

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE THAT GHISLAINE MAXWELL SHOULD NOT BE GRANTED A PRESIDENTIAL PARDON OR ANY FORM OF CLEMENCY FOR HER CRIMES WITH JEFFREY EPSTEIN RELATING TO THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF MINORS

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, tomorrow, the Judiciary Committee will vote on Todd Blanche's nomination for Attorney General.

There are a number of reasons the members of the committee should oppose Todd Blanche's nomination—from his willingness to enable Donald Trump's worst instinct to his role in helping to create Trump's corrupt slush fund to pay out to January 6 rioters who assaulted police officers here in this Chamber and others. Yet there is one reason that stands out far ahead of the others—that of his complete and total mishandling of the Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell case.

Former Trump Attorney General Pam Bondi told the House behind closed doors that Todd Blanche, as her Deputy, was responsible for how the Department handled the Epstein files. Under his supervision, the Department of Justice promised the release of Epstein's client list, claiming there was a list they compiled for Pam Bondi and sent to Pam Bondi, only to back-track and refuse to release the document for months.

It took Congress passing an overwhelmingly bipartisan, veto-proof Federal law to force the release of these materials. Even then—even then—the Trump administration and specifically the Department of Justice, under Todd Blanche's management, delayed their compliance with this law.

When files were finally released, the identity of many perpetrators—not victims—were redacted, raising serious questions and concerns about who the administration was trying to protect. They redacted perpetrators, not victims.

As the White House and Justice Department tried to manage the fallout from mishandling this case, Todd Blanche was purportedly in the Situation Room with senior Trump administration officials working on a public relations strategy—well, on behalf of the President.

According to the New York Times, one of the options was to have a Justice Department lawyer interview Ghislaine Maxwell in order to get her to clear Donald Trump. Well, Todd Blanche apparently offered himself up to interview Ghislaine Maxwell and strangely raised the possibility that Maxwell's lawyer “might expect something in return for her candor,” according to the Times. A convicted sex trafficker wishes something in return from the President of the United States.

White House Counsel then laid out the possibility that Ghislaine Maxwell might be pardoned or have her sentence reduced. You heard that right. There literally was a serious discussion at the White House to pardon or reduce the sentence of Ghislaine Maxwell just in order to get her to say nice things about Donald Trump. And mind you, this is the same woman—the same woman—who facilitated Jeffrey Epstein's horrific abuse of underage girls over many years, year after year, hundreds of young women.

Our justice system worked as it was supposed to. Maxwell was found guilty by a jury of her peers. She was sentenced to 20 years in prison for her crimes. That is why it was odd when Todd Blanche, in a highly unusual step, personally interviewed Maxwell. And days later, she was—whoop—magically, magically transferred to a minimum security prison. Imagine that.

That is not the only thing that is odd. Ghislaine Maxwell's attorney, who Todd Blanche calls a friend, said that Maxwell wanted a pardon from Trump in exchange for her public testimony that would help Donald Trump. At the same time, Trump has refused to rule out—refused to rule out—pardoning her.

Trump has said:

I'm allowed to do it.

He has even gone as far as saying:

I'll take a look at it. I'll speak to the DOJ.

This is our President. The President said he would speak to the DOJ, which would now be led by his former lawyer Todd Blanche.

It is frankly horrifying that Trump would entertain the idea of clemency for even a second—even a second—for a convicted sex trafficker. That alone should be enough for the Senate to speak up with one voice and affirm that there should be absolutely no pardon for Ghislaine Maxwell—not now, not ever. That is why, earlier this year, I introduced a resolution doing just that. But given that Senate Republicans are poised to soon confirm Todd Blanche to lead the Department of Justice, the time to bring this resolution is now.

Earlier this month, the Senate passed a similar resolution saying there should be no Presidential pardon for Sam Bankman-Fried, so we have already set that precedent here in this Chamber. So let us now send a message to the White House and the Department of Justice right now that there should be no pardon for Ghislaine Maxwell. There should never be a pardon for someone who helped a monster—a monster—abuse underage girls for years. That is why I am requesting that we pass my commonsense resolution today saying just that.

Mr. President, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration and the Senate now proceed to S. Res. 608.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 608) expressing the sense of the Senate that Ghislaine Maxwell should not be granted a Presidential pardon or any form of clemency for her crimes with Jeffrey Epstein relating to the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Ms. ROSEN. 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.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 608) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of February 12, 2026, under “Submitted Resolutions.”)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, I am so pleased that we could find unanimous agreement on a resolution against a pardon for Ghislaine Maxwell. If Republicans advance Todd Blanche's nomination tomorrow in the Judiciary Committee, this is the least they can do to make their opposition to a Maxwell pardon clear.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative senior proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING LINDSEY GRAHAM

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to pay tribute to an outstanding U.S. Senator and a dear friend, Senator Lindsey Graham.

When my husband first woke me with the news that Lindsey had died the night before, I couldn't believe it. I said to him: That can't possibly be true. I thought it was some tasteless internet hoax or a false report. Not Lindsey. Not our Lindsey. But sadly, it was true, although I still find it so hard to accept. I can only imagine how difficult this unexpected loss must be for his beloved sister DARLINE and the other members of his family.

Often when we think of a Senator, we ask: Did he or she make a difference? Did he or she have an impact on events here at home or abroad? Was the person a consequential Senator?

With Lindsey, the answer clearly was the resounding yes. Lindsey was a leader not only in national policy but also in shaping international events. How telling it is that the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of Ukraine both made the long voyage to attend his memorial service yesterday at the National Cathedral.

Whether he was leading a congressional trip to Israel in the wake of the

October 7 massacre to demonstrate America's solidarity with Israel or his many trips to Ukraine to show the Senate's unwavering opposition to Russia's unprovoked invasion, Lindsey time and again demonstrated strong, effective leadership. He was truly a player on the world stage.

And for me, Lindsey was also a close friend. Along with Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman, I traveled four times with Lindsey to Afghanistan and Iraq. Believe me, on those long military trips, you get to know your colleagues very well. Lindsey's unsurpassed sense of humor, his self-deprecating wit, and his storytelling ability made serving with him delightful, and I always learned so much when I traveled with him as well.

I keep thinking that John McCain and Joe Lieberman—both treasured friends and colleagues of mine—were there waiting to greet what they called the third amigo when Lindsey Graham entered the heavenly gates, and I tried to take some comfort in knowing that the three of them are now reunited.

Yesterday, we celebrated the life of this extraordinary Senator. Lindsey's life on Earth ended far too soon, but his legacy will endure forever.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. LUMMIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4744

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, 2 weeks ago, House Republicans failed to advance the Take Care of America's Veterans Act. That failure in the House was the latest example of broad bipartisan opposition to the Republican proposal to cut more than \$50 billion—that is \$50 billion—in benefits for disabled veterans over the next 10 years.

This controversial proposal continues to divide Congress, and it also is dividing the veteran community. And it is something we could have easily averted if my Republican friends had engaged in a serious and substantive conversation about the process, a conversation not only with Democrats but with the veterans service organizations.

They pursued a take-it-or-leave-it approach. I would like to think that it is mainly the House of Representatives that is responsible for this take-it-or-leave-it approach because Democrats and veterans advocates have been very clear from the very beginning, we oppose the cuts in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act for more than 1 million veterans who are currently eligible to receive benefits because they suffer from sleep apnea or tinnitus.

These disabilities are not hypothetical or abstract; they are real. And

they do disable people, and often they are the result directly from combat or training that inflicts the same kind of harms. For example, standing near artillery being fired for many hours a day, the result is impairments of hearing, tinnitus. And the toxic chemicals in training as well as in combat can result in sleep apnea.

So I am here to say again I oppose efforts to water down the Major Richard Star Act, a DOD-administered and funded policy, with cuts to veterans' benefits. I oppose watering it down by taking care and benefits away from veterans.

The Take Care of America's Veterans Act, to its credit, includes dozens of bipartisan priorities that Democrats have authored and championed. They are bipartisan, many of them. I support them. I want these priorities signed into law. Veterans, survivors, and caregivers deserve them. But we cannot accept the false narrative that accepting the Republican-proposed cuts is the only way to do it—our way or the highway—especially since it is a budgetary rule that has been selectively enforced in the past that somehow there needs to be an offset.

In fact, there should not be an offset to care for veterans by taking away from other veterans for a program that is an obligation of the Department of Defense. Call it the Department of War; it is still their obligation to provide full retirement pay without subtraction for disability benefits, as is now required. Unjustly, unconscionably, Republicans insist on offsetting new investments in veterans with those offsets, which is absurd, and I hope still my Republican colleagues will look to the compromise that I have offered.

I don't think there should be a need for an offset. There hasn't been for some benefits in the past. But if Republicans are going to continue to block the Major Richard Star Act with insistence on an offset or a pay-for, I have one. It is, in fact, contained in an alternative bill that I am offering today to address the two major concerns with the Take Care of America's Veterans Act. First, it would replace the watered-down version of the Major Richard Star Act with my bill to fully eliminate the wounded veterans tax, and it would strike the unprecedented cuts for disabled veterans who suffer from service-connected tinnitus and sleep apnea. In doing so, it would utilize unspent Department of Defense funds from H.R. 1, the so-called Big Beautiful Bill, to cover the entire cost of the bill. It is the only offset proposal for the Take Care of America's Veterans Act that has garnered bipartisan support, and it is the one that doesn't pit some veterans against other veterans.

