



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2019

No. 194

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.

Majestic God, Your name fills the Earth. In spite of our challenges, You continue to rule with Your love, wisdom, and power. Grant that our lawmakers may not forget the many dangers, toils, and snares You have already brought our Nation through.

Lord, give our Senators the wisdom to know that You continue to direct the steps of the faithful and that we have nothing to fear. Spirit of God, arise within our hearts and prepare us for the task of this day. Surprise us again with Your ability to transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows, doing for us more than we can ask or imagine.

We pray in Your great 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 address my colleagues for 1½ minutes as in morning business.

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

WORLD BANK

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I believe I have developed a reputation among my colleagues, and hopefully among my constituents, for transparency in the issue of the public's

business should be public. That applies to how the World Bank loans U.S. dollars. The World Bank is right now trying to sneak through a new policy that offends me.

I received word that the World Bank is planning to vote right now, as I speak, on a new country partnership framework with China. That framework commits the World Bank to providing China with billions of dollars in loans indefinitely. What is odd about this is that China is now the world's second largest economy and its per capita income is well above the levels at which countries are supposed to graduate from needing World Bank assistance. In other words, China should stand on their own two feet without help from the American taxpayers or even indirectly through the World Bank.

It happens that our country is the World Bank's largest contributor, and the spending bill that funds the World Bank includes a provision for a big capital increase from the American taxpayers to the World Bank. With this legislation pending, we in the Congress have an opportunity to weigh in and we should take that opportunity to make sure that American taxpayer dollars don't go to China, particularly when China is taking their own money and investing in the Belt and Road Initiative to get influence around several countries on the face of the Earth.

I will have more to say later on this topic.

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.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, for weeks now, the Republicans have been asking the Democrats to take off their impeachment blinders and let Congress legislate for the American people. We have argued that American families deserve better than this partisan paralysis, where the Democrats literally obsess over impeachment and obstruct everything else.

This very morning, for example, the Speaker gave a speech on national television to push forward her rushed and partisan impeachment, with not one word on the outstanding legislation the American people actually need—nothing on the USMCA or the NDAA or funding for our Armed Forces. It is all impeachment, all the time. Only in this town, only in Washington, does anybody think it is OK for our Armed Forces to go unfunded and for a major trade deal to go unpassed, because the Democrats are too busy hosting a panel of law professors to criticize President Trump on television instead of being busy on the things the American people actually need us to address.

The Kentuckians I represent cannot believe our military commanders are being denied certainty, our men and women in uniform are being denied stable funding, and 176,000 new American jobs are being held up all because the Democratic leadership thinks there is more political advantage in obstruction than in doing their jobs. Well, the servicemembers and personnel in the Kentucky National Guard and at Fort Campbell, Fort Knox, and the Blue Grass Army Depot aren't going to simply stop doing their jobs. No, they are counting on us to pass critical defense legislation that reforms housing and spousal employment programs, that invests in construction, readiness, and

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



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modernization, and that locks in—listen to this—the largest pay raise in a decade.

These bills touch every single State. Of course, there are major national and international issues at stake, as well, but the Democrats are still holding the NDAA hostage for a partisan wish list that is meant to appease trial lawyers, public sector unions, and their own far-left base. They are holding up the NDAA over unrelated, nongermane, leftwing wish-list items.

Meanwhile, the Speaker and the Democratic leader are withholding their assent from important bipartisan provisions like the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which has previously passed both Houses and has been modified to resolve all concerns by the committees of jurisdiction. Unlike the Democratic leader's rhetoric on Syria in recent weeks, this bill would actually do something to stand up for the Syrian people and hold Assad accountable. So I hope the Democratic leader will allow this important demonstration of our support for the Syrian people to go forward.

In the meantime, as if to underscore that the Democrats' top priority is performance art for coastal elites and not the people's business, I understand the Speaker of the House spent part of this week in Madrid, talking about climate change. She took an international flight to discuss carbon emissions. So the Speaker was in Spain, lamenting President Trump's decision to pull us out of the Paris Agreement. Maybe she pitched her conference's Green New Deal—its socialist plan to hurt our economy for American families—while bigger emitters like China go roaring right by.

As an aside, over the past 15 years, the United States' carbon emissions have actually fallen significantly. We appear to be on track for another decline in 2019. Meanwhile, Paris Agreement signatories, like China and India, continue to emit more and more every year. China already emits, roughly, twice as much as the United States, and it is increasing every year.

