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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, a Senator from the State of Connecticut.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray. Eternal God, known to us in countless ways and times without number, we turn to You, that in Your light we might see light. Lord, illuminate the minds of our lawmakers regarding how to solve the difficult problems of our Nation and world.

As our Senators become aware of Your presence, may their lives experience the splendor and strength that You alone can give. Help them to remember that You are still their best help in the time of trouble. Send them forth to face this day armed with a faith that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe.

We pray in Your powerful 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 10, 2023.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, a Senator from the State of Connecticut, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL 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 L. Felice Gorordo, of Florida, to be United States Alternate Executive Director of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for a term of two years.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first thing this morning, on a happy note, I join my fellow Senators in welcoming back our dear friend and esteemed colleague DIANNE FEINSTEIN. It is so good to see her back here at the Senate, ready to get back to work.

I have been in touch with Senator FEINSTEIN over the past few weeks, and I can report she is exactly where she wants to be, ready to do the thing she loves most: serving the people of California.

So, Senator FEINSTEIN, we are so happy to see you. Welcome back.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. President, now, on default, yesterday afternoon, I met with President Biden, Speaker MCCARTHY, Leader MCCONNELL, and Leader JEFFRIES at the White House to discuss how we can take default off the table while making separate progress on an annual budget.

There was bad news and good news coming out of yesterday's White House meeting. The bad news: Speaker MCCARTHY refused—absolutely refused—to take default off the table. He was the only holdout during yesterday's meeting.

President Biden said that, no matter what, default should be taken off the table. Leader JEFFRIES said default is off the table. I committed to taking default off the table. Even Leader MCCONNELL said unequivocally that, no matter what, the United States will not default.

But Speaker MCCARTHY—Speaker MCCARTHY alone—refused to take the threat of catastrophic default off the table. I asked him pointedly if he would join us, but, during yesterday's meeting, he was the sole holdout.

Instead of taking default off the table, Speaker MCCARTHY is taking default hostage. If anyone wonders what the biggest problem for avoiding default right now is, it is Speaker MCCARTHY insisting he will exploit default to push a hard-right agenda. Speaker MCCARTHY realizes his hard-right agenda would never become law on its own because the American people are so opposed. So, instead, he is holding the country hostage to default. It is dangerous. It is reckless.

Avoiding default should not be contingent on passing the GOP's hard-

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



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right, partisan agenda, and the American people overwhelmingly agree. A recent Washington Post-ABC poll found that when Americans were asked if debt limit and Federal spending should be handled separately or together, 58 percent of Americans believe they should be handled separately, just as we are saying, just as President Biden is saying. Only 26 percent of Americans say they should be linked, as Speaker McCARTHY is proposing to do.

Even 46 percent of Republicans said it should be handled separately. A plurality of Republicans, 46 to 40, is against what McCARTHY is doing by tying the two together. They realize—Americans realize—how dangerous this is.

So, again, avoiding default should not be contingent on passing the GOP's hard-right agenda—certainly, not one that will make drastic cuts to veterans, to healthcare services, run a buzz saw through Federal law enforcement, and abandon our seniors and working families.

What is more, the GOP's extremist bill is riddled with unrelated hard-right policies. It would gut rules for corporations, hollow out environmental law, and cut healthcare for millions of our Nation's most vulnerable.

The cherry on top—not much of a cherry, a sour cherry—MAGA Republicans want to undo Democrats' marquee legislation to invest in America, advance energy security, and reduce the deficit. That is the agenda Speaker McCARTHY believes is worth threatening default.

Now the good news: The good news is that President Biden has asked the four leaders and our teams to sit down and begin talking about where we can agree on budget and appropriations. Our staffs will be having conversations beginning today that are part of the regular appropriations process.

Now, Speaker McCARTHY will have plenty of say over the budget in the appropriations process. That is the proper place to have these debates, not during conversations about the full faith and credit of the United States.

When President Trump was in office and I was minority leader, I hated the Trump tax cuts on the rich and what it did to my State and my country. I could have easily said: I am holding default hostage unless we repeal the Trump tax cuts, unless we undo the Republicans' signature issue.

But, of course, I didn't do that because I knew the consequences of default would be too severe.

But Speaker McCARTHY is doing the same thing. He is taking our signature issue—one of the leading ones, the IRA—and holding it hostage, saying he is tying it to default.

