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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JACKY ROSEN, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, who harmonized the world with seasons and kindness, sowing and reaping, color and fragrance, we praise Your loving Name.

Lord, strengthen our Senators to do their part in fulfilling Your purposes for this land we love. Be for our lawmakers a refuge and a shelter from life's storms. Give them the wisdom to find in Your word a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. Provide them also with the resolve to walk in that light and follow Your guidance. In Your compassion, free them from the cares that deplete their trust in You.

We pray in Your merciful 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, September 15, 2022.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JACKY ROSEN, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. ROSEN 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 and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Sarah A. L. Merriam, of Connecticut, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

RAILWAY LABOR MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, last night, as most Americans were in bed asleep, freight rail companies and unions representing tens of thousands of workers secured a tentative agreement that will keep the trains running on time and keep our economy moving. And the best part is that union leadership representing tens of thousands of railway workers, who have worked themselves to the bone over the course of the pandemic, seem to have secured

the higher pay and better working conditions for their members. Railway workers have earned that pay and those benefits through blood, sweat, and tears, and I hope it will make it easier for other workers in future negotiations to secure stronger benefits.

This is exactly the sort of outcome that will keep our economy going, our supply chains running, and, most importantly, our workers well-taken care of. The episode is a reminder of an evergreen truth that people underappreciate even now: Workers are what make the wheels of our economy turn—in this case, literally.

I want to thank President Biden and Secretary Walsh, who was steadfast and dedicated, and in a word that we have used for our Senate caucus, he persisted and persisted and persisted. I want to thank every single union representative and railworker who negotiated in good faith to reach this outcome.

RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE ACT

Madam President, now I have a few short remarks to say on marriage equality.

Negotiators have been meeting practically every single day. Senate negotiators, Democrat and Republican, have been meeting practically every single day this week to find a path forward. There will be a meeting later today between both sides, and I look forward to seeing what progress Republicans make to reach the magic number of 10. The onus is right now on our Republican colleagues to demonstrate they are serious about passing marriage equality into law. Every single Democrat is for it, but, of course, we need 60 votes.

Let me be clear. My No. 1 priority is to pass legislation. It is an issue that will have profound consequences for millions of Americans in same-sex marriages and who identify as LGBTQ. To downplay this issue, to let it pass by or to act as if we can put it off for another time is not the right thing to

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



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do. We should do it now. That is why we are so eager to get 10 Republicans to support the bill.

And across the street from here, we have all heard Justice Clarence Thomas and his fellow MAGA Republican Justices are surely waiting for the chance to one day follow through on his threat—Justice Thomas's threat to drag same-sex marriage rights back under the spotlight of the Supreme Court. That thought should send a shiver down all of our spines.

So I want to thank my colleagues, from Senators BALDWIN to SINEMA to COLLINS and others, for continuing their talks. I am glad to give them the space to lead these negotiations because this needs to be done and done right. But for the sake of tens of millions of Americans, we need to get this done, and I hope we have 10 Republicans who are willing to raise their hands and push this process forward.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, finally on judges, it was another productive week here on the Senate floor when it comes to confirming more judicial nominees. On Monday, we completed the confirmation process for Salvador Mendoza to sit on the Ninth Circuit. Then we confirmed Lara Montecalvo to sit on the First Circuit. And later this morning, we will vote to confirm Sarah Merriam to be on the Second Circuit.

We also will return to the nomination of Arianna Freeman to the Third Circuit as soon as possible.

That brings our total for the month of September to five circuit court judges, and we now have confirmed more than 80 judicial nominees to the Federal bench. On numerous occasions, it has been with bipartisan votes, and I want to thank my Republican colleague who joined us in voting for these fine nominees.

To the Committee on the Judiciary, Senator DURBIN, and all of my colleagues, I say great work. Let's keep going.

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. Madam 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 Republican leader is recognized.

INFLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. This week's inflation report confirmed what working people across this country know all too well: The costs of feeding a family and keeping the lights on have skyrocketed more quickly this past year than at any time since the wake of the Carter administration.

