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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.

Almighty God, our fortress and might, deliver us from clouds of pessimism and fear. Lead our lawmakers in these challenging times, fulfilling Your purposes through them. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heaven, as You demonstrate Your power to make the crooked places straight.

Have mercy upon us and protect us, for Your unfailing love and faithfulness sustain us. Shine Your glory over all the Earth as we learn to trust You at all times.

And, Lord, we thank You that Senator GRASSLEY has had another wonderful birthday.

We pray in Your strong 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 1 minute as in morning business.

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

CONSTITUTION DAY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Since the day I was born, I have celebrated Constitution Day. That is because the 39 delegates signed the U.S. Constitution on September 17, which is exactly 146 years before I was born. It is a gift to share my birthday with the historic signing of our Nation's founding charter.

The Constitution lends weight to the resilience of our heritage and to the heroes who fought to defend and protect our borders at home and from distant shores around the world.

On this Constitution Day, it is my hope that Americans of all ages will reflect upon the blessings of freedom handed down from one generation to the next and protected by the U.S. Constitution.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. The American people deserve for the Federal Government to spend their money in a considered, deliberate fashion, and until very recently, we have been on a track to conduct a smooth, regular appropriations process for this year.

More than a month ago, leaders in both parties, in both Chambers, and at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue all agreed to terms that had been negotiated by the Speaker of the House and the President's team. It specified topline funding levels and put guardrails around the appropriations process to keep out poison pills and all of our other disagreements.

So yesterday, to keep us on track, I began the process to advance the first set of appropriations bills. The next step is a vote tomorrow to begin consideration of a package of House-passed funding bills that Speaker PELOSI grouped together. They include several of the domestic funding bills along with the legislation to fund the Department of Defense. There should be no reason for Democrats to vote against this first procedural step.

As Chairman SHELBY and our committee colleagues continue to process

Senate legislation, proceeding to this floor action will help to keep us on track toward passing as many of the 12 bills as possible this month before we turn to a temporary continuing resolution.

So it has been distressing to hear troubling signals from the Democratic side. We have heard that they may choose to filibuster the Defense funding bill. They may block the very increase of defense funding that they all just agreed to a month ago.

Progress on our shared priorities, good faith cooperation in areas of disagreement—it seems all of this may be taking a backseat to a familiar litany of partisan stumbling blocks. My Democratic colleagues seem eager to bog down the funding process with all their outstanding disagreements with the President, in other words, taking exactly the kind of partisan approach we had successfully avoided last year and in which both sides pledged just last month—just a month ago—to avoid this time as well.

A couple of weeks ago, everyone at the table seemed to understand that the world was too dangerous to leave funding for our military vulnerable to poison pill riders or political copouts. I wish Democrats would keep bearing that in mind today.

So whatever rationale my colleagues across the aisle may offer for these new disruptions, let's get one thing straight: Holding defense funding hostage for political gain is a losing strategy, not only for Members of this body, not only for the appropriations process, but a losing strategy for the safety and strength of our Nation.

As partisanship bogs us down here in Washington, Moscow and Beijing are not exactly slowing down to wait for us. Our two most capable great-power adversaries are expanding their own capabilities and modernizing their forces by the day.

In the current international system, delivering on our promises to America's men and women in uniform is not

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



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a simple matter of routine maintenance on equipment. If we would like the U.S. military of the future to remain the world's preeminent fighting force, then, the stakes are much higher. As Russia rattles its saber and develops weapons such as hypersonic cruise missiles and quiet submarines, we need to continue funding for research and development of our own cutting-edge capabilities.

We have to provide for the modernization of infrastructure and update defenses against cyber threats so that China's ever-bolder meddling in this domain cannot bring about the cyber hegemony it craves. We cannot turn our back on our interests and partners in the broader Middle East. In Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and beyond, we face ongoing terrorist threats. Iran's violent aggression certainly highlights the need for vigilance and for strength. All of this is needlessly more difficult if we don't fund the military's modernization and readiness. The stakes are too high for us to fail.

