

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 70.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Keith Bass, of Texas, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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. 70, Keith Bass, of Texas, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense.

John Thune, Pete Ricketts, John Boozman, Lindsey Graham, John Barrasso, Steve Daines, Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz, Deb Fischer, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Roger F. Wicker, John Cornyn, Tim Sheehy, Katie Boyd Britt, Jame E. Risch, Mike Crapo, Jon Husted.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 574.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Alexander C. Van Hook, of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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. 574, Alexander C. Van Hook, of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana.

John Thune, Katie Boyd Britt, Tommy Tuberville, Tim Sheehy, Jon A. Husted, Joni Ernst, Shelley Moore Capito, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Mike Rounds, Bernie Moreno, Jim Justice, Pete Ricketts, John Barrasso, Ted Budd, Eric Schmitt, Ashley B. Moody, Tom Cotton.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 476.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Sara Bailey, of Texas, to be Director of National Drug Control Policy.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

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. 476, Sara Bailey, of Texas, to be Director of National Drug Control Policy.

John Thune, Pete Ricketts, John Boozman, Lindsey Graham, John Barrasso, Dan Sullivan, Steve Daines, Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz, Deb Fischer, Thom Tillis, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Roger F. Wicker, John Cornyn, Tim Sheehy, Katie Boyd Britt, Jame E. Risch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

OPERATION DIRTY LAUNDRY

Mr. BUDD. Madam President, I rise today to commend the law enforcement officers of Graham County, NC, for their exceptional efforts in the completion of Operation Dirty Laundry. This 11-month undercover investigation successfully disrupted a large-scale criminal network in Appalachia. The operation unveiled a coordinated criminal enterprise involving drug trafficking and illegal gambling in Western North Carolina.

The investigation began with tips about unlawful activity tied to multiple businesses in and around

Robbinsville, including 30 vape shops that were in the area.

The Graham County Sheriff's Office worked in conjunction with State and Federal partners to uncover some horrific evidence. On the scene, law enforcement discovered more than \$200,000 in illicit cash that was seized, along with 130 pounds of dangerous scheduled substances—including marijuana, methamphetamine, fentanyl, and hallucinogenic mushrooms—and 13 illegal gambling machines. Authorities are pursuing charges against more than 38 individuals connected to this criminal activity.

But these numbers are not just statistics; they represent safer neighborhoods, families shielded from the devastation of addiction, and young people steered away from the life-altering trap of dangerous drugs. For North Carolinians of Graham County, the completion of this operation brings a renewed hope and reassurance that local law enforcement is standing firm and holding criminals accountable that seek to exploit our communities.

I want to extend my gratitude to my good friend Graham County sheriff Brad Hoxit and to every other officer and deputy in his department who worked tirelessly and took on personal risk to keep their community safe.

Your courage, integrity, and unwavering commitment represent the very best of public service.

I applaud the continuing efforts of local law enforcement to bring these dangerous criminals to justice.

I am going to continue to ensure our law enforcement agencies have the resources they need to keep North Carolina strong. As I have said before on the Senate floor, drug traffickers will find no refuge in Western North Carolina or anywhere in the Old North State.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, a few weeks ago, I spoke about the tragic death of a National Guard servicemember here in Washington, DC, on the eve of Thanksgiving.

While I salute and we should all salute the bravery of those who risk their lives to keep us safe, we can't ignore the reality that this woman was yet another unnecessary victim of President Biden's careless immigration policies. The man who committed this heinous crime was an Afghan national who President Biden allowed to enter the United States without proper vetting after our disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. He did this via a procedure known as parole, which I will explain more about in a minute, but this was not in accordance with any law or any visa recognized by Congress or passed through a legislative act. This was done on a wholesale abuse of something called parole authority.

As I said, I will explain a little bit more, but parole allows inadmissible

aliens—that means people from other countries—to be physically present in the United States. It is designed to be used on a case-by-case basis but was widely abused by the Biden administration to circumvent Congress.

So I asked my friendly AI assistant to give me a summary of some of the parole programs that were used by President Biden to circumvent Congress and the legislative process.

There was a process known for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans. Up to 30,000 people a month were basically waved into the United States due to the abuse of this so-called parole process.

Then there was Uniting for Ukraine, which allowed roughly 267,000 Ukrainians to be paroled into the United States.

There was Operation Allies Welcome, which this individual who perpetrated this crime against these two guardsmen here over Thanksgiving was part of. Over 77,000 Afghans were evacuated and paroled into the United States.

There was another one called Keeping Families Together, which was enjoined by a Federal court.

Then there was one called the Family Reunification Parole Programs, which expanded the program for Cubans and Haitians and for certain other family-based visa beneficiaries facing long waits.

Finally, there was Central American Minors Program expansion to allow more minors from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to apply for refugee status or parole to reunite with their families here in the country.

So the point is, by abusing the parole process, which is supposed to be used on a case-by-case basis, President Biden waved them through, gave them essentially an E-ZPass into the United States—about 1 million people from foreign countries. And this particular shooter who killed one National Guard man and injured another was a product of this parole program—the one that had to do with Afghans.

