

But today, colleagues, I offer a modest step that we can take. Currently, the Federal law enforcement retirement age is 57, but the Capitol Police Board can increase that up to 60 for officers who may wish to continue their service, to extend their service.

We are talking about officers who have served for a long, long time and have a tremendous amount of institutional memory, experience, and expertise. They offer immense value to the department.

Senator McCONNELL and I have a bill to increase that retirement age of the Capitol Police Board to be able to extend the retirement age to 62 instead of the current 60. It allows us to all benefit for a few more years for those veteran officers, with their experience and expertise, who desire to continue to serve. This is voluntary but an important element to what the Capitol Police does and needs.

The House unanimously passed a bill just recently—a very similar bill—and after some bicameral and bipartisan discussion, I hope to see this measure signed into law. The Capitol Police union, as well as the department, support these steps, and I believe it deserves unanimous support from the Senate.

Mr. President, that being said, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4530, which is at the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 4530) to amend chapters 83 and 84 of title 5, United States Code, to authorize an increase of the retirement age for members of the Capitol Police.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (S. 4530) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed as follows:

S. 4530

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. AUTHORIZATION TO INCREASE RETIREMENT AGE FOR MEMBER OF THE CAPITOL POLICE.

(a) CIVIL SERVICE RETIREMENT SYSTEM.—Section 8335(c) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking “becomes 60 years of age” and inserting “attains an age determined by the Board, which shall be not less than 57 years of age and not more than 62 years of age”.

(b) FEDERAL EMPLOYEES’ RETIREMENT SYSTEM.—Section 8425(c) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking “becomes 60 years of age” and inserting “attains an age determined by the Board, which shall be not less than 57 years of age and not more than 62 years of age”.

Mr. PADILLA. I yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ARMSTRONG). The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WITHHOLDING THE PAY OF SENATORS IF A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN OCCURS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 296, S. Res. 526.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 526) withholding the pay of Senators if a Government shutdown occurs.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution, which had been reported from the Committee on Rules and Administration.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on the resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If there is no further debate, the question is on adoption of the resolution.

The resolution (S. Res. 526) was agreed to.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

(The resolution is printed in the RECORD of December 3, 2025, under “Submitted Resolutions.”)

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 735.

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 Sheria Akins Clarke, of South Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

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. 735, Sheria Akins Clarke, of South Carolina, to be

United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

John Thune, Ted Budd, Thom Tillis, John Barrasso, Tim Sheehy, Joni Ernst, Jon A. Husted, Katie Boyd Britt, David McCormick, Mike Rounds, John Boozman, Bill Cassidy, Rick Scott of Florida, Josh Hawley, Cynthia M. Lummis, Kevin Cramer, Steve Daines.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. 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. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 737.

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 Evan Rikhye, of the Virgin Islands, to be Judge for the District Court of the Virgin Islands for a term of ten years.

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. 737, Evan Rikhye, of the Virgin Islands, to be Judge for the District Court of the Virgin Islands for a term of ten years.

John Thune, Ted Budd, Thom Tillis, John Barrasso, Tim Sheehy, Joni Ernst, Jon A. Husted, Katie Boyd Britt, David McCormick, Mike Rounds, John Boozman, Bill Cassidy, Rick Scott of Florida, Josh Hawley, Cynthia M. Lummis, Kevin Cramer, Steve Daines.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion on the nominations en bloc pursuant to S. Res. 690.

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

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

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

RECOGNIZING AND HONORING MERIWETHER LEWIS AND WILLIAM CLARK, AND THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY, FOR THEIR EXPEDITION TO EXPLORE THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

Mr. SCHMITT. Mr. President, I rise today because America needs to remember that our Nation was not built by men who asked permission from history. It was built by men who looked into the unknown and saw more than danger. They saw destiny.

Mr. President, 222 years ago today, on May 14, 1804, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and the Corps of Discovery departed from the St. Louis area and began one of the most consequential journeys in the history of our Republic.

But before they ever set foot in that wilderness, our Nation made its boldest wager yet. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson doubled the size of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase. He bought a continent on paper, sight unseen, believing that the future belonged to a people willing to bet on themselves, endure hardship, and build something greater than themselves.

America 250 cannot become a year-long exercise in nostalgia. It must be a national summons to remember what we inherited, to recover the courage that built it, and to rededicate ourselves to it.

Jefferson understood something too many in this city have forgotten. Nations are not forged by committees of caution. They are forged by men with enough faith to act before every risk has been removed. Jefferson gave that honor to a small band of men who turned their restless, adventurous, and fearless American spirit into something that could be passed down for centuries. These were not soft men. They were not managed men. They were men born close enough to the Revolution to understand that freedom is not a theory. It is something fought for, defended, and carried forward across generations.

