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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.

Father of all, give us Your wisdom in these challenging times. May Your wisdom ignite within us reverential awe for You. Inspired by Your wisdom, help our Senators to strive to ensure that their thoughts, words, and deeds glorify You. May our lawmakers not forget that You are an ever-present help for turbulent times, eager to deliver those who call on Your Holy Name.

Lord, sustain us with Your might that we will live free from fear. Mighty God, salvation belongs to You. Continue to shower us with Your blessings.

We pray in Your majestic 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.

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, I asked the Obama administration to step back from the Iran negotiations, press pause, and reexamine the point of having the talks in the first place. That would have been the most rational and reasonable approach for the White House to take, especially considering that its own allies in the

Senate were using phrases such as “deeply worrying” to describe the direction of the talks.

But instead of taking the time to re-examine basic objectives with its partners and agree on the nonnegotiable elements of any deal—things such as anytime, anywhere inspections, complete disclosure of previous military-related nuclear research, and phased relief of sanctions tied to Iranian compliance—the White House acquiesced instead to artificial deadline after artificial deadline and opportunity after opportunity for Iran to press for additional concessions along the way.

The result is the comprehensive nuclear agreement announced today. Given what we do know so far, it appears that Republicans and Democrats were right to be deeply worried about the direction of these talks.

It seems Americans in both parties were right to fear that a deal inked by the White House would further the flawed elements of April’s interim agreement, that it would aim at the best deal acceptable to Iran rather than one that might actually end Iran’s nuclear program. Remember, ending Iran’s nuclear program was supposed to be the point of these talks in the first place. What is already clear about this agreement is that it will not achieve or even come close to achieving that original purpose.

Instead, the Iranians appear to have prevailed in this negotiation, maintaining thousands of centrifuges, enriching their threshold nuclear capability instead of ending it, reaping a multibillion-dollar windfall to spend freely on terrorism, dividing our Western allies and negotiating partners, some of whom will undoubtedly sell arms to Iran, and gaining legitimacy before the world.

This was an entirely predictable result—in fact, the most predictable result given the administration’s stance. As noted back in 2012, here is what I said: “The only way the Iranian regime

can be expected to negotiate to preserve its own survival rather than to simply delay as a means of pursuing nuclear weapons is if the administration imposes the strictest sanctions while at the same time enforcing a firm, declaratory policy that reflects a commitment to the use of force.”

But, no, the administration never did that. Instead, it relied upon train-and-equip programs instead of forward presence, emphasized special operations forces in economy of force efforts, pursued a drawdown from Iraq and Afghanistan based on timelines, not battlefield conditions, and executed a drawdown of our conventional and nuclear forces and a withdrawal of those forces by both attrition and redeployment. Through actions such as these and by eschewing any declaratory policy toward Iran, the President made clear to the world, contrary to his rhetoric, that all options were not on the table. All options were simply not on the table. Knowing this, the Iranians never feared for their survival—of course, the survival of their regime being their No. 1 goal. And so we have the deal we have today.

It appears we have lost the chance to dismantle Iran’s nuclear program and that will now become a challenge for the next President to confront, regardless of political party. But the Senate has yet to receive the final text of the agreement. We will not come to a final judgment until we do. The country deserves a thorough and fair review right here in the Senate, and that is just what we intend to pursue.

Committees will be holding hearings, witnesses will be coming to testify, and then Congress will approve or disapprove the deal in accordance with the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act.

The test of the agreement should be this. Will it leave our country and our allies safer? Will this agreement leave our country and our allies safer?

There are several things we will be looking at in particular as we weigh

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whether it will, and here are a few of them: Will the agreement allow for anytime, anywhere inspections of military installations and research and development facilities?

Will the agreement compel the Iranians to disclose the possible military dimensions of their nuclear program?

Will the agreement make any real impact on Iran's ability to continue researching and developing advanced centrifuges?

Will the agreement's sanctions relief be tied to Iran's strict adherence to the terms of the deal, and will we have any real way to verify its compliance?

These parameters will also help us determine just how successful the Iranians have been in extracting concessions from the White House. So we will be examining them very closely.

I will remind colleagues of the deadly seriousness of the issue at hand. This should not be about some political legacy project. This is not some game either.

It is certainly not the time for more tired, obviously untrue talking points about the choice here between a bad deal and war. No serious person would believe that is true. Even the people saying these things have to know they are not true, and they probably know that the very opposite is, in fact, more likely. So the country doesn't have time to waste on more White House messaging exercises when the seriousness of the moment calls for intellectually honest debate. The choices made today are sure to affect our country for years—probably decades—to come.

