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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, the source of light and life, we praise Your Holy Name. Because of You, we live and move and have our being. Remind us that we are not adequate for our daily task without Your strength and abiding presence.

Lord, empower our Senators this day to think clearly, speak wisely, and live faithfully. May they strive to do their best and then leave the results to You.

Eternal God, we are trusting You to fulfill Your purposes for our Nation and world.

We pray in Your powerful 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.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, a 5-year decline in farm income, retaliatory tariffs on U.S. ag commodities, disrupted renewable biofuel policies, devastating natural disasters, and now shortages of LP gas needed to dry harvested grain add to the growing burdens weighing heavily on the minds of Iowans and American farmers.

Mounting pressure to pay the bills, to get the crops out, and to make ends meet can be overwhelming. We have lately expressed lots of worries and pressures that come from the increase in farm bankruptcies and the increase in rural and farm suicides.

There are many uncertainties in farming that are beyond human control, but there are other areas where Congress can help. As a farmer and as a Senator representing the No. 1 agricultural State, I am fighting to build mental health resources—as an example, there is the Grassley-Tester bill to help preempt suicides—to uphold the RFS by fighting with the EPA, and to pass the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

These are issues that are tops on the minds of Iowans and not just the farmers.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, while our Senate Democratic colleagues continue blocking this body from considering funding for our Armed Forces, the Senate has taken advantage of the time to confirm more of President Trump's well-qualified nominees for Federal service, as well as the judiciary.

Yesterday, we confirmed Chad Wolf to serve at the Department of Homeland Security. Following President Trump's decision to designate him Acting Secretary, he is now heading up the Department.

I want to take a moment to thank the outgoing Acting DHS Secretary, Kevin McAleenan. His tenure leading the Department of Homeland Security capped off a distinguished career in

public service, including nearly two decades rising through the ranks of the Customs and Border Patrol.

His leadership at DHS saw significant progress in mitigating major aspects of our border security and humanitarian crisis, a strong focus on cyber security, and hard work to strengthen the Department all across the board. So I thank the outgoing Acting Secretary for his years in public service and, particularly, for his leadership in this recent chapter.

Now, today, we will vote on the confirmation of Steven Menashi to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Mr. Menashi won majority support on the Judiciary Committee on the basis of strong academic and legal qualifications—degrees from Dartmouth and Stanford, clerkships on the appellate level and the Supreme Court, and experience in both teaching and practicing law.

I would urge all of our colleagues to vote to confirm this impressive nominee this afternoon.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, as my colleagues know, I have no qualms about spending floor time on the personnel business. Our Democratic colleagues have made it necessary by subjecting this President's nominees to unprecedented, systematic delays and obstruction. The majority has been willing to do things the hard way. We are giving the American people the government they voted for, as chosen by the President they elected.

My Republican colleagues and I wish that we could also be spending floor time on productive, bipartisan legislation that the American people need to actually become law. We want to pass the USMCA and the 176,000 new American jobs it would create, but Speaker PELOSI continues to block it. The far left objects to their passing anything—anything—that the President likes.

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



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We want to pass a conference report for the NDAA, critical legislation for our national defense. Congress has passed a bipartisan NDAA every single year since 1961. Now it is another casualty of the impeachment obsession.

House Democrats steamrolled Republicans in order to pass a wholly partisan bill. I believe this may be the first time ever that either Chamber has passed a purely partisan NDAA. Now they are stalling the conference committee and jeopardizing the whole process.

We want to pass the defense funding bill that our Democratic colleagues have now filibustered twice so that our servicemembers and commanders get what they need. Back in the summer, the Republican and Democratic leaders in the House and Senate all agreed and all signed onto an agreement with President Trump—a bicameral, bipartisan agreement. Everybody signed it. We brokered this deal to make sure the appropriations process did not—did not—get bogged down with bickering over policy issues. We all agreed to keep poison pills out so that government funding could move forward.

But just a few months later, our Democratic colleagues are now insisting on exactly the kinds of poison pills they foresaw when they signed onto the agreement this summer. They are holding up funding for our men and women in uniform because they disagree with the President's views on border security. They want to chip away at the exact Presidential authorities that they specifically agreed not to be touched. Let me say that again. They want to chip away at the exact Presidential authorities that they specifically agreed not to be touched. In short, my friends in Democratic leadership smelled an opportunity to pick a political fight.

