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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all You have done for us. We thank You for the splendor of creation, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank You for work that demands our best efforts and for the satisfaction of a job done well.

As our lawmakers strive to please You in working to fulfill Your purposes, inspire them with Your Spirit to glorify You in their thoughts, words, and actions. Lord, endue them with courage and loyalty, whether their duties are large or small. Give them an eternal perspective on the myriad issues they face.

We pray in Your great 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. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, over the past several weeks, we have seen unprecedented obstruction from our colleagues across the aisle. This made the confirmation of the President's nominees the slowest in modern history. It has left several key depart-

ments without a permanent secretary at the helm for far too long. What is the point of the needless delay? What is the point? Our friends are slow-walking votes, not changing outcomes.

We took several important steps last night to move the nominations process forward. We confirmed Steve Mnuchin as Treasury Secretary. After 8 years of failing economic policy, stagnant growth, and a tough job market, it is clear we need a new direction to get our country back on track. We need a new direction on regulations—smarter and pro-growth. We need a new direction on taxes—simpler and pro-jobs. If we are going to accomplish either of those goals, we are going to need new leadership at the helm of the Treasury Department. Secretary Mnuchin has real-world understanding of the private sector, and he is ready to work with both sides to get the economy moving.

Second, we confirmed Dr. David Shulkin as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The debt we owe our servicemembers and their families extends far beyond any program or benefit the government can provide, but through the VA, we should be doing everything we can to fulfill our commitments to veterans and their families, like the more than 300,000 veterans who call Kentucky home. Secretary Shulkin will be tasked with overseeing that our veterans in Kentucky and across the Nation receive quality and timely care. It is a heavy burden, but he seems up to the task. The chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Senator ISAKSON, has a well-deserved reputation for working tirelessly on behalf of our veterans, which makes it notable that his committee voted unanimously to recommend Dr. Shulkin to the Senate and the full Senate confirmed him unanimously too.

We haven't seen much of that lately. I am confident that Secretary Shulkin will work with Congress to build on the progress we have already made in expanding accessibility and improving accountability at the VA.

Third, I took the necessary procedural steps last night to allow us to confirm the rest of the nominees on the calendar: Representative MICK MULVANEY, the nominee for Director of the Office of Management and Budget, who can help get our Nation back on track fiscally; Scott Pruitt, the nominee for Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, who can bring much needed change after 8 years of heavyhanded, job-killing regulations; Wilbur Ross, nominee for Commerce Secretary, who can help promote job creation and economic growth; Representative RYAN ZINKE, nominee for Interior Secretary, who can help improve our Nation's land use and conservation policies; Dr. Ben Carson, nominee for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who can help reform HUD to better serve the American people; and Governor Rick Perry, nominee for Energy Secretary, who can help guide us toward smarter energy policies to grow our economy and strengthen national security.

Beginning with Representative MULVANEY, we can get each of these nominees confirmed soon. With cooperation from across the aisle, we can put them to work for the American people even sooner.

We will be able to put another important nominee to work just this morning, one who understands how to help businesses flourish. The last 8 years have been very difficult for our economy, for workers, and for small businesses. I am confident that the President's pick to lead the Small Business Administration, Linda McMahon, will prioritize growing jobs over growing government bureaucracy. In so many States, including mine, that is a welcome change of pace from Washington. Small businesses help drive America's economy, and they help drive Kentucky's economy as well. Almost half of all the private sector jobs in Kentucky—about 700,000—come from the more than 340,000 small businesses

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



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across the Commonwealth. These small businesses not only grow the economy, but they also serve important roles in our communities.

Mrs. McMahon, who has built a company from the ground up, understands the many challenges small businesses can face. She certainly has come a long way from sharing a desk with her husband and leasing a typewriter. I commend her for her willingness to serve her country, and I look forward to her confirmation later this morning.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, is likely to come to the floor soon, and I will certainly defer to him at a later time, but I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

RUSSIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, November 8, 2016, was not just election day. It was a day that will live in cyber infamy because it turns out that one of the leading enemies of the United States, the nation of Russia, was directly engaged in the Presidential campaign that resulted in the election on November 8. This is not speculation. It is a fact based on conclusions that came from 17 different intelligence agencies that confirmed this reality. This is the first time we can point to where a foreign power has tried to influence the outcome of a Presidential election in the United States. Their goal was clear: to elect Donald Trump, to defeat Hillary Clinton. They hacked into computers. They released information on a selective basis. They created fake news stories. They used WikiLeaks—everything within their cyber power to influence the outcome of the election. That was the reality.

