



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 2019

No. 20

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.

Lord of the harvest, we continue to seek You, for we desire to do Your will. You are the strength of our lives.

As our lawmakers strive to walk uprightly, provide them with the harvest of truth, justice, and righteousness. May they cultivate such ethical congruence that their rhetoric will be undergirded by right actions.

Lord, keep them aware of Your continuous presence as they find in You fullness of joy. Show them the path to life as Your truth brings them to a safe harbor.

We pray in Your merciful 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 (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

S. 1

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, earlier this week, Senate Democrats stopped filibustering the important legislation before us. They finally joined Republicans and voted to advance these measures to renew our commitment to Israel, deepen our cooperation with Jordan, and deliver justice

for the victims of Assad's brutality in Syria.

But it appears some of my Democratic colleagues are not finished with their obstruction just yet.

On Tuesday, I offered a straightforward amendment to allow for a straightforward debate about the Senate's continued commitment to ongoing missions in Syria and Afghanistan. It is not a partisan amendment. It is not complicated. There is no poison pill—just an opportunity for Senators to go on the record about what our country should be doing in Syria and Afghanistan.

I have been clear about my own views on these subjects. I believe the threats remain. ISIS and al-Qaida have yet to be defeated, and American national security interests require continued commitment to our missions there.

But I guess some Senate Democrats don't want to vote on these important subjects. Perhaps it could have put some of my colleagues with aims beyond the Senate at odds with parts of the far left. Whatever the reason, our colleagues tried to avoid taking a position and tried to block my amendment from getting a vote.

Make no mistake. Today, the Senate will vote on this amendment. Members will go on the record for our allies and our partners in the Middle East.

When Senator RUBIO introduced S. 1, which is just a collection of bipartisan bills, I hoped for an open amendment process so that the Senate could debate important matters of national security. I am disappointed that our friends on the other side of the aisle have chosen to make that impossible.

Another issue I had hoped we could address is America's ironclad commitment to the transatlantic alliance. NATO has a proud history of delivering greater security to America and our allies and greater peace to the world. We stood shoulder to shoulder with our NATO allies throughout the Cold War; they stood with us following 9/11.

NATO's mission in Afghanistan today is an essential element of bringing peace and stability to that troubled country.

NATO will continue to be critical to transatlantic security, but it must adapt to new challenges. The United States has made significant new investments in our security posture in Europe, most notably through troop deployments all along the eastern flank and through the European Deterrence Initiative, which has bipartisan support here in Congress.

Former Secretary Mattis was also instrumental in pushing NATO to reform, especially in the areas of capabilities modernization, readiness, and military mobility. These reforms are essential to ensuring NATO readiness.

President Trump has also reaffirmed our Nation's commitment to NATO. As recently as just a few days ago, he said the United States will "be with NATO 100 percent."

The President is right to call upon our allies to contribute their fair share toward our collective defense. As NATO's Secretary General recently explained, President Trump has "clearly stated that NATO allies need to invest more. . . we agreed to do more . . . and now we see the results. . . by the end of next year, NATO allies will add . . . 100 billion extra U.S. dollars [for] defense."

Here is how the Secretary General summed it up: "So we see some real money, and some real results, and we see that the clear message from President Trump is having an impact."

We need to build on this momentum and continue strengthening NATO, dispelling all doubt—all doubt—about America's commitment to this alliance, which has reshaped history for the better.

NATO deserves the Senate's support. I believe it has the Senate's support, and at some point I hope this institution is able to debate that matter.

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



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H.R. 1

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on a totally different matter, earlier this week I began discussing H.R. 1. This is the House Democrats' marquee bill for the new Congress.

I have stated this week that it really adds up to one big expensive partisan power grab, an effort to centralize more control over America's speech and America's voting here in Washington—the "Democratic Politician Protection Act." I am pleased that people are beginning to pay attention to this monstrosity—a monstrosity.

Today I want to focus on how the power grab would affect our elections because when Washington politicians suddenly decide their top priority is grabbing unprecedented control over how they get elected and sent to Washington in the first place, alarm bells should start ringing all over this place.

