



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2019

No. 36

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.

Precious Lord, take our hands. Lead us forward, and help us to stand.

We praise You for the gifts and talents You have given our Senators. Continue to bless them with influence that can make a difference. Lord, give them the wisdom to cut through the complex issues and discover solutions to the challenging problems that threaten our freedom. Remind them to be good stewards of the abilities You have so generously given them. Prepare their hearts to respond to You with gratitude as they strive to live for Your glory.

We pray in Your great 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. CRAMER). 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 resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michael J. Desmond, of California, to be Chief Counsel for the Internal Revenue Service and an Assistant General Counsel in the Department of the Treasury.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate confirmed the 31st new circuit judge since January of 2017. Eric Miller came to the Senate for our consideration with a stellar resume and a sterling legal reputation. We had every indication he would interpret our Nation's laws and Constitution as they are actually written. This is exactly the kind of judge the American people deserve to sit on our Nation's courts of appeals. That is why the Senate will continue to make judicial nominations a top priority.

This week, however, we need to make more progress on the backlog of important executive branch nominees whom Democrats' delaying tactics and obstruction have left literally languishing on the Senate calendar.

The first is Michael Desmond, the President's choice to serve as Chief Counsel of the IRS. Mr. Desmond has put his legal expertise to work through years of public service, including at the Department of Justice Tax Division and at the Department of the Treasury. He has an impressive private sector background as well.

So listen to this: In the last Congress, the Finance Committee recommended Mr. Desmond to the full Senate by a vote of 25 to 2. That was last August. Yet this noncontroversial nominee never got a floor vote and had to be sent back to the White House. Well, Mr. Desmond was renominated. Earlier this month, our colleagues on the Finance Committee reported him favorably yet again—26 to 2.

I am sorry my Democratic colleagues required us to file cloture on this thoroughly noncontroversial nominee. It is a good example of the unreasonable tactics that have, sadly, become their standing operating procedure in many cases, but I am glad we voted to advance the nomination yesterday, and I urge everyone to join me in voting to confirm him soon.

THE GREEN NEW DEAL

Mr. President, on another matter, the Environment and Public Works Committee, led by Chairman BARASSO, is meeting today to consider legislation that would help reduce, capture, and find productive uses for carbon dioxide emissions. It is an important subject and deserves a serious approach, but, as we all know, some on the far left have recently offered other ideas on this subject. That is right—the much heralded Green New Deal. Nothing says forward-thinking and fresh ideas quite like borrowing the name of an 80-plus-year-old policy program and just adding the color “green.”

So what is this thing all about? That turns out to be an interesting question. It depends on whom you ask. The Democrats who authored it say it is a massive reorganization and government takeover of our Nation's economy and our culture. Some have argued it is the only way to stop the world from ending in about a decade.

This was interesting news, even to many of their fellow Democrats. Our colleague Senator DURBIN reacted this way:

I have read it, and I have reread it, and I asked [Senator] Ed Markey: “What in the heck is this?”

That was the assistant Democratic leader.

But it looks like, one way or the other, the Democratic Party as a whole is eager to get behind this great idea.

So what is in it? Here are just a few of the hits in the 16-page resolution the Senate will soon be voting on.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S1497

Here is one you will like: “Upgrading all existing buildings in the United States and building new buildings.”

Don’t want a Federal bureaucrat to decide how your house should look or what size it should be? Don’t want to pay to rebuild the entire downtown? Don’t want to tear down your small business so it can be replaced by the government? Too bad. These new social planners know best.

Here is another quote: “Meeting 100 percent of the power demand in the United States”—listen to this—without using any American fossil fuels or nuclear power whatsoever.

That is right. It is the War on Coal on steroids. Say goodbye to all of those jobs, and say hello to a new wave of cronyism that would make the half a billion dollars in taxpayer losses from Solyndra look like pocket change. Everything in your garage will have to go too. A lengthy background document that this plan’s authors have since tried to scrub from the internet helpfully explains that a Green New Deal would mean “replac[ing] every combustion engine vehicle.”

How about this one: “Guaranteeing a job . . . to all people of the United States.”

That one is buried on page No. 14—a government-guaranteed job for everyone. That may sound like a good utopian goal, but their handy background document makes the real intention known, promising “economic security for all”—listen to this—even for those who are “unwilling to work.”

