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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 12 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2022

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Give us the wisdom, the strength, the faith to trust in You in all things and above all things.

And let all of us pray for the parents, the children, the innocent civilians in Ukraine who are suffering more than anybody should. Let us all hold them in our prayers. 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 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 Shalanda D. Young, of Louisiana, to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The distinguished Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business.

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

UKRAINE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, last Thursday, I decided to join with Senator SHAHEEN and set up a meeting with about 13 European Ambassadors to the United States. It was for the Democratic Senators. Afterward, we thought this should have been bipartisan, and the next one will be.

But the Ambassadors' meeting was nothing short of historic because these

14 Ambassadors, representing the obvious leaders in Europe, all spoke to the issue of Ukraine and what it has meant to them and what it has done to their nations.

Some of their statements were profound. The Ambassador from Germany talked about how her country had, in a matter of 2 weeks, dramatically changed its position on many issues: On the future of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, they have come to realize that dependence on Russia is risky business in the 21st century; whether or not Germany will step up and support the Ukrainian people. They decided they would, and they also decided that they would make a substantial investment in military spending as part of NATO.

Some of those things seem like very common decisions to Americans, but for them, it was many times a reversal of a party position. They have come to realize, as we have around the world, that the Ukrainian situation calls for emergency measures.

I first want to commend President Joe Biden. Though I may not agree with all his policies and approaches, I have to say that at the moment in history we find ourselves, thank goodness Joe Biden is our President. I cannot imagine his predecessor in a similar circumstance.

Joe Biden set out to first unify NATO. It sounds like an easy task. It is an alliance which we inspired back in the 1940s, after World War II, and have been an active leader in for decades. But our relationship with the nations of NATO and Europe and our relationship to the world as a NATO alliance

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



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had suffered greatly in the last few years. Joe Biden set out to change that, and he is the man to do it.

Throughout his career in the Senate and as Vice President to President Obama, he played a major role in foreign policy. He was no stranger to many of the people he sat down with in the NATO alliance. He brought them together and impressed upon them that, if Putin should decide to invade Ukraine, the NATO alliance had to be stronger than ever. He convinced them, and we should recognize that. Both parties should recognize that. His leadership brought NATO into the 21st century and brought it to the stage where it can confront this Putin threat in a responsible manner.

This is being felt across the world, but it is being felt particularly in the nations that are on the border of Ukraine or Belarus.

At this meeting of the Ambassadors, I called on the Ambassador from Poland. I will have to admit and concede that I have a bias there because I represent the second largest Polish city in the world, Chicago, IL, second only to Warsaw. There are many fine Polish people there, and there have been for many generations, who are following this closely, realizing that they are right on the edge, right next to Ukraine.

The Ambassador made some comments that I thought were worth repeating on the floor. At that time, about 1½ million refugees—1½ million refugees—had flown or come across the border into Poland, and they were being absorbed and accepted in that country—1½ million. He said something that was noteworthy.

He said: If you watch the TV of the people coming to the train stations and across the border, did you notice there are no refugee camps in Poland for the Ukrainians? Those people who come across the border are being brought into the homes of Polish families. They are taking the spare bedroom or finding a way to get by in homes of people who care for them—1½ million. Now, some go on to other countries, but many are staying in Poland.

Then he said something which has historic significance. He said: We are taking care of these people because in 1939, no one would take care of us.

He is, of course, referring to the invasion of Poland by the Nazis and the subjugation of the Polish population after a valiant effort to stop the Nazi advance and then the hardship and suffering of the Polish people under Nazi rule. They remember that. Few were personally alive to remember, but families have repeated the stories over and over again.

My hat is off to the Polish people for their kindness and caring and their leadership when it comes to accepting refugees. But what a lesson for us and for the rest of the world. Countries around Europe are each accepting responsibility.

This was a big weekend in Chicago. It is St. Patrick's Day weekend. We dyed

the river green—lots of parties, lots of fun, events at churches like Old St. Patrick's and others. It is a tradition which I am really fond to be part of each year.

I noticed when I spoke to the Irish American Partnership on Friday morning how many people were asking me about Ukraine. At a time when we usually just have a lot of fun and remember good times involving Irish parties and Irish families, there was a real concern about Ukraine—and not just in Chicago among the Irish but equally important in Ireland among the Irish, because several things have happened in the last few days in Ireland.

They have been gathering thousands of pounds of medical supplies and humanitarian aid and shipping them over to Ukraine through Poland and other countries. They really care. Then they made a commitment. Ireland—a nation of 5 million people—made a commitment to take 100,000 Ukrainian refugees.

I said to the group that I met with on Friday morning: A lesson for us all. This isn't the first time we have seen refugees in the world; it is the current refugee crisis, and it is ongoing in many other parts of the world. And what a lesson for us all—regardless of our religious affiliation, that if we do care for our fellow man, we should care for these refugees. They are the strangers, as often referred to in Christian teaching, whom we are asked to accept.

