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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Rev. Dr. Richard Gibbons of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, SC.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us join our hearts and minds together as we pray.

Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, in seeking Your presence today, we recognize that You are eternal in nature, infinite in love, holy in every aspect of Your being, yet immanent in grace.

Today, we ask that You would refresh and renew each Senator, stimulating and sustaining within them nobility of character, focused wisdom, inspired direction, and a profound dependency on You as they seek to serve these United States.

Grant to this upper Chamber the tender touch of Your Holy Spirit, equipping each lawmaker with thoughtful, measured, prescient leadership, capable of prolific solutions equal to the demands of the 21st century.

As Senators and their staff move toward the end of this legislative session and they are weary or perhaps frustrated, nourish within them a unified and energized focus on national priorities, compassionately supporting communities in need, inspiring new generations of civic leaders, and modeling for each one credibility, integrity, and authenticity as we seek to be "one nation under God."

Father, we bring our prayers to You through the Name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. McCONNELL. The Biden administration has been working overtime to sell the American people a fantasy. The President would like working families who struggled under 2 years of soaring inflation to believe their refrain that "Bidenomics is working for America."

The White House Press Secretary declared recently that "people are feeling better about their personal finances." If only that were true. Unfortunately, the American people have too many reasons to believe their financial outlook is worse today—worse—than when the President took office.

According to a survey conducted last month, just 24 percent of voters say the American economy is on the right track; less than a third buy the claim that this administration's policies are bringing costs down for working families; and just 22 percent think inflation is getting any better.

No matter how many ways the administration officials spin the numbers, folks who work for a living and manage a family budget know that Bidenomics has made their lives harder. They know that prices have risen 16.6 percent since the President took office because they feel it every time they pay their bills. Energy prices, for example, are 38 percent higher than

they were in January of 2021, and groceries are 20 percent more expensive.

In Washington State, one man reported recently that soaring rent had forced him to move, take on a longer commute, spend more on gas, and put his goal of homeownership on hold.

In Illinois, one woman told a reporter recently that she had paid \$90 for groceries that would feed her family of three for 3 days. They might have to start visiting food pantries. "You have no choice but to sacrifice," she said.

So look at it this way: During the first terms of the last four administrations before this one, year-on-year inflation never cracked 4 percent. Under President Biden, it happened 26 times. To borrow the President's own phrase, that is Bidenomics in action.

As one top Democratic economist put it last year, "This is Biden's inflation and he needs to own it."

So it is fitting that the President finally slapped his name on our current economic situation. He is right to take credit. Working families wouldn't be in this mess if he hadn't spent his first few months in office cramming \$2 trillion in leftwing spending down the throat of our economy. So owning the runaway inflation Washington Democrats helped produce is one thing, but it is about time they focused on fixing it.

PRIME MINISTER GIORGIA MELONI

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on a different matter, tomorrow, Prime Minister Meloni of Italy will visit Washington for a series of meetings. I look forward to welcoming her to the Capitol at an important time for our two countries' friendship and for Italy's role in the transatlantic alliance.

Prime Minister Meloni took office as Europe faced its first large-scale land war in decades and Italy faced the increasing economic vulnerabilities of reliance on China. By all accounts, she has addressed these challenges head-on.

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



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The Prime Minister has repeatedly asserted Italy's commitment to helping Ukraine beat Russian aggression and rebuild its economy. Importantly, like some leaders, she has done so with refreshing clarity to the Italian people about their own country's concrete interest in helping Ukraine defend itself.

Earlier this spring, in an address to the Italian Senate, Prime Minister Meloni summed up the reality. She said:

We are also sending [arms] to the Ukrainians to prevent the possibility of having to use them ourselves one day. We are sending arms to Ukraine also to keep the war far away from the rest of Europe and our home.

Not vaguely defining philanthropy; just cold, hard investments in our own security.

At the NATO summit in Vilnius earlier this month, Italy's leader rightly declared:

Our freedom has a cost. . . . [W]hat is invested in defence comes back tenfold, a hundredfold, in terms of our ability to defend our national interests.

Secretary General Stoltenberg has recognized the Prime Minister's "strong, personal commitment to NATO, [and] to our trans-Atlantic alliance."

And the Italian Government has expressed its intention to accelerate progress toward the alliance's 2-percent defense spending program. I hope and expect to see Italy and all NATO allies meet this goal.

This shift in Italy's approach to defense and security policy reflects what allies have recognized across Europe: that the long holiday from history is over, and their investments and hard power are overdue.

