

the Senator from North Carolina is willing to play politics with our national defense.

As we all know by now, the Senator from North Carolina disagrees with the Department of Defense's policy to help members of the military and their families access healthcare, specifically reproductive healthcare. Republican Senators claim they wanted a vote on DOD's policy on abortion; but just this week, they lost a vote to move forward toward overturning that policy. So if they can't get it on a straight-up vote, they are now blocking Mr. Keohane out of spite.

Last week, after months of undermining our national security, the Senator from Alabama backed down with nothing to show for his nearly yearlong blockade of promotions for hundreds of senior military officials—nothing to show, that is, except for the long-term damage he inflicted on our military personnel, on their families, and on our military readiness.

So now the Senator from North Carolina is stopping well-qualified nominees. He has no specific objection to this nominee. In fact, the Senator serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee that unanimously advanced Mr. Keohane's nomination. But the Senator from North Carolina now blocks the confirmation of Mr. Keohane.

We need leaders at the Department of Defense. Blocking these confirmations is corrosive to our national security.

Our Nation cannot continue to hold key national security officials hostage. We must put the safety and well-being of our servicemembers first. Our greatest strength as a nation is our people, and we need a confirmed leader like Mr. Keohane to make sure that our servicemembers have everything they need to succeed.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 109, Ronald T. Keohane, of New York, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; and that, if confirmed, 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. Is there objection?

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Reserving the right to object.

Mr. President, Mr. Keohane has been nominated to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, which is the senior leadership role in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This is the very office responsible for the Department of Defense's abortion travel policy.

I have been very clear with the Pentagon since the day that I placed a hold on Mr. Keohane that I would be happy to release it if Secretary Austin would rescind this abhorrent policy.

This policy has been politicized. It has politicized the military. It has harmed the institutional norms of our country.

Beyond the clear violation of basic morality, Congress never authorized the Department to use taxpayer funds to facilitate elective abortions. Now for the Biden administration to begin such a policy and use taxpayer resources to aid in the taking of unborn life, it defies the will of Congress. And it violates the spirit—if not the letter—of the law. Now taxpayers—many of whom have deeply held religious and moral objections to abortions—they are on the hook to facilitate the very abortions that they fundamentally oppose.

Worse yet, the Pentagon's stated reason for issuing the policy was that the Supreme Court Dobbs decision had "readiness, recruiting, and retention implications." This is total nonsense. The Pentagon was, and is still able, to provide any data or evidence to support their claim. For the administration to cling to this policy is just wrong.

At the end of the day, whether it was the hundreds of holds from my colleague from Alabama or my hold on Mr. Keohane, the reason to resolve and the power to resolve this situation, it begins and ends with the power of one man, and that is Secretary Lloyd Austin. With the stroke of a pen, Secretary Austin can fix this situation and end the impasse. It is time for him to do the right thing and to rescind the policy now.

I object.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I think what the Senator from North Carolina has just said is he doesn't like the abortion policy that the Department of Defense has adopted.

He is right. It is a new policy. It is a policy that was made necessary because an extremist Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade* with the Dobbs opinion and forced the military to have to decide how to deal with access to healthcare, access to abortions for people who were now involuntarily stationed in States where that care was no longer available.

The Senator, and all of the Republicans, were offered a vote on the Department of Defense's policy. And we voted just this week on a measure that would move toward that vote. And it failed. In other words, the Republicans who oppose this policy simply don't have the votes.

So instead of yielding to the will of the majority and letting this policy go through without a problem, instead, they play politics with the people who are trying to serve our Nation.

That Mr. Keohane gets caught in this—someone who is willing to serve our Nation and, most importantly, right now, to help our servicemembers live their best opportunities in the

military at a time when we are having recruiting challenges, is just putting politics ahead of the defense of the United States; it is putting politics ahead of our servicemembers and putting politics ahead of our servicemembers' families.

I think this is fundamentally wrong. They had a vote; they lost; they don't like it; and they are holding Mr. Keohane just out of spite.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3533

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I want to talk a few minutes about seafood.

In many respects, at least in terms of our physical health, we are what we eat, and Americans have been eating a lot more seafood, which is good for you.

A lot of people don't know this. I didn't until I researched. Ninety-four percent of the seafood sold in the United States is imported—94 percent. That is a pretty extraordinary figure. Of the various types of seafood, shrimp represents the highest volume of imports of total edible fishery products.

