



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2017

No. 180

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.

O God, You are our God. Please draw near to all who are affected by the violence in Your house of worship in Sutherland Springs, TX. Comfort those who mourn, bring healing to the injured, and shower Your mercy upon us all.

Lord, keep our lawmakers composed even in life's storms. May they acknowledge their need of Your power, Your wisdom, and Your might. May they run toward life's challenges and hardships, knowing that they are never alone. Satisfy their souls with good things, and transform the mundane into the meaningful. Lord, purify their hearts, creating within them a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Reveal to them Your plans for their well-being, providing them with a future and hope.

We pray in Your loving 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Engel nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Steven Andrew Engel, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order of November 2, which notwithstanding rule XXII, be modified to have all executive session cloture motions ripen following the disposition of the Gibson nomination; further, that if cloture is invoked on the Engel nomination, the time postcloture be counted as if invoked at 5:30 p.m. on Monday.

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

TEXAS CHURCH MASS SHOOTING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for most Americans, a church is a place of worship and love, a place where the faithful go to feel mercy and compassion, which is why what happened in Texas yesterday is so difficult for many to comprehend. Why would an individual do this? Families lost so much. Our hearts go out to them in this time of untold grief. Our gratitude goes out to the civilians and first responders who answer the call when others are in need.

As we continue to learn the details of yesterday's tragic events, I, along with all Members of the Senate, will keep the victims of this tragedy and their families in my prayers.

Mr. President, on a completely different matter, last Monday I said the Senate would confirm four excellent

judicial nominees by the end of the week. That is just what we did—Amy Barrett, confirmed; Joan Larsen, confirmed; Allison Eid, confirmed; Stephanos Bibas, confirmed.

After 8 years of a President who selected judges based upon an ideological litmus test designed to find nominees who favor certain groups or individuals over others, we now have a President who is sending over nominees who will ensure that the judiciary is actually living up to the role we expect in our democracy: treating everyone equally, giving every litigant a fair shake, applying the law as it is actually written, not as the judge wishes it might be. The four circuit court nominees the Senate confirmed last week will do just that.

Democrats have put up a lot of procedural roadblocks to prevent the Senate from moving forward all year. We have moved ahead anyway. As a result, despite all the obstacles from the other side, we are making significant progress.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the hard work and notable leadership of Judiciary Committee Chairman CHUCK GRASSLEY, and I want to thank him again for everything he has done.

We are not finished yet. We are going to keep pressing forward on judicial nominees. We are going to keep confirming the other nominees before us as well.

This week the Senate will consider some of President Trump's other qualified nominees for various positions throughout the Federal Government. Each of these individuals will help lead their agencies to fulfill their particular mission in running the government.

First, we will advance the nomination of Steven Engel to serve as Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel. Mr. Engel previously worked in the OLC, having done so under President Bush. He also served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General

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



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and counsel to the Assistant Attorney General. He obviously has a lot of experience advising senior policymakers on a wide variety of legal issues facing the executive branch. That is good because the role he has been nominated to has the responsibility for providing legal advice to the executive branch on all constitutional questions and reviewing pending legislation for constitutionality.

I look forward to advancing Mr. Engel's nomination tomorrow so that he can begin putting his experience to work for our country as soon as possible, and then we will turn to the various other nominees before us so they can begin doing the same. Confirming the President's nominees is an important part of the Senate's business, and I urge all of our colleagues to work together so we can get this done.

TAX REFORM

Now on one final matter, Mr. President, today our colleagues on the House Ways and Means Committee began marking up the tax reform legislation they unveiled last week. Under Chairman BRADY's leadership, the committee is continuing its work to get our economy reaching again for its true potential. This is yet more momentum for our country's once-in-a-generation opportunity to update the tax system, deliver relief to hard-working American families, and get our economy creating more opportunities and prosperity.

Under Chairman HATCH's leadership, the Senate Finance Committee is continuing to move forward on its own legislation to increase opportunity and to provide more take-home pay for American families. In an open process through regular order, members of the committee will continue to have input in the writing of this tax reform legislation.

Both Chambers are working with the President and his team to overhaul our country's complex and outdated tax system. We are united around a commonsense set of goals to make taxes lower, simpler, and fairer; take more money out of Washington's pockets and put more money in the pockets of America's middle class; and level the playing field for American workers and businesses so they can compete against foreign competitors on an equal footing and not only create more jobs in America but keep them here too. These are goals shared by so many across our country regardless of party.

