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Senate

The Senate met at 11 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.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, thank You for our Nation and for the freedoms we enjoy. Lord, thank You also for the men and women who gave their lives that we might be free.

Forgive us when our preoccupation with selfish dreams keeps us from surrendering to Your will. Help us to strive each day to give You our best.

Guide our Senators. May nothing deter them from doing Your will. Lord, give them faith to meet each challenge with Your wisdom. Help them to give themselves completely to You, permitting Your peace to guard their hearts.

We pray in Your sacred 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. FLAKE). The majority leader is recognized.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the President released a budget today. Congress will review his final set of proposals and priorities—his call for new taxes, new spending, and more debt.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, just this morning, local health departments confirmed two cases of the Zika virus in two States bordering Kentucky—Indiana and Ohio.

Americans want a better understanding of the administration's efforts to fight this virus and its spread. Americans want to know what the administration's funding priorities are for combatting Zika in a time of limited Federal resources. We appreciate Secretary Burwell coming today to help explain all of this. She and her team will provide a briefing to Senate leaders, committee chairs, and ranking members about a virus Americans are rightly concerned about. Keeping Americans safe and healthy is a top priority for all of us. I am looking forward to hearing what she has to say.

THANKING AMBASSADOR DEREK MITCHELL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, turning to the nomination we will consider today, our Ambassador to Burma, Derek Mitchell, has staunchly pursued America's interests in an important post. He helped guide our relationship with Burma through a historic transition to elected government. He also served as a trusted and valuable partner in understanding how best to measure the pace and viability of reform within Burma.

I have gotten to know Derek pretty well over the last few years. I offer to him sincere gratitude for all of his advice and counsel. He will be missed. He is a genuine expert on that country. And while he leaves big shoes to fill, I intend to support the man nominated to succeed him.

NOMINATION OF SCOT MARCIEL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Scot Marciel has served as the Principal Deputy Executive Secretary since

August 2013, following time in Jakarta as our Ambassador to Indonesia for 3 years. He served as Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs and as Deputy Assistant Secretary for the East Asia and Pacific bureau, responsible for relations with Southeast Asia. Earlier in his career, he served in Vietnam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Brazil, and Turkey, as well as in the Economic Bureau's Office of Monetary Affairs.

Ambassador Marciel will represent us as a new government is formed in Burma and as America's policies adjust to those changes on the ground. He obviously has a lot of experience. I think it will prove valuable as he works to represent our Nation at a time of truly consequential change in Burma.

Burma's transition to a democratically elected government is an important mark of reform in a country with a long and very troubled history. We know there is more to be done, but the administration can take credit for its efforts, and so can Members of Congress in both parties. Hopefully we can build on that momentum working together.

NORTH KOREA SANCTIONS AND POLICY ENHANCEMENT BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, the regime in North Korea presents serious threats to regional stability, to the security of Americans, to the safety of our allies, and to the well-being of North Koreans themselves.

Pyongyang regularly threatens neighbors, such as South Korea and Japan. It routinely engages in cyber warfare. It repeatedly commits gross human rights violations against its own people and continues to develop a nuclear program that threatens peace in the region and throughout the world. The regime's most recent display of belligerent behavior only underlines that the administration's approach has certainly not worked. Let's

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



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work together to change that. Let's vote to move America's policy in a better and more successful direction.

Last month the House of Representatives voted to pass comprehensive sanctions legislation on a bipartisan basis. Tomorrow the Senate will turn to comprehensive sanctions legislation that builds on what the House passed, and we should pass that measure on a bipartisan basis as well.

The North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act was written by a Republican from Colorado, Senator CORY GARDNER, and a Democrat from New Jersey, Senator BOB MENENDEZ, and reported from the Foreign Relations Committee. It would strengthen congressional oversight. It would give the President more tools to take action against North Korea's growing aggression and require him to do so. It would also reassure our regional allies that we have not despaired in taking any action against North Korea—with or without help from China.

The kind of belligerence we have seen from Pyongyang must not be ignored. Let's work together to make our country and our world safer by passing this bipartisan bill.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ZIKA VIRUS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I said yesterday and I say again today that I appreciate very much the Republican leader scheduling the meeting to talk about the Zika virus today. As I indicated yesterday, things crop up. I have been called to the White House at that same time, so I personally won't be at the meeting, but I will have people there to make sure that if there is anything I missed, I will be brought up to date on that. Again, I appreciate the Republican leader scheduling that meeting.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am pleased that we are going to be considering the Ambassador to Burma. Everyone knows the personal attention Senator MCCONNELL has shown to the country of Burma for many years. I am pleased we are going to get an Ambassador to Burma.

