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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at 2 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2023

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a Senator from the State of Illinois.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You have told us that in every circumstance we should give thanks. Today, we pause to thank You for the challenge of making responsible decisions.

Lord, we are grateful for the unfolding of Your prevailing providence and for Your love that sustains us through life's seasons. We express gratitude for the eternal vigilance our lawmakers are willing to pay for the price of freedom.

Accept our thanksgiving also for Your promise in Matthew 28:20 that You will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Lord of all, to You we raise this our prayer of grateful praise.

We pray in Your marvelous 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, December 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 TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a Senator from the State of Illinois, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. DUCKWORTH 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 Martin O'Malley, of Maryland, to be Commissioner of Social Security for the remainder of the term expiring January 19, 2025.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, over the past week, Democrats and Republicans have made important progress toward an agreement on the national security supplemental. While the job is not finished, I am confident we are headed in the right direction.

I want to thank all the Members and staff from Senate Democrats, Senate Republicans, and the White House who worked through the weekend to get us closer to an agreement. I can imagine that they are tired after working non-stop, coming into the office early in the morning and working furiously into the evenings. With the holidays around the corner, they are sacrificing time with family, with their kids, and have to put travel plans on hold to get this done.

I salute my colleagues and staff for their excellent work, and I am encouraged by the progress we made over the weekend—significant progress—and I urge them to keep going.

Now, we all know this is extremely difficult work—among the most difficult things we have done in recent

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



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memory. Everyone knows that something should be done to fix our broken immigration system, but we can't do so by compromising our values. Finding the middle ground is exceptionally hard, and both sides must accept that they will have to make concessions. And it is going to take some more time to get it done. But we must succeed. Democrats remain committed to working with our Republican counterparts to reach an agreement.

As these negotiations continue off the floor, we must also finish the job on confirming military promotions and other nominees. In past years, these four-star generals would have been swiftly appointed to their posts. But this year, one Senator—the Senator from Alabama—has broken decades of bipartisan tradition by placing blanket holds on these highly qualified and dedicated nominees.

While I am glad the Senator has relinquished his holds, I am disappointed it has taken this long, and we will still need to confirm the last few of these nominees before the end of the week.

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. Madam 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 SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, over the weekend, our colleagues continued to make progress toward an agreement on border security. I am especially grateful to Senator LANKFORD for stewarding Senate Republicans' efforts to produce meaningful policy changes, fix our broken asylum system, and secure the southern border.

Addressing the border crisis at home is a fundamental part of legislation that will help America meet each of the most glaring national security challenges we face around the world. And there are a number of significant issues our colleagues are still working to resolve.

The effects of years of failed border enforcement are compounded. Border security policy is complex. And our colleagues at the negotiating table are clear-eyed about the fact that getting this agreement right and producing legislative text is going to require some time.

Senate Republicans will not make up for others showing up late to the table by waving our responsibility to carefully negotiate and review any agreement before voting on it. I am encouraged by our colleagues' commitment to keep making steady progress in negotiations over the coming week and beyond.

America is facing a never-before-seen border crisis. An imperialist thug is

trying to redraw the map of Europe. A repressive authoritarian state is preparing to put more of the Indo-Pacific under its control. And the world's largest state sponsor of terror is showing us it is as determined as ever to kill American servicemembers and disrupt global commerce. There is simply no room for falling short here. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

IRAN

Madam President, the weekend brought even more glaring evidence that Iran and its terrorist proxies feel emboldened to escalate their attacks in the Middle East.

In the past 2 months, the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have reportedly used lethal force and brazen attacks against military and commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea.

Just 2 days ago, the destroyer USS *Carney* engaged and destroyed at least 14 terrorist drones. U.S. Navy vessels have thus far succeeded in defending against these attacks. But the risk of American casualties is growing. Air defense is not perfect, and it doesn't come cheap. The Navy is having to use expensive interceptors to bring down the low-cost suicide drones. Commercial vessels have been less fortunate. Several ships have been hijacked or struck by drones and anti-ship missiles in recent weeks, including two strikes just today.

This violence represents a grave and immediate economic threat. Iran's network of terrorists is making an artery that carries nearly 12 percent of global trade essentially inoperable. In recent days, four of the world's five largest shipping companies have suspended operations in the Red Sea. The carriers who account for more than half of maritime container traffic are opting to add weeks to transit times and an untold extra fuel costs to avoid transit terrorist attack. And supply chains everywhere are bracing for the effects.

Make no mistake, an undeterred adversary is laying down a direct challenge to American leadership, and the world is watching to see if we rise to meet it the way we have met countless times.

Protecting the freedom of navigation is an essential American interest because maritime commerce has been central to our Nation's economy from the very beginning.

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps waged their first successful expeditionary campaign against the Barbary pirates in order to protect American shipping. The "shores of Tripoli" are immortalized in the Marine Corps hymn. And freedom of navigation operations have been an essential part of U.S. power projection ever since.

In recent years, these operations have been especially important in the Indo-Pacific, where China increasingly threatens sealanes. But let's be clear: If America conducts freedom of navigation operations as peacetime exercises but fails to actually protect this freedom from immediate realtime threats,

then we are just playacting as a global superpower.

What is happening right now in the Red Sea isn't an exercise. It is a blaring siren that deterrence has failed. The United States and our allies and partners have a stake in defending the freedom of navigation. If we fail to take more serious action against Iran-backed Houthi terrorists, we will embolden other aggressors to challenge this freedom everywhere and risk major consequences.

Needless to say, our greatest strategic adversary and systemic rival is watching especially closely how we respond to this brazen challenge.

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. CARDIN. Madam 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.

NOMINATION OF MARTIN O'MALLEY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I rise in strong support of the nomination of former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley to be the next Commissioner of the Social Security Administration.

The Social Security Administration is confronting a consumer service crisis. Today, SSA is serving 50 percent more customers and beneficiaries with the same staffing it had in 1995. This has resulted in unacceptable service delays, including 37-minute average hold times on the 800 number and as much as a 2-year wait for disability determinations and appeals. The American people deserve better. Recall that about 66 million Americans—one in five—receive some benefit from Social Security each year.

Governor Martin O'Malley is the strong operational leader the Social Security Administration needs right now. He has demonstrated time and again that by focusing on performance management, smart government, and data-driven results, he can bring change and accountability to large organizations and significantly improve government service for the American people.

His leadership credentials include decades of public service, including two terms each as mayor of Baltimore and then Governor of Maryland.

I saw his hands-on approach firsthand as a longtime Baltimore resident. I was at city hall when Governor O'Malley set up CitiStat when he was mayor. This is a novel approach I had never seen really carried out by a chief executive of a city. He brought his agency heads in on a regular basis with specific objectives they needed to accomplish, and then on a regular basis he had the statistics to see whether they were performing as they should, as they indicated they needed to. That is called accountability. He held his