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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 helper, we sing Your praises and will not keep silent. You clothe us with gladness, and Your favor is for a lifetime.

Bless our lawmakers and hear them when they pray. As our Senators lift their fervent prayers, empower them to meet the challenges of our time. May they always seek You while You may be found, calling upon You while You are near. Lord, when great waters overflow them, protect and preserve them with Your great strength. Be for them a hiding place, and surround them with songs of deliverance.

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.

INTERNET TAX FREEDOM FOREVER ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Internet is a resource used daily by Americans of all ages all across our country. Students use it to research school projects and papers. Entrepreneurs use it to help run their busi-

nesses and come up with new ideas. Families use it to manage their busy schedules and stay in touch with their relatives. It is important that they be able to do this without the worry that their Internet access is being taxed.

Congress first voted to ban taxes on Internet access back in 1998, but it was only a temporary ban. Congress has since held that vote eight additional times—eight extensions of the Internet tax moratorium over these years. Today we have an opportunity to make it permanent.

The Internet Tax Freedom Act is a commonsense, bipartisan piece of legislation with 51 cosponsors. I appreciate the diligent work by the Republican Senator from South Dakota and the Democratic Senator from Oregon and, of course, the many efforts of our colleague from Utah to move this legislation. I look forward to supporting it today.

WAR ON TERROR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate joined together to overwhelmingly pass bipartisan legislation that will further isolate North Korea in response to its policy of aggression. It was necessary because our Nation faces a daunting array of threats and challenges from all across the globe. Our next Commander in Chief, regardless of political party, will face similar challenges upon taking office.

We see terrorist threats from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, from Al Qaeda, and from both of their respective affiliates. For example, the terrorist group that grew from Al Qaeda in Iraq, ISIL, is now not only capable of launching infantry assaults, suicide bomber attacks, and raids initiated by the detonation of IEDs, it is also working hard to radicalize individuals over the Internet and is determined to keep attacking Westerners right here where they live.

We see threats to stability in Afghanistan from Taliban forces and the Haqqani Network. For example, just this week we learned that additional U.S. forces will be needed to reinforce the Afghan National Security Forces in Helmand Province. We have a determined partner in President Ghani, and General Campbell has testified that we need to maintain a sufficient force posture to both train and advise them and also conduct counterterrorism operations.

We see challenges from countries looking to aggressively expand their influence, such as China and Russia and Iran, while, of course, diminishing our influence. For example, Russia is rebuilding its conventional and nuclear forces while launching cyber attacks, conducting espionage, and propping up paramilitary forces like we see in Ukraine. China is rebuilding and modernizing its conventional and nuclear forces, as it masters the tactics of low-intensity conflict designed to coerce our allies without provoking an overwhelming response from us.

The challenges we face today are very great. They are likely to be even greater tomorrow. All of this comes at a time when America must rebuild both its conventional and nuclear forces.

Clearly, the next Commander in Chief is going to take office confronting a complex and varied array of threats. After 7 years of the Obama administration delaying action in the War on Terror, the next administration will need to return to the fight and to restore our role in the world. We want to work with our next President, regardless of party, to do the things we know are needed to help protect our country, but that incoming leader also needs our help now, and we should take action now in this year of transition.

The Secretary of Defense last week announced two aspects of this—first, a defense budget request that emphasizes the weapons systems needed to balance

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



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against China's anti-access and area denial weapons and plans and a regional security initiative designed to resist Russian encroachment in Eastern Europe.

General Dunford has talked about the acute threat represented by ISIL in Libya and the need to take action against this group. Other defense officials have recently focused on the need to rebuild the nuclear triad too.

It is clear what needs to be done. For instance, we know that our nuclear forces must be modernized to deter countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. We know that our conventional forces must be modernized to both balance against and contain their regional aspirations. We know that our Special Operations and Marine expeditionary units must be maintained and equipped to conduct counterterrorism and regional response. That means providing sufficient sealift and naval platforms and carrier air wings to keep amphibious-ready groups and carrier battle groups on station rather than withdrawing our presence at the very moment allies are questioning our commitment to traditional alliances. It means that our regional combatant commanders need sufficient force levels to protect our interests.

We know the commander of Central Command must have the assets needed to assure our moderate Sunni allies, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and help them resist Iran's efforts to intimidate neighbors.

In the Pacific, we know we must undertake a sustained buildup of naval air and expeditionary capabilities and work closely with Japan, South Korea, and other regional partners if we want to lead within the region and deter China's belligerent policies.

