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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Our guest Chaplain, Rabbi Peter S. Berg, of The Temple, Atlanta, GA, will offer the opening prayer.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, may Your Name be invoked only to inspire and to unify our country but never to divide it.

We ask Your blessings upon our U.S. Senators and all who serve this body, that today and every day, they lead wisely and with civility, working together for our common good.

Tonight, Jews all around the world will light the sixth candle of Hanukkah. We will do so in a world that is teeming with xenophobia and hatred. Let us never forget that this is a time of year where we all bring light and hope to despair and to darkness.

Be with us now, God. Make us strong to do Your will. Help us to understand and proclaim the truth that not by might and not by power, but by our spirit alone can all of us prevail. Let injustice and oppression cease, hatred and cruelty and wrong pass away.

Bless, O God, the lights of this season. May they shine their radiance in this historic Chamber. They kindle within us the flame of faith and of zeal that, like the Maccabees of old, we bravely battle for Your cause.

May our Senators be blessed today to use their God-given light to chase away the darkness. Let us resolve to do our share to hasten the day by taking a true measure of life, by learning to face life, to judge the challenges that are set before us with realism, with courage, and with understanding.

These things we ask in Your Name, O God, until the radiance of peace and righteousness for all of God's children shines to the ends of the Earth. 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, December 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.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Harry Coker, Jr., of Kansas, to be National Cyber Director.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. OSSOFF. Mr. President, thank you for the recognition this morning.

It is a pleasure to be with you, Mr. President, here this morning as we, together, represent the State of Georgia, an obligation that we both cherish, an obligation I cherish sharing with you. And it is a pleasure to be with you here, Mr. President, this morning to open the Senate, having heard such a moving prayer and such words of wisdom from Rabbi Peter Berg of The Temple in Atlanta, GA.

Rabbi, on behalf of the U.S. Senate, we thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule tending to your congregation and providing light and inspiration to our constituents in Georgia to provide such wisdom and a blessing to those of us here in this Chamber who labor each day to do the work of the people and to advance the interests of the United States.

I thank you, Rabbi Berg, for your leadership at this moment of trial for Jewish Americans in Georgia, across the country, and for Jews around the world at this moment that frays the bonds between faith communities. I thank you for your interfaith leadership, for your consistent calls for solidarity, compassion, and mutual love and respect between all people of all faiths.

It is particularly fitting, Rabbi, that you joined us during Hanukkah. And, Mr. President, to have Rabbi Berg here as we approach the sixth night, during this moment when so many Jews feel such anxiety and fear amidst the overt expression of anti-Semitism such as we have not seen for a generation, we draw upon the Hanukkah story—one of endurance and resilience and survival—for inspiration, a story that can inspire all people of all faiths.

Finally, Mr. President, I would note, as you and I together represent the State of Georgia—for the first time in

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its history represented by a Black man and a Jew—that to have Rabbi Berg here representing The Temple's civil rights commitments in history—The Temple, which in 1958, as you know, Mr. President, was bombed by White supremacists in an attempt at vengeance for Rabbi Jacob Rothschild's alliance with civil rights leaders and Dr. King in the American South—it is particularly powerful to have Rabbi Berg here with us this morning.

He leads, of course, the congregation where I was bar mitzvahed. We are grateful for Rabbi Berg's spiritual leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, it is my honor and joy to join you in welcoming our good friend Rabbi Peter Berg to the U.S. Senate today.

Rabbi Berg, thank you so very much for your inspiring prayer. It lifts, before all of us, our highest ideals and reminds us of the important work that we are called to do together.

It is always great to see you. As I often say, every Baptist preacher needs a rabbi. And Peter Berg is not only the rabbi at The Temple; he is my rabbi. And he is my friend.

For more than 15 years, Rabbi Berg has led The Temple, Atlanta's largest and one of its most historic synagogues. Its history is so very important not just for Atlanta's Jewish community but for my own church, the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Dr. King served and, indeed, for the entire city of Atlanta. You are such an important leader in our country.

For more than 50 years, Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, led by Dr. King, has had a special relationship with The Temple. After Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize, some folks in Atlanta didn't want to celebrate it. They weren't certain that that was worthy of recognition. But it was Rabbi Jacob Rothschild, The Temple's then-senior rabbi and a champion for civil rights himself, who helped to bring the city together to commemorate that important moment in the movement for Georgians. It was an interracial dinner, and that, in and of itself, was a movement forward at a time of deep divisions and some of the darkest hours of our country.

