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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.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, the protector of our dreams, we praise Your righteous Name. Lord, December 7 reminds us of a season of infamy. At that time, our Nation confronted greater challenges than we face today. Remind our Senators and Nation that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. May our lawmakers not repeat past mistakes, always remembering that eternal vigilance is freedom's price. Help us to remember that we will be buffeted by winds of fear only when we forget how You have protected us in the past. If Your power prevailed in our past, it can still conquer all our present and future dangers, toils, and snares. May we never forget that in everything You are working for the good of those who love You.

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 MINORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have heard reports that the Speaker has an-

nounced that Congress will be in session next week. I don't know if that is valid. I haven't heard from him myself, but the December 11 deadline was a deadline that the Republicans set and we didn't.

If the Congress fails to finish our business by December 11, it will be because Republicans continue to insist on extraneous poison pill riders in the government funding bill. These are Republican riders, Republican earmarks, and as long as they are there, there can be no legislation.

Without legislation, the government shuts down again—as it did a couple of years ago—because of Republicans.

FIGHTING ISIS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last night, President Obama spoke in stark terms about the threat terrorism poses to the United States. He detailed the extraordinary efforts our government is taking to protect Americans. He also outlined a strong plan for continuing to combat terrorism at home and abroad. President Obama is right to say the first thing Congress should do is close the loophole that lets the FBI terror suspects buy assault weapons such as those used in the San Bernardino shooting.

Senate Democrats support President Obama's plan to fight ISIS and protect America. President Obama has made it clear that Democrats do not believe we should put thousands of troops on the ground in the middle of another civil war in the Middle East. But we do support the President's strategy of continuing to go after ISIS in the air with our coalition partners, targeting their leadership, oil infrastructure, and heavy weapons.

We know that it must be the local forces on the ground that ultimately fight for and hold their ground because it is their land.

Senate Democrats understand that the Syrian war will only be resolved

diplomatically, with all parties supporting the removal of Assad. We also know that we can do more to address the threats from terrorists. That is why beginning today Senate Democrats will unveil a series of proposals to take the fight to ISIS while enhancing our protection of Americans at home.

There are a few important steps we must take in order to combat ISIS's terrorism. The Democratic plan would create a new ISIS czar, one person who is fully empowered and unifies the Federal Government's efforts in fighting ISIS. We did it with Ebola. We certainly can do it with this scourge that is facing our country, ISIS. I am pleased that President Obama has taken a first step in that direction.

To continue targeted airstrikes on ISIS strongholds and oil supplies and to increase support for anti-ISIS local fighters on the ground are part of the plan.

We must also cut off ISIS money through new sanctions.

ISIS runs its reign of terror in Iraq and Syria through extortion, oil sales, and theft. Senate Democrats' legislation imposes new sanctions—and they are tough—including a cutoff from the U.S. and international financial systems if people knowingly facilitate financial transactions with ISIS.

One of the things that would help is that we have a person who has been waiting for hundreds of days to be confirmed. What is his job? He works in the Treasury Department with the State Department to stop financing of terrorism. The Republicans—for reasons totally not understood by anyone—are blocking voting on this person. The job is vacant.

We also believe that we should improve intelligence training between the United States and our allies in the fight against ISIS. Some of that has started, of course.

• 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 believe we must screen and support migrants in Europe and the Middle East. Europe is facing an unprecedented number of migrants landing on their shores, almost 1 million this year. Their screening systems have been overwhelmed by the large number of migrants. Our bill would respond to Europeans' request to provide them with technical assistance to screen migrants and improve their own border security and our security as well.

In the Middle East, the Democrats' plan will help Jordan, a strong U.S. ally at the forefront of the migrant crisis. Four million people are displaced in the region, creating instability in Jordan, our ally, and also harming the neighboring countries. Democrats' legislation includes a new stabilization fund for Jordan and Lebanon, helping those fleeing the conflict in Syria stay in the region, closer to home.

These are just a few of the components of our plan to degrade and destroy ISIS, but we are equally committed to thwarting terrorism here at home. The Democratic plan would close the terrorist's gun loophole.

As of today, there is a legal loophole that prevents law enforcement from verifying that potential gun buyers are not FBI terror suspects. That means if a person has pledged allegiance to ISIS online and is barred from flying due to the threat they pose, that man or woman can still walk into any gunshop and purchase weapons and ammunition. They can do that today, right now. That is wrong.

