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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.

Eternal God, we praise You for the marvelous things You have done throughout our Nation's history. Thoughts about Your mighty deeds continue to fill us with joy.

Lord, in these difficult times, we continue to trust You to guide our Nation toward Your desired destination. Surround this Nation we love with the shield of Your divine favor as You execute judgment from Your throne.

Lord, continue to remind our lawmakers that they are accountable to You. Use them for Your glory as they seek to ensure that Your will is done on Earth even as it is done in Heaven. Do for us all immeasurably, abundantly, above all that we can ask or imagine, according to Your power working in and through us.

We pray in Your merciful 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, July 18, 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 Rachel Bloomekatz, of Ohio, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Sixth Circuit.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will take the first procedural step to begin consideration of our annual Defense bill.

For more than six decades, Democrats and Republicans have worked in good faith to pass the NDAA. This

year's Defense authorization bill is a prime example of how Senate D's and R's can work constructively to provide our Nation's defense, take care of our servicemembers and DOD civilians, and make the investments necessary to innovate and build up our military intelligence capabilities.

I hope we can have an open and constructive amendment process for the NDAA, without needless delay or dilatory tactics. I certainly hope we do not see the kind of controversy that severely hindered the NDAA process over in the House. Both sides should defeat potentially toxic amendments and refrain from delaying the NDAA's passage.

So far, we have thankfully avoided all of that. Over the weekend, nearly all the committees across the Senate worked around the clock on a substitute, with a managers' package that has 51 amendments—21 from Republicans, 21 from Democrats, and 9 bipartisan. We have had many great amendments. This is a good start, and we are working toward a second managers' package with even more priorities for Democrats and Republicans.

I want to thank Chairman REED, Ranking Member WICKER, all the other chairs and rankers, and all of my colleagues and the staff who worked long and hard over the weekend for their good work on this bill.

There are a few items that are in the bill that deserve some attention, and, in the largeness of the bill, I would like to highlight them. I want to highlight a few items added to the managers' package that are very important and bode well for our country's future, particularly on AI, on outcompeting the Chinese Government, and on tackling our Nation's fentanyl crisis.

First, I am pleased that the managers' package includes an amendment I worked on with Senators ROUNDS, YOUNG, and HEINRICH that takes some early initial steps on AI legislation, the first steps this body is taking in a

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



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while. The Senate has already done important preliminary work to bring ourselves up to speed on this issue, but the NDAA will be the Senate's first opportunity this year to pass real AI legislation.

My AI amendment includes provisions that will boost AI oversight within the national security space, including an increase in data sharing within the DOD, new risk studies to examine explainability and similar issues, and it provides for "bug bounty programs" that will help sniff out vulnerability in AI systems used by the DOD.

This year, our first managers' package also makes a critical down payment on the Senate's efforts to outcompete the Chinese Government. We have over a dozen amendments related to our ongoing competition with the Chinese Government, including measures that make progress on the AUKUS defense cooperation agreement between the United States, the UK, and Australia. Senator MENENDEZ and I wanted more, but we have a good compromise in the bill, and I hope we can add more in the amendment process.

We have provisions to strengthen our partnership with Taiwan, boost the development of quantum information technologies, and strengthen the United States' position in the Indo-Pacific region, to name a few.

As you know, we are working on a bipartisan China competition package that will deal with the excesses and wrongs of the Chinese Government. But this, in the DOD bill, is a good first start.

And I also want to praise my colleagues TIM SCOTT and SHERROD BROWN for their work to combat our Nation's fentanyl crisis. This is one of the most devastating health crises happening in our country.

In 2021, the DEA, the Drug Enforcement Agency, seized enough fentanyl to give every single American a lethal dose—every single American. A lot of blame for this crisis lies at the feet of the chemical suppliers located in China that operate with little or no accountability, which represent the bedrock of the international fentanyl supply chain.