A year and a half of crippling runaway inflation is the most important

story to the American people every single day. The media have grown somewhat numb to month after month of 8 and 9 percent inflation, but working Americans have not had the luxury of growing numb. The pain gets worse every single time they have to fill a shopping cart or pay their credit card bill.

One mother of young sons in my hometown of Louisville put it this way:

My grocery bill has [gone] up a lot. It's terrible right now. I have to be really strategic on how I plan out the whole month to make sure we have enough money.

Of course, Kentuckians aren't the only ones in this predicament. In Nevada, an office worker recently told reporters:

I've not been buying a lot of things because I can't afford it. I'm like, "The kids don't need juice for school anymore. We'll just do water."

In Arizona, so many families are having to make tough choices at the grocery store, many are accepting charity to keep food on the table.

According to an employee of one food bank in Phoenix:

The impact we are seeing day in and day out continues to go up. The families are stressed.

And who can blame them? Food inflation in America is at more than a four-decade high. Bread is 16.2 percent more expensive than it was a year ago. Milk is up 17 percent. Flour is up 23.3 percent, and eggs are going for nearly 40 percent more.

Week after week, feeding a family has become a stressful proposition for millions of Americans, and every extra dollar spent on groceries is one fewer to spare for soaring electricity bills.

In the suburbs of Las Vegas, residents have commiserated over the astronomical cost of keeping their homes cool in the summer. One neighborhood message board reads like this:

My bill for this month will be \$574 . . . it's insane.

Yes, ours was \$800 for June.

In Arizona, a restaurant worker didn't mince words about scraping together enough to keep the lights and air-conditioning on:

If I didn't have roommates, I wouldn't be able to make it on the salary that I have.

Overall, inflation in Phoenix and Atlanta is way, way higher than even the sky-high national average. The country as a whole is still grappling with inflation over 8 percent, but Phoenix has seen a staggering 13 percent inflation in just the last year, and Atlanta has seen nearly 12 percent.

Of course, for working Americans in some other States, the most acute emergency is not the cost of summer cooling but, rather, the cost of winter heating.

In places like New Hampshire and Vermont where many homes burn heating oil, this important price is up more than 91 percent since President Biden took office.

And in every corner of the country, one of the biggest collective headaches

facing working families with young kids is the rising cost of back-to-school shopping lists.

According to one working mother in Pennsylvania, she had to take items like a backpack for her preschooler out of her shopping cart in the checkout line:

It's been at least 20 years since I have had to pull back to this extent. This is a new and humbling experience for me as an adult.

American families are facing math problems that just don't add up.

Meanwhile, the same Washington Democrats who got them into this mess spent Tuesday celebrating having rammed through, on a party-line vote, a bill that does nothing to help them solve it: hundreds of billions of dollars in new spending, just as working families are having the hardest time in decades making ends meet at home; hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars that wouldn't even accomplish Democrats' own underlying radical climate goals, let alone the false claims of "inflation reduction" on the cover.

So our economy continues to hand working families a raw deal. But the same day this latest awful inflation report was published, Washington Democrats went to a concert at the White House and celebrated—celebrated—their economic policies.

How much more out of touch can you get?

The Democrats' giant inflationary spiral is costing the average American household 460 extra dollars every single month just to buy the same things they bought last year. President Biden and his government have imposed a silent Democratic inflation tax of \$460 every single month.

In Kentucky, the average household has to pay \$608 more a month—well over \$7,000 more a year—just to stay where they were when President Biden was sworn in.

Americans' real wages—their purchasing power—has plummeted since this all-Democratic government was sworn in.

And the Democrats response? Print and spend hundreds of billions more, make Americans without bachelor's degrees pay off the graduate school debt of doctors and lawyers, and throw themselves a party on the White House lawn.

Our colleagues across the aisle created this human catastrophe. This runaway inflation was a policy choice by Democrats, and they aren't even trying to stop it.

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. THUNE. Madam 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.

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT OF 2022

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, the August inflation numbers came out