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Senate

The Senate met at 3 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 and sovereign God, the Earth in its fullness belongs to You. Teach us to live by Your precepts and follow Your plans. Guide our lawmakers in the challenging decisions they face. May they build up rather than tear down, using their powers to keep dreams from becoming nightmares. Give them the wisdom to know that history will judge them by whether they act with courage or cowardice.

Lord, lead our Senators in their efforts to guide our citizens to the better angels of our nature. May our lawmakers make the commitment to stand for right though the heavens fall.

And, Lord, we pray for those affected by Hurricane Harvey and for those bracing for Hurricane Irma.

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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1757

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1757) to strengthen border security, increase resources for enforcement of immigration laws, and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

HURRICANE HARVEY DISASTER RELIEF AND OTHER ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I want to begin by extending the Senate's heartfelt sympathies to those affected by Hurricane Harvey. We have seen the devastation across Texas, Louisiana, and the gulf coast. We know the recovery will not be easy, nor will it be quick.

We also understand the Federal Government's important role in assisting impacted communities. Last week, the President submitted a supplemental emergency funding request that will allow this critical work to continue. It will also allow our country to be better prepared for future natural disasters. It is especially important, given the potential for another major hurricane to strike our country this very week.

As I said when the President submitted his emergency funding request, the Senate will work closely with his administration and the House of Representatives to deliver that much needed relief. I am glad to see the House Appropriations Committee has already taken important steps to get us there, and I look forward to the House sending over legislation so the Senate can act on it as soon as possible.

I know that securing this emergency funding is very important for the

President, and I know that preventing a default or shutdown amidst such a historic natural disaster is also very important to him—and even more so now with another major hurricane on the way.

These are the President's immediate priorities: pass disaster relief, prevent a default, and fund the government. These are my immediate priorities as well, and I am sure all of our colleagues feel the same way. We have to get all three of these things done, and we have to do it very quickly.

In the case of the debt limit, we need to act quickly, given the new uncertainty from the large costs of storm recovery. As the President's Budget Director wrote in his letter to Congress last week, "Given the need for additional spending as a result of disaster response and initial recovery from Hurricane Harvey, the Administration continues to urge Congress to act expeditiously to ensure that the debt ceiling does not affect these critical response and recovery efforts. Otherwise it may not be possible to get those critical resources to Americans who desperately need them."

Here is why. As Treasury Secretary Mnuchin explained, "[O]ur first priority is to make sure that the state gets money, it is critical, and to do that we need to make sure we raise the debt limit. So if Congress appropriates the money, but I don't have the ability to borrow more money and pay for it, we're not going to be able to get that money to the state."

He called for Congress to "put politics aside" and get these things done as quickly as possible. That was the Secretary of the Treasury.

I look forward to continuing to discuss these important issues with the President's team and congressional leaders of both parties at the White House tomorrow. I look forward to discussing other important and shared priorities as well.

Nominees, for instance. It was good to see the Senate clear a large package

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



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of nominees before we left for the State work period. Now our work continues. There are other vacancies to fill. There are nominees, for instance, for positions that are critical to recovery from Hurricane Harvey. We have to work together to get those nominees confirmed quickly, and we have to keep working together to fill other vacant positions in the Federal Government as well.

Another issue of extraordinary importance is tax reform. We will actually have another meeting at the White House today on that issue specifically. It is clear the President is very engaged on this issue. As he wrote in an op-ed over the weekend, "Our self-destructive tax code costs Americans millions of jobs, trillions of dollars and billions of hours spent on compliance and on paperwork. . . . We owe it to the American people to fix this broken system. American businesses want to prosper on our shores, and middle-class families are ready for more growth, more jobs, and higher pay."

That is the aim of tax reform, and that is the message I hope the President will continue to take around the country, including his trip this week to North Dakota. In the meantime, work will continue among Members and committees in both Chambers to keep moving forward on this important issue.

In addition to these issues, I also look forward to tomorrow's discussion about the national security challenge that is before us. Administration officials will be coming to Congress later that day to give a briefing on challenges like North Korea and Afghanistan. I am looking forward to that important meeting. These are complicated issues, and they will require smart responses from both the administration and from Congress.

Here in Congress, we will have an opportunity to address some of them soon as we work to pass related legislation such as the annual Defense authorization bill. The chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator MCCAIN, will take the lead on that legislation. We have kept Senator MCCAIN and his family in our thoughts over the State work period. We are glad to have him back with us. We know he will again manage this year's legislation with skill and dedication.

