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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.

Eternal God, our Strength, thank You for Your providential love. Today give our Senators the wisdom to do what is right. Enlighten their minds with Your truth as You warm their hearts with Your love. Lord, fill their lives with Your power that they may accomplish Your purposes. Make them so aware of Your presence that they will remember that wherever they are and whatever they do, You see them. May they feel nothing but to grieve You and seek nothing except to please You.

We pray in Your Holy 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. PAUL). The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2146

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due a second reading.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2146) to hold sanctuary jurisdictions accountable for defying Federal law, to increase penalties for individuals who illegally reenter the United States after being removed, and to provide liability protection for State and local law enforcement who cooperate with Federal law enforcement and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY RELIEF ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, before I speak on the legislation the Senate will consider this afternoon, I want to say a few words about S. 1300, the Adoptive Family Relief Act. I spoke on this bill in July after it passed the Senate with unanimous consent. Now I would like to praise the House of Representatives for passing this important piece of legislation just yesterday.

The issue this bill addresses is of particular importance to me, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the legislation. More than 400 American families, approximately 20 of them from Kentucky, have successfully adopted children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or the DRC. However, due to the DRC Government's years-long suspension of exit permits, many of these families have been unable to bring their adoptive children home to the United States.

To make matters worse, families have been financially burdened by the cost of continually renewing their children's visas while they wait for the day the DRC decides to lift its suspension. In an attempt to help these families, the Adoptive Family Relief Act would provide meaningful financial relief by granting the State Department authority to waive the fees for multiple visa renewals in these and other extraordinary adoption circumstances.

This bill builds on Congress' bipartisan efforts on the adoption issue, including my amendment to this year's budget resolution to encourage a solution to the situation as well as numerous bipartisan congressional letters sent to Congolese officials.

Later today I will have the opportunity to meet with the Brock family from Owensboro. I was grateful to assist in the return of their medically fragile child from the DRC last Christmas. However, their other adopted son still remains in the country.

For this Kentucky family, and for many others still waiting, I again strongly urge the Government of the DRC to resolve the matter expeditiously and in a way that provides for the swift unification of families. Until then, I want to praise the bipartisan action that led to the passage of the Adoptive Family Relief Act. I hope families see this as a message that Congress is supporting them.

This bill will now go to the President for his signature. It is my hope it will bring needed assistance to so many loving families, like the Brocks, who want nothing more than to open their homes to a child in need.

Allow me to also thank the sponsors of this bill, Senators FEINSTEIN and JOHNSON and Representative TRENT FRANKS, for all their hard work. That thanks extends as well to the 78 other cosponsors in both Chambers and both parties, along with the Senate and House judiciary committees for their hard work and truly bipartisan commitment to solving this heartbreakingly issue.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter before the Senate this afternoon, I was glad to see the Senate come together yesterday to advance the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act. This bipartisan Defense bill will support our men and

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



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women in uniform in many, many ways.

The bill attacks bureaucratic waste, authorizes pay raises, and improves quality-of-life programs for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. It will strengthen sexual assault prevention and response. It will help wounded warriors and heroes who struggle with mental health challenges. Most importantly, it will equip the men and women who serve with what they need to defend our Nation.

The chairman of the Committee on Armed Services was unrelenting in his work across the aisle to craft a serious defense bill with input from both parties. Senator McCAIN can and should take pride in yesterday's 73-to-26 vote to advance this bill. He should take heart in today's vote to send it to the President as well.

That is where this legislative process should end—with the President's signature, with a win for our forces, and with a win for our country at a time of seemingly incalculable global crises. But the White House has issued threats that the President might actually veto this bipartisan bill for unrelated partisan reasons. That would be more than outrageous—truly outrageous, Mr. President. It would be yet another grave foreign policy miscalculation from this administration, something our country can no longer afford.

Just a year ago, the President announced a strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL. Today, the threat remains as versatile and resilient as ever. ISIL has consolidated its gains within Iraq and within Syria. Russia is now deploying troops and attacking the moderate opposition forces in Syria. Iran is reportedly sending additional forces to the battlefield. Civilians are dying and refugees are fleeing.

John Kerry calls the situation “a catastrophe, a human catastrophe really unparalleled in modern times.” He is right.

According to news reports, this is all forcing the President to reconsider his strategy in that region and craft a new one. Regardless of what he decides, it is going to be a protracted area of struggle. It has been profoundly challenging already. That is to say nothing of the countless other mounting global threats, from Chinese expansion in the south China Sea to Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan.

Many Americans would say this is the worst possible time for an American President to be threatening to veto their national defense bill, and especially to do so for arbitrary partisan reasons. I wish I could say it surprises me that President Obama might, for the sake of unrelated partisan games, actually contemplate vetoing a bipartisan defense bill that contains the level of funding authorization that he actually asked for. Let me say that again. This bill contains the funding authorization the President asked for. So I am calling on him not to, especially in times like these, but if he

does, it will be the latest sorry chapter in a failed foreign policy based on campaign promises rather than realistically meeting the threat before us.

