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## Senate

(Legislative day of Thursday, March 31, 2022)

The Senate met at 3:00 p.m., on the expiration of the recess, 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, our light and salvation, You have invited us in Psalm 50:15 to call You in the day of trouble, and so we are here. We thank You that prayer is a key to unlock the arsenal of Your power, mercy, and grace. Because of prayer, we remain confident that You are still in control of our troubled world.

As we see a nightmare unfolding in Ukraine, we ask You to deliver the Ukrainian people from this season of despotism, desperation, destruction, and death.

Lord, continue to use our Senators to accomplish Your purposes on Earth.

We pray in Your majestic 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.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized at 5 p.m.

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

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mr. HICKENLOOPER assumed the Chair.)

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Without objection, it is so ordered.

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

### NOMINATION OF KETANJI BROWN JACKSON

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this week, the U.S. Senate will commence the final stage—the final stage—of confirming Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as the 116th Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

It is a joyous and history-making moment for the Senate as 115 individuals have come before this Chamber for consideration to the highest Court in the land, but none—none—were like Judge Jackson. Like many before her, she is brilliant; she is esteemed and highly accomplished, but never—never before—has the Supreme Court had a Black woman bear the title of “Justice,” and she will pave the way for others to follow in her example.

Not long from now, the Senate Judiciary Committee will conclude their markup of Judge Jackson’s nomination by voting to report her out of committee. Chairman DURBIN has adjusted the schedule to make sure all members are able to vote, but the process is moving forward. There is no question—no question—that Judge Jackson deserves a strong bipartisan vote in committee; but, sadly, despite the judge’s qualifications, the Republicans on the committee have made clear that not one of them will vote to report her out of committee.

If the Judiciary Committee does reach a deadlocked vote later today, I

will move as soon as I can to have the Senate hold a discharge vote so that her nomination can be considered by the full Senate.

It is obvious, in listening to Republicans, that their objections are entirely unserious. Many who label Judge Jackson as “radical” and “far left” today conveniently ignore that she received bipartisan support not once, not twice, but three times in this Chamber, including by voice vote. They also fail to mention that Judge Jackson commands strong support from across the political spectrum, from conservative judges to the Nation’s largest police unions to a long list of former colleagues who say she is nothing short of the best of the best.

Republicans in committee have ignored, in other words, the plain facts of Judge Jackson’s record, and that is deeply disappointing. Judge Jackson is a brilliant and historic nominee, and her elevation as the first Black woman to the U.S. Supreme Court should bring the Senate together.

Let’s be clear: Despite Republican opposition, Judge Jackson has enough votes to get confirmed to the Supreme Court on a bipartisan basis. The Senate is going to keep working until she is confirmed.

Once Judge Jackson is out of committee, I will file cloture on her nomination as quickly as possible and, in doing so, set in motion a process that will set up a final confirmation vote by the end of this week. I hope both sides can work together to advance her all-but-certain confirmation through the Senate without delay.

Once again, I want to finish by commending Judge Jackson for conducting herself brilliantly and unassailably during the entire confirmation process. It is not easy to be thrown suddenly and abruptly into the national spotlight and have every detail of your life scrutinized. It is even harder to then

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



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engage in marathon sitdowns with nearly every Senator in this body in just a few weeks, and it is nothing short of herculean to endure 3 days of lengthy and, at times, deeply unfair and mendacious questioning before the Judiciary Committee—with the eyes of the Nation upon you.

But 6 weeks after her nomination was announced, Judge Jackson has proven that she is up to the task before her. She has shown that she merits the title of “Justice,” and from this moment on, the Senate will not stop working until we finish the work of confirming Judge Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court.

#### BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Now, Mr. President, on other Senate business, this week, the confirmation of Judge Jackson to the Supreme Court remains the highest Senate priority by far, but Senate Democrats will continue our work to lower costs for the American people.

Last week—little noticed but quite important—the Senate passed bipartisan ocean shipping reform, spearheaded by Senators KLOBUCHAR and THUNE and CANTWELL. This is very significant and much-needed legislation that will reduce costs for the American people by unclogging our ports from Los Angeles to New York to Savannah to Seattle. These backlogs have caused not only great harm for American exporters trying to send their products out in the world; it has also skyrocketed the price of goods coming into the country, and, ultimately, American consumers pay that price. I commend my colleagues for getting this important bill done.

This week, the Senate is also close to entering a conference committee with the House to finalize our jobs and competitiveness act; and tomorrow, Chair CANTWELL will turn the focus of the Commerce Committee to an urgent matter for the American people: ensuring transparency in petroleum markets.

We all know that big oil companies are dramatically expanding corporate stock buybacks and reporting record profits while Americans struggle with higher gas prices. Just today—this is so confounding, so upsetting—ExxonMobil indicated that its profits this quarter will be its highest since 2008. And what are they going to do with this surplus cash? They announced, in the coming months, they will spend \$10 billion on corporate stock buybacks. According to Bloomberg, oil and gas companies’ stock buybacks were up 2,000 percent in the fourth quarter of last year. Using that to enhance worker productivity? Nope. Using that to do something some people might object to, increasing exploration for oil and gas? Nope. Lining the pockets of their shareholders and their corporate executives in stock buybacks, which do nothing—absolutely nothing—to advance the American economy or to deal with the oil prices.