But on the banks of the Missouri that day, there was no great spectacle, no crowds, no fanfare, and no guarantees. From the first settlements in Jamestown to the edge of the frontier in Missouri, every generation of Americans has carried a simple promise forward: that this Nation, this Republic, would belong to her people.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark came from those first families of Virginia in Jamestown. They were raised in the shadow of the American Revolutionary War. They were descended from those who bled for this budding Nation. Their kith and their kin had already fought to carve a nation out of the wilderness—an empire. They inherited not just land but virtue, discipline, leadership, and a willingness to stake everything on uncertain ground. Every mile they gained was earned—through hunger, through bitter cold.

Lewis and Clark faced rivers that threatened to sweep them away. They encountered Tribes whose intentions

they could not know. They came face to face with grizzly bears, unlike anything Americans had seen before, and still they pressed forward—not because the path was easy but because their mission demanded it. That is what courage looks like—not one dramatic act but a habit formed mile by mile, hardship by hardship, by a people proving themselves worthy of the inheritance that they have received.

That first summer, as they passed what would one day become Jefferson City and, later, near present-day Kansas City, they passed on the Fourth of July and paused. Hundreds of miles from civilization, surrounded by uncertainty, they celebrated the birth of this great Republic. They fired their rifles into the sky. They shared an extra ration of whiskey. And they toasted a nation that existed in that moment more in their hearts than in the world around them.

Think about that. In the middle of an unknown wilderness, they celebrated freedom. That is America—not comfort first, not fear first. America is men in the wilderness raising a toast to liberty because they knew the Republic was real even when civilization was far away.

And the expedition continued. The challenges only grew. Winter came hard and unforgiving. The mountains rose before them. The land itself seemed to push back against every step westward. Avalanches, freezing winds, starvation, exhaustion—staring fate directly in the eye in the high passes of the Rocky Mountains, the Corps of Discovery learned something that has defined the American story ever since: that progress is not given; it is earned—that destiny is not inherited whole; it must be claimed through sacrifice, endurance, and through faith.

And so they climbed, they crossed, they endured until, in November of 1805, after more than a year of hardship, on the other side of the Continental Divide, William Clark wrote three simple words: “Ocean in view.” In those three words was the answer to every frozen mile, every doubt, every hardship endured along the way. The unknown had given way to proof. The continent was not a barrier. It was, in fact, a bridge.

What had been uncertain before became the foundation of a nation stretching sea to shining sea. And from that journey flowed the America that we know today: the river cities of the Midwest and, of course, my hometown of St. Louis, that later was christened the “Gateway to the West,” and the beautiful and majestic Gateway Arch that now commemorates that heritage; the industries, the railroads, the settlements, and the towns that would rise across the continent. And the mighty Mississippi became the first economic superhighway.

Lewis and Clark did not build all of that with their own hands, but they made it possible. And that path began in my State of Missouri.

We often speak in this Chamber about budgets and programs and legislation, but beneath all of that lies a much deeper question: Who are we? Are we still the kind of people who build, who explore, who dare, who believe enough in ourselves to shape the future?

Or have we become a nation content to manage decline, a people more comfortable explaining why greatness isn't possible rather than summoning the courage to pursue it?

Lewis and Clark did not cross a continent so that their descendants would learn to live small. America was founded on a bold declaration and revolutionary ideas, but not just ideas; it is a nation; it is a people; it is an inheritance purchased by the sacrifice of generations who refused to accept the limits placed before them and entrusted to them to carry forward.

From the pioneers who crossed the frontier to the workers who built our industries to the innovators who reshaped the modern world, this country has always been defined by people who honor the past by building something worthy of it.

They did not worship ashes, but instead, preserved fire. That is the legacy of Lewis and Clark; not merely that they explored a continent, but that they revealed the character of the people capable of building a civilization upon it, a people who moved forward, a people who endure, a people who built.

As America approaches 250 years of independence, that spirit is being called upon once again, the spirit of '76, the spirit of discovery, obtaining a continent, the spirit of St. Louis, the American spirit.

Take the inheritance, carry the flag, and build the future. We face different challenges today, sure, but the test is the same. Do we have the courage to still act, the discipline to endure, the confidence to shape our own destiny, or will we allow the flame carried across this continent through hardship and danger to flicker and to fade?

I do not believe the American people have forgotten who they are. I believe that spirit still burns. And like Lewis and Clark before us, it is now our responsibility to carry it forward faithfully, courageously, and without apology, not for ourselves alone but for the generations yet to come so that when they look back on us, they will see a generation that merely didn't just curate the future ruins of a great nation; they will see a generation that remembered who we were, a generation that took up the trail, a generation that carried the flag, a generation that kept the flame alive, and a generation who handed this Republic on stronger, freer, and more faithful to its inheritance than we received.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 729, which was submitted earlier today.