

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, the story of this Republican majority has been a story of surrender—a surrender of the Senate's power over to Donald Trump. That is especially true of the nominations process.

What is going on right now with nominations is beyond the pale. Donald Trump has nominated, as a whole, some of the worst, some of the most unqualified, some of the most unscrupulous loyalists ever to serve in the Federal Government.

These nominees are just horrible, one after the other, and now Republicans don't even want to vote on them. I understand why. They know how bad these nominees are, and they don't want to be held accountable. They know the American people would be appalled if they knew the kind of people Trump is trying to confirm and bring into the government.

So what do they do? Do Republicans send these terrible nominees back to Donald Trump and say: Try again, try someone better—which previous Republican Senators have done, even under Republican Presidents? Nope. Of course not, not these Republicans. Oh, no. They would rather go nuclear, change the way the Senate confirms nominees to make the confirmation process easier, faster, more hidden with virtually no scrutiny or accountability.

Republicans don't want to be forced to vote on some of these awful people. They don't want to go on record one at a time, so they would rather turn the Senate into a conveyor belt and escape accountability.

Just look at the kinds of nominees that have already gone through this Chamber and tell me if you think this is normal, that Senate Republicans have already approved anti-vaxxers and pseudoscientists to serve as public health officials to lead American health policy—not just quacks like R.F.K., Jr., but people like Jay Bhattacharya, who opposed healthcare guidelines during COVID and policies meant to keep our kids safe in school. Thanks to Republicans, he is now leading America's healthcare system. God help us.

And if Republicans go nuclear, it is going to get even worse. It is insane that Republicans have allowed the Department of Justice to be staffed by Donald Trump's own personal lawyers who prosecute his enemies, exonerate his friends, regardless of the law. It is a disgrace. That is a mark of dictatorship when that happens, when there is no rule of law in prosecutorial Agencies.

Thanks to Republicans, we now have podcasters and influencers in senior leadership at the FBI, people like Dan Bongino, someone with zero experience at the Agency. And if Republicans go nuclear, it is going to get even worse because nominees will be hidden; there won't be accountability; there won't be votes on individual nominees.

Finally, it is utterly insane that every Trump nominee has had to pass a litmus test about denying the legitimacy of the 2020 election when everyone knows that Donald Trump made up a whole bunch of lies about the 2020 election and keeps talking about it unproven. But you have to pass this litmus test: Was the election faked? Did Trump really win?

They have to say yes. That means they are willing to lie for Donald Trump.

And so Republicans are going nuclear to hide people like this from the public eye because they don't want to be forced to take a vote on them. Well, sorry, Republicans. In the Constitution, voting on nominees is our job. And when we have a President like this, one which you know—you know he has no sense of integrity or honesty or fidelity to the truth, you know he is a President who doesn't care about acting corruptly—look what he is doing with his own personal wealth—then the Senate's job is to scrutinize and review nominees, and it is doubly important under a President like this.

I warn my Republican colleagues. They will come to regret this move because what goes around comes around. They may not like being on the receiving end of the changes they will bring to bear this week. After all, when Democrats were last in charge, we were able to confirm a record number of judges to the bench.

I ask my Republican colleagues to think carefully—very carefully—before moving forward on this awful, awful, provision that goes nuclear and blows up even worse the Senate rules.

JEFFREY EPSTEIN

Mr. President, on Epstein, yesterday, the House Oversight Committee released a salacious drawing, the figure of a woman drawn around the text of a lewd poem. At the bottom, Donald Trump's signature.

Where did this image come from? From the Epstein estates. You know what this looks like to every American? Donald Trump is yet again lying to the American people.

He said for months that he never signed anything. He said this letter was “nonexistent.” He said the Wall Street Journal, often his political ally, is lying, but the letter is right now before our eyes.

It is gross. The American people can see for themselves that Donald Trump is an inveterate liar. There is no turning away from it. We have had probably, almost certainly, the most dishonest President in American history who will just lie at will. It is his MO.

The Epstein saga is, perhaps, the nastiest example of a trend that infects his entire Presidency, an infection of lies, dishonesty, dodging, self-enrichment. It is as if lying, to Trump, is like oxygen is to the rest of us. He needs to do it. One must imagine the truth to be fatal to him.

If Donald Trump disagrees, if he has got a problem with anything about

this, the answer is simple; he should release the Epstein files; he should tell the truth.

What he should not be doing is calling the Epstein files a “Democratic hoax.” A “Democratic hoax?” Does he think his supporters are stupid? Does he think the American people are stupid? No one believes him when he says this. It came from the Wall Street Journal, hardly a Democratic newspaper.

