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Senate

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard, of Hawaii, to be Director of National Intelligence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

NOMINATION OF BROOKE ROLLINS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, one short issue to just make mention, and then I want to pay tribute to an Iowan.

This week we are going to vote on the Secretary of Agriculture to be confirmed for the Cabinet. That person was voted out of committee unanimously. So I think it is ridiculous for the minority—for a committee where every Democrat and every Republican voted for this nominee—to have even 1 minute of debate. It ought to be approved by unanimous consent.

Now, it may not be, but at least I expressed my opinion, and I gave a rationale why that should be done. We shouldn't be spending 30 hours of debate on somebody that has been approved unanimously by the Agriculture Committee.

TRIBUTE TO PEGGY WHITSON

So, today, I pay tribute to an outstanding Iowan who celebrated her 65th birthday February 9. An astronaut and patriotic American, Peggy Whitson has never stopped reaching for the stars.

Her hometown is located in Ringgold County. That community of Beaconsfield—its community building—is also the birthplace of another Iowan icon, the Hy-Vee supermarket, famous in about seven Midwestern States.

Peggy Whitson spent 675 days in space, more than any other American

astronaut or woman in the world. This year, she is heading right back to space for a historic fifth space mission.

By all accounts, she is driven to help humanity. We don't often think about space travel as helping humanity, but she does it—from tracking cancer cell growth to developing therapies that save and extend the quality of life here on Earth. So there is something very heavenly that has some earthly good.

This U.S. Senator is proud to wish my fellow Iowan Peggy happy birthday. Peggy, may you continue to defy gravity and achieve stellar good things for many years to come. And I am sure she will.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam 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.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, this week the Senate will be considering its 14th nominee for President Trump's Cabinet, Tulsi Gabbard for Director of National Intelligence.

Ms. Gabbard is a patriot. She is someone who is motivated by service, and she has been serving her country and community since she was 21 years old, when she was elected to the Hawaii State Legislature.

Like many Americans of her generation, she felt called to serve her country after the attacks of September 11.

After her first session in the Hawaii Legislature, she enlisted in the Army National Guard. The following year, she dropped her reelection campaign to volunteer to deploy to Iraq—the first of three deployments that she has made. It was after her second deployment—

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Great and everlasting God, who was and is and is to come, inspire all who work on Capitol Hill. Lord, help us to see Your image in each other and to draw strength from an awareness of Your sovereignty. Empower us to serve with the spirit of humility and gratitude, remembering that to whom much is given, much is expected.

Lord, strengthen our Senators. Give them the wisdom to know your will and the courage to obey your precepts. May they comprehend your vision for our Nation and world, becoming instruments for Your glory. Lord, fill them with your power so that no weapon formed against them will prosper. Help them to view the shortcomings of others with patience and to be grateful for the exemplary virtues they witness each day.

We pray in your glorious Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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now as an officer and platoon commander—that she set her sights on making an impact on national and global issues, eventually being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Tulsi Gabbard has worn the uniform of our country for the last 22 years, leading American soldiers in some of the most dangerous parts of the world. She also served 8 years in Congress, including service on the Homeland Security, Foreign Affairs, and Armed Services Committees. By her own count, she has taken the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States at least eight times.

As both a military officer and policymaker, Ms. Gabbard has been a consumer of intelligence. She knows that good decisions depend on having the best information, and she knows that the cost of bad information is measured in lives lost.

In recent years, there have been some significant intelligence failures, and these failures aren't confined to one Agency or one part of the world. The intelligence community needs to refocus on its core mission: collecting intelligence and providing unbiased analysis of that information. That is what Tulsi Gabbard is committed to ensuring. If she is confirmed to be DNI, I believe she has the knowledge and leadership capabilities to get it done.

I am also grateful that Ms. Gabbard has expressed a willingness to rightsize the Office of the DNI. When this position was created by Congress in the wake of 9/11, it was designed to be a sort of quarterback, if you will, for the intelligence community. It was designed to be a lean organization focused on coordination and ensuring all the elements of the intelligence community are communicating and working together toward a common purpose. But it quickly became much larger than intended, and it has become a bureaucracy unto itself. So I am glad that Ms. Gabbard plans to focus on identifying and eliminating redundancies and inefficiencies to restore the Office to what it was originally designed to be.

I was also very pleased to hear Ms. Gabbard say at her hearing that section 702 is “essential for our national security.” This foreign intelligence collection program is the key tool used to identify threats to Americans at home and abroad. I was glad to hear Ms. Gabbard acknowledge its importance.