So I want to commend the Polish people, the Hungarians, the Romanians, the Moldovans for accepting refugees as they have from Ukraine. It is a tragedy that it is necessary, but thank goodness there are caring people in those countries who do open their homes and their lives to the refugees.

There was a conversation as well from other Ambassadors that day, but the message that came through dramatically was that we are now unified. The NATO alliance and other countries in Europe, like Sweden and Finland and Switzerland, although they are not part of the NATO alliance, really care and want to be part of the response to it. That is the strength of the force against Vladimir Putin. But the real strength is in Ukraine itself.

How can you watch the television and see the devastation that is taking place and not feel for the people who are still remaining there, the millions who each day wake up and wonder if that is the last day of their life because of a Russian missile or a Russian bomb or because Vladimir Putin has decided to engage in a scorched-earth policy?

When they bombed maternity hospitals, I thought they had reached the lowest possible point, but over the weekend, Vladimir Putin intensified his illegal, unprovoked war on Ukraine—shelling apartment buildings, hospitals, schools, creating an obscene body of evidence that Vladimir Putin should be charged and convicted of the worst possible war crimes.

That is why I had to hesitate for a moment and say, when I hear apolo-

gists for Putin in America, I wonder who they are and what they are made of. Tucker Carlson is one who even the Russians are recommending that their friends in the media listen to, making excuses on FOX for Vladimir Putin. There are no excuses—none acceptable—on the subject. Mr. Carlson should be ashamed of himself.

It is impossible to know how many innocent civilians have already died in Ukraine. Estimates run from hundreds to thousands. An estimated 2.8 million Ukrainians—almost all of them women, children, and the elderly—have fled in the bitter cold to other nations, carrying one or two suitcases and a backpack and a baby on their side. Millions more Ukrainian citizens are displaced inside Ukraine—we can't even count that number—and multitudes are trapped in places like Mariupol and other cities under siege by Russia. Many of them are without food and water and medicine and electricity.

These families are coming to shelters and saying: We have no food to give our children. That is how desperate the circumstances are because of Mr. Putin's invasion. His unprovoked war is a war of atrocities.

Yesterday, I attended a rally at the Ukrainian Center in Chicago. It had been chilly the day before, but it warmed up into the 50s—which is good news in Chicago in March—and we were outside. Quite a crowd showed up. There were more blue and gold Ukrainian flags than I had seen in any one place in America, but there were many other flags too. There were Polish flags; and I am proud to say there were Lithuanian flags—my mother's homeland—Estonian, Latvian, American flags, all gathered to show unity with the Ukrainian people.

Since this war started, they have been working to provide aid shipments and to reach family members in Ukraine. You can tell that it is taking its toll on them as they talk about members of their families that are still in Ukraine today.

But people came with a loud round of applause when I announced that we had, on the floor of the Senate last week on Thursday, passed a bill to provide \$13.6 billion to Ukraine—humanitarian aid, military aid. And President Biden, over the weekend, talked about another \$200 million worth of direct military aid. That makes it over \$1 billion that America has sent, and there is more to follow.

We talked about the sanctions against Russia, sanctions which will be felt by the common people of Russia. Unfortunately, some of them are innocent victims in this as well, but it will put pressure on Putin to finally stop this deadly invasion.

They said—and I believe—that this is not simply a war on Ukraine; it is a war on democracy. It is a war on civilization.

On Wednesday, we are going to have a historic moment here in the Capitol. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the

President of Ukraine, will address a joint session of Congress using the remote technology. We are all in awe of his courage and leadership, and we are anxious to hear his message, to think of what that man has achieved by staying on the scene, regularly broadcasting videos to show that he was still there. He inspires his people to get up and fight for Ukraine.

Our message to him on that day is “Slava Ukrayini!”—that is, “Glory to Ukraine.” And it is a phrase that was actually banished during Soviet times because it was so nationalistic that the Soviets didn’t want the people of that country using it. They use it proudly today because they are an independent, free, and democratic nation.

America stands with Ukraine in its fight for democracy and civilization. I just hope that we will learn many lessons from this. Don’t many of the things which we were arguing about in America seem so trivial in comparison to what we are talking about in Ukraine: truckers coming to protest social distancing and masks and vaccine mandates? I am sure those are important issues, but they pale in comparison to the life-and-death struggle which is going on in Ukraine.

These people understand that they must be ready to stand and die for their freedom. How many of us could rise to that level if challenged? It is something I think about a lot.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Madam President, on another topic, 2 years ago—March 13, 2020—President Trump officially declared COVID a national emergency in America. We all remember the dark and uncertain days in the early spring of 2020. Overnight, schools, offices, and businesses closed their doors and opened their Zoms.

Today is also an important anniversary in America’s recovery. One year ago today—1 year ago—Democrats in Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, our comprehensive plan to help American families, hospitals, and small businesses weather the economic hardship of the pandemic and to distribute vaccines and medical equipment so that we could get the pandemic behind us and return to normal life in America.