We know that the authorities our intelligence and counterterror forces need to defeat ISIL must also be renewed and restored.

We know that we must return to capturing, interrogating, and targeting the enemy in a way that allows us to defeat terrorist networks.

It is clear that the Obama administration has failed to lead in sustaining the force and in meeting these strategic objectives. We have seen that the administration's efforts to employ Special Operations Forces to train and equip units in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq have proven insufficient to generate the combat power that is needed to defeat the enemy.

The economy of force strategy set forth in the President's West Point speech has failed. National security policies that were for too long focused on campaign promises made back in 2008, such as the effort to close Guantanamo, to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan based on arbitrary deadlines, and to end the War on Terror and take away the CIA's detention and interrogation capabilities and remake it into a Cold War clandestine service, are finally giving way to geopolitical reality today.

The fact that current members of the Obama administration are now recognizing the threat and the need to rebuild the force should inspire all of us to get started now—this year, not next year. I think we should be doing all we can today to ready the force for the challenges ahead and to lay the groundwork for the next President regardless of party. Passing the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act yesterday was a positive step, but we must also ensure that the United States does not withdraw from our alliance and forward presence.

With sustained bipartisan cooperation, we can pass a national defense authorization act at levels that will allow us to modernize the force and execute current operations against ISIL and in Afghanistan while meeting our commitments to keep the force ready. With sustained bipartisan cooperation, we can pass Defense appropriations at adequate levels to train and equip and sustain the best military in the world. Doing what is required will necessitate a sustained effort, but we can begin now, if colleagues are willing to work with us in this year of transition. Let's work together to keep our country safe.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CUSTOMS BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Customs bill is another in a series of missed opportunities and half-measures that have characterized this Congress. The legislation we are going to vote on today, the conference report on Customs, misses the opportunity to take strong action against currency manipulation. The bill we sent out of here had strong currency manipulation language in it; it is not there anymore.

It throws up unnecessary hurdles to agreements on climate change. It basically says that any agreements the United States makes cannot take climate into consideration—on any of those agreements.

No one that I know of opposes the legislation that is stuck inside this Customs conference report dealing with taxation on the Internet. We all support that. But the sad part about this is the manipulation to get it in this bill. It did not start in either House; it was just airdropped into the conference report. The reason it was done that way is everyone knew that if this matter was brought up—the Internet Tax Fairness Act—as part of it, we always had marketplace fairness. That was part of the deal. They went together. But the manipulation took place.

This most important piece of legislation dealing with helping States—States are struggling. It does not matter which States they are, they are

struggling. What we have are the brick-and-mortar places that can't compete with online merchandising. Someone who has a brick-and-mortar store—someone will walk in, see something they like, and then they will walk out, go to the computer, and buy it online. They pay no taxes. That is unfair to the brick-and-mortar stores and small businesses across America. It would help States remarkably if people who buy on the Internet would have to pay the same taxes as someone who buys in a brick-and-mortar store.

But in an effort to protect a number of Senators—one in particular—this matter was stuck in this bill. We have just a few States that don't have a sales tax. One of those Senators is up for reelection. She has a very tough election, and anyone who understands politics a little bit understands that this was done as a result of trying to protect her.

But as Senator DURBIN, the person who has pushed this marketplace fairness more than anyone else—except perhaps for Senator ENZI and LAMAR ALEXANDER—knows, what has been done is unfair. But they have been told this matter will be brought up before the end of the year. So I don't know what solace that should give the Senator who is worried about the marketplace fairness passing because it would seem to me that the vote we had here earlier was 69 votes, and it will pass again. The Speaker has told me that he is going to bring up marketplace fairness on the House side. So we are going to vote on it before the end of the year. It is going to be the law anyway.

It is too bad small businesses have to wait again for 6 months or 8 months to get this done.

The Customs bill does not do enough to enforce our trade agreements or protect American workers, and I will oppose it.

BUDGET AND DEFENSE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish to make a few comments on the statements of the Republican leader, my friend. It is obvious that he has been reading the press and perhaps talking to some people on the House side. These people have created so many problems.

This right, right, rightwing in the House of Representatives is now saying that what we did, having a 2-year budget, they want to change. They want to take money away from the middle class and give it to defense.

I supported the North Korea sanctions. It is a good piece of legislation. I supported what we did in December. It was good legislation. But we decided that the military, as strong as it is, should remain strong but that we should give some equal footing to the middle class, and we did that.

Now my friend the Republican leader is obviously trying to pave the way to increase defense funding and go against the middle class.