More than \$75 billion of the Department of Defense funds in H.R. 1, a bill signed into law more than 1 year ago, still remain unspent and unobligated, and CBO has confirmed—absolutely confirmed—enactment of my proposal

prior to the Department's obligation of those funds would provide the savings we need. The CBO has said, if we pass this bill, the savings from unobligated funds can be counted as an offset.

Let me just say bluntly: There is a lot of rhetorical rigmarole that we can apply to pay-go and offsets and pay-fors. We make the laws here. We can pay for this program out of unobligated funds that the Secretary of Defense—call him the Secretary of War—has said is unobligated.

Now, he has said a lot of it will be obligated, but it is for things like the Golden Dome, where most military experts say that money will not be feasibly spent by the end of the year. We should use it if we need to have an offset.

I believe that veterans, survivors, and caregivers have paid for their benefits through service and sacrifice. The cost of caring for veterans is part of the cost of war, and for those combat-injured veterans who are receiving disability benefits for their injuries, they should not have to sacrifice their retirement pay that is an obligation of the Department of Defense. It should not be taken out of the VA. It may seem like an abstract principle, but to veterans who would lose sleep apnea and tinnitus benefits, it is a big deal. In fact, it can be a life-changing deal.

Costs that are dramatically increasing each day because of the President's blundering war of choice in Iran have resulted in 18 service members dying and more than 600 injured, and they will be among the ones who are penalized if they retire with fewer than 20 years. We are creating a new generation of combat-injured veterans. It is unconscionable to claim that we can only care for them by forcing other veterans to sacrifice. We need to do the right thing. Veterans deserve meaningful results from a grateful nation, and they should never be handed an invoice when the costs of war come due.

My Republican colleagues cannot claim that the Major Richard Star Act is unaffordable. If you want a chart to give you some idea of the comparatively minuscule cost of the Major Richard Star Act, here is \$13 billion. It is over 10 years. Here is our fiscal year 2027 defense request for 1 year. It dwarfs. In fact, \$13 billion is hardly a rounding error on \$1.5 trillion. The NDAA benefits expansion in fiscal year 2020 and fiscal year 2021 was \$13 billion—no pay-for. The estimated cost of the Iran war: \$38 billion. That figure is a lowball. It is in excess, really, of \$100 billion; we all know it.

Compared to all we spend on our defense capability, doing right by these veterans is basically a rounding error that the country can well afford.

Now, my colleague's bill also siphons off \$500 million from disabled veterans for an IT slush fund that the VA does not need or request. The money that they are taking from veterans who suffer from sleep apnea or tinnitus covers, in their view, the Major Richard Star

Act, but it is only 17 percent of the money that they are taking away from these disabled veterans. The rest of it, of the \$56.2 billion that they would save by, in effect, inflicting harm on these veterans—who knows.

Taking money from veterans with service-connected disabilities and giving it to President Trump's cronies or whoever else is going to lay claim to that compensation cut but not used is absolutely shameful—a staggering dereliction of our obligation to veterans. Cutting \$56 billion worth of benefits when only 15 percent, 17 percent will go toward covering new VA benefits is cruel and unconscionable. Better to adopt my compromise proposal. Taking unobligated funds—\$13 billion—out of the more than \$75 billion that are unspent and unobligated, that the CBO says can be used for these savings, is the better way to go. It is the only one that has garnered bipartisan support. It is the only one that isn't opposed by the stakeholders. It is the only one that can pass. It is the only one that should pass.

So notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 433, S. 4744. I ask unanimous consent that the Blumenthal substitute amendment at the desk be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, reserving the right to object, it saddens me that we are here because I wish we were here with a vote on the Senate floor to pass the Major Richard Star Act and other pieces of legislation that are so important to veterans, their families, and their caregivers across the country.

The Senator from Connecticut outlined all the things that he says his amendment to this legislation would do and be supported by, but the reality is, the Senator from Connecticut has tried time and time again to pass legislation similar to that, never to succeed.

Earlier this year, I was on the Senate floor at my seat here, standing here telling folks that maybe for once we will quit sponsoring pieces of legislation that benefit veterans but never get to the point in which they are actually passed. And I committed myself to finding a way in which passage of the legislation could occur, not just remarks on the Senate floor or in committee or in gatherings of veterans or speaking to our constituents at home of our support. In most instances, this would be the Major Richard Star Act, which has nearly every Member of the Senate as a cosponsor and many Members of the House of Representatives as cosponsors. But that has been the case for 6 years. I was looking for a path that would result in a result.

At the heart of the debate today are those tens of millions of servicemembers, veterans and caregivers, survivors and family members, and VA employees who would benefit by the legislation that I have introduced—the legislation that the Senator from Connecticut is offering to accept with some amendments.

These men and women have been waiting years—years—for the life-saving benefits this bill would provide. What we will decide today will determine whether they can access the mental health treatments they desperately need, whether they can put food on the table and pay their bills on time, whether they are able to remarry after the loss of their servicemember or veteran spouse without sacrificing benefits they need to support their families, and much more.

The point of that sentence or few sentences is that this is a comprehensive piece of legislation that begins with the Richard Star Act—the one that I said was sponsored by most Members of Congress but never sees the outcome those veterans and military retirees deserve.

The stakes in this debate are high. I think the legislation we are talking about—perhaps debating about—is one of the most consequential pieces of legislation that will affect veterans, their family members, caregivers, and others certainly in my time as chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and perhaps my time in the U.S. Senate.

I have been a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee 14 years in the House and now 15 years in the Senate. I have devoted effort, time, and attention to making sure we do right by those who serve our country.

I appreciate my colleague Senator BLUMENTHAL—in fact, our shared determination, our dedication to the Richard Star Act. He has tried, as I understand by his words, eight times offering a unanimous consent, and each time, that effort has been unsuccessful.

Occasionally, I get complimented for effort. I appreciate compliments at any stage of what we are doing here, but what we really ought to be interested in is getting results—not results for a compliment but results because it makes such a difference in so many veterans' lives.

Today, the Senator from Connecticut—it is another example of his attempt to pass legislation—usually without an offset but today using an alternative offset. I respect his goal, but once again, as of July 22, the Congressional Budget Office has again confirmed to the committee that a rescission of unobligated funds to the Department of Defense in H.R. 1 does not offset mandatory spending and therefore does not qualify under the requirements of law to the Senate—excuse me—the requirements of law as the Senate does its work but as the House and Congress are obligated to abide by.

This plan does not meet the needs of the moment, and it will result in the

failure by Congress once again to deliver to America's heroes.

There is a simple choice before us: We can either keep repeating failed efforts that result in no progress delivering for veterans and military families or we can step up and provide leadership needed to finally get them the help they need and deserve—action and results. We want action that has results. This is why shortly after this conversation, this discussion between the Senator from Connecticut and I, I will be asking for a unanimous consent agreement myself to pass the legislation with an offset that the Congressional Budget Office has determined to be a viable offset.

The Take Care of America's Veterans Act would expand benefits and healthcare to millions of veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors across our Nation.

It combines 60—I think our committee, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, deservedly has the reputation of working in a bipartisan way to get results. We combined, in our efforts to get the Richard Star Act, other pieces of legislation that are hugely important to the veteran community—60 pieces of bipartisan legislation chosen in this process of putting this package together for their sponsorship and support by Democrats and Republicans.

This is not a partisan effort; this is a desire, an effort to accomplish something that would benefit all of us who have made efforts to support our veterans and to make certain that we do it in a way that gets 60 votes in the U.S. Senate.

That includes the Major Richard Star Act, of which the Senator from Connecticut has been a longtime advocate. That is to address a longstanding injustice—something that is totally wrong—by allowing medically retired, combat-disabled veterans—they are not allowed to receive both benefits. This would allow medically retired, combat-disabled veterans to receive both disability compensation from the VA and their earned retirement pay from the DOD.

The Senator from Connecticut talks about our committee and the committee that he serves on as well, the Armed Services Committee. The Armed Services Committee has jurisdiction, but there are so many veterans that have consequences from the current law that we decided—I decided it was time for us to step forward and find a path forward.

This legislation, in addition to the underlying Richard Star Act, includes the Love Lives on Act. That allows surviving spouses of fallen servicemembers and veterans to remarry without losing the benefits they need to support their families.

It includes the Veterans' ACCESS Act to make it easier for veterans to get lifesaving treatment—and particularly mental health capabilities—and expands access to high-quality care in VA medical facilities and in the community as well.

Those of us from rural places understand the value of that community care, and in today's time of challenges with our veterans' mental health and suicide prevention efforts, that community care becomes even more important. Quick access is critical.

It also includes the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act to increase compensation benefits for veterans with severe service-connected disabilities and their families.

There are dozens of other bills—bipartisan bills sponsored and led by Republicans and led by Democratic Members of the Senate—that are included in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act to make certain the VA is equipped with the right resources, staff, facilities, and authorities to provide the support servicemembers, veterans, and their families need.

The question we generally are arguing about is the pay-for. Again, the law requires that. To pay for these improvements, this bill would codify elements of a rule that the VA proposed 4 years ago in the Biden administration, in 2022. The VA indicated then and now that it plans to change how the Department evaluates claims for service-connected disability ratings for sleep apnea and tinnitus. VA officials testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in January that the Department is moving forward, and VA officials confirmed that again just several weeks ago.

