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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Thursday, December 31, 2020, at 10 a.m.

Senate

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2020

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the Honorable DEB FISCHER, a Senator from the State of Nebraska.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Prince of Peace, give us today Your pardon and peace. Pardon the sins of our lips, the untrue and unkind words we have spoken. Pardon the sins of our minds, the ignoring of truth and the refusal to face the facts. Pardon the sins of our hearts, the pride that makes us esteem ourselves as better than others and unwilling to forgive.

Lord, place Your peace within us, that we may no longer be torn by the cares of this life. As the Members of this body receive Your peace, help them to live in unity with each other.

We pray in Your great 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 29, 2020.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable DEB FISCHER, a Senator from the State of Nebraska, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. FISCHER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WILLIAM M. (MAC) THORNBERRY
NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—VETO

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the veto message on H.R. 6395 received from the House be considered as having been read, spread in full upon the Journal, and be printed in the RECORD.

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

The veto message was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning, without my approval, H.R. 6395, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (the "Act"). My Administration recognizes the importance of the Act to our national security. Unfortunately, the Act fails to include critical national security measures, includes provisions that fail to respect our veterans and our military's history, and contradicts efforts by my Administration to put America first in our national security and foreign policy actions. It is a "gift" to China and Russia.

No one has worked harder, or approved more money for the military, than I have—over \$2 trillion. During my 4 years, with the support of many others, we have almost entirely rebuilt the United States military, which was totally depleted when I took office.

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



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S7955

Your failure to terminate the very dangerous national security risk of Section 230 will make our intelligence virtually impossible to conduct without everyone knowing what we are doing at every step.

The Act fails even to make any meaningful changes to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, despite bipartisan calls for repealing that provision. Section 230 facilitates the spread of foreign disinformation online, which is a serious threat to our national security and election integrity. It must be repealed.

Additionally, the Act includes language that would require the renaming of certain military installations. Over the course of United States history, these locations have taken on significance to the American story and those who have helped write it that far transcends their namesakes. My Administration respects the legacy of the millions of American servicemen and women who have served with honor at these military bases, and who, from these locations, have fought, bled, and died for their country. From these facilities, we have won two World Wars. I have been clear in my opposition to politically motivated attempts like this to wash away history and to dishonor the immense progress our country has fought for in realizing our founding principles.

The Act also restricts the President's ability to preserve our Nation's security by arbitrarily limiting the amount of military construction funds that can be used to respond to a national emergency. In a time when adversaries have the means to directly attack the homeland, the President must be able to safeguard the American people without having to wait for congressional authorization. The Act also contains an amendment that would slow down the rollout of nationwide 5G, especially in rural areas.

Numerous provisions of the Act directly contradict my Administration's foreign policy, particularly my efforts to bring our troops home. I oppose endless wars, as does the American public. Over bipartisan objections, however, this Act purports to restrict the President's ability to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, Germany, and South Korea. Not only is this bad policy, but it is unconstitutional. Article II of the Constitution makes the President the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States and vests in him the executive power. Therefore, the decision regarding how many troops to deploy and where, including in Afghanistan, Germany, and South Korea, rests with him. The Congress may not arrogate this authority to itself directly or indirectly as purported spending restrictions.

For all of these reasons, I cannot support this bill. My Administration has taken strong actions to help keep our Nation safe and support our service members. I will not approve this bill, which would put the interests of the

Washington, D.C. establishment over those of the American people. It is my duty to return H.R. 6395 to the House of Representatives without my approval.

DONALD J. TRUMP.

THE WHITE HOUSE, December 23, 2020.

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

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, Congress has returned to work this week to enact the 60th annual National Defense Authorization Act into law. Yesterday, a bipartisan supermajority in the House voted to reapprove the conference report of this must-pass legislation. Today, the Senate will set up a final vote for tomorrow, Wednesday, for this Chamber to follow suit. Soon, this important legislation will be passed into law.

President Trump has rightly noted this year's Defense bill does not contain every provision we Republicans would have wanted. I am confident our Democrat colleagues feel the same way, but that is the case every year.

Yet for 59 consecutive years and counting, Washington has put our differences aside, found common ground, and passed the annual Defense bill. Not once in six decades has a Congress let its differences prevent it from completing this work for our national security and our men and women who wear the uniform.

This year's NDAA will continue our momentum in rebuilding and modernizing our Armed Forces. It will authorize the personnel, equipment, tools, and training we need to reinforce the national defense strategy and to deter great-power rivals like China and Russia. It will cement our advantage on the seas, on land, in the air, in cyber space, and in space. The bill will help us continue to recruit, retain, and support the men and women who keep us safe. It provides a pay raise for the troops, improvements for military housing, childcare, and more.