I hope everyone understands we are really shortchanging the State Department. We have numerous people held up. The Secretary of State has called me on several occasions lamenting the fact that he is having trouble getting the work done because we don't have the people to do the work.

Fifteen foreign policy nominations are being held up by Republicans, and we have a number of Ambassadors who are being held up: Sweden, Norway,

Luxembourg, and Trinidad—a number of countries that are extremely important to what we are doing here. It is a shame that they are being held by Republicans. It is very unfortunate.

FLINT, MICHIGAN, WATER CRISIS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the people in Flint, MI, continue to suffer through a catastrophic series of problems. Basically, it is their water. It is heavily contaminated. Their nightmare, which began almost 2 years ago, is an emergency that requires a Federal response, and that is what we have been trying to do. In the case of emergencies like this, we must act to help Americans dealing with a public health crisis.

For weeks now, we have called on Republicans to work with us to provide assistance for the people of Flint—100,000 people. Nine thousand children under the age of 6 have been poisoned in that little city in Michigan. It is very large by Nevada standards, but by Michigan standards, that city is not one of the bigger ones, but they need help. We need help from the Republicans. Nothing is happening because we haven't had enough Republican support. In the meantime, the people of Flint, MI, are using bottled water to bathe, to drink, to brush their teeth, and to cook with. That is really too bad.

This should not be a partisan issue. This is drinking water we are talking about. Everyone is entitled to pure, clean drinking water, and access to safe water is a right every American deserves. Whether you live in Michigan, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Nevada, Illinois—it doesn't matter where you live, you shouldn't be afraid to drink the water that comes out of your faucet. No one should have to suffer, but the people of Flint, MI have suffered.

Yesterday the American Academy of Pediatrics wrote a long letter to me and to Senator MCCONNELL. In this letter they said that this organization representing 65,000 pediatricians and other pediatric specialists believes something needs to be done with the water in Flint.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the letter from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS,
Elk Grove Village, IL, February 8, 2016.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR LEADERS MCCONNELL AND REID: On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of 64,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical sub-specialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, I write

regarding Congressional efforts to respond to the tragedy in Flint, Michigan and the exposure of its citizens to lead, a potent neurotoxin, through their drinking water.

The AAP supports federal efforts to provide immediate funding and other assistance to the people of Flint, including the amendment offered by Senators Stabenow and Peters. While their proposal is a vitally important first step, we would urge the Senate to provide additional funding for long-term educational, early literacy, nutrition, medical, behavioral, and other assistance to this community. This includes, but should not be limited to: support for Head Start and Early Head Start; quality child care; literacy programs; Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program enrollment; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; school meals and after-school feeding programs; and mental health screening and treatment.

There is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Lead damage can be permanent and irreversible. Lasting decreases in cognition have been documented in children with blood levels as low as 5 micrograms per deciliter of lead in blood. It is therefore clear that the children and families of Flint will need comprehensive assistance in both the short- and long-term.

The AAP is eager to assist this community, and federal policymakers, in both immediate and longer-term solutions to this public health tragedy. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ami Gadhia in our Washington, D.C. office.

Sincerely,

BENARD P. DREYER, MD, FAAP.

President.

Mr. REID. I will only read a short phrase or two out of the letter, which says it all:

The AAP supports federal efforts to provide immediate funding and other assistance to the people of Flint, including the amendment offered by Senators Stabenow and Peters.

The letter goes on to say:

There is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Lead damage can be permanent and irreversible. Lasting decreases in cognition have been documented in children with blood levels as low as 5 micrograms per deciliter of lead in blood. It is therefore clear that the children and families of Flint will need comprehensive assistance in both the short- and long-term.

This is a letter from the American Academy of Pediatrics. These are people who deal with children. They are not politicians. They are willing to tell us that these children have been poisoned.

In order to do something for the children of Flint and other families, we need help from my Republican colleagues. Despite harsh words from several Members of the Republican caucus who have no interest in resolving the crisis in Flint, some Republicans are willing to help. For example, the senior Senator from Oklahoma has been working with Senator STABENOW all weekend to put together an aid package that includes immediate funding for the people of Flint. Now we are once again waiting on Republicans to step forward and to support the chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee. It is incumbent upon the Republican majority to get to "yes" to