

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Puzder nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just listened to my friend, the majority leader, speak. Let me say, historically bad nominees deserve historic levels of scrutiny. I saw the majority leader bring out a chart again today comparing the situation right now to past nominees from past administrations. What he fails to mention is we have never seen nominees as flawed, as compromised, as unqualified as we have right now. And the Republican Senators know that.

So, once again, historically bad nominees deserve a historical level of scrutiny.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, on approps, we did get appropriations bills done last night, and now I would like to say a few words on what needs to happen with appropriations moving forward. Last night was another clear example of Democrats working in good faith to put the needs of families, veterans, moms, kids, and rural communities ahead of the special interests. Donald Trump and DOGE have run roughshod on hundreds of billions of dollars in funding that so many communities depend on, including funding to care for parents, to care for rural Americans, and to care for those, our veterans, who have served this country.

But last night's appropriations bills were a rejection of the Trump-Vought agenda. We took a good step in reversing those DOGE cuts and fully funding many critical programs last night, including funds to care for our veterans and our farmers. Specifically, we provided our Nation's veterans with the benefits and medical care they have earned, while countering the awful DOGE cuts at the VA. We provided for rural veterans' care, expanded access for telehealth, and fully funded benefits through the PACT Act to cover those suffering from toxic exposure, and so much more.

And that is not all. We are fully funding WIC, which cares for women and children's nutrition and healthcare. We protect rural funding, too.

These numbers are all much higher than what House Republicans are push-

ing in their legislation, and it is bipartisan agreement here in the Senate, unlike the House.

So last night's legislation wasn't a perfect bill but a step in the right direction. And it is an example how the funding process could work—could work—if the other side is willing to work in good faith, instead of listening all the time to Donald Trump and Russell Vought and the extreme right.

Democrats want the bipartisan funding process to work. We believe that when we have legislation before us that takes real steps—important steps—to help the American people in many ways, we should take it seriously. That is why we worked on these bills over the past week in good faith.

But we have a long way to go. We know that. We all know that. Democrats aren't going to take things for granted and some difficult bills remain ahead of us. The onus is on the Republican majority to determine how this Chamber is going to operate when it matters most during the appropriations process. They must do more to ensure that process stays bipartisan in the fall. They cannot just keep caving to Donald Trump and Russell Vought when they try to kill bipartisan cooperation, push illegal impoundment of funds or rescission packages. We have seen that already, and it is unacceptable. The process isn't easy, but we are showing today that it is possible.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

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. 186, Andrew Puzder, of Tennessee, to be Representative of the United States of America to the European Union, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

John Thune, John R. Curtis, Bernie Moreno, Tommy Tuberville, Kevin Cramer, Ron Johnson, Shelley Moore Capito, John Boozman, John Barrasso, Marsha Blackburn, Roger Marshall, Jon A. Husted, Roger F. Wicker, Jim Banks, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ted Budd, David McCormick.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Andrew Puzder, of Tennessee, to be Representative of the United States of America to the European Union, with the Rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Sen-

ator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL) and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. GALLEGU), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER), and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. WELCH), are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 485 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Banks	Graham	Moreno
Barrasso	Grassley	Mullin
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Boozman	Hassan	Ricketts
Britt	Hawley	Risch
Budd	Hoeven	Rounds
Capito	Husted	Schmitt
Cassidy	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Collins	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Justice	Shaheen
Cotton	Kennedy	Sheehy
Cramer	Lankford	Sullivan
Crapo	Lee	Thune
Cruz	Lummis	Tuberville
Curtis	Marshall	Wicker
Daines	McCormick	Young
Ernst	Moody	
Fischer	Moran	

NAYS—41

Alsobrooks	Hirono	Peters
Baldwin	Kaine	Reed
Bennet	Kelly	Rosen
Blumenthal	Kim	Schatz
Blunt Rochester	King	Schiff
Booker	Klobuchar	Schumer
Cantwell	Lujan	Slotkin
Coons	Markey	Smith
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Durbin	Murkowski	Warnock
Fetterman	Murphy	Warren
Gillibrand	Murray	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Ossoff	Wyden
Hickenlooper	Padilla	

NOT VOTING—7

Duckworth	Sanders	Welch
Gallego	Tillis	
McConnell	Warner	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 41. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, when I walked through that door—I guess it was only about 50 minutes ago—I had no intention of speaking. Half an hour ago, I had no intention of speaking today. But I need a little therapy. So congratulations, therapists—I have a couple of things on my mind.

As I stand here—as we stand here—uncertain about what this Saturday morning in August is going to produce, I just had some thoughts. My first thought seems probably pretty basic, and it is to the Democrats in the Chamber—specifically, their leadership.

Breaking news: Donald Trump won the election. He is the President of the United States. You don't have to like it, but he did. He won.

What got me a little bit ramped up this morning was I started thinking about all of Joe Biden's nominees that I voted for, and I got to thinking about

the many Cabinet Secretaries in the Biden administration whose cell numbers I still have and I am happy to use. We were in this together.

I got to thinking about how very, very special this institution is, in a country that is made up of self-governed people. We, ladies and gentlemen—we, Mr. President—are the representatives of those self-governed people. And in many respects, what we are going through this weekend is in large part a direct reflection of the division of our country—for sure, for sure. But I submit that we have a higher responsibility than to simply gravitate to the worst instincts but, rather, elevate this institution to a more aspirational conclusion. It is not even really a new conclusion; it is the tradition and the history of this institution.