I was also pleased that Ms. Gabbard intends to prosecute leakers to the full extent of the law. In a day and age when anything and everything ends up on the internet, it is essential that we have zero tolerance for those who deliberately compromise classified information, and we must safeguard our sensitive sources and intelligence collection methods.

Madam President, Tulsi Gabbard is a patriotic American. She believes strongly in the mission with which she will be tasked: keeping America safe.

And you don't have to take my word for it; take it from Americans who have served alongside Ms. Gabbard during her 22 years in uniform, from the people who have put their lives in her hands.

One wrote:

Her exceptional qualifications, coupled with a proven track record of leadership and unwavering commitment to safeguarding our national interests, render her the unequivocal choice for this critical position.

From another:

I know Tulsi will be fully committed to protecting ALL Americans during this pivotal moment in American history.

Madam President, it sounds like what we need in a Director of National Intelligence. I look forward to confirming Ms. Gabbard this week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, last week, Pam Bondi was sworn in as the highest law enforcement officer in the United States of America. She is now the U.S. Attorney General. Unfortunately, as many of us feared, Attorney General Bondi took immediate steps to undermine the integrity of the Department of Justice.

President Trump, after Bondi was confirmed, even said:

I know I'm supposed to say she's going to be totally impartial with respect to Democrats. . . . I'm not sure if there's a possibility of totally.

On day one in office, Attorney General Bondi created a so-called Weaponization Working Group—a task force to investigate “the activities of all departments and agencies exercising civil or criminal enforcement authority over the last four years.” Bondi said that she would “investigate the investigators” and “prosecute the prosecutors,” and now she is doing exactly that to seek “retribution” against political enemies, real and perceived, that President Trump has repeatedly threatened.

I wish I could say I am surprised by Attorney General Bondi's actions, but last week, I stood at this very spot sounding the alarm just before her confirmation vote. The writing was on the wall. Attorney General Bondi has made it clear that her foremost loyalty is to one person—President Trump—and she kept her promise on day one after being sworn into office by Associate Justice Clarence Thomas of the Supreme Court.

Bondi's directive is only one step in misusing the powers of government to carry out President Trump's retribution against those he perceives to be his enemies, and the list is long. Even

before Attorney General Bondi was confirmed, the Trump administration purged dozens of senior career law enforcement officials at the Department of Justice and the FBI. Many of these senior officials are reportedly being re-assigned to immigration cases for which they have little or no expertise.

Last week, FBI law enforcement personnel across the country had little over 48 hours to answer a survey about their work on any case related to the January 6 attack on the Capitol, including whether they handled arrests, led operations, testified in trials, and more.

Consider this for a moment. I don't know if you were here, Madam President, on that day, but those of us who were will never forget it. An insurrectionist mob left a rally for President Trump and came to Capitol Hill, crashed down the doors and windows, invaded the Capitol, and started beating up on the Capitol Hill Police. The net result: Four policemen died and 140 were seriously injured.

They took control of the U.S. Senate Chamber and the House Chamber and went through their antics, posing for pictures sitting in the chair you are sitting in. They went through my desk and other desks too. It was their day, these so-called tourists, so-called political prisoners.

I have said on the floor before and I have thought about this many times. If we were told that in the House of Parliament in London, a mob had a beaten down the wooden door and taken control of the House of Commons, what would have been the reaction in the United States? First, incredulous: That can't happen. England is a powerful nation. It has a rich history. A mob took over Parliament?

That is exactly what happened on January 6. A mob took over the Congress of the United States, invaded the Capitol Building like the British in the War of 1812, and forced control at the expense of a lot of people who were prepared to die to defend us that day.

That was a horrible incident. It is a horrible chapter in American history. Now the Trump administration is setting out to erase that history.

The Soviet revisionists would look at this with some pride, to think that politicians in America are engaging in the same historical rewrite that they did for so many decades. This rewrite is to erase January 6 as a reality, to whitewash it, to describe it as something that isn't. How they will ever overcome the hours and hours of videotapes which verify exactly what happened that day, I don't know, but they are going to start by cleansing the ranks of those in law enforcement who had anything to do with the 1,600 criminal defendants who were charged because of that day. Apparently, they wanted disclosure of the names of all those who took the assignment given to them at the Department of Justice or the FBI to investigate that crime of January 6. At the FBI, at least six FBI