The reason this is important is that that means there are going to be changes that the VA is authorized to make in these two arenas in providing benefits to veterans.

The VA in the Biden administration—and apparently agreed to in the Trump administration—found there were ways to improve—they are required by law to evaluate the benefits they provide veterans, and if changes are appropriate because of medicine or science or changes in treatment, the VA can modify those benefits to reflect current science and medicine. The VA is going to do that. The offset is the fact that when the VA does that, it saves money. When the VA does that, however, it will be considered paying down the debt.

I don't know how it can be a radical idea or an unfair idea that if we are going to take the money out of the VA for those two circumstances—the VA is going to do that—why don't we capture a significant portion of that and actually use that money to provide benefits to veterans? It is not like we are taking something away. The VA is going to alter the formula in their normal course of business, and we are capturing the savings in part—we are capturing part of the savings to actually use it to help other veterans, their families, and their caregivers.

Once the Department finalizes the rule, the savings associated from that change in the rule will be lost. It will no longer serve as an offset for any-

thing; it will just go into the General Treasury. It will be a lost opportunity for us to reinvest those funds in the long overdue improvements included in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act.

My colleague has stated that “the costs of war include caring for our veterans.” I share that sentiment. Military service is a family service. The cost of war also includes caring for spouses and children and caregivers and survivors. The Take Care of America's Veterans Act would do that and more.

So we had the opportunity to use something that is going to happen. We had the opportunity—we have the opportunity to make sure it is used to benefit veterans. The idea that we are taking a benefit away from someone is also false. This is prospective. After the rule changes, that is when we have the opportunity to make certain that we are still caring for our veterans. We are not taking anything away from any veteran that receives benefits today. In fact, there is a grace period in which veterans can continue to apply for these benefits after this legislation becomes law.

We are not taking anything away; we are using money that the VA says is no longer going to be spent and spending that money in a different way for veterans, often including the same veterans that receive those disability payments.

This legislation is strongly supported by many military and veterans organizations, including the Wounded Warrior Project, the Military Officers Association of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Tragedy Assistance Program—or TAPS—for Survivors, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, the Veterans Justice Alliance, the National Defense Committee, the Military Coalition, and Mission Roll Call.

It is also supported by the American Legion—the largest veteran service organization in the country—and by Medal of Honor recipients Britt Slabinski and Earl Plumlee, the president and vice president of the Medal of Honor Society.

It is also supported by Richard Star's brother, who has been an advocate for the Richard Star legislation since the beginning of this issue's arrival and certainly since the passing of his brother and his interest in making sure that his brother is honored.

These organizations know the challenges facing the military and veteran community. They know firsthand the high cost of continued inaction by Congress, the cycle of delaying veterans, caregivers, and survivors from receiving earned benefits.

It is not a perfect analogy, but I remember my own mother lobbying me because she was a “Notch Baby” in the Social Security system. If you were born in a certain set of years, your benefits were less than the people before you and the people after you.

My mom accused me of—Congress—maybe she wasn't accusing me person-

ally—but accused Congress of just waiting until she died before making the change.

I want to make sure that we do not lose another veteran, another servicemember. I want to make sure we get a result and we get a result fast.

When I introduced this legislation, my assumption was that we could accomplish this—even in the Senate and the House in this difficult world we work in—that this legislation could be passed by Congress and signed by the President, this legislation that is supported by the White House. We could get this legislation done in the miracle of a month.

I didn't anticipate the opposition that has arisen. I have indicated to the Senator—the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs—an interest in working together to resolve differences, and we will work to do that.

But doing what we have done—what has been done time and time again—of a UC request that has no result is unsatisfactory to me and unsatisfactory to the veterans and the veterans organizations I just listed. I am tired of waiting. Don't wait until our veterans are no longer living before you do something to protect their benefits and resolve an injustice that has gone on far too long.

The cycle of delaying veterans, caregivers, and survivors from receiving their earned benefits must end and must end now.

And with that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am, frankly, astonished and appalled by the argument just made by my friend and colleague from Kansas, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. His argument essentially is: The VA is going to take away these benefits through rulemaking and, therefore, we should take advantage of the savings that the VA is going to make by action that is wrong, unconscionable, and deeply hurtful to veterans.

Now, let's be very blunt here. The Biden administration was considering a similar proposal. I fought it. We fought it successfully. The Biden administration backed down because they knew it was wrong.

I predict that there will be this similar kind of outrage in the veterans community to taking away these disability benefits from well-deserving veterans and that the present Secretary of the VA will be forced to back down as well.

Why are we doing his handiwork when he has not even yet proposed the rule? We are assuming he will do something that is wrong, shameful, and unconscionable—and we should take advantage of it? Count me out.

I fought the Biden administration on this one. I will fight any rule that will inflict this harm on veterans. And even

if he were to do it, why should we codify it, put it into statute so that it can't be reversed at some later point without another statute?

I am hopeful that we can reconsider this idea of depriving disabled veterans of benefits in order to help other veterans.

Now I want to be very clear. This is my eighth or ninth time here, asking for unanimous consent, but it is an entirely new proposal that I am offering. In fact, it is the same proposal that the Senator from Kansas is offering, except it doesn't take away benefits from veterans; it pays for the measure in another way.

The Senator from Kansas says it would be against the law for us to do it. Who makes laws here? The Senate and the Congress make the laws. If we made a law about how to pay for something, we can make an exception to that law. We are not bound inextricably and inevitably by other Congresses if we face an injustice under laws that other Congresses have passed. I am unwilling to accept the idea that we have to deprive benefits—gouge them, in effect—of benefits they have earned.

And let me just conclude by saying: All of the good things in this bill, count me in; but taking away benefits from veterans to pay for them, count me out.

I think we can do better as a nation. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I object. I indicated my objection.

Mr. President, I have described the Take Care of America's Veterans Act in my remarks following the unanimous consent request by the Senator from Connecticut.

But, again, I would highlight that these are changes that are going to be made under normal statutory law by rules at the Department of Veterans Affairs. And the end result is that the money, when saved, will be—the reductions and the savings that occur will accrue to the General Treasury, as compared to the benefits that we want to provide to the veterans in this country.

Notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to immediate consideration of Calendar No. 433, S. 4744. I ask unanimous consent that the Moran substitute amendment at the desk be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, for all the reasons that I have stated, this bill has all the right measures that

I can support except taking away benefits in the expectation that the VA Secretary is going to promulgate a rule that has been beaten back in a prior administration, that we should be united in opposing.

Let me ask my colleague, the chairman of the VA Committee: Will you support the VA Secretary in proposing this rule that would, in effect, cut benefits for disabled veterans?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is reminded to direct his questions to the Chair.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I propose that question to my colleague through the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. You can answer; you cannot answer.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I look forward to continuing to work to make sure the veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to and to make certain that the VA does its job in a medical- and science-based manner and would await for the VA to accomplish that, which they indicated as recently as 2 weeks ago they were going to do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am going to be really charitable because I know my colleague's heart is in the right place, and I know we share an objective here, which is to care for our veterans.

And I am going to interpret that answer as his being willing to join—if it comes to pass that we have this proposed rule, that he would oppose it.

I think the VSOs would oppose it. I think the veterans community would oppose it. I think the people of America would oppose it, which is why it was withdrawn under the Biden administration—because it is such a shameful, bad idea. And we should not incorporate it in a veterans bill, the Take Care of America's Veterans Act as a means to pay for benefits to other veterans when there is no need for a pay-for.

All of the good things in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act—I support. We have a path. We have a path. Use the money from H.R. 1: unspent, unobligated, unfeasible to spend before the end of the fiscal year. It will go back into the Treasury.

I think the path is clear. I hope we can come together and support it.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection to the underlying request?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, the rule-making process that was initiated in the Biden administration in 2022 has continued on the VA's list of work and has never been withdrawn and continues to be considered. And as I indicated now for the third time—indicated by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs—the Department—that it will be implemented.

I just know that repeating the same political talking points without a realistic alternative has prevented these bills—and particularly the Richard Star Act—from passing for years. It has been too easy for us to put our name on the legislation and never see it accomplished.

We can tell our veterans we are supporting them, we are working for them—I want a path forward that actually demonstrates that we are able to accomplish the elimination of this injustice and the support for veterans who desperately need our attention.

Our veterans should not have to—they know the cost of war. They should not have to wait for us any longer.

And, again, the offer that the Senator from Connecticut indicated, it is the same kind of UC request with something as was—that doesn't result in a result because it is not an offset that satisfies the law.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Indiana.

SHIPS FOR AMERICA ACT

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, Americans are aware that many of the products we buy and sell in this country are manufactured in China, but fewer may know that most of the Chinese goods come across the ocean and into our ports on Chinese ships—whether they are flying the Chinese flag, whether they are owned or operated by Chinese companies, or are even built in Chinese shipyards.

But what may come as a shock is that those same ships could also carry deadly weapons. That is right. Hidden among the shipping containers carrying appliances, clothing, and household goods, might well be missile launchers and drone launching systems. Arriving undetected, they could target our cities, destroy our infrastructure, and kill our citizens.

This is a possibility American leaders must prepare for now. Naval analysts confirm that China is retrofitting cargo ships with deadly weapons: long-range strike and surface-to-air missiles, drone launching systems, and radar and tracking systems.