For the brave men and women of the United States and our Armed Forces, failure is simply not an option. So when it is our turn in Congress to have their backs, failure is not an option either.

I would urge my colleagues to support this legislation one more time when we vote tomorrow.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. On Sunday, President Trump signed into law another bipartisan rescue package that will provide major support to American families through what we hope will be the home stretch of our fight with the coronavirus.

Congressional Republicans and congressional Democrats and President

Trump's senior team had all worked together to pass hundreds of billions more dollars of urgent assistance to the people who need it most.

This new law will set up a targeted second round of the Paycheck Protection Program to save jobs. It will renew and continue Federal programs that helped laid-off workers endure this crisis. It will send more cash to households. It will invest billions in vaccine distribution so the success of Operation Warp Speed kills this pandemic as fast as possible, and much more.

This bipartisan compromise was our shot at getting help to working families on the urgent timeline that they need.

Once again, I want to applaud President Trump for signing the bill and getting this much needed assistance into the pipeline.

During this process, the President highlighted three additional issues of national significance, which he would like to see Congress tackle together. First, as he explained, the President would like further direct financial support for American households. Second is the growing willingness on both sides of the aisle to at least reexamine the special legal protections afforded to technology companies under section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, including the ways that benefit some of the most prosperous, most powerful "Big Tech" firms. And the third subject—since every American, regardless of their politics, should feel the integrity of our democracy beyond reproach—is exploring further ways to protect the sanctity of America's ballots, while continuing to respect the Federal Government's limited role in standing behind State and local elections authorities who actually run elections.

Those are the three important subjects the President has linked together.

This week, the Senate will begin a process to bring these three priorities into focus.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3985

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 480, S. 3985.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3985) to improve and reform policing practices, accountability and transparency.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks on Wednesday, December 30, the time until 1:15 be equally divided between proponents and opponents of the bill, with opponent time being controlled by Senator PAUL or his designee; further, that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on passage of the bill, the objections of the President to the contrary notwithstanding; finally, if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon

the table with no intervening action or debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Reserving the right to object, the Senate is here this week for a rare holiday session to address two major issues: the President's veto of the annual Defense bill and the effort to send \$2,000 survival checks to millions and millions of American families, something Senate Democrats strongly support.

The Senate should be in session to address both issues. There are only a few days left in this session. We should not adjourn until the Senate holds a vote on both measures—the NDAA veto override and the House bill to provide \$2,000 checks for the American people.

As we all know, the majority leader controls the schedule on the floor. So Leader MCCONNELL holds the key to unlocking this dilemma. The solution is a simple one: Put both bills up for a simple up-or-down vote and then let the chips fall where they may. I believe both measures will pass, as they should. But Leader MCCONNELL must allow the Senate to vote on both pieces of legislation, the Defense bill and the \$2,000 checks, before we go home. We will start the process on overriding the President's veto of the Defense bill tomorrow.

Today, at the end of my remarks, I will ask the Senate's consent to take up the House-passed bill to provide the American people immediate survival checks of \$2,000 a person.

Throughout this pandemic, working Americans have taken it on the chin. Right now, they are facing their hardest and their darkest days. Tens of millions have lost their jobs. Tens of millions are struggling to put food on the table, to keep a roof over their heads. In the wealthiest Nation on Earth, modern-day breadlines stretch for miles down American highways.

The fastest way to get money into Americans' pockets is to send some of their tax dollars right back from where they came. And \$2,000 stimulus checks could mean the difference between American families having groceries for a few extra weeks or going hungry, the difference between paying the rent or being kicked out of your home that you have lived in for years. It would buy precious time for tens of millions of people as the vaccine thankfully makes its way across the country. Of course, we could have taken up this issue weeks ago.

In the COVID bill Congress just passed, Democrats wanted generous direct payments to the American people. Speaker PELOSI and I repeatedly asked our Republican counterparts how much they could support. Their answer: \$600. It was a compromise many of us were not happy about. I came to the floor myself with the Senator from Vermont

to ask that we double at least the size of those checks. A Republican Senator objected. Six hundred dollars was the most Republicans would support.

Well, my colleagues and my fellow Americans, \$600 is not enough. It is not enough for the mother in Nashville \$4,000 behind on the rent whose water was shut off earlier this month; not for the medical receptionist in Macomb \$2,100 behind on the rent, whole electricity shut off in September on her son's third day of virtual kindergarten; not for the 12 million Americans who have fallen on average nearly \$6,000 behind on their rent and their utilities or the 26 million Americans who have had trouble putting food on the table in the past 5 days. Six hundred dollars? Nope. It is not enough.