So, again, Speaker McCARTHY must commit to taking default off the table, and we will continue to have a separate conversation with Republicans about the budget. And, as I said and as everyone knows, the Speaker has plenty of

say over the appropriations process. He won't be left out.

And if the Speaker wants to be honest, by the way, about the drivers of debt, he should take a cold, hard look at the damage caused by Republican tax cuts.

Next week, the Senate Budget Committee, led by Chairman WHITEHOUSE, will hold a hearing focused precisely on how GOP cuts have been primarily responsible for increasing the debt-to-GDP ratio. I thank Chairman WHITEHOUSE and members of the committee for their continued work on exposing the GOP's destructive policies. The committee will make it clear that much of the debt came at the insistence of a Republican President, the Republican Senators, the Republican House Members, but only now, with a Democratic President, does McCARTHY do this awful, awful, dangerous gambit of holding default hostage.

I urge the Speaker and my Republican colleagues to come to their senses about avoiding default.

Mr. Speaker, you are standing alone in that meeting. Take the needless, reckless threat of default off the table. Time is of the essence, and there is nothing stopping us from coming together in a bipartisan way, as we regularly have, to ensure that America can continue to pay its bills.

MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. President, on military holds, the senior Senator from Alabama, Senator TUBERVILLE, is continuing his dangerous and reckless hold of hundreds of routine, nonpolitical promotions of senior military officers.

This morning, Senator WARREN, Senator REED, and I released a new letter from Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin detailing how the Senator from Alabama's blanket holds pose a clear risk to our military readiness and directly impact and hurt military families. And since these are general officers, they have spent decades—their and their families—serving our country.

Secretary Austin's letter confirms what Democrats have been saying for weeks: Senator TUBERVILLE's indefinite hold on the confirmation of our general and flag officers is reckless, unprecedented, and harmful to our military's readiness and sends the wrong message to our partners and allies.

In the letter, Secretary Austin warned that a prolonged blanket hold is creating unnecessary uncertainty in the chain of command that "diminishes our global standing as the strongest military in the world."

Let me say that again; it is so striking. The Senator from Alabama's blanket hold is creating unnecessary uncertainty that "diminishes our global standing as the strongest military in the world."

Secretary Austin's letter also laid out how the Senator from Alabama's hold is also harming our military families, preventing children from starting new schools, and spouses from starting

new jobs. That is shameful—hurting these generals' and admirals' families in this unique attempt to try and get his way, which will not happen.

Finally, Secretary Austin's letter highlighted that, over the next several months, there will be hundreds more promotions requiring Senate confirmation, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Staff of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, Commander of U.S. Cyber Command, Director of the National Security Agency, and so much more. These are just some of the positions at risk of delay if the Senator from Alabama keeps his reckless holds.

Secretary Austin's letter follows a letter, last week, from seven—seven—former Secretaries of Defense, Democrat and Republican, who served under Democrat and Republican Presidents, stating that blanket holds are both "harming military readiness and risks damaging U.S. national security."

And let's be clear-eyed about why the Senator from Alabama is carrying out this reckless act. He is doing it to advance the extreme MAGA Republican agenda. He is doing it because he fundamentally doesn't believe women have the right to make their own choice.

I hope Senate Republicans read Secretary Austin's letter, as well as the letter from the seven former Secretaries of Defense, and prevail on the Senator from Alabama to end this dangerous blockade and get our military operating to its full capacity. Destroying a Senate process that has been apolitical and pro forma throughout history should not fall victim to MAGA Republican politics.

I thank Senators WARREN and REED for continuing to bring attention to this issue.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

DEBT CEILING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I was glad to attend yesterday's White House meeting in solidarity with Speaker McCARTHY. Unlike the White House, the Speaker has been handling the debt limit in a responsible fashion.

Speaker McCARTHY and House Republicans have passed the only legislation currently in existence that prevents default. He spent months waiting for President Biden to come to the table. But the White House has wasted 3 months—3 months wasted. The President of the United States has been MIA.

So let's hope yesterday was the start of the administration accepting the reality of our situation. Everybody knows there is only one way to defuse the looming crisis, the normal and routine thing—spending negotiations between the President and the Speaker.

The American people voted for divided government. President Biden refusing to compromise is really not an