

Should a President pardon a person who led an organization who orchestrated this riot after being convicted by a jury of impartial citizens and being convicted of seditious conspiracy? I say no.

Should a President pardon a person who was sentenced to more than 6 years for beating the police with a metal whip, assaulting them with bear spray—something that can cause lasting eye damage—should that person be pardoned? I say no.

Should a person who, at his own trial, said he didn't think he was subject to the laws governing the United States and who, before storming the Capitol, bragged that what the British did to DC will be nothing compared to what he does? Should that person be pardoned? I say no.

Should a person who said many of us should be hanged, should that person be pardoned? I say no.

I am very proud of the men and women of our law enforcement community, U.S. Capitol Police and DC Metropolitan Police Department who stood their positions and defended the Capitol and defended the peaceful transfer of power. And I have in mind someone who was standing over me in the Capitol when I was in the Gallery and the mob was trying to break down the doors, breaking the glass of the House Chamber, and this officer was a young man who commuted to work from about an hour away. He had two young children. He had his gun out, and I looked in his face, and I could see the last thing in the world he wanted to do was have to use that weapon. But I saw that he was going to do his job and whatever was required to protect the people who were in that Gallery.

And I just thought to myself, How is it that the people who are attacking could have such disregard for the reality of this person's life and how much it would change his life if he actually had to use that firearm?

And I am proud, too, of Officer Brian Sicknick, who lost his life; Officer Howard Liebengood; Officer Jeffrey Smith; Officer Gunther Hashida; Officer Kyle DeFreytag, all of whom died in the aftermath of January 6th.

These presidential pardons are disrespectful. They are also dangerous. They are disrespectful to the men and women who served, who suffered the violence, and are living with the consequences. And they are dangerous to the men and women of law enforcement who serve us every day. The pardons validate the violence of the mob and dishonor the service of those who protect us.

These unconscionable and appalling actions of January 6 should be repudiated by every Member of Congress. And whatever differences we have, it is vital that those differences be resolved at the ballot box and that the will of the people always be respected.

No citizen, however passionate they may be about their political beliefs, no matter how disappointed they may be

at the outcome of an election, is justified in attacking the men and women of the Capitol Police. Their actions should be condemned by each of us and by our President. Those actions should not be condoned with pardons.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. MORENO assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Connecticut.

NOMINATION OF PETER HEGSETH

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, we are in the midst of considering Peter Hegseth to be the next Secretary of Defense. I don't think there is a more important office in this country, having power and responsibility for 3.4 million Americans, most of them in uniform, many of them civilians, all of them potentially putting their lives in harm's way.

The President's choice to lead the Department of Defense is not only one of the most significant he will make but is also probably the most unqualified nominee for this position of immense authority and responsibility in recent history.

It is clear that his history of mismanagement—he drove two veterans organizations into the ground financially—makes him patently incapable of the powerfully challenging management task that he will have as Secretary of Defense. This sprawling enterprise has to be directed and guided by someone who has had some significant management responsibility in the past. I hesitate to say how much because the standard and the bar have always been extremely high under both Republican and Democratic administrations, including President Trump's first term when he appointed General Mattis.

I voted for General Mattis. He was obviously a Republican nominee, but he had the experience—not just in combat but also at the Pentagon.

Now, I know the President wants to be a disrupter and a change agent. The Pentagon may be in need of some change and disruption, but not chaos, not financial mismanagement such as characterized Pete Hegseth's service as the head of Vets for Freedom and then Concerned Veterans for America.

What can be said about his service in those two organizations is that year after year, he spent more than he raised. He had deficits year after year—not by a little bit, by hundreds of thousands of dollars. So at the end of his service at Vets for Freedom, the board did an intervention. They had a forensic study done, which showed that there were tens of thousands of dollars in unpaid debt, and they, in fact, ousted him.

He then went to Concerned Veterans for America and same pattern, roughly the same financial failings—deficits year after year, significant in their number and total amount. There again, he left under a cloud, with a nondisclosure agreement, so we don't have, necessarily, the full story.

Just as a management issue, this nomination is fundamentally flawed.

He left those two separate organizations smoldering in ruins after just a few years as their executive director.

We have documents from whistleblowers that detail a toxic workplace environment at those organizations. It was rife with alcohol abuse and sexual harassment under his leadership. Former employees have detailed that Mr. Hegseth routinely used organization funds to pursue personal pleasures, usually involving alcohol and women. His underlings referred to them as “party girls.”

