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## Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.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.

Almighty God, whose power moves in the changes of the seasons and in the beauty of the stars, let Your gentle strength live in our hearts. Today, infuse our Senators with Your wisdom so that they will walk in the path of Your will. Lord, keep them faithful. May Your love empower them to grow in knowledge and judgment so that they will be able to choose what is best. Amid the haste and hurry of their labors, remind them to spend time with You in order to experience the joy and strength of Your presence. Make their lives gifts of Your love to a hurting nation and world.

We pray in Your sovereign 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 bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, April 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 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. The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 bill clerk read the nomination of Joshua David Jacobs, of Washington, to be Under Secretary for Benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

#### DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, for months, the President has been clear that he will not allow the full faith and credit of the United States to be taken hostage. He has rejected brinksmanship, hostage-taking, and asked for what is the only way to solve this problem given where we are at right now, which is clean, clean, avoiding default—clean to avoid default.

To avoid default, Democrats have asked Speaker MCCARTHY and Repub-

licans to present a credible plan, but last week Republicans instead released an extremist, hard-right agenda, written in a backroom, in secret, to win support from the Freedom Caucus. The GOP's "Default on America Act," as we call it, does not bring us any closer to avoiding a first-ever default. In fact, it only brings us dangerously closer to defaulting.

The "Default on America Act" would mean fewer jobs, higher costs for the American people, and would leave policemen, first responders, Border Patrol, and our brave veterans all hanging out to dry.

For those who worry about gun violence and crime and keeping our communities safe, the "Default on America Act" will wipe out nearly 30,000 law enforcement while also gutting critical resources to secure the border. Donald Trump told House Republicans to defund law enforcement, and so the "Default on America Act," on cue, does just that.

That is what the "Default on America Act" does. And not just that; it would eliminate over 142,000 new jobs, including 18,000 manufacturing jobs that have been created since the Inflation Reduction Act was passed.

If you are a parent struggling to pay for childcare, the "Default on America Act" will eliminate more than 105,000 childcare slots across the country, making it harder for parents to find work, finish their education, or even provide for their families.

If you know someone who struggled with addiction, this bill would also worsen the opioid epidemic by cutting critical HHS programs by over \$10 billion in the next decade. That is the definition of cruelty.

If you want to go to college, the Republican package will slash Pell grants for all students by \$1,000 and even eliminate Pell grants entirely for tens of thousands of Americans.

And for those who worry about gun violence and keeping our communities

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



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safe, the “Default on America Act” will wipe out nearly 30,000 law enforcement positions while gutting critical resources to secure the border. Again, Donald Trump told House Republicans to defund law enforcement, and the “Default on America Act,” on cue, does just that.

Put plainly, the House Republicans are hell-bent on default one way or another—either a default on the debt or a default on everything else: on our future, our children, our promise to care for our kids and veterans and law enforcement and first responders. No matter what happens, Republicans are promising real pain for American families.

And what happened just a few hours ago in the wee hours of the morning? Plainly, Speaker MCCARTHY capitulated even further to the hard right. Again, if anything, this revised bill is even more extreme, more radical—a more radical version of the “Default on America Act.” It brings us no closer to avoiding a default on the national debt.

Let me be clear. Democrats cannot and will not allow the Republicans’s “DOA Act” to ever become law. It is DOA, plain and simple. And if Republicans refuse to level with the public about the terrible things their “Default on America Act” will do to them, Democrats will do the work ourselves. We will let America know how bad this is because Republicans are intent on hiding it. They know how unpopular it would be.

In the meantime, Speaker MCCARTHY needs to recognize that all the energy he is putting into passing the “Default on America Act” will be wasted effort. The Speaker should drop the brinksmanship, drop the hostage-taking, come to the table with Democrats, and pass a clean bill to avoid default. Given where the Republican proposal is, that is the only way to go. Time is running out.

#### EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Mr. President, on the ERA, tomorrow, the Senate will have a chance to take the next major step on an effort a century in the making: ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment under the Constitution.

The story of American democracy has been an uneven but inexorable march toward greater equality for all people. America’s foundation contains a simple premise: No matter who you are, where you come from, you too deserve equal treatment under the law.