But that was just a piece of a larger puzzle of 1 million illegal immigrants admitted to the United States through the parole program by Joe Biden because he wanted to circumvent Congress.

Well, this young woman who was killed during the Thanksgiving holidays—her sacrifice demands that we look for the mistakes and the flawed decisions that allowed her killer to enter the United States and that we take swift corrective action.

I want to remind my colleagues that this crime was at the hands of an Afghan national parolee, and it was not a one-off incident. For example, the next week, another parolee nearly committed a terrorist attack in Fort Worth, TX. In this instance, the man created a video threat where he described his plans to carry out a suicide mission to kill Americans. This is in Fort Worth, TX. The man explained in the video how he would use a par-

ticular cooking oil container preferred by the Taliban to build a bomb inside his car and then use this handcrafted device to murder Americans.

This individual's intentions were clear. In the video, he expressed his affection for the Taliban, which is a terrorist organization now governing Afghanistan, and he stated that he had entered the United States for the explicit purpose of killing Americans.

Thankfully, Federal and local law enforcement were able to apprehend him before he was able to carry out the attack. I am grateful to Attorney General Pam Bondi and our State and local law enforcement officials who prevented this attack from happening—in all likelihood, killing some of my constituents back home in Texas.

However, the fact that this individual was here in the first place underscores yet another failure of the Biden administration to properly vet individuals who entered the country, again, not through any law but through this abuse of something called parole. How could someone like this intended suicide bomber, who, in his own words, came into the country with the express intent of killing Americans, slip through the cracks? Well, we know there were more than just “cracks” in the Biden administration's vetting process; in many cases, it was virtually nonexistent.

The repeated incidents committed and attempted by Afghan nationals in the very same week demonstrate that something has gone terribly wrong with the way the U.S. Government during the Biden administration was vetting or failing to vet aliens who entered our country. But, again, as you heard me go through the various categories of individuals that came into the country under this abuse of parole authority—about 1 million—how in the world could the Biden administration have adequately vetted 1 million paroled immigrants? They can't do it. And that is one reason why this young National Guard woman is dead.

For this reason, I am chairing a joint Judiciary subcommittee hearing later this week, alongside Senator HAWLEY from Missouri, entitled “Biden's Afghan Parolee Program—A Trojan Horse with Flawed Vetting and Deadly Consequences.” We will examine the policies implemented by the Biden administration that led to these catastrophic events and particularly the flaws in President Biden's mass immigration parole programs.

As I said earlier, parole—ordinarily, we would think of it in the criminal law context, somebody who has gone to prison who then is paroled. But this is a totally different term used in immigration and essentially constituting of an E-ZPass—waving people into the country without the normal procedures.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services defines the word “parole” as “the discretionary decision that allows inadmissible aliens . . . [who] are not

admitted to the United State . . . to be physically present.” In other words, these individuals are ostensibly physically present legally, but they are not admitted for purposes of immigration.

Well, under Operation Allies Welcome, President Biden essentially gave an E-ZPass to 77,000 aliens who weren't eligible to come to the United States by law as it existed in the first place. This so-called discretionary immigration authority was only supposed to be used, again, on a case-by-case basis for exceedingly rare and extreme circumstances, but the Biden administration turned this “rare” exception into the categorical rule. Just like he opened the floodgates at the southern border, he opened the floodgates for hundreds of thousands of ineligible aliens to come to the United States and presumably stay.

Now we know that when it comes to the Afghan parole program Operation Allies Welcome, the Biden administration allowed in many aliens who had not been properly vetted.

I would venture to say that the man who drove across the country to murder one of our National Guard servicemembers and the man who threatened to carry out the suicide mission in Fort Worth were not eligible to enter the United States, but the Biden administration let them in anyway.

As we will learn at the hearing, in most, if not all, cases, we quite literally did not know who these people were. Many of them could not say where they were born. Many of them did not speak English. In some cases, they did not even know their own last name. I know that is hard to imagine, but it is true. Many of them were coming from a country whose government was literally run by a terrorist organization—the Taliban. Consequently, it is quite possible that some of these aliens had previously committed acts of terror or had ties to terror groups.

The lack of information on these parolees also raises the possibility of a preliminary background check coming across as clean because there simply wasn't enough information available to know whether this person was a safety risk or not.

In this week's hearing, we will learn more about this and other problems with President Biden's mass parole of Afghan nationals into the United States. We will hear expert witnesses, including deputy inspectors general from the Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as well as researchers and advocates, who will help shine a light on the missteps of the Biden administration and hopefully the lessons we should learn from those mistakes.

The American people deserve to live in a country where they are safe from criminal aliens and terrorist sympathizers, and they deserve answers about what the Biden administration did or did not do to make their lives more risky and more dangerous by abusing this so-called parole authority.

We must expose the previous administration's mistakes so we can learn from those, and together we can ensure that the awful tragedy that happened on November 26 will not happen again. 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. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING ELLA COOK AND MUKHAMMAD AZIZ UMURZOKOV

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I am here with Senator WHITEHOUSE and Senator BRITT from Alabama to recognize the victims of a terrible, heartbreaking mass shooting that took place at Brown University in Providence over the weekend.

