

the Homeland Security Department's abuses in Chicago and Minneapolis. The Department of Justice has sought to press charges against Americans who peacefully protest, like Marimar Martinez in Chicago.

In addition to state-sponsored violence against its own citizens, the country is less safe as the DOJ has redirected thousands of law enforcement agents to immigration-related initiatives and away from gun violence, drug trafficking, and child exploitation.

When this President, through his Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security, announced that they were going after the "worst of the worst"—rapists, murderers, terrorists, the criminally insane, criminal children's predators, and the like—the "worst of the worst," remember that?

We didn't think it was Marimar Martinez, a 30-year-old Montessori teacher with no criminal record, born and raised in the city of Chicago, an American citizen. That was one of the victims they shot five times, trying to kill her when leaving the scene of a confrontation.

On day one in office, Attorney General Bondi created the so-called Weaponization Working Group, a task force to investigate the investigators and prosecute the prosecutors. Recent reports suggest the group will soon meet daily with the goal of producing results in the next 2 months that re-energize the partisan criminal probes that only exist for the sake of one sad man's ego and to revitalize his dangerous conspiracy theories.

But in the quest to pursue the President's political enemies and rewrite history, Attorney General Pam Bondi has tripped over her own feet repeatedly, the most recent example being her mismanagement of the Epstein files.

Let's take a trip down memory lane. Last February, the Attorney General claimed she had Epstein's client list "sitting on [her] desk right now to review." Several days later, in a media event the White House staged, she released a number of binders of files to conservative influencers and commentators that were already largely publicly available.

Then, as a whistleblower disclosure to my office revealed, in the wake of public criticism, she pressured 1,000 FBI agents to comb through thousands of pages of documents in the Epstein files and to flag any mention of President Trump.

This effort resulted in an unsigned memo released by DOJ and the FBI that walked back Attorney General Bondi's claims and concluded there was no "incriminating 'client list'" despite the statement to the contrary.

Then, in December, the Attorney General broke the law when her Department failed to release the entirety of the Epstein files by the date mandated by Congress and signed into law. DOJ continues to slowly walk the release, and what they have released has

harmed survivors by not appropriately redacting their names, images, and other personal information.

The American people deserve answers about the conduct of the Nation's leading law enforcement officers. No public servant who respects constitutional checks and balances would behave the way she did. According to an academic analysis of 400 cases involving the Trump administration, as of October 2025, at least 35 times courts have found the Department of Justice under President Trump has provided false or highly misleading information, including false sworn declarations.

It makes you wonder: What is the Attorney General concealing? What kind of precedent is the Department creating for itself under this leadership?

We cannot allow the Trump administration to stonewall and lie to its co-equal branches of government, Congress and the judiciary.

The announcement today that 700 Federal agents are going to be removed from Minnesota is a minor relief to the beleaguered State. There are 3,000 agents already in place. So to take 700 away, this is still a massive force, larger than the local police force in Minnesota.

And my question for the State of Illinois is, How many of these agents are headed to my State? Who will be the next beneficiary of this outrageous conduct?

Leaders in Congress, Democrats and Republicans, have a responsibility: Hold ICE and the Border Patrol to the same standards as every other police force in America. Don't give them special privileges. Give them only their rights under the law, and make them hold to them.

That is one of the cruelties and realities that we face today—that the standards are being changed so that these people can harass innocent individuals like Marimar Martinez. That is unacceptable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

NASHVILLE ELECTRIC SERVICE

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, 12,937 is the number of homes and businesses in Nashville that are still without power in the wake of Winter Storm Fern.

Eleven days after the storm hit, still, 12,937 customers of Nashville Electric Service are still in the dark. At its peak, hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans were without power. The consequences have been unimaginable. Many residents have had to leave their homes; others have struggled to power their life-sustaining medical equipment. Across Nashville, there have, tragically, been five fatalities linked to the storm, including some that occurred days after the storm hit the State.

One 92-year-old man, James Mitchell, passed away in his home after the generator powering his space heater stopped running. When a family mem-

ber found him, it was 47 degrees in the house.

Two days later, 79-year-old Betty Doss, she passed away in her home after losing power for her HVAC system—her thermostat, 44 degrees in her home. I join all Tennesseans in mourning the tragic loss of every person across our State.

By failing to properly prepare for Winter Storm Fern, the Nashville Electric System, the 11th largest electric utility in the Nation put Tennesseans in harm's way.

