

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

WELCOMING PASTOR ANDREW
BRUNSON

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President and those who were watching during the opening prayer, that was Pastor Andrew Brunson from North Carolina. This month marks a year since Pastor Brunson was released from a Turkish prison. Norine, his wife, is in the Gallery as well. They were swept up in what I considered to be an overreaction by President Erdogan and the Turkish regime in their imprisoning thousands of people after the coup attempt in Turkey. I actually found out about this first as casework. Pastor Brunson was from North Carolina. Then, slowly but steadily, diplomacy wasn't working, and he found himself in a Turkish prison—at one point in really what we would consider to be despicable circumstances. He was in a prison cell that was designed for maybe 8 or 10 people that had had more than 20 in it, and none of them spoke the English language.

Pastor Brunson was a missionary in Turkey for almost 20 years. He had a church in Izmir, and all they tried to do for those who wanted to hear the Word of God was to speak it. For that, he was ultimately incarcerated and accused of being a part of the Turkish coup attempt. It was about a year later that they issued an indictment for him. It was a 62-page indictment that read like a horrible, fictional novel and had some of the most absurd allegations you could possibly imagine. Certainly, they were things that wouldn't keep you in jail overnight in the United States but were things that were potentially going to have Pastor Brunson convicted and spending 35 years in a Turkish prison.

We got word back that after the indictment was issued against Pastor Brunson, he was afraid that the American people were going to believe it, that we would simply move on, and that he would be left there at the fate of the Turkish judiciary. When I heard that, the first thing I told my staff is that I had to go to Turkey. I wanted to go to the prison that Pastor Brunson was in, and I had the opportunity to meet Norine, his wife, the day before. I went there, and across a table that was about as wide as this desk, I told Pastor Brunson that we were not going to forget him and were not going to stop until we got him released from prison.

In a series of efforts here, for which I have to really compliment all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, more than 72 Senators signed on to a letter that encouraged Pastor Brunson's release. More than 100 House Members signed on to a similar letter. We did everything we could diplomatically to get Pastor Brunson released.

I decided I wanted to see how the court case was going, so I went back to Turkey a few months after I had first

met Pastor Brunson in the prison, and I sat through 12 hours of so-called Turkish justice. I saw this man stand before a dais of three judges and a prosecutor, where basically you were assumed guilty until you proved innocence. His defense attorney was as far away from him as is that wall. That is Turkish justice. That is not anything we can imagine in this country, but that is what this man was subjected to.

Over the course of several months and in working with the President, Secretary Pompeo, the Vice President, and a number of other people, we were able to get President Erdogan to recognize that this was a political exercise, that it was not an exercise in justice, and that he needed to be released.

A year ago this month, he was released, and now he is opening the Senate in prayer. I thank Pastor Brunson for his perseverance. He went through things that most of us cannot imagine, and Norine was his strongest advocate.

I see the Parliamentarian looking at me as if I am not supposed to recognize the fact that Norine Brunson is in the Gallery, so I will not recognize that fact because that would be a violation of the rules.

They are a sight for sore eyes, and I am so glad to have them back in this country. I know they are going to continue their missionary work wherever they can. I thank them for their leadership and their deep faith.

Thank you for opening the Senate today.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. 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 MAJORITY
LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Congress is returning to Washington for a work period that will be filled with important to-do items, but we already know what will top the agenda in the House of Representatives: House Democrats are finally indulging in their 3-year old impeachment obsession, full steam ahead.

Many of us remember the Washington Post headline that was literally published on Inauguration Day in 2017. Here is what it said: "The campaign to impeach President Trump has begun." And, sure enough, House Democrats have been at it ever since.

One prominent House Democrat called this Presidency illegitimate before it had even begun. One of Speaker

PELOSI's committee chairs whom she has tasked with leading this process promised years ago that she would find a way to impeach the President.

Now that Speaker PELOSI has finally crumbled and allowed her leftwing impeachment caucus to dictate the House's actions, I don't think many of us were expecting to witness a clinic in terms of fairness or due process. But even by their own partisan standards, House Democrats have already found new ways to lower the bar. This is about the most consequential process the House of Representatives could possibly engage in: overruling American voters and nullifying an election.

Surely, any such process must be conducted with the utmost fairness and transparency. It must be held to the most exact of standards. Yet House Democrats have wasted no time throwing fairness and precedent to the wind. Already, they have denied their Republican counterparts certain minority rights, like equal subpoena power, which Republicans provided Democrats in the Clinton impeachment.

Already, they have made clear that President Trump's counsel will not be allowed to participate in hearings, present evidence, and cross-examine witnesses—all-important rights that Republicans provided to President Clinton.

Already, one House chairman has been caught publicly mischaracterizing his committee's handling of the whistleblower inquiry on which this whole investigation hinges.

For all the public hyperventilating over institutional norms that we have heard from House Democrats in recent years, it appears they have no intention of letting norms, precedents, or basic due process stand in their way as they seek to cancel out a Presidency.

In the meantime, in the Senate we will keep our focus squarely on the substantive work we need to complete for the American people. In the coming days, we will confirm another slate of President Trump's well-qualified nominees. For starters, later this afternoon, we will advance the nomination of Barbara Barrett, the President's choice to be Secretary of the Air Force.

Speaking of our Armed Forces, Congress can waste no more time in getting our appropriations process back on track and delivering a funding that our servicemembers need. Just 2 months ago, the President and the Speaker of the House produced an agreement to guide the appropriations process. The White House and congressional leaders set top-line funding targets for defense and nondefense and agreed to forego poison pills. Last month, unfortunately, our Democratic colleagues went back on the deal. Routine funding negotiations were again subject to poison pill threats, and urgent resources for the operations of the Pentagon were withheld for the sake of politics.

