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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, our shield and fortress, we thank You for Your unfailing love. Look with favor upon our Senators. Guide them around the obstacles that hinder their progress, uniting them for the common good of this great land. Lord, enable them to go from strength to strength as they fulfill Your purposes for their lives in this generation. Striving to please You, help them to stand for right and leave the consequences to You. Lord, give them a sense of partnership with You in seeking Your best for all phases of our national life.

We pray in Your mighty 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 (Mr. ROMNEY). The Senator from Iowa.

2020 ELECTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, there has been a lot of finger wagging across the aisle by both Senate and House Democrats about accepting election results. Most of that has been related to whether or not Trump would concede the results of the election to Biden. But, obviously, there is somewhat of a double standard because these same Democrats are mum about a looming challenge to the certified results of the election of Iowa's Second Congressional District.

Representative-Elect Miller-Meeks won by six votes, and that was after careful recounts conducted and certified on a bipartisan basis according to Iowa law. On election night, the Democratic candidate lost. A few days later, two counties were recounted, and the Democratic candidate still lost. Then the Democratic candidate asked for a recount of all 24 counties, and after that recount, the Democratic candidate lost. A day later, the secretary of state of Iowa certified the election, just like the secretaries of state of our 50 States certified their elections in the Presidential election.

Now the Democratic opponent chose not to make a case under Iowa law to a judicial panel headed by the chief justice of Iowa, presumably because there was no legal case.

Now what happens? The next step is that candidate, under a 1969 Federal law, can ask the House of Representatives to set aside Iowa's election law and overturn Iowa's certified election results through a purely political process, which could presumably have a Democratic majority of 222 in the U.S. House overturn the votes of 400,000 Iowans.

Now, getting back to what seems to be a double standard, if Democratic leaders do not nip this in the bud now, they have no room to point fingers at any other Member of Congress.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, our bipartisan discussions are continuing to make significant headway toward another relief package for the American people. The Democratic leader, Speaker PELOSI, Leader MCCARTHY,

and I have been working around the clock for several days now. The talks remain productive. In fact, I am even more optimistic now than I was last night that a bipartisan, bicameral framework for a major rescue package is very close at hand.

Well, let's face it, though, it doesn't help struggling Americans keep their jobs or endure unemployment or pay their rent or get vaccines any faster to keep hearing that we are having good discussions. What families across the country deserve—what they have needed and deserved for months now—is an outcome, another targeted relief package to get more assistance into their hands as fast as possible.

Struggling small business owners have already waited too long for a targeted second round of PPP. Laid-off workers have already waited too long to have expiring programs extended. Kids, teachers, and families have already waited too long for funding to help schools reopen safely. We have already waited too long to fully fund vaccine distributions so our scientists' historic sprint toward a safe and effective vaccine is followed up by an equally important logistical effort.

This has been an unbelievably hard year for our country. We have seen normal daily life grind to a halt and take a record-setting economy right down with it. And even as we have watched doctors, nurses, and researchers make lifesaving history, we have lost more than 300,000 Americans entirely too soon.

Like I have said, the Senate will be right here until an agreement is passed, whenever that may be. We will just continue voting. There are some more well-qualified nominees for important posts that we can confirm in the meantime. So let's finish our business for the American people.

TRIBUTE TO PHIL MAXSON

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, on a completely different matter, Mr. President,

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



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I jump at any opportunity to praise my incredible staff. I am just sorry that one natural occasion is when great people head toward the exits.

Phil Maxson of Lexington, KY, has mastered one of the toughest jobs on Capitol Hill. As chief of staff for my personal office, he oversees the operation that delivers for Kentucky families and Kentucky priorities.

Here is what that role means in our tight-knit organization. It is like being the player-coach on an old baseball team who is also a utility player at the same time. Phil wears about 10 hats each day, orchestrating a seamless operation. He has mastered policy, political strategy, messaging, and constituent services. He has budgeted and managed the office itself, and Phil is also a liaison and colleague to my leadership office here in the Capitol.

He is the linkage between the two sides of my operation, the single person most responsible for helping me harmonize home-State priorities with my national duties and keep the Commonwealth at the center of all I do. It is a tall order. It takes the best of the best, someone who is so capable that every important issue will involve them, but so humble that situations never become about them. Enter Phil Maxson—a kind, cheerful, and unbelievably confident servant leader whom I am convinced nobody in this planet dislikes.

