one way or the other. But at the end of the day, they are a sovereign

nation, and we have a positive balance of trade with them, and we are asking them to reverse a court decision or encounter a 50-percent tariff on goods coming into this country. Well, think coffee, think inputs from manufacturing, think any number of products that you buy, apparel that says "Made in Brazil" having a 50-percent tariff applied to it because our President of the United States doesn't like the outcome of a court system in a sovereign nation.

So I would encourage the President to do like that senate member in my office, who is a member of the opposition, the minority party, who says: He is a friend of mine. We are working through our court system, but allow us to do that. Please don't do the economic damage to a nearly 200-year-old relationship with a sovereign nation.

And on that subject, I agree.

#### JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, I do want to take a moment to talk about a separate subject, and that has to do with the blue slip.

Like Chair GRASSLEY said in the Judiciary Committee, most people would not even have any idea what a blue slip is, so let me just explain.

We have district court judges. For district court judges, their territory remains in a given State. We have three districts in North Carolina. We have a policy where both Senators must return a blue slip—I think it was literally blue at some point. I have never seen it, but they had a tradition. But they have to return a blue slip in order for a judicial nominee to move forward. President Trump is, rightly, frustrated because blue slips are not being returned.

But I would urge my colleagues to, respectfully, tell the President that we would do damage to this institution and we would do damage to the power of individual Members if we were to rescind the blue slip.

I am a great example of that. In fact, there were nearly 40 district judges that came open in the Biden administration that the Democrats honored the blue slip on. I am not even going to talking about U.S. attorneys and others who are subject to the blue slip. But the Democrats honored that tradition in the 4 years that Biden was in power, and we honored that tradition in the 4 prior years that President Trump was in power.

I am retiring, and I won't be here in 17 months. But I am telling my colleagues, I have seen that issue cut both ways. I have actually even seen honoring the blue slip in my unique circumstance in a way that I don't think has occurred in years. I built relationships with Democrat Members who were willing to tell their chair that they wanted to honor an agreement that I had to not even confirm a circuit court judge who is not subject to the blue slip anymore.

So if we really want to work agreements here and we really want the

gears of the Senate to work, understand it is about relationships and trust, and the tradition of the blue slip is foundational to those relationships and trust. So rather than succumbing to the moment and the pressure to destroy a decades-old tradition, figure out how to get it done in spite of those limits.

If my colleagues invest in that, I will guarantee you, you will be in the same position someday like I was in the last part of last year to have Democrats agree with a Republican in the minority to not have a circuit court judge shoved down my throat for the circuit that I am in.

If we yield to the pressure of the President, if we don't honor what we have heard Chair GRASSLEY say is foundational and very, very important to the Judiciary Committee, I think those who will be here after I leave will regret it.

On a final note on that subject, Chair GRASSLEY came to me on the Senate floor a couple of weeks ago and said: I am polling Members about whether or not we have support in the blue slip.

I said: Chair GRASSLEY, you can rescind the blue slip if you feel like you have the support, but you need to understand that I will honor the blue slip for as long as I am a U.S. Senator. And with the numbers in the Judiciary Committee today, that means that regardless of what my other colleagues want to do on the blue slip, I am simply not going to allow it for the next 17 months. So let's move on, honor it, and do the work. I guarantee you if you do, you can get a lot done here and still work within the norms of this great institution.

I want to thank Chair GRASSLEY for being the great chair that he is and for standing up for that very principle.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Nebraska.

#### REMEMBERING RYNE SANDBERG

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the loss of a man who had a great impact on the city of Chicago, the Chicago Cubs, and my family.

Ryne Sandberg was the greatest second baseman to ever play for the Cubs. He came to the Cubs in 1981 as part of a trade where the Phillies sent Larry Bowa to the Cubs, and Dallas Green insisted on Ryne Sandberg being a part of that trade because he had seen him play.

From the get-go, Ryne Sandberg made an impact on the Chicago Cubs. Just a couple of short years later, in 1984, Ryne Sandberg led the Cubs to their first playoff appearance since the 1945 series. It was an MVP season for him. He had 19 home runs, and that was just the beginning of a fantastic career.

I was just getting to Chicago around that time, and that season is what made me a Cubs fan. I recall going to many games and watching Ryne Sandberg play. He was one of the best second basemen in the game. He set

records for home runs by a second baseman, for fielding percentage—96 consecutive games without an error. The man could do it all.

Throughout his tenure at the Cubs, he did a fantastic job. In fact, in 1984, who can forget the game—with all due respect to my colleagues from Missouri—in 1984, he hit a home run in the 9th inning to make sure that we had extra innings in that game against the St. Louis Cardinals and then again in the 10th to beat them. That was the kind of competitor that Ryne Sandberg was.

Throughout his career, he got a lot of hardware. He went to the All-Star game 10 times, 9 Golden Gloves, 7 Silver Slugger Awards. All of these accolades reflected the kind of person he was and are one of the reasons why Ryne Sandberg is a Hall of Famer. There was a statue of him in Wrigley Field for his contributions to the Cubs and to the game of baseball. Ryne was just synonymous with the Cubs while he was playing, and he was the kind of baseball player you were proud of. He didn't say much, but when he did, people listened.

