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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.

O God of us all, who is above all yet in us all, make us ever sensitive to all of the expressions of Your Grace. Lord, thank You for the glory of a sunrise and sunset, for the refreshment of the breezes that invigorate, and for the technicolor in trees, shrubs, sky, and sea. May the challenges of these times never blind us to life's wonders.

Prepare our lawmakers for today's journey. May they strive to stay within the circle of Your will as You guide their steps. Lord, help them to be ready to solve problems, receiving inspiration from the creative power of Your love. Let business be done on Capitol Hill that will address itself to the real issues and not to games. May the work of our Senators become an expression of Your truth, righteousness, and justice.

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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 19, 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 Vernon D. Oliver, of Connecticut, to be United States District Judge for the District of Connecticut.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we are days away from another MAGA government shutdown. Avoiding one will require the House majority to quickly

accept a bipartisan solution. Yet, this week, House Republicans are trying everything but bipartisanship.

Everyone knows that the GOP's proposed CR is a nonstarter here in the Senate. Let me say that again. Everyone knows that the House GOP's proposed CR will not pass the Senate because, instead of even pretending to aim for bipartisanship, this bill had zero—zero—Democratic input. It calls for a crushing 8-percent cut to virtually all nondefense spending—8 percent. The House Republican proposal, drafted and put together by the MAGA hard-right wing is slapdash, reckless, and cruel.

It includes cutting investments to the Social Security Administration, to law enforcement, to nutrition assistance, to K-12 education, to small business, to rural communities, to protections for drinking water, to lifesaving medical research—cancer and other research—and much more.

The American people need to know just how bad this MAGA Republican CR truly is. This slapdash CR would decimate investments in lifesaving research, hollowing out the National Institutes of Health.

This reckless CR would lower public safety, cutting back on drug and food inspection; weakening wildfire prevention; and eliminating law enforcement officers in the Federal Government, weakening our battle against violent crime and the scourge of fentanyl.

And this cruel CR would gut investments in K-12 education, slash resources for suicide support services, upend Tribal investments, and cut loans to small businesses and rural communities.

Slapdash, reckless, cruel—that is the hallmark of this MAGA Republican proposal in the House.

Then there is Ukraine, which the House GOP bill completely abandons. At the very same time that President Zelenskyy comes to the United States to make the case for standing firm

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



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against Putin, the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives is essentially telling him: You are on your own.

Nothing would make Putin happier right now than to see the United States waver in our support for the Ukrainian people. Nothing would make Putin happier. Providing aid is not just a matter of Ukrainian security but of American security, too, because a victorious Putin would be an emboldened Putin. That would make the world less safe for democracy and for America. For MAGA House Republicans to oppose Ukrainian aid is a terrible, dangerous mistake that could come back to haunt U.S. security.

Ukrainian aid could have been an opportunity for bipartisanship, but the hard right—against what, I imagine, is the majority of Republicans in the House—has prevented that from happening, too.

So let me say it again: The House package is slapdash, reckless, and cruel, and everyone knows it has no chance of passing the Senate.

The more time House Republicans waste trying to pass this MAGA wish list, while ignoring chances for real bipartisanship, the greater the odds they will push us into a costly government shutdown.

The last government shutdown lasted 35 days and began when then-President Trump said to me and Speaker PELOSI in the Oval Office: “I am proud to shut down the government.” That is what he said.

In the 2 years that Democrats held the House, the Senate, and the White House, we didn’t have a government shutdown. We didn’t have a debt limit crisis. We didn’t have the kind of chaos that we see when MAGA Republicans seem to control so much of the Republican agenda. And, this year, we have already seen both: a debt limit crisis and a looming shutdown crisis, just months apart.

Only one thing has changed since last year, when there was none of this chaos: a House controlled by MAGA Republicans. They are back to their old ways.

And, of course, former President Trump is trying to add to the crisis—it is typical of what he always does—practically commanding his MAGA House sycophants to “shut down the government if they can’t make an appropriate deal—absolutely.”

This is the problem with MAGA extremism: It is not capable of governing. It is only capable of chaos, and this year, sadly, chaos has reigned in the House.

