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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Eternal God, create in us a hunger and thirst for righteousness. May Your presence and power direct our actions. Strengthen our Senators to do the work of freedom. Rescue them from trouble and give them triumph over life's trials. Lord, remind them that all things are possible to those who believe in You.

O God, who rules forever, hear our prayers. Incline Your ears to us and grant us Your peace. Keep us from slipping as we trust You to save us.

We pray in Your great 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Paloma Adams-Allen, of the District of Columbia, to be a Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The majority leader is recognized.

BUILD BACK BETTER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, on Build Back Better, Democrats continue their work this week to iron out the details of our Build Back Better agenda—a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild ladders for working families to reach the middle class, to help people stay in the middle class who are already there, and to secure another century of American prosperity.

Last night, I held another round of extensive talks with top officials from the White House, with the Speaker, and with my Senate colleagues. We made good progress, and we continue our talks later this week. There is more work to do, so we are going to keep at it. We are going to work at this every day until we can get it done.

I want to thank my colleagues, the Speaker, and the White House for everything they are doing to finalize this important bill. It is a rare opportunity to do something big for the American people, and we will press ahead until we pass both a bipartisan infrastructure bill and our Build Back Better agenda into law.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. President, now, on the debt ceiling, last night, as you know, I filed cloture on legislation sent to us by the House of Representatives that provides for a suspension of the debt ceiling until December of 2022.

The Senate is going to hold that vote tomorrow, and, once again, Members of

this body will face a choice: We can bring this Republican-manufactured debt ceiling crisis to a swift end or Republicans can keep barreling our country ever closer to the first default in American history.

By now, it is perfectly clear which political party is working to prevent a default on the debt and which party is deliberately and almost cynically rooting for one. Republicans have been offered multiple opportunities to deescalate this crisis they have created. Yet, each time, the Republican leader has chosen to magnify it instead.

Last week, Democrats offered a commonsense proposal that would have addressed the debt ceiling on a bipartisan basis; Republicans voted, instead, to default.

Democrats then offered Republicans what the Republican leader said they have wanted by proposing a simple majority vote—exactly what happened in the early 2000s—and, again, Republicans blocked it in favor of default.

By now, it is clear that despite what they say, Republicans seem intent on seeing the United States miss out on its payment for the first time ever. They seem perfectly at ease telling the American people, including our Active military, our Social Security recipients, and all those who rely on Medicare, that they are unequivocally the party of default—the Republicans are unequivocally the party of default. And some of them seem to be proud of it.

It is hard to believe that one of America's two major parties would be willing to jeopardize our entire economy and irrevocably damage our standing throughout the world just because they don't like that the party that won the election is following through on its agenda to help American families. But that is what is exactly going on here.

Now, to be clear—let's be very clear—tomorrow's vote is simply a cloture vote. It is not a vote to raise the debt ceiling; it is, rather, a procedural step to let Democrats raise the debt ceiling

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



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on our own, just as Republicans have called for.

Let me say that again so all my Republican colleagues can hear it, and the American people can hear it loud and clear: Tomorrow's vote is simply a cloture vote. Tomorrow's vote is not a vote to raise the debt ceiling; it is, rather, a procedural step to let Democrats raise the debt ceiling on our own.

We are telling Republicans: We are not asking you to vote for it; just let us vote for it. And that is what you called for. That is what Leader McCONNELL has called for on countless occasions from July on.

As recently as yesterday, the Republican leader pointed to episodes in 2004 and 2006, while the majority raised the debt ceiling, while the minority voted against it. As happened then, the minority party can just get out of the way and let the majority supply the votes.

Tomorrow's vote, then, is a chance for Republican Senators to show that they don't have to link arm-in-arm with those extreme Members of their conference running for President. They have a chance to show that they are still responsible. It is not too late, but it is getting dangerously close.

As I said yesterday, this Chamber must send President Biden legislation to raise the debt ceiling before the end of the week. We do not have the luxury of using a drawn-out, convoluted, and risky process. We can resolve the debt ceiling crisis this week and reassure the world that the full faith and credit of the United States will never be in question.

Democrats are going to do the responsible thing tomorrow and vote yes to prevent a default.

There is still time—still time—for Republicans to get out of the way and allow this bill to pass with a simple majority vote. If Republicans want to vote no tomorrow, if they really want to be the party of default, that is their choice.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. President, now on voting rights, despite all we must do in the coming weeks, Senate Democrats remain strongly committed to advancing legislation in this Chamber to protect the most precious right in our democracy: the right to vote.