Kentucky and many other States know exactly what happens when Washington Democrats ignore these facts and decide America needs to take on unilateral economic pain for no meaningful change in global emissions. We are still trying to recover from the Democrats' last "War on Coal." We certainly don't need the Speaker of the House to promise the Europeans that she is going to start a new one. So working Americans and their families are not well served by the Democrats' political performance art. What they really need are results.

The only path to results is bipartisan legislation, and, fortunately, it is a well-trodden one. There are 58 consecutive annual defense authorizations to prove it. Always in the past we have been able to overcome these partisan differences and go forward. There is a bipartisan-bicameral agreement that

the Speaker and the Democratic leader signed just a few months ago to help them find their way back to the table, but the agreement needs to be honored. I hope they do so sometime soon.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, while we wait for our Democratic colleagues to let this legislation move forward, the Senate has used the time to confirm more of President Trump's impressive nominees for the Federal courts.

Some of my friends across the aisle complain that we devote too much time to nominations. First, I would like to remind everyone that district judges are the kinds of nominations that, historically, have sailed right through the Senate in big groups by voice votes. If our Democratic colleagues want to spend less time voting on district judges, they should take it up with the Democratic leader, who is forcing us to take cloture vote after cloture vote. As of this morning, we have taken cloture votes on 81 district judge nominees.

By this point in President Obama's Presidency, we had taken one cloture vote on a district judge nominee. Let me say that again. As of this morning, we have taken cloture votes on 81 district judges. By this point in President Obama's Presidency, we had taken one cloture vote on a district judge nominee—just one.

At the comparable point in the five Presidencies preceding President Obama's, combined, we had not taken a single cloture vote on a district judge's nomination—not one. Yet, 3 years into the Trump Presidency, there have been 81 cloture votes and counting just on district judges. So there is your answer on floor time.

More broadly, I want to take a moment to help clarify why I and millions of other Americans care so much about having Federal judges who believe in the radical notion that words matter and that a judge's job is to follow the law and the Constitution.

Take, for example, the subject of religious freedom. The liberty of conscience and the freedom to live out our faiths has been a foundational principle from the Republic's earliest days. Many of the first Europeans who arrived in the New World came here after having fled religious persecution.

James Madison wrote that religion "must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate."

Samuel Adams said in the summer of 1776 that America would be the "last asylum" for "freedom of thought and the right of private judgment."

Let me contrast the Founders' understanding with a couple of current events. Last month, New York State convinced a district judge to throw out the Trump administration's conscience protection rule for healthcare pro-

viders. This straightforward rule ensured that healthcare workers could not be forced to perform or assist with medical procedures that profoundly violated their religious beliefs. Yet the radical Democrats in New York could not abide by this basic protection for people of faith. Instead, they wanted to force Christians and other people of faith who work in healthcare to either assist in procedures like abortion or lose their jobs—so much for freedom of conscience.

New York's behavior is part of a disturbing trend. Powerful interests on the left want to shrink freedom of religion until it means freedom to go to church for an hour on Sundays as long as it doesn't impact the rest of your life. That shrunken interpretation is nothing like what our Founders intended, and, candidly, I am not sure how much longer the modern Democratic Party will even believe in that.

A few months ago, a Democrat who is running for President told CNN that the government should take away the tax-exempt status of churches and religious institutions that disagree with leftwing positions. He was not some fringe candidate. He was a guy whom the Democrats and the mainstream media had likened to John F. Kennedy. He was openly suggesting the Federal Government should punish churches if liberals don't like their social views—how appalling.

These disturbing signs have not been limited to the courts or to the Democratic campaign trail. Absurd anti-religious arguments have appeared right here in the Senate. In the last several years, some of our Democratic colleagues have tried, literally, to impose religious tests on nominees for Federal office. Just take the "no religious test" clause and the First Amendment and throw them right out the window. Get rid of them.

Judge Brian Buescher, now a district judge in Nebraska, was attacked by two Democrats on the Committee on the Judiciary for being a faithful Catholic and a member of the mainstream, worldwide Catholic group the Knights of Columbus. He was attacked for being a member of the Knights of Columbus? In written questions, one Senator called standard Catholic teachings "extreme positions" and asked if he would dial down his personal faith practice if confirmed. That happened in the Committee on the Judiciary of this Senate.

As our colleague Senator SASSE observed at the time, the Democrats were transparently implying that Brian's religious beliefs and his affiliation with his Catholic, religious, fraternal organization might make him unfit for service. It was plainly unconstitutional.

Judge Amy Coney Barrett, now a circuit judge on the Seventh Circuit, was likewise subjected to a religious test during her confirmation hearing. One Democratic Senator literally asked: Do you consider yourself an orthodox