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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Merciful God, enthroned far above all other powers, we need You to exercise Your might for our Nation during this challenging season. As we wrestle with the stalemate of this partial government shutdown, inspire our lawmakers to do what is best for our Nation and world. Remind them that Your power is far above any conceivable command, authority, or control. Help them to appreciate their accountability to You, as You guide them to contribute to unity and finding common ground. Be near to those who are the collateral damage of this impasse, supporting them with Your wisdom, power, mercy, and grace.

We pray in Your sovereign 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 (Mr. HOEVEN). The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CAL- ENDAR—S. 28, H.R. 21, AND H.J. RES. 1

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand that there are three bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is correct.

The clerk will report the bills by title for the second time en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 28) to reauthorize the United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 21) making appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 1) making further continuing appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for fiscal year 2019, and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar en bloc.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, for years America's vital interests in the Middle East have been jeopardized by regional chaos. The security of our ally Israel continues to be challenged by the long reach of the Iranian regime and its affiliates. In Syria, the Assad regime has made its own nation a graveyard for hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, and the resulting chaos continues to provide Iran and Russia opportunities to expand their malign influence throughout the region. That is why the Senate is going to vote later today to take up pressing legislation that tackles all of this head on.

The bill at hand would reaffirm the United States' commitment to Israel's security and authorize military assistance, cooperative missile defense, and loan guarantees. It would counter an aggressive and hostile attempt to delegitimize the State of Israel through economic boycotts. It would also reauthorize efforts to strengthen defense cooperation with our ally Jordan, as its people and government grapple with the security and humanitarian ramifications of the Syrian crisis.

Importantly, the legislation also includes the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. This provision would hold accountable individuals responsible for the senseless evils of the Assad regime and impose severe penalties on the entities that support them.

We will vote later today on whether or not Members of this body believe these issues should be addressed. It is my sincere hope that the Senate will approve these bipartisan proposals and send the strong message of support that our friends and partners in the Middle East deserve.

During the last Congress there was broad agreement on both sides of the aisle on the need for action. I expected today's action to be a big bipartisan vote, not some partisan showdown, but over the last few days something seems to have happened. The Democratic leader and several of his colleagues have stood up and said they want to block the Senate from even considering this legislation—never mind that it includes legislation cosponsored by the Senate Democrats last Congress and never mind that Senate Democrats mentioned the Syria crisis literally dozens of times last month here on the Senate floor.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in spite of all of that, some Democrats have now threatened to block us from even taking this legislation up later today. We would have to ask why. It is because we are 18 days into the partial government shutdown caused by Democrats' total unwillingness to negotiate with the White House over border security.

Democrat intransigence has made sure that a quarter of the Federal Government has been shut down for more

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



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than 2 weeks—2 weeks. Now they are threatening to shut the Senate down too. They have shut down the government for 2 weeks, and now they want to shut the Senate down. They are threatening to shut down efforts to protect our allies and strengthen our relationship with Israel—something they all recently claim to support.

Let's remember what we are talking about. In light of the urgent humanitarian and security crisis on our border, the President is requesting \$5.7 billion for physical barriers and border security. For some context, that is just about one-tenth of 1 percent of Federal spending—one-tenth of 1 percent—for physical barriers like fences and barriers that already exist, which Democrats have previously voted for with enthusiasm.

Back in 2006, then-Senators Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and our colleague, the current Democratic leader, all voted for more than \$1 billion to construct about 700 miles of physical barriers.

Then-Senator Obama called it “badly needed funding for better fences and better security . . . that should help stem some of the tide of illegal immigration.” That is what Senator Barack Obama said.

Senator SCHUMER later described his vote proudly as “miles of border fence that create a significant barrier to illegal immigration.”

As recently as 2015, Secretary Clinton boasted: “I voted numerous times . . . to spend money to build a barrier to try to prevent illegal immigrants from coming in.” That is what Hillary Clinton said.

Obviously, that was then, and today the new Speaker of the House is trying to argue that a physical barrier is “immoral”—“immoral.”

Today, my friend the Democratic leader is proposing to add a Senate shutdown to the partial Federal Government shutdown and block even more of the people's business, all—all—to avoid more of what he already voted for. Maybe the Democratic Party was for secure borders before they were against it, maybe they are just making it up as they go along, or maybe they are dead set on opposing this particular President on any issue, for any reason, just for the sake of opposing him.