So in a moment, I will move to have the Senate take up the House bill to increase that number to \$2,000, which, I might add, had broad bipartisan support. I don't want to hear that we can't afford it. I don't want to hear that it would add too much to the deficit. Senate Republicans added nearly \$2 trillion to the deficit to give corporations a massive tax cut. Republicans just fought to include a tax break for three-martini lunches in the COVID relief bill. So I don't want to hear that it costs too much to help working families get a check when they are struggling to keep their jobs, pay their rent, feed their families, and live a halfway normal and decent life.

Even in our deeply divided times, this issue has united Americans from coast to coast and bridged the massive political divide here in Washington. A vast majority of the public, Republican and Democrat, strongly supports \$2,000 checks. An overwhelming bipartisan majority in the House supports \$2,000 checks. Senate Democrats strongly support \$2,000 checks. Even President Trump supports \$2,000 checks.

There is one question left today: Do Senate Republicans join with the rest of America in supporting \$2,000 checks?

Now, some of my Republican colleagues have said they support the checks, but there is a major difference in saying you support \$2,000 checks and fighting to put them into law. The House bill is the only way—the only way—to deliver these stimulus checks before the end of session.

Will Senate Republicans fight for a vote on the House-passed CASH Act, or will they look some other way? Will Senate Republicans stand against the House of Representatives, the Democratic majority in the Senate, and the President of their own party to prevent these \$2,000 checks from going out the door? We are about to get the answers to these questions.

So now, Madam President, would the Senator modify his request to include a unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 9051, a bill received from the House to increase recovery rebate amounts to \$2,000 per individual; that the bill be read a third time and passed

and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection to the modification?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I object.
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, reserving the right to object, we should all be very, very clear. The working class of this country today faces more economic desperation than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and working families need help now—not next year but right now.

Last night, the House of Representatives, with a two-thirds majority—275 to 134, a two-thirds bipartisan vote—moved to increase the direct payment going to working families from \$600 per adult to \$2,000 per adult. The House did the right thing; I congratulate them. Now it is time for the Senate to step up to the plate and do what the working families of this country overwhelmingly want us to do.

Madam President, as a result of the pandemic, tens of millions of Americans have lost their jobs and their incomes. These families, in the middle of the winter, now face the threat of eviction and the possibility of being thrown out in the streets. Hunger in America is at the highest level that it has been for decades, with moms and dads struggling to feed their kids and working families lining up mile after mile to get emergency food packages. We are even seeing an increase in grocery store shoplifting as desperate Americans try to keep their families from going hungry. All of this is taking place in the wealthiest country in the history of the world.

Over the last number of years, as I think everybody in America knows, Congress has provided massive tax breaks for the very wealthiest people in our country, which is one of the reasons why today we have more income and wealth inequality than any time since the 1920s. In fact, in the midst of this pandemic, this terrible pandemic, inequality has grown worse, with many in the billionaire class seeing their wealth increase by hundreds of billions of dollars while average Americans struggle to put food on the table.

Congress has given huge tax breaks to large corporations so that some of the most profitable and largest corporations in America today pay zero in Federal income taxes.

We have just passed the largest military budget in the history of our country—\$740 billion, more than the next 10 nations combined. By the way, there was almost no debate about the size of that huge budget. Trump's veto dealt with other issues.

Meanwhile, over half a million Americans are homeless, half of our working families are struggling to survive paycheck to paycheck, and in the midst of

this terrible, unprecedented pandemic, over 90 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. In the midst of a pandemic, they are not sure whether they can afford to go to a doctor.

We are coming to the close of one of the most terrible and painful years in American history. That is a tragic fact. Over 330,000 of our people have died of COVID-19, and, as we speak, we are seeing recordbreaking numbers of new cases, and hospitals around the country are being overwhelmed with new admissions.

During the last year, the education and well-being of tens of millions of our young people, from childcare to graduate school, has been disrupted. The terrible emotional isolation this pandemic has caused, where people are unable to spend time with their families and friends, has resulted in a huge increase in mental illness, drug addiction, and even suicide.

As I mentioned, the House has done the right thing. By an overwhelming vote, Democrats and Republicans voted to increase that \$600 direct payment to \$2,000. A recent poll came out, and 78 percent of the American people think that was the right decision. They are hurting. They want help. The leaders of our country—President Trump, President-Elect Biden, Minority Leader CHUCK SCHUMER, the Speaker of the House, NANCY PELOSI—are all in agreement: We have to raise that direct payment to \$2,000.

So that is where we are right now in this historic moment. Do we turn our backs on struggling working families, or do we respond to their pain?