We need to put these political games aside. Democrats need to stop filibustering a pay raise for our troops and

the funding our commanders need. We need to get our funding process back on track for the entire Federal Government.

House Democrats need to stop slow-walking the USMCA, the landmark trade agreement that stands to create 176,000 new American jobs. Mexico is ready, Canada is ready, and a majority in the Senate is ready. The entire continent is just waiting on Speaker PELOSI to stop blocking this win for the United States and to stop blocking these new jobs. I don't care how much my Democratic colleagues in the House may dislike the President. They shouldn't throw 176,000 new American jobs on the scrap heap.

On all these fronts, I hope sincerely that our Democratic colleagues will be able to separate this vital business from their animus toward the administration and join Republicans in moving forward with the work of the American people.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, I know I speak for many of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle in expressing my grave concern at the events that have unfolded in Syria in recent days.

Turkey is our NATO ally. Yes, it hosts millions of Syrian refugees and has a legitimate security concern about the situation in Syria. But Turkey's escalation of hostilities with the Syrian Kurdish partners who have helped the United States fight terrorism is completely and totally unacceptable. This violence needs to end.

Syrian Kurdish forces have stood proudly alongside U.S. forces in the fight against ISIS. Over years of joint effort, their shared sacrifices have put ISIS on its heels and rendered its physical caliphate essentially nonexistent. But leaving the field now would mean leaving the door wide open for a resurgence of this dangerous force and a new iteration of the Islamic State; creating a power vacuum begging for the meddling influence of Russia; leaving northeastern Syria wide open for Iran to extend its reach, unimpeded, all the way from Tehran to the doorstep of our friends in Israel; and destroying the leverage we currently have to compel Bashar Assad to stop his slaughter of the Syrian people and negotiate an end to this terrible conflict and humanitarian catastrophe.

I want to make something clear: The United States has taken the fight to Syria and Afghanistan because that is where our enemies are. That is why we are there. Fighting terrorists, exercising leadership in troubled regions, and advancing U.S. interests around the world does not make us an evil empire or the world's policeman. It makes us a prudent and responsible world power that stands up for our own security and the freedom of others.

Alongside the 80 coalition partners that U.S. forces have led in the

counter-ISIS coalition, that is what we must continue to do. We must continue to provide support to the local forces that carry the lion's share of the responsibility to defend their homelands. This effort must continue to include our allies and partners, even the imperfect ones that sometimes behave rashly and dangerously, as both Saudi Arabia and Turkey have recently.

When it looked like President Trump would withdraw from Syria at the beginning of the year, 70—70—Senators joined in warning of the risks of precipitously withdrawing from Syria or Afghanistan. The veto-proof majority vote for my amendment to S. 1, the Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act, demonstrated strong and bipartisan appreciation of our enduring security interests in that region. The Senate spoke clearly and said that we must ensure that we have set the conditions for an enduring defeat of the terrorists before any withdrawal.

Regrettably, many of the Democratic Senators running for President, along with my friend the Democratic leader, parted with this bipartisan consensus and voted against this amendment. So I hope those aspiring Commanders in Chief are asked to explain how they reconcile their criticism of the administration today with their votes just a few months ago. Maybe they will even be asked on the debate stage this very evening.

I am heartened to hear that Vice President PENCE will soon lead a delegation to begin immediate talks with Turkey to end this violence.

I expect Turkish allies listen carefully to the anger from Washington, welcome our Vice President, and take steps to repair our important relationship. It would be a tragedy for both of our nations if Turkey's escalation in Syria imperils our common fight against ISIS and emboldens traditional adversaries like Iran and Russia. This would be bad for U.S. interests, but it would be terrible for Turkey.

I also look forward to discussing with Members on both sides and with the administration how the United States can stand with our partners and provide strong, principled, and consistent global leadership.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2593

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the title of the bill for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2593) to amend title 31, United States Code, to provide for automatic continuing resolutions.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provision of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, over the past month, evidence has emerged that the President of the United States pressured a foreign leader to investigate one of his leading political rivals. A whistleblower inside the intelligence community first raised alarms that the President applied pressure on Ukrainian President Zelensky that would benefit President Trump politically. The President himself then released a memorandum of his conversation with President Zelensky, which demonstrably validated the whistleblower's concerns.

In the weeks that followed, the House has received testimony from a number of State Department officials who have filled in additional pieces to this very troubling puzzle. Rudy Giuliani's efforts to dig up dirt on the President's political rivals were well known within the State Department and the National Security Council. The Ambassador to the EU, Gordon Sondland, was heavily involved with Mr. Giuliani, and we continue to receive additional information about Mr. Sondland's participation. His scheduled testimony in the coming days will undoubtedly be relevant and important.

Amidst all of this, the White House has engaged in stonewalling and outright defiance of congressional prerogatives. The State Department instructed its officials not to comply with congressional subpoenas, the White House has refused to cooperate with the House impeachment inquiry, and the President has publicly and repeatedly sought to bully and intimidate the whistleblower.

As additional facts are unearthed, we have a responsibility to consider them with the best interest of our country in mind. The whistleblower was doing a courageous and patriotic act and must be protected. He must be protected. The Constitution made Congress a co-equal branch of government. That role must be respected. The matter at the heart of the inquiry concerns the very integrity of our democratic elections, and it must be investigated thoroughly, completely, and in a non-partisan manner.