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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

O God, our protector, mountains melt in Your presence and islands shout for joy. We praise You because Your ways are just and true. Lord, You know our hearts and minds like an open book. Thank You for the security we have in You. When all around us seems daunting, You alone remain our rock and refuge.

Give our lawmakers this day such reverence for You that they will stay in the path of integrity. May they think about You throughout the day, whispering prayers of gratitude for Your goodness and grace.

Lead our national and international leaders on the road that will bring glory to Your Name. Lord, give them the courage to speak for justice, truth, and peace.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 13, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. HELLER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 3747

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

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

The legislative clerk read the title of the bill as follows:

A bill (S. 3747) to provide for programs to help reduce the risk that prisoners will recidivate upon release from prison, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar, under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate began this week with a long list of important unfinished business. And make no mistake—that list remains lengthy. It will require the continued good-faith efforts of Members on both sides of the aisle to keep up the progress.

We need to confirm more of the well-qualified nominees who remain waiting on the Senate's calendar. We need to deliver the targeted resources that are necessary for securing our border and fund the remaining parts of the Federal Government.

Today, of course, debate will continue on the Sanders-Lee resolution with respect to U.S. involvement in Yemen. As I stated yesterday, their resolution is not sufficiently prudent nor sufficiently precise for the job at hand. Yes, the Senate wants Saudi Arabia to act responsibly. We want to see a more stable Yemen for the sake of the Yemeni people. We also want to preserve this 70-year partnership, which serves our interests and helps stabilize a crucial region.

The resolution before us is a blunt and imprecise measure that would not advance these delicate goals. To the contrary, it would jeopardize U.S. support that has actually limited civilian casualties. And I maintain that since genuine hostilities are not involved, the resolution should not even be privileged under the War Powers Act.

I urge my colleagues to vote against their resolution and to support Chairman CORKER's more responsible alternative in its place.

Even considering the work still before us, Members should take pride in the significant milestones we have checked off this week.

On Tuesday, the Senate completed the 30th Federal circuit judge confirmation of this Congress.

Yesterday evening, the Senate and the House reached a landmark agreement to reform the process by which Capitol Hill itself handles claims of sexual harassment, discrimination, and other workplace violations. It is a bicameral and bipartisan agreement. It strengthens protections for victims. It ensures that Members of Congress shall be held responsible for their own misconduct, not taxpayers. It contains a number of other important reforms to

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



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create more transparency and accountability in the process. I am very glad Congress will be taking this important step. I want to thank Chairman BLUNT and Ranking Member KLOBUCHAR and their counterparts in the House for working hard to get this across the finish line.

That wasn't the only milestone we cleared yesterday. Yesterday afternoon, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing the farm bill conference report. Now it is on its way to the President's desk.

The boost this bill delivers couldn't come soon enough. It is no secret that these are tough times in farm country. Falling prices and volatile markets make it harder to make ends meet. Net farm income continues to decline. The threat of natural disasters is a constant fear for even the most skilled and prepared farmers.

Families in my home State of Kentucky are all too familiar with these challenges. Months of heavy rain and severe weather this year have damaged crop yields and increased the burden on producers. We are home to more than 75,000 farms. They produce everything from soybeans and poultry to horses and corn. These families are looking to us for help and stability, and when President Trump signs our farm bill into law, more stability is just what they will get.

I would like to share some of the bill's highlights that will support farm families in the Blue Grass State, by way of example.

In need of certainty and predictability, this farm bill extends a strong commodity safety net and protects crop insurance.

It contains policies to encourage future generations of farmers to plant their own roots—particularly important in States like mine with aging agricultural populations.

To preserve our land for the future, the legislation promotes conservation programs, outdoor recreation, and upgraded watershed and drinking water infrastructure.

For our rural communities, it expands broadband deployment and dedicates further resources to combat the opioid epidemic.

For hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians faced with food insecurity, the farm bill increases funding for emergency programs at food banks.

The legislation provides continued funding for groundbreaking agricultural research at universities and research institutions.

For producers looking for markets abroad, it strengthens our trade programs to develop new opportunities for Kentucky around the globe.

Of course, each of these important victories for Kentucky farmers comes in addition to the new opportunities available with the full legalization of industrial hemp, as I have discussed extensively here on the floor.

All in all, this legislation is a big win for farmers in Kentucky and across our

country. I am proud to have played a part in delivering that victory.

