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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable THOM TILLIS, a Senator from the State of North Carolina.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

God of our silent tears, You have put gladness in our hearts. Give our lawmakers such reverence for You that their words and actions will honor You. In Your presence, may they cultivate humility to acknowledge their needs, trust to ask You for help, and wisdom to obey Your commands. Walk with them throughout this day, reminding them that there is no purity without vigilance, no learning without effort, and no mastery without discipline.

Lord, inspire them to pay the price required to glorify Your Name. Strengthen their resolve to choose the right and refuse the wrong.

We pray in Your sacred 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. GRASSLEY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 13, 2019.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable THOM TILLIS, a Senator from the State of North Carolina, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this week the Senate has been remarkably productive in confirming more of the President's well-qualified nominees. We have confirmed nine newly minted judges to fill vacancies on the Federal bench.

Today we will turn to the executive branch and confirm David Stilwell to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Edward Crawford to serve as Ambassador to Ireland.

Remember, earlier this spring, we put in place a modest reform to Senate rules so we could consider these uncontroversial, lower level nominations at a more reasonable pace. That had been the Senate's normal tradition until very recently, and so we restored it.

At the time, I recall my friends across the aisle insisting that the majority would use these more efficient procedures to push through all kinds of polarizing and controversial people. That is what they argued—if we made this modest rule change, we would be pushing through all these polarizing and controversial people.

Well, here are a few of the rollcall votes the Senate has taken on nominations this week: 91 to 5, 62 to 34, 77 to 19, 85 to 11. Yesterday afternoon, on a procedural vote for Mr. Stilwell, it was 93 to 4. A pretty controversial bunch.

So virtually all of us can remember a time when nominations of this sort would have passed the Senate on a voice vote. These days, Democrats are making us file cloture and spend floor time on each, but at least our new Senate rules are helping us get these thoroughly bipartisan nominees through at a more efficient pace.

ARMS SALES

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on another matter, later today the Senate will vote on two resolutions that would undermine U.S. influence and credibility in the Middle East and ultimately make the region a more dangerous place. Some of our colleagues seek to block arms sales to two of the closest partners of the United States in the region—Bahrain and Qatar.

These resolutions are misguided. They would make the United States a less reliable partner, weaken the influence we have with our friends, and open the door to other more unscrupulous powers like Russia and China.

There is this small matter that neither of these resolutions would even solve the problem that seems to have motivated them. I understand many Members of this body are genuinely concerned about some of the actions of our Saudi partners in Yemen. Fortunately, the Senate has repeatedly expressed these concerns directly

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



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through our legislative and oversight authority. As I stated in the past, Members should share their concerns and discuss these matters directly with members of our administration or with Saudi officials.

If Senators are upset about the State Department's recent invocation of a national emergency to advance arms sales to Saudi Arabia, they will have an opportunity to vote on that matter later. So the Senate has ample opportunity to make our voice heard about Riyadh's behavior, but the two resolutions we vote on today are not that opportunity. It is something else.

Whatever frustrations my colleagues may feel with the course of the conflict in Yemen, taking swipes at our relationships with Bahrain and Qatar is certainly not the response. Bahrain's involvement in the Yemen conflict has been limited to defensive border security operations and, for the past 2 years, Qatar has been completely uninvolved. Moreover, both Bahrain and Qatar provide absolutely essential support to our military operations in the region, without which our ability to project power and protect U.S. interests would be severely challenged.

I assume everyone knows Qatar is home to the U.S. Central Command's forward headquarters in the region, with 10,000 U.S. personnel and upward of 100 aircraft. It is the hub for many of our ongoing efforts against ISIS and other regional threats.

In Bahrain, you will find the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. That is another 7,000 U.S. personnel, plus assets, responsible for command and control of over 3 million square miles of international waters.

So I would remind our colleagues of the briefing we received recently about the growing Iranian threat in the region. I would encourage them to reflect on recent attacks, probably by Iran or its proxies, against civilian vessels in UAE, against civilian airports in Saudi Arabia and UAE, and near our Embassy in Baghdad. In fact, literally just hours ago, two more commercial shipping vessels were apparently attacked off the coast of Oman. These attacks may appear directed at the countries that use them to export petrochemicals or at the international owners of the vessels, but the fact is, they threaten the very underpinnings of the global trading system and customary Law of the Sea that ensures freedom of transit on the seas.