I felt this is very important that we do more to stop the scourge of fentanyl from coming into our country. So I pushed very hard to get this amendment in the managers' package, and I am glad it was—championed, as I said, and passed in the Banking Committee, by Chairman BROWN and Ranking Member SCOTT. It declares the international trafficking of fentanyl a national emergency and adds teeth and potential sanctions to the administration's ability to hold wrongdoers accountable. The ability to declare this a national emergency gives the President broader powers and allows him to do more to stop the flow of these precursor chemicals coming from China and other countries. The bill was passed unanimously, I am proud to say, by the Banking Committee—another

great example of regular order here in the Senate.

Finally, I am pleased the NDAA will include my amendment on increasing transparency on UAPs, Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena. UAPs generate a lot of curiosity from many Americans, and with that curiosity, sometimes comes misinformation. My amendment will require the National Archives and Records Administration to create a collection of records from across government Agencies that can be declassified for the public's use, similar to the approach used in 1992 with the J.F.K. Assassination Records Collection Act. These records will carry a presumption of immediate disclosure, which means they can only be made classified with good reason.

I thank my colleagues who worked with me on this legislation—Senators ROUNDS, RUBIO, HEINRICH, GILLIBRAND, and YOUNG—for their partnership on this amendment. And as many know, my mentor and dear friend whom I miss so much, Harry Reid, was passionate about this issue, and so were Senators Stevens and Inouye. So I am glad we could get this into the managers' amendment.

For these and many other reasons, I look forward to beginning floor consideration of the NDAA bill today. The four things I mentioned—dealing with fentanyl, dealing with competition with China, dealing with AI, and making public the UAP phenomena and what we know about them in an unclassified way—are all important additions to the Defense bill. I am glad we added them in.

I thank both sides for their good work, and I hope we can pass this important bill without needless delay or controversy.

#### FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Mr. President, on the Freedom to Vote Act, in just a few minutes, I will be joining a group of my Democratic colleagues to mark the reintroduction of the Freedom to Vote Act.

The Freedom to Vote Act rests on a simple yet fundamental principle: All Americans, no matter where they live, should have the freedom to vote without fear of discrimination.

Our bill will set basic standards for Americans to vote safely and securely and help instill confidence that our Nation's elections are free and fair.

I want to thank Senators KLOBUCHAR, KAINE, and WARNOCK for their good work on putting this bill together, as well as my House colleagues, led by Leader JEFFRIES.

While Democrats are actively working to expand access to the ballot box, MAGA Republicans in the House, unfortunately, are doing exactly the opposite. Last week, House Republicans introduced and advanced through committee the most restrictive voting rights package we have seen in decades. The Republican package would make voting harder for millions of Americans by creating more barriers to the ballot box, including new obstacles

to voter registration and mail-in voting.

The Republican package would allow the scourge of dark money to fester in our politics by loosening campaign finance safeguards and empowering wealthy, wealthy donors.

Let me be clear. Let me be very clear. Democrats will never allow this Republican package to become law and, instead, will focus our efforts on commonsense, real voting rights legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, later today, the Senate will confirm Rachel Bloomekatz to serve as circuit court judge for the Sixth Circuit. A graduate of Harvard and UCLA Law, Ms. Bloomekatz is an accomplished litigator who has dedicated her career to the pursuit of equal justice for all.

I want to note, Mr. President, that with the Bloomekatz confirmation, the Senate will have confirmed 36 circuit court judges to lifetime appointments under President Biden, including 27 women. These appointments are significant because the lion's share of all Federal cases never actually make it to the Supreme Court and are, instead, resolved at the circuit court level. Senate Democrats have prioritized filling these vacancies with highly qualified nominees who reflect the diversity and dynamism of our country. That is the best way to restore trust in our courts, so sorely needed today.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The 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.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will vote to begin consideration of this year's National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA is our most significant opportunity to set priorities for competition with adversaries like China and Russia.

It is our chance to keep the Biden administration focused on critical missions, like rebuilding America's defense industrial base, instead of the woke partisan agenda of political appointees. It is our time to lay the groundwork of robust investments in hard power.

For 62 straight years, from the thick of the Cold War through the Global War on Terror, the Senate has used the NDAA to match tailored solutions to evolving national security challenges.

This year is no different. Ranking Member WICKER, Chairman REED, and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee considered 445 amendments