These veterans service organizations ran fiscal surpluses before Mr. Hegseth's tenure, and upon his exit, their budgets were really in flames. In one case, the organization simply ceased to exist. Vets for Freedom was absorbed by another organization.

He testified that he is proud of the work he did while he was at Vets for Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America, but he made a career of advocating for policies that would, in effect, contract and even defund the Veterans' Administration and harm servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

For years, he lambasted veterans who pursued disability compensation, and he advocated for for-profit colleges that make their living preying on servicemembers and veterans. These organizations and the policies he advocated could potentially have done grave harm to our veterans.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Hegseth also refused to answer questions regarding the use of Active-Duty military within the borders of the United States.

One of the President's own former Secretaries of Defense stated unequivocally that “the option to use active-duty forces in law enforcement's role should be only used as a matter of last resort and only in the most urgent and dire of situations.” Yet the President is apparently laying down plans to use the Active-Duty military to conduct mass deportations and to quell civil unrest.

Americans don't want the military, our men and women on Active Duty, raiding restaurants and farms, looking for individuals who have overstayed their visas. If the President is unwilling to invest in ICE, it should not be the Department of Defense, the Pentagon, our Active-Duty men and women going into homes, workplaces, schools, churches, hospitals, and in effect performing the raids—the law enforcement duty—that really are specifically prohibited by statute.

Pete Hegseth will be behind these policies. Many of them he has already endorsed. Most of them, unfortunately, were not delved into in any depth in his hearing because so much of it was on the sexual improprieties and alcohol abuse and other personal issues that would be disqualifying.

Let's make no mistake. There is a lot of focus on this latest affidavit. There is significant information—not anonymous smears, significant information—

in that affidavit, but there was already enough on the record, in fact, acknowledged during that hearing by Mr. Hegseth himself, as to information that would be disqualifying if he as a major were up for promotion, if he as a corporal were up for promotion to a sergeant; facts about marital infidelity—open, blatant, matter of public record—that would be disqualifying to him within the military and in fact might even subject him to discipline within the military; other reported instances of drunkenness, of misconduct, all of it in the public record acknowledged by him—at least as to the marital infidelity.

So the focus on those personal aspects of his background took time. And by the way, we had very limited amounts of time because we were not permitted a second round of questioning. We were not given access to the FBI background report. We were not given, in fact, the benefit of a full FBI background investigation—an adequate one—because there were gaps, as shown by the affidavit, as to who was interviewed, and that is in part why that affidavit is important, because it shows that there were, in fact, gaps in the FBI's investigation.

The American people don't want the National Guard or our military reserves or their Active Duty, their own neighbors, on the streets of Des Moines, Cleveland, Hartford, Montgomery—places where they call home—checking their papers, conducting surveillance operations that could sweep vast amounts of their private data. That is our military going into our workplaces and our homes collecting information.

The Founders of this Nation never envisioned our military as a police force, and neither did Congress. That is why we have the Insurrection Act and other measures that forbid that kind of intrusion. In fact, it was that kind of invasion of their homes by the British military that caused them to adopt many of our constitutional guarantees against the use of the military for those kinds of purposes.

Mr. Hegseth declined to state his opposition to such deployments when asked during his hearing. What he said, and I take him at his word, is that he will heed the President's direction as Commander in Chief.

The reason he was chosen for this job obviously is not his experience as a manager; it is not his bona fides as a leader of major organizations; it is his loyalty to the President, to Donald Trump. And more than loyalty, it is fealty. It is that acquiescence, obedience, obsequiousness, blind loyalty that would lead him to take that order and, in turn, order American troops into people's homes.

There is no question that beyond what could happen in America on our soil, his confirmation would also present enormous problems for our allies and partners in the Middle East. I have been working with the senior Sen-

ator from South Carolina for some years to encourage the normalization of relations between the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is an enterprise and an effort that I think has occupied many of us in this Chamber. We have visited the region together.

And one of our objectives, in fact, is a treaty or agreement that would bind us closer together—Israel, Saudi Arabia, America, perhaps the UAE—as part of normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and the regional nations and Israel.

Suffice it to say that the recent cease-fire announcement between Israel and Hamas is a historic shift in regional politics. I believe that Mr. Hegseth's personal beliefs would diminish our support of the peace process or derail it entirely because of comments he has made about Islam and Muslim nations. Those comments were explored in some detail in his testimony.