A large percentage of these vessels coming in and out of our ports are owned and operated by firms with direct ties to the Chinese Communist Party. What if one of these ships arrived in one of America's largest ports? Now, the best case scenario is our intelligence community would detect the weapons, enabling the Coast Guard to intercept and seize the Chinese ship. That is the best case scenario.

But there is a far more alarming possibility: An armed Chinese cargo carrier slips in, undetected, and it launches devastating attacks on the port, destroying vital infrastructure and killing hundreds, and possibly many, many more.

The Port of Houston is, for example, one of the largest by tonnage in our country. It is home to the world's largest petrochemical complex and a quarter of America's oil refining capacity.

The explosions caused by a Chinese attack on the port would send clouds of carcinogens into the air and over nearby communities. Meanwhile, America's energy supply would be devastated, causing painful shortages and draining the economy of millions of dollars a day.

A similar disaster could play out at any of our other major ports—Los Angeles, for example, our hub for trans-Pacific trade; or Hampton Roads, VA, the east coast's deepest harbor and home to the world's largest naval base.

Now, neither of these situations is inevitable if we cut our reliance on Chinese vessels and we decide to make American ships again.

You see, the United States was once home to the world's largest commercial fleet, numbering 4,000 ships. Today, we manufacture only a handful of commercial vessels each year. China can build over a thousand. In total, the United States has fewer than 100 ocean-going commercial vessels; while China, they have nearly 6,000, the largest fleet in the world.

Letting our maritime industrial base continue to rust is a great risk. It doesn't just give China control over global supply chains and levers to constrain America's policy options; it presents the Chinese Communist Party opportunities every day to sneak weapons into our cities.

We have a choice. We can do nothing and invite a potential economic and national security disaster, or we can rebuild our fleet. We can end our dependence on Chinese ships, and we can open up a new era of American ship building.

I choose the latter. I choose restoring American maritime dominance.

The SHIPS for America Act is the best way to accomplish this. The bill will encourage the construction of new ships and shipyards through tax incentives. It will deliver deregulation and permitting reform to reduce costs and speed the delivery of new vessels. It also will modernize training programs at our maritime academies and recruit a new generation of mariners.

And the SHIPS Act will establish a maritime security trust fund to finance these programs, plus an expansion of the U.S.-flagged international fleet to 250 ships by the mid-2030s.

Now, we have a strong champion in President Trump, whose Maritime Action Plan is consistent with this bill.

China is retrofitting its commercial ships into covert warships. The evidence is clear. So too is the risk of allowing these vessels to dominate global trade and fill our ports because we have no ships of our own.

But we have a plan to protect our ports and people, to build and launch a new fleet manned by American mariners, flying the Stars and Stripes. And Congress should pass the SHIPS Act without delay.

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

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

STOP INSIDER TRADING ACT

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, integrity—integrity inspires confidence. We have a problem here in the Senate and in the House: 80 percent of Americans believe we do a poor job of keeping our financial interests separate from the insider information that we have. People don't have the confidence in us, and that leads to an approval rating of 15 percent for Congress.

But we can help restore integrity, and therefore confidence—confidence in the Senate, confidence in the House, confidence in our institutions. We can do that with a bill that I have introduced called the Stop Insider Trading Act.

Now, it is well known that Members of this body and the House have bought individual stocks. In fact, we have seen that people will post on social media the stock trades of the former Speaker of the House and trade off of her trades. In fact, as crazy as it sounds, that has become a legitimate investment strategy because it makes money. And that undermines the confidence people have in our institutions.

We have disclosure laws, which is how people can see those trades and make them. But it is not enough for the integrity of the institution. We need to make the rules stronger. We need to stop people from being able to buy individual stocks in the Senate and in the House.

We need my Stop Insider Trading Act because that is exactly what it does. It says that, if you get elected to the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate, you can no longer buy stock. Trading on insider information will become impossible because you won't be able to make that purchase.

Now, we also want to make sure that if, say, you come from a successful business, we don't want to penalize you. We are not going to force you to sell your stock of your company. But we are going to say that you have to give notice, 7 days at least, to let people know if you are going to sell any positions you own. Remember, you can't buy any more. But if you have some already and you want to sell them, you have to give 7 days' notice.

And that will address the issue of, for example, when we had a member of the Intelligence Committee sell about a million and a half dollars' worth of stock right before the COVID pandemic selloff of the stock market.

Even the perception of impropriety undermines the integrity, and therefore the confidence the people have. So let's stop it altogether. Let's ban people's ability to use insider information to buy stocks and make sure, if they are going to sell any, that they have got to tell everybody well in advance

so that Americans and the market can know.

My bill also has real teeth in it. It is a \$2,000 fine or 10 percent of the proceeds. Let's say you sell a million dollars in stock, and you didn't tell the market ahead of time, like you were supposed to. You didn't follow that 7-day rule. It is a \$100,000 penalty—a 10-percent penalty. So either \$2,000 or 10 percent, whichever is bigger, plus you have to give up all your profits. That is a penalty with teeth that will get the attention of Members here on Capitol Hill.

It is time that we restore the integrity and the confidence in this body when it comes to inside information. We, because of our position, have access to this, but we should not benefit from it. This is supposed to be public service. No one should come here seeking a profit.

And yet, on Monday night, some of my colleagues tried to pass a unanimous consent, passing the Stop Insider Trader Act that the House of Representatives passed, and Democrats blocked it. Democrats blocked my Stop Insider Trading Act, which would have helped restore confidence in this body.

It is time that we got the Democrats on board, that we get this passed. It passed in the House with Democrat support. And 13 Democrats and 2 Democratic cosponsors are on the Stop Insider Trading Act in the House, which the House was able to pass. They have sent it here for the U.S. Senate—for us—to do our job.

I call on my Democratic colleagues—my colleagues across the aisle: Please, get on board. We need to restore faith in the institution. A 15-percent approval rating is terrible. We need to restore the integrity. We need to restore the confidence.

My Stop Insider Trading Act does just that. I encourage all of my colleagues to get on board this common-sense proposal to be able to restore integrity and confidence in the U.S. Senate and prevent insider trading from getting between us and the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, I want to talk about a subject people just love to talk about. I have come to the floor to talk about a big scam in our country. It is happening in broad daylight before our very eyes. Politicians here in Washington know what is going on, but they refuse to speak about it. They are too worried about getting reelected in most cases, and they think telling the truth about the scam will hurt their chances of staying in power.

Well, here is the sad truth: For decades now, the American people have paid into Social Security each month without having any idea if they will ever see a cent of the money they put in.

Since being signed into law in 1935 by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, our great President, Americans' money has been going in the front door of the Federal Government and then going right out the back door. Your dollar doesn't grow, and it doesn't come back to you or your children. It is a big, gigantic, blown-up Ponzi scheme, and the last time I looked, people who do Ponzi schemes usually go to jail.

Every American is forced to participate in it. You have no choice. You don't have a say in the matter. Whether you are 17 or 67, more than 6 percent of your paycheck is taken out by the Federal Government to pay for Social Security—your so-called retirement. That might not seem like a lot, but to millions of Americans struggling to live paycheck to paycheck, that 6 percent is a huge sacrifice.

Americans have been paying into this program for years, only to see a fraction of what they have been promised. It really makes you wonder how this government-approved Ponzi scheme is legal.

The truth is that this "retirement savings" program is 100 percent broke. It is absolutely broke, just like our Federal Government—\$40 trillion in debt. The Social Security trust fund is projected to run out of its reserve money in 2032—just a few years from now. You know, when these funds are depleted, senior citizens could see a cut in their monthly check up to 22 to 25 percent of their benefits. On average, that is \$500 a month.

You know, if the Federal Government were to try to save the program, it would most likely mean that your taxes would skyrocket.

Mr. President, 38 percent of mandatory spending within the Federal budget annually goes toward the failing Social Security Program. Yes, the money you send up here, 38 percent a year goes to Social Security—not the money that you already sent because, guess what, it has been sent and it has been spent and scammed out of our system. It is not there. In other words, almost \$1.6 trillion every year of your taxpayer dollars is being spent on a program that is currently scheduled to go bankrupt in 6 years. So basically, the money you send up here has been spent and now is nowhere to be found.

The Social Security Program is the single largest program we are wasting our tax dollars on—the biggest. It is a mind-boggling program to say the least, but don't worry, it gets worse.

After decades of having Social Security taken out, millions of Americans have to pay taxes when they go to collect their Social Security. Yep, you heard exactly right. After you pay taxes and you put it in there for savings for many years and you get it back, guess what—you have to pay taxes on it now because our former President and former Senator, Mr. Joe Biden, when he was a Senator in 1983, got the great idea of, let's tax Social Security. What a scam. Depending on

which tax bracket you are in, between 50 percent to 85 percent of your benefits can be taxed by the Federal Government.

Last year, I introduced the Senior Citizens Tax Elimination Act to stop the unjust double tax on Social Security benefits. Thankfully, the One Big Beautiful Bill included senior deductions that significantly reduce Federal taxes for the majority of retirees. Thank goodness.

In a day and age where the cost of living is skyrocketing, our seniors should not experience a second tax on their Social Security when they have already paid tax on that money. If we must keep this outdated program, the least we can do is to ensure that senior citizens don't get slapped with a double tax.

