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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ALEX PADILLA, a Senator from the State of California.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, who rules the raging of the sea, thank You for being our constant source of strength.

Lord, You know our limitations and how our weaknesses can distort the clarity with which we should see Your providence unfolding.

Continue to lead our Senators. Direct their steps to the destinations of Your choosing. Open their ears, O God, so that they can hear Your voice calling them to attempt great things.

Though Your path may take them through the night, empower them to persevere until the morning comes.

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. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 16, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable ALEX PADILLA, a Sen-

ator from the State of California, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. PADILLA 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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 Radhika Fox, of California, to be an Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Senators are moving forward this week on two major legislative initiatives: infrastructure and voting rights.

Bipartisan infrastructure talks continue in our Senate committees and among our Members.

Remember, discussions about infrastructure, both physical and human, are proceeding along two tracks. The

first track is bipartisan, and I understand there has been some progress. The second track pulls in elements of President Biden's American Jobs and Families Plan and will be considered by the Senate even if it does not have bipartisan support.

Today, we are going to start moving the trains down the second track. I will convene a meeting with all the Members of the majority party on the Senate Budget Committee to begin the important work of producing a budget resolution for the Senate to consider. This is something we have planned for quite a while, but we are moving forward today after having individual discussions which I have had with many members of the Budget Committee.

It is a diverse committee. Senator SANDERS is the Chair. Senators WARNER and KAINE are on it as well.

There are many items to discuss, but one subject is not up to debate. I will instruct members to ensure that any budget resolution puts the United States on track to reduce carbon pollution at a scale commensurate with the climate crisis. We need significant reductions in emissions through clean energy and electric vehicles, as well as funding to help manufacturers and farmers be a part of the solution in fighting climate change.

The American Families Plan, as well, is essential to the forthcoming budget resolution and must be robustly funded.

The Senate will also vote on major voting rights legislation before the end of June.

Yesterday, the Democratic caucus hosted a group of Democratic lawmakers from Texas who led the dramatic walkout to prevent the Texas Republican legislators from passing one of the most draconian voting laws in our country. It was a powerful meeting. We heard moving testimony from five different lawmakers about the vicious, nasty, even bigoted attacks against voting rights in their State.

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



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The actions taken were totally partisan, just like those in all the other legislatures. So the idea that this can have some kind of bipartisan solution befuddles me, because every action taken in the legislature is done just with Republican State Senators, Republican assembly members, with no Democratic participation or input. In fact, the Texas legislators told us they were deliberately excluded from certain meetings and conference committee hearings.

Speaking for our caucus, we were all taken by the courage of the Texas legislators, their fortitude, and, most importantly, by their mission to defend the right of every American to be able to access the ballot, not just in Texas but across the country. These lawmakers in one State put everything on the line to protect voting rights in their State. The Senate should put everything on the line to protect voting rights in this country.

Now, tomorrow, Senate Democrats will hold another special caucus meeting to continue discussing the best path forward to achieve voting rights legislation.

AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

Mr. President, 2 days ago, the Biden administration became the first administration since the beginning of the Iraq war to support repealing the authorization for the use of military force in Iraq, passed in 2002 and now in effect for 19 years.

The Iraq war has been over for nearly a decade. An authorization passed in 2002 is no longer necessary in 2021. It has been nearly 10 years since this particular authorization has been cited as a primary justification for military operations. It no longer serves a vital purpose in our fight against violent extremists in the Middle East.

So I strongly and fully support repealing the 2002 authorization for the use of military force in Iraq. This is the first time I am formally announcing my support for repeal.

I want to be clear. In no way will America abandon our relationship with Iraq and its people as they rebuild their country after years of war in our shared fight against ISIS, but there are very good reasons to repeal the specific legal authority.

For example, it will eliminate the danger of a future administration reaching back into the legal dustbin to use it as a justification for military adventurism. At the beginning of last year, we saw that danger become frightfully real when President Trump ordered an airstrike against an Iranian target in Iraq without transparency, without proper notification to Congress, and without a clear strategy. President Trump cited the 2002 AUMF as partial justification, ex-post facto—a claim that legal scholars and foreign policy experts resoundingly rejected. There is no good reason to allow this legal authority to persist in case another reckless Commander in Chief tries the same trick in the future.