Given that this seafood is imported, we have to be careful. For that reason, Congress created what we call the Seafood Import Monitoring Program. I am going to call it SIMP, S-I-M-P. So if I say "SIMP," you will know what I am talking about. SIMP's job is to make sure that these foreign imports are safe—safe to eat for the American people.

SIMP has jurisdiction over 13 different species groups and about—well, over 1,100 unique species. As I said, that includes shrimp and red snapper but almost all forms of seafood that are grown overseas, are produced overseas and imported—or exported, I should say, to the United States.

Now, this sounds simple, but it is not. SIMP's job is to ask questions. SIMP wants to know how the seafood was caught. SIMP wants to know the conditions under which the seafood was farmed, if it is a domestic product. If the seafood has been processed, SIMP wants to know how it was processed, what the final form was supposed to look like and what it actually does look like.

SIMP is supposed to keep us safe. Part of the way that SIMP keeps us safe is to inspect the product—not just look at the reporting requirements that the foreign producers give to SIMP but actually look at the product, whether it is the raw seafood or whether it is processed. SIMP inspects it.

In fiscal year 2020, SIMP—once again, the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, SIMP—and its auditing team

completed 1,131 investigations. That is the good news. The bad news is, that was only 1 percent—1 percent—of all of the imports.

Of the audits or investigations—the inspections, if you will—that SIMP did, about 40 percent of those were on shrimp. Of the 40 percent that SIMP did on shrimp, 35 percent were found to be not in compliance with the rules. Thirty-five percent was unsafe.

This is serious business. Unlike most of our domestic producers, a lot of the producers in foreign countries try to produce their shrimp or their seafood on the cheap. They raise the product in filthy water. They don't have rigorous standards for processing the product if they take the raw product and turn it into a final product. Oftentimes, many of these foreign producers shoot the shrimp and other forms of seafood, like red snapper, with antibiotics, which, of course, if you eat enough of them, makes you resistant to those antibiotics if you get sick in another way that the antibiotics could cure.

I mean, let me just be blunt. Some of this product is unsafe. It will make you grow an extra ear. And that is why we have SIMP, is to say: Wait a minute. You can't sell this in the United States.

Once again, of the 1,100-and-change inspections that SIMP did in fiscal year 2020, 40 percent were shrimp, and SIMP found that 35 percent of that 40 percent failed the test.

SIMP is able to inspect, as I said, 1 percent of this exported—for us, imported—seafood. One percent. It needs to be doing 10 percent. It needs to be doing 10 percent, and my bill would help them do 10 percent. My bill would provide additional funding for additional seafood inspections on imported seafood, and we would be asking SIMP to go from 1 percent inspections of all imported seafood to 10 percent.

Now, there is no free lunch, Mr. President, and you don't get one now. My bill costs money. It will cost \$36 million. In the grand scheme of our spending, that is not much, but \$36 million is a lot of money. And I didn't want to come up here and just offer a bill that was a money suck; I wanted to come up here and say: Look, we have a problem. It will cost \$36 million to solve it, and here is where the money is going to come from.

The money, the \$36 million, will come from the money that has been appropriated—the extra billions of dollars that have been appropriated—to the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS, believe me, will never miss the \$36 million. The IRS wastes that much money between bites of oatmeal at breakfast.

If we do this bill, people can enjoy their seafood, and they can appreciate the fact that it is safe.

So for that reason, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3533, which is at the desk—and S. 3533, as I just indicated, is the Seafood Import Monitoring Pro-

gram Audits bill—and I further ask that the bill 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?

Mr. WYDEN. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I just heard about this legislative idea a few minutes ago. So I really have very little information about it.

But what I can tell you is, we already know what the bottom line is. The amendment offered by the Senator from Louisiana will hurt honest taxpayers and will help wealthy tax cheats. That is the bottom line.

Now, I am all for seafood inspections. We have got loads of seafood in our part of the world. But I want to take just a minute to talk about the reasons that Members of this body ought to oppose the legislation.

First—and the Congressional Budget Office has made this point—this amendment uses the fake offset of cutting IRS funding. The cut in IRS funding included in this amendment doesn't pay for an increase in seafood inspections; it increases the deficit. And the reason I say that is because that is what the Congressional Budget Office says about these ideas.

The Congressional Budget Office are the folks that we put in place to give us objective, nonpolitical analyses of various important ideas. The Congressional Budget Office are the people that we use on the Finance Committee regularly, and the Congressional Budget Office has said that every dollar cut from the IRS budget reduces revenue by \$2. And that increases the deficit.

