



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 169

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023

No. 76

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

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O Lord, our redeemer, abide with our Senators through the passing hours of this day. Strengthen them to stand firm for those good and eternal values that keep the Nation strong.

Lord, give them the courage to do the right even when others are doing wrong. Remind them that You are the pilot of their lives, who can guide them to a desired destination. Let discretion preserve them and understanding keep them, protecting them from the forces of evil.

Lord, save them from pride that mistakes their abilities for possessions, and keep them humble enough to see their need of You to solve the problems of these turbulent times.

We pray in Your mighty 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 4, 2023.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK 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 ses-

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of LaShonda A. Hunt, of Illinois, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last week, House Republicans rammed through a nakedly partisan bill to default on America, without taking even a moment to explain how their bill would wreak havoc on our country. That, of course, was by design.

Republicans have known for years that their agenda is horribly unpopular with the American people. So the MAGA part of the GOP has used this default crisis to sneak their radical proposals through the back door.

Since MAGA Republicans—and House Republicans, in general—have refused to level with the American people, Senate Democrats have been doing their work for them: exposing how “Default on America” will crash the economy, raise costs, and kill millions of good-paying jobs.

Yesterday, at an Appropriations subcommittee hearing with Administrator Regan, Chair MURRAY and Subcommittee Chair MERKLEY showed how “Default on America” would devastate clean water and cut programs that protect kids from harmful PFAS chemicals.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

Chair MURRAY and Senator HEINRICH also met with Deputy Secretary Turk and showed how “Default on America” would slash scientific research and cripple American competitiveness, just as both parties passed CHIPS and Science.

Here we have finally passed good, strong bipartisan legislation that will help us compete against the Chinese Government. And what do the House Republicans, led by the MAGA group, do? They cut so much of that out. The American people don’t want that. And they don’t even want the American people to know what they are doing.

Today, the Senate Budget Committee is hearing from experts like Mark Zandi of Moody’s Analytics—hardly a liberal stalwart—to show how “Default on America” would lead to hundreds of thousands of job cuts and diminish economic prosperity. And “Default on America,” as you know, is the Republican plan. That is what we are calling it, and that is what America knows.

And we won’t stop there. Senate committees will continue, next week, showing how the MAGA Republican “Default on America” plan utterly wreaks of MAGA Republican extremism. And it is not a plan at all. It is just a rightwing wish list thrown together in the House. The stench is foul.

Just look at the way the Republican bill treats our seniors. One million seniors will lose access to Meals on Wheels if Republicans’ “Default on America” becomes law. These are seniors who often can’t leave their homes by themselves to get groceries and need a hand from others.

It is incredible—tell seniors who are homebound they can’t get meals so that some rightwing billionaires don’t have to pay taxes?

That is the way these MAGA Republicans think, and that seems to be where House Republicans are following.

Or look at the way “Default on America” turns its back on our Nation’s veterans. If Republicans get their way and “Default on America” becomes law, up to 80,000 jobs at the Veterans Health Administration would be cut.

Our Nation’s veterans have dedicated their lives to keeping our country safe. There is no greater shame than intentionally depriving them of the resources to stay healthy, but that is precisely what the House Republican bill does.

And if anyone wonders whether or not House Republicans truly care about law enforcement and public safety, “Default on America” would cut 30,000 law enforcement jobs—30,000.

Let me emphasize that again because it is a stunning revelation.

If “Default on America” becomes law, 30,000 law enforcement jobs would be cut. Our Border Patrol would be left hanging to dry. Our communities that are fighting the opioid crisis, drugs, and guns would be less safe.

This party, which is railing against “those outside of this room who have

said defund the police,” are defunding the police.

Cuts to seniors, cuts to veterans’ health, cuts to Federal law enforcement—these are just some of the consequences of the “Default on America” wish list that has been proposed by the MAGA Republicans and the Republican leadership in the House.

