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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon 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 in Heaven, You are our shield and deliverer. You, O God, are our light and salvation. So we refuse to be afraid. Continue to be the strength of our lives, as we remember the many times You have protected and preserved America in the past.

Lord, inspire our lawmakers with Your presence so that the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts will be acceptable to You. Help them to remember that You are an ever-present help for turbulent times, eager to empower those who depend upon Your might.

We pray in Your strong 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. LANKFORD). The majority leader is recognized.

S. 1

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I have discussed several times, the Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act is a consequential legislative package that would strengthen vital partnerships and reaffirm our active role in matters of global concern. I am proud to support it. I

was also proud to lay down an amendment yesterday that would allow the Senate to speak equally forcefully on critical subjects in American foreign policy.

The United States is engaged in Syria and Afghanistan for one simple reason: because our enemies are engaged there. Real dangers to us and to our allies still remain in both of these nations. So we must continue to confront them there. Fortunately, we are not alone. We are joined in the counter-ISIS coalition by 78 other partners, and in both Syria and Afghanistan, local fighters are bearing the brunt—the brunt—of the work.

But American leadership is absolutely essential, and that is what this amendment is all about. My amendment is not partisan. It expresses views and concerns from Senators on both sides of the aisle, and it certainly isn't political. I intended it as an opportunity for the Senate to debate and vote on some of the more consequential matters of the day, and I expected this institution to rise to the occasion.

I was a Senator on September 11, 2001. I don't want America to ever live through another day like that—none of us do.

I have also been here in the Senate for the 17 years since—17 years of American engagement in worldwide efforts to combat terrorism. It hasn't been easy navigating American interests through this complicated and troubled region. It hasn't been easy adapting to an entirely new way of warfare against enemies that have proven adaptive themselves.

It is understandable that as we get further from September 11, many would grow tired of our military efforts a long way from home, but as decisions from the Obama administration have made painfully clear, leaving too abruptly carries its own grave risks.

Had President Obama known that ISIS would emerge in the wake of his withdrawal from Iraq and flourish in

the chaos of the Syrian civil war, I suspect he might have done things differently. Perhaps he would not have abandoned Iraq so precipitously, ignored the growing terror threats in Syria, or allowed Assad to steamroll over his now-infamous “red line.”

We can't undo this unfortunate history, but we certainly cannot afford to repeat it. So it has been a welcome contrast to see the Trump administration make huge progress reinvigorating our fight against al-Qaida in Afghanistan and ISIS in Syria. Unshackling our military has led to progress on the ground, greater pressure placed on the terrorists, and new opportunities for diplomatic and political solutions that have opened up as a result of the pressure that we have applied.

So what we must remember is how hard won these gains have been. Our response to this progress must not be to take our foot off the gas pedal but rather to keep up those strategies that are clearly working.

Our partnership with Iraqi security forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces have stripped ISIS of much territory in those two nations, but we have not yet defeated ISIS. We have not yet defeated al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Civil wars continue to rage in both Syria and Afghanistan. There are still cauldrons—cauldrons—of sectarianism, extremism, and terror.

President Trump is right that this cannot be America's fight alone. The threats that ISIS and al-Qaida pose are global. That is why many countries are with us in this fight. There is more that those partners can and should do to keep up direct pressure on terrorists and on outside actors who interfere with diplomatic efforts to resolve these wars.

Putin's Russia and the ayatollahs in Tehran need to pay a real price for their attempts to back butchers—butchers—like the Assad regime, Hezbollah, and the Taliban.

We also need to understand that if we withdraw too soon—too soon—we will

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



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create vacuums in Syria and Afghanistan. We know from experience that Russia and Iran would be only too happy to fill those vacuums.

If we truly care about containing Russia, the battleground is not only on Twitter or Facebook but also in the world of old fashioned geopolitics.

So my amendment would offer Senators the ability to speak on all these subjects. I honestly did not expect this would be controversial stuff. I didn't expect that my colleagues across the aisle would make a partisan stand and try to block this straightforward "sense of the Senate" amendment when it really just restates—restates—what most of us thought was a broad bipartisan consensus about American leadership in the world, but that is what our Democratic colleagues did.

They tried to block it. Democrats objected to a vote on this amendment, apparently because it would expose a rift among their own membership—a division between those Senate Democrats who still subscribe to the vision for America's leadership and their colleagues who have abandoned those principles at the urging of the very far left or are too afraid to take either position—either one. It is quite the split. It shows how caught up my Democratic colleagues are in the partisanship of this moment.