Shame on you, Mr. President. Shame on you for lying to the American people; shame on you for lying about this; shame on you for lying about so many other things.

Donald Trump and his minions are trying to desperately put this issue back in the bottle. At the same time, Americans are struggling to make ends meet. Americans are struggling to retain their trust in government after so many lies from the President.

Americans are struggling to keep their jobs, pay their bills, and provide for their kids. And then, when they look to the White House and see the President on a scorched-Earth campaign try and hide the truth about Jeffrey Epstein, they say: How can they trust Donald Trump on anything else? How can Americans trust a President who lies not only about the Epstein files but about the economy; who says that things are actually great; that there is no inflation; who pathetically urges foreign leaders to tell the Nobel committee to give him the Nobel Peace Prize?

In reality, unemployment is going up, manufacturing is going down, his own tariffs are forcing companies to raise prices.

How can anyone trust a President like Donald Trump who lied about Medicaid? Remember when he said Medicaid would not be touched by the “Big Beautiful Bill”? And now Medicaid has seen the biggest cuts in American history.

Donald Trump lied to the American people about Social Security. He said he wouldn't touch it. And now Social Security is being strangled by Donald Trump and cuts that come straight from the DOGE playbook. He said he would usher in a golden age. Friday, we learned that unemployment continues to rise.

Autocrats—autocrats lie. They reject reality, spin fantasy to try and retain control. That is what Donald Trump is doing. He is poisoning the soul of America and betraying the people who trusted him to fight for their interests.

President Trump, if you disagree with me, if you have a problem with anything I am saying, my answer is very simple: Do what you said you would do. Release the Epstein files. Release the Epstein files.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

RULES CHANGE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor having just listened

to the minority leader talk about the nominations the President has made to fill out the positions in government. The U.S. Senate has standards, we have customs, we have long-established traditions, and these include allowing a President to fill out the team he needs for the government to function.

These traditions go all the way back to George Washington. So let me remind the Senator from New York about how the Senate functions—is supposed to function—before he and those with this Trump derangement syndrome have come to the position that the country shouldn't be allowed to function, because exactly 235 years ago this week, the Senate used its advise and consent powers, and they used them for the first time.

President George Washington nominated Alexander Hamilton to be the Secretary of the Treasury. The Senate confirmed him immediately. The official Senate history says:

Minutes later, perhaps even before the messenger returned to the President's office, senators approved [Hamilton] unanimously.

That has been the standard for more than two centuries. Senate Democrats have now, under CHUCK SCHUMER, trashed this tradition of the U.S. Senate. Confirming even the most routine nominees is now a long and bitter fight.

From Hamilton's confirmation in 1789 to SCHUMER's unprecedented obstinate obstruction going on today, the Senate has gone from speed to stalemate.

Prior to Senator SCHUMER trying to shut down the Senate and shut down the confirmation process, routine nominees cleared the Senate Chamber quickly by voice vote, by unanimous consent, and often in groups.

More than half of every President's nominees were confirmed that way until this year; 90 percent or more of a President's nominees were confirmed by voice vote or unanimous consent from the days of George Washington all the way through the Presidency of Barack Obama.

During President Trump's first term, Democrats cut it down to 65 percent. Now during the second term, it is zero. Absolutely zero of President Trump's nominees have been confirmed by unanimous consent or voice vote. Not a single nominee has been confirmed that way since President Trump took office almost 8 months ago.

President Trump is the first President in U.S. history to not have a single nominee confirmed by voice vote or unanimous consent. Not one. Never happened before in the history of the United States. Maybe CHUCK SCHUMER is proud of that. Maybe he is going to use it around with the Democrats and the far-left wing of his party who continue to be radical, extreme, dangerous, and scary and don't want this country heading in the right direction, but it is a disgrace what he has done to the U.S. Senate.

This is the Schumer confirmation shutdown. He and the Senate Demo-

crats are forcing the Senate to waste hundreds of legislative hours because they have filibustered each and every one of President Trump's nominees, every single one.

Mr. President, 109 sub-Cabinet nominees have been confirmed this year. Democrats filibustered every one of the 109, and that calls for two separate rollcall votes with 2 hours in between set aside for debate. Now, of the 109 nominees, in those 2 hours that were set aside for each one of those 109, 81 of them not a single word was spoken by the Democrats on the floor about any of them.

CHUCK SCHUMER just came to the floor, and he said: These nominees are not qualified. But he didn't say anything about when any of these 81 actually came to the Senate floor; when we voted, through cloture, and then waited 2 hours for the Democrats, they talked about other things. They didn't talk about the nominees. If they are so bad, why didn't they talk about them?

