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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, May 5, 2023, at 11 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3, 2023

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.

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arms have bound the restless waves, let Your still, small voice echo down time's corridors to renew our law-makers and to lift their vision of one Nation guided by Your wisdom. Inspire them to dedicate themselves to eternal values and to be unafraid of the consequences of following the highest standards they know.

Lord, guide them by Your living Word, as You infuse them with the spirit of service. Help them to see that nothing they do can separate them from Your love. Do for them, as You have promised, more than they can ask or imagine.

We pray in Your Holy 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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 3, 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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Orelia Eleta

Merchant, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I hope you had a good birthday yesterday.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Thank you.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, decades ago, President Reagan warned that debt ceiling brinksmanship "threatens the holders of government bonds and those who rely on social security and veterans benefit . . . [and] the United States," he said, "has a special responsibility to itself and to the world to meet its obligations.

If President Reagan were around today, he might well be exiled by a modern Republican Party that in many ways seems dead set—dead set—on abandoning that special responsibility never to default.

We have less than a month to go until we hit June 1. Every day wasted is another day closer to catastrophe. At stake is the well-being of families, retirees, veterans, kids, and the very stability of our economy.

But by ramming the "Default on America Act" through the House—totally partisan, knowing full well this bill can never become law—Speaker MCCARTHY and the hard right have made the odds of default go up. By handing his gavel over to the hard right, the Speaker is giving the American people two terrible options: either default on the debt or 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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on the country, with steep cuts to law enforcement, first responders, veterans, seniors, and even cancer research. Just think how radical such an ultimatum truly is. It is a dramatic break from how both parties have approached default in the past.

On one hand, a Republican default would crash the economy, increase costs, and kill American jobs. Unemployment would rise to at least 8 percent. Mortgage and car payments would all go up by a lot, while the value of pensions and 401(k)s would come crashing down. That is the future that Speaker McCarthy and the House Freedom Caucus have made more likely by passing the “Default on America Act.”

But the alternative is also a nightmare scenario. If the Republicans’ “Default on America Act” became law, 1 million seniors—1 million seniors—would lose access to Meals on Wheels. These are seniors who literally can’t get food on their own much of the time and rely on others bringing it to them. They would be on the chopping block if the GOP has its way. Deprive seniors who can’t leave their homes of food—what is that all about?—so that some very wealthy, wealthy multibillionaires don’t have to pay any taxes? It is outrageous.

Here is another one. The Republican “Default on America Act” would eliminate 30,000 law enforcement jobs across the country. Do you know what that means? Gun violence will get even worse. Our neighborhoods will become less safe. Border security would be deprived of billions in crucial resources. The war on opioids would decline, and more addictions, crimes, and others from opioid use would go up. What is that all about?

Once again, the hard right—totally enthralled by the very wealthy, wealthy few who are so greedy, they don’t want to pay any taxes—say cut things like this. Cut law enforcement. Cut Meals on Wheels.

The “Default on America Act” would shamefully attack our Nation’s veterans, purging 80,000 VA jobs, leaving our Nation’s heroes without the care they have earned throughout a lifetime of service.

These are just three of many. Eliminate Meals on Wheels; greatly hurt our efforts at law enforcement and safety by dramatically cutting, defunding police; greatly—greatly—tying the hands of the VA so that veterans would get worse healthcare and they would have to wait even longer—this is what the Republicans’ “Default on America” bill does. That is why it is dead on arrival—not for some political ideological reason, but it would do such harm.

When you wonder about the motivation of the Republicans, it ultimately is this, these rightwing Republicans. Listen to the greedy few, the powerful greedy few who don’t want to pay any taxes and want to have taxes reduced. Some of them even called for even eliminating the income tax.

Finally, the “Default on America Act” is chock-full of totally irrelevant, hard-right goodies that would deregulate fossil fuel, reward corporate greed, shower the ultrarich with tax giveaways, and impose cruel and unpopular work requirements on vulnerable families.

Whether it is kicking seniors to the curb, cutting law enforcement jobs, or abandoning our veterans, everything about the “Default on America Act” wreaks of MAGA extremism. So it is no wonder the Republicans did it in secret. It is no wonder that they didn’t want to do what they promised to do: have hearings, have witnesses, have bipartisan discussions and amendments.

But if Republicans won’t level with the American people about their terrible bill, Senate Democrats are going to do it for them. Tomorrow, the Senate Budget Committee will hold a hearing on how the “Default on America Act” would weaken the economy and slash hundreds of thousands of jobs. I want to thank Chairman WHITEHOUSE and all the members of the committee for doing the important work of bringing this bill to the public eye because the American people deserve better.

Incredibly—incredibly—tomorrow’s hearing will be the very first hearing in either House that actually looks at what the “Default on America Act” does. Amazing. This huge bill that affects almost every aspect of American life—they haven’t had one hearing on the issues they are doing. But we are going to start doing it, and that hearing will be the first, but there will be many others.

As Democrats shine a light on how unserious and extreme the Republican “Default on American Act” is, our view about the path forward remains the same: can’t choose the “Default on America Act”; must avoid the horrors of default; pass a clean bipartisan bill to avert default.

CHINA

Mr. President, later today, I will join my colleagues and committee chairs at a press conference to talk about the next steps in the Senate’s effort to outcompete the Chinese Government and preserve America’s global leadership in the 21st century.

The Democratic-led Senate has done some important bipartisan work to outcompete the Chinese Communist Party in the last few years. The infrastructure, CHIPS and Science, and the omnibus bill all did some in that regard. But we all know we can’t stop there. We have to build on this progress. This work is critical to our national security. It won’t be enough to outcompete the Xi regime in any single area. We must be ready to compete with all of them on all these fronts, and that will require comprehensive and bipartisan legislation.

We must not aid and abet the Chinese Government’s development of advanced technologies—like microchips, 5G, AI, quantum computing, and more—that will shape the course of this century.

We must limit investment capital from flowing to the Xi regime—the Chinese Government—and prevent them from taking advantage of America’s critical assets. We must continue in investing in our workforce and other key technology areas that drive American innovation. We must strengthen our economic and military alliances and partnerships around the world to constrain Chinese potential aggression.

The Chinese Government is not constraining itself in its pursuit to dominate the 21st century, and if we in America were to rest on our laurels, if we let the CCP beat us, it would have certain consequences for the world’s democratic nations.

The United States cannot afford to cede its leadership to governments opposed to democracy and individual liberty. We cannot let authoritarianism call the shots in the 21st century. So that is why this bipartisan effort in the Senate will be so important.

The Senate has already shown that both sides are capable of working together on this most important issue, and I thank my colleagues who will join me at our press conference later this afternoon.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. President, finally, on Senate business, it is going to be another busy day here on the Senate floor. Later this morning, the Senate will vote on the confirmation of Orelia Merchant, whom I was proud to recommend to President Biden to serve as district judge for the Eastern District of New York. We will also advance the nomination of two more terrific nominees: Wesley Hsu to serve as a district judge for California and LaShonda Hunt to serve as district judge for Illinois. By the end of this week, the Senate will have moved forward with one circuit judge, Anthony Johnstone, and as many as five new district court judges.

The Senate will continue doing the important work of ensuring the Federal bench is filled with excellent, mainstream, and highly qualified judges in the weeks and months to come.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, months of inaction by President Biden have left our Nation drifting toward economic disaster. His own administration says our Nation is only weeks away from a debt crisis, but there has been a total absence of Presidential