Maybe they should think instead of giving the money to shareholders, they should give money to their customers, give it back, by lowering the price.

It is the latest reminder of a disturbing trend with the oil and gas companies. As the price of gas goes up and as Americans are struggling more and more to keep up, the Nation’s largest oil companies are up to their eyeballs in massive profits and then use that money for unproductive stock buybacks, which, if anything, increase income inequality at a time when the country needs to decrease it.

There is something deeply incongruous and wrong about seeing the largest oil companies and gas companies in the world drench top executives and wealthy shareholders in cash while Americans are struggling at the pump. I thank Chair CANTWELL for holding tomorrow’s hearing so we can provide accountability, transparency, and relief, hopefully, for the American people.

#### CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, finally, on COVID. Very briefly, over the last few days, my Democratic colleagues and I continue talks with Senator ROMNEY and Republicans, working all hours of the night and into the weekend. I will have more to say on this matter shortly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

#### LABOR MOVEMENT

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating the workers at Amazon in Staten Island, NY, who, for the very first time, were able to win a union organizing campaign against that giant corporation, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, the second wealthiest person in America.

Amazon spent over \$4 million in trying to defeat the union organizing drive in Staten Island and in Bessemer. The independent union, the Amazon Labor Union, had almost no money at all for their grassroots campaign but ended up with 55 percent of the vote.

Congratulations, Amazon Labor Union, for your extraordinary and important victory.

(Ms. DUCKWORTH assumed the Chair.)

Madam President, I also want to congratulate the workers at Starbucks for their incredible union organizing efforts.

Starbucks has coffee shops in some 15,000 locations all across America, and until a few months ago, none of them were organized. Then, in December, workers in two shops in Buffalo, NY, voted to join a union, and that union organizing effort at Starbucks is spreading like wildfire all across the country. In fact, last Friday, workers in New York City successfully voted to form the first Starbucks union roastery and 10th union Starbucks coffee shop in the country. And in the coming weeks and months, Starbucks workers in some 170 other coffee shops in 27 States will be holding union elections.

What makes these union victories so impressive is that from start to finish, they were accomplished by a grassroots movement with very little financial resources.

Now, why is it important that we support these union organizing efforts at Starbucks and in other companies throughout the country? The answer is pretty simple. We live in a time of massive income and wealth inequality, where CEOs make 350 times more than the average worker, where two people—two people—own more wealth than the bottom 42 percent of Americans.

We live in a time where the billionaire class is becoming much, much wealthier, while real weekly wages for American workers are \$40 lower today than they were 49 years ago. In fact, we are seeing more income and wealth disparity now than we have seen in 100 years. And what we are witnessing is a massive, massive transfer of wealth from working families and the middle class to the top 1 percent—people on top doing phenomenally well, while millions and millions of working-class families are falling behind. And that has been going on for almost 50 years.

According to the RAND Institute, since 1975, 50–5–0—trillion dollars in wealth has been redistributed from the bottom 90 percent to the top 1 percent. Now, I know we don’t talk about it too much in corporate media; we don’t talk about it too much on the floor of the Senate, but that is an astounding reality, and that is a reality that we have got to address. It is not acceptable that since 1975, \$50 trillion in wealth has been redistributed from the bottom 90 percent to the top 1 percent.

Listen to this, which really says it all. During this terrible pandemic, where we have lost almost a million American lives, when thousands of essential workers died—people going to work and had no choice about it—during that entire period, some 700 billionaires in America became nearly \$2 trillion richer.

Today, multibillionaires like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Richard Branson are off taking joyrides on rocket ships to outer space, buying \$500 million superyachts, and living in mansions with 25 bathrooms. That is what is going on with the people on top. But for working families, there is a continuous struggle to pay the rent, to provide healthcare, and to make sure their kids are able to get a decent education.

Let us be very clear. It is not just income and wealth inequality that we are talking about; it is economic and political power—power—power.

In America today, just three Wall Street firms—Black Rock, State Street, and Vanguard—control assets of over \$21 trillion, which is essentially the GDP of the United States, the largest economy on Earth. Can you imagine that?

Now, I know we don’t talk about it, but you have got three Wall Street firms that control assets equivalent to the GDP of the United States, the largest economy on Earth. That is power.

And these firms have power over hundreds and hundreds of corporations in every sector of our society and many millions of workers.

So why do we want to see the trade union movement grow? Why do we want to see more and more workers entitled to negotiate decent contracts? The answer is pretty obvious, and it is because unions provide better wages, benefits, and working conditions for their members. That is what unions do—not complicated.

In fact, union workers make, on average, wages that are about 20 percent higher than their nonunion counterparts. They also have much better healthcare benefits and far better pension plans than nonunion employees. That is why it makes sense to join a union and why it makes sense for us to do everything that we can to grow the trade union movement in this country.