Later today, my friend the Senator from Vermont, Senator LEAHY, will introduce the new John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. I am a co-sponsor, and it is my intention in the coming weeks for the Senate to hold a vote on this bill.

As a complement of the Freedom to Vote Act, Senator LEAHY's bill restores some of the most critical safeguards of the original Voting Rights Act gutted by the Supreme Court's conservative majority in 2013.

Perhaps, most importantly, this proposal would reinstate the so-called "crown jewel" of the civil rights movement: the VRA's preclearance coverage formula, retailored for the 21st cen-

tury. It would also adopt new provisions to address the next generation of suppressive voting already sprouting in States, unfortunately, across the country.

Critically, this new bill also responds to the Court's troubling ruling in the Brnovich case of earlier this year, a decision which further weakened the VRA's protections against State practices that hinder minorities seeking to vote.

I will have more to say on this later, but, for now, I want to thank my colleague from Vermont for his diligence and leadership in our fight to protect our democracy.

The Senate must act soon if we are to successfully defeat the anti-democracy forces of the far right. And we will; we will do just that.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, while the American people are battling inflation at its worst since 2008, Washington Democrats are behind closed doors, writing another reckless taxing-and-spending spree that would have the government borrow trillions upon trillions more. While our economy still struggles to fully recover from last year's COVID lockdowns, President Biden wants to slap Americans with the biggest tax hike in half a century.

You know, it is really remarkable to watch senior, established leaders in the Democratic Party take their marching orders from the radical left. We are hearing claims and arguments that are absurd on their face as top Democrats try to wrestle with the positions they have literally been forced into.

Yesterday, for example, President Biden's Twitter account made the following two claims in the space of two sentences. First, the "Build Back Better Agenda costs zero dollars." And then in the next sentence: "We're going to pay for it by ensuring those at the top and big corporations pay their fair share."

How amazing, Mr. President. It's the first time in human history something can be totally free, yet, nevertheless, needs to be paid for. The Democrats' socialist logic has become so advanced, they have transcended mathematics itself.

Of course, the truth is that the Democrats' massive tax hikes would not only hit the wealthy. It never works that way. There is no way to set up the kind of massive, never-ending new entitlements the Democrats want without coming hard—hard—after the middle class.

Oh, and, sure enough, nonpartisan experts have already confirmed the Democrats' reckless taxing-and-spending spree would hit the middle class and shatter President Biden's promise of no new taxes for anybody earning less than \$400,000 a year.

But as my colleague, the junior Senator from South Carolina, has put it,

as much as the reckless cost of their wish list would hurt Americans, the reckless content of the legislation may be even worse. Just look at what Democrats want to do to American families' healthcare and prescription medicines.

Last month, a new report from the Medicare trustees confirmed that the trust fund for Medicare Part A is on track to reach insolvency in just 5 years—5 years from now. More than 54 million American seniors rely on Medicare, and the promises we have already made are getting more and more expensive to keep.

Last year, for example, for the first time ever, the amount the Federal Government spent on Medicare alone exceeded everything that we spent on our national defense.

With Medicare 5 years from real fiscal problems, the last thing we need right now are politicians stretching the program even thinner, but that is exactly what Democrats are doing behind closed doors at this very moment.

Their reckless taxing-and-spending spree would heap hundreds of billions of dollars in new expenses and obligations onto the already troubled Medicare trust funds; hundreds of billions of dollars in new obligations for untested new programs, for big new pools of people, all using the care seniors count on as the Democrats' piggyback, with the program already on unsure footing.

Even some of our colleagues on the Democratic side are calling this craziness what it is. As one of our colleagues said recently, we have to "stabiliz[e] what we have, before we start going down this expensive [road]" or else it would be "fiscal insanity."

But that isn't the only damage the Democrats' bill would inflict on our health system. At the same time, they want to impose socialist price controls on the prescription medicines that Americans need. This is another example of magical thinking: If we just pass a law saying something ought to be cheaper, it will be cheaper.

But here in the real world, arbitrary price-setting on prescription drugs would cut down the private sector's incentive to keep innovating. Expert research shows Americans and the whole world would be left with fewer new drugs, fewer new treatments, and fewer new cures.

Mr. President, this isn't an abstract thing. This is a human cost. In the world Democrats want to create, some Americans would get sick and some would die who would have lived if new treatments had come into existence instead of being squashed—squashed—by bad policy.

One University of Chicago academic and past leader of the Council of Economic Advisers has calculated that over one decade, House Democrats' prescription price controls could rob our Nation of 15 to 20 times as many collective years of life as the entire COVID pandemic has stolen so far.

Let me say that again. This expert believes that the Democratic war on