Phil climbed the Capitol Hill ladder the old-fashioned way. He joined my team as an intern a decade ago. Actually, I think Phil may have snuck a late application into a last-minute opening. If I am right about that, then his good fortune was ours as well.

He has done every job: legislative correspondent, legislative assistant, legislative director, and then the top spot.

As one of his old bosses reminded me recently, “every time a gap in the office appeared, Phil was the natural choice” to fill it. It is not like he elbowed his way up. It is that circumstances and our needs kept pulling him up. He is that good.

For the past decade, Phil has walked into every meeting, every markup, every normal day at the office, and every grueling far-flung codel with total preparation, complete professionalism, and the score of the latest UK game.

Another former supervisor of his put it this way: “I don’t think I ever asked Phil a single question he didn’t already know the answer to, or didn’t find the answer within about 10 minutes.” That is high praise when your portfolio ranges from U.S.-Burma relations to the BUILD grants that improve our roads and everything in between.

It helps that Phil is a Kentucky thoroughbred through and through. The man really is “dyed in the bluegrass.” As a young man in Lexington, he found part-time work giving tours at Henry Clay’s Ashland estate. He also graduated from Henry Clay High School.

You could say the Senate was a natural destination. Here, he met UK

Coach Calipari, President Netanyahu, and families from Kentucky’s smallest towns. And they all got exactly the same attention, enthusiasm, and warmth from Phil Maxson.

He clicks with everyone. He is as affable as he is intelligent. In a town full of big egos and sharp elbows, he stands out because he doesn’t try to stand out.

For the better part of a decade, virtually every significant win we have notched for our Commonwealth has had Phil at its nucleus. But if you drop by the staff meeting the day after, what you would hear is Phil explaining why everyone else deserves more credit than he does, why it really all came down to my leadership or his peers’ efforts or the hard work of the junior folks beneath him—in other words, everyone else but him.

You would have to go to everyone else to learn that Phil was the human glue that, in fact, held it all together. It would take me all day to list every win Phil helped quarterback for our home State: a state-of-the-art chemical weapons destruction facility in Madison County, the transfer of the Rochester Dam to local ownership, a new wildlife refuge in Henderson County, environmental cleanup and health benefits for nuclear workers in Paducah, the planned construction of a new VA hospital in Louisville, Freedom to Fish and the raising of Lake Cumberland, and many, many more.

But, alas, his dedication to Kentucky is so all-encompassing that he and his wife Sarah Beth have decided they don’t want to raise their young family anywhere else.

So “Bee and Phil on Capitol Hill”—as friends have called them—plus their two boys, Barbour and Theodore, are homeward bound.

I made the same decision myself as a young man, trading in the life of a Senate staffer for a move back home. So I can’t exactly fault his decision.

Phil needs to spend fewer breakfasts and dinners with me and more with his own burgeoning clan. I get it, but I am sure sorry to see him go.

Phil is the kind of Senate all-star who deserves a full-dress curtain call. He deserves toasts and a dinner and a big farewell party. I regret that in these bizarre pandemic times, a floor speech will have to suffice, at least right now.

So, Phil, thank you for your years of dedication to the State we both love. We will miss your brain. We will miss your heart. You are leaving behind one heck of a fan club all throughout the U.S. Senate. We wish you all the best in the chapters ahead.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

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

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

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.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

DECEMBER 19

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I want to make an observation here because I have been serving for quite some time in the U.S. Senate, and a lot of the things that are said on the Senate floor are not really all that significant, and yet the Members who are delivering messages believe they are or they wouldn’t be doing it. This is what it is all about. This is a deliberative body. Some things are maybe not all that significant, but what I am about to say is significant, so I would like to have the attention of anyone who wants to know that in the midst of all of the problems that we are facing now, some good things are happening.

I want to mention something that is significant that I don’t think you have thought of, I say to the Presiding Officer; that is, tomorrow is the 354th day of the year, and that is very significant. That is December 19. People have not stopped to realize the significant things that have happened on December 19 throughout our history and the history of the world, going all the way back to December 19 of the year 1154. That is when Henry II became King of England. We haven’t really thought about what that means to us today, but we will before long.

In 1843, December 19, Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol.” That is the most watched, listened to, and sung event every Christmas. And it has been for all that time.

In 1932, December 19, the British Broadcasting Corporation—that is the BBC; we are all familiar with that—but that is when it started. On December 19, they began transmitting overseas. That was the beginning of a whole new world of knowledge and understanding.