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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Most glorious and exalted God, You glorify humanity with Your love and mercy. Accept our thanksgiving for Your providential care.

Today, guide our Senators on the road of integrity. May they seek to live above reproach, striving to please You in all they think, say, and do. Lord, give them ears to hear Your divine imperatives and the courage to do them. Use them to heal the wounds in our Nation and world.

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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH.) The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, first, I want to thank and congratulate our colleagues who have been working hard to secure a bipartisan, bicameral solution to complete the appropriations process and fund the government. It had been clear to everyone that in order to reach an agreement, our Democratic colleagues would have to walk away from two extreme positions that had been dictated to them presumably by the far left—the notion that Congress shouldn't spend more than ''one dollar'' on new border barriers and the idea that we should impose a hard, statutory cap on ICE detainees in the interior of our country, which would require the release of criminals into the United States.

Fortunately, our Democratic colleagues did abandon those unreasonable positions, and the negotiations were able to move forward productively. Last night, Chairman SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and their counterparts in the House announced they have reached an agreement in principle, which is certainly good news. It provides new funds for miles of new border barriers, and it completes all seven outstanding appropriations bills, so Congress can complete a funding process for all the outstanding parts of the Federal Government with predictability and with certainty.

I know I speak for Members on both sides of the aisle when I say that we are grateful to our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee for their leadership. We are eager to see them complete this work. As we speak, our colleagues are working hard to produce legislative text. I look forward to reviewing the full text as soon as possible and hope the Senate can act on this legislation in short order.

S. 47

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday the Senate advanced S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act, and later today we will vote to pass it. The lands bill is the product of over 100 pieces of legislation addressing the management and preservation of some of our Nation's most precious natural areas. It touches every State, features the input of a wide coalition of our colleagues, and has earned the support of a broad, diverse coalition of many advocates for public lands, economic development, and conservation.

I am especially proud that the bill will take action on key priorities for my own State, from protecting national monuments, to preserving the legacy of historically Black colleges and universities, to helping local communities fight invasive species.

The fact that we are about to push this comprehensive package across the finish line is a credit to the dedicated efforts of Chairman MURKOWSKI and Ranking Member MANCHIN. From the outset, S. 47 has benefitted from good-faith, bipartisan efforts at the committee level and here on the floor. I look forward to voting to pass the bill later this afternoon. I am going to do so enthusiastically for the people of Kentucky and for communities across the Nation.

H.R. 1

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, last week the House began the hearing process on Speaker PELOSI's signature bill, H.R. 1, the Democrat Politician Protection Act. I have already touched on several of its outlandish and problematic provisions. What I want to do today is focus on one corner of the craziness. It is the wild idea that what American politics today is really missing is a big taxpayer bailout of political campaigns, attack-ad makers, and campaign consultants.

For everyone who is now convinced they must have misheard what I just said, let me say five of those words again: taxpayer bailout for political campaigns.

It is really something. Democrats have spent months, if not years, crafting this sprawling, 500-plus page Federal takeover of our political speech and our elections. They had all the time in the world to carefully choose each provision and tailor their political strategy, but even after all that, my colleagues in the House Democratic conference are so Washington-centric in their thinking and so

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

happy to tax and spend other people's money that it never occurred to anyone that maybe the American people wouldn't love the idea of their own tax dollars being redistributed to political campaign consultants. It never occurred to them that the American people might not like to have their tax money redistributed to political consultants. This is how out of touch with taxpayers the modern Democratic Party has become.

They saw all these proposals to take the American people's tax dollars and funnel them into more attack ads, yard signs, and telephone calls, and thought, what a great idea. We will put that in. The Democrat Political Protection Act would do this in several different ways. There would be a new Washington, DC-run voucher program so that would-be political donors could simply ask for chunks of taxpayer money and then hand it out to the campaigns they favor. There would also be a brandnew, sixfold matching program for certain donations. The Federal Government would literally come in—sort of the way some businesses match their workers' charitable contributions—and use the American people's money to match certain campaign contributions sixfold. In other words, millions of dollars would be available for each candidate who comes along asking for his or her share of the taxpayer loot.

Keep in mind—this would put each taxpayer on the hook for financing the candidates and campaigns they personally disagree with. They will take our money and give it to people we are not for. If Democrats have their way, citizens won't just have to sit through television commercials railing against the candidate they plan to vote for; now they would also have the pleasure of bankrolling the ads. You can sit there in front of the TV screen and watch your tax dollars at work supporting a person you are going to vote against. People are going to love that.