So as I was looking at the leader's chart in the cloakroom earlier, I see this rather rich history of an institution that, first of all, respects the prerogative of the person who won the Presidency while also protecting our prerogative to have some oversight and to advise and consent.

Boy, when I think of supporting Lloyd Austin for Secretary of Defense, a decision I came to regret—not because I didn't like him but because he proved to be a pretty bad Secretary of Defense—nonetheless, nonetheless, Joe Biden had won the election, and that is who he chose. When I supported Pete Buttigieg for Secretary of Transportation, I had higher hopes, but we had a decent working relationship, and I was happy to have supported him. When I introduced Shalanda Young in the Budget Committee in her hearing to become OMB Director, that was a decision I never regretted and still do not.

But I will tell you, this morning, as I stand here in early August on a Saturday morning, with this circle of zero percent bright-gray, as though there is such a thing as bright-gray, I am frustrated. This is the future of this place if something good doesn't happen today in this place. And I fear we are going down a path we may never ever be able to go down again—or at least go the other direction.

Some fights aren't worth winning, much less losing. I have always loved this institution and the norms of it, but this is not normal. This is the exception. And this I do not want to ever have become normal. But I, as somebody who appreciated the relationships—and still do—that I have had with Joe Biden's nominees, today, if you were to ask me to vote for a Joe Biden nominee, I don't give a rat's rear who they are, how great they are, how spectacular they may be—I don't care what their credentials are—the message to me is I have to vote no. We darned sure aren't going to let them have it the easy way. We are darned sure never going to do 46 percent of the next President's nominees with a voice vote or unanimous consent because the new norm is we fight every one of them

because they won the election instead of us winning the election.

It is not OK, friends.

It is not OK, Mr. President.

Last night, in this Chamber, we did something rather remarkable together with a very large bipartisan vote. We passed not one, not two, but three appropriations bills—as Chairman COLLINS reminded us, the first time we have done it before the August recess since 2018.

We celebrated for a complete—oh, I don't know—30 seconds maybe. And the American people instead are waking up to this—to this. And what this is—what this is—this is us voting for very low positions in the sub-Cabinet of appointees and nominees—not unimportant jobs, by the way, but low positions in comparison to the Cabinet—one every 2 hours, one every 2 hours, because that is as fast as we are allowed to go with the 1,200 or so nominees that we have the responsibility of confirming or not.

And here is what I fear. I fear that the occasional bad nominee will always pass now, from now on, because we have turned—somebody has turned this into a shirts-and-skins game. So from now until eternity, the first question is going to be: Oh, I don't know. Who won that Presidential election again? Oh, yeah, the other team. Well, we can't allow them to have their nominees on a simple voice vote.

It will, I am afraid, have a very, very, very bad ramification on this institution if we don't correct course sometime today, if we don't come to some sort of an agreement that recognizes that Donald Trump won the election and has the right to have the government that he wants and that we have a prerogative to make sure that it is not just confirmed but that if there are some bad apples along the way, that they get held up for greater scrutiny.

But if this becomes a straight skins-and-shirts game, then all discretion is out the window; then all oversight is really out the window; then the responsibility of scrutiny goes out the window because it is one team versus the other team, with nobody looking out for the American people.

As I said, I didn't intend to get up and talk today. I don't know that I feel any better for it. But we have an opportunity today—today—to knock out this obstruction by the leader of the Democratic Party in the U.S. Senate. If we don't, if something doesn't happen today, then we, in my view, are confronted with the only other choice, and that is a major rules change that acknowledges the new reality in this country. I don't want that to be the case. I am still more optimistic than the path we are on.

With that, thanks for your time.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COTTON. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The legislative clerk continued with the call of the roll.

The Senator from Oregon.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2557

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, nobody in our country should ever be above the law, certainly not powerful people who believe that they can perpetrate crimes on victims and get away with it because they have so much wealth and so many lawyers and so many friends in high places.

If you go outside the doors of the Senate Chamber, to my right, and you continue straight ahead and you go out the second set of doors to the steps of the Capitol, you are looking straight across at the Supreme Court. And while scaffolding is up right now, making it hard to see the words, the words that are engraved above those pillars are those words "Equal Justice Under Law." Powerful words. A powerful vision that all Americans are subject to the law.

There is no special get-out-of-jail-free card under that vision for the powerful, but all too often the combination of reams of well-paid lawyers and a whole lot of friends ready to help you, the powerful commit crimes and get away with it.

We should aspire to the vision that is there above the Supreme Court, that vision of "Equal Justice Under Law," that no politician, no celebrity, no megamillionaire or billionaire can buy their way out of justice when they commit crimes and particularly not crimes that involve life-altering damage, crimes in which people are killed, crimes in which people are mutilated, crimes in which people are raped.

No matter how powerful someone is, they need to be prosecuted when they commit these crimes. And the American people have a right to know what information the government is suppressing to protect these individuals. So this brings us to the conversation of the Epstein files. There is only one right answer, complete and total disclosure. That is the only pathway to justice.

We have a lot of suspicions across this country about what is contained in those files hidden in the Department of Justice, those files that are hidden in the Department of the Treasury.

My colleague Senator WYDEN, on the Finance Committee, has been working on this for years. I heard an objection from across the aisle. Why are you interested now? Well, Senator WYDEN has been leading the search to understand what went on. There is a billion dollars