

Trump with his grandiose ballroom and arch projects.

Why would President Trump give any U.S. legitimacy to this Russia propaganda event, while Putin continues to bomb Ukraine and snub efforts to end the war?

Why would President Trump proceed with recently reported plans to significantly reduce air and naval assets available for NATO operations in Europe, while Putin continues such mayhem?

On Tuesday, President Trump went as far as to signal that the war in Ukraine was not a priority of the United States. President Trump told reporters at the G7 summit that we had “nothing to do” with a war that was “thousands of miles away.”

I could not disagree more. It is long overdue that the Pentagon spend the \$400 million in Ukraine assistance, which was appropriated by Congress and signed into law by the President, and the \$200 million in Baltic security funds that this Congress passed several months ago.

I raised the point that we had appropriated these funds officially—signed by President Trump—at a recent hearing with Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Rubio. They indicated to me the funds were just getting ready, any day now, to be moved, which I hope is correct, as these should have been sent long ago and should not be delayed any further.

It is also long overdue for this Chamber to act on Russia- and Ukraine-related legislation.

A few weeks ago, the House of Representatives, overwhelmingly and on a bipartisan basis, passed a bill to provide additional security aid to Ukraine and to tighten sanctions on Russia. That is exactly what is needed to force Russia to finally negotiate peace and stop this attack on Ukraine and its people.

Here in the Senate, we have a broad, bipartisan Russia sanctions bill that has been pending for months without action.

So, while we send the President's ballroom representative to represent the United States of America in St. Petersburg, Russia, and talk about Putin's plans for rebuilding Russia's economy—while that is going on—Russia is attacking the Ukrainians and neighboring countries; and the United States, through the President, has announced that it is none of our business.

#### ECONOMY

Mr. President, on a separate topic, last week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported and confirmed what Americans already knew: Inflation is at a 3-year high—marking the second straight month inflation has outpaced wage growth. Rising energy costs are crushing American families, and their dollar simply doesn't stretch as far anymore. It is a lose-lose scenario.

In a birthday present to the President, new NBC polling revealed the President's approval rating has hit an

alltime low for his second term. It is no wonder why. In my home State of Illinois, the average household has had to spend \$3,400 more on goods and services during President Trump's second term, despite the President's campaign pledge to lower costs on day one—another broken promise. That is according to a new report released by the Joint Economic Committee.

That same report also details what Illinois families have spent while the President's second term has transpired. Illinois families, on average, have spent \$815 more than in a previous similar period on housing costs, like rent and mortgage payments, and the like; \$310 more for groceries than in President Trump's first year, compared to 2024; and more than \$350 more on gasoline since the start of the Iran war, a little over 100 days ago.

What was the President's official response? “I love the inflation,” the President said.

During the vote-arama earlier this month, on the President's mass deportation funding bill, Senate Democrats offered numerous amendments to address this affordability crisis, which the President has barely acknowledged. Senate Democrats offered a proposal that would have funded the largest Federal grant program to create more affordable housing. We put forth a measure that would investigate health insurance companies that are denying patients the care they need. And we gave Republicans a chance to join us in ending—for good—the President's anti-weaponization slush fund of taxpayer dollars to cop beaters from January 6.

At all of these opportunities, too many Republicans refused to join us. When will the Republican Party join the Democrats in the Senate to provide relief to struggling families in their own home States? Only time will tell. Senate Democrats will continue to put forward legislation to help families with the rising costs of gasoline, groceries, housing, and child and healthcare. We will put Republicans on record. I hope they will join us in a bipartisan effort to give Americans real relief.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator from Rhode Island.

#### U.S. MILITARY

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the U.S. military and its role as an apolitical institution.

For 250 years, our military's most important source of strength has been the trust of the American people. Their trust is hard won and relies upon the belief that our military remains above politics. I fear that trust is being eroded by the current Secretary of Defense.

I want to begin with Dwight Eisenhower. This month marks the 82nd anniversary of D-Day and the American invasion at Normandy. General Eisenhower spent the night before those landings walking among the men he was sending into battle, asking where

they were from, what they did back home, and how were their families.