My amendment simply reemphasizes the expertise and counsel offered by experts who have served Presidents of both parties. It is a mainstream amendment with 19 cosponsors, but apparently a significant portion of today's Democratic Party isn't sure—isn't sure—they believe in these principles any more. They would rather try to squash the debate and dodge the vote altogether.

Well, that is not going to work. These are exactly the kinds of issues the Senate should be debating. The Senate has a special role in foreign policy.

Americans are serving in harm's way in Syria and Afghanistan. The American servicemembers, diplomats, and aid workers in those conflict zones all deserve to know whether their elected officials support their efforts or whether we no longer believe their tireless efforts serve our national interest.

Our constituents deserve to know which Senators welcome a thorough debate over Syria and Afghanistan and which are simply trying to duck the debate. Well, despite my Democratic colleagues' attempt, I can assure the American people that they are going to learn precisely that. I filed cloture on the amendment yesterday afternoon, and we will vote on it. Regardless of whatever political contortions the far left may be demanding from Senate Democrats, the American people are going to learn exactly where their Senators stand. Our institution will not shrink from this important duty.

H.R. 1

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, I spoke for the first time, yesterday, on the subject that House Democrats have crowned as their signature effort for this Congress—H.R. 1, also known as the "Democratic Politician Protection Act." Speaker PELOSI and her colleagues are advertising it as a package of urgent measures to save American democracy. What it really seems to be is a package of urgent measures to rewrite the rules of American politics for the exclusive benefit of the Democratic Party.

Yesterday, I gave a brief tour through several of the most bizarre components of their proposal. Today, I would like to focus on just one of the legislation's major victims—the American taxpayer.

H.R. 1 would victimize every American taxpayer by pouring their money into expensive new subsidies that don't even pass the laugh test. In several new ways, it would put every taxpayer on the hook to line the pockets of candidates, campaigns, and outside consultants.

Do you look forward to bumper stickers, robocalls, attack ads, and campaign mail that descend on the country in seemingly endless cycles?

Speaker PELOSI must think you do, because she wants you to pay for these things with your tax dollars. You get the opportunity, with your money, to pay for attack ads and bumper stickers and the rest. This bill creates brand-new government subsidies—government subsidies—both for political campaign donors and for the campaigns themselves.

The Federal Government would start matching political donations the same way some employers match gifts to charity. You would be literally funding attack ads for the candidates you disagree with. How about that—your money funding ads for the candidates you disagree with?

Maybe that is why every Democrat opposed our tax cuts for middle-class families and small businesses. They were counting on that money to pull off this stimulus package, if you will, for campaign consultants.

And for what reason? To increase the competition? Well, studies have shown that incumbents win just as often in taxpayer-funded elections as they do when campaigns are funded with private money.

To reduce corruption? Hardly. Jurisdictions that have toyed with taxpayer-funded political systems have turned out to be replete with misappropriation, personal use, straw donors, and public corruption scandals.

So I remain curious why, exactly, the "Democratic Politician Protection Act" wants to offer the American people's money to thousands of candidates that run for the House of Representatives every 2 years, whether they support these candidates or not. They want citizens to bankroll political materials that they totally disagree with.

But they aren't stopping there. Democrats also want taxpayers on the hook for generous new benefits for Federal bureaucrats and government employees.

Their bill would make election day a new paid holiday for government workers and create an additional brandnew paid leave benefit for up to 6 days for any Federal bureaucrat who decides they would like to hang out at the polls during any election. Just what America needs—another paid holiday and a bunch of government workers being paid to go out and work, I assume, for our colleagues on the other side on their campaigns.

This is the Democrats' plan to "restore" democracy—a brandnew week of paid vacation for every Federal employee who would like to hover around while you cast your ballot? A Washington-based, taxpayer-subsidized clearinghouse for political campaign funding? It is a power grab that is smelling more and more like exactly what it is.

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—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1) 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.

Pending:

McConnell amendment No. 65, to express the sense of the Senate that the United States faces continuing threats from terrorist groups operating in Syria and Afghanistan and that the precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from either country could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I appreciate the fact that the majority leader has put before the Senate an important piece of legislation that reemphasizes our support for our allies in the Middle East, a very dangerous neighborhood that has a tendency to have others drawn into the neighborhood and into the fight. This legislation is comprised of four bills that have enjoyed bipartisan support, but we weren't able to