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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Eternal God, You continue to hear and answer prayers. You have empowered us to catapult daunting hurdles, and we continue to depend on You to strengthen us for the difficulties ahead.

Be near to us during this challenging season, as our lawmakers work in an effort to accomplish Your purposes.

Supply the needs of our Senators, providing them with wisdom to navigate to Your desired destination for our Nation and world.

Do for our legislators more than they can ask or imagine.

We pray in Your holy 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAWLEY). The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 648

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

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 648) making appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

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

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

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, later this afternoon, the Senate will hold its fourth cloture vote on a package of important foreign policy legislation that was introduced back on January 4. For weeks, Senate Democrats have effectively filibustered this legislation and blocked it from moving forward.

At first, my colleague the Democratic leader said his party was simply opposed to considering any other business during the partial government shutdown, but then just a few days later, he actually sought to move ahead with a foreign policy vote of his own. In other words, though Senate Democrats were filibustering this pro-Israel legislation with the thin excuse that they didn't want to take up any other business, it turns out it was just the pro-Israel legislation that was actually off-limits.

While Senate Democrats were filibustering this legislation, by the way, the Democratic House had no problem considering one component of it, which it passed by voice vote.

So I remain curious as to the real reason why the Democrats insisted on filibustering these critical bills. Maybe we will get a better explanation this week, assuming Democrats finally drop the filibuster and allow this body to get back to work. This is an important piece of legislation. It comes at an urgent time.

For the past 8 years, the world has seen a despotic regime wage brutal war upon its own people. The conflict in Syria has taken more than 400,000 lives

and driven more than 5.6 million civilians to flee the country, straining the capacity of nations in the region, as well as Europe, to deal with the refugee and humanitarian fallout. Bashar al-Assad and his cronies have paved the way for the persistent terror of the Islamic State and invited the chaotic influence of foreign powers, especially Iran and Russia.

Of course, this is a region that already contends with persistent—persistent—instability, including Iran's meddling, financial support for terror, and explicit threats against Israel, but the legislation at hand addresses these challenges actually head-on. It tells our ally Israel that our commitment to its security is ironclad. It tells our partners in Jordan that we have their backs as they grapple with the flow of refugees and other ongoing effects of the Syrian crisis. It makes a crystal clear statement to the Syrian regime and those who abet it: Your brutality needs to end.

Here is how the legislation accomplishes all that: It makes sure the United States walks the walk when it comes to supporting Israel by authorizing military assistance, loan guarantees, and teamwork on missile defense.

Another bipartisan provision would preserve communities' rights to combat the destructive BDS movement by ensuring that States and local governments can choose not to funnel taxpayer dollars to companies that push anti-Israel boycotts.

With respect to Jordan, the bill before us reauthorizes legislation to deepen our cooperation with this key regional partner, which has faced grave challenges from the chaos that continues to unfold in its neighbor to its north.

With respect to Syria, this legislation includes the bipartisan Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. As I mentioned earlier, this passed the House on a voice vote just last week.

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



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It would create new pathways to hold accountable the individuals and institutions that have tortured and murdered countless Syrian civilians over the course of the civil war. It would ensure that unless the Syrian regime shifts course and ends its brutality, the nation's major industries and financial institutions would pay a heavy price due to American sanctions.

So if it weren't obvious, these are critically important issues, and none of them have been put on pause because the Democrats' political strategy has blocked this body from taking action.

Due to the Democrats' filibuster, Israel, Jordan, and the innocent people of Syria have already had to wait 24 days for the Senate to proceed to these largely noncontroversial and widely supported bipartisan bills.

I hope our colleagues across the aisle don't keep them waiting much longer.

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.

STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ACT OF 2019—MOTION TO PROCEED—Resumed

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to the consideration of S. 1, a bill to make improvements to certain defense and security assistance provisions and to authorize the appropriation of funds to Israel, to reauthorize the United States–Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and to halt the wholesale slaughter of the Syrian people, and for other purposes.