Despite what millions of Americans have been tricked into believing, it turns out that paying into Social Security does not entitle you to a fixed pot of money. Everybody thinks: We are going to pay in, and I am going to get a lot of money in the end. The sad reality is that many Americans won't see a cent of the money that they paid into Social Security.

Basically, Social Security is just, folks, another tax—a tax on both employees and employers since most companies have to match the 6 percent that their employees are forced to pay out of their paychecks. Yeah, they double the tax.

This is socialism. It is highway robbery. And for the last 60 years, we have known this program was going under, but no one up here has been willing to fix it. In fact, Social Security is known as the third rail of politics that no one up here is allowed to talk about.

Don't talk about Social Security because we don't have a solution, and we might lose our jobs.

In fact, Social Security is known as that third rail because nobody will touch it. It is taboo to talk about Social Security. But my question is: Why? Why is that? We work for the people. We work for the taxpayers. We have known this program was going bankrupt for years. It has been a disaster since day one.

When millions of Americans are going to reach retirement age soon, we had better look out. They are expecting to get their money. They are expecting to get the money that they paid into Social Security for years. They are going to get screwed over with nothing left, and this is going to be a serious problem.

The Social Security scam doesn't stop there. As you know, Joe Biden welcomed tens of millions of illegals into this country with open arms. They said that our borders are closed. Yep, after they let 20 million people in that shouldn't be here. These aren't nice people either, most of them. Many of them are rapists, murderers, drug lords, and gang members. Well, it turns out, the Biden administration and Alejandro Mayorkas, our great Home-

land Security Director, they weren't just letting these illegals into our country without vetting them; they were handing them Social Security and Medicaid benefits as they were coming into the door.

Welcome to the United States of America. We are broke, but we are going to give you money. We are going to give you a Social Security number.

It is no wonder we are broke. While millions of Americans will never see the Social Security benefits that they worked hard to pay into throughout their career, illegals, they are getting money. They are getting rich off the money that Joe Biden said that they could have. It is disgusting, but it is not surprising. This is our Federal Government.

So why aren't we allowed to talk about it? It is almost like the system was set up to fail from the get-go. I caught a lot of flak when I brought this up in a hearing just a few years ago.

What is this guy talking about? We are going to get Social Security.

Yep. If you believe that, I got beach land I will sell you out in Arizona.

If every single American had invested the money that they are forced to pay in Social Security each month into a stock—if they had done that, they would have gotten 10 times the money that they put in, if it was just invested in the stock market.

But do you know where it was invested in? Most people don't know this. Your money, when it comes here, is put into Treasury bonds that have very low returns—very, very low—not even close to anything that you would ever invest in yourself. That is where your money goes.

Don't be naive. The reason Social Security is invested in bonds is because it is being used to basically prop up the Federal Government.

We are broke. We don't have any money. Please send more. Can we raise the Social Security tax and just tell them they are going to get more money at the end?

Folks, it is a scam. If this money had been invested in the stock market, again, you would have had 10 to 15 times more money. It is embarrassing, but apparently we are not supposed to bring that up.

To his credit, President George Bush tried to save Social Security in 2000. He tried to privatize a lot of this money. If we had just done that—if this body in here would have just said: OK, we know we screwed it up for 40 years. Let's go ahead and do it. Let's get out of this jam.

They didn't want any part of it because they wanted to steal the rest of the money, and that is exactly what is going on.

He suggested that younger workers divert their portion—young workers divert their portion—to a money market account that would pay for theirs in the future and ours today, those of us that are close to the Social Security. But, of course, the DC swamp up here,

they shut that down fast: Let's don't talk about Social Security. It is taboo. It is a dang shame. The program might not be on the verge of bankruptcy today if they had just invested part of the young people's money into the market.

But you have to remember, the government relies on your money for their slush fund. The Federal Government stopped working in your best interest a long, long time ago. The average taxpayer earning the median wage is paying approximately \$3,500 to \$4,500 annually into the Social Security Program. Over a 40-year work period, that is around \$140,000 to \$180,000. That could have gone toward a 401(k), and you would have had money to retire on. People would be seeing much greater returns.

We had better start figuring this out, folks. We had better start figuring it out. This group up here, a lot of them say: I am going to be gone. I won't have to worry about it.

Somebody is going to pay the price.

It won't be long until people will be coming right around this building going: Where is my money?

Do you remember January 6? Yep. January 6 was a pretty bad day. I was here. I sat right over there. It was my very first day here. I was thinking: What a disaster I have gotten into.

Well, if you start telling people, "You are not getting your Social Security money," it is going to get ugly. And I don't blame them—not one bit. We are \$40 trillion in debt. There is no sign of it slowing down. The bottom line is we need to get bureaucrats and politicians out of this mess, stop the Social Security scam, let people really know what is going on, and give the money back to the people.

We need to make sure Americans get what they were promised, or we need to come up with an alternative solution that would allow Americans to make their own retirement investments. Give them their money, or let's put it in a money market account. The stock market is booming.

It is far past time Washington, DC, starts working for the people that we are supposed to represent. What a thought. That is mind-boggling, isn't it? Why would we do that? We work for ourselves up here. We don't work for the people. It is ridiculous. It is a scam. Not for special interests. Not for career politicians entrenched in bureaucracy or for Washington elite pet projects.

Instead of spending money we don't have on things we don't need, why don't we put the money back into the American people's pockets and tell them the damn truth: We stole your money, but we are going to try to get your money back.

Not only is it in America's best interest to do this; it is the right thing to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Delaware.

TRIBUTE TO MARIE CORDIVANO

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, all of us who hold the office of Senator know that we really only succeed in our service to the States which we represent because of the tireless dedication of the men and women who make up our teams, back home where we are from and here in Washington, DC.

While we may be the face or the voice on television—it is our name on the bills; it is our name on the door—it is really the folks who make up our teams that make it possible for us to make a difference every day for the people we represent.

I am blessed to represent a million Delawareans. And I know that I could not do that job at all, let alone well, without the gift and the blessing of the service of roughly 50 people.

But today I want to take some time out to thank and recognize the heart of my team in Delaware, someone whom I have long admired and whose service I greatly appreciate, Marie Cordivano.

What does it take to run a political campaign, to run a political party, to run a Senate office? It takes someone like Marie. I have known her so long I feel like she has been in my office for decades, but it has really only been 5 years that she has been a full-time part of my Senate office, but I have known her since I first ran.

She is the heartbeat of the Delaware Democratic Party and, in many ways, of my office in Wilmington, DE. She brings so much to her service to her job: kindness, hospitality, a charitable and upbeat spirit, a passion for serving others, a lifelong Democrat, someone who is because she believes in helping others.

When I have asked folks for what they associate with Marie, one word came up over and over: mushrooms. Now, that might surprise you if you are not from where I am from, but just on the northern border of Delaware is the center of mushroom horticulture in North America, and because of Marie's family connection to some of the leaders in the mushroom industry, every year she brings a pallet at Thanksgiving of boxes of mushrooms and won't let anyone go without accepting one.

Being as I am a little picky about the Ethics Committee on which I serve, I initially tried to reject these gifts of mushrooms, to donate them to the food bank, or give them to someone else. And yet, like so much of Marie's hospitality and kindness, they just kept coming.

They are a welcomed and appreciated gift but a reminder of the example of her kindness and her generosity to others.

That is the word that came up most often when I asked others who have served with her for now 5 years in my office: What do you think of when you think of Marie? Kind, someone who gives great, big, warm hugs, who, even if she is having a hard day, asks: "How is your day," someone with contagious

positivity, someone who every day has to answer call after call after call from constituents who more often than not are calling to complain.

And Marie doesn't just answer the phone, she listens. She doesn't just listen, she engages. She doesn't just engage, she educates. She handles it with incredible skill, making sure that the folks who call my office are heard and their concerns are conveyed, and, if possible, that they leave better understanding what it is they called in about because, let's be blunt, sometimes these calls are motivated by seeing something on cable TV that maybe isn't exactly true. And so in a gentle but positive way, she asks persistent questions and guides my constituents to better insight.

When I have asked others in the office, they have said this: I can't imagine a better person to represent you, CHRIS, to your constituents. Even over the phone, you get a sense of Marie's heart and warmth, and there is no one more dedicated, not just for the fight of democracy but for the values of CHRIS COONS and his office.

So, Marie, thank you. Thank you for sharing your kindness. Thank you for sharing your warmth. Thank you for sharing what you have done for Delaware for so long. You are loved across our DC and Delaware teams and will be dearly missed. I hope you get to spend more time now with your children Ben and Sarah, with your grandchildren Asher and Carter, with your dog Nico.

You are the best of Delaware, a proud Padua alumna with a passion for service, family, kindness, and democracy. I cannot wait to hear about the adventures ahead, and thank you for your service.

TRIBUTE TO JOSE ESTRADA

Mr. President, I want to take some time today to also speak about someone who has been the heart of my team here in Washington, Jose Estrada.

My wife and I have come to view Jose not just as a colleague, an employee, but a friend, a member of our extended family.

What makes for an incredible public servant? diligence, determination, insight, hard work, humor, trust, kindness. Jose has all of these and more.

When he initially got the job offer, he drove without stopping from San Diego to DC, just a first sign of the intensity of his commitment to this work. I have watched him grow from being a right-out-of-college 22-year-old to someone whose advice and counsel on a daily basis are key to me and how I do my job.