He wrote two messages after that meeting. The rallying call for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force was one of those messages, but a second message—a message he had hoped no one would ever read—was written in case the landings failed.

It read:

If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone.

Fortunately, he never had to send it, but he wrote it because he understood that the privilege of command carried the full weight of its consequences.

In 1947, Eisenhower addressed the graduating class at West Point. He had just finished commanding the largest military campaign in human history and witnessed the deaths of hundreds of thousands of young Americans. He knew what war was, and this is what he told the cadets:

War is mankind's most tragic and stupid folly . . .

Fifteen years later, GEN Douglas MacArthur—no stranger to war himself—again stood at West Point and said:

[T]he soldier, above all other people, prays for peace . . .

Those commanders understood that lethality is a terrible tool and humility is paramount in warfare.

Last weekend, Pete Hegseth traveled to Normandy to observe the D-Day anniversary. He stood at the American cemetery above the beaches where more than 2,500 Americans died in a single morning. Standing on that sacred historic site, Secretary Hegseth did not use his platform to express humility or unity, but to preach an anti-immigrant message. He said:

Sadly, today, different European beaches are stormed by different dangerous ideologies. Beaches in Spain, in Italy, in Greece and Bulgaria. Boats and men arrive. When will European capitals do something about that invasion?

Well, many historians and veterans, hearing his words, called his speech grotesque. I would call it a desecration and an ignorant one also.

I doubt the Secretary knows that during World War II, more than 300,000 foreign-born individuals served in the U.S. Army alone. More than 109,000 of them were not even American citizens. They were men and women who crossed an ocean to fight and die for a country that had not yet fully claimed them and earned their citizenship through their service.

Hundreds of thousands more were first-generation Americans, the children of immigrants. For example, U.S. Navy coxswain Amin Isbir, the son of Syrian immigrants who settled in Pittsburgh, was among the first men off his landing craft when it reached Omaha Beach under heavy fire. After securing his landing craft on the beach, he was killed by a German shell while helping load a fellow wounded soldier onto a stretcher.

Coxswain Isbir and countless heroes like him are buried at Normandy, the sons and daughters of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Yet Secretary Hegseth stood above their graves and used the moment to deride the kind of people they were.

Last month, Secretary Hegseth got his own chance to address West Point cadets at their commencement. Where Eisenhower and McArthur spoke of wisdom, humility, and caution, Pete Hegseth boasted about lethality, claimed that West Point had turned into “woke Princeton” and made such bluster as “you can’t throw your pronouns at the enemy.”

He told the class of 2026, the most diverse class in the history of the U.S. Military Academy, that strength in diversity is “the single dumbest phrase in military history.” He mocked the service of women officers and criticized those with nonconservative political beliefs. He told a captive audience of newly commissioned officers that the presence of their classmates with different beliefs and demographics represented a lowering of standards. It was a shameful, divisive, and self-centered speech.

I attended West Point as a cadet. I taught there as a professor. I served on Active Duty as an Army officer. I hope I know what West Point stands for and what its graduates embrace: principled leadership to serve their soldiers and the Nation. Where past leaders asked West Point cadets to understand the economic, political, and spiritual aspirations of other peoples, to devote their lives as seriously to leading toward peace as preparing for war, Hegseth gave them a culture war speech.

Indeed, as James Bennet observed in *The Economist*:

[W]here past military leaders treated violence as a tragic necessity, Hegseth celebrated it as righteous and thrilling.

His hyperpartisan remarks were both morally and factually wrong. But this was not an isolated incident. It is a part of a pattern of partisan political behavior antithetical to the role of the Secretary of Defense.

Last month, Secretary Hegseth traveled to Kentucky to campaign for a Republican House candidate the day before a primary election. He stood on a stage, attacked a sitting Republican Member of Congress, and told the crowd to send a different person to Washington. He announced a disclaimer, apparently “for the lawyers,” that he was there in his personal capacity.

That disclaimer is void. The Secretary of Defense does not have a personal capacity. He represents, at every moment, this Nation and its military forces.