And the special relationship has sustained to the present day, where Rabbi Peter Berg, who is the fifth senior rabbi in The Temple's history, and I, the fifth senior pastor in the history of Ebenezer Baptist Church, have carried on that tradition of ecumenical, spiritual friendship. And that friendship is genuine.

As you know, Rabbi, we have done a lot of important work together, and I am so grateful for the long history of friendship between our two congregations. This past March, I was honored to have you to serve as the guest preacher for Ebenezer's 138th anniversary, and you preached with all the fire of any Baptist preacher I know.

In fact, every year, our congregations come together to observe the MLK holiday, and we worship and we work together as one beloved community.

But beyond the doors of your congregation, Rabbi Berg has been a stalwart champion for change in Georgia. He and I have served together on too many occasions to count—from the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students to Faith in Public Life, Faith Forces Against Gun Violence, the Georgia Interfaith Public Policy Center; our work together addressing the issue of mass incarceration in our country; standing up against bigotry, racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia. Wherever hatred rears its ugly head, we have spoken time and time again together, as one voice. And because of that intersection of faith and justice, you will see Rabbi Berg and you will hear his voice time and time again.

We don't have enough time for me to run through all of Rabbi Berg's accolades, of which there are many. Time and time again, he has been recognized as one of the most influential spiritual leaders in our State and in our Nation.

So on behalf of the State of Georgia, I join Senator OSSOFF in uplifting our appreciation for Rabbi Berg, who has been a source of counsel and a partner in making what Congressman Lewis called "good trouble."

And so during this season of Hanukkah and during this season of Advent, I lift the words of Isaiah, who said that "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

May our lights continue to shine in this world.

Rabbi Berg, I am so blessed to have you as a spiritual brother.

With that, I yield floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

UKRAINE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, earlier this morning, Senator MCCONNELL and I welcomed Ukrainian President Zelenskyy to the U.S. Senate, his third visit to the U.S. Capitol. It was a very powerful, enlightening, and positive meeting.

President Zelenskyy's message was direct: Ukraine will win the war against Russia if more aid is approved. But his message to the contrary was also true: If no more aid is approved, Putin will win.

It is that simple. Ukraine, the West, the U.S. strength as a credible ally are all hanging in the balance right now. Also, President Zelenskyy urged that we need to pass this aid quickly because if we don't pass it quickly, it will send a signal to the whole world that we are abandoning Ukraine and could start a snowball cascading to Ukraine's detriment and to our detriment.

If Ukraine falls, it will be a historic and colossal tragedy. If Russia is victorious, future generations will remember this as a moment of shame for the

West, for the United States, and for those in the Senate who sought to block it.

This is a moment when a friend in need called on our help. We must rise to the occasion. If we abandon Ukraine to the dark forces of autocracy, we will all pay a price. The price won't be tomorrow, meaning next week, but it will be in the months and years ahead but will be an awful price. And everyone who voted against aid to Ukraine will have to live with it.

This is a time for Republicans to be serious about reaching an agreement. "Serious" is the word we are saying to our Republican colleagues. It is not a time for one side to demand maximalist, fringe policies that they know are unrealistic and then say "our way or the highway."

If our Republican colleagues want an agreement on the border, they must meet us at the middle. They need to show us they are serious. So far, when they just ask for H.R. 2—or something like it—they are not showing seriousness.

There are two words to describe Democrats right now. Just like the Republican word should be they need to be "serious," the two words that describe Democrats right now: "still trying." We are still trying to find a good-faith compromise with Republicans, but they must do the same.

Now, last night, I got on the phone with Speaker JOHNSON and urged him to keep the House in session to give the supplemental a chance to come together. I told him that the House should stay in session because over the past 24 hours, I have been alarmed to see some of the same Republicans in the House—and now a good number in the Senate—who had previously demanded action on the border are now suggesting there is no urgency to act before Christmas. After months of saying the border is a crisis, that we must get something done yesterday, many Republicans now seemingly prefer to go home rather than pass a bill.

If Republicans are serious about getting something done on the border, then why are so many of them in such a hurry to leave for the winter break? Has the border simply been an excuse to kill funding for Ukraine?

By Republicans being unwilling to budge on H.R. 2 and getting ready to rush out of town, unfortunately, it may seem the case that these are both excuses, and they really want to kill funding for Ukraine and never had any intention of passing it. That is not true of all Republicans but too many—enough simply to hold us up right now from getting something done.

Do Republicans not realize how thrilled Putin must be right now seeing the gridlock? Russian state TV is even running segments on how great it is for Russia that Congress can't pass Ukraine funding.

Think about that. Putin's allies on Russian state TV are running segments right now on how great it is for Russia that aid to Ukraine is stalled.