That is a lot of magic wand-waving, but I have only scratched the surface. The background document also called for a plan to “build out high-speed rail at a scale where air travel stops becoming necessary.” As our colleague Senator HIRONO pointed out, this might be a tough sell in Hawaii or in Puerto Rico or in other places. The Governor of California just scaled back a high-speed rail project in California because, as he put it, it “would cost too much and, respectfully, take too long.” Even with heavy Federal subsidies, it is billions over budget and behind schedule.

That document also promised to, magically, “remove pollution and . . . emissions from manufacturing” just like that. I wonder why nobody has thought of that before.

So it is clear what we have here. It is the far left’s Santa Claus wish list that is dressed up to look like serious policy.

Bad ideas are nothing new, and silly proposals come and go, but the philosophies and the ideas behind this textbook socialism are not just foolish; they are dangerous. Their ascent in the Democratic Party is a real threat to American prosperity and to working families.

Chairman BARRASSO reported that one analysis found that this proposal could increase the average household’s power bills by as much as—listen to this—\$3,800 a year. Another estimate predicted that families would have to

spend hundreds of billions of dollars just to replace common household appliances with Washington-approved models.

What about the total cost to the government for this socialist shopping spree? One recent estimate has that pegged at a cool \$93 trillion over the first 10 years—more than the combined GDP of the entire world. Let me say that again. Their plan is predicted to cost more than the entire economic output of every country on Earth combined.

Remember what the American people are supposedly getting in return—a sprawling socialist state to rule over us, a host of good jobs and key industries ripped away, and an end to every energy source that the middle class can actually afford. Remember, China has already sailed past the United States in terms of carbon emissions. The far left still wants us to unilaterally disarm our whole economy—lots of pain for us and no meaningful gain in containing global emissions. We will go bankrupt, but at least it will be great for China. I bet they are cheering in the streets.

So the way I see it—the way most Republicans see it—is this proposal is either a brilliant piece of comedy or a disastrous socialist vision that is totally alien to the United States of America.

What about our Democratic colleagues? Where do they stand?

Recently, I announced that Senators will get to go on record and vote for or against all of this, but curiously enough, this planned vote was met with outrage from the very people who were claiming to champion the proposal.

Last night, our colleague from Rhode Island said it was “truly preposterous” for me to schedule a vote on the Green New Deal. That is not exactly a ringing endorsement of a plan the Democrats claim to support. He does not seem to be alone in his uneasiness. At one point, the Speaker of the House dismissed her party’s own plan as the “green dream.” The senior Senator from California worried publicly the other day that there is no way to pay for it. As I noted, the assistant Democratic leader summed up a lot of people’s thinking when he asked: “What in the heck is this?” I think a great many Americans all across the country are asking themselves the very same thing—what the heck is this?

Before much longer, every Member of this body will have a chance to go on record, loud and clear. Do our Democratic colleagues really support this fantasy novel that is masquerading as public policy? Do they really want to completely upend Americans’ lives to enact some grand socialist vision? Do they really want this to be their Democratic Party? Well, before long, the Senate will vote, and these questions will be answered.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. 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.

THE GREEN NEW DEAL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I heard Leader MCCONNELL knocking the Green New Deal. I would ask the leader—and we are going to keep asking him and every Republican in this Chamber—what they would do about climate change, about global warming.

So, Leader MCCONNELL, do you believe that climate change, global warming, is real? Yes or no.

Second, do you believe that climate change, global warming, is caused by humans?

And, three, do you believe that Congress should take immediate action to deal with the problem?

Until Leader MCCONNELL and his Republican majority answer those questions, the games they are playing here will have no meaning. This is not a debate. It is a diversion. It is a sham.

Democrats will be introducing a resolution in a few days—shortly—that says we believe in these three things, and we will be asking our Republicans if they support or oppose that resolution.

The silence of the Republican majority on climate change is enormous. Is it because the oil industry gives so much money to our Republican friends? Is it because they are antisience? What is the reason?

Not a single bill has been brought to the floor to deal with climate change or global warming in the 5 years Leader MCCONNELL has been the majority leader. What is your plan, Leader MCCONNELL? What is your answer? We know what you don’t like. What do you like? Anything?

NORTH KOREA

Now, the Trump administration is in the middle of two crucial negotiations with foreign capitals, the result of which will have ramifications for decades.

In Vietnam, President Trump will meet with Chairman Kim to continue discussions over the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, while at the same time administration officials continue negotiations with Beijing over a major trade pact. In both instances, President Trump would have the best chance of having success if he articulated clear objectives and maintained a hard line until those objectives were achieved.

For a time, that approach—the right approach—seemed to hold sway at the White House, as sanctions and tariffs brought both North Korea and China to the negotiating table. Recently, however, President Trump seems headed