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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, February 18, 2022, at 10 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARTIN HEINRICH, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Mighty God, the refuge and strength for all who trust You, come close to us, as we lift our hearts in prayer. Lord, help us to love You as You deserve. Inspire us to love one another as You have loved us.

Today, bless our lawmakers in their work. Warm their hearts, increase their faith, and make them more conscious of Your transforming presence. Lord, breathe Your peace into their hearts, as they strive to build a better nation and world. Please do for us more than we can ask or imagine.

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, February 16, 2022.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARTIN HEINRICH, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore

Mr. HEINRICH 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 Celeste Ann Wallander, of Maryland, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

UKRAINE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, President Biden addressed the country about the ongoing crisis that Russia has created on its border with Ukraine.

There was much in the President's remarks that I appreciated. He was right to candidly remind the Russian people that neither the United States nor NATO nor Ukraine wants a war. He was right to emphasize that the world will not shrug or stand idly by if Vladimir Putin tries to invade his neighbor or redraw the map of Europe through deadly force.

We have spent much time discussing Russia's alleged security concerns and not enough time examining the legitimate concerns of Russia's neighbors, many of whom have a long history—a long history—of being invaded by Moscow. The concerns of these free, sovereign states matter as well, and the President would do well to amplify their voices and their historical experiences.

So it is fine for President Biden to engage in good-faith diplomacy, provided we are skeptical about Putin's intentions. Thus far, Putin's behavior is proving how little he can be trusted and how little he is interested in diplomacy as anything other than a gambit to divide the West or a pretext for war.

The United States must keep sending these strong messages, verbally and with concrete actions, both right now before any hostilities and then with

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



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devastating force if Putin does, indeed, plow ahead.

The United States and our partners should waste no time in helping Ukraine prepare for war—weapons, materiel, advice, logistics, and intelligence. We should be building the infrastructure to help Ukraine sustain their resistance to Russian aggression if and when it comes.

I welcome the President's deployment of additional forces to the territory of NATO allies situated along our alliance's eastern flank. I recommended he take such action months ago. And I am particularly grateful to the Kentuckians of the 101st Airborne Division who are leaving Fort Campbell this week to join NATO reinforcements in Eastern Europe.

As our diplomats work to halt the train of Russian aggression, it is the brave men and women of the U.S. military who give their words added weight.

I am hopeful that President Biden will rise to the occasion. As a bipartisan group of colleagues and I made clear in a joint statement yesterday, the President would have overwhelming, bipartisan support to use his existing Executive authorities for tough sanctions against Russia in the event of conflict.

We should acknowledge Putin's use of energy as a weapon. If the President is serious about providing relief for Americans at the pump or blunting Putin's manipulation of energy markets, he will stop his administration's anti-energy policies that make it harder for our own producers to explore, to produce, and to export energy to vulnerable allies.

While our eastern flank allies have consistently taken a clear-eyed approach to their own defense, it is time for America to invest more meaningfully in our own military capabilities and demand that our allies in Western Europe actually follow suit.

Whether the administration is serious about competition with Russia and China will be clear when it submits its fiscal 2023 budget request. Our allies and adversaries will all be watching.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, now on a different matter, while the world's eyes are fixed on the present foreign policy crisis, troubling facts are continuing to surface surrounding the administration's previous self-inflicted crisis—the botched retreat from Afghanistan.

Last week, journalists published the findings of a 2,000-page autopsy that Army officials compiled following the chaotic withdrawal from Kabul. The report hammers home a damning fact we have actually already known for months: The Biden administration received clear advance warnings from commanders on the ground that should have been heeded but went ignored. As I warned at the time, we have confirmation this disaster was foreseeable—foreseen, actually—and avoidable.

The Army's conclusions build upon the report from the Special Inspector General which was declassified last month.

While President Biden and his political advisers still cling to the notion that they got mistaken advice and were caught off-guard, both these reports suggest that nonpartisan experts knew and predicted the Afghan military would likely collapse and spent months trying in vain to get the administration to pay attention.