Walls and barriers are not immoral—how silly. Enforcing our laws wasn't immoral back in 2006 when then-Senator Clinton, then-Senator Obama, and our friend the Democratic leader were proud—proud—to vote for physical barriers. The only things that have changed between then and now are the political whims and, of course, the occupant of the White House.

This is no newfound, principled objection. It is just political spite—a partisan tantrum being prioritized over the public interest. For more than 2 weeks, they have indulged in that partisan tantrum rather than negotiate in good faith over border security funding—hardly something that should be a

partisan subject in the first place. They have put that partisan tantrum ahead of keeping a quarter of the government open. Now they are saying their partisan tantrum is more urgent than pressing legislation that concerns our alliance with Israel and the Syrian civil war.

I hope that isn't the case. I hope our Democratic colleagues don't pile on even more pointless obstruction. I hope they don't block the Senate from turning to this important legislation—legislation, by the way, they support. We will find out later today.

We all know what is necessary to move past the funding impasse: a negotiated solution that can pass the House, earn 60 votes in the Senate, and get the President's signature. That is what it takes to make a law.

As I have stated clearly, the Senate will not waste floor time on show votes, messaging votes, or any other proposals that fail to check those boxes regarding the funding bills.

The Democratic leader actually shared that opinion earlier. Here is a fairly recent quote from the Democratic leader. He said: “The President must publicly support and say he will sign an agreement before it gets a vote in either Chamber.” That is a fairly recent quote.

I am glad we seem to agree on that—no wasted floor time on appropriations bills that fail to clear the President's reasonable threshold.

For the sake of the humanitarian crisis on our border—as the President will describe in his address to the Nation this evening—for the sake of our national security, and for the sake of all the Americans who need all of their Federal Government reopened, I would urge our Democratic colleagues to get past these harmful political games and get serious about negotiating with the 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. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

S. 1

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote to begin consideration of legislation that will address some of the seemingly never-ending challenges the world—including the United States—is facing in the Middle East.

The decision made at the beginning of the 20th century by then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, to convert British ships from coal to oil for fuel changed world history by making access to Middle East oil reserves a national security imperative for all developed nations.

More recently, on 9/11 of 2001, when nearly 3,000 Americans lost their lives

in a terrorist attack directed from Afghanistan on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, we learned a hard lesson: Although separated by an ocean, what happens in the region does not stay in the region.

Finally, with the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the nuclear aspirations of Iran—the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world—to attain them, the relative stability and security of the Middle East have a direct connection to our national security, as well as that of our allies, like Israel.

With the administration's recent announcement that the United States will begin withdrawing troops from Syria, this debate and these votes could not be more timely.

While I am comforted by National Security Advisor John Brennan's recent statement that the withdrawal from Syria will be conditions-based, the precise details of how and when it will be executed remain to be seen. One thing, however, is perfectly clear: We cannot allow the creation of a power vacuum in the Middle East to bolster our adversaries' influence in the region. That is precisely what this legislation addresses. The Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act incorporates four bipartisan, non-controversial bills that were nearly enacted last year, but the clock on the 115th Congress ran out on December 31. As we begin what I hope will be another productive year in the Senate, I am glad we will have a chance to vote on this legislation.

Our national interests demand that we fully support and ensure the security of Israel—our closest ally in the region. As the majority leader said last week, this bill affirms that the United States needs to do more than just talk the talk; we must also walk the walk to support Israel's security.

This legislation will help Israel maintain its qualitative military edge against ongoing threats by authorizing military assistance and allowing the transfer of equipment and defensive weapons. Importantly, it will also assist Israel in countering the emerging threat of unmanned aerial vehicles deployed by Iran, in particular.

In addition to supporting Israel, it will empower State and local governments in the United States to counter the anti-Israel boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement—better known as BDS—and its discriminatory economic warfare against the Jewish state.

In addition to nurturing our relationship with Israel, the bill also recognizes the importance of supporting Jordan—another key regional ally. It reauthorizes legislation to strengthen our defense cooperation and support Jordan's response to the overwhelming humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian civil war. According to the United Nations, there are more than 740,000 refugees in Jordan. That equates to 89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, making them the second highest refugee host nation per capita in the world.