



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2019

No. 192

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.

Our Father, be with us not only in great moments of experience but also during mundane and common tasks. Through the power of Your Spirit, may our Senators mount up with wings like eagles, running without weariness and walking without fainting. Give them the wisdom to be patient with others, ever lenient to their faults and ever prompt to appreciate their virtues.

Lord, rule in the hearts of our lawmakers, keeping them from sin and sustaining their loved ones in all of their tomorrows. Surround us all with the shield of Your mercy, as You provide us with a future, hope, and blessings too numerous to be stored.

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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I would like to address the Senate for 1 minute as in morning business.

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

IRAN

Mr. GRASSLEY. I hope a lot of Americans have been able to watch on

television what is going on over in Iran right now. I hope Americans have an opportunity to listen to some Americans of Iranian descent who are commenting on what is going on over there because, recently, thousands of Iranians have taken to the streets protesting their country's corrupt regime. Frustrated by a lack of opportunity and frustrated by constant political oppression, these largely young and non-violent protesters have stood up to say: Enough is enough.

In response to these protesters, we see the regime engaging in a brutal crackdown, and that crackdown is on a scale not seen since the 1979 revolution, killing hundreds of civilians within the last few days.

The United States is not an enemy of the Iranian people. In fact, Americans of all backgrounds can't help but sympathize with these brave protesters seeking a more prosperous, more responsible Iran and having the Iran Government give that sort of an environment. We need to tell the Iranian leaders the world is watching.

I yield the floor.

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. 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.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, this week, House Democrats are continuing their 3-year-long quest to impeach the President and are continuing

to obstruct urgent bipartisan legislation. This has been the Democrats' strategy for months now—obsess over impeachment and obstruct everything else.

Take the USMCA, which would create 176,000 new American jobs. Speaker PELOSI has been stalling it for months, constantly saying she is optimistic or getting close or almost there. For months, it has been this broken record. I understand, this very week, while the Speaker of the House has apparently flown to Madrid to discuss climate change, she keeps offering the same empty rhetoric that is no different than what she was saying 10 months ago. American workers have waited and waited and waited. House Democrats keep stalling.

Consider the appropriations process. Even after signing a bipartisan agreement to forgo poison pills, Democrats ignored it and thrust other policy disagreements back into the appropriations process. They voted twice to filibuster funding for our Armed Forces. Well, last week, Chairman SHELBY and Chairwoman LOWEY reached an important agreement to address allocations at the subcommittee level. This was an essential step. It will take a lot of work and cooperation to move the appropriations process forward in the short time ahead of us. Our Democratic colleagues will finally need to rediscover that our men and women in uniform are more important than their partisan fights.

Speaking of our Armed Forces, let's talk about the NDAA. Congress has passed an annual defense authorization bill every year since 1961. Every year, after some jousting and jostling, the Congress has put aside all of our extraneous disagreements to fulfill one of our most basic responsibilities and reauthorize our Armed Forces, but remember the Democrats' new playbook: Obsess over impeachment, obstruct everything else, including, apparently, even our troops and national security.

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



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Imagine being so far left that even the routine annual bill to reauthorize the U.S. military is some controversial thing you have to be goaded into supporting. House Democrats abandoned longstanding traditions of compromise and larded up the NDAA with partisan policy riders. For what appears to be the first time ever in either Chamber, they passed an NDAA on a pure party-line vote—the first purely partisan NDAA in 58 years. In the Senate, by contrast, Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED collaborated on a bill that passed the Senate 86 to 8. We certainly did our part to stick with an annual tradition.

Now my colleague, the Democratic leader, is moving the goalpost and enabling Speaker PELOSI's reckless strategy. Longstanding bipartisan precedent says that in order for any subject outside the Armed Services Committees' jurisdiction to travel in the final NDAA, the chairmen and ranking members of the actual committee of jurisdiction need to give bipartisan sign-off. This basic test protects the Senate; it protects our committees; and it protects the NDAA from being held hostage for specific partisan ends. Every year, dozens, if not hundreds, of provisions meet that bar. Those that don't end up on the cutting room floor.

Thus far, in the Senate, Chairman INHOFE and Ranking Member REED have worked hard to respect those norms, but this year, the Speaker of the House and my colleague the Democratic leader want to scrap this precedent, undermine the committees, and demand special treatment for partisan priorities that have no business being crammed into this essential legislation for our Armed Forces.

We are talking about a new taxpayer-funded benefit for all Federal employees and sweeping changes to U.S. foreign policy. This is what they are trying to shoehorn into the NDAA. It is not good-faith policymaking, not when these demands pour in at the eleventh hour over must-pass legislation for our servicemembers. It is just political theater that is taking precedence over our Armed Forces. So, right on cue, I am sure we will hear made-for-TV histrionics about all of the new provisions the Speaker and the Democratic leader want to shove into this bill—bypassing hearings, markups, and negotiations between chairmen and ranking members.

