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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.

O God, the might of them that put their trust in You, save us from the fatal folly of relying upon our strength alone.

Help our lawmakers to remember that You are the only sure refuge and You desire to do for us more than we can ask or imagine. Give our Senators the courage to seek Your truth and the humility to walk in the light You provide. May their labors contribute to America's strength and influence in our world as You use them to lift aloft the light of freedom. As our legislators labor for Your glory, may they know that they are part of Your ultimate plan for our Nation and world.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 47

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

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 47) to provide for the management of the natural resources of the United States, 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.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last night, President Trump delivered his first address to the Nation from the Oval Office. In the midst of this partial government shutdown, the President offered a reminder of just what is at stake; that is, the security of our Nation's southern border.

By now, on day 19 of Senate Democrats' latest experiment in "absentee negotiation," my colleagues are well-versed in the facts on the ground.

We know Border Patrol agents are encountering historic levels of illicit substances like fentanyl and heroin at our border. We know that last year saw thousands of attempted border crossings by individuals with criminal records and literally hundreds more by known gang members. We understand the status quo is not enough to keep our families and communities safe.

Fortunately, we know the solutions on the table—solutions which the President has placed at the center of the national conversation since the earliest days of his administration—are actually eminently reasonable.

As one former Border Patrol Chief's under President Obama put it just recently, "If you look in the past, you don't have to go too far back into history . . . bipartisan legislation passed where they built the wall, or fence, or physical barrier, or whatever you want to call it. It's a wall. It works."

That is what the Border Patrol Chief under President Obama said.

He went on to say:

It is not based on personal political ideology. That's based on historical data and facts that could be proven. . . . I cannot think of a legitimate argument why anyone would not support the wall as part of the multi-layered border security issue.

So why are we not listening to the experts and the people who are doing this every day, like that Border Patrol Chief under President Obama?

The experts know what they are talking about. The facts back them up. According to CBP, in four border sectors where this administration has already constructed or improved physical barriers in the last 2 years—listen to this—illicit traffic has fallen by 90 percent—90 percent.

Of course, not too long ago, my colleagues across the aisle had a completely different position on this subject. Before the political winds blew a different way, before this particular President was inaugurated, Senate Democrats did heed the advice of the men and women who protect our border.

By very wide bipartisan margins, and on multiple occasions, the Senate has cleared literally billions of dollars in funding for physical barriers along the southern border.

In 2006, then-Senator Obama said the Secure Fence Act would provide "badly needed funding for better fences and better security." That is what then-Senator Obama said in 2006.

In 2009, the current Democratic leader praised as major progress "630 miles of border fence"—fence—"that create a significant barrier to illegal immigration." That is what the then-majority leader said in 2009, who is now the minority leader.

During the last Presidential election, former Senator Clinton saw fit to tout the "numerous times" she voted to "build a barrier to try and prevent illegal immigrants from coming in." That is what Hillary Clinton said. "Numerous times," "significant barrier,"

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



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“badly needed,” that was where leading Democrats stood.

Today, however, it seems there is a new party line. The use of physical barriers to preserve the integrity of a sovereign Nation is now, according to the new Speaker of the House, “immoral”—“immoral.” They went from “badly needed” to “immoral” in little more than the span of a Presidency. Talk about a pivot. Talk about a pivot.

My Democratic friends wanted fencing and physical barriers in the recent past. Their most prominent leaders actually bragged about voting for physical barriers. The only thing that has changed between then and now is the occupant of the White House.

Steel fencing was fine, even salutary, when President Obama was in the White House, but it is “immoral” when President Trump occupies the office.

All of a sudden—all of a sudden—Democrats have developed this new partisan allergy to the subject of border security. They are even prolonging a partial government shutdown just to avoid getting more of what they themselves have voted for in the past.

This inconsistency doesn’t stop with drawing imaginary lines in the sand between the border security the Democrats once supported and the virtually identical measures they have decided to oppose today. The inconsistency also extends to the conduct of the Senate itself during this tantrum.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday evening, Democrats blocked the Senate from proceeding to important foreign policy legislation. This bill, which was blocked last night, included measures of which they have been outspokenly supportive and even cosponsored, but then they decided that getting anything done at all this week would clash with their new political brand.