Indeed, this trip seems to violate the Defense Department’s own political activity rules which expressly prohibit Senate-confirmed officials from taking an active part in political campaigns. The Department rules are explicit.

Even making speeches or knocking doors constitutes a prohibited political act for someone in Hegseth’s position.

Pete Hegseth arrived in Kentucky as the civilian leader of the most powerful military on Earth, in the middle of an active war. The “Secretary” title travels with him. He can’t leave it at the office. The authority of the office travels with him. And every servicemember watching the news understood exactly what they were seeing: the man who controls their careers, their promotions, and their deployments inserting himself into a partisan election on behalf of the President’s favorite candidate.

This was an abuse of office and created an image that every Secretary of Defense, in my memory, has worked to avoid.

The Kentucky party’s own former spokesperson questioned whether Secretary Hegseth violated the Hatch Act, and numerous independent groups have filed complaints with the Pentagon’s inspector general.

This isn’t about my opposition to the Secretary or President Trump. I am driven by the corrosive impacts of his rhetoric, his actions, and what they mean for the strength of our volunteer military. We need to think about what this means for the men and women in uniform who serve under this Secretary. They took an oath to the Constitution—not to a political party, not to a candidate, not to a President. The Uniform Code of Military Justice restricts their partisan activity precisely because we have always understood that a politicized military is a dangerous military. And now our servicemembers are watching their Secretary of Defense do what they are forbidden to do.

What message does that send? What chilling effect does it have on good order and discipline throughout the ranks?

Secretary Hegseth has personally intervened in the careers of nearly 50 senior officers that we know of, firing them or blocking their promotions without explanation. Just last month, we learned he had personally blocked and delayed the promotions of dozens of top performing Navy and Air Force officers, the majority of whom are women and minority officers. These are leaders, selected by their peers, based on merit and performance, in a promotion system that has functioned on those principles for generations.

The chilling effect is real. Senior officers across the force are asking themselves whether their professional military advice—the kind that keeps soldiers alive—will cost them their careers.

And this is not hypothetical. We have already seen it happen. General Kruse, the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was fired last year after his analysts produced an intelligence report that contradicted the Secretary’s public claims about Iran.

The message was received by those advising him, and here we are today,

more than 100 days into a war with Iran.

I would also note, that under U.S. law, only the President may remove an officer from a promotion list. Secretary Hegseth has refused to explain why or how he believes he has the authority to terminate or delay these officers’ careers.

And, of course, there is the Kid Rock incident. In March, two Army Apache helicopters flew to the Nashville home of Kid Rock—a well-known Trump supporter—and hovered over his pool while he filmed them for social media. This was an obvious violation of military protocol and aviation safety laws, and the Army immediately launched an investigation and suspended the crews. But within hours, Secretary Hegseth intervened. He posted on social media:

No punishment. No investigation. Carry on, patriots.

The Army’s chain of command was overruled by a tweet because the man being entertained was a friend of the President.

Secretary Hegseth later doubled down by taking Kid Rock for a ride in an Army Apache helicopter as part of a promotional video.

The Army’s aviation safety regulations exist for a reason. The chain of command exists for a reason. It ensures commanders hold each other and their troops accountable, that those who break regulations face consequences, and that military assets are used for legitimate operational needs, not political theater.

When the Secretary of Defense short-circuits good order and discipline to benefit a political ally, he does not just bend the rules; he signals to every officer that accountability is conditional on politics.

These actions are emblematic of the Secretary’s broader focus on his own personal agenda. In the past 3 months alone, while our servicemembers have been fighting and dying overseas, he has taken it upon himself to cancel flu vaccine requirements, repeal firearm restrictions on military posts, bar servicemembers from attending certain universities, and upend the Chaplain Corps.

My point is this: Secretary Hegseth is behaving as though his time as Defense Secretary is an opportunity to impose his personal political views on our military men and women. He is wrong. The Office of Secretary of Defense is about leading millions of American servicemembers of every faith, race, and gender with the character and composure they deserve. The military’s apolitical mission is not incidental to its strength; it is foundational to its strength.