The average amount of time of all of these sub-Cabinet nominees spent by the Democrats: 2 min 12 seconds. Eighty-one of them, they said nothing. Only seven of them did they talk about for more than 10 minutes. If they are so bad, why aren't they talking about them? Because these people are qualified.

But they were delayed for no reason other than the Trump derangement syndrome. Each one has been confirmed after maximum amounts of time have expired. That is time that should have been spent on legislation. But, no, the Democrats don't want us to be able to legislate.

Is what they have done advise and consent? No. Is it congressional oversight? No. Is it serious scrutiny? No. It is obstruction on autopilot. That is what we are seeing in this body by those Democrats, led by CHUCK SCHUMER, the "king of the shutdown." No President has ever faced a total shutdown of nominees like President Trump has under the Democrats and CHUCK SCHUMER.

This has resulted in a historic backlog. Today, 149 qualified, ready-to-serve nominees are still waiting to be considered here on the Senate floor, and they are stuck in Senate purgatory.

Now, we know these nominees are qualified, despite what Senator SCHUMER said on this floor just a couple of minutes ago. How do I know they are qualified? Well, the FBI has vetted each and every one of them. The Office of Government Ethics has reviewed each and every one of them. The Senate committees who held hearings heard from all of these nominees, and they were all voted successfully out of committee.

And now let me just point out to CHUCK SCHUMER that over half of them earned bipartisan support with Democrats voting for them in the committee. Yet, here on the Senate floor, Senate Democrats are stonewalling their consideration.

And there are still more than 800 nominees and nominations and positions in our government that still need to be filled. So, this week, Senate Republicans are going to restore these longstanding traditions of the Senate to get back to the way the Senate is supposed to work.

Nominees who have been successfully approved by Senate committees will now be considered and confirmed in groups. This is keeping with the longstanding traditions of how this body operates. The Republican plan is similar to one that was proposed by Senators KLOBUCHAR and KING in 2023.

At the time, they said that they were facing obstruction. Sixty-two percent of Joe Biden's nominees had been confirmed by unanimous consent or voice vote. So this updated process applies only to the routine executive branch decisions. This is pretty simple. We are talking about positions like Deputy Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Ambassadors, and hundreds more. These are the positions that in the past have never required a rollcall vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

America needs these men and women working, not stuck in some procedural traffic jam. The process of Cabinet-level and judicial nominees remains the same. They are going to continue to come to the floor individually for debate, discussion, and votes. These rule changes will get the Senate working again, doing the business of the American people.

Eight months now into President Trump's second term, only 12 percent of President Trump's team is in place.

Now, remember, modern Presidents have over a thousand positions to be filled. At this pace, it would take over a thousand additional hours of Senate time on the floor to fill it.

No Senate, Democrat or Republican, has ever operated this way. No President, Democrat or Republican, can govern efficiently under the current abuse by the Democrats.

The Schumer confirmation shutdown leaves critical jobs unfilled in our government. That weakens our economy. It undermines our international diplomacy. It jeopardizes our safety. It disrespects the will of the voters. This rules update will clear this backlog of nominees, and it will allow us to scrutinize nominees effectively and confirm qualified nominees efficiently.

Committees are still going to hold hearings. They will still question the nominees. There will still be all of the background work, and then the FBI checks will still be done. The Office of Government Ethics will still review the conflicts. None of that changes. What changes is this pointless partisan delay right here on the Senate floor.

What we are doing today is restoring the Senate's constitutional responsibility. That responsibility is advice and consent, not stall and delay. President Trump was elected to get America back on track. He deserves to have his

team on the job and so do the American people. Senate Republicans are committed to making the Senate work again just as it has for every President up until now.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The minority whip.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2025

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it has been my honor and one of the highlights of my Senate career to watch the restoration of democracy in the Baltic States: Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. I have said on the floor many times with real pride, my mother was born in Lithuania, and she was an immigrant to this country at the age of 2. And she never made it back to her home country where she was born, but I did, even to the town where she was baptized and raised before she came to the United States.

It has been quite a journey. In 1978 or 1979, I visited what was then the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania. I am still struck by the images which were so common there: the gray Soviet approach to things both physical and otherwise and the belief that these poor people were under the subjugation of Moscow at a time when they deserved independence.

And then to have served in the House of Representatives and, again, in the Senate and to watch the evolution of Lithuania as well as Latvia and Estonia as democratic countries and the amazing development where they became part of NATO and part of the European Union and became Western-viewing nations and equal partners with other countries in Europe when it came to security and democracy—it is remarkable.