Second, this has given a big pass to wealthy tax cheats. People need to know that the reason there is a focus on IRS enforcement is because the wealthy tax cheats have the lawyers and accountants, and they have all kinds of ways to get around the rules. The working families that we represent—the folks in Michigan, the automobile workers—pay taxes with every single paycheck. We know what kind of financing they have because they pay with every check. It is the wealthy tax cheats that we have to deal with.

And I just say to my friend, the kind of person that he has given a pass to is—we recently found almost a thousand millionaires who didn't even file a tax return. Not one of the scams—they didn't even file a tax return, almost a thousand millionaires. The Federal Government lost more than \$30 billion just on that.

So the Senate ought to be focusing on making sure that we have tough IRS enforcement, that we have the funding to improve services for all taxpayers—all of them—and, particularly, ending the free ride, once and for all, for wealthy tax cheats.

And the service has gone up. We have seen reduction in waiting times for calls from 28 minutes to 3 minutes.

I wish I had time to have a more extended exchange with my colleague. We are, right now, in our caucus meeting having debates on important issues.

But I would just say, in the future, if my colleague could even give us 15- or 20-minutes' notice, we could maybe have a more extended discussion.

The people who get help here are wealthy tax cheats. The people who are hurt here are honest taxpayers. And for that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, look, I understand Senator WYDEN's point of view. I don't think he meant this, but I don't want to leave anyone with the impression that he didn't know about this bill and that all of my colleagues didn't know about this bill.

We have something called a hotline. And when we have a bill and we want to try to move it on the floor, we, through this hotline, notify well in advance every Senator: Hey, KENNEDY is coming to the floor at this time, on this day, with his bill. If you object to it, you can come down and object.

That hotline was sent to Senator WYDEN. It was sent to all the other 98 of my colleagues. It was sent to every single Senator, and we do hotlines every day.

So if he was surprised, I am sorry. But that is between him and his staff.

Point two, I appreciate Senator WYDEN's point of view. He is a smart gentleman. He is smart enough to know this has nothing to do with wealthy tax cheats. This has to do with safe seafood for the American people.

The bill would have cost \$36 million. It would come from the IRS. No Republican Senator voted for it. My Democratic colleagues gave the IRS \$80 billion extra—\$80 billion extra—to go out and audit the American people. This will take \$36 million of it to make sure that they are still alive when the IRS audits them because they may not be eating dangerous shrimp full of antibiotics.

Does the IRS need all \$80 billion? Of course not. How do I know that? Don't take KENNEDY's word for it. Take the word of the gentleman who asked us to pass the bill: President Biden. He has already told us the IRS doesn't need the full \$80 billion. He offered up \$20 billion to us for this year's budget to spend on other things.

So the idea that the world is going to spin off its axis—and wealthy tax cheats and all of this other foolishness—is just not accurate. I say that with all respect to my colleague, Senator WYDEN.

I will be back. For \$36 million, we can protect the American people. I can promise you that the seafood board will spend that money better than the Internal Revenue Service. That is faint praise, but I can promise you that will happen.

My final point, I appreciate the opportunity to present this bill. Be careful what you eat, particularly if it is imported seafood. I am not kidding you. If you are eating seafood, given the statistics, you are probably eating foreign seafood, and this stuff can be dangerous. I mean it. Some of this product has enough antibiotics in it that you will grow an extra ear. And you don't want that.

The best way to be safe is to eat domestic seafood—good old American seafood. But if you don't, if you are going to eat foreign seafood, be very, very careful.

I will be back with a very common-sense approach to try to solve that problem, and I am sorry we couldn't do it today.

Thank you, Mr. President, for your time, and I thank Senator WYDEN. And I wish both of you a Merry, Merry Christmas.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection was heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 6503

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, over the next 2 weeks, more than 7.5 million Americans will fly to see loved ones and to celebrate the holidays—a record number.

This is no easy feat. A seamless travel experience depends on airlines, on air traffic controllers, on airport managers, on TSA screeners all working together for the aviation system to run efficiently during times of extreme strain like the holiday season.

At the center of this effort is the Federal Aviation Administration, but there is one problem: The FAA's authorities are set to expire at the end of the year.

Without the FAA extension, air travel and air cargo for those counting on quick shipping during Christmas and New Year's will be severely impacted. At the moment, we face a potential challenge of not extending the FAA's authorities because of the objections of a Senate Democrat.

This is irresponsible and, frankly, bad for the safety Agency's ability to operate effectively. For the past year, Senator CANTWELL, the chairman of the Commerce Committee, and myself have worked to pass a long-term FAA authorization. The authorization we drafted on a bipartisan basis addresses airport infrastructure, workforce challenges, ATC staffing, protections for passengers, the safety framework, manufacturing. I could go on.