This morning we were awakened to the headline that President Trump's head of the National Security Council, LTG Michael Flynn, has resigned. That is an incredible blockbuster of a story. And what was the reason for his resignation? It turns out that he had a direct conversation with the Russian Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Kislyak, and that conversation included references to sanctions that President Obama was imposing on Russia because of their involvement in our election. What led to his resignation, of course, was that he misled both the Vice President and the President about that conversation. When the facts came out, he was forced to resign.

This is not business as usual in Washington. What we are dealing with here is, in fact, a historic event—a powder keg in history—when it comes to the United States and its security. The obvious question is, Will this Congress of the United States, this branch of our government, respond? Will we initiate thorough investigations as to the involvement of the Russians in that elec-

tion campaign and, specifically, any involvement with any Presidential campaign during that time?

Twenty years ago, when I was elected to the Senate, there was an investigation initiated by the Republicans at the suggestion—the suggestion—that the Chinese Government played some role in the Clinton-Gore campaign. The Governmental Affairs Committee of the Senate was entrusted with the responsibility to do a thorough investigation of that allegation, and Fred Thompson, the Senator from Tennessee, was the chairman of that committee, with John Glenn as the ranking Democrat.

The hearings went on for weeks—ultimately, for months—and then there was a formal report issued. No credible evidence was found of the suggestion, but it was taken that seriously by the Republican-led Congress that the Chinese may have been involved in a Democratic Presidential campaign.

How seriously is the Republican Congress taking the allegations and statements from our intelligence agencies that the Russians were involved in this last Presidential campaign?

It is time for us to have an independent, bipartisan commission beyond Congress to look into this and give us solid answers. We need to appoint people to head this commission of the stature of GEN Colin Powell and Sandra Day O'Connor, who served on the Supreme Court, who are credible people to lead this effort and this investigation and give America the truth.

A week or so ago the New York Times published the results of a recent poll that asked Americans what other nations they considered to be our closest allies and worst enemies. The results weren't surprising. Canada, the UK, and Australia topped the list of our best allies. Of America's enemies, the top nations were different, but they included North Korea, Iran, and Russia. That makes me wonder why President Trump, in the span of a week, managed to insult and hang up on the telephone call with the Prime Minister of Australia and then go on national news to once again defend Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, in light of what I just said earlier. Just a few days later, it is revealed that his National Security Advisor, General Flynn, the one who was fired by the previous administration and led chants unworthy of a great democracy about locking up a political opponent, was, in fact, speaking to a Russian official as a private citizen before President Trump took office.

Monday, we learned that former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, whom President Trump abruptly fired, had warned the White House that General Flynn had misled senior administration officials about his communications with the Russian Ambassador and warned he was potentially vulnerable to Russian blackmail. Understand what I have just said. The man who was picked by President Trump as his top

National Security Advisor misled the President and the Vice President about a telephone conversation with the Russian Ambassador and, in the opinion of our top law enforcement officials, left himself vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

In the last days of the Obama administration, then Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan reportedly shared Yates' concerns and concurred with the recommendation to inform the Trump White House. Now that General Flynn has resigned, leaving an already chaotic National Security Council in even greater disarray, perhaps this isn't all that surprising anymore, but it certainly should be.

This President has a troubling habit of lashing out at everyone and anyone involved in a perceived slight—dangerous and unbecoming behavior when granted the privilege to become President of this great Nation. In fact, the number and range of those attacked or insulted by Twitter is so significant I wouldn't even start to list them, but it is important to note the list includes Republicans, Democrats, labor leaders, businesses, retired generals, and others in almost every conceivable category. Actually, one looks at the list and you quickly realize the only unifying factor is not about putting America first or America's image but instead about protecting a deeply fragile ego.

Listen to this excerpt from a vast list of those who have been attacked by President Trump: President George Bush, President George W. Bush, Speaker PAUL RYAN, Florida Gov. Rick Scott, Federal judges, former Governor of New Hampshire John Sununu, the Republican establishment, NATO, Major League Baseball, Macy's Department Store, European leaders, Britain, Germany, New Jersey, the American delegate system, the "Today" show, "Saturday Night Live," "The View," Chief Justice John Roberts, Colin Powell, President of United Steelworkers Local 1999, ABC News, NBC News, FOX News, and seemingly every other media outlet.

Now that we are in the category of those who have been attacked, we can't leave Nordstrom off the list. The President even insulted the former Governor of South Carolina, then chose her to be U.N. Ambassador. In fact, there are hundreds upon hundreds on this list—a list that in a foreboding, Nixonian way keeps on growing.

So if you make any criticism or joke about President Trump, make any perceived slight, run a department store that doesn't carry his daughter's products, lead a labor union, or do just about anything, be prepared for an attack by a Trump tweet—except if you happen to be the former Communist KGB official who now leads the one nation that actually recently attacked our Nation. That would be Vladimir Putin.

How is it possible?

Russian President Putin launched a cyber attack of war on the United