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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, accept our thanks and praise for all You have done for us. Thank You for the splendor of creation, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. Thank You for family and friends and for the love that surrounds us on every side. Lord, thank You for work that demands our best efforts and for the satisfaction of a job well done. Thank You also for disappointments and failures that teach us to depend on You. Thank You for our lawmakers; endue them with courage and loyalty, inspiring them to glorify You in every action, both large and small.

And, Lord, thank You for the influential life and legacy of former First Lady Nancy Reagan.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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. The majority leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING NANCY REAGAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Nancy Reagan was one of the most powerful First Ladies in recent memory. For instance, sometimes she spoke

out on issues like substance abuse, but more often Nancy wielded her power with calm confidence and quiet steel. It was an attitude that helped guide Nancy through so many challenges in her own life: getting an acting career off the ground, leaving it to raise a family, riding the ups and downs of a life in politics, watching her husband brave the bullet of a would-be assassin or face the threat of cancer, and then confront the same reality herself.

Nancy Reagan may have been a star in Hollywood and a force in the rough-and-tumble of Washington, but it was the challenges to come that would reveal her true strength.

In 1994, former President Reagan addressed a letter to his fellow Americans. He said: "I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life."

Nancy shared her very personal experience with that cold and cruel disease, telling Americans of the "terrible pain and loneliness" that accompanied Alzheimer's "very long goodbye," but she never gave in or gave up. Nancy was strong for her husband, she was a rock for her family, and she was an example for a nation that looked to her for inspiration.

One day, after many long and difficult years, Ronald Reagan opened his eyes and looked at Nancy. "He hadn't done that in well over a month," she recalled. "But he looked at me and closed his eyes. And went. And that was a wonderful gift."

We felt Nancy's immense pain when she leaned over his casket, kissed it, and mouthed her tearful farewell.

From "Morning in America" to a sunset in Simi Valley, the Reagan love story was classic Hollywood, but it was also unmistakably human. Nancy said her life had only really begun after she met Ronald Reagan. Now she joins her best friend to dance together once more.

We in the Senate join our Nation in mourning the loss of Nancy Reagan.

We offer every condolence to the family members left behind.

Let us remember the rest of what President Reagan wrote to the Nation in 1994. "I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life," is what he wrote then, but—but—"I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead."

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, as I noted earlier, combating substance abuse was an issue close to Nancy Reagan's heart. It is fitting that we will have an important opportunity this afternoon to address the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic sweeping our Nation. We can do so by advancing the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act.

Just a few months ago, we appropriated \$400 million to opioid-specific programs. We are glad that all of those funds remain available to be spent today, and now we can pass comprehensive, bipartisan legislation that will help build upon the progress being made in this fight.

This CARA bill would expand education and prevention. It would bolster law enforcement efforts. It would improve treatment initiatives. This bill has also received broad bipartisan backing and the support of nearly 130 groups dedicated to ending this crisis.

We appreciate the work of the senior Senator from Iowa, Mr. GRASSLEY, who worked to move this bill swiftly out of the Judiciary Committee. We thank Senator PORTMAN, Senator AYOTTE, along with the junior Senator from Rhode Island and the senior Senator from Minnesota, for all the work they have done to advance CARA. We recognize the continuing efforts of Senators on both sides of the aisle who have put party labels aside to build support for this much needed legislation.

So let's continue that work by voting for cloture on CARA so we can take an

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



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important step forward to address this national epidemic.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 7, 2016.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. ERNST thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING NANCY REAGAN

Mr. REID. Madam President, I join the Republican leader in extending my sympathies to the entire Reagan family. Nancy Reagan was a wonderful First Lady. She was also an incredible individual in her own right. She was always gracious and charming.

The last time I saw Nancy Reagan, she was here in the Rotunda of the Capitol dedicating a statue of her husband, President Ronald Reagan. At that time, she was already well into her late eighties, but there she was, standing next to his statue with a big smile on her face. Her very presence brightened the entire Hall—she and Ronald Reagan standing together, he in the form of a statue, she standing next to him, together. It really was a fantastic picture.

Nancy, of course, will be missed. I say, though, my mind returns to a different time. It reminds me of the years Ronald Reagan was in the White House—a card-carrying conservative, yet a very pragmatic Republican.

The Nation will miss First Lady Nancy Reagan and miss her partner, the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. REID. Madam President, from the Des Moines Register. Two former Lieutenant Governors of the State of Iowa—and I am sure the Acting President pro tempore knows both of them, one a Democrat and one a Republican—here is what they said, among other things: “This isn’t the CHUCK GRASSLEY we thought we knew.” Again, I re-

peat, this is two Iowans, former Lieutenant Governors Joy Corning, a Republican, and Sally Pederson, a Democrat.