It is an important bill that makes progress toward solving some of the challenges facing aviation, but we need to make sure we get it right. We now find ourselves having to pass a second short-term FAA authorization in less than 6 months, without even having gotten the bill through committee.

This situation was entirely avoidable, but special interests, in particular the pilots' unions like ALPA, have decided that if they can't get

their way, then the American people should pay the price.

There have been several times throughout this process where we thought we had a deal, but, inevitably, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, often spurred on by the union, have tanked these agreements.

Each month, it seems, there is a new issue we are told cannot be in the FAA bill because the unelected special interests are opposed to it. First, it was a modest reform to update pilot training. Then it was raising the retirement age for pilots. Imagine telling a perfectly healthy 66-year-old pilot who wants to fly, no, you can't fly anymore because your union has decided that younger pilots—with a lifetime of union dues still to pay—are more important than you are.

What next will unelected, unaccountable, special interests tell Senate Democrats that we are not allowed to have in the FAA bill?

Let me be clear. Short-term extensions are not good for the FAA. This extension until March should be the last extension. I am not satisfied with kicking the can down the road. I don't presume to speak on behalf of my partner in this effort, Senator CANTWELL, but I am certain that she doesn't want to continue kicking the can down the road either.

I would prefer that we pass a serious, multiyear authorization, such as the bill Senator CANTWELL and I agreed to in June, but, unfortunately, in the months since that stalled markup, we have not made substantial progress, and we still have numerous outstanding provisions.

I am very concerned that given the time we have, the limited progress we have made, and the constant moving goalposts in bill negotiations, that we are getting to the point that we will be forced to extend the FAA's authority until 2025.

I don't want to do that. I don't think Chair CANTWELL wants to do that either. We need to get this bill done, and I am still committed to trying to do so if it is a bill that is actually bipartisan and not a special interest wish list that ignores very real problems like the pilot shortage.

In a moment, I will ask unanimous consent for the Senate to pass the FAA extension, which will last until March 8. The House earlier this week voted 376 to 15 to pass this legislation. The Senate cannot leave for the holidays without passing an extension.

Without an extension, here is what would happen: No. 1, all airport construction projects using FAA grants would immediately stop. No. 2, the FAA would lose the ability to make new expenditures from the aviation trust fund, causing many employees in airports, facilities and equipment, and R&D offices to be immediately furloughed. No. 3, special authorizations for drone operations would expire. No. 4, airlines would have no authority to

collect ticket taxes that fund the aviation trust fund.

In 2011, the last time the FAA's authorization lapsed, more than 4,000 FAA employees were furloughed, and the FAA lost more than \$400 million. The 2-week lapse halted billions of dollars' worth of construction projects and impacted more than 70,000 construction jobs.

Leaving town without giving the FAA the certainty to operate would be a mistake. I remain committed to working with Senator CANTWELL to negotiate a truly bipartisan FAA bill that the Agency, the industry, and the flying public deserve.

And with that, I yield the floor to the Senator from Kansas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Texas Senator CRUZ, and I appreciate his leadership. He is here to make the effort to see that we reauthorize, on a temporary basis, the FAA. He is absolutely right; it has to be done before the end of the year. We are creating more uncertainty every day, every hour that we fail to do so. It is regrettable that the Senator from Texas is here to do that. It is almost a question in my mind, When do we have an agreement that is not an agreement?

We have been down this path several times now in which we believe we are ready to markup, only to find that something else stands in the way.

I was here earlier today to talk about the importance of a long-term reauthorization. And while I am here to support the short-term extension, only to get us to the point of a long-term reauthorization, it is significant that we do what we need to do today, and that means it is then an opportunity for us to complete our work in the early year—the few first weeks of January 2024.

We came together to confirm an FAA Administrator. We can do this. We did it 98 to zero. I implore my colleagues to allow this opportunity to have this short-term extension take place, and, most importantly, I implore my colleagues that we find this path forward for the safety of those Kansans and the safety of Americans who utilize our airways.

Our country's economic interests, our public's safety interests all come together. It is a mistake for us to have short-term extension after short-term extension. One last time, let's do it today and complete our work.

We should be able to do this, and I ask that we extend the FAA today and complete our work in January. I thank the gentleman from Texas for his efforts to accomplish that goal.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, at this point, I yield to the Senator from North Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, in the past year, we have witnessed one aviation