

remind me all too often when I wanted to do something that I shouldn't do, in terms of policy or whatever the foibles were—usually successful in deterring me. When I made a mistake, it was my fault. It wasn't his, as I probably didn't listen to him. But after 7 years, he will be leaving my office for his next chapter.

During his time here, he held a bunch of titles—national press secretary, communications director—but the titles that matter most didn't come from this building. He became a husband. This year, he became a father. And my hope is that the next chapter gives him more time with his wonderful wife Megan, who has had a very successful career herself, and his amazing son Ethan. Ethan is only 11 months old, but when you see Ethan, you know he has gotten the intelligence, the awareness, the alertness, and the perspicacity of his dad.

Hi, Ethan.

He stopped crying.

Good boy.

And, of course, the other person who is part of Alex's family—not quite a person—is, of course, George, the office dog, who somehow had better press access than most reporters.

Now, look, I am really happy for Alex, but I won't pretend this is easy because his departure leaves a real hole in our team.

Alex helped shape the message behind some of the most consequential accomplishments of our majority—the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, infrastructure, gay marriage, gun control, and so much more. Let's just say we have a lot of wins under Nguyen. That is a lot of W-I-N-S under N-G-U-Y-E-N.

In the mornings, he was often the first person I called—No. 72 on my speed dial. It got worn out. It is a ritual, I suspect, he is not going to miss very much.

Everybody knows this place can be a tough place, and it is even tougher being the press guy for CHUCK SCHUMER, but Alex never flinched. He was great in the good moments and even better in the tough moments.

He was with me in China. He was with me in Israel in the days after October 7. He was here with me on January 6. And not a day went by over those 7 years when I didn't think: Thank God—thank God—Alex is here.

On the most stressful days, he lowered the temperature, and when we needed urgency—real urgency—he raised the temperature. He did it all with sharp instincts, dry humor, and the courage to tell me when I was wrong or I could be better.

So now I have a feeling I may still pick up the phone and dial 72—I am not taking you off my speed dial—every now and then to ask his opinion. Old habits die hard.

The truth is what I will miss isn't just his advice. It is the judgment. It is the calm. It is the trust. Alex made everyone better around him, including

me, and that is the highest compliment I can give.

So, Alex, thank you for everything you gave this office. Thank you for the countless early mornings and late nights. Thank you for standing steady, no matter what the moment.

You have made your mark here. We will miss you. We are proud of you, and we are better because of you.

And, Alex, no matter where you go next, you will always, always have a home in the Schumer family.

Are we allowed to hug on the floor, Madam President?

Yes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

IRAN

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, Democrats' radical base and the left-wing media have made it abundantly clear that Trump derangement syndrome has clouded their ability to call a spade a spade and to actually recognize reality. President Trump could hardly blink without progressive hardliners lodging an objection.

Their obstinance has sustained the longest shutdown in the Department of Homeland Security's history.

They have just spent the last several weeks insisting to Americans that overwhelmingly support voter ID laws that these requirements would be impossible for them to meet.

Recently, the latest object of left-wing ire has been President Trump's targeted attacks against Iran with Operation Epic Fury. Now, it is not hard to imagine why the same party that allowed more than 10 million illegal immigrants to enter the country under President Biden's watch would want lax voter laws that might allow these aliens to vote in American elections, but what is a little harder to understand is why they would object to the dismantling of the arsenal of the world's No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism. If we want to have fewer wars and a more peaceful, less dangerous world, than a defanged Iranian regime is in everyone's interest.

President Trump's actions against the Iranian regime are not a solution in search of a problem. He is not engaging in a benevolent quest to build democracy around the world. Rather, this operation directly aims to ensure the safety and security of the American people and our friends and allies.

Nothing—nothing—would do more to support the cause of world peace than to neutralize the most significant threat to global security.

The Islamic Republic of Iran provides material support to proxy terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah, al-Qaida, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis in Yemen, and many more. They provided materiel support to terrorists who carried out the attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001. They backed and in some instances directly carried out attacks against American officials and troops

in the Middle East. Iran funded and trained Hamas terrorists who raped and murdered more than 1,200 innocent men, women, and children, including 46 Americans, on October 7, 2023. Even more alarmingly, they have recently demonstrated an ability to launch missiles at targets approximately 2,500 miles away—previously believed to be beyond their reach.

Iran has aligned itself with America's enemies, including North Korea, Russia, and the People's Republic of China. They have even helped finance drug traffickers in Central America.

Last fall, I chaired a hearing of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control which examined the role that terror networks closely connected to Iran, including Hezbollah, have played in contributing to the drug crisis we face here in America. Hezbollah—one of the Iranian proxies that operates primarily in Lebanon and which obtains a substantial percentage of its funding from Iran—has developed close ties with South American drug trafficking organizations. It engages in money laundering, oil smuggling, counterfeiting, illegal weapons procurement, and has even carried out terror attacks on targets in South America, including the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association Jewish community center and the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

Hezbollah's activities haven't remained physically south of the border. One of the witnesses at our hearing had played an instrumental role in breaking up a Hezbollah smuggling cell in North Carolina. Cells like those discovered in North Carolina and in South America finance terror back in the Middle East and around the world.

Given this context, given this history, given this reality, it goes without saying that a more dangerous Iran would put the safety and security of Americans and America's allies and American interests in peril.