When you ask Democrats why exactly they would propose something as absolutely ludicrous as a massive, new, taxpayer-funded bailout of the permanent political class, sometimes they make vague claims that problems in American politics would go away if only we took more power out of the people's hands and shipped it here to the Nation's Capital. The evidence suggests they are dead wrong on this. Research suggests that jurisdictions—and there are a few of them—that have matching-fund systems in many cases also have rampant corruption, misappropriation, and waste. There are numerous examples that there is still plenty of corruption and wrongdoing in those systems—not exactly a surprise outcome when you centralize more money and power through government channels.

Public financing doesn't appear to change the playing field between challengers and incumbents in any way either. Here is how one University of Wisconsin political scientist summed it up: ''The people who propose these systems often oversell them.''

There are no apparent benefits, significant new costs, and they want to stick taxpayers with the bill. This is just another one of the Democrat Politician Protection Act's greatest hits. I will have more in the future.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, last night, the country heard some good news. The members of the conference committee announced a tentative agreement to keep the government open past Friday as well as provide additional border security. It was welcome news.

All on the conference committee worked very hard and should be commended for their efforts. I talked to them regularly. Everyone wanted to get something done, and everyone wanted to avoid a government shutdown. While the details are still being hammered out, the tentative agreement represents a path forward for our country—away from another round of fraught negotiations up against a government funding cliff, away from a dreaded government shutdown.

Over the past few months, we have been lurching from one manufactured crisis to another. It would be a wonderful thing for this Congress to pass bills that settle the budget issues for the rest of this year and for the country to finally move past. Hopefully, that is what this agreement will portend. Hopefully, this agreement means that there will not be another government shutdown on Friday—sparing the country of another nightmare of furloughed Federal employees, snarled airports, and economic hardship. Hopefully, it means that we will pass not only the DHS appropriations bill but all six other appropriations bills—done in a bipartisan way—that have been caught in the tangle of these negotiations since last year.

Each of these bills is a product of bipartisan consensus. Each contains more support for programs to help the American people—additional funding for infrastructure, housing, money to combat the opioid crisis, and more. We should pass these appropriations bills alongside this agreement on DHS.

These months of shutdown politics must come to an end. We now have a bipartisan proposal to accomplish our goals, better secure the border, and avoid another senseless government shutdown. I don't know the details, but the parameters of this are good. So I thank the members of the conference committee.

I would make one more point. I urge President Trump to sign this agreement. We must not have a rerun of what happened a few months back, whereby legislators—Democratic and Republican, House and Senate—agreed, and President Trump pulled the rug out from under the agreement and caused the shutdown. If he opposes this agreement, the same thing could happen again. We don't need it. So I strongly urge the President to sign this agreement. No one gets everything one wants in these agreements. The President must sign it and not cause another shutdown.

PRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, on another matter, late last week, I had the privilege of addressing an audience at the Newseum about the current challenges facing the free press in America.

I ask unanimous consent that my remarks be printed in the RECORD after my remarks here.

One of the most significant challenges the press faces, of course, is economic. Besieged by a fractured media landscape and rapidly changing technology, newspapers have been forced to adapt or die. Some have adapted, but many have died.

One area in which it is particularly troubling to me is in smaller markets in midsized and smaller cities. In those areas, local newspapers have been the glue that keeps communities informed and stitched together. I have seen it. In cities in Upstate New York—small- and middle-sized—big companies have left, and some of the community banks have been bought up by major large banks. The things that keep a community together are greatly deteriorating. Newspapers are one of the few glues these communities have. They are vital—way beyond the profit and loss that they might make. The external benefits of these newspapers, as the economists would say, are large, but they are in trouble because of all the economic issues I mentioned.

Now there is a new threat on the horizon. A few weeks ago, a hedge fund, known as the ''destroyer of newspapers,'' announced a bid to take over Gannett, which, in addition to USA Today, publishes a lot of small- and medium-sized newspapers and four important papers in my State, those being the Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester, the Press & Sun in Binghamton, the Poughkeepsie Journal, the Journal News in Westchester, and newspapers in Elmira and Ithaca.

This morning, on the front page of the Washington Post, there is an article about the business practices of