He is often the first person I see in the morning and the last person I see at night. And he is incredibly humble and would never take credit for all the contributions he has made to my team and my office, which is why I thought it was important to get it on the record so that in the future he could not deny that he was well-regarded, well-respected, and made a significant impact.

It is hard to capture everything Jose does for our team. He is someone who

always has the answers to pressing questions, whether from me, from the scheduling team, or from interns. He remembers whom I was in a meeting with 3 years ago. He remembers the details of all sorts of memos. He remembers the details of my life; what church I grew up in, what neighborhood I grew up in.

He has now mentored more than 70 interns in my office, and I am very proud of our intern program because it is where I hire from. I began here as an intern for Senator Bill Roth and for Senator Joe Biden, and knowing that Jose has taken intense care of every intern, their interview and selection, their placement in making sure they have the chance to genuinely contribute, means a lot to Annie and me.

From one of our former interns, they said: In a role where Jose had to be everywhere and do everything, he still spent the time to get to know each of us and make sure our internship was special.

And he has been so good at it that they then come and work for us full time in our office.

From one of his colleagues in my office here in Washington: In any crisis, you know you can call Jose and he will just take care of it. Not only will he take care of it, but you know you have a friend through all of it.

Jose, you have served with selflessness, kindness, dedication, even joy. You are someone who is willing to put in the hard work, to work 14, 16, 18 hours a day. When we are here all night for vote-arama, he is the one who is with me at 3 a.m., 4 a.m., 5 a.m. He takes the time to get up early, get that extra cup of coffee, get in to talk to the interns early, get them doughnuts, be generous with his time and advice, and make our office a great place to be.

The most important accolade, of course, comes not from me but from my wife Annie, who literally said Jose is one of the most “thoughtful and kind people” we know. I know he will be an inspiration to his 11-month-old niece Valentina. I know his parents Jose and Marisela are so proud of him. They need to know that you raised a remarkable young man. I know they will be thrilled to have him back in California as he returns to attend Stanford Law School this fall.

I believe there is nothing this promising young man cannot do. He has demonstrated remarkable wisdom and talent, insight into politics, and I am confident his future is bright, and we will someday see him back here.

The next chapter of his life includes becoming a lawyer and using the skills and the talent of a lawyer to change lives, to help those whom the law does not protect, and to advocate for justice at a time when that is really at risk in our Nation.

Jose, the office will simply not be the same without you, but you leave us better. We all will carry a piece of your heart, your humor, your kindness, and your insight. And you won't be free of

us either because you are a friend and a member of our family for life.

You are the best of what DC should be, someone here truly to do good and to make a difference, and I hope you know that you have.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

HONORING MARSHAL BRAD FISHER

Mr. BANKS. Mr. President, before I begin my remarks today, I must say that with a heavy heart I am grieving today for town marshal Brad Fisher, a 25-year law enforcement veteran who was tragically killed today in the line of duty in Indiana.

Marshal Fisher was assisting other officers in stopping a fleeing suspect when the suspect hit Marshal Fisher and ultimately killed him.

I am praying for Marshal Fisher, for his family, everyone in the town of Lynn, IN, and Randolph County. What a devastating loss, a tragic loss. May he rest in peace.

And may we always remember the sacrifice that all of our men and women of law enforcement make when they keep us safe. I just want to take a minute and remember him.

ELECTION INTERFERENCE

Mr. President, President Trump recently confirmed what many of us already knew: that foreign adversaries like China are working daily to interfere in our elections and our democratic society.

China especially seeks America's decline in hopes that they can establish a world order that runs through the Chinese Communist Party, and we must do everything possible that we can to stop them from doing that.

Historically, when countries have held that kind of ambition, they have started big, catastrophic wars. It should come as no surprise that the People's Liberation Army is undertaking the largest peacetime military buildup in human history.

That is why it is incumbent upon this body to fully fund our military—including President Trump's \$1.5 trillion defense budget request that he has made of this body—so that we can deter exactly that kind of conflict.

It is outrageous that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle—the Democrats—are holding up this bipartisan NDAA and budget request to fund our military when our military desperately needs our support.

Yet, even if we successfully deter a hot conflict, we could still lose in other ways. That is because every day the CCP is waging economic and political warfare against us. The CCP is trying to nurture dependency, exploit our divisions, cause us to question the justness of our cause, and erode our democracy.

This political warfare campaign is not confined to the shadows. In many cases, it operates out in the open.

Just take a look at Neville Roy Singham. Singham is a 72-year-old American tech mogul who sold his

company and immediately fled to China. From his Shanghai office—which he shares with a CCP propaganda outlet—whose avowed mission, by the way, is “to tell China's story well”—Singham began funding a complex network of leftwing NGOs and nonprofits that advance the interests of the Chinese Communist Party.

Take a look at some of the radical organizations on this chart that he supports through the billions of dollars that he made selling his tech company to a Chinese Communist Party business.

This is all a matter of public record. Even the New York Times has marveled at the hundreds of millions of dollars that Singham-linked groups have funneled to radical nonprofits that “mix progressive advocacy with Chinese Government talking points.”

Take one example that you and I know well—CODEPINK—you know, the radical organization that chases many of us around the hallways—around this building and our office buildings. You see, CODEPINK used to condemn CCP human rights abuses.

But after Singham started lavishly funding the group—and then, by the way, he married its cofounder—CODEPINK stopped criticizing the Chinese Government and started defending it. In fact, in recent years, CODEPINK has even provided cover for the CCP's shocking genocide in Xinjiang.

Meanwhile, a newer Singham nonprofit called No Cold War is entirely dedicated to advocacy designed to ensure America is defenseless against the CCP's economic, military, and political warfare.

But the Singham network is not limited to China-specific advocacy. Singham groups advance a wide variety of causes that are united only by their hatred of America, our allies, and the rule of law.

From anti-ICE boycotts, violence against law enforcement, rioting, obstruction, and support for Hamas' attempted genocide of Jews in Israel, Singham groups and their members advance division, chaos, and hatred.

All of this advances CCP interests and poisons our society. Thankfully, under President Trump's leadership, the Department of Justice is now investigating this and whether Singham has been fueling this lawlessness in violation of U.S. law. It has been a long time coming.

At the same time, the State Department under Secretary Rubio is leading from the front in identifying leftwing violence and building an international coalition to confront it.

It should come as no surprise that, as the CCP seeks to interfere in our society, it also seeks to interfere in our elections. As President Trump disclosed before the American people in a prime-time address earlier this month, China perpetrated the largest known compromise of United States voter information in history: stealing the personal data of over 220 million Americans in the 2020 election.

The President also exposed ongoing vulnerabilities when it comes to America's elections, and thank God he did that. As one newly declassified intelligence assessment found:

We judge that U.S. adversaries, including at a minimum Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, as well as non-state groups, have the capability to compromise U.S. election infrastructure.

Our adversaries are actively coming for our elections, and if that is not enough to sound the alarm—what you just heard from President Trump in his prime-time press conference and what I just shared with you—I don't know what else is.

All Americans—especially my colleagues in this body—should be outraged by this vulnerability. We know that our adversaries like the CCP seek to do us harm and yet we stand by and often do nothing about it. Our inaction has no excuse.

We need to safeguard our democracy, and we need to do it right now.

If this Chamber does anything at all this year, it must ensure that American elections are for Americans only—now and always. That is precisely why we have got to pass the SAVE America Act, and we have to pass it now, ASAP.

In the face of the CCP's coordinated campaign, we need more election integrity—not less. We need to ensure that all votes in American elections come from Americans—not illegal aliens or foreign manipulation.

And by the way, it is not only because of our international adversaries that we need to pass the SAVE America Act. Just last week, a huge story hardly got any notice in the mainstream media. But the new Democrat Governor of New Jersey—a former colleague of mine in the House—she announced that 6,600 noncitizens were “accidentally added to the New Jersey voter rolls.” That is a hell of an accident.

But not only that, she also told us that nearly 400 of those voters, who were accidentally placed on their voter rolls, actually voted in the last two elections in New Jersey.

Some of my colleagues keep saying that stories like this are a figment of our imagination. It doesn't really happen. Illegals don't vote in American elections.

The Democratic Governor of New Jersey just told us it did happen. They keep saying that these stories are just, I suppose, “accidents” or “software glitches” is what the Governor called it. The fact of the matter is that these stories keep happening, and we need to do everything that we can to put an end to it. It destroys trust in our elections when Americans read about stories like that.

If we have to cancel the August recess to pass the SAVE America Act, so be it. Let's do it. Protecting our elections from fraud and international interference is a lot more important to me than vacation time.

Our adversaries—like the Chinese Communist Party—will stop at nothing

to distract, divide, disrupt, and destroy America. Their campaign is not confined to election day. Election day is our last line of defense.

Americans must always be free to reject the CCP and its values, while choosing a path that embraces the timeless truths that have always been at America's core. The day that the CCP chooses the outcome of our elections will be the day that it won. And by then, it will be way too late to correct course and pass a commonsense bill like the SAVE America Act. We cannot wait for that day.

I urge all of my colleagues to wake up. It is time to pass the SAVE America Act to save our elections, protect our country, save America. It is fundamentally important.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise to speak to what Americans all over this country are deeply feeling at this moment.

America is not a nation that prefers wars, but we are being led by an administration that is foolishly choosing war to solve problems that could best be solved by other means or—more troublingly—it is choosing to wage war to distract public attention from larger problems of its own making.

