

fight because success is within our reach.

TRIBUTE TO SUE ELLEN BALL

Mr. SCHMITT. Mr. President, I rise today to honor Mrs. Sue Ellen Ball of Houston, MO, for her retirement from the Senate after 20 years of dedicated service.

Sue Ellen is best known for her tireless advocacy for the veterans in Missouri needing assistance to access their hard-earned benefits. She championed their needs and put in the extra effort to offer any assistance, dedicating her own time on evenings and weekends to the brave soldiers who served our country, tracking down the correct Embassy or Agency staff to fix passport or visa issues.

Sue Ellen has been dedicated to the constituents of Missouri. She served in former Senator Roy Blunt's office from 2003 to 2015 in a variety of roles, including constituent services representative, constituent advocate, and as the southwest Missouri district director from 2011 to 2015. Since then, she has specialized as a veterans constituent advocate with my office since January. Throughout her time in the Senate, Sue Ellen has ensured that the citizens of Missouri have an advocate in Congress.

She is married to Ed Ball, has one son Charlie, and enjoys her two grandchildren Logan and Eleanor. I wish Sue Ellen the best in her well-earned retirement, during which she plans on spending as much time with her family and grandchildren as possible. She truly is an example of a public servant, and our Nation and our government is better off because of her tireless efforts.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO GARY E. HICKS

• Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I rise today to salute Justice Gary E. Hicks for his many years of dedicated service in the New Hampshire judicial branch. Justice Hicks recently retired from his role as senior associate justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court, a culmination of a long legal career that also included 23 years as a commercial litigator and 5 years as a Superior Court judge. He leaves a legacy worthy of our praise and our gratitude.

Justice Hicks has firm roots in New Hampshire. He was born in West Stewartstown and raised in nearby Colebrook, two close-knit communities in northern New Hampshire near the U.S.-Canada border. His father ran the local hardware store on Main Street in Colebrook, Hicks Hardware. Justice Hicks started working in the store at age 12, and he often observes that the service-oriented and problem-solving aspects of that job proved useful in his later career as a judge. Even when his duties as a justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court kept him close to

the State capital, Justice Hicks still found time to visit family and friends in his hometown and mentor students at his alma mater, Colebrook Academy.

He left Colebrook after high school to attend Bucknell University. At the encouragement of his wife Patricia, Justice Hicks then enrolled in law school and received his J.D. from Boston University School of Law in 1978. He worked as a commercial litigator for 23 years at a prestigious New Hampshire law firm. In a short time, Justice Hicks developed a reputation for his compassion, his kindness, his intellect, and his thorough understanding of the law.

As Governor of New Hampshire, I had the honor of nominating Gary Hicks to fill a vacancy on the New Hampshire Superior Court in 2001. He brought the same integrity and work ethic to the bench, and he later wrote that his experience as a Superior Court judge was both fascinating because of the breadth of issues he encountered and rewarding because of the many people who obtained justice through the legal system. When there was a vacancy on the New Hampshire Supreme Court in 2006, Governor John Lynch nominated Gary Hicks for a position on New Hampshire's highest court. An elated Justice Hicks referred to the appointment as his "life's ambition."

Friends, colleagues and fellow jurists are quick to point to one character trait in particular when describing Justice Hicks. He is an incredibly thoughtful person who is generous with his time and takes great care to use his legal talents to get it right. His thoughtfulness emerges not only in the many cases to which he applied an even temperament and careful deliberation, but also in his treatment and mentorship of law clerks and new attorneys. Many of his former law clerks, including my daughter Stacey, remember his patience and guidance as they navigated complicated legal questions, and they continue to draw on their formative experience with Justice Hicks when resolving difficult issues later in their careers. They benefited tremendously from his goodwill. In many respects, Justice Hicks is a living testament to one of his literary heroes, the dignified, reasoned, genuine, and inspiring character of Atticus Finch from "To Kill A Mockingbird."

On behalf of the people of New Hampshire, I ask my colleagues and all Americans to join me in thanking Justice Gary Hicks for his many years of service to New Hampshire and his fellow Granite Staters. In retirement, he plans to spend more time with his grandchildren and expand his involvement with the advanced studies program at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH. We wish him all the best in this new chapter of his life.●

TRIBUTE TO SPECIALIST MATT BRANNON

• Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, many of our veterans carry both visible

and invisible scars from their time in the military. This is true for U.S. Army SPC Matt Brannon of Boaz. Matt vividly remembers, as a young man, watching the events of 9/11 unfold. This inspired him to join the military in 2007 after graduating from Boaz High School. Matt was wounded in action by an RPG explosion, receiving wounds to his face, arms, and hands. He continued to fight even after sustaining injuries, saving the lives of many of his fellow soldiers. Matt was awarded a Purple Heart for his heroic actions.

In 2012, he returned home to Boaz, where he began working with the local police department. As Matt adjusted to living with his battle scars, he found healing through the outdoors. He decided to use his experience to help veterans like him who were struggling with the after-effects of war. This led him to bring Wounded Warriors in Action to the region. Each year, he helps veterans from Alabama—and across the Nation—who served in combat, find healing through hunting and fishing.

Matt also serves as a narcotics agent with the Bureau of Special Investigations arm of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency. He is on the frontlines keeping our communities safe from deadly drugs like fentanyl.

Alabama is grateful for Matt's service. It is my honor to recognize Matt Brannon as the December Veteran of the Month.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Kelly, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

In executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:21 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 4468. An act to prohibit the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from finalizing, implementing, or enforcing a proposed rule with respect to emissions from vehicles, and for other purposes.

