

burn it down—burn it down. They want chaos because they think it will help them win the midterm elections. And for that reason, I don't think we are going to have a budget.

We will keep trying. Our chair is SUSAN COLLINS. Chairwoman COLLINS and Vice Chairwoman PATTY MURRAY put together the budget last year. They did a great job. We know it can be done. But I think that is the game plan. And the cherry on top is going to be—you watch. We are going to get to September, and Republicans are going to say: Well, we don't have a budget because you refused to talk about it, because you want chaos, because Senator SCHUMER told you to create chaos, because the Graham Platner wing of the Democratic Party told Senator SCHUMER to tell you to create chaos.

And we are going to say: Let's don't shut down the government. Let's do what is called a continuing resolution. Let's maintain the status quo so we can keep the government open.

And Senator SCHUMER is going to shut it down as tight as Dick's hatband. That is what is going to happen. That is what is going to happen. You heard it here first.

And that is not fair to the American people. That is not fair to the American people in the world that we live in today. And that, in my opinion, is totally irresponsible—in order to win a midterm election, to create that kind of chaos in this dangerous world. That, to me, is living proof that human evolution is a slow process.

The American people deserve better. And if I am wrong, I will come to this floor and say: I was wrong. My Democratic colleagues are willing to negotiate. They don't have a predetermined game plan. They are not slaves to the loon wing of their party. They understand that the American people, both domestically and internationally, need help.

I will be the first to say I am wrong. And I may be wrong, but I doubt it. The American people deserve better. And if I am wrong, I hope they will prove me wrong.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, earlier today, there was a discussion here on the Senate floor of the Major Richard Star Act, legislation that I cosponsored and strongly support. This legislation would allow medically retired veterans with combat-related disabilities to receive their full military retirement pay from the Department of Defense and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I came to the Senate floor in March to express my support for the Major

Richard Star Act and to reiterate to my colleagues that I want to work together to see this bill signed into law this year. That is what I still seek to accomplish.

I have been working with my House colleague Chairman MIKE BOST, the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee here in the Senate, with the legislative leadership, the majority leader's office here in the Senate on a comprehensive veterans package that would improve the delivery of healthcare, benefits and services for veterans, servicemembers, survivors, caregivers, military families, and VA staff.

Notably, this package that we are putting together that we have developed and continue to develop would include the Major Richard Star Act. Veterans who did not get a chance to complete their military career due to medical retirement should not be penalized because they received disability compensation from the VA.

This comprehensive legislative package also includes the bipartisan Veterans ACCESS Act, the Love Lives On Act, the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act, among a number of other bills sponsored by Republicans and by Democrats.

We are close to a final agreement to introduce this comprehensive veterans package. This is not anything out of the norm, but putting this package together, we are going to include the Major Richard Star Act for which the Armed Services Committee has jurisdiction, not the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

We are doing this because we see a way forward, finally, on the Major Richard Star Act becoming law. We are close to reaching an agreement on that package. We have worked extensively over months with veterans service organizations, a wide array—dozens of them—to garner their feedback, to seek their input, to determine whether they can be supportive, and continue to review this legislation in the way we intend, including the way we intend to pay for it.

In addition to working with veterans service organizations, Chairman BOST and I have met with our Democrat and Republican colleagues in both the House and Senate on our committees, the White House's Domestic Policy Council, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to make certain we are creating legislation that is sound policy, has widespread support, and the ability to gain the necessary votes.

Let me say that again: the ability to gain the necessary votes to be passed and signed into law and, most importantly, at the same time will meet the needs of our Nation's veterans.

It is easy to come to the floor and ask for unanimous consent to make a point, but we are doing something different. It takes hard work and consensus building to pass legislation that

meets the needs of veterans and has the ability to become law.

This is not just like a symbolic thing that we are with our veterans; it is how do we make something that matters so greatly to them actual law and the benefits they would receive.

I, again, express my support for the Major Richard Star Act, but that means little—my saying that means little to the veterans who are currently being denied the benefits owed them for their military service. I have served on both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees and often remark how the committees are the most bipartisan committees in Congress.

In 2020, I worked with then-ranking member Jon Tester, a Democrat, to pass the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, and when Senator Tester became chairman, I was the ranking member, and we worked to pass the PACT Act.

We were able to work together to pass these bills because it didn't matter which party controlled the Chamber but because we knew we owed veterans the healthcare and benefits they desperately needed, earned, and deserved.

Some of my colleagues would like to see this bill and many others pass without any offset of the costs. That is not and has not been a viable path forward under either Republican or Democratic majorities. For 5 years, under both Republican and Democratic leadership, the Major Richard Star Act has been unable to pass either the House or the Senate, in significant part, due to the inability to offset the cost of the legislation, something required by law.

We can either continue to encounter this same roadblock—we can do this over and over and over again and see the same result—or we can work together to address the concerns that have prevented this bill from passing for the last 5 years.

Lots of sponsors on the Major Richard Star Act, one of the most sponsored pieces of legislation in Congress, but for 5 years it has not become law. It is my goal to change that, and we are developing a path to do exactly that.