This pattern of foolishly choosing war, whatever the legality and whatever the price, is sacrificing the lives of American troops, killing innocent civilians, stressing our Nation's budget, imposing devastating costs on American families and businesses, dividing us from our allies, and shredding our reputation as a stabilizing force in the world.

The chaos and damage from these wars are mounting, even as the President contemplates more military misadventures in Cuba, Mali, and who knows where else.

Our constituents know that Congress is the only institution with the constitutional power to stop unnecessary war, and they are begging us to do so.

President Trump has launched three wars that are currently underway. He has not sought the approval of Congress for any of them. The wars are all, therefore, illegal.

But in addition to the illegality that naturally flows from a President starting a war without a congressional authorization, each war is also burdened by numerous other legal, moral, and strategic weaknesses.

The first war is Operation Southern Spear, a campaign that began nearly a year ago to use the U.S. military to strike boats in international waters near South America. To date, more than 65 separate strikes have killed more than 250 people on boats chosen as targets by our military.

The operation has been repeatedly justified by the Pentagon as attacks on narcotraffickers. But the evidence suggests that many innocent civilians—

unarmed noncombatants who are not transporting narcotics—are being murdered in these strikes, even while reporting confirms that this bloodshed is not accomplishing its stated purpose of decreasing the amount of drugs coming into the United States.

Now, the administration has worked exceptionally hard to maintain all aspects of Operation Southern Spear as secret, as classified. Because it is all classified, I am severely limited in what I can say about it.

The President created a secret list of what he calls “designated terrorist organizations,” last July, as subjects for military attack. There is no law giving the President such a power to create such an attack list. I have reviewed the list, but because it is classified, I am not able to describe it here. And as a result of the fact that the list has never been made public, those marked by the President for execution have never been notified that the United States has placed a target on them.

The Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice produced a legal memo, last September, to justify boat strikes against narcotraffickers in very specific circumstances. The memo also carefully described prohibited activity that could not be legally justified. I have read that legal memo, but it remains classified. So I cannot discuss its contents.

In October, the Pentagon issued an implementation order to carry out the President's directive in accordance with the OLC legal opinion and limitations. That EXORD contains the targeting criteria that are to be used in choosing which boats to attack. I have reviewed the EXORD, but it has remained classified. So I cannot describe its contents.

Each of the attacks is accompanied by a file describing the strike. I have reviewed the files of nearly 50 of the strikes and will soon complete review of the remaining. Those files remain classified. So I cannot describe their contents.

So why—why—is the administration maintaining the classification of all of this Southern Spear information—the justification, the legal rationale, the target list, the targeting criteria, the strike files describing each attack? Why the secrecy?

It is obvious why the administration wants all this cloaked in secrecy. The President and the Pentagon don't want the American public to see what is being done in our name and with our tax dollars. They are trying to hide from the public—and even from this body—the flimsiness of their legal case and the exorbitant cost and ineffectiveness of the operation.

For example, the Pentagon is glad to show edited videos of an exploding boat to pat itself on the back about its lethality toward narcotraffickers. They proudly did so on social media, and all over mainstream media, following the first fatal strike of a boat last September—September 2.

But months after the administration produced this PR video of a fatal strike, it was revealed that the full video—the unedited video—also showed struggling survivors clinging to the boat's wreckage and seeking to be rescued.

In violation of U.S. and international law, the United States returned to the site in open international waters and killed the survivors.

I have seen the video, many of my colleagues have, and it is horrifying. The administration refuses to release it.

Now, remember that, at the time of that strike—September 2, 2025—the existence of Southern Spear hadn't even been announced. Those struggling for their lives, clinging to shipwrecked wreckage, had not even been informed that they might be targeted. The United States killed them anyway and then selectively edited the video so that the American public would only see the flashy initial boat explosion but not see the cowardly and cold-blooded murder of desperate shipwrecked people that took place later.

And, you know, that is not even the most shocking thing about Southern Spear. The most shocking thing is that the administration has been lying to the American public about whether the campaign is even against narcotrafficking.

While I am not allowed to discuss the contents of the legal opinion, and I am not allowed to discuss the EXORD's targeting criteria, I can say this: In reviewing the targeting criteria and trying to match it up with the legal opinion, I was immediately struck by what was missing. So I am not going to describe the contents of either, but I was immediately struck by what was missing from the targeting criteria.

It is hard to believe this, but the targeting criteria used by the U.S. military to strike boats and kill people on open waters contain no requirement that there be any evidence that there are narcotics on board—no requirement that there be any evidence that there are narcotics on board—nor is there any requirement that the sailors on any of these boats be armed.

Now, these criteria could have been included by the Pentagon in the targeting criteria that they chose, but they intentionally chose not to include the presence of narcotics or the presence of arms.

Why not restrict U.S. military attacks on boats to those we know to be carrying narcotics? How could it be legally justifiable for the U.S. military to strike boats and kill those aboard with no evidence that the boats contain narcotics or arms? How could this be deemed self-defense, which is the requirement for the President to use lethal force without a congressional authorization?

I ask these questions as a proud member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. I ask these questions as the proud father of a U.S. marine.

How could it be legally justifiable for the U.S. military to attack boats without evidence of narcotics and without evidence that those on board to be killed are armed?

Many of those killed in Operation Southern Spear—unarmed individuals not transporting narcotics—are not combat casualties. They are murder victims. Public reporting conclusively shows that some of those murdered have been humble fishermen, whose families saw them leave for an honest day's work and then never come home.

President Trump's second illegal war is Operation Absolute Resolve, the U.S. military invasion of Venezuela to topple the regime of dictator Nicolas Maduro.

I have long in this body, as the lead Democrat on the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, supported all kinds of policies to sanction and punish and isolate the dictatorial Maduro regime. But using the U.S. military to invade a sovereign nation without congressional approval, and without any explanation or strategy for what might come next, is another matter entirely.

The world follows the example of this country, and if invading another nation's sovereign territory to kidnap its President and topple its government is acceptable for the United States, we lose our standing to criticize dictators around the world who might decide to do the same thing—in fact, who are currently doing the same thing.

The actual military invasion of Venezuela was at least brief, and I think all recognize that the U.S. military performed in a very exemplary fashion in carrying out the mission they were ordered to perform.

But its aftermath has been highly problematic. The United States is now using the American military to control the Venezuelan economy and government, and thus contributing to the oppression and subjugation of the Venezuelan people.

Even though Venezuelans chose overwhelmingly to reject the Maduro regime in a 2024 Presidential election, in favor of the political opposition headed by the recent Nobel laureate Maria Corina Machado and the duly elected President Edmundo Gonzalez the United States has, following the invasion, thrown its support behind the Maduro regime by propping up his Vice President Delcy Rodriguez as the country's leader.

The United States just announced a potential process toward finding elections and democracy in Venezuela. And guess who is leading it. Vice President Rodriguez' brother, part of the Maduro regime that was and remains oppressive toward Venezuelan people.

Public reporting suggests that the administration has deliberately made it difficult for Maria Corina Machado, who just won the Nobel prize 7 months ago for her advocacy for Venezuelans, and for Edmundo Gonzalez, the duly elected President of the country. The

United States has made it hard for them to return home to Venezuela, even in the aftermath of a horrible earthquake that has killed and injured thousands and thousands of their countrymen and women.

Why is this administration choosing to support the Maduro-Rodriguez dictatorship and impede authentic leaders who offer a new chapter for the Venezuelan people?

The Venezuelan people deserve a government by, of, and for Venezuelans. Maintaining Maduro's cronies in place and allowing them to continue the oppression of the Venezuelan people, primarily to benefit well-connected energy companies, is not a legitimate use of American military power.

Rodriguez and the remnants of the Maduro regime are moving aggressively to consolidate their hold on power that the overwhelming majority of Venezuelans want to dislodge. Like despots around the world, they have learned how to humor the administration in the short run and buy its affection, and then, hopefully, wait until we get distracted and move our attention elsewhere.

And it is Venezuelans who are suffering, especially in the aftermath of the earthquake, as they watch the government of the Maduro Vice President, Rodriguez, not be able to effectively provide services to those who are in need of disaster relief.

Finally, America has spilled much blood and treasure during President Trump's foolish war against Iran.

On February 27, we were not at war, and the Strait of Hormuz was open; and the price of gas and other key commodities were as normal as things can be in 2026. But President Trump—without a clear plan, a coherent rationale, the participation of allies, the approval of Congress, or the support of the American public—launched Operation Epic Fury.

The President ignored his own promise to avoid more war in the Middle East. He fulfilled a sad prophecy many of us made during his first term, when he tore up a diplomatic deal that was working to control Iran's nuclear program. Those who make diplomacy impossible make war inevitable.

Now, 5 months later, the folly of this illegal war has been made plain to all. Eighteen U.S. troops have been killed, and the President—it has recently been revealed—and the Pentagon are disrespectfully reclassifying some of those deaths as not being related to the war so that the President can downplay the true impact it has on service members. Hundreds of our troops have been injured, although the Pentagon is trying to downplay those numbers as well. Thousands of innocent Iranian civilians have died, including children—schoolchildren—who were killed when the United States bombed a school in the opening days of the war.

The costs of the war to the American taxpayer has ballooned into tens of billions of dollars, and the Pentagon is

now seeking an astronomical extra increase in last year's record defense budget to pay for the costs of this war, which have all been self-imposed costs. American families are paying more for gasoline. American farmers are paying more for fertilizer and diesel. American businesses are paying more for goods and materials that normally flow through the Strait of Hormuz.