The pandemic has affected everybody: Republicans, Democrats, and people who don’t care at all about politics. Sadly, however, the American Rescue Plan only passed with Democratic votes. Not a single Republican would vote for it, in the House or in the Senate.

And it worked. We were right. It was needed. The U.S. economy has recovered faster and stronger from this pandemic than any other G-7 nation in the world. America’s economy added more than 6 million new jobs in the year since we passed the American Rescue Plan. That is a record.

Part of the reason our economy is strong today is because that plan made wise decisions that helped families, helped businesses, and helped commu-

nities through the worst time when the pandemic forced businesses and schools to close. The American Rescue Plan provided a critical lifeline to low-income families, stabilized middle-class families by providing enhanced child tax credits, and expanded unemployment insurance and housing relief. That plan also closed the holes to provide help for families with children, expanding the earned income tax credit and child tax credit.

In particular, the enhanced child tax credit gave working families a chance to breathe. They used it to buy the basics—groceries, diapers—pay the utility bills, pay the rent, pay the mortgage. Some of us just take that all for granted. For many people, it is a paycheck-to-paycheck challenge. Some families actually finally paid down their debts. Others put a few dollars away for the next emergency.

Now, they are feeling squeezed again, those same families. That doesn’t mean we were mistaken when we passed the American Rescue Plan. It means we have more to do to lower the cost of living for families across the United States. This should be done on a bipartisan basis.

Inflation is a global problem, not simply an American problem. It is a reflection of the world labor market and a global supply chain basically disrupted by a pandemic and still in the process of recovery.

Now, we have made a decision as a nation to ban imports of Russian oil. Seventy-nine percent of the American people support that decision, even though they understand that it will drive up the price of gasoline. They don’t want their hard-earned American dollars paying for Vladimir Putin’s war, killing the innocent people of Ukraine. I salute them for their courage in joining our Nation together in that effort to stop it.

Yes, it will add more to the price of oil. It already has over the last week or two because of Putin’s invasion, but we have got to face a reality. To stop the killing and death in Ukraine, we have to be prepared to make some sacrifice.

Inflation is a real problem. We need real solutions, not just complaints.

TRIBUTE TO DR. NGOZI EZIKE

Madam President, my remaining statement is a tribute to an extraordinary individual, a lady who is a doctor and was the head of the Illinois Department of Public Health during the worst part of the pandemic.

Her name is Dr. Ngozi Ezike. I saw her on TV every day when I was back home during the pandemic, and she was such an inspiring person, so talented. She was calm. She was wise. She was compassionate. And she was professional. She really made life bearable during an unbearable time. She saved lives.

A Harvard-trained, board-certified internist and pediatrician, she worked at all levels of public health. For the last 3 years, she has been our State’s top doctor. She had been in that post for a

little over a year when COVID hit. We were lucky she was there.

Directors of State health departments usually work outside the public spotlight. She was in the spotlight every day. Appearing with Governor JB Pritzker in his daily briefings, she was the public face of Illinois’ effort to contain the virus and save lives. What a reassuring presence. She dispensed daily doses of compassion and empathy along with the facts and statistics, the realities, pleas for mask wearing and handwashing. She delivered her message calmly, clearly, and then, without missing a beat, delivered it again in Spanish.

Her sincerity was obvious and never more so than at a news conference about 7 months into the pandemic when she broke down as she was delivering the day’s grim statistics. She paused to regain her composure and then urged Illinois residents to fight the fatigue and keep doing what is needed to protect themselves and each other from the virus. After seeing that on television, I wrote her a fan letter, and many others did too. She really cared.

Two weeks ago, she was at another news conference with the Governor. With the number of Illinois residents hospitalized with COVID below 1,000 for 3 days for the first time since last August, the Governor said it was time to lift our mask mandate, time to move toward normal life in Illinois.

Dr. Ezike surprised everybody by announcing that she was going to return to normal life herself; she was leaving her position. In announcing her decision, she thanked her husband and four kids “for tolerating the absences, the last-minute changes in plans, the endless multitasking and the ever-present cellphones.” And she added:

Now it’s time—

She said to her family—

to make you my priority and give back a portion of the encouragement and support that you have lavished on me.

She thanked the people of Illinois “for their sacrifices” and asked we continue to show each other compassion and tolerance. She remembered the nearly 33,000 people in our State who have died of COVID since the beginning, and she said:

All of the people and all of their stories, I will carry always in my heart.

And she said:

I’m so blessed to have been able to bring some measure of comfort to Illinoisans, to quiet some of the chaos and to infuse some calm.

Dr. Ezike, I would say that the blessing was ours.

As the first Black woman ever to head the Illinois Department of Public Health in its 143-year history, Dr. Ezike added that she was also “glad that I served as a role model to young girls, girls of color, little Black girls, that they can be leaders in any field.”

In addition to shepherding our State through the worst COVID crisis, I am