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Senate

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

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our help in ages past and our hope for years to come, as Baltimore, MD, descends into chaos and the death toll in Nepal rises, we come to You today in the assurance not of our feeble hold on You but of Your mighty grasp on us. Thank You for the beckoning glory and the fresh vigor of a new day.

Sustain our Senators in their work. May they trust in Your power as they strive to solve the vexing problems of our time. Lord, use them to ensure that justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. Strengthen them with Your might and fill them with the Spirit of Your love.

We pray in Your merciful 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The majority leader is recognized.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT REVIEW ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, every Republican and every Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee voted to approve the Iran

Nuclear Agreement Review Act. That 19-to-0 vote cleared the way for its consideration on the floor today.

This is an important debate in our country. At its heart, it turns on a central proposition: Do the American people, through the Members of Congress they elect, deserve a say in one of the most important issues of our time? For a long time, the answer from the White House seemed to be no. We have since seen a softening of that hard line, but that doesn't mean the fight for this bipartisan legislation has been won. I still expect to see a vigorous debate this week. I still expect to see a robust amendment process. And then, at the end of the day, the American people are right to expect their Senators—regardless of party—to stand for them by supporting a bill that is as sensible as it is bipartisan.

Preventing the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism from getting access to nuclear weapons should be the goal of our Senators no matter what party they belong to. The price of a bad agreement with Iran could be catastrophic.

Iran's nuclear program is only one aspect of its efforts to confront the West across the full spectrum of warfare: through public diplomacy, through its support for terrorism and proxies, through its missile capabilities, and through a modernization of its conventional forces. Iran is on the move in all of those areas. Any sanctions relief from a nuclear agreement would give Iran, actually, more funds to conduct these and other activities, so Congress needs to have a say.

Let's not forget that the American people were led to believe that the point of the White House negotiations with Iran were to end Iran's nuclear program and to prevent it from obtaining nuclear weapons. Congress and the American people were not told that this would be an exercise in granting Iran international permission to become a nuclear threshold state—just steps away from a nuclear weapon.

If that truly is how things have developed since, then the Members of this body and the people we represent need to be heard. The American people, through the representatives they elected, have a right to review, analyze, and pass their judgment on any agreement reached to ensure Americans are getting the kind of agreement they actually deserve.

Giving the American people a real voice on a topic of such vital importance should not be a partisan issue, and by passing the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, we can help ensure that it isn't.

Among other things, this bipartisan bill would require that any agreement reached with Iran be submitted for congressional review and for public examination. It would also provide the Congress elected by the people with the ability to approve or disapprove of any Iran deal before congressional sanctions are removed.

In short, the point of this bill is to give the elected representatives of the American people the tools to assess any agreement reached by the administration before congressional sanctions are lifted. Those crippling sanctions—which include bipartisan sanctions authored by Senator KIRK that passed 100 to 0, over the White House's objections—are one of the most important reasons we even got Iran to the table in the first place. So the United States should not give up that leverage now if it means bringing home an agreement that does not meet American national security interests or one that simply passes on dealing with the Iranian nuclear program to the next administration.

The point of these negotiations should be to secure an agreement strong enough on its own merits to pass muster with Congress and with the American people.

Congress had the correct judgment to impose bipartisan sanctions over White House objections a few years back.

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



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Congress would now have the correct judgment to insist that its Members and the Americans each of us represent be considered in this critically important conversation. Passing the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act is key to ensuring that happens, and in the process of doing so, we will ensure that the voices of all Americans are heard with the kind of robust amendment process I mentioned on the floor last week.

In that vein, we appreciate the Democratic leader's comments about an open amendment process where, no matter how a person feels about this bill, they will have an opportunity to offer amendments. I appreciate his supportive comments, and we encourage Senators to come to the floor today and to offer their amendments.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT REVIEW ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I express my appreciation publicly—I have done so privately—for the good work done by Senator CORKER and Senator CARDIN, the chairman and ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee. They have done remarkably good work and exemplary work for us. Getting consensus on anything in the Senate is very hard. In spite of the monumental task they faced, the chair and ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CORKER and Senator CARDIN, were able to do just that with their Iran legislation. These two good Senators have worked very hard to find a middle ground that satisfies both Congress and the administration. I think they have done that.

The Corker-Cardin bill allows Congress to vote on a final agreement. It also provides for immediate reinstatement of the sanctions should Iran breach the terms of the agreement. After weeks of bipartisan negotiations, the Foreign Relations Committee reported the Corker-Cardin legislation with a unanimous 19-to-0 vote.