Our servicemembers need their funding. American workers and small businesses need their new trade deal. Our Armed Forces need the authorizing legislation that has been a bipartisan slam dunk every year for almost 60 years—60 years.

We cannot cease all legislation just because Democrats would rather fight with the President. We will not neglect the business of the American people just because a House committee is holding some public hearing. If they are going to keep plowing ahead with their impeachment obsession, they cannot abdicate their basic government responsibilities at the very same time.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now, on another matter, last Tuesday was election day in dozens of States and localities, including in my home State of Kentucky. There was one important aspect of election day that didn't get much attention. Unlike in 2016, last week's elections were not marred to the same extent by foreign

interference from our Nation's adversaries, and neither were the 2018 midterm elections last year.

As of now, there are no reports of foreign intrusion into voter records and no reports of significant and successful disinformation efforts on social media or anywhere else. By any reasonable standard and by all available evidence, the past two elections have gone a whole lot more smoothly than back in 2016.

Now, this wasn't for lack of trying. Russia and our other adversaries have tried for decades to interfere in our politics and to undermine the competence of the American people in our democracy, and they will not likely let up anytime soon. This fight is nowhere near over. But make no mistake, our defenses are a whole lot stronger.

A massive coordinated effort to confront this threat has brought together the Congress, the Trump administration, all 50 States, the private sector, and more than 2,000 local jurisdictions. We have worked to address the weaknesses Russia sought to exploit during the Obama administration and have proactively strengthened our defenses.

Last week, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, the Acting Homeland Security Secretary, the acting DNI, and the heads of the FBI, the NSA, the U.S. Cyber Command, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued a statement. Here is what it said:

Election security is a top priority. . . . In an unprecedented level of coordination, the U.S. government is working with all 50 states and U.S. territories, local officials, and private sector partners to identify threats, broadly share information, and protect the democratic process.

Now, I know my colleagues already know about these significant efforts thanks to the groundwork laid by the Intelligence Committee's painstaking investigation. We know about it because we have provided \$380 million to help modernize State election systems. Back in September, I cosponsored an amendment in committee that will bring the total to more than \$600 million.

We know about the progress because we have had a bipartisan, all-Members briefing from administration experts. Senators literally broke into applause in appreciation for what the administration was doing to protect our election. The story is not finished. The crucial work continues, but the progress is undeniable.

No longer is threat intelligence siloed within the Federal Government. This administration has moved to share vital information systematically with everyone, from States and localities to social media companies. No longer is interference cost-free for adversaries. The administration has sanctioned and prosecuted Russians engaged in election interference and issued an Executive order that paves the way for additional sanctions on those who seek to interfere.

The Department of Homeland Security now runs a National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center—a physical war room of sorts—on election day for sharing information and coordinating action. That is along with an online platform that 200 jurisdictions reportedly tapped into last week.

Long before election day, this administration was connecting with all 50 States and more than 2,000 localities to deploy new cyber security tools, new training for election workers, and to provide threat alerts, and the list goes on and on.

Our adversaries are still at the door, but for two election days in a row now, we have benefitted from stronger defenses. Progress like this should earn bipartisan applause. Like I said, behind closed doors, it did, but in public our Democratic colleagues have not loudly cheered the successes. Instead, they are trying to use the very serious issue of election security to repackage their long-held liberal view that Washington, DC, needs far more power over elections.

Look, nobody really believes that all the partisan proposals from Speaker PELOSI and company are some kind of tailored response to Russian meddling, not when they transparently serve the same goals the Democrats have wanted since way before 2016.

For goodness' sake, the New York Times was editorializing for federalizing elections right after election day 2012, even when they liked the outcome. That was the same election cycle, by the way, in which President Obama mocked—mocked—his Republican opponent for being too tough on Russia.

So let's not mistake these long-held liberal policy goals as some new, targeted response to Russian meddling. Election security is too important to become a Trojan horse for ideological goals that Democrats have wanted for many years.

We need to continue the serious work that Federal, State, and local officials are engaging in every day—work that is already yielding results—and we need to stay vigilant because our adversaries will not stop.

So I want to salute the Federal, State, and local professionals who helped make last week an apparent election security success. I urge Senate Democrats to stop blocking a bipartisan appropriations process so that we can secure hundreds of millions of dollars more for the folks out there on the frontlines.

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.