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Senate

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.

We pause at the convening of this Senate session, Eternal God, to acknowledge our total dependence upon You. We are aware of the fragile and temporary nature of our earthly pilgrimage and look to You, the changeless one, to guide our steps. From You we borrow our heartbeats and because of You we live and move and have our being.

Guide our lawmakers today with more than human wisdom. Give them the ability to solve the difficult problems of these turbulent days. Break in and through their human efforts, empowering them to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

We pray in Your sacred 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, September 12, 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 session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Tanya J. Bradsher, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INSIGHT FORUM

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, for Congress to legislate on artificial intelligence is for to us engage in one of the most complex and important subjects Congress has ever faced. In just a few years, artificial intelligence has grown in complexity, speed, and power, doing things even experts didn't think possible so soon.

In past situations, when subjects like this that are so complex and difficult have come forward, too many Congresses have tended to behave reactively or have favored delaying action until it is too late. But on AI, we can't behave like ostriches and stick our heads in the sand. It will affect just about every aspect of society in major ways, both positive and negative, and on an issue this wide-ranging and important, we must make every good-faith effort to act.

Congress must recognize two things; that this effort must be bipartisan and that we need outside help if we want to write effective AI policies. We need help, of course, from developers and experts who build AI systems, but we also need help from critics who can make sure the liabilities of AI are minimized by guardrails. Those critics will come from two places, like from outside the industry, such as labor and civil rights and the creative community, but we also need critics from inside the industry as well who may know, in a very technical sense, how to minimize the dangers.

That is why tomorrow will be so important. Tomorrow morning, I will convene, with Senators ROUNDS and HEINRICH and YOUNG, the first of a series of AI Insight Forums to bring leaders from inside and outside the industry to debate Congress's role in regulating AI.

We will have a balanced and diverse group at the table, not just those from tech but AI experts and ethicists who have spent years researching and advancing the technology. We will also have organizations outside the industry representing labor and civil rights, the world of academia and defense, and so much more—all of these groups together in one room, talking about how and why Congress must act, what questions to ask, and how to build a consensus for SAFE innovation. That is, of course, what we have called our suggestion because AI innovation must be our North Star in all we do.

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



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And I am talking about innovation in both a transformational sense—the kind of innovation that unlocks new cures, improves education, protects our national security, protects our food supply—and sustainable innovation so that we may find new and creative ways to protect against AI's risks and minimize the chances of this technology going off the rails, which would undermine innovation altogether.

The only way we will achieve this goal is by bringing a diverse group of perspectives together, from those who work every day on these systems to those openly critical of many parts of AI and who worry about its effects on workers, on racial and gender bias, and more. So I look forward to tomorrow's conversation, the first of many we will have this fall. I expect we will hear a wide range of views and opinions and lots of dissenting views. That is how it should be.

I want to thank every participant attending tomorrow's forum. Thank you also to Senators ROUNDS and HEINRICH and YOUNG, who helped to organize tomorrow's meeting. And, of course, I want to thank all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle who recognize the urgency of AI.

The Senate is fully engaged on this issue and is ready to do more. Our committees and subcommittees have already held no fewer than nine hearings on AI, with more happening this week, all on issues ranging from national security to human rights, to IP, and more. We need all hands on deck if we want to maximize AI's societal benefits while minimizing its many risks. Tomorrow, we will take the next step in this great undertaking, and I urge all of my colleagues from both sides to attend.

NOMINATION OF JEFFREY IRVINE CUMMINGS

On nominations, Mr. President, today, the Senate will continue the business of confirming more judicial nominees. We will vote this afternoon to confirm Jeffrey Cummings of Illinois to serve as district judge for the Northern District of Illinois. Judge Cummings was reported out of committee with a bipartisan vote, and he would be the 104th district court judge that we confirm under President Biden.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, on another matter, after a lot of hard work and compromise by appropriators on both sides—a salute goes to PATTY MURRAY and SUSAN COLLINS—today, the Senate will take up the first procedural vote on a package of three appropriations bills: MILCON-Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, and Transportation-HUD. Each of these bills passed unanimously out of committee, so I hope they will have strong bipartisan support here on the floor.