The President's approach to foreign policy has been nothing if not consistent over the past 7 years. I have described this in detail many times before. From repeatedly seeking to declare some arbitrary end to the war on terror, to discarding the tools we have to wage it, to placing unhealthy levels of trust in unaccountable international organizations, the President's foreign policy has been as predictable as it has been ineffectual.

Take, for instance, his heavy reliance on economy-of-force train-and-assist missions. This has been the primary tool of the President to cover our drawdown of conventional forces. The train-and-equip concept is to train indigenous forces to battle insurgencies in places such as Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These forces ideally partner with U.S. capabilities, but under the President's policy, they have been left to fight alone as we continue to draw down our conventional forces.

The essence of this was captured in a speech he delivered at West Point just last May. In that speech the President described a network of partnerships from South Asia to Sahel to be funded by \$5 billion in counterterrorism funds. By deploying Special Operations Forces for train-and-equip missions, the President hoped to manage the diffuse threats posed by terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Boko Haram, the al-Nusra Front, the Taliban, Libyan terrorist networks that threaten Egypt, and, of course, ISIL.

The President never explained the strategy—beyond direct action such as unmanned vehicle aerial strikes—for those cases when indigenous forces proved insufficient, as we have seen in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Nevertheless, this concept of operations suited the President because it allowed him to continue with force structure cuts to our conventional operational units. It allowed him to continue refusing to accept that leaving behind residual forces in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan might represent a means by which this Nation could preserve the strategic gains made through sacrifice. It also allowed him to continue refusing to rebuild our conventional and nuclear forces.

This was never, never an approach designed for success. Today it is clear this is now an approach that has also reached its limits.

The New York Times is hardly an adversary of this administration, but it recently ran a story titled “Billions From U.S. Fail to Sustain Foreign Forces.” Once again, this is the New York Times. Here is what it said:

With alarming frequency in recent years, thousands of American-trained security forces in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia have collapsed, stalled or defected, calling into question the effective-

ness of the tens of billions of dollars spent by the U.S. on foreign military training programs, as well as a central tenet of the Obama administration's approach to combating insurgencies.

Without rebuilding the force, we cannot deter China's efforts to extend its conventional reach in the South China Sea. Without rebuilding the force, we cannot deter Russian adventurism in places such as Crimea. Without rebuilding and deploying the force, we cannot hope to deter Russia's gambit to increase its Middle East presence or its air campaign in Syria. And under this strategy, when the host nation militaries we trained and equipped proved inadequate to defeat the insurgency in question, the strategy allowed for a persistent, enduring terrorist threat in those countries. That is just what we have seen with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with the Taliban, and now with ISIL.

I thought the growth, advance, and evolution of ISIL last year would have presented a turning point for the President. I thought the fall of Anbar Province and the threat posed to allies such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey would have provoked a reconsideration of his entire national security policy, but it didn't. If the latest stories of White House efforts to revise its ISIL strategy are to be believed, then perhaps the President now finally realizes the threat from terrorist groups like ISIL and Al Qaeda have outpaced his economy-of-force concept. He may even be accepting the reality that withdrawing arbitrarily from Afghanistan is neither consequence-free nor is it a good idea.

One year after the President's ISIL speech, it is time to reverse the withdrawal of our military from its forward presence. It is time to lay the groundwork for the next President to rebuild America's credibility with friend and foe alike. That is true of ISIL and it is true of dissatisfied powers such as Russia, China, and Iran, who are all looking to exploit American withdrawal in pursuit of regional hegemony and dreams of empire.

To paraphrase the President: Russia is calling, and it wants its empire back. Russia wants its empire back. China is calling, too, and so is Iran. They have watched as both our economy-of-force efforts to mask American withdrawal and as other U.S. commitments have proven quite hollow—like the announcement of a strategic pivot to Asia, without the investments to make it meaningful. The next President, regardless of party, will need to craft plans, policies, and programs to balance against expansion. Signing the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act we pass today—and of course matching the authorization with its corresponding funding—would represent a good first step along that path. If the President is serious in his just-restated commitment to taking all steps necessary to combat ISIL,

then he will know that signing this bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act is anything but the waste of time some of his allies might pretend it to be. In fact, this bill is essential.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL AND BENGHAZI SELECT COMMITTEE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the bill before the Senate this afternoon, in spite of all the statements of my friend the Republican leader, is another piece of political theater. Everyone knows the President is going to veto this. Everyone knows this. The House, if they are called upon first to sustain the veto, will do it. If we are called upon first to sustain the veto, we will do it.