And yet I am not naive, I know these are smaller countries, and they will be easily overwhelmed by Russia if that were the Russian ambition.

So I have tried over the years to maintain the strong relationship between the Baltic States and NATO and also the strong relationship with the United States and these three Baltic nations.

One of the things I worked on for a number of years is known as the Baltic Security Initiative. It is an investment by the United States of several million dollars in the training of troops in the Baltic States so that they are prepared if they are brought into enemy conflict. It is a modest investment. They have shown their good faith on their side by maintaining strong support from NATO and contributions to it. But the Baltic Security Initiative is an incentive for them to continue along those lines.

As I have said, I am not naive about this situation. Being part of NATO means that our alliance will stand by them if they are ever invaded by another country. I hope that never happens, but if it does, it means that NATO is there. They cannot go it alone, but they have certainly shown they are prepared to do their part to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and the values the United States shares.

We are now considering the National Defense Authorization bill. It is an important piece of legislation, which we, every year, take seriously and pass, and I hope we do this time as well.

I have offered amendments that would strengthen our alliances in my bipartisan amendment to authorize the Baltic Security Initiative. Since I created the program by including it in the fiscal year 2021 appropriations bill, this initiative has provided millions of dollars in dedicated security assistance to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

These important NATO allies are on the frontlines against Russian aggression. They have a long history of experiencing Russian tyranny, and I firmly believe they have also been targets of Putin if they were not members of NATO. They are some of the top NATO members in terms of military expenditures and percentage of GDP, something President Trump has rightfully urged. I have visited bases in Lithuania where American and other NATO allies are working closely to deter Russian aggression.

Yet, despite the clear success of this program, we recently learned that the Trump administration announced last week that it intends to suspend the European security programs, including the Baltic Security Initiative. That would be music to the ears of Vladimir Putin, and it sends a dangerous signal as Putin continues to attack Ukraine despite assurances from President Trump that he wanted to end the war on Ukraine on his first day in office.

As I mentioned, I am the son of a Lithuanian immigrant. My mother's family knew she could depend on the United States and all it stood for when they gave up their home in Lithuania and came to this country.

We should not allow the President to unilaterally threaten our alliance that has been carefully threaded over decades and decades.

I am grateful to the senior Senator from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, for joining me on the amendment which I am going to offer on the Baltic Security Initiative. I urge my colleagues to join us.

I am reaching out to colleagues on both sides of the aisle and asking them to stand with me for the Baltics to make it clear to Putin this is not going to be easy picking for him in the future.

They are part of the NATO alliance and a worthy part as well. We should continue our support, and I hope the Baltic Security Initiative is an indication of that.

I urge colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in this bipartisan effort to support Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, first, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to speak prior to the scheduled rollcall vote: WICKER for up to 10 minutes, REED for up to 15 minutes, COTTON for up to 5 minutes, and TUBERVILLE for up to 10 minutes.

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

UKRAINE

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, now let me say that I come to the floor today to join with President Trump and with a bipartisan majority of my colleagues in the Senate in calling for another tougher round of sanctions against Russia and its war machine.

For the past 8 months, President Trump and President Zelenskyy have extended the hand of peace. Ukraine is committed to a cease-fire. President Trump has sat down personally with Vladimir Putin on U.S. soil. In response, President Putin has mocked the peace process by repeatedly escalating his attacks on the free people of Ukraine, and he is doing so even as we speak.

Over the weekend, Russia launched its largest aerial attack of the war. Putin rained over 800 Iranian-designed drones and missiles down on cities across Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv.

For the first time, Russia damaged Ukraine's main government building, where the Cabinet of Ministers meets. The burning building symbolizes Putin's ultimate prize: His dictatorship seeks to take down Ukraine's democratically elected government.

On Sunday, President Trump said he is ready to increase the economic pressure against Russia. I agree. So does commentator Mark Levin, an experienced political writer and analyst and a prominent advocate for President Trump and his agenda.

After the attack, Mr. Levin put it well when he said:

It's time to unleash an economic barrage against Putin and sell NATO what Ukraine needs to slam back.

I say: Amen. Do not tolerate Putin's lies and games any longer.

President Trump has given Vladimir Putin every chance to show who he is, and time and again, Putin has shown himself to be a war criminal. Economic and military punishment is all Putin understands, and it is all he deserves.

Here is a brief refresher. In February, Vladimir Putin marked the third anniversary of his invasion by launching what was then the largest drone strike of the war. The next month, Ukraine agreed to a cease-fire even though Ukraine is the one being invaded.

The episode previewed a pattern that has continued ever since: Ukraine