The Senate will have a chance tomorrow to bring our country one step closer toward greater equity by voting on a bipartisan resolution regarding the Equal Rights Amendment. The measure is simple. It will recognize that 38 States have now legitimately ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, meeting the threshold required under the Constitution. It would remove an arbitrary deadline set decades ago that invalidated the ratification that occurred in a few States. The States did the work,

just not in the required time that was imposed on them a very long time ago. I believe the Senate should now remove that obstacle.

And we must act now because the Equal Rights Amendment has never been more necessary than today. To the horror of hundreds of millions of people, women in America have fewer rights today than they did even a year ago. The protections of *Roe v. Wade* are gone thanks to the MAGA majority on the Supreme Court. Over a dozen States have near-total abortion bans, and tens of millions of people have to travel hundreds of miles just to access reproductive care. That is sickening.

We cannot claim that America is a nation of equal justice when half of its citizenry languishes on with fewer rights, less dignity, and limited recourse under the Constitution. That is why the Senate must vote in favor of advancing this ERA resolution tomorrow, so we can bring our Nation one step closer to greater justice, greater equality, and equal rights for all people, regardless of gender.

Thank you to Senators CARDIN and MURKOWSKI for championing this resolution. I look forward to voting in its favor tomorrow.

#### ELIZABETH DOLE VETERANS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. President, finally, the Senate will take the first procedural vote on legislation to care for our Nation’s veterans, spearheaded by my good friend Senator TESTER, head of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

The Elizabeth Dole Veterans Program Improvement Act of 2023 is the union of a number of important and impactful bills that will strengthen the VA, improve its caregiver program, expand home- and community-based services for vets, and ultimately bestow greater dignity on those who defended our Nation.

The bipartisan veterans bill is precisely the sort of legislation the Senate should be working on to build on our success on the PACT Act last year. This is bipartisan, far-reaching, and will make an enormous difference in the lives of our veterans across the country.

I want to thank Senator TESTER, Senator MORAN, and Members from both sides of the aisle for working on this important veterans package.

I yield the floor.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

#### ISSUES FACING AMERICA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the last several years, Democrats have given many dramatic speeches about our country’s norms and institutions, about the rule of law and the health of democracy. But the sad irony has been this: The same political left that shouted so loudly about norms, institutions, and the rule of law has kept trying to steamroll these principles themselves.

Look at recent events at the State capitol buildings in Tennessee and Montana—angry liberal activists in shoving matches with law enforcement, shouting down proceedings. I myself am on the record as a firm critic of rioters and disrupting legislatures, across the board, no matter who is doing it. Why can’t the left be as consistent?

And look at their side’s growing hostility to the very independence of our judicial branch. A few weeks ago, when one Federal judge issued a ruling with policy outcomes that Democrats didn’t like, they started suggesting that politicians should just openly disobey—just openly disobey—the judge’s rulings.

Those suggestions are toxic and, frankly, anti-American. It was wrong when President Andrew Jackson tried to ignore the Court way back in the 1830s, it was dead wrong when Governor Faubus defied the Court on civil rights in the 1950s, and it is wrong also when today’s Democratic Party brings all of that back.

The attacks on the judiciary don’t stop there. In 2020, our colleague the Democratic leader stood on the very steps of the Supreme Court and threatened Justices by name—by name—with a “whirlwind” of retaliation if they failed to rule the way he wanted.

Then, after top Democrats encouraged mob outrage over a leaked draft opinion, President Biden’s Attorney General failed to enforce clear Federal law and put a stop—a stop—to illegal protests that sought to intimidate the Justices at their private family homes.

Recently, a number of Senate Democrats have gone so far as to propose defunding security needs for the Justices and their families if Chief Justice Roberts doesn’t reorganize internal matters the way Democrats would prefer. So after fanning the flames of violence against an equal branch of government, Democrats now want to defund the Justices’ ability to protect themselves and their families if certain Senators don’t get their way.

They are trying to turn impartial judges into partisan hostages. This is really beyond irresponsible.

And then, of course, there are the desperate and never-ending attempts to smear and defame Justices appointed by Republican Presidents, going back years and decades. Over the last few weeks, two Justices have been particularly subjected to a carousel of character assassination. I am sure it will be another Justice’s turn again before too long. This is simply how the far left treats the rule of law.

Let me just repeat that I have total confidence in Justice Gorsuch, Justice Thomas, and all seven of their distinguished colleagues, no matter who appointed them—no matter who appointed them. Just yesterday, all nine Justices explained in a statement their joint approach to maintaining their high ethical standards. Unlike the activists and elected Democrats trying to