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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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.

Almighty God, as bombs fall in Syria and refugees seek safety, may all who are oppressed look to You. In spite of our world's turbulence, we continue to proclaim Your greatness for Your sovereignty will prevail. Free us from fear. Answer when we call. Shelter us from disappointment.

Bless our Senators. Lord, fill them with the Spirit of Your wisdom, making them equal to challenges of this difficult season of our national and world history. Open their minds to comprehend Your wisdom, their ears to hear Your guidance, and their hearts to obey Your biddings.

Lift the light of Your countenance upon all who seek You and give them Your peace.

We pray in Your mighty 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. HELLER). The majority leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY AND SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS AND VETERANS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, with each passing day, the American

people are reminded of the peril attached to the Obama administration's inflexible determination to conduct foreign policy based on campaign promises made in 2008. These goals—unilaterally withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan based on fixed deadlines, ending the war on terror and some of the critical tools used to pursue Al Qaeda, closing the secure detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, withdrawing from our deployed forward presence, slashing investment in our conventional armed services, and pursuing nuclear agreements with Russia and Iran at any cost—have remained constant, although the world has changed right in front of our Commander in Chief.

Yesterday we saw the Obama administration threaten to veto the national Defense authorization bill, which recently passed the Senate by a large bipartisan majority of 71 to 25. It passed the House by a big bipartisan margin as well.

This is the legislation that sets out military policy and authorizes funds for our military each year. It is always one of the most important bills we consider every year, but it is especially important right now.

The number of threats currently facing us is truly staggering. The last month and week have brought glaring reminders. We are now seeing Russian forces deploy to Syria to preserve the Assad regime. Although Moscow may try to call this some kind of counter-terrorism campaign, let's be perfectly clear: Russia's offensive is designed to protect Assad's Alawite stronghold and Russian military installations, while driving out the moderate opposition and compelling coordination of Syrian airspace with the coalition. Russia aims to forcefully insert itself into the middle of coalition operations to gain insights into the plans of the United States and, of course, to secure a seat at the table. Meanwhile, our moderate Syrian allies stand appalled that the

United States has ceded its leadership position in the broader Middle East.

Of all the promises made by this administration, withdrawing from Afghanistan by a date certain seems to ignore the attack upon Kunduz by the Taliban and the efforts of President Ghani to secure the gains of the coalition and his country's future. How can the administration be pondering a withdrawal of the force when the Taliban's offensive persists and the campaign against Al Qaeda has not yet achieved its defeat?

So many threats face us—from Russia, Iran, Syria, ISIL, and even China—as do so many different means of attack: conventional, cyber, or terror. And now the Obama administration is talking about vetoing America's national defense bill. They are talking about vetoing the national defense bill in the wake of all of this.

I will have more to say about the national defense bill in the coming days. But this is about more than one bill; it is the latest in an increasingly worrying pattern. Just last week, Democrats voted again to block funding for our military. Democrats had voted for that military funding bill in committee. They issued press releases praising the bill they had supported in the Appropriations Committee, but then they blocked the Senate from even debating it. Now they appear ready to give the same treatment to our veterans. Democrats voted for the veterans funding bill in committee. They issued press releases praising the bill. But now they seem prepared to block the Senate from even debating this bill too. It is all part of some half-baked Democratic scheme to get more money for the IRS and for Washington bureaucracies. It makes no sense, it is extreme, and it needs to stop.

The veterans funding bill before us would do right by the men and women who have given everything to protect us and who have suffered so much

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



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under the failings of this administration. This is the bill that supports veterans by funding the health care and the benefits they rely on. This is the bill. This is the bill that supports military families by funding the housing, schools, and health facilities that serve them.

The veterans legislation before us provides support for women's health, for medical research, and for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury. It provides funding for design work at a new VA medical center in Louisville, for educational facilities at Fort Knox, and for a special operations headquarters at Fort Campbell, all in my State.

The bill contains important reforms aimed at supporting veterans in the wake of a true national disgrace—the VA scandal. The reforms funded in this bill will allow for greater national and regional progress in reducing VA claim backlogs, and they will deploy important protections for whistleblowers too.

Look, we need to remember that we have an all-volunteer force in this country. The young men and women who sign up to defend our Nation don't ask for a lot, but our Nation certainly asks a lot of them. These heroes shouldn't have to worry that their benefits or health care or the housing and support their families need might not be there.

There is a long tradition in the Senate of bipartisan support for our troops, our veterans, and their families. We saw that bipartisan tradition on full display just a few months ago when Republicans and Democrats came together in the Appropriations Committee to pass bipartisan legislation to fund our troops and support our veterans.

