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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHARLES E. SCHUMER, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer is going to be led by one of the greatest pastors and human beings I have met in my long career in politics. He has done an amazing job both at CCC, his church, and throughout New York and America.

So the prayer will be led by Dr. A.R. Bernard, founding pastor of CCC, Christian Cultural Center, in the great borough of Brooklyn, NY.

Let us pray.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Thank you, Senator.

Let us bow our heads as we go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father and our God, to whom belongs all glory, honor, and praise, we humble ourselves in prayer, seeking Your wisdom and guidance as we accept the responsibility to guide, guard, and govern this great Nation. As the prophet Jeremiah said, "We stand at a crossroad."

We join our hearts and minds in the simple prayer of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and the prophet of the New Testament. We ask "Thy Kingdom come," not a future messianic Kingdom—that we leave in Your care and control—but the power of Your presence in the here and now; the power that changes the hearts, minds, and lives of people by truth, righteousness, justice, and peace and thus transforms our Nation, its political constructs, our social institutions—their systems, structures, policies, and practices—that while elevating some, tend to marginalize others; the power that transforms relations between government and citizens, labor and capital, between neighbors and friends, between the members of a household.

Let our love of a free market and our responsibility for the most vulnerable collaborate toward the common good.

Help us to clarify our role and function, both domestic and abroad.

Help us to understand the meaning of our identity as one nation under God.

Bring the spirit of renewal to our Nation. Reawaken passion, fervor, and creativity toward purpose. Let it begin with the individual and spread to our culture.

We understand this is a big prayer, but You are a big God. So we ask You and trust You to help us, O God, and hear our prayer.

In Your Name we pray. Amen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It is the first time I am sitting in the Chair, and you can see why. What a great man he is.

Let us pledge.

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 (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, January 26, 2023.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHARLES E. SCHUMER, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SCHUMER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Senator GILLIBRAND has had the great sense to invite the pastor to give the opening prayer. Let me call on her for a brief introduction.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Thank you so much, Mr. President. Thank you for your leadership and your extraordinary stewardship of our State.

I rise today to thank and welcome my guest, Rev. A.R. Bernard, for leading us in that beautiful prayer this morning—so heartfelt, so purposeful, selected exactly for this moment in time. The wisdom that you bring us is very welcome.

Through all the challenges that my constituents and Senator SCHUMER's constituents in New York have faced over these last few years, Rev. Bernard has been a steadfast and devoted leader, serving his flock through faith and good works.

Not only does he lead one of New York's largest churches, Reverend Bernard is tackling some of the most pressing issues that our communities face: food insecurity, injustice, ensuring all of our children receive high-quality education.

He truly embodies the Word and the grace of God, and I am proud to welcome him as my guest for the summit that we are hosting today for African-American faith leaders.

I hope we will be able to learn from his example.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). The Senator from New York.

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



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WELCOMING THE GUEST
CHAPLAIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just wanted to add another word for Pastor Bernard before he leaves.

He is such an extraordinary leader to so many, not just the thousands who are—tens of thousands who are members of his church, Christian Cultural Center, but for the Nation.

And he has been a great spiritual guidance for me during times of difficulty. We have shared our joys and our sorrows together—but for the whole country.

He has done an amazing thing, as CCC, Christian Cultural Center, has been a beacon for so many different congregations throughout the country, as a way to lead, as a way to combine the temporal and the secular.

He has done an amazing, amazing job. So I just wanted to, again, thank him for being here but, more importantly, thank him for all he is doing.

Pastor Bernard is a blessing—a blessing to CCC, a blessing to our borough of Brooklyn, to our city, our State, our Nation, and our world.

May God give him strength to continue in his ministry.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY
LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CAL-
ENDAR EN BLOC—S. 81, S. 82, H.R.
300

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, before I get to my remarks and house-keeping, I understand there are three bills at the desk due for a second reading, en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 81) to provide a moratorium on all Federal research grants provided to any institution of higher education or other research institute that is conducting gain-of-function research.

A bill (S. 82) to protect social security benefits and military pay and require that the United States Government to prioritize all obligations on the debt held by the public in the event that the debt limit is reached.

A bill (H.R. 300) to amend chapter 3 of title 5, United States Code, to require the publication of settlement agreements, and for other purposes.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in order to place the bills on the calendar

under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings, en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, if the 118th Congress is going to do its job and raise the debt ceiling later this year, there is one very big, very important question that all of us need to answer: Republicans, where is your plan? It is the first question that must be asked, so let me ask it again. Republicans, where is your plan?

For weeks, we have heard lots of howling at the Moon from House Republicans on the MAGA fringe about sabotaging the credit of the United States but little in the way of actual solutions. Republicans in the House, especially the MAGA ones, seem disturbingly at ease with taking our economy hostage in exchange for gutting vital programs, but when asked to explain to the American people what kind of cuts they want, suddenly these Republicans seem stumped.

This is reckless. Few issues require more bipartisanship, more cooperation, and more serious-mindedness than protecting the full faith and credit of the United States. We have never failed to pay our debts on time, and the debt ceiling has consistently been a bipartisan endeavor. The radical MAGA crowd running the show in the House seems unable to grasp this truth.

So let me try it again. House Republicans, where is your plan? You want to gut Federal spending, so show us what that means. Show us what it means to the average American family in specific detail. It is your responsibility on such a weighty issue to do just that.

Speaker MCCARTHY. Speaker MCCARTHY has an obligation—an obligation—to explain to the American people what Republicans actually plan to do about raising the debt ceiling. Until we get a clear answer from House Republicans about what their plan is, there is no point in speculating about anything else, because if Republicans really want to starve the American people of vital services, the American people have a right to know what that will mean for their daily lives. Otherwise, the American people will be left with only questions and no answers.

Republicans say they want cuts. Do Republicans want to cut Social Security and Medicare? Do Republicans want to cut military funding? Do they want to cut aid to veterans? Do they want to cut funding to police and firefighters and first responders? Do they want to cut education, public health, science and research?

Saber-rattling about the debt and grandiose statements without any specifics are not going to cut it. They have been doing that for a while. It doesn't work. Lay out the plan. Show us your plan. Republicans need to show

us the math. They need to level with the American people. They need to show us their plan.

Now, here in the Senate, some Members from the MAGA faction—particularly Senator RICK SCOTT—have taken it upon themselves to fill the void that House Republicans have created. The bad news is, the plan they came up with is about as unhinged as they come.

Yesterday, the junior Senator from Florida—the very same Senator who thought that tax hikes on middle-class families was a winning formula for Republicans last November—released a proposal that would put the interests of the Chinese Communist Party before the needs of American families. Senator SCOTT calls it the Full Faith and Credit Act, but it is legislation that does not even deserve partial credit.

Bondholders in Beijing would get their money, while Floridians, Alabamians, Wisconsinites, and so many other American citizens would be left out to dry. Does he want to pay China before he pays schoolteachers? Does he want to pay the Chinese Communist Party before he pays our police officers? There is no end to the negative impacts of this piece of legislation, and it is no substitute for real action to avoid default. Worse yet, reports suggest that Speaker MCCARTHY has promised MAGA radicals in the House that he will hold a vote on a similar proposal to this one.

Seriously, Mr. President, just when we thought we had seen the limits of MAGA extremism, Senator SCOTT has swooped in and reminded us that when it comes to MAGA insanity, there is no bottom. And who—who—is going to pay the price? The American people.

Now on the national sales tax—I mean, you can't make this stuff up, but it goes on and on and on, these really ludicrous, way out of line, way over to the extreme Republican plans. They keep coming at us. Another one they put out is a national sales tax.

While Republicans refuse to show what they plan to do about the debt ceiling, they spend a lot of time talking up one of the worst policy proposals in existence—a 30-percent national sales tax on all consumer goods. The House Republicans just can't seem to get out of their own way. House Republicans call it the Fair Tax Act, but let's call it what it really is—a disaster for middle-class families.

There is nothing fair about a tax that punishes average families for buying essential goods while giving the rich another chance to lower their tax burdens. That is what is behind most of these Republican plans—a desire to help the very wealthy. And if it comes out on the middle class and most Americans, they don't give a hoot. They don't give a hoot.

The Fair Tax Act is truly foul stuff. The Republican tax plan would raise the cost of buying a house by \$125,000. It would raise the cost of buying a car by \$10,000. It would raise your average