But as great a baseball player as he was, the man was even better. Ryne Sandberg was the type of player you were proud to have on your team. He was a man of integrity. He did what he said he was going to do, worked hard, was tenacious, was great in the clubhouse. He was a player, a coach, an ambassador for us. He gave back to the community, whether it was through Cubs charities or his own Ryne kids foundation, where he helped sick kids stand up to cancer. All of those things he did to give back to the community.

He was one of those people that was just a pleasure to be around.

Somebody who understood the importance of the game but also knew the people were more important.

So, now, Ryne Sandberg is playing that eternal baseball game up in the sky, but his legacy will live on here. Countless fans will go to Cooperstown, read about his baseball exploits.

But his family—his wife Margaret, 5 kids, 11 grandkids—and all the folks in the Cubs organization know how Ryne Sandberg was a man that was more than just a baseball player. He was the kind of man that was an example for all of us in this country, who played America's pastime but knew the values of America meant taking care of our fellow citizens.

Ryne will be missed, and I hope we can all reflect upon what he meant to the game, to the Cubs, and this country as an example of how we should all be.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### NOMINATION OF CHERYL MASON

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, as we know, inspectors general in our Federal Agencies—and every Agency has one—have a really unique role in our Federal Government. They are responsible for rooting out waste and fraud, uncovering wrongdoing. They

are supposed to be fearlessly independent advocates of integrity, completely nonpartisan, and above the political fray. And that is the role they have performed in our government: saving millions—perhaps billions—of dollars in taxpayer money, ending corruption at the highest levels, and performing a vital experience for our democracy.

One of the very best of our inspectors general has been Mike Missal. He was responsible for recovering more than \$37 billion during his tenure at the Veterans' Administration. He was the inspector general at the VA under both Republican and Democratic administrations, widely respected by both sides of the aisle. Republican colleagues have worked with him, I have, and so have my colleagues on this side of the aisle. He was performing with extraordinary excellence and integrity, until he was fired without any cause, without any reason, by President Trump.

And he was not alone. In fact, the President illegally fired 18 inspectors general. I say "illegally" because they are protected by statute. They can't just be fired willy-nilly without cause. And that litigation will continue, but in the meantime, those 18 inspectors general have been deprived of the opportunity to save us money, end corruption, and protect the integrity of our democracy—18 of them, nonpartisan, independent public servants.

Today, we consider Mike Missal's replacement, a woman named Cheryl Mason, who, unfortunately, is one of the most partisan and least independent of the nominees for inspector general positions that we have seen in recent years.

We need now, more than ever, independent oversight in the VA. And so to my friends, to veterans of America who may be wondering why I am standing here urging a "no" vote on Cheryl Mason, just consider the role of inspector general in the VA for you as veterans. When you have a complaint about a VA facility—it has failed to give you appointments on time for care—if you have a complaint against some VA claims processor blowing you off, if you have a complaint about the system, about the failures to provide compensation and care, the inspector general is the one who vindicates justice for you.

Ultimately, we have an oversight function here in the U.S. Congress. I am going to fight for you as your Senator, if you are from Connecticut—or anywhere else. There are lots of different points where oversight and advocacy can occur on your behalf.

But the inspector general is inside the VA and has access to all of the documents, all of the information that are necessary to protect the integrity of this Agency. And that person should be fearlessly independent.

As a matter of fact, Cheryl Mason served on President Trump's transition team, and then she has been, for the last 6 months, senior adviser to Sec-

retary Doug Collins, who himself has been a partisan, who has dismantled the VA workforce, who has canceled contracts and endangered care and compensation from the VA.

She was senior adviser when Secretary Collins illegally fired thousands of VA employees, a quarter or a third of them veterans. He fired them, and she was his senior adviser.

As adviser, we have to presume she aided him in implementing policies that are expected to drive at least 30,000 public servants out of the VA by the end of the year, while refusing to fill 40,000 vacancies that have existed before he took that position.

Those 30,000 who will be out of the VA by the end of the year include 1,720 registered nurses, 600 doctors, 1,150 medical support assistance, 200 police officers, 80 psychologists, and more than 1,000 claims examiners. Maybe we should be grateful the number isn't 83,000, which was his plan, and she was his senior adviser for that plan.

She was a senior adviser when Secretary Collins began the process to cancel or end more than 1,600 contracts providing direct services to veterans or support for critical VA operation, including for suicide prevention and mental health treatment, cancer registry, and inspection of VA healthcare facilities. She was his senior adviser when Doug Collins wanted to end the veterans' suicide crisis line, which epitomized the cruelty and stupidity of those cuts in workforce, hiring freezes, ends in contract.

And despite a formal request from myself and Senator PETERS, the Republican chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs refused to hold a hearing on the Mason nomination. A hearing is customary for the nomination of inspectors general, particularly one this controversial.

But we did have a hearing in the VA, and it was highly illuminating—not for what we learned but for what she denied doing. Listen to her. She continually avoided giving committee members any specific information about her role in realigning the senior executives at the VA or her role in the firing or reorganization or her role in requiring employees to sign nondisclosure agreements or any of the substantive work she has been doing as a political appointee. She denied any role in the freezes, the firings, the elimination of contracts.

I said to her: Well, what have you been doing?

And we got no straight answer. She was evasive, and her evasiveness was illuminating. She refused to commit to conducting any investigation of employee terminations that were found illegal by the courts. She refused to condemn President Trump's illegal firing of her predecessor and other inspectors general.

She has a conflict of interest here. She served as a senior adviser for 6 months while policies were devised and