We cannot afford to abdicate our responsibility to deliver timely funding to the critical priorities of the Federal Government, least of all to the men and women in uniform who keep us safe. So I would urge each of my colleagues to engage in this process, honor our agreement that we made just 1 month ago—just a month ago—and keep us on track to deliver for our country.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of John Rakolta, Jr., of Michigan, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. McCONNELL. 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. 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.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, as negotiations continue on a continuing resolution to keep the government open past next week, we should be laying the groundwork to process the 12 appropriations bills for fiscal year 2020.

In an ideal world, the Republicans on the Appropriations Committee would be negotiating in good faith with the Democrats on the Appropriations Committee to determine the allocations and the content of those bills, but the Republicans, unfortunately, have not chosen to do this. They are acting in a totally partisan way. The Republicans have chosen to back the President's demand for an additional \$12 billion in funding for his border wall, taken from other sources, including medical research, opioid treatment, and funding intended for our military, their families, and their kids. Mexico, oddly, isn't chipping in a penny.

This was all done totally on the Republican side with there having been no consultation of the Democrats and, certainly, no buy-in. So, of course, the Democrats oppose taking funds from Congress to use on the President's border wall that have been intended for our military. Everyone knows that. In fact, 12 Senate Republicans opposed the very same thing this year, but in typical Washington, blame-game fashion, Republican leader MITCH McCONNELL has been accusing the Democrats of threatening to block military funding because we don't want to pass a bill that steals money from the military. That is right. The Democrats are the ones threatening not to vote for this bill because we oppose a Republican bill that would shortchange the military.

I have heard some howlers in my day, but that is pretty rich, what McCONNELL is saying.

Leader McCONNELL constantly talks about stunts. He doesn't like stunts because they won't be signed or passed into law. This is a stunt if I have ever seen one, that of putting this bill—\$12 billion more for the wall and with no buy-in by the Democrats—to a vote. It will lose. We know it will lose.

What is the point, Leader McCONNELL? You say you don't like stunts. You say you don't want to bring bills to the floor that won't become law. Well, this one certainly won't.

The fact is the Republican leader knows well that the Democrats oppose taking funding away from our troops to use on the President's wall. He knows that Members of his own caucus oppose taking money out of their States to spend on the President's border wall. Some have been quite vocal; yet Leader McCONNELL is moving forward with the bill all the same, knowing that it lacks votes.

For him to say the Democrats are the ones threatening to block military

funding when, in fact, we oppose a Republican bill that would shortchange the military is the height of double talk by the Republican leader.

Again, the Republican leader is fond of reminding the press that he doesn't like to engage in stunts—that the Senate is for making laws and is not a forum for political theater. Yet putting this bill on the floor of the Senate that everyone knows lacks the votes is the definition of a stunt.

Leader McCONNELL—and I mean this with all due respect—it is time to negotiate. Both sides must sit down and have a serious negotiation—no stunts, no blame game. The Democrats want to work with our Republican colleagues, but we need a willing partner, and time is quickly running out to get a bipartisan appropriations process back on track.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Madam President, now, on guns, a week and a half after our return from the August work period, Senators from both sides of the aisle are still waiting to hear what the President proposes in order to combat the epidemic of gun violence. According to reports, the President's yet-to-be-released plan will likely not include universal background checks or even a significant expansion of background checks. If those reports are true, it will be a profound shame.

Without closing the loopholes in our background check system, most other gun safety measures, like emergency risk protection orders, would be severely compromised. Background checks must be the base, the foundation, of gun safety legislation. If background checks aren't included, we will still be allowing guns to fall into the wrong hands—those of convicted criminals, domestic abusers, the adjudicated mentally ill.

You can have one of these emergency risk protection orders issued to someone—let's say to Mr. John Smith. Yet, if we don't close these loopholes, John Smith, the next day, will be able to go online and get a new gun because there will be no background check, and the seller of the gun will have no way of knowing there will have been a protection order against him. Without having background checks, a lot of this other stuff isn't going to do the job. It isn't going to save the most lives that we can.

I hope the President thinks long and hard before releasing a proposal that falls short of making meaningful progress, particularly on background checks.

In the past, Republican Senators, Congressmen, and candidates promised action after mass shootings, only to have announced support for legislation that was specifically designed not to offend the NRA. We have seen that before.

This is a chance for the President to do something different and, frankly, something courageous. It would be a terrible shame if he were to squander that very much needed opportunity. If