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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Mighty God, help our lawmakers to not put their complete trust in mere humans, who are as frail as each breath. Instead, give them the wisdom to totally trust You to guide them in doing what is best for our Nation and world.

Lord, remind them that eventually all will be well for those who pursue Godliness and that You reward those who diligently seek You.

May they remember that You will judge their work and reward their faithfulness, for they are accountable to You.

Inspire them to continue to plant and water the seeds of peace, knowing that a bountiful harvest will surely come. Keep their motives pure, as they seek to glorify You.

We pray in Your Merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 17, 2020.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, there is significant outstanding business that Congress needs to complete before the end of the year.

My Republican colleagues and I have stated over and over that we still want to pass more coronavirus relief for the American people. Senate Republicans have voted multiple times to send hundreds of billions of dollars to schools, small businesses, healthcare, and laid-off workers.

If Speaker PELOSI and Leader SCHUMER had not made the calculation to block it, that money could have been out the door many weeks ago.

Instead, our Democratic colleagues have spent months—literally months—holding all of that urgent help hostage over unrelated, leftwing wish list items.

Their so-called “Heroes” proposal is so unrealistic and poorly targeted that Speaker PELOSI’s own moderate Democrats ridiculed the bill the instant she put it out and said it will never become law.

It includes things like a massive tax cut for wealthy people in blue States

and huge sums of money for State and city governments with no linkage to demonstrated COVID needs.

Some blue States, including New York and California, have actually seen higher State income tax revenues this autumn than they saw during the same months last year, in part, because they are taxing a chunk out of vulnerable people’s unemployment benefits. They are receiving more tax revenue now than they did in 2019. Some of these blue States are receiving more revenue now than they did in 2019.

But, alas, Democrats still want coronavirus relief for the entire country held hostage over a massive slush fund for their own use.

Well, even if our Democratic colleagues continue to block any bipartisan pandemic relief from becoming law, there are other responsibilities we still need to tackle together.

The Federal Government is currently funded through December 11. The next few days will tell us a lot about whether Congress can pull off the bipartisan, bicameral appropriations process that I believe both sides would like to deliver.

Last week, our colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee released all 12 bills for fiscal year 2021. The bills would fully fund all kinds of crucial priorities, from securing our border to caring for our veterans, to supporting public health at this particularly critical time.

What needs to happen now is quite simple. Our colleagues on the committee and their counterparts in the House need to continue their bicameral discussions and settle on topline dollar amounts for each separate bill.

I hope they will be able to reach this broad agreement by the end of this very week. That would help keep us on course to deliver full-year funding legislation, which helps our Armed Forces and all Federal agencies plan and get ahead of the curve by the December deadline.

For nearly 2 years now, we have avoided the drama that has become a

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



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Washington routine and funded our government on a bipartisan basis. Last August, we passed a 2-year bipartisan funding agreement that let our committees do their work even amid this divided government.

When both sides have honored the agreement and kept bills clean of poison pills, Chairman SHELBY has been able to deliver full-year bills without drama. I hope we can replicate that successful pattern this year.

Congress should also reach a bipartisan, bicameral compromise on the National Defense Authorization Act and pass a conference report before the end of the year.

Our men and women in uniform need every tool and resource to confront the great-power competitors, rogue states, and terrorists who wish us harm. Congress should be an asset to our own servicemembers, not a liability.

This year would make the 60th consecutive year Congress will have passed an NDAA. This is no time to break that streak and leave our forces in the lurch. Let's get this done and pass a conference report through both Chambers this year.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, while our committees are working, the full Senate is keeping busy with one of the core constitutional responsibilities we have: continuing to confirm well-qualified men and women to lifetime appointments to the Federal judiciary.

Yesterday, we voted to advance the nomination of Kristi Haskins Johnson, the current solicitor general of Mississippi, with multiple impressive clerkships under her belt, to serve as a district judge for the Southern District of Mississippi. She will make history as the first woman to join the bench in that district.

This is just the first of several nominations we will consider this week. We will also vote on Benjamin Beaton, a Kentuckian who has been nominated to be a district judge for the Western District of Kentucky. This Paducah native is yet another outstanding choice by President Trump.

