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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O mighty God, our gracious Father, thank You for the gift of this day. Lord, You are the one clear manifestation of love in the midst of lesser powers. Today, use our lawmakers to bring more of Your love to our world so that Your kingdom may come and Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

May our Senators discover the stillness of soul needed to begin to comprehend what is the height, length, breadth, and depth of Your great love. Use them as Your instruments of righteousness and justice in our world. Lord, open their minds to think Your thoughts and give them the courage to do Your will.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

MAKING EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 488, S. 2648, the emergency supplemental appro-

priations act dealing with the border crisis.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 488, S. 2648, a bill making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2014, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12 noon, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

At 12 noon, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider Robert Alan McDonald to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The Senate will recess from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. to allow for weekly caucus meetings.

At 2:45 p.m. there will be a rollcall vote for confirmation of the McDonald nomination, followed by several voice votes to confirm the Andre, Hoza, and Polaschik nominations.

Upon disposition of the Polaschik nomination, the Senate will consider the Highway and Transportation Funding Act. Senators should expect five rollcall votes this evening in relation to Wyden-Hatch, Carper-Corker-Boxer, Lee, and Toomey amendments and on passage of H.R. 5021, as amended, if amended. Senators will be notified when those votes are scheduled.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2673
AND H.R. 3393

Mr. REID. There are two bills at the desk due for second readings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2673) to enhance the strategic partnership between the United States and Israel.

A bill (H.R. 3393) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to consolidate certain tax benefits for educational expenses, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make improvements to the child tax credit, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. I would object to any further proceedings of these two matters.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The bills will be placed on the calendar.

VETERANS' CARE

Mr. REID. Almost 2 years ago, within a few days 2 years ago, we were in Las Vegas to dedicate this beautiful new veterans facility. Taxpayers' money spent on it was about \$700 million. It is beautiful. It is the second one we have been able to do in southern Nevada. We built a nice little hospital with a joint venture between the Veterans Administration and the Air Force.

But with the wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan, we ran out of room to accommodate the influx of veterans.

It became very difficult for veterans. We have a huge veterans population in southern Nevada. We have all kinds of military bases there that they are stationed in. They come, and they decide they want to live in southern Nevada.

So the veterans in southern Nevada found themselves in a difficult situation. When this new hospital was dedicated—it took 7 years of work to get this done. I worked hard, as did others, to obtain this money. It was a state-of-the-art facility, 100 inpatient beds, a nursing home unit, and an ambulatory care center. It was a state-of-the-art facility. It was unquestionably, probably without exaggerating, the finest veterans hospital in the country. It was brandnew. But, more importantly, it was a precious resource to veterans throughout the State of Nevada.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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We have a facility in northern Nevada. It has been there for many decades. To the credit of Senator MIKULSKI from Maryland, she came and visited it a number of years ago and said: This is wrong. In that facility we couldn't get the modern equipment down the halls and into the bedrooms. We had to renovate, so it is in good shape. So the veterans in northern Nevada had a facility long before southern Nevada.

But in spite of all this happy talk about what a wonderful facility this is, veterans depending on VA care have been stunned. Why? Because they are waiting 50 days. If you are a new patient, you call and they say: Well, we will see you in a couple of months. Come on in. About 2,000 patients have been waiting 90 days in order to even get an appointment. This is unacceptable.

It is not a problem only in Las Vegas, it is all over the country: a nationwide, systemic problem where these combat veterans and other veterans have been languishing on some nonexistent waiting list.

When I learned that BERNIE SANDERS from Vermont and Congressman MILLER had worked out something, I was stunned. I was so happy. I got a call from Senator SANDERS on Saturday telling me: I think we have got it done. That is wonderful. That is truly remarkable, what they have done.

I don't need to go through the bill, what it does, but it provides billions of dollars for emergency funding to hire new doctors and nurses. It will authorize 27 new medical facilities around the country, allowing the VA to grow as it needs to grow.

That is wonderful news. That is the way we should be legislating. We couldn't find two more politically different people than BERNIE SANDERS of Vermont and Chairman MILLER. They are very different people; they have very different views. But they know we have sent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people to Iraq and Afghanistan, when these veterans come home, they need help. We took care of the war efforts, and rightfully so. The military needed every penny they have to fight these wars, but we haven't been as generous in taking care of these people when they come home from these wars.

The main point I want to make is that Chairman MILLER and Senator SANDERS understand we owe America's veterans.

It is good we are talking about this, rather than an impeachment of the President or suing the President. Look in the papers today. The American people are totally opposed. We shouldn't be off on these tracks of impeachment, suing the President. We should be legislating. An exemplary standard of that is what I hope will be completed this week when the conference report comes to us from the House to complete this legislation. It is truly a good day for the American veterans and the American people.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. America makes a promise to every man and woman who puts on the uniform. In exchange for their service, our country pledges they will be well trained, well equipped, and treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

It is the least we can offer to the brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who put everything on the line so we can live in freedom. It is a solemn pact, and that is why the American people were so shocked to read some of the headlines we have seen over the past few months, headlines such as: "Veterans languish and die on a VA hospital's secret list." Then, as the Obama administration tried to cover its tracks, a headline such as: "Veterans Affairs spies, stonewalls on people investigating it."