But the horrors don’t end there. “Default on America” is loaded with poison pills that have nothing to do with averting default and everything to do with the hard-right agenda. “Default on America” would deregulate fossil fuels and empower Big Oil, make life easier for wealthy tax cheats, and impose unpopular work requirements on vulnerable families.

There is no way the American people will accept legislation as flawed, as cruel, as hard right as the Republican “Default on America Act.” “Default on America” cannot credibly be called any sort of plan from Speaker McCARTHY to avoid default. It reads much more like a House Freedom Caucus manifesto.

The solution here is staring Republicans in the face: Do what we have already done under President Trump and President Biden, under both Democratic and Republican majorities. We should pass a clean bill to avoid default—no brinksmanship, no hostage-taking. If we do that, there will be no default on the national debt.

MILITARY NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, I want to salute JACK REED because he put together a very important letter which has been made public this morning. Leader McCANNELL and I received a letter from seven former Secretaries of Defense—Democrat and Republican alike—they served under Democratic and Republican Presidents, including Donald Trump—regarding the blanket holds by the Senator from Alabama on the nominations of senior military leaders.

The letter that is signed by Secretary Gates, Cohen, Panetta, Hagel, Mattis, Esper, and Perry minces no words. The blanket holds are “harming military readiness and risks, damaging U.S. national security”—harming military readiness and risks, damaging U.S. national security.

That is the assessment of former Secretaries of State from both parties. That is the damage caused by the Senator from Alabama. The Secretaries of Defense explained that these holds are preventing key leaders from taking important command positions, including leading the 5th Fleet in Bahrain, critical for keeping Iran in check; and the 7th Fleet in the Pacific, critical for keeping the Chinese government in check.

Let me read just one sentence from the letter:

Leaving these and many other senior positions in doubt at a time of enormous geopolitical uncertainty sends the wrong message to our adversaries and could weaken our deterrence.

Senator TUBERVILLE’s holds are also affecting the next military representa-

tive to NATO, a post essential in allied efforts to support Ukraine.

The future Director of Intelligence at U.S. Cyber Command is also impacted. I hope Senate Republicans read the letter and tell Senator TUBERVILLE to drop these reckless holds. I urge all my Republican colleagues to impress on Senator TUBERVILLE the damage he is causing to our military of people who served for decades and to our own national security at a time when we can’t afford to drag our heels on national defense. All of us in the Senate have strong opinions on various topics, but that cannot justify putting our national preparedness at risk.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, on AI and the AI meeting today, today the White House will hold a meeting with CEOs of four top AI developers. It is an incredibly important engagement. Over the past several weeks, my staff and I have met with close to 100 CEOs, academics, and more, and I plan to continue to do this. I have also met with Republicans on this important policy topic.

I welcome the White House’s engagement here, and I expect there will be more to come. As I said before, AI is one of the most pressing and serious policy issues we confront today. That is why we are meeting with so many experts to try to get this right; to maximize the benefits of AI but minimize the harm that AI might do.

And before you put forward anything, you have to really know the issue because it is a deep and difficult issue to deal with. That is why we are meeting with so many experts right now. It is critical that as we grapple with artificial intelligence, we should seek to invest in American ingenuity, solidify American innovation and leadership, enhance our national security, and be sure it is done in a responsible and transparent matter.

I want to underscore that anything we do regarding AI must be thoroughly bipartisan. That is why I am talking to a good number of my Republican colleagues here in the Senate. We have to be clear-eyed about the pros and cons of this technology. This is not an ideological issue, but it is a very important issue; and I hope both parties will come together on it.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, it was another productive week here on the Senate floor when it comes to judges. By the end of today, the Senate will have confirmed another six highly qualified judicial nominees to lifetime appointments on the Federal bench this week—five District judges and one circuit court, all with bipartisan support. I thank my colleagues on both sides for their cooperation.

Confirming highly qualified, diverse judges has been one of the Senate Democrats’ highest priorities the moment we entered the majority. This was a very good week in that regard.

But we are by no means done. You can be sure that confirming judges and