It is time to deliver real tax relief for hard-working families, and we are going to keep working together to do just that.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TEXAS CHURCH MASS SHOOTING

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the mass shooting in Texas yesterday—the latest mass shooting in what seems like never-ending gun violence in our country. My heart breaks for the victims and their families and for the community of Sutherland Springs in Texas.

We are still gathering all the facts about this specific crime. We are still learning about what happened, how this murderer was able to purchase a gun, whatever his twisted rationale was for walking into a house of worship in a small town and slaughtering more than 20 people, including young children, with an assault weapon. Our incredible law enforcement officials are working hard to answer all of that, but the most important fact of all is something we already know very well. This was yet another case where someone on American soil who had absolutely no business getting his hands on a weapon of war was able to get one and use it to commit heinous mass murder.

Of the five worst mass shootings in our history, three of them have occurred in just the past 17 months. Think about that. In a small town in America, nearly 7 percent of the town's population was slaughtered just because they went to church that day. The weapon he used was based on a military weapon designed for a war zone, but this was not a war zone. It was a church. People were singing and praying and savoring life.

I reject the notion that it is too soon to act. If not now, then when? We should ban assault weapons and bump stocks today. People who don't want to have an honest conversation say we need to wait. Well, for how long? Because we wait, and we wait, and we will see evil rear its ugly head over and over again, and we are told to wait again.

We have enough information today for Congress to do its job and try to keep our constituents safe from gun violence. We had enough information before yesterday to act, but what Congress does not have is the political will to act. My friends, this must change. Thoughts and prayers are not going to stop the next mass shooting. Merely talking about doing something about the mentally ill obtaining guns isn't going to stop the next deranged person with hate in their soul from committing yet another mass murder. The Second Amendment does not mean that Americans should have to risk getting shot because they walked down the wrong street in a city or decided to go to a music festival in Las Vegas or a night club in Orlando or an elementary school in Newtown or a movie theater in Aurora or a church on Sunday in Texas.

After each of these horrific acts of violence, what happened here in Congress? Nothing. More than a month after Las Vegas, we still can't even tackle the most obvious fixes like banning bump stocks. Plain and simple,

Americans are being slaughtered and Congress is refusing to protect them.

I hear my colleagues who rightly say we can't pass laws to stop every instance of a deranged gunman who wants to kill innocent men, women, and children, just like our other criminal laws will not necessarily stop every instance of crime, but there is no excuse for not even trying. Everyone in this Chamber knows that a shooting in a church is something that should never happen in this country. Mr. President, I think you would agree with that. I think everyone who serves in this Chamber would agree with that. So then why aren't we doing anything to stop this violence? Why aren't we making it harder for a crazed, evil person to get their hands on a weapon of war?

It makes me wonder what our colleagues are waiting for. Are they waiting for the NRA to come in and give them cover and tell them it is OK to act? Are they waiting for the NRA to give them permission to stand up and do something? If the NRA said today assault rifles or bump stocks should be banned, it would be done tomorrow. That is the sad truth of this place, but we know the NRA will not say that because they want to keep selling these weapons of war to anyone who is willing to buy them, no matter how unsafe it makes it for the rest of us.

Congress has caved in over and over again to the enormous pressure by the NRA and the gun industry—which just wants to protect their profits—and has ignored the vast majority of Americans. Gun owners and nongun owners alike support commonsense measures to keep their fellow Americans safe.

These mass slaughters continue, and Congress has done nothing—absolutely nothing. To me, this is a monumental failure of leadership, and it is no wonder that gun violence and mass shootings happen here at a higher rate than any other developed country in the world. This has to change. It is not enough to solve the individual crime after the fact. We have to take meaningful, real action to prevent the next one. This is what has to happen. To those who doubt that Congress can actually get something done, we already know that, depending on the motivation, depending on whom Congress is actually listening to, Congress is fully capable of moving quickly to enact change. Instead of acting like its hands are tied and refusing to do anything—which is what is happening right now—far more often than not, Congress listens to the special interests instead of the people who actually elect them to keep them safe.

Look at the shameful state of our gun laws now and tell me if you think these laws came about because families in our States demanded them or was it because the NRA demanded them? Congress has turned a collective back on strengthening and expanding our national background check system. We should be fixing the holes in the system—whatever is necessary—not just