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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.

God, our Lord, You are the light of the world. In Your light, we see our lives and know our poverty. Illuminate our path with the brightness of Your abundance. Supply our needs from Your celestial bounty.

Bless our Senators. Lord, You know their lives, hearts, and thoughts. Give them the wisdom to refuse to deviate from integrity. Equip them with strength and spirit to trust You, even when they don't understand Your providential guidance. Guide their words so that those with whom they work will seek common ground for the good of our Nation and world.

And Lord, surround the United States Senate page spring class of 2018 with the shield of Your Divine favor. Thank You for their faithful service.

We pray in Your strong 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 (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF KENNETH MARCUS AND THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, today the Senate will consider the

nomination of Kenneth Marcus to serve as the Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. His resume includes degrees from Williams College and the California Berkeley School of Law, and his career has spanned private practice and public service, with considerable experience in government. I look forward to voting to confirm Mr. Marcus later today.

Then, the Senate will resume consideration of the John S. McCain 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. It is the result of serious bipartisan work over the past several months.

Our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee have engaged in candid discussions with our Nation's top military leaders. They have heard about the pressing needs of the men and women who serve in harm's way: greater readiness, enhanced weapons capabilities in the air and on the seas, simpler processes for acquisition, and more support for military families.

This week we have already discussed the array of global challenges that face our Nation at this critical moment. This NDAA will help to equip our troops with the latest training and the best technology to confront those challenges and to keep us safe.

It is also important to reflect on all that this legislation will do for our warfighters and their families here at home. It will increase base pay for servicemembers by 2.6 percent, the largest annual raise in nearly a decade. It authorizes new resources for family housing construction, improved care for servicemembers' children with severe disabilities, and programs to better manage opioid prescriptions in the military health system.

It will authorize continued operations at military posts across our country that build up our Nation's security and form the backbone of local communities.

The servicemembers who serve at Kentucky's Army installations and in the Kentucky Air and Army National

Guard are critical to our overall national defense strategy. I am proud to represent them here in the Senate.

Fort Campbell is home to the 101st Airborne Division and a number of Special Operations units. In recent years, many of these servicemembers have seen a near-constant cycle of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The NDAA ensures that they are not forgotten. Fort Knox hosts the Army's Human Resources Command and Recruiting Command, where the NDAA will help to modernize officer personnel management, and this year's legislation paves the way for new construction projects at both these facilities.

In Madison County, the Blue Grass Army Depot is responsible for storing and demilitarizing conventional and legacy chemical weapons. It is a top-of-the-line facility, integral to our national security. Passing this NDAA will help to ensure that it can continue safe and effective operations.

It is my privilege to represent the men and women of the Kentucky Air and Army National Guard, including the 123rd Airlift Wing. This legislation will reaffirm our commitment to these citizen soldiers and airmen who are always ready to respond to emergencies at home or threats from abroad.

Kentucky is indeed proud of our men and women in uniform. When I vote for this Defense bill, I will be casting my vote for them.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, 16 months ago, President Trump and Republican majorities arrived in Washington with clear instructions from the American people: Get the Federal Government out of the way. A decade of Democratic control meant that taxes were too high, regulations were too burdensome, and America was too difficult a place to start a small business or hire more workers.

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



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Republicans heard our marching orders loud and clear. We used the Congressional Review Act a record 16 times to root out invasive rules that tripped up small businesses. We uprooted key pieces of ObamaCare and Dodd-Frank that had burdened the middle class, and we delivered a long-overdue, comprehensive overhaul of America's Tax Code. It is helping to rejuvenate the economy and is letting American families keep more of what they earn.

Today, under this Republican government, the U.S. economy is healthier than it has been in a long time. We have the lowest unemployment in 18 years, and more open positions than workers seeking jobs for the first time since the Labor Department started collecting these data. There is record levels of optimism among small businesses and manufacturers. More Americans are saying that now is a good time to find a quality job than at any point in the last 17 years.

In the Obama years, prosperity was slower in coming. Opportunities were comparatively few, and what limited growth did occur flowed disproportionately into America's very biggest urban centers.

Now our economy is starting to work better for all kinds of communities. I recently heard a few inspiring stories from my friend Senator PORTMAN. In Zanesville, OH, the owners of GKM Auto Parts spent much of the last decade watching health insurance premiums soar. By 2016 they could no longer support coverage for their employees, but as Senator PORTMAN recently explained, one of the first things the company was able to do following the passage of historic tax reform last year was to restore that coverage.