And, in recent days, a new challenge has emerged, one that the administration should easily have anticipated. The Houthis, who are together allied with Iran and are strategically positioned in Yemen, have started to cut off transit through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in addition to the closures in the Strait of Hormuz. This is one of the world's major commercial routes and threatens even more inflation that will punish American consumers.

The endless rounds of start-stop and the frequent Presidential proclamations of victory or cease-fire, then to be interrupted by new rounds of the back-and-forth of attacks in the region, have produced a profound uncertainty that is endangering economic prospects in all corners of the Earth.

Now these three foolish and illegal wars—Southern Spear, Absolute Resolve, Epic Fury—are largely rejected by the American public. Our voters want us to make their lives better, not waste their money in pointless military engagements far from home, especially with regard to Trump's war with Iran.

Haven't we learned something from 20-plus years of war in the Middle East? The Global War on Terror cost the United States more than 14,000 lives, led to more than 65,000 American casualties, and skyrocketed costs into the trillions of taxpayer dollars that should have been spent on education and infrastructure and healthcare investments at home.

Americans want a President, but more than that, Americans want a government that will spend our dollars here to make energy, healthcare, childcare, and other necessities like groceries more affordable. The President has already punished us enough with his chaotic tariff taxes and his doubling down on illegal wars just to make things so much harder for everyday people.

So what can we do? What can we do?

Knowing that the President is likely to plow forward on this failed and destructive policy, Congress has to finally stand up. The Iran war is triply illegal.

First, it is unconstitutional because the President launched it without having the congressional approval required by article I of the Constitution.

Second, the war violates the War Powers Act of 1973. This act allows a President to initiate military action in very specific circumstances: if there is a declaration of war by Congress, which there hasn't been; if there is an authorization for use of military force passed by Congress, which there hasn't

been; or in the case of a national emergency created by an attack upon the United States. None of those conditions were met prior to the President's launching of this war.

But even if one were to assume that one of those conditions had been met, the War Powers Act requires that any military activity started by the President without Congress has to hit a hard stop at 60 days unless Congress affirmatively votes to continue it. We are well past the 60-day point—we are now past the 5-month point—with no congressional authorization. Yet the President continues to send more troops to the region and threaten more attacks as the American public watches more flag-draped caskets come home.

Now both Houses of Congress, under Republican majorities, have passed legislation requiring the President to remove U.S. troops from hostilities against Iran unless Congress passes a war authorization. The President has not removed troops from hostilities. He is actually sending more into harm's way. The President has not sought a vote on a war authorization because he knows that such a vote would lose in both Houses in Congress in a dramatic fashion. Instead, he has taken the war-mongering all on his own shoulders.

President Trump can ignore the law, and he can break the law, but he can't change the law. If the President won't abide by the Constitution, by the War Powers Act, or the express will of two Republican-majority Houses of Congress, we have one more power. Only Congress can appropriate funds for war or defense operations.

As the President and his Cabinet are here seeking even more funds to carry out his illegal wars and fighting against any guardrails against his war-mongering, Congress has to stand up against him. We have to stand up against illegal wars. We have to stand up for our troops. We have to stand up for our military families. We have to stand up for citizens who want a government focused on making lives better, not waging warfare away across the world. And we have to stand up for America the peacemaker, not America the war wager.

It is telling that at the very moment we are in the middle of these three illegal and undeclared wars that are causing a huge cost to our troops and innocent civilians, the President and the Pentagon are choosing this moment to try to rename the Department of Defense as the Department of War. Of course, they are. They want performative war in the worst possible way. They care more about the optics and the trolling Twitter with flashy videos than they do about doing the hard work necessary to keep Americans safe and defend this country.

You know, most nations actually had a Department of War during much of their history, and the United States did too. America had a Secretary of War and a War Cabinet for many, many

years during the history of this Nation. But after World War II, when President Harry Truman, who had seen the bloodshed of war as a military officer in World War I and had to make consequential decisions as the Commander in Chief to end World War II, stood back and said: Do you know what? The United States is a great nation. We shouldn't prefer war; we should prefer defense. Let's defend our Nation, and let's tell the world we will do anything necessary to defend our Nation, but let's make it clear to the rest of the world that the mission of our military is not war; it is defense. We changed, in 1947, the Secretary of War to the Secretary of Defense, and the Pentagon is the Defense Department, not the War Department. And guess what. It was a great thing the United States did.

When nations all around the world saw us do it, they did it too—Britain and France, also World War II enemies like Germany and Japan, and current adversaries like Russia and China. All other nations followed the diplomatic lead of the United States and said: The mission of military should not be war. We don't prefer war. The mission should be vigorous defense. Brazil was actually the last nation to make the switch. They did it about three decades ago.

So now, in the world, the use of war to describe the mission or the Cabinet or the Secretary is virtually unheard of, except the United States wants to bring it back. President Trump and his self-titled "Secretary of War" want to switch us back so that we, instead, brag about the fact that we are focused and interested in war. It is a pending matter that is contained within the National Defense Authorization Act that will be debated on the floor here in the next few months. The Pentagon has even changed its email address to war.gov.

This is juvenile and embarrassing, and it would be comical if it weren't so tragic.

Is this who the United States of America has become now—war.gov?

Is that how we want to be known in our history?

Is that how we want to be known by allies and adversaries around the world—as a nation that prefers war to diplomacy? as a nation that sends its troops into harm's way for needless wars of choice rather than being focused on the vigorous defense of our homeland and our way of life?

I don't believe that is who this country is after 250 years, so I am going to keep challenging the President's illegal and foolish wars at every opportunity and with every tool granted me as a U.S. Senator, being mindful of Mother Teresa's wisdom: We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful.

If we focus on being faithful to our history, to our values, to our troops and their families and to our citizens, we are likely to be successful. In doing so, we can reclaim the role for Congress that our Founders envisioned as

they embarked upon this 250-year experiment in American democracy.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on adoption of the motion to proceed to H.R. 5334 at 6 p.m. today.

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

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote scheduled for 6 p.m. today on H.R. 5334 be allowed to begin.

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

VOTE ON MOTION TO PROCEED

The question occurs on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Ms. GRAHAM) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. GALLEG0) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 84, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 213 Leg.]

YEAS—84

Alsobrooks	Fetterman	Murkowski
Armstrong	Fischer	Murphy
Baldwin	Gillibrand	Murray
Banks	Grassley	Peters
Barrasso	Hagerty	Reed
Bennet	Hawley	Ricketts
Blackburn	Heinrich	Risch
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hoeven	Rounds
Boozman	Husted	Schatz
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schiff
Budd	Johnson	Schmitt
Cantwell	Justice	Schumer
Capito	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Collins	Kennedy	Shaheen
Coons	King	Sheehy
Cornyn	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Cortez Masto	Lankford	Smith
Cotton	Lee	Sullivan
Cramer	Lujan	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Marshall	Tuberville
Curtis	McCormick	Van Hollen
Daines	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Moody	Warnock
Durbin	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Moreno	Young

NAYS—12

Blunt Rochester	Markey	Sanders
Hassan	Ossoff	Warren
Hirono	Padilla	Welch
Kim	Paul	Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Gallego	McConnell	Whitehouse
Graham		

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). On this vote, the yeas are 84, the nays are 12. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

SUPPORTING EARLY-CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' DEDUCTIONS ACT

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5334) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow early childhood educators to take the educator expense deduction, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion on S. Res. 817.

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 legislative 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 Executive Calendar No. 6, S. Res. 817, an executive resolution authorizing the en bloc consideration in Executive Session of certain nominations on the Executive Calendar.

John Thune, John Barrasso, Alan Armstrong, David McCormick, Kevin Cramer, John R. Curtis, Tim Sheehy, James E. Risch, John Boozman, Pete Ricketts, Chuck Grassley, Cynthia M. Lummis, James Lankford, Jim Banks, Bernie Moreno, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Tim Scott of South Carolina.

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 Executive Calendar No. 6, S. Res. 817, an executive resolution authorizing the en bloc consideration in Executive Session of certain nominations on the Executive Calendar, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from South Carolina (Ms. GRAHAM), and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. GALLEG0) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 214 Leg.]

YEAS—50

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

NAYS—45

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

NOT VOTING—5

Cruz	Graham	Whitehouse
Gallego	McConnell	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 45. The motion is agreed to.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE RESOLUTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: An executive resolution (S. Res. 817) authorizing the en bloc consideration in Executive Session of certain nominations on the Executive Calendar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

NATIVE CHILDREN COMMISSION IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I come to the floor this evening to speak about legislation that I have recently introduced as chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, alongside my friend Vice Chairman SCHATZ. The bill that we have introduced is the Native Children Commission Implementation Act.

Before I get started explaining our legislation, I want to recognize the Tribal leaders, the elders, the youth, the children, and the families who flew in last week for a congressional staff briefing to share their perspectives on the bill and the importance of it but also to help educate members and staff about the importance of the bill.

As events turned out, it was unfortunate that I was not here on that day due to my having a family emergency back home, but I was able to tune in virtually. It was 5:45 in the morning Alaska time, and I was able to beam in. I have to say I can't tell you how proud I was to see the Senate Indian Affairs hearing room. It was packed literally