And I mentioned both Chair MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS. I want to also thank all of the members of the Appropriations Committee for their great work. None of it was easy. They deserve great credit.

The Senate appropriations, thus far, has been the gold standard for good governance. All 12 appropriations bills passed through regular order, with Democratic chairs and Republican ranking members working together to move bills forward.

As the Senate continues the work of funding the government, the House gavels back in today with one very important responsibility: following the Senate's example and working in a bipartisan fashion to prevent a government shutdown. The American people don't want a shutdown. It would undo so much of our progress to lower costs, create millions and millions of jobs, and help our economy recover from the pandemic.

So I, once again, implore the House Republican leadership to reject all-or-nothing tactics, to reject unrealistic expectations, and refuse to cave to the extremist demands we are hearing from 30 or so Members way out on the fringe.

There is only one way we will avoid a costly government shutdown: bipartisanship. It is as simple as that. We have seen bipartisanship work in the Senate, and now the House must follow suit.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this week, the Senate will begin consideration of the first package of full-year appropriations for the coming fiscal year. This is an important milestone and a downpayment on our goal of funding the Federal Government through regular order.

Our progress on this front has been due in large part to the leadership of Senator COLLINS and Senator MURRAY of the Appropriations Committee. For months—months—our colleagues have worked diligently to build consensus and process as many bills as possible with deadlines looming large.

The legislation before us this week is designed to address a trio of important commitments—to America's farmers, to our veterans, and to investing in transportation infrastructure.

Seven percent of American adults are veterans of the Armed Forces. Ten percent of American jobs are supported by agriculture. And our entire economy hinges on safe and efficient airports, roads, bridges, and ports. So it is difficult to overstate the importance of this legislation, but it is especially important that we get it right. To that end, I hope and expect that all Senators will receive ample opportunity to offer amendments for consideration.

Ultimately, our work will need to earn the support of a divided Congress and earn the President's signature. So I am grateful to our colleagues' commitment to regular order appropriations, and I look forward to supporting a sensible step forward in the coming days.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, now on another matter, I have spoken in recent days about the most common arguments deployed against U.S. assistance to the fight against Putin in Ukraine and how they fall short. Today, I would like to address the misconception that America's lethal aid lacks necessary accountability and protections against misuse.

The United States probably has a deeper understanding of how Ukraine is using weapons provided by the United States and our allies than we have had with any other partner nation, period. There are many reasons for this.

First, Ukraine is not Iraq or Afghanistan; it is a modern democracy, firmly committed to integration with the West.

Second, Russia's escalation last year led to a political sea change in how Ukraine treats corruption. Today, corruption and misuse of funds or weapons can mean the death of loved ones or imperil critical Western support.

I am not saying that corruption has vanished. Even in the worst conflicts or most advanced democracies, human nature remains. But the cost calculus has changed, and robust, independent anti-corruption bodies are making a difference.

Third, American diplomats, military officers, and USAID employees have finally returned to Kyiv. Their presence allows for more oversight and accountability of our assistance.

Senators who have visited the American-led headquarters in Germany and seen the professional, multinational effort supporting Ukraine firsthand have come away impressed. They have also been impressed by LTG Tony Aguto, the senior American officer who runs this effort and was confirmed by the Senate last year by a voice vote.

Through these coalition efforts, we have unprecedented insight into how nearly 30 types of Western weapons systems and vehicles are being used by Ukraine, often down to the serial number.

Take for example an American-led effort in Poland that remotely assists Ukrainian units on the frontlines to maintain and prepare various weapons and vehicles. When trouble arises, Ukrainian units have every incentive to share data, photos, and video in real time about the status of their weapons and benefit from engineering solutions we have provided to help maintain and prepare these weapons out in the field.

This is a win-win. The United States gets unprecedented insight into how our weapons are being used—often overused—in combat, which helps us improve and maintain America's own arsenal. U.S. forces also get a unique view into the situation on the battlefield and the challenges Ukrainian forces are facing.

Given his oversight role and regular contact with Ukrainian commanders, I have requested the administration make Lieutenant General Aguto available to brief Senators on these insights.