He also shared that builders and manufacturers across his State, from Wolf Metals in Columbus to Advanced Industrial Roofing in Massillon, are increasing pay and benefits, investing in equipment, and creating jobs as a direct result of tax reform and this pro-growth economic climate.

We are hearing stories like these from every corner of our country.

American workers and job creators are turning the page on the last decade and writing brand-new success stories, and Republican policies are helping to make that happen.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 pro-

ceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Kenneth L. Marcus, of Virginia, to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12:30 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from North Carolina.

CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF PASTOR ANDREW BRUNSON

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President, I wish to speak briefly. I thank the Democratic leader for giving me the opportunity to speak for 5 minutes to do what I have done every week for the past couple of months and what I will do every week until we get a resolution; that is, to talk about Pastor Brunson, a Presbyterian minister who has been in prison in Turkey since October of 2016.

As best as we can tell, the only thing Pastor Brunson is guilty of is being a missionary who has committed 20 years of his life to working with people in Turkey who want to hear the Word of God. That is it. We can talk about—I will not today because my time is limited—all the trumped-up charges I witnessed when I spent 12 hours in a Turkish courtroom a couple of months ago or that I discussed with Pastor Brunson about 3 weeks earlier when I visited him in a prison.

Today what I want to talk about is relevant to the national defense authorization and the work we have done in committee to put Turkey on notice that this is unacceptable.

Turkey has been an ally of the United States since 1952. The NATO alliance commits every member of NATO to send their men and women in uniform into harm's way to defend the national security of a nation of the alliance. We have that with Turkey; we have since 1952.

Over the past month or so, we have seen a would-be adversary in North Korea release three prisoners, we have seen Venezuela release a prisoner, but in Turkey, since October of 2016, we have seen them hold a man for almost a year and a half without charges. Then I saw a man go before a court—and I witnessed for a whole day—being subjected to some of the most absurd charges possible. Next week, when I have more time, I will get into those.

I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who voted to put a provision in the national defense authorization that really makes us wonder whether we have to rethink our relationship with Turkey, particularly around the Joint Strike Fighter. The Joint Strike Fighter is one of the most sophisticated tactical fighters that has ever flown; arguably, the most sophisticated. Turkey is a NATO ally and, as such, they have access to that weapons system. In fact, they manufacture a lot of the critical parts for it.

What we offered in the NDAA is an examination of whether that relationship makes sense; No. 1, because of the way they are treating one of our American citizens, not letting him come back home, he and his wife; and No. 2, if that is the behavior of a NATO ally, is that really where we should be putting, in our supply chains and in our defensive systems, one of the most sophisticated weapons, one of the most important weapons in our arsenal. I, for one, think we have to look at it.

Until the Turkish Government recognizes that they are illegally holding Pastor Brunson, and a number of others, then I think we have to put the spotlight on them and hold them accountable. If I have an obligation, as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate, to defend their integrity, they have an obligation to treat our American citizens with respect.

We have the amendment in the NDAA. We also have another amendment we may offer. We need to make Turkey know we believe our alliance with them is important, but it is also important to treat American citizens who are not guilty of a crime with respect and bring Pastor Brunson home.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

TURKEY

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, I thank my colleague. I was asked by my colleague from North Carolina if I would agree with his remarks, and he said he thought so. I definitely do. I think Erdogan is doing very bad things to the Turkish people, to our NATO alliance in the Middle East. He has had a vehemently anti-Israel position. To allow him to get away with all of this stuff without putting maximum pressure on him makes no sense. So I thank my colleague from North Carolina.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Madam President, on other subjects, later today the Senate will move to the consideration of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act. The annual defense authorization is something our friend Senator MCCAIN cares deeply about and has talked to me about regularly, and we wish he were here to shepherd it on the floor as we have seen him do many times before.

It is important that we get this done for our military, for our broader national security, for Senator MCCAIN, and to ensure that this critical authorization bill moves forward on a steady track. Any time we say the name or see the name written, "John S. McCain," our hearts go pitter-patter a little bit, and we pray for his speedy recovery.

The NDAA is an opportunity to revise and improve our national security to meet the evolving threats of a world that is changing so very fast. I just