So, Madam President, would the Senator modify his request that immediately following the vote on the veto override, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 9051; that the bill be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill with no intervening action or debate; further, that, if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection to the request for modification?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original?

Mr. SANDERS. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, this is our historic moment. We can see the

suffering across our country. We can see how desperate people are. We can see how during this holiday season, the people are looking at the prospect, in the words of Tony Fauci, where the worst may be ahead of us for these families. The worst may yet to have been actually inflicted upon families and our country. Yet the Republicans are refusing to allow for a vote on giving each individual \$2,000 in order to make it through the rest of this pandemic.

Senator SANDERS today speaks for the millions of Americans who are suffering through a devastating health crisis, an unemployment crisis, an eviction crisis, a hunger crisis, and a crisis of faith—faith that their leaders in this country will stand up and provide for Americans in their hour of need.

Meanwhile, we here in Washington must confront a moral crisis: Why can't we keep working families from starving even as we stand ready to approve a massive defense bill?

That is why I am here with my colleague BERNIE SANDERS to call for a simple vote to provide \$2,000 in direct cash payments to Americans across our country. It is this simple. Just like they did in the House of Representatives, the Senate should have a vote—up or down, yes or no—on providing these increased cash payments to desperate Americans. We can get this done quickly and before the holiday if Leader MCCONNELL will simply agree to do it. They already had this vote in the House, and 44 Republicans voted for it. Give the Republicans in the Senate the same opportunity to vote. We already know that many of them have already said they will vote for the \$2,000 if they get a chance to vote. It is this simple.

We can do this because a simple vote will just say that you want to provide a grand total of \$2,000 to Americans who need it to pay the rent, to keep the electricity on, to buy diapers, to pay for lifesaving medication—just to survive this devastating pandemic. There are 44 House Republicans who voted for the \$2,000 checks. I believe that the Republicans in this Chamber will do so as well, and President Trump has already made it very clear that he will sign the bill. So we can see where the opposition is. It is with the leadership of the Republicans in the U.S. Senate.

People across our country are falling ill and falling behind on their bills, and for the families of the hundreds of thousands who have died from coronavirus, the medical and funeral expenses are compounding their grief. They need money in their pockets.

In Massachusetts, this past Sunday, we hit 100 deaths in a single day—the highest death toll our State has seen in a 24-hour period since the very beginning of this pandemic. In the week before Christmas, 21,000 new people in our State applied for unemployment benefits just as Donald Trump let these protections lapse before millions of Ameri-

cans lost their benefits, and that is a tragedy.

A \$2,000 check is the most direct and effective mechanism for delivering economic relief right now to those who are barely holding on throughout this crisis, particularly low-income Americans, immigrant communities, and our gig and service workers—our essential workers. They need help. They have been helping our families, and we need to help their families. Right now, these checks would help 158 million people across our country pay for housing, put food on the table, and make sure that grandma and grandpa have their diabetes or heart medication.

That is why Senator SANDERS, Senator KAMALA HARRIS, and I introduced legislation to provide every person in our country, regardless of immigration status, with \$2,000 monthly recurring payments in order to help weather this storm. We knew then, 7 months ago, that a single \$1,200 relief check was not going to be enough to help families get by, and the \$600 payment in the latest coronavirus package is a crumb to the working people who have faced economic hardship through no fault of their own. It won't even cover a month of rent, let alone heating bills, food bills, Wi-Fi bills for students who are learning from home, and all of the other expenses that are piling up for these families.

Now, some of my Republican colleagues have said that providing \$2,000 would be too expensive. Well, here are some other costs they seem to have forgotten. If our proposal to increase stimulus checks to \$2,000 is soaring, the overall cost of the stimulus bill would go from \$900 billion to \$1.36 trillion. Yes, that is a \$464 billion increase over what we were currently projecting for this bill, but it is only a fraction of the \$740 billion Defense bill that this Chamber stands ready to approve again this week.

I hate to say this, but my Republican colleagues seem to be more interested in funding defense than in funding the defenseless, and that is what this debate is all about. What do we do to help these defenseless families? In this moment of national crisis, we were able to afford spending three-quarters of a trillion dollars on a bloated defense budget—spending that was supposed to protect our country yet did nothing to inoculate against the most profound public health emergency in a century—but we can't give hungry and suffering Americans \$2,000? That is a moral failure for our country. Give Americans this money.

Most of my colleagues support this defense budget. They got to vote on it a few weeks ago, and I know they stand ready to override President Trump's racist, belligerent veto. We are here today, asking the same thing for \$2,000 payments—a simple up-or-down vote. Let's bring the House bill up for a vote. Leader SCHUMER is committed to bringing it forward. We can get this done before the holiday. We can do this for Americans before the year is out.