Mr. Beaton received a first-rate education from Kentucky's Centre College and then Columbia Law School, where he edited the law review. He clerked on the DC Circuit and on the Supreme Court for the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Since then, Mr. Beaton has excelled at some of the country's top law firms. He has also undertaken a substantial pro bono caseload and shown a dedication to community service.

At each step, the nominee has demonstrated a firm commitment to the Constitution and the rule of law. The American Bar Association has confirmed what Kentuckians already knew—Mr. Beaton is well qualified to serve as a district judge.

Last month, our colleagues on the Judiciary Committee advanced this

brilliant nominee with no Members voting in opposition. I urge all my colleagues to join me in voting to confirm him later today and our other impressive nominees this week.

Now, this week's nominees are only the latest example of the incredible qualifications that have characterized President Trump's nominees.

Take the metric that our Democratic colleagues have called the "gold standard," the ratings of the left-leaning American Bar Association. As of a few months ago, across all the people that President Trump had nominated to the Federal District Courts, 68.8 percent had earned the ABA's top rating—top rating—of "well qualified."

If you look back over the last seven Presidential administrations, only one—Bush 43—has managed to post a higher average rating for judicial nominations. Even then, it was only higher by just a hair—just a hair.

Even the Democrats' own supposed "gold standard" destroys the talking point that President Trump's nominees have been less thoroughly qualified. It is just not factual. It is not true.

Earlier this year, looking at clerkships and professional experience, one liberal commentator admitted that "the average Trump appointee has a far more impressive resume than any past president's nominees."

Let me say that again. This is a liberal commentator who follows these things and admitted that "the average Trump appointee has a far more impressive resume than any past president's nominees."

So it is pretty hard to argue that these haven't been extraordinary additions to our Federal courts. This is a tremendous accomplishment. These are judges who will serve our Nation honorably for generations to come.

Our colleagues here in the Senate should be rightly proud to have confirmed them, and we are going to continue doing just that.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Beaton nomination be waived.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

MASKS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, before I begin, Madam President, I want to remind Senators to wear a mask as much as possible on the floor. I personally take my mask off when addressing the Chair, so long as other Senators or staff are not nearby. Otherwise, a mask should be worn at all times on the floor.

This is not only for the safety of other Senators. This is for the safety of our staffs, everyone who works here on the floor, and everyone who works here in this building, as well as setting the right example for the American people.

NOMINATION OF JUDY SHELTON

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, on Judy Shelton, today the Senate will vote on the nomination of Judy Shelton to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve.

Ms. Shelton is, without a doubt, one of the most unqualified nominees I have ever seen for our Nation's central bank. When her nomination first came before the Senate Banking Committee, a former Republican aide to a Senator on the Banking Committee said that she was so unqualified and so far out of the mainstream that the "idea of even calling Ms. Shelton as a witness for something was beyond the pale."

That is a former Republican aide saying that Shelton wasn't qualified to be a witness in a committee hearing, let alone a nominee to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

It is not hard to understand why. For years, Ms. Shelton has advocated for the resurrection of the gold standard, a long since discarded policy that in part led to the Great Depression. She has questioned the independence of the Fed and, beyond that, has even questioned whether the Fed should exist.

Ms. Shelton has also suggested that we put an end to Federal deposit insurance, an institution that has protected American savings since the 1930s. That is why over 130 of the nation's top economists, including seven Nobel laureates, have opposed her nomination, as have countless alumni of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

Ms. Shelton's views have another strange quality: They seem to change when it is politically convenient. When President Obama was in office, Ms. Shelton harangued the Fed to increase interest rates, despite the economic downturn. But in 2017, when President Trump took office, Ms. Shelton abruptly switched her position and argued that the Fed should reduce rates, in her words, "as fast, as efficiently, as expeditiously as possible."

It may surprise few to learn that she was an adviser to President Trump's 2016 campaign. She has defended his candidacy and his policies and encouraged world banks to hold international conferences at Mar-a-Lago. Imagine—a nominee for the Federal Reserve, which is supposed to be an independent body.