Last Thursday Democrats tried to pass legislation to give law enforcement the tools needed to prevent the sale of guns to suspected terrorists. Republicans blocked our commonsense measure. We are not finished. We will bring this vote to the floor as often as we can. That is the way it should be.

We need to strengthen the Visa Waiver Program. It was amazing to see the Republicans running for President waffle and weasel out of why someone who is on a flight-risk status, someone who cannot fly, should be able to buy a gun. It was interesting to see on the Sunday shows the Republicans waffle and weasel through answers on this subject.

We need to strengthen the Visa Waiver Program so ISIS fighters cannot access the program and travel to our country. This includes requiring visa waiver travelers to use machine-readable passports, requiring information sharing rules with visa waiver countries and requiring visa waiver countries to enter into agreements regarding the air marshal program and to comply with U.S. aviation and airport security standards.

We must improve aviation security. We must work to secure our airports. We saw all the news when ISIS brought down a Russian plane with hundreds of passengers aboard.

A recent report from the Homeland Security inspector general found that 73 workers with access to secure areas in airports had links to terrorism—

stunning. Our legislation authorizes new vetting for aviation workers and new security measures for the most important areas of our airports.

We must lock down radiological materials to stop a dirty bomb. With both ISIS and Al Qaeda saying they want to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, it is disturbing that there are 2,300 sites around the United States with radiological material. Our legislation requires a new plan for locking down those materials at the places where they are held, such as universities and hospitals, so we can reduce the threat of a dirty bomb.

Our legislation is concerned—and we are going to do everything we can—with preventing homegrown terrorists by creating an office within the Department of Homeland Security tasked with countering extremism.

We must address encryption by directing the National Academy of Sciences, the intelligence community, and the private sector to work together to identify new encryption technology and how it is used to make sure that our national security needs and technology policies are not working at cross purposes.

Finally, Senate Democrats are proposing legislation to provide law enforcement agencies with grant money to help prepare for active shooter situations. We know how critical first responders are to containing and ending active shooter attacks. So we should ensure they have all the tools necessary.

This is the plan that we, Senate Democrats, are putting forward. It is comprehensive. It addresses international and domestic concerns. The consequences of inaction are too grave for us to waste time seeking political gain.

The security of our Nation and the decimation of ISIS depend on the steps we take now. So I hope Republicans will join us to implement these logical reforms that place the security of Americans first and address the threat of ISIS around the world.

Mr. President, I see no one on the floor wishing to speak.

Would the Chair announce the program for the day.

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, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAST ACT

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to applaud the tremendous work that has been done over the course of this year to pass a bipartisan, 5-year, \$305 billion highway bill, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, known as the FAST Act. Transportation infrastructure is an essential part of the U.S. economy. It serves as the foundation to support our country's economic global competitiveness and connects communities, people, and markets.

Federal investment in transportation and other infrastructure has, unfortunately, lagged in recent decades, with public expenditures on infrastructure as a percentage of GDP steadily declining to its lowest levels in 20 years. I have consistently called for a highway bill that ensures steady and reliable funding for States so they can make long-term plans for improving our crumbling infrastructure. For too long, stopgap measures to prop up the highway trust fund for just a few months at a time have failed to provide the stability necessary to grow our economy.

The FAST Act comes at a critical time. This legislation will improve our Nation's infrastructure, make our Federal surface transportation programs work better for States, and address our Nation's infrastructure priorities by focusing on critical commerce corridors and emerging freight corridors as well.

The FAST Act also makes key investments in something I am very passionate about, and that is the future of mobility in the United States. Today, the auto industry is working hand in hand with tech, telecom, and software companies and their partners in academia and Federal agencies to collaborate and contribute to the transportation system of the future. This future will be dominated by connected and autonomous vehicles—on-demand services such as ride-sharing and car-sharing—and innovations in vehicle-to-infrastructure communications.

Vehicle-to-infrastructure communications technologies—known as V2I—have the potential to deliver incredible safety, mobility, environmental, and operational benefits to the driving public. For example, V2I technologies will allow bridges that are icing up to be able to communicate directly with an automobile before it gets to the bridge and, as a result, will prevent an accident before it even occurs. Today, stakeholders are working to develop and test V2I technologies, and widespread deployment is expected in the coming years.

We have to make sure the States are making plans for their future in V2I technologies. That is why I introduced