Top commanders reported that trying to get State Department officials to engage in advance evacuation plans was like “pulling teeth”; that the National Security Council was “not seriously planning for an evacuation”; that among peers in uniform, “everyone clearly saw some of the advantage of holding Bagram.”

As the top U.S. commander on the ground during the evacuation put it, policymakers had not “paid attention to the indicators of what was happening on the ground.”

This staggering report from our own U.S. Army should have chastened the Biden administration. It should be an occasion for apology, reflection, and accountability. But last week, President Biden instead tried to simply wave away our own Army's conclusions without evidence.

He was asked, “Are you rejecting the conclusions or the accounts in this [Army] report?”

The President replied, “Yes, I am.”

“So, they're not true?”

“I'm rejecting them,” the President said.

No evidence; just hand-waving denial. Frankly, it was a bizarre performance.

Our retreat from Afghanistan seriously damaged America's credibility. It made confronting terrorist threats that much harder from over the horizon, and it invited more testing like what we are now enduring in Eastern Europe.

President Biden and his team were warned of all these dangers well in advance by our own military, but our Commander in Chief seems to have flat-out ignored our commanders. This has been an unbelievably costly lesson that the Biden administration should never have had to learn even once. Let us all hope they don't need to learn it twice.

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. President, now on one final matter, parents and kids need a swift end to pandemic disruptions that ignore the incredibly low risk to children.

I am proudly joining Senator THUNE and many of our Republican colleagues on a resolution that would overturn the absurd preschool mask mandates which the Biden administration has tied to Head Start funding.

More than 1,200 doctors and health professionals have signed a public statement about “the Urgency of Normal”—“the Urgency of Normal”—the medical and moral urgency of returning normalcy back to children as fast

as possible. Republicans at the local, State, and Federal level are standing with the parents. We are going to keep fighting against these disruptions to family life caused by rules and mandates that are not at all based in science. Two years of needless school closures and unscientific, forced child-masking are 2 years too many.

But, unfortunately, pandemic policies are not the only reason that recent years have been one giant advertisement for school choice and parents' rights. We have also seen far-left bureaucrats trying desperately to inject radical theories and fringe ideas into teacher trainings and K-12 classrooms.

Everybody has heard draw-dropping anecdotes from school districts all across our country. Last year, the Biden administration tried to divert money for mainstream civics education into woke propaganda like the debunked 1619 Project. They only backed down when Senate Republicans called out Secretary Cardona directly. Meanwhile, the far-left national teachers union adopted an official resolution and approved extra money for their fight to make “structural racism” and “critical race theory” into central tenets in kids' schooling.

This nonsense is absolutely pervasive—pervasive.

Just a few weeks ago, North Carolina parents had to call out their statewide Office of Early Learning for funding training materials that talked about “deconstruct[ing] whiteness”—“deconstruct[ing] whiteness.” These materials were for preschool teachers.

In San Francisco, the school board spent 2021 focused on renaming schools instead of reopening schools. They decided “George Washington” and “Abraham Lincoln” were insufficiently woke namesakes, and they tried to change a prestigious high school's merit-based standards into a non-merit-based lottery in the name of equity.

Not surprisingly, parents are watching this nonsense and demanding change. For example, just yesterday, a multiethnic multilingual recall campaign to unseat three of those San Francisco school board members won an overwhelming victory with the voters.

American parents are speaking out, but instead of listening to them, the political left is lashing out.

President Biden's Education Secretary solicited an outside group to send a letter to President Biden's Attorney General that referred to concerned parents as potential domestic terrorists.

One part of the Biden administration set up another part of the Biden administration with a pretext to investigate and harass concerned parents.

One far-left advocate recently complained to NPR that “school transparency is essentially this big brother-type regime.” What a joke.

The nationwide teachers union boss, Randi Weingarten, personally tweeted out a claim that “racists . . . are showing up in droves to school board meetings.”