Republicans are trying to paint Democrats as being soft on defense. Based on what we have heard from my friend today, I don't know where he doesn't want American troops—China, Iran, Russia, all over the Middle East. It is stunning to listen to what he has said. We have spent a lot of money training foreign troops. I was in Iraq. Who was training the troops then? General Petraeus. I don't know what my friend wants, but I do tell everyone the gimmick we have in this bill today; that is, having this funny money funding and that is what it is—I can't imagine my Republican friends who have in the past been so supportive of not doing things that deal with funny money, that their—Senator McCAIN, the chairman of the committee, has acknowledged that sequestration will destroy the military—that is my word—but will badly damage the military. He has said that many times.

So we have a lot of problems here, but the gimmick my friend is so touting today does nothing to support the security we need at home: The FBI, homeland security, border protection. I say to my friend, the Presiding Officer, today: You voted the way I thought Republicans should vote when this matter came before the body yesterday.

It has been a week since it happened, but the American people are still reeling from House Majority Leader KEVIN McCARTHY's admission that the so-called Benghazi Select Committee is nothing more than a political hit job on Hillary Clinton. That is what he said. Speaking about this committee, he told FOX News:

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

It doesn't take much to figure out the point he was making; that this was nothing more than a hit job on Hillary Clinton. According to Mr. McCARTHY, the so-called Benghazi Select Com-

mittee was orchestrated with one goal in mind—to weaken Hillary Clinton's Presidential campaign. Of course that is shameful. House Republicans have used the tragic deaths of four Americans as political fodder to win an election. Don't the victims deserve better? Don't their families deserve not to have their deceased loved ones pulled into a political inquisition?

Even more shocking, this political farce continues now. House Republicans are showing no signs of bringing this charade to an end. Consider the facts. These are a number of the select committees that have been going on that we have had in the Congress in recent years: Hurricane Katrina, Pearl Harbor, Warren Commission, Iran-Contra, Watergate, and the Benghazi Committee. This big red line sitting here shows this committee has spent far more time than any committee except Watergate. Look at that. It is hard to believe. For 16 months now we have used the tragic deaths in a way that is not what we should be doing. They have spent almost \$5 million of taxpayer money on this so-called select committee, and the number continues to climb as I speak. Not only do they have a select committee, they have had six other committees that have held hearings on this. What a waste of taxpayer dollars. The select committee has investigated Hillary Clinton for 17 months, 517 days—longer than the investigations that I mentioned: Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, and even, timewise, Watergate—close but still more time than on Watergate, and it is still going on. What have they accomplished? What have they achieved after all that time and money has been spent? What have they accomplished for the American people? Nothing. And they have held three hearings in 17 months. Not one American is safer today because of the select committee, not one terrorist attack has been thwarted because of the committee's work, and Republicans are fine with that. They hail the Benghazi committee as a success because it was never the panel's intention to get to the truth. This committee's only real objective was to hurt Hillary Clinton—exactly as Congressman McCARTHY said. The evidence makes that clear. In 17 months, the committee has interviewed or deposed eight Clinton campaign staffers. They are obsessed with Hillary Clinton and her campaign status. Yet, stunningly, Chairman Gowdy and Republicans have little interest in questioning intelligence and defense experts. They have held only one hearing with an expert from the intelligence community. They have never held a single hearing with anyone from the Department of Defense. The Republican chairman and his colleagues have abandoned their plans to interview Defense officials and instead have gone after Secretary Clinton and her staff. The evidence is clear. The Benghazi Select Committee is a sham. Democrats have known this for 2 years, but now

we have the man who is going to be—I understand after tomorrow at noon—running the House of Representatives come November 1. He has acknowledged it is a witch hunt. That is why the Democratic leadership of the Senate wrote to Speaker BOEHNER asking him to disband the select committee. That is why I will not stop reminding Republicans of Congressman McCARTHY's admission.

If it were up to me, the House Democrats on that panel would nail this quote on the committee room doors as a reminder to everyone that Republicans have manipulated a true American tragedy and turned it into a political circus:

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

He is so proud of himself. Until House Republicans do the right thing and disband this committee, I will continue to tell the American people about the disgrace that is the House Republicans' Benghazi committee.

Mr. President, would the Chair announce what we are going to be doing today.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016—CONFERENCE REPORT

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 1735, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Conference report to accompany H.R. 1735, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 1 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Utah.

THE RIGHT TO EXTENDED DEBATE

MR. HATCH. Mr. President, 2 months ago I came to the Senate floor in my capacity as President pro tempore to speak to my colleagues about the importance of maintaining decorum and respect in this body. I reminded them that decorum is essential to the proper functioning of the Senate and to its unique role in our constitutional structure. The Framers designed the Senate to be an institution of deliberation and reason, where Members would work to promote consensus and the common good rather than their own narrow, partisan interests. Today I rise once