President Trump's actions toward Iran in Operation Epic Fury demonstrate that he understands the danger Iran poses to the world, especially—especially—if they were to acquire a nuclear weapon. If Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon, it would permanently alter the balance of power in the Middle East. Iran is estimated to already have 440.9 kilograms of up to 60 percent highly enriched uranium—just a step away from weapons-grade. There is simply no realistic civilian use for Iran's highly enriched uranium stockpile. The reason they are doing this is obvious.

Our President understands the “art of the deal” better than any modern head of state, and his dealmaking techniques were on full display last week when he secured a 2-week cease-fire with Iran. In order to bring Iran to the negotiating table, President Trump did what any shrewd businessman would do: He applied credible pressure, threatening extreme action if a deal

was not reached. Mainstream news outlets prematurely condemned his comments, but they were soon proven wrong. By issuing a dramatic threat, President Trump commenced negotiations to bring the conflict to a close on terms that put America first.

But it is important to remember that these negotiations were not conceding to Iran's unreasonable demands, including its demand to be able to secure a nuclear weapon or issue tolls to people transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

Over the weekend, Iranians demonstrated that they were not serious about reopening the Strait of Hormuz or giving up their uranium enrichment program. When it became clear the Iranian regime was not serious about this, President Trump imposed a blockade of vessels carrying Iranian oil transiting the strait. This blockade is a critical negotiating tactic, showing Iran that the United States will not cave and targeting their economic lifeline.

President Trump is not abandoning diplomacy. He said diplomacy is still an option for the regime. But he is insisting on diplomacy in terms favorable to the United States and not caving against our enemies.

Our President demonstrated for all to see that the ultimate way to win over a bully is not to give in but to stand up to him.

Furthermore, let's not forget this targeted operation has been successful in mitigating the threat posed by the Iranian regime toward the United States and our allies, and the data bears that out. Since the start, more than 13,000 targets have been struck, including Iranian ballistic missile sites, drone manufacturing facilities, weapons production and storage bunkers, and surface-to-air missile facilities.

Missile attacks—it shouldn't be surprising—have fallen by 90 percent as Iran has lost many of its missile launchers. Their navy is largely decimated, with more than 155 vessels damaged or destroyed. And while we are still waiting to see the ultimate outcome of the ongoing negotiations, by these measures, Operation Epic Fury has already been a resounding success.

Iran relied on its ballistic missiles to defend against strikes on their enrichment facilities. So simply by knocking these out, we have set them further back in developing their nuclear weapons.

President Trump understands what the progressives on the left do not, which is that a nuclear Iran would impose an existential threat to the free world. He is right to stand up to this regime. Finally, we have a President who has been willing to stand up to the Iranian regime that has been at war against the West and the United States since the 1979 Iranian Revolution and which has American blood on its hands.

Rather than allow the regime to continue to funnel money to terrorist organizations around the world and hold the world hostage by halting the global

oil supply, President Trump has said: Enough is enough. America cannot surrender to the regime that chants "Death to America."

I am thankful for President Trump's resolve in standing up to this Islamic theocracy, and I would encourage his detractors to rethink their positions and do the same.

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

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

The Senator from Kentucky.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call in relation to the Shepherd nomination.

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

Mr. PAUL. I ask unanimous consent to commence the vote.

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

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 senior assistant executive 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. 672, John Thomas Shepherd, of Arkansas, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Arkansas.

John Thune, Bill Hagerty, Tim Sheehy, Jim Banks, Ted Budd, Katie Boyd Britt, Bernie Moreno, Tommy Tuberville, John R. Curtis, Mike Rounds, John Barrasso, Pete Ricketts, Kevin Cramer, James Lankford, Ted Cruz, Rick Scott of Florida, Mike Crapo.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of John Thomas Shepherd, of Arkansas, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Arkansas, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from Missouri (Mr. SCHMITT).

Mr. DURBIN: I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET), the Senator from Georgia (Mr.

OSSOFF), and the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and the nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 75 Ex.]

YEAS—50

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

NAYS—44

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|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Alsobrooks | Hickenlooper | Rosen |
| Baldwin | Hirono | Sanders |
| Blumenthal | Kaine | Schiff |
| Blunt Rochester | Kelly | Schumer |
| Booker | Kim | Shaheen |
| Cantwell | King | Slotkin |
| Coons | Klobuchar | Smith |
| Cortez Masto | Lujan | Van Hollen |
| Duckworth | Markey | Warner |
| Durbin | Merkley | Warnock |
| Fetterman | Murphy | Warren |
| Gallego | Murray | Welch |
| Gillibrand | Padilla | Whitehouse |
| Hassan | Peters | Wyden |
| Heinrich | Reed | |

NOT VOTING—6

| | | |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| Bennet | Ossoff | Schatz |
| Murkowski | Risch | Schmitt |

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 44. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO TESS BOEHM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to Tess Boehm for her hard work as an intern in my Washington, DC, office. I recognize her efforts and contributions to my office, as well as to the State of Wyoming. Tess is originally from San Luis Obispo, CA. Tess attends the Texas A&M Bush School of Government and Public Service where she is pursuing a master's degree in national security and intelligence. She has demonstrated a strong work ethic, which has made her an invaluable asset to our office. The quality of her work is reflected in