There are obviously other important issues before us as well. There are many goals we share with the administration. There is a lot we want to get done, and we have three critically important things before us right now that we need to do quickly: pass disaster relief, prevent a default so those emergency resources can actually get to Americans who need them, and keep the government funded. Those are the three important things before us now.

We will continue working with the administration and our friends on both sides to accomplish those things.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HURRICANE HARVEY DISASTER RELIEF AND OTHER ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, I welcome the Presiding Officer and every other Senator back from the district work period. As we all know, much has happened since we last were here.

North Korea has tested several ballistic missiles and reportedly tested a nuclear weapon, alarming well-meaning nations around the world.

In Charlottesville, neo-Nazis and White supremacists marched through the streets, reminding us we are not done fighting the darkest elements of American society—racism, bigotry, hate.

Right now, large parts of the fourth largest city in our country remain underwater. I extend my most heartfelt sympathies to the people of Houston and to those across parts of Texas and Louisiana who are just beginning a long road to recovery from Hurricane Harvey. Having lived through Hurricane Sandy in my home State of New York, I remember the agonies of families who lost their homes, lost their businesses, and, particularly in the first month, had a sense of helplessness about what had happened to them. Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone in Houston.

We thank all the first responders and the rescue organizations—the police and fire departments—that are on the scene, as well as those everyday American heroes. Americans always rise to the occasion to lend a hand, such as the folks who drove to Houston with boats hooked to their cars to help rescue stranded families. In rough times, Americans pull together, and Congress will do its part to provide relief and aid to the people of Houston this month.

Needless to say, we have a busy work period ahead of us. In addition to a recovery package for Houston, we have to pass appropriations to keep the government open, raise the debt ceiling, protect the Dreamers, provide certainty on the cost-sharing program that helps keep healthcare premiums down, and much more. The to-do list is lengthy. Nearly all the items I mentioned will require votes from Senators from both sides of the aisle. The best way to tackle and ultimately pass legislation on those issues is for us to work in a bipartisan way this month.

Mr. President, on taxes, unfortunately, we are off to a very bad start because President Trump has scheduled a meeting on tax reform today with only Republican legislative leaders. Just as they did with healthcare, Republicans seem to be excluding Democrats from the legislative process from the very beginning.

The majority leader announced prior to the break that he would likely pursue changes to the Tax Code on reconciliation, meaning the Republicans would only need the votes of their own party. Now they are meeting about the issue without even inviting Democrats to join in preliminary discussions.

Very simply, if Republicans hope to avoid the same pitfalls that ultimately brought down their effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, they ought to abandon the misguided idea that one party can enact major changes to the Tax Code. An effort such as this requires two parties, and the result for the American people will be better if we all work together. The American people understand clearly that if Democrats were included in the debate, tax reform would be much more likely to help the middle class. If Republicans are the only ones in the room on tax reform, the vast majority of the benefits are likely to go to those at the very top. That is what the Republican Party has stood for for years.

Mr. President, on another matter, over the past 6 weeks, North Korea has repeatedly tested the resolve of the United States with the launch of several ballistic missiles. The rogue regime has threatened to launch a missile in close proximity to Guam, a U.S. territory, and has, in fact, fired a missile over the territory of our ally Japan.

The United States must respond to these increasingly bellicose actions with firmness and levelheadedness. The President of the United States has to lead the way. The President of the United States should be firm, level, and above all else, credible. The President's words matter—especially on issues of national security—but thus far, President Trump has responded to North Korea with bluff and bluster, hyperbole and exaggerated language: "fire and fury like the world has never seen." That is the kind of language we typically hear from the North Korean regime, not from the President of the United States.

The harsh fact is that because President Trump bluffs and blusters, he will be much less effective in dealing with North Korea in the long run. Foreign leaders—especially our allies—don't know whether they can trust his words when there is so much hyperbole involved, and it undermines his ability to lead in a geopolitical crisis.

I urge the President to speak with caution, to speak with prudence, and to always speak credibly as well as strongly. It is paramount that North Korea understand the position of the United States and that when the President of the United States makes a statement, it believe we are prepared to act accordingly.

Mr. President, finally, on the DACA Program, today the administration announced it would terminate the program after a period of 6 months. Most Americans know how heartless this DACA decision is, ripping families