MR. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 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. Mr. 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.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

MR. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as the dust settles from the longest shutdown in American history, we have work to do to get our country back on track. Hundreds of thousands of Federal workers who endured a month without compensation need to get their pay-

checks and backpay as soon as possible. So I have written a letter to President Trump urging him to expedite the delivery of those paychecks.

At the same time, we must be mindful of the hardships that persist for Federal contractors, who may not receive the backpay they have missed and who may have lost health insurance during the shutdown. We need to find a solution as well for those contractors. Senator SMITH of Minnesota is working on that, and I hope we can do something to help them. It is of no fault of their own that they lost pay.

But there are some costs from the Trump shutdown that cannot be recouped. The CBO today released a report about the lasting damage that the Trump shutdown has done to the American economy. According to the CBO, the 5-week shutdown cost the U.S. economy \$11 billion overall, including \$3 billion in economic activity that can never be recovered.

Let me repeat that. The Trump shutdown has cost the U.S. economy \$11 billion. What a devastating and pointless exercise this has been. If President Trump didn't appreciate the error of his ways already, his CBO ought to set him straight—no more shutdowns. They accomplish nothing. They only inflict pain and suffering on the country, our citizens, our economy, and our national security. That is a lesson we all must keep in mind.

The continuing resolution we passed on Friday only runs until February 15. In 3 weeks, we must pass additional appropriations to avoid another shutdown. Let the CBO report be a dire warning to President Trump and my Republican colleagues in the Senate against shutting down the government again.

Now, in these next 3 weeks, House and Senate appropriators named to the conference committee on Department of Homeland Security will endeavor to strike a bipartisan deal on border security. The good news is that we begin this process with plenty of common ground. Democrats and Republicans alike agree on the need for stronger border security. Though Democrats sharply disagree with the President on the need for an expensive and ineffective border wall, we agree on the need to strengthen our ports of entry, as well as the need to provide more drug inspection technology and humanitarian assistance. Since so many of the drugs come through the portals, a border wall will do no good at all, but strengthening those portals is vital.

Because we have set this up as a conference, Democratic and Republican leadership—House and Senate—will be involved, as well as the appropriators from those committees. Everyone has skin in the game. So in the next 3 weeks, the goal of the committee should be to find areas where we agree and work on them together.

In the past, when the President has stayed out of it, when the President has given Congress room, we have been

repeatedly able to forge bipartisan agreements, including two budget agreements and the Russia sanctions. When the President injects maximalist partisan demands into the process, negotiations tend to fall apart. The President should allow the conference committee to proceed with good faith negotiations. I genuinely hope it will produce something that is good for the country and acceptable to both sides.

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. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

MR. CORNYN. Mr. President, after a 35-day government shutdown, more than 800,000 Federal workers and their families are finally back at work. Their families have endured unnecessary and needless hardship over the past several weeks because, frankly, the Speaker of the House, Ms. PELOSI, was more determined to try to win the political battle than solve the problem. I could give the same comment to our friend the Democratic leader here in the Senate. I hope now, after we have been through this exercise in futility, that our colleagues will take seriously our responsibility to solve the problem before us, and that is to reach an agreement so we don't end up in the same position 3 weeks hence when this continuing resolution expires.

I tell people that we solve problems like this every single day here in the Congress. You don't read about it, necessarily, or hear about it because when we build consensus and negotiate compromises, it is not news. The only time it is news is when we disagree and when it is broadcast across cable TV or the subject of talk radio or social media.

It is unfortunate that dedicated public servants were caught in the crosshairs over a partisan fight on border security. What we have seen over the last months is that many Members desire to score those political points and win a fight against the President, and that desire is much greater than their desire to build legislation that benefits the American people.

There is a solution to be had. As I said, we do it every day. The only question is, Are we willing to work together to find it? I know I am.

I have been speaking with many Members of the Texas delegation, both Republicans and Democrats, to try to find that common ground for our constituents for border security. We don't consider these to be political footballs or talking points; we consider these matters to be part of their daily lives and part of our responsibility as their elected representatives.

In the last few days, I have had the chance to be in Dallas, TX, and also in