When the Secretary of Defense uses his office to promote a sectarian vision of his culture war, he does not inspire the force; he divides it.

Taken together, the Secretary’s actions are an assault on the norms, traditions, and structures that have kept

the American military the most trusted institution in this country for 250 years.

Good order and discipline is not a slogan. It means that the rules apply to everyone, including the leaders at the top. It means that accountability flows both ways and that promotions are based on merit, not loyalty to a party. And it means that servicemembers of every faith and background are welcomed and respected.

Secretary Hegseth is undermining every one of those tenets. Our servicemembers deserve better, and we have an obligation as a body, this Senate, to say so plainly and to counter this abuse of power.

I yield the floor.

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

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

The Democratic leader.

**CONGRATULATING THE NEW YORK KNICKS ON WINNING THE 2026 NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION FINALS**

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this is one—one—happy moment. It is an honor to offer this resolution with Senator GILLIBRAND to pay tribute to the great New York Knicks. With their historic victory in the NBA finals, the Knicks reminded the country and the world that it is never a good idea to bet against New York.

We just witnessed perhaps the greatest playoff run in history and finals series in history as well. Coming off the second longest playoff win streak in the NBA history, the Knicks achieved the first, fourth, and sixth biggest comeback wins in the history of the NBA finals, and they did it all in a single series—absolutely extraordinary coming off that second longest playoff win streak in NBA history.

We are so, so proud—so, so proud—of our New York Knicks. This team has joined the ranks of DeBusschere and Bradley, of Willis Reed, of Earl “the Pearl” and Clyde, and the rest of the 1973 legendary Knicks who last brought the title home. I admired that team as a young man, and we have been waiting and waiting and waiting, and here we are again.

For their efforts, this championship team will be honored tomorrow with what many are expecting to be the largest ticker-tape parade in New York history. In fact, the Knicks’ victory goes beyond the team itself; it brings such honor, such pride, such joy to New York and has united our diverse city in a way that maybe nothing else could.

It is truly an honor to introduce and pass this resolution to congratulate the Knicks for winning the champion-

ship and to thank them for the dedication they showed to our city both on and off the court throughout the season.

I speak for the Senate—perhaps with the exception of one or two Spurs fans—when I say: Let’s go, Knicks!

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 771, congratulating the Knicks, which was submitted earlier today.

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

The senior assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 771) congratulating the New York Knicks on winning the 2026 National Basketball Association Finals.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions 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 (S. Res. 771) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to. (The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today’s RECORD under “Submitted Resolutions.”)

Mr. SCHUMER. “Go Knicks!”

I yield the floor.

**EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued**

**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 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. 760, Michelle Steel, of California, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Korea.

John Thune, Ted Budd, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Katie Boyd Britt, Thom Tillis, Roger Marshall, Rick Scott of Florida, Bernie Moreno, Mike Rounds, John Boozman, Joni Ernst, Jon Husted, Marsha Blackburn, Steve Daines, Shelley Moore Capito, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Pete Ricketts.

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

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Michelle Steel, of California, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Korea, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. JUSTICE) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), and the Senator from Georgia (Mr. WARNOCK) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 54, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 176 Ex.]

**YEAS—54**

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

**NAYS—41**

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

**NOT VOTING—5**

|        |           |         |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Bennet | Justice   | Warnock |
| Booker | McConnell |         |

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). On this vote, the yeas are 54, the nays are 41. The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Vermont.

**U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT**

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I strongly support the resolution offered by my colleagues Senator CORTEZ MASTO and Senator KAINE.

This resolution requires a report from the State Department on the human rights practices of the Government of Honduras during the very corrupt Presidency of Juan Orlando Hernandez and a report on steps the United States has taken to promote human rights and to bring drug traffickers and criminals in Honduras to justice.

During former President Hernandez’s time in office, the United States—our taxpayers—provided hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Honduras, including to the Honduran security forces.

So the information requested in this resolution is directly relevant to Congress’ oversight responsibilities. We have an obligation to make certain that taxpayer dollars are served in the