To be clear, the legislation I am referring to would have addressed several serious challenges to U.S. interests in the Middle East. It would have reaffirmed our commitment to the security of Israel, our closest regional ally. It would have reauthorized defense cooperation with Jordan, a critical partner, and it would have taken a vital step toward bringing the perpetrators and the enablers of the Assad regime atrocities in Syria to justice. Frankly, it would have delivered on promises to which my Democratic colleagues appeared to be firmly committed.

In their own words, Senate Democrats have discussed “the continuation of America’s unshakeable, seven-decade commitment to Israel’s security” and doing “everything in our power to fight the BDS movement,” but, alas, instead of proceeding to this legislation, Senate Democrats voted to block it.

My friend the Democratic leader chose to take this partial government shutdown that he is prolonging and add

his very own Senate shutdown on top of it. They want to shut down the Senate as well—no progress, no bipartisan work, not even on urgent and pressing matters, nothing that might take the spotlight off his unreasonable show-down with the President.

Just as an example, during the 2013 government shutdown, the Senate kept right on chugging through the people’s business. We passed 5 bills, 13 resolutions, appointed conferees on the farm bill, the budget resolution, and confirmed 28 of President Obama’s nominees. The Senate was not shut down during the last government shutdown. This time, the Democrats want to hold everything hostage—everything?

Here is more inconsistency. Senate Democrats were for border security, including billions for physical barriers, before they were against it, and they were for the Senate working hard during government shutdowns on other business before they were against it.

Until our Democratic colleagues agree to get back to work—until they agree to get back to work—the Senate can’t make much progress. Rest assured, Assad has not pressed the pause button on the Syrian civil war simply because it doesn’t suit the Democratic leader’s political strategy this week, Israel’s enemies haven’t stopped either, and until Democrats prioritize the public interest ahead of political spite, our border will not be secured, and the Federal Government will remain partially closed.

I cannot urge my Democratic colleagues more strongly to get past this purely partisan spite, rediscover their own past positions on border security, and negotiate a fair solution with the President to secure our Nation and reopen all of the Federal Government.

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. 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, last night President Trump tried to convince Congress and the American people that there is a crisis at our southern border. It was little more than a rehash of spurious arguments and misleading statistics the President has been using for weeks. President Trump once again tried to claim there was a crisis at the border. The fact is, migrant border crossings have been declining for nearly two decades.

The President inveighed against drugs pouring over the border, but the

vast majority of heroin enters the United States through legal ports of entry in trucks and on airplanes.

The President and his allies have been claiming that nearly 4,000 known or suspected terrorists have been stopped from entering the United States. They say that is a reason for the border wall. But nearly every single one of those apprehensions occurred in airports, not on our southern border.

In a recent report, Donald Trump’s State Department concluded that there is no credible evidence that terrorist groups were trying to enter the United States through the southern border. In a report on the President’s strategy to combat terrorist travel, sent to Congress by President Trump on December 21—the day the shutdown began—the National Security Council, appointed by President Trump, did not even mention a wall or a barrier to stop terrorists from entering the country.

The President continues to fearmonger, and he makes up the facts. This is a Presidency that is in crisis. It has so many problems, and it is the old trick—fearmonger, distort, try to scare people, and maybe they will not pay attention to the real problems in this administration.

In no way, however—the President is not getting his way. His fearmongering just isn’t working. In no way did the President’s speech last night make a persuasive or even a new case for an exorbitantly expensive border wall—a wall that the President guaranteed would be paid by Mexico. He said: I ran on this. Yes, he ran on it, saying Mexico would pay for it. At his rallies, he chanted: Who will pay for the wall? The people screamed back: Mexico.

The President’s speech did nothing—nothing—to convince us here in Congress, and I believe it did nothing—nothing—to convince a skeptical public that this government shutdown is anything but a manufactured crisis of the President’s own making. The President’s speech, if anything, moved the American people even further away from his view that he should keep the government shut down until he gets his way. Reports say that the President didn’t want to give this speech. Well, he was right. I don’t think it helped his cause, and he probably hurt himself.

It is time for the President and our Republican colleagues to stop this fearmongering and to stop this diversion away from the problems that the President really has and end the shutdown. The shutdown is hurting millions of Americans, and it is going to get worse, all because of President Trump’s temper tantrum. We should not—we should not—treat hundreds of thousands of Americans—millions of Americans—as leverage to try and get something by pounding the table. That is not how our government works.

What is happening? Hundreds of thousands of Federal workers—innocent Federal workers who do their jobs, who work hard, and sometimes they get up on Monday morning with a 100-