It is a national disgrace, ailing veterans being put off for months by a hospital system that should be rushing to their aid, and veterans dying while waiting for care.

According to the government's own report on these failures, we also know these problems were so systemic that they spread to more than three-quarters of the VA facilities surveyed, literally to every corner of the country, including Kentucky.

Kentuckians heard shocking news stories such as the one about a Harrodsburg veteran who was being treated at the VA facility in Lexington. The staff there declared him dead. Yet when the veteran's wife came to say her final good-byes, she found her husband breathing—with a pulse.

I was glad to hear this veteran is now back home with his family and recovering. But no veteran and no spouse should ever have to go through such a horrific ordeal. Yet I continue to receive letters from Kentucky veterans who have been denied the care they deserve, such as this one from a disabled veteran in Gradyville. This is what he had to say:

I have had some of the most frustrating of times trying to receive the quality of health care that anyone deserves.

Not only has it taken me months to be seen, but I have been told by a primary care physician that "He did not need to see me until my 6 month checkup". . . . I simply no longer have the time and money to invest in the run around I receive in trying to make an appeal. . . . I gave up 4 years of my life and proper use of my right arm in this nation's defense. I would have given my life without question to protect a country that I love. It breaks my heart to no longer be a part of an institution I so lovingly became a member [of]. Our nation's veterans deserve so much more.

Well, he is certainly right. Thousands of Kentuckians have had to wait for more than a month at VA facilities in Louisville and Lexington.

So the Obama administration needs to use every tool available to address the systemic failures of the VA, and it

needs to work with Congress on reforms that can help address these challenges too.

Initially, the Obama administration was slow to respond to the crisis. The White House tried to treat it as some PR predicament to get beyond rather than the true tragedy that it was—a tragedy that required bipartisan action to investigate and address.

Ultimately, pressure from Republicans and revulsion from the American people forced the White House to take this crisis seriously. Audits were conducted. Management changes were undertaken. And the necessity of serious reform was accepted—eventually.

I was proud to support bipartisan VA reform legislation that passed the Senate last month, and I am encouraged by the progress of the conference committee toward completing a final compromise that can pass Congress and be signed into law. The compromise legislation would introduce some much-needed accountability into the VA system and help increase patient choice. In fact, the compromise appears to include two initiatives I specifically pressed with the President's nominee to head the Veterans Affairs Department when I recently met with him.

One, I said we need to make it easier to fire VA bureaucrats who fail our veterans; and, two, I said we need to allow veterans to seek care outside the VA if they face long wait times or if they do not live near a VA facility.

The conference report, fortunately, appears to include both. I thank Senators BURR, MCCAIN, and COBURN for steadfastly fighting for the veterans choice part of the conference agreement that will allow our deserving veterans the option of accessing care in hospitals when VA facilities are not available.

As for the President's nominee to run the VA Bob McDonald, we all know he has a tough job ahead of him after his confirmation. I made clear my expectations for dramatic change when I met him. But if Mr. McDonald is willing to work in a collaborative and open manner with Congress—and I expect he will—he will find a constructive partner on this side of the aisle.

Look, we know there is much we can and should do to address this crisis together. So I am hopeful because when veterans are denied care, it is a priority deserving of bipartisan attention, and the government needs to start living up again to the promises it made to our veterans. We certainly owe them no less.

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION

Mr. President, Israel's military campaign against the terrorist organization Hamas has a clear-cut objective: to restore Israel's security by eliminating rockets, shut down these infiltration tunnels from which Hamas is launching its attacks against Israel, and, indeed, to demilitarize Gaza. That is Israel's objective.

This is clearly justified in the face of more than 2,300 rocket attacks into

Israel from Gaza since early July. I strongly support Israel's recent efforts through Operation Protective Edge to defend itself and to end the threat of additional rocket and infiltration attacks by Hamas. Operation Protective Edge also serves a larger purpose, and its resolution has broader implications for the future of the Palestinian people.

If Hamas declares victory by keeping its weapons stockpile, by continuing to undermine Israel's security, and by turning away from Egypt's efforts to forge a reasonable cease-fire, the net result will be a relative weakening of the Palestinian Authority and of those in the West Bank who have worked toward a peaceful resolution of the overall conflict.

So I support any effort which brings this campaign to an end in a manner that increases Israel's security. That means specifically that Hamas cannot be left with a large stockpile of missiles and rockets and cannot be left with infiltration tunnels. They must be destroyed. Hamas cannot be allowed to aggressively rest, refit, and build up a weapons stockpile. That weakens Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Here is what I oppose. I oppose any efforts—any efforts by the international community, especially the United Nations—to impose a cease-fire on Israel that does not meet these military objectives and that therefore risks actually rewarding Hamas for a campaign of terror and that seeks to make additional concessions to Hamas such as easing security along the borders of Gaza.