We will probably keep hearing the dishonest myth that the Republicans are soft on Russia—never mind that a few years ago, President Obama was mocking the Republicans for being too tough on Russia; never mind that this administration has aggressively pursued sanctions, expelled Russian operatives, provided lethal defensive weapons to Georgia and Ukraine, taken major steps to protect our elections, and more. It is just more bluster and histrionics to distract from the core fact that is crystal clear to the entire country: There is no legislation, no

matter how crucial, that the Democrats will not obstruct in order to pick fights with this President.

The very bills the Democrats are resisting are essential for our national defense strategy—for our needed investments in cutting-edge weapons, in the European Defense Initiative, in modernizing our nuclear force. They are all critical for competing with, deterring, and defending against Russia and China. If the Democrats divide Congress over nondefense issues and kill these bills, they will have played right into our adversaries' hands. If we jettison the longstanding bipartisan process for negotiating the NDAA, they will have made this basic national security requirement far more difficult in the future.

Our Democratic colleagues must understand that national security comes before "the resistance." The country cannot afford this new tactic of obsessing over impeachment and obstructing everything else. I hope this changes soon.

TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY ISAKSON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on a totally different matter, the Senate has set aside today to honor our distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from Georgia, JOHNNY ISAKSON.

It has been about 3 months since JOHNNY announced he would retire at the end of December. Since then, I think we have all been taking stock of everything our dear friend has accomplished and everything he means to so many people. I have long said, if the Senate were to hold a secret ballot popularity contest, JOHNNY ISAKSON would win in a bipartisan landslide—quite possibly in a unanimous vote.

He commands bipartisan respect and affection to a degree that is truly remarkable. Yet, if you think about it, it makes sense for a man whose personal mantra goes like this: "There are only two kinds of people: friends and future friends." For most people, that might be a noble aspiration but unrealistic. For JOHNNY ISAKSON, it is a statement of fact. Nobody is an enemy, and nobody is a stranger—just a friend and future friend. That is it. With a motto like that, it is no wonder that JOHNNY's first career was a successful stint in real estate—a field in which relationships are everything.

It strikes me there could be two ways you could thrive in a business in which friendships and connections matter so much. You could be either good at faking a smile, at feigning interest in others, or you could genuinely love meeting everybody and learning how you might be able to help people. That second kind of person is exactly who Ed and Julie Isakson brought up in Atlanta, GA—warm, honest, forthright, incredibly kind. No wonder JOHNNY's neighbors jumped at the chance to hire him to be their State representative, then their State Senator, then their

Congressman, and then their U.S. Senator. So his retirement this month will cap a 45-year career in public service, packed with one significant accomplishment after another.

First and foremost in JOHNNY's long legacy is his work for our Nation's veterans. He spent 6 years in the Georgia Air National Guard as a young man, and he has spent the half century since then as one of his fellow veterans' best friends at any level of government.

Under JOHNNY's chairmanship, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs has passed literally scores of bills: more accountability at the VA, more education benefits, better community care programs, better procedures for when veterans appeal determinations, an updated GI bill with no more expiration date, and, of course, JOHNNY's landmark bill—the VA MISSION Act. It is now law. It provides many of the most significant reforms in the history of the VA by taking power away from bureaucrats and giving it back to the veterans and their doctors.

Yet, somehow, in the midst of compiling this singular record for our Nation's veterans, JOHNNY racked up countless more legislative successes that impact literally every American—from securing pension protections to reforming education policy, from regional infrastructure projects like the Savannah Harbor Expansion to combating hunger worldwide. One look at the list of laws bearing JOHNNY's fingerprints and you would be forgiven for thinking he never met a problem he could not solve.

But alas, every Senator sometimes encounters requests from back home on which he cannot deliver. Sometimes you have constituents on both sides of an issue. Sometimes a request might conflict with your principles. Whatever the reason, everybody in office eventually disappoints somebody. Yet JOHNNY's staff marvels at the fact that even when Georgians come up here to meet with him and, unfortunately, go away disappointed, they still walk out of the meetings, beaming with praise for their Senator: "Can you believe JOHNNY? He is the greatest guy ever. What a Senator"—and these are the people he just said no to.

The same traits explain why JOHNNY is just as popular under this dome as he is back home, and I don't just mean with his fellow Members. JOHNNY ISAKSON is practically an honorary member of every other Member's staff and an honorary elevator operator and an honorary Capitol Police Officer and an honorary member of Chaplain Black's team and on and on. He knows and values absolutely everybody.

I can't count how many times I would hear a peal of laughter from out in my staff bullpen and realize that JOHNNY ISAKSON had dropped by, not to see me but to chat with my team, to ask after their families, and to maybe check up on a couple of Georgia's priorities while he was there.