

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 | Luján | 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 |
|-------|------------|-----------|

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 | Luján | 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 |
|-------|-----------|------------|

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

Judge for the Western District of Tennessee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, all postcloture time be expired and the Senate vote on confirmation of the Lea nomination at 11:30 a.m. tomorrow; further, that the cloture motion filed during Tuesday's session of the Senate ripen following disposition of the Lea nomination; further, if cloture is invoked on the Olson nomination, the Senate vote on confirmation of the nomination at 1:45 p.m. tomorrow; finally, if any nominations are confirmed during Thursday's session of the Senate, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

THE NEW START TREATY

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, on February 13, 2025, President Trump said something few expected to hear. He said, "There's no reason for us to be building brand-new nuclear weapons. We already have so many. . . You could destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over. And here we are building new nuclear weapons. . . . We're all spending a lot of money that we could be spending on other things that are actually, hopefully, much more productive."

I could not agree more with that statement. It is why I want to speak about the New START Treaty, which expires on February 5, and the very real possibility of a new nuclear arms race—something that, to my knowledge, neither the President, Vice President, nor any other senior U.S. official has meaningfully discussed.

The decision to start a nuclear war can be made by a single individual—the President of the United States—with no requirement that he first consult with anyone. A nuclear war could also be started at any moment by Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, or any other leader of a nuclear weapon state. Or it could be triggered by mistake.

A single use of a tactical nuclear weapon, either by accident or design, could trigger a flurry of escalating re-

sponses with far more powerful strategic weapons that would cause incalculable loss of life, widespread radiation poisoning, and destruction on a scale unlike anything seen in human history. We all, regardless of political affiliation, must reaffirm what Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev said 40 years ago: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

For the past 80 years, the probability of mutually assured destruction has deterred the use of nuclear weapons. But in today's increasingly dangerous and unpredictable world, with mercurial leaders like Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, we cannot rely on deterrence alone. Existing nuclear arms control treaties are either no longer adhered to by Russia or the United States or, as in the case of New START, are on the verge of expiring.

That represents a colossal failure of leadership by both the United States and Russia. There is no greater threat to humanity than a nuclear war, yet there are no negotiations underway to replace the treaty, nor are there discussions to consider a new generation of limits on nuclear weapons.

My colleague from Massachusetts Senator MARKEY and several others here have sought to counter this complacency. But the danger of a new nuclear arms race has received far too little attention from Congress and the administration, and with tomorrow's expiration of the New START Treaty, it is staring us in the face.

The United States, and our allies, must urgently seek to reinvigorate negotiations on a verifiable replacement for New START, with more effective mechanisms to prevent the development, proliferation, and use of nuclear weapons. Until then, we and the Russians should agree to continue abiding by the limits under New START, as President Putin has reportedly proposed. Despite our stark differences with the Russians, they have as much interest in preventing an unwinnable nuclear war as we do.

We must also invigorate discussions with China, which has some 600 nuclear weapons. That number is expected to more than double in fewer than 10 years.

If Putin refuses to replace New START, despite it being in Russia's own national interest, there are other steps that we, Russia, and China should take—short of negotiating a new treaty—to help reduce the risk of a nuclear war, whether due to a false alarm, error, or other misperception. For example:

- * Creating joint early warning centers to monitor missile launches;
- * De-targeting, so any accidental launch of a nuclear armed missile lands in the ocean;
- * Removing all nuclear weapons from high-alert status;
- * Reducing incentives to respond quickly to an unconfirmed nuclear attack;
- * Reducing the number of deployed nuclear weapons; and
- * Renouncing first use of nuclear weapons and eliminating the President's authority to

launch nuclear weapons without congressional approval.

Since the 1980s, thanks to negotiators in both countries, the United States and Russia curtailed an unrestrained nuclear arms race that had led to the deployment of staggering numbers of increasingly destructive weapons that could not rationally be justified for deterrence or any other purpose. The START Treaty and New START were historic achievements.

Twelve months ago, President Trump spoke of the need for the United States, Russia, and China to stop building more nuclear weapons. Yet while his National Security Strategy calls for "the world's most robust, credible, and modern nuclear deterrent," it says nothing about preventing another nuclear arms race. With respect to New START, he reportedly said, "If it expires, it expires."

As the New START Treaty fades into history, one commentator has suggested that "one likely successor to nuclear weapons' sole dominance on the strategic value ladder could be AI technology. . . . Either AI technology itself will become the primary strategic weapon—or it will enable the rapid creation of alternatives that render nuclear arsenals increasingly irrelevant to real-world outcomes."

It is only a matter of time—and probably far less time than we think—before the application of AI technology to warfare creates a whole new impetus for global instability. But even as AI becomes more versatile as a disruptive and destructive force, nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war are not going to disappear. So I urge President Trump to elevate nuclear arms control to the top of his national security agenda. Even the modest steps I have mentioned to reduce the chance of a catastrophic mistake or miscalculation resulting in the use of nuclear weapons should be among our highest national security priorities.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO RAY CURTIS

• Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, I want to honor a very special North Dakota resident who is turning 109 years old on February 11. Ray Curtis is considered to be the oldest veteran living in North Dakota and our State's oldest resident. There are only 10 other known living veterans in the Nation who are older.

Ray embodies the very best of the "Greatest Generation." He was born in 1917 in the hospital in Portal, near his northwestern North Dakota hometown of Columbus. Ten years later, his family moved to Minot, and he graduated from Minot High School in 1935. Before enlisting in the U.S. Army, Ray farmed with his father and brother. His 5 years of Active Duty involved work as a clerk-typist, communications officer, and commander of an automatic weapons unit in the United States. After the