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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

All-powerful God, who lives above the highest Stars, we borrow our heartbeats from You. Each day Your power enables us to live and breathe and have our being. When our hopes are uprooted, You comfort us with Your presence.

Lord, guide our lawmakers on a road that leads to a clear conscience. Inspire them to refuse to think, say, or do anything that would disappoint You. Help them to hear, even in the beauty of falling snow, whispers of Your power.

We pray in Your sacred 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. WARNOCK). The Senator from Vermont.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

HONORING OFFICER BRIAN D. SICKNICK

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the Capitol attack on January 6 unleashed many, many horrors, but it also revealed many heroes. One such hero was Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, a New Jersey native, an Air Force National Guard veteran, and a 12-year member of the Capitol Police Force who tragically lost his life during the attack.

This evening, the body of Officer Sicknick will arrive at the Capitol, and he will lie in honor beneath the Capitol Rotunda. We will formally pay our respects to Officer Sicknick with a service on Wednesday.

I join with my colleagues and members of the Capitol Police Force in grieving the loss of one of their fellow officers. May his memory live forever as a model of service to our Nation, selflessness in the line of duty, and courage in the face of danger.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on another matter entirely, the Senate, this week, will continue confirming President Biden's Cabinet nominees, closing the book today on the nomination of Alexander Mayorkas to be the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Mr. Mayorkas's qualifications are unassailable. He is a 7-year veteran of the DHS and has already been confirmed by this Chamber three—three—times. Like most of President Biden's Cabinet nominees, his nomination is also history-making: He will be the first Latino and first immigrant to hold the top job at DHS. I look forward to confirming Mr. Mayorkas today.

We have a second outstanding nominee to confirm today as well—Pete Buttigieg for Secretary of Transportation. Mr. Buttigieg—known to many simply as Mayor Pete—has demonstrated an impressive familiarity with the entire Nation's transportation

challenges—challenges that are pronounced in States like my own, where projects like the Gateway Tunnel are a top national priority.

I know that Mr. Buttigieg is committed to working with Members from both sides to improve rail and transit, highways, and more in rural communities, urban centers, and everywhere in between. I am excited to call him Secretary Pete by the end of the day and get to work with him immediately on helping the MTA—the Nation's largest transit network in the country—and moving Gateway forward after years of cynical obstruction by the Trump administration.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on COVID-19, even as we continue to confirm President Biden's nominees, the Senate will turn this week to the historic task of preparing a rescue package to lift our country out of the depths of the awful COVID-19 pandemic and set our country back on the path to normalcy. Despite the best efforts of Congress over the past year, the needs in our country are still great and still urgent.

The disease has been with us for nearly a year, and yet this January was officially the worst month to date. Nearly 100,000 Americans died just in the last month. Unemployment insurance claims remain at nearly 1 million a week. Schools remain closed, businesses unvisited, and all the familiar fixtures of daily life still remain on hold.

All of us in this Chamber are tired of seeing our constituents, our friends, our family, our country suffer. It is time to meet the challenges of the moment with boldness, with courage, and with urgency.

When Congress came together to pass an interim emergency relief bill in December, we all knew the job was not complete. Economic experts and the

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



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President-elect at the time called it an important downpayment because that is what it was—a downpayment, not the final act. No one should be surprised that the first legislative act of the new Democratic majority is to build on that foundation and help the country defeat COVID-19 once and for all. So the Senate is going to move forward this week with the process for producing the next bold rescue package.

Yesterday, Speaker PELOSI and I filed a joint budget resolution for the 2021 fiscal year, totaling \$1.9 trillion, which will give us another legislative tool to pass a COVID relief bill quickly and decisively. The Senate will vote to proceed on the budget resolution this afternoon. Time is a luxury our country does not have.

Let me be very clear. We are not going to dilute, to dither, to delay. We are not going to dilute, dither, or delay. The needs of the American people are so demanding, we need to think big, and we need to act quickly. The Senate must move forward today with the vote to begin debate on the budget resolution, and I am optimistic that the motion to proceed will pass.

I would say to my Republican colleagues that we want this important work to be bipartisan. We welcome your ideas, your input, and your revisions. We welcome cooperation. There is nothing about the process—or a budget resolution or reconciliation, for that matter—that forecloses the possibility of bipartisanship.

I would remind this Chamber that since 1980, the budget process has been used 17 times—17 times—to pass serious bipartisan legislation. This process is open to bipartisanship.