The legislation that I plan to introduce pays for the Major Richard Star Act and other bipartisan and bicameral priorities in their entirety. Ensuring that veterans have the care and benefits they have earned is my primary concern. While some of these benefits typically are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense and not the Department of Veterans Affairs, we don't let that technicality, that technical jurisdiction, stand in the way of helping veterans.

I choose to lead on this effort because I decided to be an original cosponsor of the Major Richard Star Act, not to cosponsor it for the purpose of saying I cosponsored it but for the purpose of seeing it become law.

In the coming days, I will put forth a legislative package that accomplishes the goals of the Major Richard Star Act, and I will do so in a way that addresses the policy and cost concerns that have prevented this bill from passing the House or Senate despite widespread bipartisan support.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work with me on this path forward that restores benefits to retirees with combat-related disabilities, offsets the costs of those benefits, earns the support of veterans and advocates, and can feasibly pass the Senate and the House and be signed into law by the President. That would be a great day for us as a Congress, as a legislature, to make certain we do our work. More importantly, it would be a great accomplishment for the veterans who deserve the full benefits of what they have earned.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

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. 742.

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 Justin D. Smith, of Missouri, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit.

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. 742, Justin D. Smith, of Missouri, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit.

John Thune, Tim Sheehy, Pete Ricketts, Mike Rounds, John Barrasso, Ted Budd, Jim Banks, Rick Scott of Florida, Todd Young, David McCormick, Shelley Moore Capito, Jon A. Husted, John Boozman, Mike Crapo, Katie Boyd Britt, Eric Schmitt, John R. Curtis.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume 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.

REMEMBERING JIM WHITTAKER

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, today I come to the floor to honor a true American legend, Jim Whittaker. Jim passed away at his home in Port Townsend on April 7, 2026, at the age of 97. A memorial in his honor will be held at the Mountaineers in Seattle on Sunday, June 14.

Jim was born and raised, along with his twin Lou, in West Seattle. A towering figure, Jim was nicknamed “Big Jim,” and he more than lived up to the moniker.

Born February 10, 1929, as a young boy, the mountains called to him, and by the 1940s he was exploring with the Boy Scouts and the Mountaineers. In 1948, he and his brother began running guiding services on Mount Rainier, eventually taking over management of that operation.

In 1953, Jim answered the call to serve during the Korean war. He served at the Army’s Mountain and Cold Weather command in Colorado, providing training to the 10th Mountain Division in skiing, climbing, mountain maneuvers, and bivouacs.

Following an honorable discharge, Jim began another adventure: heading the first retail store for the fledging REI Co-op. Over 25 years, he helped build REI, eventually becoming CEO and president. Under his leadership, it became a national brand focused on providing quality outdoor gear and fulfilling environmental conservation goals.

Throughout this time, Jim’s passion for big mountains never faded and led to one of the greatest achievements in American mountaineering history. In 1963, Jim and his Sherpa partner Nawang Gombu summited Mount Everest. Jim was the first American to accomplish this feat. He was awarded the Hubbard Medal by President John F. Kennedy, who became a family friend.

Building on this incredible achievement, in 1978, Jim led the American expedition to K2, largely considered one of the most difficult and dangerous peaks in the world. The expedition achieved the first ascent of K2, and Jim’s leadership was crucial during harrowing times on the mountain.

The word legend can become overused and diminished—not in “Big Jim’s” case. Jim’s life and legacy inspired generations of Americans to pursue heights they could only previously dream of.

Beyond the mountains, Jim had a passion for sailing, conserving pristine landscapes in the Pacific Northwest, and for his family. I had the opportunity to meet Jim personally a few years ago and was honored to stand side by side with him in the fight to conserve our majestic State and protect the Wild Olympics.

His legacy will live on for generations to come in his daring adventures, his efforts to pass on protected landscapes for future generations, and through the incredible family and friends who shared in his adventures.

We should all look to the passion with which Jim lived his life day in and day out as an example to follow on our own journeys and adventures.

SECURE AMERICA ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I submit this statement on behalf of Senator DURBIN, Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee; Senator PETERS, Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and myself.

Federal law prohibits bills enacted through the budget reconciliation process from effectuating primarily substantive changes to law that are not related to fiscal policy. The budget reconciliation process is reserved for changes to the Federal budget and specifically precludes the inclusion of “extraneous” matters, including any provision whose budgetary effect is “merely incidental” to its nonbudgetary policy components. These limitations on the reconciliation process are commonly referred to as the “Byrd rule” after Senator Robert Byrd, who championed their enactment. So long as these limitations, among several others, are adhered to, a budget reconciliation bill can pass the Senate with only simple majority votes; but any language that does not comply with the Byrd rule is subject to a point of order that requires 60 votes to waive. In practice, the minority scrutinizes every provision of a reconciliation bill and challenges those it believes violate the Byrd rule in litigation before the Senate Parliamentarian, which occurs before the Senate considers the bill on the floor. In response to successful challenges, the majority often strikes or revises text ahead of floor consideration.

This statement highlights sections of S. 2, the Secure America Act, the fiscal year 2026 reconciliation bill passed by the Senate on June 5, 2026, to further demonstrate that provisions passed through the reconciliation process must be read in accordance with the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-457; 122 Stat. 5044), hereinafter the TVPRA, the Flores Settlement Agreement, and other applicable laws.

On May 4, 2026, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee—our HSGAC—Chair PAUL released the