We ask a lot of the men and women who serve. They don't need a bigger IRS or political games like the Democrats' self-described filibuster summer; they need our care and our support. It is our turn to give back to them. Why don't we get back to the bipartisan tradition of supporting these bills so we can do what we need to do for our veterans.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY, BENGHAZI SELECT COMMITTEE, AND THE NEED FOR BIPARTISAN NEGOTIATIONS

MR. REID. Mr. President, it is hard for me, when I come here every day, to be patient and listen to my friend the Republican leader talk because he is talking about something that is not real. He is not talking about reality. He wants to get back to the bipartisan way we used to do things. I certainly agree with him, but having looked at

some 600 filibusters during the last few years conducted by my Republican friends, I think that speaks volumes.

To have the Republican leader come to the floor and criticize Obama about what is going on in the Middle East—that takes a lot of gall. We all know what happened in the Middle East a number of years ago that created all these problems. It was the worst foreign policy mistake in the history of our country—invading Iraq. For what? Look what we have now in Iraq. Look what we have in the entire Middle East. So it takes a lot of rearranging facts for the Republican leader to come to the floor every day—most days I just sit here, listen, and go on about my business, but I can't do that. It is just unfair. Everyone knows we need to look no further than President Bush's invasion of Iraq to find out what the real problem is in the Middle East.

He talks about the Defense authorization bill. If it is such a great piece of legislative action, why does all of our military think it is a bad deal? This would be as if you decided one day you are going to make your house payment and your car payment with money that doesn't exist. That is what they have done. That is what the Republicans have done. They have \$39 billion in the Defense authorization bill that doesn't exist. It is just on paper. It is a gimmick for short-term funding. And to have the audacity to come here and talk about—look at all the threats we are having with cyber security, cyber threats. We have a cyber bill we have tried to get on this floor. The Republicans blocked it when they were in the minority. Now when they are in the majority, they won't do a bill, period.

We have an order that is before this body now that allows us to go forward on cyber security. We already have a list of amendments to agree on. But the Republican leader won't bring it to the floor. To have him come to this floor and complain of Obama not doing anything about cyber—I would suggest my friend, every morning when he gets up, walk into the bathroom, put a little water on his face, wake up, and look in the mirror.

I will talk about this a little more in a minute, but I want to start what I have to say right now by reading a direct quote from the current House majority leader, and we are told he is going to be the next Speaker of the House of Representatives. Listen to this one, speaking about the Benghazi committee. This is what Congressman McCARTHY told FOX News:

Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi select committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping.

I might add, the person doing the interviewing—good job.

But there you have it. According to the odds-on favorite future Speaker of the House, the Benghazi select committee was put together to hurt Hillary Clinton politically, to make her

poll numbers drop. We have been saying this all along, but we have now had a gaffe. But it wasn't a slipup; he just told the truth. This is evidence of what we have been saying. The Benghazi committee is a political stunt meant to influence Presidential elections that will be coming up in about a year. It is no surprise that Congressman McCARTHY's own colleagues are now backpedaling on his comments as fast as they possibly can. Their elections will be in 1 week. They better take a look at whom they are going to put in as Speaker. The Republicans have taken a national tragedy—four Americans were killed—and turned it into the cheapest political farce imaginable. This is a shame. The very notion that an official House committee was used as a political tool is appalling. Even more disgraceful is the fact that they spent almost \$5 million on this select committee—dollars spent on this rightwing political hatchet job.

That is not all. In addition to this select committee, they have had six other committees investigating this. There are untold millions of dollars spent on this. Whose money are they spending? They are spending taxpayer dollars.

We hear my friend make references to how bad it is that we are concerned about nondefense stuff. Yes, we are. We are concerned about nondefense stuff. We think the nondefense part of this budget should also get some recognition. We are concerned about the FBI and the Federal court system. We are concerned about the Drug Enforcement Administration and all the immigration officials who need help. We are concerned about our forests that are burning down. We are concerned about the situation we have where we don't have enough money to build our highways or to repair our highways. Yes, we are concerned about that and rightfully so. To have a secure nation is more than having a lot of bombs and bullets and airplanes and tanks and ships. It is also having a population that is educated.

We sent a letter to Speaker BOEHNER asking that the Benghazi Select Committee be disbanded. Get rid of it. It is a disgrace. Do the right thing; get rid of this.

Senate Republicans are stuck in a deep rut. They have dug this hole. They are in it, and they don't know how to get out of it. The Republican leader continues bringing bills to the Senate floor that have no chance of passing. We have things out there we could be doing.

Four months ago we said to the Republican leader: Why don't we sit down and try to work something out on this budget for the long term. We have been ignored. They have ignored the need for a consensus budget framework and instead are trying to move a flawed appropriations bill based on the Republicans' partisan budget. The Senate spoke and, of course, the bill didn't advance.