So let me be clear to my colleagues this morning. There will be a bipartisan, open amendment process on the budget resolution this week. Democrats eagerly encourage participation from both sides of the aisle on this proposal. Again, there is nothing about the process itself that prevents bipartisanship. What has made recent reconciliation efforts by Senate Republicans so partisan was not the process but the legislation they sought to pass.

The former Senate majority—I heard the Senator from Texas crying crocodile tears about using reconciliation, but just a few years ago, he was an active participant in using it twice to pursue expressly partisan and deeply unpopular legislation—first, to repeal our Nation's healthcare law and kick millions of Americans off of their healthcare coverage, and second, to slash taxes for big corporations and the wealthy to the tune of a \$1.7 trillion bill and hole in our deficit. Of course, Democrats opposed those efforts on the merits.

At the moment, however, we are talking about using the budget process to help small business—something we all support. We are talking about using the budget process to speed the production and distribution of a vaccine that

everyone champions and everyone knows is the key to ending the crisis. We are talking about getting our country back on its feet and our economy back on track.

We want this entire effort to be bipartisan. We do. But helping the American people with the big, bold relief they need—that is job No. 1. That is job No. 1, which is so, so important. So, again, we are not going to dilute, dither, or delay because the demands of the American people are so real and so large. We need to think big and think quickly.

Helping millions of Americans who are still without work by extending the enhanced unemployment benefits that are now slated to expire in March. Helping parents waiting for the day their kids can finally go back to school safely. Helping teachers, firefighters, busdrivers, and other essential public employees at the State and local levels, preventing them from the risk of layoffs. Helping restaurants and bars and theaters, which were the first to close and may be the last to open. Helping every American struggling to make ends meet, to pay the rent, pay the mortgage, pay for groceries, keep up with that utility bill, by sending them direct assistance in the form of a check. That is job No. 1—helping the American people survive the toughest months of this crisis while hastening the end of the crisis itself.

In the months to come, millions of Americans will be vaccinated, and slowly but surely, life will return to normal once again. The rescue plan proposed by President Biden—the rescue plan that we begin to work on this week—will lay the foundation for our country's long-awaited comeback, while giving Americans a helping hand to stay safe and stay financially secure in the meantime.

I look forward to proceeding with this budget resolution and on the work of making this historic and vital rescue package a reality so it works for the American people.

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. Mr. 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote on Alejandro Mayorkas, President Biden's nominee to be Secretary of Homeland Security.

Up to this point, I have voted in favor of the President's mainstream nominees to key posts. I will have my differences with Secretaries Austin, Yellen, and Blinken on policy, but they were mainstream choices from the President.

Mr. Mayorkas is something else. He does not deserve Senate confirmation to lead Homeland Security. Frankly, his record should foreclose confirmation even to a lower post. The problem isn't experience—not exactly. Mr. Mayorkas is all too familiar with the levers of power that control U.S. immigration law. The problem is when he is chosen to pull those levers—and for whose benefit.

As a high-ranking official in the Obama administration, Mr. Mayorkas did his best to turn U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services into an unethical favor factory for Democratic Party royalty. Governors, a DNC chair, Hollywood executives, a Senate majority leader from Nevada—they all received special treatment to a degree that stunned and disturbed the Obama administration's own inspector general over at that Department. His independent report blasted the “appearance of favoritism and special access.” We are talking about shoving through green cards as political favors and intervening to overturn denials. The IG confirmed this wasn't just about speed; Mr. Mayorkas's improper influence actually changed outcomes.

This wasn't the first time this nominee abused an office for political purposes. Before his tenure at DHS, while U.S. attorney, the nominee had helped his fellow California Democrats get a well-connected L.A. drug kingpin onto President Clinton's infamous eleventh-hour pardons list. The drug dealer's father was a Democratic Party donor. Mysteriously, several notable California Democrats took an extremely keen interest in the case. Both Mr. Mayorkas and yet another one of President Biden's nominees, Mr. Becerra, came under scrutiny for their personal roles in the special treatment that was dished out to this donor's son.

When questioned about these actions, Mr. Mayorkas responded with false and conflicting statements, including while under oath. Reviews of USCIS under Mr. Mayorkas found intimidation and retaliation against employees when they were too focused on rooting out fraud instead of merely rubberstamping applications. According to some of his own employees, his leadership led to “a culture of fear and disrespect.”

Does this sound like somebody who deserves a promotion?

Employees reported Mr. Mayorkas viewed the people applying to live here as the Agency's “customers,” whom it was their job to please and satisfy. They said the crucial goal that defined his approach was not enforcing American laws, protecting American jobs, or defending the American homeland, but rather ensuring there were “zero complaints” from the customers.