In fact, in recent years, the company slashed funding for one of the most important ways to prevent power loss. Across Nashville, hundreds of tree branches have broken off into power lines due to the ice buildup. It is the main reason for power loss, and it is the responsibility of NES to trim trees around power lines to ensure this does not happen.

But between 2023 and 2025, the utility's leadership cut funding for tree-trimming services by \$7 million dollars. The reason, as the NES CEO told local media in August:

We care about the tree canopy. We have to live here too.

Instead of funding tree trimming, the utility has focused on DEI. Between 2023 and early 2024, NES held 102 DEI training sessions for employees. It should be no surprise that when disaster struck, the utility was unprepared. In many cases, it offered completely contradictory information to customers.

People would get notices that their power was back on, but electricity was not restored. People would try to call NES and report an outage, but the phone system, it was not working.

They would pull up the website, but their online reporting was down. Yes, this is a failure. It is a failure for all 470,000 customers of NES. Half of them lost power. That is a 50 percent fail rate. When half of your customers lose power, then your system is not resilient. You do not have redundancies, and you are not able to provide the service that you are there to perform.

On Friday, I sent a letter to NES demanding a clear explanation for why it failed to prepare for the storm and prevent massive power loss for thousands of Tennesseans. In response, the company refused to take any responsibility and said that power should be fully restored by—get this—next week.

That would be a full 2 weeks of no power for many Nashville homes and businesses—businesses that have lost a lot of money.

So let me be clear, whomever is responsible for the disaster should be fired and should be replaced with competent leadership. This can never happen again.

In the meantime, I am incredibly grateful for the linemen who were on the ground making repairs and working in frigid temperatures to restore power. We thank them. They are the unsung heroes of the emergency response, along with our National

Guardsmen, first responders, local and State law enforcement who are working around the clock to keep people safe and get them out of the cold.

As we work to recover from the storm, I am grateful that Elon Musk has donated generators to hundreds of Tennesseans who are still without power. We have also seen everyday citizens coming together with that good Tennessee volunteer spirit. Yes, we are the volunteer State.

They are showing up, cleaning out debris, chopping down branches, and helping their neighbors in need. We thank them, and we thank friends who have come from other States to help with the cleanup.

In the face of any challenge, Tennesseans always come together. This challenge is no different.

I thank all who have been here to support us.

NOMINATION OF BRIAN CHARLES LEA

Mr. President, in a few moments, this Chamber will proceed to a cloture vote on the nomination of Mr. Brian Lea to serve as the U.S. district judge for the Western District of Tennessee. I urge all of my colleagues to vote to end debate and proceed to final confirmation.

Mr. Lea is an experienced lawyer who will serve our Nation with excellence and with integrity.

He grew up in Memphis. He graduated from Evangelical Christian School in 2002. He went on to receive his B.A. from Union University in Jackson, TN, and attended the University of Georgia School of Law. He graduated first in his class and served as articles editor for the Georgia Law Review.

He clerked for Justice Clarence Thomas and worked for years at one of our country's preeminent law firms, Jones Day. While there, he handled everything from product liability cases and business disputes to constitutional litigation and intellectual property matters.

Most recently, he has served our Nation in President Trump's Justice Department advising Attorney General Bondi on the implementation of the Department's policies and assisting with litigation.

Mr. Lea has the experience and the qualifications to serve the American people as a district judge in the Western District of Tennessee. I know he will make the people of Tennessee proud.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Tennessee.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the previously scheduled rollcall vote begin immediately.

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

VOTE ON BENTON NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Benton nomination?

Mrs. BLACKBURN. 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 Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 28 Ex.]

YEAS—51

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

NAYS—46

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

NOT VOTING—3

Crapo	Gillibrand	McConnell
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Ohio.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. MORENO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call in relation to the Lea nomination.

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 bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby

move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 612, Brian Charles Lea, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Tennessee.

John Thune, Markwayne Mullin, John R. Curtis, Tim Sheehy, Joni Ernst, Pete Ricketts, John Cornyn, Jim Banks, Mike Rounds, Steve Daines, John Barrasso, Mike Crapo, Kevin Cramer, David McCormick, Jon Husted, Dan Sullivan, Lindsey Graham.

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

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Brian Charles Lea, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Tennessee, 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 Idaho (Mr. CRAPO), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL), and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. Tuberville).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 29 Ex.]

YEAS—50

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

NAYS—47

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

NOT VOTING—3

Crapo	McConnell	Tuberville
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 47.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Brian Charles Lea, of Tennessee, to be United States District