Tomorrow, the House of Representatives will vote on whether to formally repeal the authorization. Next week, Chairman MENENDEZ and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will mark up a resolution led by Senators YOUNG and KAINE which will repeal the Iraq war AUMF. It is my intention, as majority leader, to bring this matter to a floor vote this year, and we will discuss the precise timing with Chairman MENENDEZ.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, sometimes good news comes to those who wait. Other times, it comes rather quickly. Earlier this year, I recommended to President Biden a prominent voting rights attorney for a key position on the Federal Bench in New York.

Yesterday, President Biden agreed with my recommendation and announced his intention to formally nominate Myrna Perez for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. I am very pleased that the President has chosen her and am proud to have championed her candidacy.

Ms. Perez is not only an accomplished attorney who has dedicated her career to equal justice under the law, but she is one of the Nation's foremost experts on voting rights and elections. With a national focus on voting rights now, it is a significant step to elevate Ms. Perez to the Federal Bench.

Beyond that important exercise, she would also be the first Latina to serve on the Second Circuit Court since now-Justice Sonia Sotomayor—who, incidentally, I suggested to President Obama that he put her on the Supreme Court. Ms. Perez is a perfect example of Democrats' desire to bring balance, experience, and professional and personal diversity back to the judiciary.

So far this year, I have made two recommendations to the Second Circuit in New York: Ms. Eunice Lee, a former Federal defender, and now Ms. Perez, a voting rights attorney.

The cupboards of the Federal judiciary have long been stocked with former prosecutors and corporate lawyers. It is about time that civil rights attorneys, voting rights attorneys, and Federal defenders like these two outstanding nominees join the ranks.

So, again, I applaud President Biden's decision. It is a very bright day for the future of the Federal Bench in New York.

I yield the floor.

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. Mr. 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 Republican leader is recognized.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Mr. McCONNELL. Key economic indicators continue to show that our Nation's recovery is still facing significant headwinds.

Last week, we learned that inflation has logged its steepest increase since the 2008 financial crisis. There are more unfilled jobs in America than at any point on record, and, when asked, more than 90 percent of the small business owners trying to fill them say they are having trouble finding qualified candidates.

So how did we get here?

When COVID-19 arrived last spring, emergency shutdowns put the brakes on what had become a roaring economy. The pro-growth agenda enacted by Republicans had helped drive unemployment to its lowest level in a half-century. Take-home pay was rising and rising fastest for lower earners, and millions of new workers were coming off the sidelines to join a competitive market for American talent.

The past year presented harsh new challenges, but thanks to the bravery of frontline workers, the genius of scientists, and targeted, bipartisan relief measures passed here in Congress, our Nation was beginning to turn the corner.

The Biden administration actually inherited the conditions for success. It had a bipartisan roadmap of how best to support our economic recovery.

Alas, but instead, the Democrats chose to ram through trillions of dollars in liberal pet projects—a relative pittance for actual pandemic relief and a massive expansion of Federal unemployment benefits that has made staying home the most sensible financial decision for literally millions of American workers.

As one pair of economists put it recently, "The stimulus bill stimulated unemployment, not employment." To be specific, their analysis found it created conditions in at least 19 States where a family of four could claim the equivalent of a six-figure salary by staying out of the workforce.

Let me say that again. One recent study found that in 19 States, a family of four, with two working parents, would have had to earn at an annual rate of more than \$100,000 from working for it to make financial sense not to stay home. In 19 States, it made more sense to stay home than to go back to work.

But burying American workers in incentives to stay home hasn't just hurt rehiring; it has also magnified supply shortages. A few months back, the recovery made possible by bipartisan action last year had our economy geared up for a rush of consumer spending, but today, short-staffed producers are having to pass the rising costs on to households just as this rush was set to ramp up.

A tough year forced American families to put off some big purchases, but now they are facing some of the worst sticker shock in a generation. Used car