My concern is there have been numerous reports in addition to his own words that appear to convey a hostility on his part—if not outright antagonism—toward Islam and Muslims. A former employee of Concerned Veterans for America alleges that he shouted racist and Islamophobic chants during an official tour in Ohio, well-publicized and well-known, in the region where Muslim Nation and Islam are predominant.

In his book "American Crusade," he expressed concern about Muslim birthrights and said the present moment for Christians is like the time of the Crusades and that Christians must arm themselves metaphorically, intellectually, and physically.

Our fight is not with guns. Yet. [Not with guns. Yet.]

Well, we are not in a time where we need a crusader in the old-fashioned sense of that word and who says that Christians must arm themselves metaphorically, intellectually, physically—physically—for a fight that may be coming.

We are trying to engage those nations in a common purpose toward normalization, peace and stability, an expansion of the Abraham Accords. People in Israel are hoping that progress can be made, that there can be a successful effort to build on the Abraham Accords.

The current cease-fire agreement is the result of both the Trump administration and the Biden administration coming together—the two teams, Brett McGurk and Envoy Witkoff—making sure that peace was the objective, not antagonism or hostility. Ambassador Witkoff, I don't think, would want a Secretary of Defense talking about a crusade against Muslim nations.

I don't think that a more problematic and concerning nominee has been put before this body, and I urge my Republican colleagues to review what Senator MURKOWSKI and Senator COLLINS said when they announced that they were going to oppose this nomination, as they did earlier today.

Senator MURKOWSKI said:

I have met with him and carefully reviewed his writings, various reports, and other pertinent materials. I closely followed his hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee and gathered substantial feedback from organizations, veterans, and Alaskans. After thorough evaluation, I must conclude that I cannot in good conscience support his nomination for Secretary of Defense.

She went onto talk about some of the allegations that have been made against Mr. Hegseth:

Although he has recently revised his statements on women in combat since being nominated, I remain concerned about the message that confirming Mr. Hegseth sends to women currently serving and those aspiring to join. Women have served our nation with distinction, overcoming immense obstacles to excel in combat and leadership roles, and they deserve to know that their leader honors and values their commitment to our nation.

Now, the reason for that comment by Senator MURKOWSKI was statements made by Mr. Hegseth 30 days before his hearing about the lack of value in women serving in the military and the inability, lack of capacity of women to serve in combat. He reversed himself, what one of my colleagues called "nomination conversion" and modified his previous remarks. But he couldn't tell you what caused him to have a different opinion.

And in the course of that hearing, he truly revealed that he continues to have that view of women, which is a problem for recruiting women. They are now 18 percent of our military force. And more than just recruiting women, retaining women, especially when the scourge of sexual assault continues to be so problematic in the military. We fought it for years. A number of us on the Armed Services Committee have supported measures that would provide for more effective prosecution through a system of investigation outside the chain of command. We adopted those reforms, and military leaders have joined us in seeking to combat sexual assault and harassment.

And here we have someone who has been accused, very credibly and plausibly, not just in this affidavit but by others, and the record is replete with them. There are accusations. There are no convictions here. Mr. Hegseth denies them. But, again, simply what he acknowledges having done would disqualify him from a role of command in the military. And that background and record can't help but discourage women from joining and staying in the military.

Senator MURKOWSKI goes onto say:

While the allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking do nothing to quiet my concerns, the past behaviors Mr. Hegseth has admitted to, including infidelity on multiple occasions, demonstrate a lack of judgment that is unbecoming of someone who would lead our Armed Forces. These behaviors starkly contrast the values and discipline expected of servicemembers. Men and women in uniform are held accountable for such actions, and they deserve leaders who uphold these same standards.

Mr. Hegseth complained in our hearing that the military was lowering its standards for the men and women who serve in uniform. The only standards being lowered here are the standards for the Secretary of Defense if Mr. Hegseth is confirmed. President Trump is, in effect, dumbing down the Department of Defense, and it threatens to do great damage to that powerfully important institution.

Senator MURKOWSKI goes onto say:

Above all, I believe that character is the defining trait required of the Secretary of Defense, and must be prioritized without compromise. The leader of the Department of Defense must demonstrate and model the standards of behavior and character we expect of all servicemembers, and Mr. Hegseth's nomination to the role poses significant concerns that I cannot overlook. Given the global security environment we're operating in, it is critical that we confirm a Secretary of Defense, however, I regret that I am unable to support Mr. Hegseth.

What a powerfully damning statement. Not damning, necessarily, Mr. Hegseth as a human being. I respect his service. I said at the hearing that I was grateful and respectful of his service to our Nation, including leading troops in combat and advocating for veterans. But these concerns about his personal background and about his lack of experience negate that respect for his service as a Secretary of Defense—as a Secretary of Defense.

