



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 166

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020

No. 47

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.

Arise, O Judge of the Earth, and bring healing and help to our Nation and world. We praise You that Your plans succeed and Your precepts are sure.

Lord, You know our thoughts before we think them. Encourage our lawmakers to do Your will. Give them the wisdom to totally depend upon Your unfailing love, remembering that unless You help them, they labor in vain.

Lord, when doubts fill their minds, provide them with the renewed hope in the ultimate triumph of Your purposes.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. LOEFFLER). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 1 minute in morning business.

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

LITHUANIA

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, 30 years ago today, the freely elected Parliament of Lithuania declared the restoration of that country's independence. Lithuania's brave actions began the breakup of the Soviet Union, something all freedom-loving Americans ought to be celebrating.

The modern Republic of Lithuania is 102 years old as of last month, and the

United States has maintained continuous diplomatic relations with Lithuania since 1992—in other words, since the period of time that the Soviet Union had jurisdiction over it. In these last 30 years, since the return of freedom, we have seen the partnership between our two countries become stronger than ever.

Lithuania is a close U.S. ally, a beacon of Western values, and very much on the frontlines of freedom. I thank Lithuania for its friendship, for its important contributions to our North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance, and for its vocal defense of our shared values.

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.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday President Trump visited the Capitol to discuss the ongoing efforts to fight the new coronavirus and its growing footprint here in the United States.

As Vice President PENCE, Dr. Anthony Fauci, and the other administration experts related in their briefing yesterday, we should expect a number of cases to continue to climb throughout our country. Fortunately, our Nation was rated the best prepared in the world for this kind of outbreak, and we are continuing to scale up our response every day.

My home State of Kentucky currently has eight confirmed cases. I applaud the efforts of State and local leaders who are working together with Federal officials to proceed carefully and intelligently.

Our public health experts are compiling the best guidance for individuals, families, businesses, schools, and healthcare professionals in one place, and www.coronavirus.gov is the place to go. I encourage every American to read through the information, particularly anyone whose personal circumstances make additional precautions a wise idea.

President Trump and Senators also discussed potential policies to soften the economic impact of the virus. Over the last 3 years, we have built a historically strong economy of American workers and middle-class families. We should take sensible steps to help that momentum continue, notwithstanding this new challenge.

I am glad the Secretary of the Treasury and the Speaker of the House are engaging in direct bipartisan talks on this subject. Congress has already provided billions in new funding to Federal, State, and local health leaders. I hope we can bring the same bipartisan energy to any steps that prove necessary to support our strong U.S. economy.

Now, it has been sad but not surprising to see some of President Trump's Democratic critics here in Washington fall back on the same old predictable partisan attacks, even at a time like this, but across the country, where leaders are working together on the frontlines, we have seen something different. I want to commend the Democratic Governor of California, who stated on Monday that he had been in close touch with the President and Vice President and appreciated their attention and support.

Here is what he said:

He said everything I could have hoped for. . . . We had a very long conversation, 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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every single thing he said, they followed through on.

That is the Governor of California talking about the Republican President of the United States. He praised the administration's work on this and said: "It starts at the top."

So, clearly, this does not have to be a time for partisan bickering. The American people know that. The leaders around the country know that. I hope our Democratic colleagues here in Washington understand the American people expect us to be working together on this problem.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on another matter, yesterday, both the House and Senate were briefed by top intelligence community officials on the state of ongoing efforts to protect the security of American elections.

I was glad that so many Members took the chance to hear directly from the experts. This issue is very important, and it is bad for our democracy that some have sought to politicize it.

All of us should acknowledge the threat, and all of us should applaud the unprecedented step this administration has taken to protect against it. These significant efforts undertaken by the administration and funded by the Congress are actually working.

Since 2017, the hundreds of millions of dollars we have directed to help State and local election officials reinforce their systems have been finding their mark.

In all 50 States and across thousands of jurisdictions, new tools, more resources, and greater coordination have our Nation's defenses in a stronger place. This includes far greater coordination with the social media companies to combat foreign disinformation, as well as close collaboration between the Federal Government and State and local jurisdictions on protecting electoral infrastructure.

And to date, the intelligence community reports they have not seen any foreign interference that aims to change vote tallies or prevent Americans from voting. So the American people are absolutely right to have confidence in the integrity of our voting systems, and they actually do.

As I mentioned yesterday, one new survey has found that more than 70 percent—70 percent—of Americans are confident their State and local authorities will oversee a fair and accurate election this November. That is 70 percent of the American people who have confidence in the fairness of the elections this November.

As an aside, this is worth remembering as our Democratic colleagues try to claim that election security demands things like an unprecedented Washington power grab over the nuanced details of how States and localities conduct elections or addressing things like campaign finance. These

are longtime leftwing goals that have basically nothing whatsoever to do with the actual threats now before us.

But the American people's confidence in the key institutions of our democracy does not mean they are complacent; they aren't. The same survey shows the American people understand full well that foreign adversaries like Russia want to divide our country and distort our discourse through disinformation.

The intelligence community confirms that as well. Our intelligence experts have publicly assessed that Russia and other adversaries will continue looking for ways to warp our public debate from overseas.

We all need to be aware that our adversaries seek to exploit the openness of our society to turn Americans against ourselves. Adversaries like Russia want to exacerbate social and political tensions in our country. They want to undermine our confidence in our own election and our democratic institutions. This is why I have stressed that politicians need to be careful not to take the bait. It is why the President signed an Executive order to enable sanctions against any person or any country that attempts to meddle in our elections. It is why this administration has created new procedures for promptly notifying campaigns that are targeted by foreign entities, unlike—unlike—how the Obama administration hid the ball back in 2016, and it is why the new, tough foreign policies of the last 3 years will continue to be essential.

Narrow, tailored solutions are important, but the best way for the United States to defend ourselves and our interests against any malign behavior is to possess unquestionable strength and make it perfectly clear we are not interested in being pushed around.

I have been a Russia hawk for more than 30 years. I am on record from the late years of the Clinton administration warning Democrats not to be naive about a new President-elect by the name of Vladimir Putin, so I applaud this administration's tough stance with Russia. And I am pleased that Democrats have stopped—stopped—mocking Republicans for being too tough on Russia and have come around to our point of view.

We have come a long way since the passivity and the failures of the Obama administration back in 2016, but the work is not finished, and Senators are fooling themselves if they think this is just about Russia.

We must stay vigilant—all of us; Federal leaders, State and local election officials, and every American citizen. Every one of us has a part to play in protecting our democracy.

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.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL UNDER CHAPTER 8 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELATING TO "BORROWER DEFENSE INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY"—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S.J. Res. 56, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 56) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Department of Education relating to "Borrower Defense Institutional Accountability".

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, yesterday afternoon, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem notified me that multiple residents of South Dakota have tested positive for the coronavirus. While this is obviously something we had hoped to avoid, we knew this was a possibility, and South Dakota has spent weeks preparing to deal with an outbreak.

Over the next few days, public health officials will be checking into where these individuals have been so that anyone with whom they came in contact can be notified. My staff and I are working closely with the Governor and her team, and I will continue to carefully monitor the situation.

At the Federal level, I am focused on making sure that State and local governments have the resources they need to deal with the virus. Last week, I was proud to support bipartisan legislation committing significant Federal resources to the coronavirus fight.

I am praying for all of the South Dakotans who are affected by the virus, and I want to thank the healthcare workers who are on the frontlines of this fight. We are lucky to have you.

S. 2657

Madam President, I am disappointed that the Senate failed to move forward on the American Energy Innovation Act this week. This is a bipartisan