An unfavorable settlement, especially one that left the terrorist group Hamas with a stockpile of weaponry, would create incentives for Hamas to continue smuggling arms from Iran and, of course, to return to violence. An unfavorable settlement would also undermine the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, which has attempted to negotiate with Israel through peaceful means.

So let's be clear. The terror tactics employed by Hamas show contempt for human life, whether Israeli or Palestinian. By employing rockets and mortars as weapons of terror against Israel's civilian population or by using its own schools within Gaza as weapon depots, Hamas has shown a gross disregard for civilians.

The Prime Minister of Israel put it very well when he said: "[Israel] uses missiles to protect our people. They (Hamas) use their people to protect their missiles."

There is no moral equivalency—none whatsoever. These tactics should be loudly and widely condemned, and Israel's right to defend itself should be affirmed.

As I noted last week, Secretary Hagel wrote to the majority leader seeking urgent funding for components of the Iron Dome missile defense system. I and others support this request, as Iron Dome has afforded Israel some real pro-

tection from these indiscriminate rockets.

This morning some of my colleagues will further explain the importance of Iron Dome and the need for the Israeli Defense Forces to press on and finish the job in destroying the infiltration tunnels and weapons stockpiles. Republicans are united in our support of Israel's defense, and this morning my colleagues will explain our opposition to any effort to force a cease-fire on Israel that does not further its security objectives.

In a situation such as this, Israel only has one dependable friend. The United States should not be trying to pressure Israel to make a bad deal that leaves Hamas in a position to continue these attacks against Israeli civilians.

No one has been more active on this issue than my colleague from South Carolina. I see him on the floor now. Therefore, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12 noon, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, and the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I return the compliment to Senator McConnell from Kentucky, the Republican leader.

I have been here now since 2002. There is no better friend of the State of Israel than MITCH McCONNELL. He is the former chairman and ranking member of the foreign ops subcommittee on appropriations that deals with aid to the world—particularly Israel—and it was his idea to come to the floor today and have voices speak in support of Israel at a time when they need friends.

Friends are great to have. They are wonderful in good times. They are a necessity in bad times. Israel is going through some pretty bad times and so are the Palestinian people.

I wish to clearly make myself known. I have nothing against the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people to have their own country, to live in peace and prosperity by Israel. But they have to want it more than I do.

The Palestinian people are suffering. Children are being killed, and the most innocent people on the planet are children. It breaks all of our hearts to see them as a casualty of war.

But now is the time to be clear-eyed and focused as to what the problem

really is. The problem is very simple in many ways. Hamas is a terrorist organization in the eyes of the U.S. Government. Hamas should be a terrorist organization in the eyes of any decent person in the world.

What did they do? They have as their goal not a two-state solution but a one-state solution—the complete and utter destruction of the State of Israel. If you don't believe me, just check out their own charter. They have as their tactics using their own people and children as human shields to win a propaganda war.

When Israeli children are killed, it breaks Israel's heart. When Palestinian children are killed, it breaks the heart of all decent Palestinians, but Hamas sees it as a victory. They literally try to put women and children in harm's way to marginalize the ability of Israel to defend itself against two things.

The tunnels are something new in this fight. Forty-one tunnels have been discovered that go from the Gaza Strip—some into Israel itself—and yesterday five Israeli soldiers were killed by an attack that came from Hamas fighters that penetrated Israel through the tunnels.

So Senator McConnell is not only speaking for Republicans when he says the Senate stands firmly behind Israel's right to destroy the terrorist tunnels, but I think that is the body's view and Democrats' as well.

There is a resolution that is bipartisan in nature before the body, and I hope we can pass it before Thursday. In the resolved clause, it says the Senate opposes any efforts to impose a cease-fire that does not allow the Government of Israel to protect its citizens from threats posed by Hamas rockets and tunnels. That, I believe, is the view of the Senate in a bipartisan fashion.

Today, Republicans take the floor to clearly state where we stand in this conflict. We stand with Israel's right to defend itself against a terrorist organization called Hamas. We stand with the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations to have a better life. But until that day comes, we are going to be firmly in the Israeli camp to defend themselves, because what would we do as a nation if a neighboring nation dug tunnels under our border for the express purpose of kidnapping and killing our citizens. What would America do if one rocket coming from a neighboring nation fired indiscriminately to kill American citizens? We would respond in the most aggressive fashion, and we would have every right to do so.

As the minority leader stated, there is no moral equivalency. Israel tells you they are going to attack. Israel calls before the attack. Israel gives notice about an impending attack. Hamas secretly fires rockets, caring less where they land. Their hope is that it hits a kindergarten. That is their desire. And the only reason they have not been successful is because of the Iron Dome program that has been a collaboration between the United States and Israel for many years.