After all, article I, section IV of the Constitution clearly gives—clearly gives—State legislatures primary responsibility for "the Times, Places, and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives."

There are times in American history when it has come to that. There have been times when our Nation has needed the Federal Government to get involved to expand and protect the franchise or to respond to a national emergency, for examples, bills like the Voting Rights Act, which secured the franchise for African Americans, or the Help America Vote Act, which provided guideposts—guideposts—to prevent a crisis like the Bush v. Gore recount from occurring a second time.

So what is the alleged crisis now? What is the alleged crisis now, in 2019, that has House Democrats calling for an unprecedented Federal takeover of elections across our country? Why is this Democratic bill—which would create more Federal Government mandates over the minutia of the election process than has ever been done in the past—necessary now?

The year 2016 saw the most ballots ever cast in a Presidential election in American history. Now, with population growth, that isn't entirely surprising, but the turnout rate was the third highest since 1968. So people are voting in great numbers.

Let's look at the 2018 midterms—the highest midterm turnout in 50 years. People voted in the midterms.

Listen to what Americans themselves had to say about their experience. After the election, 92 percent—92 percent—of surveyed voters told the Pew Research Center their voting experience was "very easy" or "somewhat easy"—92 percent—very easy or somewhat easy to vote. Regardless of when they voted and how they voted, huge majorities communicated that they had no real trouble—no real trouble—casting their ballots. No trouble.

My Democratic friends seem to be implying there is a supposed crisis here that conveniently is not rooted in the facts or in the opinions of American voters.

There is no objective basis for the sweeping Federal takeover of elections that House Democrats have dreamed up. There is no emergency. It is just a Washington power grab for its very own sake.

Decision after decision that our Constitution properly leaves to the States just melts away in this proposal. Practically every variable of any consequence to American elections gets a top-down mandate written by whom? Why, the Democrats, of course.

Could States require a signature to vote under the Democrats' bill? Only if they accept a computerized mark, making that signature requirement about as serious as clicking one checkbox on a website.

What if States and localities want to make sure that ineligible voters under the age of 18 don't end up on the voter rolls or decide whether or how convicted felons have their voting rights restored? Well, under the "Democratic Politician Protection Act," States have no choice in the matter.

How many early days of voting should there be? Do polls need to be open on Sundays? What is the best way to make absentee ballots available? When can early voting take place, and how long and where should the polling places be located?

Different States and communities have come to different legitimate judgments on all of these questions. It is a core part of our constitutional system, and the decentralization of our election process leads to a more democratic system with more direct impact on the elections of those decision makers.

The United States of America has never been about centralizing all power in Washington, and Washington should not get to micromanage the processes that determine who comes to Washington.

But, alas, House Democrats don't seem to care if their partisan power grab upsets this constitutional balance. These Representatives even—get this—want the Federal Government to dictate to States how their very own congressional districts will be drawn. They want the Federal Government to tell the States how to draw their congressional districts.

Right now, there is a competition of ideas among the States about the best way to handle this. Different places arrive at different answers.

Naturally, House Democrats have a different idea. They want to force every State to use a commission that is designed by them—by Washington Democrats. Every State will have to use a commission designed by Washington Democrats whose structure and procedures are prescribed, of course, by Washington Democrats. If a State doesn't know how to bow to their will, then the DC Federal court will make the decisions that have been reserved for the State legislatures going back to our Nation's founding.

I know it is not fashionable on the far left to praise the wisdom of our

constitutional structure. It seems to be out of fashion. I am sure that in some corners I will be derided for referencing the Constitution at all. They will say: How could it still be relevant after all these years?

Of course, this thinking shows exactly why our founding principles are so important.

Our Constitution is there to protect our liberties and protect our form of government from the whim of whoever happens to be currently in power. These guardrails exist to stop things like a narrow partisan majority in the House of Representatives grabbing control of election laws just to benefit themselves politically. We need to stand with Alexander Hamilton and our Constitution, not with the House Democrats' partisan power grab.

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.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for S. 1.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 1, 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