The future we leave to our children is at issue as well. The Senate should engage in serious consideration of what faces us in the years ahead. I invite every Democrat and every Republican to join us in that critical conversation. Our country deserves no less. What we must decide now is whether this is really the right time to be reducing pressure on the world's leading state sponsor of terror and for what in return. We already know what the Quds Force is capable of under the sanctions regime. What will Iran's support of terrorism look like with the additional funding obtained from sanctions relief?

Let's not forget that Iran is pursuing a full-spectrum campaign to expand its sphere of influence and undermine American security and standing in the region. Iran's continued support of terrorism and its determination to expand ballistic missile and conventional military capabilities should be gravely concerning to each of us. They certainly are to me. They pose significant challenges to our country and President Obama's successor.

This comes on top of the many other threats that challenge our country today and into the future from groups such as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and ISIL to increasingly aggressive regimes in Moscow and Beijing. A bad deal won't make any of those threats go away. Pretending otherwise isn't going to make us safer. A bad deal will

only ensure that Iran has more funding to threaten us with renewed vigor. It will only ensure that Iran expands its stockpile of missiles and that it strengthens terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah, the Houthi insurgents in Yemen, and the Assad regime in Syria.

In fact, here is a Reuters headline from this morning. Listen to this: "Syria's Assad sees more Iranian support after nuclear deal." That is the reaction from the Syrian regime. "Syria's Assad sees more Iranian support after the nuclear deal."

Look, the White House needs to know that the Congress elected by the people is prepared to do anything it can to make America safer. We want to work collaboratively with the President to advance that goal, but if we have to work against a bad agreement to do so—a flawed deal that threatens our country and our allies—I assure you, we will.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Democratic leader is recognized.

NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I issued a statement earlier this morning. Today's historic accord is the result of years of hard work by President Obama and his administration. The world community agrees that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable and a threat to our national security, to the safety of Israel, and to the stability of the whole Middle East. Now it is incumbent on the Congress to review this agreement with a thoughtful, level-headed process and to give this agreement the review it deserves.

EDUCATION BILL AND APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in the Chamber this morning we have the chairman of the education committee, a man for whom I have the utmost respect. He is a person who understands education. He was the Governor of the State of Tennessee. He was the Secretary of Education, and he has been an outstanding Senator.

But something occurred last night that I think is really outside the specter of reasonableness. Cloture was filed on the education bill last night, meaning we are going to have a vote on it tomorrow morning.

We have worked on a few amendments, and basically all of them could have been accepted with voice votes. There was not a single difficult amendment that was brought up. So now cloture is being sought, and in the process, ignoring Democratic amendments that we have been waiting to offer for some time now. We are not going to allow cloture to succeed unless we have

a pathway forward on these amendments.

The ranking member of the committee, the senior Senator from Washington, knows this. She has talked with the chairman of the committee about this, and we are going to have to have a reasonable time to debate those amendments and have votes on those amendments. Otherwise, we are not going to complete this bill. It is an important bill. We should complete the bill.

Senate Democrats have said for months that Republicans are running a sham on the appropriations process. From the very beginning, the Republicans have proceeded with an appropriations process that is designed to fail. They moved forward bills they know Democrats cannot support. Republican leaders in Congress simply have shown no interest in funding our government in a fair and responsible manner.

This past week, even we were surprised how House Republican leadership has handled the appropriations process. Republicans brought their interior and environment appropriations bill before the House for debate. This legislation is nothing short of a disaster. In fact, the bill that they brought to the floor is so bad that President Obama has made it clear already that it will be vetoed.

What does it do? It strangles the Environmental Protection Agency's budget, cutting it by 9 percent, \$700 million. It prohibits completion and implementation of pollution standards for dirty powerplants to address climate change. It cuts funding for State drinking water infrastructure. It cuts funding for National Parks.

We have such an infrastructure deficit in our National Park System that it is a crying shame. Yet they cut more from this program. We are the envy of the rest of the world with our national parks, but with how the Republicans have treated this wonderful system of parks we have, they are really being depleted. It allows corporations to shift costs of their toxic waste bills to taxpayers.

We have had for decades a very successful program to clean up these very, very dirty spills dealing with chemicals and other substances that shouldn't be on the ground. It is called Superfund. What it does is make sure that these environmental disasters are paid for by the people who created the disaster. What does the House do on this? They change this and say: No, we are not going to have the people that messed up the environment clean it up; we are going to have the taxpayers clean it up. That is wrong.

This bill that was in the House last week blocks hydraulic fracking rules for public lands designed to provide transparency and protect communities that host oil and gas drilling. Rules for public lands, not private lands—they eliminate that.

Those are only a small number of the devastating provisions the Republicans