It has been my privilege to represent Kentucky farmers on the Agriculture Committee every day I have served in the Senate. The multiyear bill we produced is a credit to the leadership of Chairman ROBERTS and Ranking Member STABENOW, and now the fruits of their labor are finally on the way to the White House.

I would like to express my gratitude to my fellow conferees, especially my colleague from Kentucky, Congressman JAMIE COMER.

I would also like to thank the Kentucky Farm Bureau, which has been my partner every step of the way. Earlier this month, the farm bureau announced the beginning of its centennial year. I would be hard-pressed to think of a better way to celebrate that 100th birthday than with a new farm bill.

There is a reason this bill passed both Houses with overwhelming bipartisan majorities. There is a reason this has been a big priority for Congress and the administration. Farming families deserve more stability. Once the President signs this farm bill into law, that is precisely what they will have.

TRIBUTE TO JEFF FLAKE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to close by paying tribute to another Member of this body whose retirement in the Senate is fast approaching. This particular Senator, in his own words, grew up on a dry, dusty ranch in Northern Arizona. You might be surprised at that description if you knew only the name of his hometown—"Snowflake." But this Navajo County town of a couple of thousand residents wasn't named for its meteorology; it was named for its founding families. It was set up back in 1878 by two wagon train pioneers: Mr. Snow and—that is right—Mr. FLAKE. It would still be 34 years until Arizona became the 48th State, and 134 years later, that Mormon pioneer's great-great-grandson would be elected to the U.S. Senate.

JEFF FLAKE is the son of cattle ranchers, so he learned all about "earmarking" from an early age. Back when JEFF was serving in the House, he explained in an op-ed that back on the ranch, earmarking was an unsavory way to brand your cattle. Apparently, the practice involves a pocketknife.

Well, JEFF moved on from that cattle pen. He wound up leading a statewide think tank. Then he won election to the House. By the time he arrived here in Washington—filled with equal parts fiery resolve and smalltown collegiality—"earmarks" had come to mean something very different to him, but, as his House colleagues would soon find out, he found the new meaning just as unappealing.

JEFF's take on fiscal responsibility and good government ruffled some feathers over in the House, but his star kept rising. He didn't seem to mind that lonely feeling that we have all

known here in Washington from time to time—the occasional sense that you have wound up on a bit of an island. I mean, JEFF really didn't mind this feeling. This is not a political metaphor, by the way; it is literally one of the man's hobbies.

Starting back in 2009, and several times since, our colleague had decided a "dream vacation" means a rugged survival trip where he is marooned on a remote island with just a couple tools. In one eloquent reflection, JEFF described this predilection as "a long bout of 'Caruso envy.'"

That first time, he traveled alone. To pass the time, there was the standard activities—dodging sharks; spearfishing for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; starting fires with coconut husks and a magnifying glass; befriending the hermit crabs—you know, typical tourist fare.

In fairness to our friend, maybe a solo getaway has a special appeal to anyone who grew up as one of 11 children or, for that matter, I can see why it might tempt a Member of the House, but apparently the appeal was somewhat broader than the alone time because on subsequent trips JEFF actually brought company.

A few years ago, he talked our colleague MARTIN HEINRICH into coming along on one of these adventures. It was just the two of them—and some TV cameras. This was prime time stuff now. The network called the show "Rival Survival."

That title actually reminds me of something JEFF said to his former colleagues in the House in his farewell speech, while he was preparing to come over here. He said coming to the Senate was like entering "enemy territory." That is a funny phrase, "enemy territory." It is funny because vitriol and hostility are so precisely not how Senator FLAKE will be remembered.

Instead, there have been warm and genuine friendships with colleagues on both sides of the aisle and shared work on policy accomplishments that have already made a difference for millions of Americans.

JEFF has cast votes for landmark accomplishments that have tangibly made life better for middle-class families in his home State and across the Nation. We don't have enough time here to name them all.

As part of this majority on behalf of the people of Arizona, Senator FLAKE gave his vote to start historic tax cuts and tax reform for the American people and to enact major regulatory reforms and to pass bipartisan achievements on every subject from the opioid crisis to caring for our veterans.

So JEFF has achieved much in this high office. He has had a hand in numerous consequential policy victories. A few years back, he was named by The Hill newspaper as the No. 1 most beautiful person on Capitol Hill. Talk about an achievement that few of us can even aspire to.