H.R. 5933. An act to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require additional information in disclosures of foreign gifts and contracts from foreign sources, restrict contracts with certain foreign entities and foreign countries of concern, require certain staff and faculty to report foreign gifts and contracts, and require disclosure of certain foreign investments within endowments.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 4468. An act to prohibit the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from finalizing, implementing, or enforcing a proposed rule with respect to emissions from vehicles, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-3029. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to violations of the Antideficiency Act that involved fiscal years 2011 through 2018 Military Personnel, Marine Corps; Operation and Maintenance, Marine Corps; and Reserve Personnel, Marine Corps funds; to the Committee on Appropriations.

EC-3030. A communication from the Alternate Federal Register Liaison Officer, Office of the Secretary, Department of Defense, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Inapplicability of Certain Laws and Regulations to Commercial Items" (RIN0750-AJ21) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 29, 2023; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-3031. A communication from the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Bonneville Power Administration, Department of Energy, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Administration's Annual Report for fiscal year 2023; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

EC-3032. A communication from the Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled "Fiscal Year 2022 Data Update Supplement to the 2021 Report to Congress for the Comprehensive Opioid Recovery Centers Grant Program"; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-3033. A communication from the Senior Advisor, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a vacancy in the position of Director of the National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 27, 2023; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-3034. A communication from the Supervisory Workforce Analyst, Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing" (RIN1205-AC02) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 29, 2023; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-3035. A communication from the Agency Representative, Patent and Trademark Office, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Changes to the Representation of Others in Design Patent Matters Before the United States Patent and Trademark Office" (RIN0651-AD67) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 27, 2023; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-3036. A communication from the Assistant General Counsel, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Department of Justice, transmitting,

pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Federal Tort Claims Act—Technical Changes" (RIN1120-AB80) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 27, 2023; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-3037. A communication from the Chief of the Regulatory Coordination Division, Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Exercise of Time-Limited Authority to Increase the Numerical Limitation for FY 2024 for the H-2B Temporary Nonagricultural Worker Program and Portability Flexibility for H-2B Workers Seeking to Change Employers" (RIN1615-AC89) (RIN1205-AC18)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on November 27, 2023; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated:

POM-86. A resolution adopted by the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania urging the Federal Housing Finance Agency to rescind all fee increases that negatively impact Pennsylvania homebuyers; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 134

Whereas, The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) implemented a change to Fannie Mae's and Freddie Mac's single-family pricing framework by introducing redesigned fee matrices for home purchases, rate-term refinance and cash-out refinance loans; and

Whereas, Under the newly effective change, fees assessed on borrowers with lower credit scores were reduced while fees were increased for borrowers with higher credit scores and moderate down payments; and

Whereas, The majority of mortgages that exist today are known as "conforming mortgages" because they adhere to the underwriting guidelines of Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac and are subject to loan-level price adjustments established by the FHFA; and

Whereas, Housing affordability has reached its lowest level in over a decade due to the significant surge in mortgage rates and record home price appreciation; and

Whereas, Imposing higher fees on borrowers further exacerbates the challenge of affording a home within an already constrained housing market; and

Whereas, The increased fees on borrowers with higher credit scores is contrary to the congressionally chartered duty of the government-sponsored enterprises, which is to promote access to mortgage credit throughout the nation, and is unnecessary for the safety and soundness of the enterprises; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania urge the Federal Housing Finance Agency to rescind all fee increases that negatively impact Pennsylvania homebuyers; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the presiding officers of each house of Congress, each member of Congress from Pennsylvania and the Federal Housing Finance Agency.

POM-87. A resolution adopted by the Senate of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts calling on the United States Government to continue to stand with the people of Israel in their time of need, support the victims of the

recent terrorist attack against the state of Israel and work towards the safe return of those who are being held hostage; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 2462

Whereas, on October 7, 2023, the Terrorist Organization known as Hamas launched a brutal barbaric assault and attack on the State of Israel and brought immense suffering to the innocent civilians of Israel and the region; and

Whereas, the Israeli people have an inalienable right to defend themselves against acts of terrorism; and

Whereas, The Commonwealth mourns the thousands of innocent victims of Hamas's terrorist attack against Israel, including women, children and babies, and is gravely concerned for the many innocent civilians who have been kidnapped and are being held hostage; and

Whereas, The Commonwealth has continuously demonstrated an unwavering commitment to supporting innocent victims of violence and calls for a safe return of the Israelis, Americans and other nationals who have recently been kidnapped and are being held hostage; and

Whereas, The Commonwealth must strongly condemn these heinous terrorist actions by Hamas in Israel; and

Whereas, The Commonwealth stands in solidarity with the Jewish community in Israel, the Commonwealth and around the world; and

Whereas, the recent, sharp rise in anti-semitism, expressed openly and violently, reinforces the need for our collective, continued efforts to stand against hatred and bigotry in the Commonwealth and abroad; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Massachusetts Senate hereby calls on the United States Government to continue to stand with the people of Israel in their time of need, support the victims of the recent terrorist attack against the State of Israel and work towards the safe return of those who are being held hostage; and be it further

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be transmitted forthwith by the clerk of the Senate to the Congress of the United States and the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. WYDEN, from the Committee on Finance, without amendment:

S. 3430. A bill to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to expand the mental health care workforce and services, reduce prescription drug costs, and extend certain expiring provisions under Medicare and Medicaid, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 118-121).

By Mr. WYDEN, from the Committee on Finance, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 2973. A bill to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to establish requirements relating to pharmacy benefit managers under the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 118-122).

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted: