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## Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

### PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Most holy and gracious God, who turns the shadow of night into the glory of morning, shower our lawmakers with Your mercy this day. Lord, calm troubled thoughts, and guide their feet in the way of peace. Let Your strength be more than sufficient to help them build a better nation and world. Make them instruments of Your Grace and goodness as You renew in them the joy of belonging to You. Let Your eyes rest upon our Senators and become for them a bulwark, never failing. Guard their feet so that they will not deviate from the path of unwavering integrity.

We pray in Your blessed 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 (Mrs. MURRAY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, April 17, 2023.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,  
President pro tempore.

Mr. WELCH 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 to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Radha Iyengar Plumb, of New York, to be a Deputy Under Secretary of Defense.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

MITCH MCCONNELL AND JOHN FETTERMAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, let me begin by welcoming back our friend, Leader MCCONNELL, to the Senate. It is great to have him back here in this Chamber. We are all glad he see he is recovering well.

I also want to welcome back our colleague from Pennsylvania and friend, Senator FETTERMAN. We are all glad he got the support he needed, and he is sending an important message to millions of Americans that asking for and getting help works.

#### DEBT CEILING

Now, Mr. President, on the debt ceiling, today is the start of a consequential work period here in Congress, but instead of getting to work in our Nation's Capital, House Republican leadership took a field trip to New York City. It was sort of a circus. Today's big spectacle, of course, was Speaker MCCARTHY's speech at the New York Stock Exchange, where he recycled the same old talking points but failed to provide anything new or anything of substance.

One thing is clear from this morning's theatrics: While Democrats want to preserve America's full faith and credit, Speaker MCCARTHY continues to bumble our country toward default, which would cause the economy to crash, cause jobs to crater, and drastically raise costs across the board for American families.

Amazingly, one of the few specifics MCCARTHY did present was his terrible idea to kick the can down the road for just a year and undergo this same default crisis all over again a year from now. Would anyone agree to undergo this fiasco again next year? Give me a break.

I will be blunt. If Speaker MCCARTHY continues in this direction, he is heading us toward default. Do you know what will avoid default? Republicans working with Democrats to avert this crisis altogether, just as we did under Donald Trump.

Speaker MCCARTHY, in his speech, invoked President Reagan, but Ronald Reagan was never reckless like MCCARTHY is being. In fact, it was Reagan who said:

[Debt ceiling] brinkmanship threatens the holders of government bonds and those who rely on Social Security and veterans benefits. . . . The United States has a special responsibility to itself and the world to meet its obligations.

And despite the Speaker's stated concerns about costs, nothing—nothing—would do more to raise costs for American families than default.

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



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Now, for months, Speaker MCCARTHY has insisted on cuts in exchange for avoiding a default. We all know the best way to avoid default is with no brinkmanship, no hostage-taking. Do it clean. President Trump did it twice with Democrats and Republicans working together, and President Biden did it once with Democrats and Republicans working together. That is the way to do this.

MCCARTHY is insisting on cuts, but, to boot, he doesn't say what those cuts are. As I have said previously, there is a time and place to discuss cuts, but that is not part of this conversation. It belongs in the discussion about the budget, not as a precondition for avoiding default.

Again, let me repeat that so they might hear it on the other side, in the House Chamber: The discussion about cuts belongs in the discussion about budget, not as a precondition for avoiding default.

The solution here is straightforward. Republicans should work with Democrats in good faith to avoid default altogether just as we did with Donald Trump: no blackmail, no brinkmanship, no default.

Speaker MCCARTHY, show us your plan.

President Biden and I are happy to meet with Speaker MCCARTHY when he has something to talk about—a plan—as most Democratic leaders are, but we need to see his plan first so we can start from there and work to avoid a catastrophic default altogether. If we go to meetings without Speaker MCCARTHY having a plan, what are we going to do—talk about the furniture? the weather?

Finally, Speaker MCCARTHY, today, quoted a great Yankee, the great Babe Ruth, saying:

You just can't beat the person who never gives up.

Well, first, Speaker MCCARTHY, don't quote a Yankee to me in New York City. Second, the Speaker is right; he has never given up. However, that is only because he has never started: no plan, no progress, no persistence.

So, to make sense of today's speech, I think it was another great Yankee, the great No. 8, Yogi Berra, who hit the nail on the head. "It's *deja vu* all over again," Yogi said. It applies exactly to Speaker MCCARTHY's speech today—no plan, no progress, nothing.

Speaker MCCARTHY, show us a plan. Work to deliver for the American people.

To sum it all up, Speaker MCCARTHY plays a risky and dangerous game when insisting on imposing severe cuts which would hurt the American people and threaten our economy before we avoid default. In addition, to boot, he can't even reveal what those cuts are. This is a sad truth, but it is the truth. If Speaker MCCARTHY doesn't change his course, he could well take this country over the cliff to default for the first time.

#### HOUSE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

Mr. President, on Republican extremism, at the start of the year, I warned that Republicans in Congress faced a critical choice: Abandon MAGA extremism for the good of the country or double down on the road to radicalism. Four months later, too many Republicans have made the choice clear. Instead of coming to the middle, they have sprinted to the extremes. Instead of abandoning MAGA, too many Republicans have doubled down; especially look at the last few weeks. Look no further than what happened last week in Florida, where the Republican Governor signed one of the most extreme anti-choice bills in the entire country, a near total ban on abortion after 6 weeks.

Let's not kid ourselves: A 6-week ban is practically a total ban. Many women don't even know they are pregnant by 6 weeks. Most Floridians fiercely oppose such a draconian provision, one that will endanger not only millions of women in Florida but tens of millions of women across the entire south who, tragically, have fewer and fewer options for accessing reproductive care.

And lest anyone think Republicans oppose abortion because of States' rights—oh, no. The decision by a Federal judge in Texas issuing a nationwide suspension of mifepristone should make it clear what this is about: a national ban on abortion. That is where the Republicans seem to be.

Republicans seem to be caught—these 2 weeks made it clear—in a self-destructive dynamic: The more that Americans reject their extreme views at the ballot box, the more these MAGA Republicans seem to double down.

We have seen this played out on choice, but we are seeing it play out on gun safety. Let me be clear: Most Americans support some commonsense gun safety. Parents are tired of worrying about whether their kids are safe at school. But when tragedy struck at a school in Nashville, TN, Republicans reacted not by voting new gun safety laws but, instead, by expelling two representatives of color who dared commit the sin of speaking out against the inaction. That is the anthesis of democracy. That is the road to outright autocracy.

Even today, Republican extremism was on full display in New York City. Today, the Republican House Judiciary chairman held what he claimed was a field hearing about public safety. But to date, Chairman JORDAN and his colleagues have refused to denounce President Trump's call to defund the FBI and the DOJ.

Defunding the FBI is truly unhinged, and every single Member of the House and Senate—Democrat and Republican alike—should unequivocally condemn former President Trump for pushing this idea. Very soon, the Members of this Chamber will have a chance to go on record and denounce the former President's call to cut funding to our

Federal law enforcement. I hope everyone in the Chamber does the right thing.

The FBI—many of them risk their lives to protect us from drugs, from guns, from terrorism. Defund it just because President Trump, in his self-serving moment, said so? Where are our Republican friends, or are they just moving so far to the right they can't even reject something as clear as this?

As I said moments ago, Republicans are caught in a self-destructive dynamic: The more that Americans reject their extreme views at the ballot box, the more they seem to double down. If they continue down this road, not only will our country suffer, but the GOP themselves will suffer as Americans keep rejecting them at the ballot box. If they continue down this road, our country will suffer and so will the GOP as Americans keep rejecting them at the ballot box.

#### BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. President, finally, on upcoming Senate business, today, the Senate gavels back in for the start of a busy week, a very busy work period.

There is so much we must do on lowering costs and improving lives of American families, strengthening healthcare, lowering prescription drug costs, preserving America's competitiveness, and protecting America's fundamental rights. We will get to work on these issues, particularly starting off with the fire bill, which will come before us this week.

I yield the floor.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is welcomed back.

#### SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is good to be back.

I want to thank all of my colleagues for their warm wishes shared over the past few weeks. Suffice it to say, this wasn't the first time that being hard-headed has served me very well.

We are truly lucky and blessed to get to serve in this remarkable institution, represent our home States, and serve our country. Needless to say, I am very happy to be back.

There is important business for Congress to tackle. We should be working to undo this administration's mistakes. We need to secure the border, reduce crime, fight inflation, and invest in America's strength and our security.

On an even more basic level, President Biden and his administration are literally "on the clock" to negotiate a debt ceiling solution with Speaker MCCARTHY and the Republican majority over in the House. The President's economic advisers say the deadline for a solution is not far off, but his political advisers apparently think the White House's position should be—listen to this—no talks and no reforms.

This extreme position is not even holding up in their own party. Even Washington Democrats are breaking