We are not choosing him to be a colonel to be promoted. We are choosing him to lead the entire U.S. military, to make decisions that will be a matter of life and death.

I was moved, as well, by the statements made by our colleague Senator COLLINS very much along the same lines. And I want to repeat some of what she said, again, in the hope that our colleagues will listen to both of them. She said, as an expert, if I may say, on the global challenges that this country faces now:

[T]he Secretary is going to be facing a number of incredibly complex problems that are going to require highly skilled management ability. I am concerned that Mr. Hegseth does not have the management experience and background that he will need in order to tackle these difficulties.

I am also concerned about multiple statements, including some in the months just before he was nominated, that Mr. Hegseth made about women serving in the military. He and I had a candid conversation in December about his past statements and apparently evolving views. I am not convinced that his position on women serving in combat roles has changed.

That is, in some ways, the nub of the problem: what he has said, how he has failed in past management positions, how he lacks that credibility as a manager and a leader.

Senator COLLINS continues:

Women compromise nearly 18 percent of our Active-Duty military. They continue to make critical and valuable contributions to our national defense. I have long advocated that women who wish to serve in and can meet the rigorous standards of combat roles should be able to do so, and numerous women have proved they can accomplish this

difficult feat. Currently, thousands of women are serving in combat roles, and many others serve in noncombat functions. Their service is essential to the success of our military. Mr. Hegseth also appears to lack a sufficient appreciation for some of the policies that the military is required to follow because they are codified in the laws of the United States of America. While I understand his point on the importance of up-to-date and workable rules of engagement, our prohibitions against torture come from American laws and treaties ratified by the United States, including the Geneva Conventions. Therefore, I will vote against the nomination.

Mr. Hegseth has demeaned and dismissed the importance of the Geneva Conventions. In fact, he has berated the lawyers in the Department of Defense who set standards and guidelines for what can be done.

I will never forget talking to our former colleague—our great colleague, a friend and mentor to me—John McCain, about why he opposed torture and waterboarding—that kind of physical abuse—and why he believed that these laws have to be followed by our military, not just as a matter of humanity but as effective military strategy. Torturing to gain information often produces false information, but it also reduces the quality of our military performance.

Yet Mr. Hegseth seems to dismiss those ideas about the Geneva Conventions, about standards for military conduct, as categorically as he does many other of the standards that should apply.

I hope my colleagues will listen to Senator MURKOWSKI and Senator COLLINS because, in their statements, they say more effectively than I am in this lengthier talk on the floor how important a vote against Mr. Hegseth is to the future of our national defense.

Much has been written about him. I urge my colleagues to review an article that appeared in *The New Yorker*—“Pete Hegseth's Secret History”—by Jane Mayer, which talks about some of these instances, not anonymous smears, as he said so many of them were, but a sourced and substantiated account of the kinds of misconduct that were detailed in a whistleblower report and other documents—again, not an anonymous smear but specific and explicit facts that were claimed. You don't have eyewitness proof in sworn testimony before the Armed Services Committee, but this report is powerful in what it shows.

I hope that my colleagues, in the hours that we have left before we will vote again on Mr. Hegseth's nomination, will reconsider, perhaps, their vote earlier today; that they will recognize they will be responsible if things go wrong, and we hope to God always that nothing goes wrong, especially all of us who have family members who have served—mine in the U.S. Marine Corps. My oldest son is a combat veteran, and my second son, Michael, is a Navy SEAL.

The responsibility of the Secretary of Defense to order men and women into

harm's way is a truly awesome responsibility. Mr. Hegseth is not the person to have that responsibility, and I hope my colleagues will recognize that fact and vote against his nomination.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to resume legislative session.

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

CONGRATULATING THE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS BEARS WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM FOR WINNING THE 2024 NCAA DIVISION III WOMEN'S SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 34, which is at the desk.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 34) congratulating the Washington University in St. Louis Bears women's soccer team for winning the 2024 NCAA Division III Women's Soccer Championship.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 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 with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 34) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under “Submitted Resolutions.”)

MORNING BUSINESS

REMEMBERING DANIEL LEVIN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, after the Great Fire destroyed much of central London in 1666, the city was rebuilt with even grander and stronger buildings than before. The most majestic building of all in the new London was St. Paul's Cathedral, designed by the great architect Sir Christopher Wren. There is no monument to Wren. But on