Two young people were killed and nine were wounded when a gunman opened fire on a classroom full of college students studying for their final.

We will mourn the victims at a later date, but we will soon, all of us, humbly request a moment of silence for sophomore Ella Cook of Alabama and freshman Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov of Virginia. These two talented, promising young people had their lives tragically cut short.

We are thinking of them and all the victims and to the broader Brown University community. We send our love and support to their families and loved ones. They are dealing with the unimaginable, and we will continue to support them.

Before I ask us to observe a moment of silence, I would like to turn to my colleagues for some brief remarks.

I yield the floor to Senator WHITEHOUSE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am honored to join our senior Senator as he calls for a moment of silence to share in the sorrow of the families who lost their young college student children to this tragedy.

I would only ask that all of us, including anyone listening, just hold off and give these families a little bit of grace and peace as they deal with this loss. They were expecting to see these kids for the Christmas holidays. There are other kids who are in the hospital—in some cases, in fairly critical condition. Those families are not going to be spending Christmas around the tree at home; they are going to be spending Christmas in a State away from home where their children are in a hospital room, trying to be there for them.

So there is a good deal of suffering and a good deal of sorrow. I think it is important that people not add to that with a lot of unfounded opinion and speculation about what took place. Let the investigation proceed. We will

know what we need to know in due time. In the meantime, please give these families grace as they go through their grief.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, I join my colleagues from Rhode Island in coming today to honor the victims at Brown University, for those who lost their lives and those who are fighting for theirs right now in a hospital room.

We lift up their families in prayer. We ask for privacy and peace as they grieve the unimaginable.

Just over the last 24, 36 hours, I have been inundated with text messages and calls specifically talking about what an incredible young woman Ella Cook was. She was everything that is great about our State—bold, courageous, convicted, thoughtful, kind. She made her mark at Mountain Brook High School. She was making her mark at Brown University. The calls that I have gotten have been not just from Alabama but literally from people across the country who encountered her.

While her life was cut way too short—and I cannot imagine the pain and grief that her parents are feeling right now and her little brother and her little sister and her extended family—it is clear that she made an impact, that her time on Earth was such a positive force for good that the ripple of her life will be felt for generations to come.

As we lift their families up in prayer—the Brown community, people across this country that are grieving—I hope to echo my colleague's statement that we can all do that together.

I yield the floor to the senior Senator from Rhode Island for a moment of silence.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, again, we will have more time to speak about these young people, but for now, I would request a moment of silence for the Brown University community, the city of Providence, and all of the victims of these tragic events, particularly the families of Ella and Mukhammad.

(Moment of silence.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Rhode Island.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. REED. Madam President, we are about to consider the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act. I rise to express my support for this legislation, and I am very pleased that we will, I think very shortly, be voting on final passage of this bill.

First, I would like to acknowledge Chairman WICKER whose leadership has been crucial for the success of this bill. The hallmark of the Senate Armed Services Committee has long been bipartisanship, and I am glad we have continued that tradition for the 65th consecutive year.

I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Armed Services Com-

mittee who helped produce this bill. We were able to adopt hundreds of amendments during the committee markup and dozens more through the floor process and floor debate.

I appreciate our colleagues in the House who worked with us these past months to produce a strong bipartisan bill.

This is a forward-looking Defense bill, and I believe we can all support it. I am confident it will provide the Department of Defense and our military men and women with the resources they need to meet and overcome the national security threats we face.

This year's Defense bill addresses strategic competition with China and Russia and confronts threats posed by Iran, North Korea, violent extremists, and also national phenomena like climate change. It authorizes significant investments in artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, and hypersonics, and it modernizes our ships, our aircraft, and our combat vehicles.

Most importantly, this NDAA delivers key wins for our servicemembers and their families. It authorizes a 3.8-percent pay raise and provides improved housing, barracks, additional childcare assistance, and expanded programs to address traumatic brain injuries because we understand that the key asset that we have that provides our military superiority is the men and women in the uniform of the United States.

This bill reaffirms America's global role by extending the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and committing the Department of Defense to continue to support Ukraine. They are fighting our fight, and we must help them.

It strengthens our alliances in Asia by fully funding the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and providing new authorities for cooperation with Taiwan.

Importantly, the bill prohibits reductions in our force posture in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. To remain a force for peace and stability in these areas, we must have effective force levels, and this legislation provides for that.

And importantly, this NDAA compels the Secretary of Defense to follow the law and submit to Congress a number of reports that he has deliberately withheld. Specifically, the bill cuts off portions of the Secretary of Defense budget until he submits the execute orders and unedited videos of the boat strikes related to ongoing operations in South and Central America.

The bill asserts congressional authority over several other areas the Secretary has been negligent in. These provisions are a ratification of our constitutional duty to raise an army, to supervise an army, and to ensure that the laws of the United States are followed scrupulously.

Overall, this is a very strong bill that represents compromise on both sides, and I would urge my colleagues to vote for it.

Finally, I would like to take an opportunity to recognize the phenomenal