But as Prime Minister Meloni meets with President Biden tomorrow, it is important to remember that our shared interests extend beyond Europe. Italy is rightly concerned about growing instability, terrorism, and migration flows in Africa—yet another area where Russian and Chinese influence has played a corrosive and threatening role. America has a shared interest in keeping pressure on the global terrorist resurgence that has followed the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I am also encouraged that the Italian government is unraveling its involvement with China's so-called Belt and Road Initiative, another indication our European allies are taking steps to protect themselves against China's economic force.

So if we are serious about competition with the PRC, we need to work more closely with allies and partners who share our interest in preserving a world of free and fair trade and secure supply chains.

I am hopeful that President Biden and Prime Minister Meloni have a productive meeting tomorrow. I look forward to discussing our two nations' common challenges and priorities with her directly.

In the meantime, I am hopeful our colleagues will continue to work dili-

gently to provide for common defense and equip America and our allies to meet and deter common threats.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today, the Senate will continue making progress on the NDAA, one of the most important bills of the year and something that for more than six decades has passed with bipartisan support.

Yesterday, we adopted two important amendments to the NDAA, adding to the Senate's work on outcompeting the Chinese Government. Both amendments—one by Senators CORNYN and CASEY and one by Senators ROUNDS and TESTER—passed overwhelmingly, with 91 "yes" votes each. It is not often that 91 Senators can unite on a single measure, let alone two measures. So to see us unite on outcompeting the Chinese Government was an important demonstration that this issue remains broadly bipartisan and something we will continue working on throughout the year.

This morning, we will hold another vote on an amendment by Senators WARNOCK and BUDD halting the harassment of our servicemembers by debt collectors. I hope this will also enjoy broad support.

Last night, we sent out a hotline with a number of additional amendments. I am hopeful we can lock in an agreement soon to begin voting on some of them.

Since last Wednesday, the Senate has voted on eight amendments here on the floor and adopted seven more by voice vote. This is how the process should work.

Finally, I will also keep working with the Republican leader, Chair REED, and Ranking Member WICKER on a second managers' package that will have more accomplishments both sides can embrace, and I appreciate the cooperation and good faith of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

I have said repeatedly that the NDAA is an opportunity for the Senate to show we can work on the biggest issues facing our country through bipartisanship, cooperation, and honest debate. That is what we have seen play out so far this year on the floor—bipartisanship. The NDAA process in this Cham-

ber is a welcome departure from the contentious, chaotic, and partisan race to the bottom we saw in the House.

As I have also said, if we continue embracing bipartisanship, we will finish our work on the NDAA before the start of the August State work period. We wish to finish the NDAA as soon as we can. There is no reason for delay. We aren't quite there yet—there is still some more work to be done—but we are close.

I thank my colleagues for their cooperation, and the Senate will continue working on the NDAA until the job is done.

(Mr. BENNET assumed the Chair.)

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on the IRA anniversary—when we passed the Inflation Reduction Act last year, I said here on the floor that it would endure as one of the defining legislative feats of the 21st century. Just 1 year later, the IRA is paying huge dividends for the American people, for our economy, and for our environment.

The Republicans claimed the IRA would make inflation worse. One of our Republican colleagues claimed the IRA would cut jobs and fuel inflation. But since we passed the IRA, inflation has gone not up but down. We are lowering costs day by day for the American people with the passage of this legislation. Inflation is now half of what it was a few years ago.

Across the board, costs are coming down for the American family. For the first time ever, we made it possible for Medicare to negotiate the price of prescription drugs, helping Americans save at the pharmacy. Because of the IRA, vaccines are free for Medicare beneficiaries, and a cap on out-of-pocket drug spending—no senior will have to pay more than \$2,000 a year for drugs—is coming very soon.

What a relief for people, lowering costs on one of the things that bothered them the most—the high cost of prescription drugs. That is what we Democrats are doing, while over there in the House, the Republicans are just racing to the bottom.

We also capped the price of insulin for seniors on Medicare to \$35 a month, spurring major companies like Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk to follow suit. Millions of people who buy their health insurance on the ACA exchanges are now saving hundreds—hundreds—of dollars each month.

Indeed, we are lowering costs. That is what we promised to do.

On top of these savings, I also said the Inflation Reduction Act would kick-start the era of affordable clean energy and create countless good-paying, green jobs. The Inflation Reduction Act has done just that too.

From the new wind turbine facilities in New York to the solar facilities in Arizona, the IRA is paving the way for America to lead in clean energy manufacturing. Eighty new clean energy