It doesn’t have to be that way. It doesn’t have to be a MAGA Republican-only bill. It doesn’t have to be the MAGA way or a shutdown. House Republicans have a choice in the matter, between pursuing real chances for bipartisanship and catering to the hard right. Each time, they have chosen to empower the hard right. They have chosen dysfunction and chaos. They have chosen to ignore bipartisanship.

But what was true months ago remains true today: There is no scenario where we avoid a shutdown without bipartisanship. If Democrats tried to do it only our way, there would be no bill. But now Republicans are trying to do it their way; Democrats are not. And there are plenty of Members on both sides of the aisle who, despite our disagreements, would like to give bipartisanship a chance, and that is what the American people would want us to do as well.

We only have a few days left for House Republicans to come to their senses and choose the more fruitful way. I urge them to reject chaos and choose to work with Democrats.

There are real people with real lives at stake here. Hundreds of thousands of Federal workers all across the country could be furloughed. Services that millions of Americans count on could be disrupted. Our communities will be less safe and our fellow Americans suffering from disasters less provided for. Those are a few of the tragic and unnecessary outcomes if the Republicans in the House let the MAGA extreme control their agenda.

The matter is simple. If both sides embrace bipartisanship, a shutdown will be avoided. If House Republicans reject bipartisanship, if the hard right is given license to run the show, a MAGA shutdown will be almost inevitable.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, now on the minibus, while chaos seems to define everything the Republican-controlled House does, here in the Senate we have shown that bipartisanship is key to getting things done, and, tomorrow, Democrats and Republicans will get a chance to make sure that that bipartisanship continues.

Unfortunately, last Thursday, a lone Senator, representing a very small group in this Chamber, tried to undermine the bipartisan appropriations process with procedural hurdles.

Yesterday, my colleague Senator MURRAY, the chair of the Appropriations Committee, moved to get things back on track with a motion to suspend rule XVI and filed cloture on that motion. We will vote on that motion tomorrow. I believe that a clear majority of Senators want to see us continue on the appropriations process. I hope they vote to keep the appropriations process going tomorrow.

Our colleagues on the other side have asked for regular order, and we have worked with them to make sure that that happens, just as it did on the NDAA bill. Our colleagues on the other side have asked for amendments, and we have worked with them to consider amendments. In fact, Senators COLLINS and MURRAY had a list of amendments that was going to go forward with the OK, I believe, of both the minority and majority leaders, until Senator JOHNSON threw the log in the tracks.

Our Republican and Democratic leaders of the Appropriations Committee

have asked to consider appropriations bills on the floor, and it is with their cooperation that these three bills—MILCON-VA, Agriculture, and Transportation-HUD—have been brought to the floor for consideration.

Democrats want to work with our Republican colleagues whenever possible. No one pretends that we don’t have disagreements—we do—but the important part is that, so far, disagreements have not stymied the process. Tomorrow’s vote will be a chance to ensure that we keep that bipartisanship going.

I thank my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, especially Chair MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS, for their excellent work and hope we can see strong support tomorrow to continue the appropriations process here on the floor.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant 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.

CHINA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in the past 2 months, the Chinese Government has reminded the world just how an authoritarian communist state operates.

In July, President Xi announced he had replaced the PRC’s Foreign Minister after the official hadn’t been seen in public in a month. Then, the senior official responsible for the PLA strategic missile force, who hadn’t been seen for even longer, was replaced. And then the Chinese Defense Minister went missing for weeks before Beijing announced he had been fired and detained for investigation. The purge of senior leaders, growing economic volatility, bellicose foreign policy—these are concerning developments in a country with a reputation for repression at home and belligerence abroad.

China’s neighbors and global powers alike are increasingly skeptical of official economic and budget numbers from a dictatorship that suppresses free speech, mocks the rule of law, and simply disappears its senior leaders—and rightly so.

One thing has long been certain: The PRC is arming itself at an alarming rate. Recent estimates suggest China spends close to \$700 billion per year on defense. That is concerning for a number of reasons. First, a much larger percentage of China’s defense budget than ours goes to modernization and capabilities. Further, since Chinese geostrategic ambitions—for now at least—are focused primarily on challenging the status quo in its immediate region, the PRC doesn’t face the resource constraints that the United