We don't know who is responsible for these latest attacks—not yet, anyway—but it is not unreasonable to suspect an Iranian hand in them. I hope, in coming days, we have clarity about who is responsible, but what is clear is the growing tension and instability in that region.

So at a time of growing threats to U.S. personnel, interests, and partners posed by Iran, do we really want to send this kind of signal to our partners?

If we turn our back on them, can we continue to count on the significant

support they provide us or the freedom of maneuver our large presence in their countries affords us?

As the State Department has announced, the proposed sales that are at issue today would provide each of these host nations with important enhanced security capabilities, including anti-aircraft systems and support equipment. They will also tie these nations closer to the United States at a time when our adversaries would happily—happily—sell comparable weapons at less cost and with fewer restrictions.

In recent years, we have seen both Republican and Democratic administrations seek to reduce the U.S. military footprint in the region and have our partners assume more responsibility for their own security. So it is curious that Senators would want to not only sever security ties with these partners but also limit their ability to defend themselves.

In each of these cases, the U.S. arms sales in question have followed normal procedures; they have been properly screened and vetted; and they have been reviewed and approved by both the chairmen and ranking members of the Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Let me say that again: The chairman and ranking members of these committees reviewed and approved these arms sales. That is bipartisan, bicameral support.

So in sum, I would ask my colleagues who support these resolutions whether they have even spoken to the Bahraini or Qatari Ambassadors to discuss any concerns. I would encourage them to visit Doha and Manama to confer with the leaders of these countries and speak with thousands of American sailors and airmen based there.

I would encourage my colleagues to ask our own senior military officials whether we will be better off if our partners purchase Russian or Chinese military systems instead of ours. I would encourage them to ask our diplomats whether America will have more or less influence with our partners if we capriciously block their purchase of American weapons.

I strongly urge each of our colleagues to reject these resolutions.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, all this week, I have been calling attention to the fact that the Democrats over in the House spent 6 weeks ignoring the urgent need for more funding on the crisis on our southern border. I have recited one quotation after another from the administration leaders who are responsible for securing our Nation and caring for individuals while they are detained. They are pleading with us to act.

“We are at a full-blown emergency. . . . The system is broken.” That is the Acting Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection. It couldn't be more clear.

“We are running out of money. We are functionally out of space.” That one is from the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I have also run down the underlying statistics. The flood of people attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border has continued at historic levels. Our border agents are overwhelmed. Our facilities are filled beyond capacity—in some cases, with more than seven times more men, women, and children than their intended capacity.

This is a full-fledged crisis, and everybody knows it. The status quo cannot hold. Already, the Department of Homeland Security is having to move people and money away from other important efforts to triage more help toward the border.

The administration has been saying this is a crisis. The officials on the ground have been saying this is a crisis. My Republican colleagues and I have been saying repeatedly this is a crisis. And lest anyone think this is some partisan exercise, the New York Times editorial board has been saying it is a crisis. There were two editorials over the last several weeks. The first headline says: “Congress, Give Trump His Border Money,” and “When Will Congress Get Serious About the Suffering at the Border?”

Those are headlines in the New York Times, not frequently allied with this administration. Everybody seems to understand that, except Democrats over in the House.

It is not as if our House colleagues are too busy working on pragmatic, bipartisan legislation with any shot at becoming law. No, here is what they are up to. One House committee spent yesterday holding a hearing on pathways to single-payer health insurance—in other words, barking up the tree of Medicare for None, their big proposal to take away every American's private health insurance, to take away Medicare as we know it, and force everyone into a new, untested, one-size-fits-all government system. That is what they are up to over there. That is the score. They have no time for the border crisis but plenty of time for socialist daydreams.

Even my colleague the Democratic leader has admitted the Democratic-controlled House is the problem here. We have even heard it from House Democrats themselves. One told reporters that his progressive colleagues weren't convinced the emergency funding was necessary. One Democratic Congressman says progressive colleagues were not convinced that emergency funding was necessary.

So it seems “the resistance” has convinced Washington Democrats that they need to come down to the left of the New York Times editorial page. There is not much space over there to the left of the New York Times editorial page.

But Senate Republicans are not going to be deterred. The crisis at the border hasn't gone anywhere, and neither has our resolve to address it. Next