I know there are some folks out there who are not union members, and they are saying: Well, it doesn't really impact me.

You are wrong. It does—because when unions gain better wages and better benefits, it means that companies in the nonunion sector have got to begin to some degree to match them. So when wages go up for union workers, they go up for all workers in this country.

Further, unions give workers some degree of control over their work lives and make them more than just cogs in a machine. Today, millions and millions of people go to work, and they have no power whatsoever about what happens to them on the job. They can be fired arbitrarily. They can learn that they have to come to work the next day, when they thought they had that day off, and they have no say in any of that. So what unions do is end the ability of companies being able to arbitrarily fire workers for any reason and to impose any schedule that they want on their employees. In other words, unions give workers some degree—some degree—of control over their work lives.

Similarly, when large corporations have enormous political power through the many billions of dollars they spend on lobbying, on campaign contributions to both political parties, and on advertising, unions have the capability—because there are many millions and millions of people involved—to fight back and create a legislative agenda here in Washington and in State capitals that work for all Americans and not just the few.

What these recent union victories tell me is that working people all over this country are sick and tired of being exploited by corporations that, today, are making recordbreaking profits. They are sick and tired of billionaires like Jeff Bezos and Howard Schultz—the founder of Starbucks—becoming obscenely richer during the pandemic while they, the workers, put their lives on the line working for inadequate wages, inadequate benefits, and unfair working conditions and schedules.

Let us be clear. If you think that the union victories—recent victories—at Amazon and Starbucks are an aberration, you would be sorely mistaken. During the last year, I have been proud to work with and stand in solidarity with courageous workers all across this country who have been on strike or who are engaged in union organizing efforts. I am talking about the United Auto Workers which went on strike at John Deere in Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas to protest against massive cutbacks to retirement benefits and totally inadequate pay raises. I am talking about the United Steelworkers that went on strike at Special Metals in West Virginia—a company owned by Warren Buffett, worth \$127 billion. They were on strike to fight for decent wages and decent benefits.

I am talking about bakery workers who went on strike at Kellogg's, Nabisco, and the Jon Donaire ice cream cake factory in California, fighting for justice, dignity, and respect.

I am talking about the United Mine Workers who are still on strike at Warrior Met in Alabama, a company owned by BlackRock, the largest Wall Street investment firm in this country, managing \$10 trillion in assets.

I am talking about United Food and Commercial Workers who went on strike at the King Soopers grocery store chain owned by Kroger's in Colorado.

I am talking about graduate students and adjunct professors at MIT who are waging a strong union organizing effort on that campus.

Today, I want to continue to express my support and admiration for these workers who are not only organizing for themselves and for their coworkers but, in fact, are organizing for all of us, because when you have a strong union movement in this country, you stand the possibility of having a strong middle class.

While we may not hear much talk about the struggles of the working class in communities all across this country, what we should be clear on is that these struggles are real and are gaining momentum.

The union struggles that we are witnessing have taken place against corporate greed, which determine whether or not workers in our country have decent wages, decent benefits, and decent working conditions. It really is, I have to say, a bit obscene to take a look at these companies, owned by some of the wealthiest people in this country, who are becoming much, much richer, and all the while, they are trying to lower wages and take back benefits. It really is absolutely disgraceful.

So, Madam President, as a strong defender of the trade union movement, what I understand is that when unionized workers do well in raising the bar for economic and social justice, we all do well. Their success is our shared success. And, as I said a moment ago, make no mistake about it, we will never have a strong middle class in this

country, with decent wages and decent benefits, where workers can afford to pay the rent and send their kids to college and take a few weeks off with paid vacation—that is not going to happen unless and until we have a strong labor movement in this country.

This is the bottom line: In the year 2022, the United States and, in fact, the rest of the world face two very distinct political paths.

On one hand, there is a growing movement toward oligarchy, in which a small number of incredibly wealthy and powerful billionaires own and control a very significant part of the economy and exert enormous influence over the political life of our country, and that is precisely what we are seeing today. The rich get richer, and with their wealth, they buy and sell politicians, put huge amounts of money into the political process, huge amounts of money into lobbying, huge amounts of money into TV ads and other ways to influence people.

So that is one direction that this country can continue to move in, but there is another direction. That other direction is opposition to oligarchy and corporate greed, and it is the creation of a movement of working people and young people who are today, in ever increasing numbers, fighting for justice—economic justice, racial justice, social justice, environmental justice—and they are fighting for justice in a way that we have not seen in years. It is that growing trade union movement that makes me so very hopeful for the future of this country, and it is a movement that I hope all of us will strongly support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

#### MOTION TO DISCHARGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, pursuant to S. Res. 27, the Judiciary Committee being tied on the question of reporting, I move to discharge the Judiciary Committee from further consideration of Ketanji Brown Jackson, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the provisions of S. Res. 27, there will now be up to 4 hours of debate on the motion, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with no motions, points of order, or amendments in order.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

#### TOXIC EXPOSURE

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I come to the floor this Monday afternoon to speak about the importance of