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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, February 11, 2022, at 11 a.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2022

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.

Almighty God, the center of our hope, open our hearts to Your movement in our midst.

As we trust Your prevailing providence, and cling to Your promises, provide us wisdom and spiritual discernment to see You at work.

Lord, save our lawmakers from being intimidated by today's challenges as You protect them by guiding their steps.

Clothe our Senators with the honor of integrity. Shield them with Your truth. And guide them with Your power. Give them a hunger for Your Word and a desire to apply Your knowledge in their daily walk, pleasing You by living with humility, honesty, and joy.

We pray in Your precious 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, February 10, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

FORCED ARBITRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it has been a busy, productive, and truly bipartisan week here in the U.S. Senate.

After days of fruitful cooperation from both sides, the Senate is now a few moments away from approving one of the most significant changes to employment law in years, eliminating for good the awful practice of forcing victims of sexual harassment and assault into arbitration.

An hour from now, we will be able to say this: The House has acted; the Senate has acted; and we are sending bipartisan forced arbitration reform to the President's desk. It is a momentous reform bill and one that is painfully overdue.

For decades, arbitration clauses have been routinely tucked into the fine print of employment contracts. Today, they impact about 60 million Americans. And many people may not even realize such clauses affect them, until it is too late.

All of us have heard the searing testimonies of those who have faced harassment or abuse at work, only to discover their jobs offered precious little in accountability.

Countless careers have been derailed or undone. Worse still, countless lives have been forever damaged. And for decades, workplace practices, like mandatory arbitration, have perpetuated cultures of abuse and unaccountability.

We can't ignore a basic reality of these clauses. They deprive victims of sexual harassment and assault of their basic rights by mandating they seek

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



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remedy only behind closed doors of private arbitration, with no other alternative.

This is wrong; it is unfair; and it is about time it changed. And that is exactly what we will accomplish through this bipartisan legislation. It will not only ensure that those who have suffered sexual harassment or assault have the option to go to court if they choose, it will also be retroactive. People locked into these clauses right now will benefit just as much as new employees will in the future. That is an important point that hasn't gotten enough attention. It will undo the pernicious effect of these clauses that already exist.

I want to thank my friend and fellow New Yorker, Senator GILLIBRAND, for spending years advocating for this legislation. This accomplishment wouldn't be possible without her leadership and her commitment to working with the other side.

Likewise, I want to thank Senator GRAHAM and Senator ERNST for reaching across the aisle and working with us to get this bill done.

Yesterday, Senators GRAHAM and ERNST met in my office, and we came to an agreement to move this forward. And we very much appreciate that. It was truly a collaborative effort by the Senate, and thanks to everyone's work, forced arbitration for sexual assault and harassment will soon be a thing of the past.

As I said in my very first speech as majority leader, Democrats will always be open to working with Members of the other side of the aisle when the opportunity arises. The differences between the parties are real and cannot be ignored, but we can neither ignore the genuine chances for progress when both parties agree to move forward on certain topics.

Last year, it was precisely this majority's commitment to bipartisan cooperation that cleared the path for historic hate crimes legislation. Together, we also passed a historic jobs and supply chain bill, which we hope is enacted soon.

And together, Democrats and Republicans secured the first stand-alone infrastructure package in years.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, this week has been a continuation of that commitment to working with the other side when possible. The legislation on forced arbitration is a prime example. And yesterday we saw another example: Appropriators from both parties announced that they reached a framework agreement for a yearlong appropriations package.

This is a huge step forward for arriving at an omnibus, and it is great news for our goal of avoiding a yearlong CR, which would have been painful and costly.

There is a lot of work left to do before we pass a government spending

bill, but yesterday's announcement shows appropriators are now on a very good path.

We are driving forward toward an omnibus, and I am very, very hopeful and optimistic that we will get there.

In the meantime, the Senate will do the responsible thing by passing a temporary CR next week in order to give the appropriators enough time to put their funding packages together.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, yesterday, our colleagues from both sides of the aisle came together to announce an agreement on reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act, which was last acted on nearly a decade ago by this Chamber.

I want to commend my colleagues Senators FEINSTEIN and DURBIN, as well as Senators ERNST and MURKOWSKI, for all the work they have done to bring us closer to reauthorizing VAWA.

I also want to thank my colleagues who are cosponsoring this legislation. And I have a particular interest because when I was in the House, I helped carry the original VAWA legislation that became law and has now lapsed.

Most importantly, I want to thank every single person who participated in yesterday's press conference who shared their own experiences of abuse.

The Violence Against Women Act is one of the most important laws passed by Congress in the last 30 years, and it is my hope that the Senate can take action on this bill in the near future.

There are nine Republicans cosponsoring this legislation so we need one more, at least, in order to clear a path forward.

If we can find more support for VAWA, I would expect that the Senate will seek to take action.

VAWA must be reauthorized. We cannot allow inaction to persist for a moment longer, and with yesterday's bipartisan announcement, we are closer than ever to achieving that goal.

POSTAL REFORM

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on postal, there is one more sign of progress this week that I want to mention, another bipartisan effort like VAWA and like all of the other bills I have mentioned—arbitration and the CR—and this is the bipartisan efforts by both Chambers to pass the most significant postal reform bill in decades.

Later today—soon—I will file cloture on the postal reform bill approved overwhelmingly by the House earlier this week. For the information of all Senators, this will set up the first vote this coming Monday evening.

Postal reform has been decades in the making and is one of the best steps we can take to strengthen one of our country's most important institutions. Tens of millions of Americans depend on the post office every day. Seniors and veterans need it for things like

medication. Businesses need it to function. Rural communities need it to stay connected. Countless people rely on the post office to connect with each other for things like birthdays, travel, the holidays, or any one of life's many, many special occasions.

By passing postal reform, we can ensure that Americans will continue to rely on a speedy, dependable, and well-run post office. We have all heard complaints about how the mail delivery has slowed down. This is a strong, important effort to rectify that bad problem. It will be a win for everyday Americans and for the dedicated men and women who work to deliver our mail every single day.

CANNABIS LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, finally, on cannabis legislation. All of these issues I have mentioned—forced arbitration reform, appropriations, VAWA, and postal reform—have been bipartisan efforts. They reflect a commitment that Democrats made at the start of the year to work with the other side when the opportunities presented themselves, and I thank my Republican colleagues for working with us. Before I close, there is one more appeal I want to make for bipartisan cooperation, and that is on cannabis reform.

This morning, I joined with Senators BOOKER and WYDEN in sending a "Dear Colleague," inviting Members from both sides of the aisle to join in an effort to draft and finalize comprehensive cannabis reform. Last summer, I joined with Senators BOOKER and WYDEN in introducing our framework legislation for Federal reform of cannabis, and we want to build on this framework as we prepare to introduce legislation in the near future.

Today, millions—hundreds of millions of Americans live in States, both blue and red, where cannabis has been legalized in some way. It is long past time for the Federal Government to catch up.

This is about individual freedom and about basic fairness. For decades, Federal cannabis laws have caused immense damage to millions of Americans, particularly Black and Hispanic people, who have been unfairly targeted by these laws. We need to change that. We need to create opportunities for entrepreneurs and small businesses to legitimately pursue new opportunities, and comprehensive Federal cannabis legislation is critical—critical—to reaching that goal.

I want to thank Senators BOOKER and WYDEN and all my colleagues who have worked with us on this important and long-overdue change. I hope we can make more progress on cannabis reform in the near future.