I, along with many of my Senate Democratic colleagues, support this legislation. In fact, I think all Democrats would support this legislation. Senators CORKER and CARDIN worked very hard to strike a very delicate balance. Now we must protect that delicate balance by working together to avoid major changes that could imperil the success of the bill.

I hope we can move forward with the same spirit of bipartisanship that got us here and bring the bill to a vote as quickly as possible. However, a number of my Republican colleagues stated publicly, in their efforts to be the Republican nominee for President, what they want to do with this bill. I am concerned that they and others want to

use this good, bipartisan piece of legislation as a platform for their political ambitions. This bill is too important to be a pawn in anyone's political game. I have told Senator CORKER and Senator CARDIN that I will support their efforts to preserve their work.

As we move forward, I am hoping we can all work together in the bipartisan spirit in which this bill was crafted and keep our eyes on the ultimate goal of preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

Having said that, I am very concerned about some statements made by my friend, the vote counter for the Senate Republicans, the senior Senator from Texas. He said in Politico—I am not going to state his full quote but basically enough to get the idea:

Some of 'em might pass. I think it's going to be an interesting dance. . . . There are some that are interesting, that will be hard to vote against.

This is a bill which was brought to the Senate floor on a bipartisan basis. We should continue on that basis. It shouldn't be up to Democrats to kill these vexatious amendments; we should get some help from our Republican colleagues.

I look forward to this debate. It is important for the country. It is important for the world. I am grateful for the work done by those two good Senators. I just hope it is not maligned, messed up, and denigrated as a result of political posturing.

THE BUDGET

Mr. REID. Mr. President, when I first came to the Senate and when I served in the House, conference committees were an important part of the business we did here in Congress. But in recent years—very recent years—going to conference hasn't been what it used to be.

Going to conference on a piece of legislation used to mean there would be serious discussions and compromises that generally produced a product that could be supported by Members of both parties. It was a real conference. Democrats sat down with Republicans and in a public forum determined what should happen on that bill.

I can remember going to those conferences. They were tough, they were long, and there were a lot of compromises made. But that is what legislation is—the art of compromise. When we finished, we had a product that was supported by both parties.

That is why we used to do appropriations bills like that. Why? As an example, Senator Domenici and I for many years were the chairman and ranking member of a very important subcommittee, energy and water. It was very important, billions and billions of dollars. We did our work as a subcommittee, but then we were able to meet and work these out in conference. That is why we came to the floor. We did the bill in a few hours because everyone had had their input.

Sadly, under a Republican House and a Republican Senate, that is no longer

the case. Here is an example: the budget conference resolution. There is all the chest-beating and flexing of muscles in the press. The Republicans have a budget. They worked and worked and got it done. They finished the conference.

The Republican majorities in the House and the Senate don't even bother to show that there is a bipartisan consensus building; they just do it. Any meetings that have been had on this bill with Democrats have been strictly for show.

There is no discussion. There is no public debate. There is nothing done. It is Republicans in the House and Republicans in the Senate meeting together. I would bet that the conferences even between the House and the Senate were done mainly by the two chairs of the committees. Not a word of input on this bill—not a word of input on this bill from Democrats. It is no conference. The party already knows what they want; they are not interested in our ideas.

Forbes magazine—I don't quote Forbes magazine very often for obvious reasons. It is a very conservative news outlet, but listen to what they said, and I quote verbatim:

This will not be the start of a period of bipartisanship when it comes to budget issues. To the contrary, the budget resolution conference report that will likely be voted on this week will solely become a product of what the Republican majorities in the House and Senate wanted to do. There was little-to-no effort to involve Democrats in the negotiations because the leadership would risk losing GOP votes in both houses by doing so. They also would have risked alienating the GOP base, much of which continues to believe a compromise with congressional Democrats and the Obama administration is the political equivalent of collaborating with the enemy.

How about that; every word of this is true. It is so sad for our country when working across party lines is considered collaborating with the enemy.

I have said here on the floor many times, and I will say it again: When Obama was elected the first time, Republicans gathered here in Washington—a couple of days the meeting took, and it has been written up a lot of times—and they made two conclusions. They came to two conclusions: No. 1, we are not going to have Obama reelected. They failed miserably with that. But on the second thing they have been successful; that is, they would oppose anything and everything President Obama wanted. They have done that now for 6½ years.

What a sad day for our country.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my friend, the senior Senator from South Dakota, be recognized as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

Mr. REID. Prior to recognizing my colleague, would the Chair note the business for the day.