Last week former Lieutenant Governors Corning and Pederson coauthored an op-ed in the Des Moines Register criticizing the senior Senator from Iowa for abdicating his constitutional duties by blocking consideration of President Obama’s Supreme Court nomination. The op-ed reads, among other things:

Iowans are known for being hard workers, and we appreciate that quality in our elected officials. We wake up every day, ready to do our part, and get the job done. We are also politically astute, understand the U.S. Constitution, and know when an elected official is more eager to find excuses than create solutions. Unfortunately, Sen. CHUCK GRASSLEY is refusing to do his job as described in Article 2 of our Constitution, giving “advice and consent” on the president’s upcoming nomination to the Supreme Court.

GRASSLEY is threatening to use his powerful post as chairman of the Judiciary Committee to block a hearing on any nominee, regardless of how well qualified he or she is. His recent column and public statements regarding the vacancy on the Supreme Court are troubling and harmful to our courts. Moreover, this isn’t the CHUCK GRASSLEY we thought we knew.

“This isn’t the CHUCK GRASSLEY we thought we knew.” I agree with these Iowans. This isn’t the Senator I have come to know over the last three decades. The Senator I knew would not cede the independence of the powerful Judiciary Committee he has served on for many decades to the Republican leader. The Senator I knew would not ignore his constitutional duties for the sake of election-year politics, but for whatever reason the Senator from Iowa made a fateful decision in the hours after Justice Antonin Scalia’s death. He is allowing himself and his committee to be manipulated by the Republican leader for narrow, partisan warfare. He is taking his orders from the Republican leader and, sadly, Donald Trump. When asked about this issue, Donald Trump’s words were three: delay, delay, delay. Senator GRASSLEY must have been listening.

The people of Iowa, without question, are displeased with their Senator. The Des Moines Register quoted one of Senator GRASSLEY’s disappointed supporters as follows:

He seems to be doing what other people are saying, not what he thinks is best. That has really colored my opinion of him in the past week.

Another Iowan who supports the Senator told the newspaper:

I think he’s making a bad mistake. . . . It’s purely a political party play, and there isn’t any space for that in this situation.

Now, as each day passes, the senior Senator from Iowa is trying desperately to justify his blind loyalty to the Republican leader and to Donald Trump. Senator GRASSLEY is grasping for a rationale—any rationale—that will excuse him for not doing his job. That desperation is now taking Senator GRASSLEY down a very dark path.

Last Thursday, the senior Senator from Iowa addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference, CPAC, which took place here in Washington. In his speech to them, here is what Senator GRASSLEY said: “I feel it’s about time that we have a national debate on the Supreme Court and how it fits in with our constitutional system of government.”

The chairman of the Judiciary Committee is suggesting that we reevaluate the Founding Fathers’ work, reevaluate the Constitution of the United States, and change the Constitution of the United States. Why is Senator GRASSLEY debating what the Constitution makes clear? The Senate must provide its advice and consent on nominees appointed by the President to the Supreme Court. Think of the irony. Justice Scalia was a strict constitutionalist. Yet now, in the weeks following his death, Senator GRASSLEY wants to throw out the Constitution just because President Obama gets to pick Scalia’s replacement.

The former Senator from Iowa Tom Harkin said it best yesterday. This appeared in the Des Moines Register: “The position taken now by the majority leader and majority members of the Senate Judiciary Committee is simply astounding, and not in keeping with a ‘strict,’ or even ‘loose,’ construction of the Constitution.”

The Constitution isn’t some ball you pick up and take home just because you are still mad that Barack Obama is the President. If Senator GRASSLEY and Republicans find themselves on the wrong side of the Constitution, it is their policies that should change, not our Nation’s founding document, the Constitution of the United States. If Republicans are uncomfortable with not performing their duties, the answer isn’t to take an eraser to the Constitution. No, we don’t need to take an eraser to the Constitution. The answer is to do your job.

If the Senator from Iowa wants to extricate himself from the situation he created, there is a way. All he needs to do is wrest back his chairmanship from the Republican leader and give President Obama’s nominee a meeting, a hearing, and a vote. In short, he needs to do his job. It is that easy. No changes to the Constitution are required. If he does his job, the people in Iowa will not have reason to say: “This isn’t the CHUCK GRASSLEY we thought we knew.”

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Madam President, on another subject, last Thursday, the Department of Health and Human Services released updated statistics about the number of Americans who now have health insurance. This is ObamaCare. The numbers are incredible.

Since enactment of the Affordable Care Act, 20 million Americans have