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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RICHARD J. DURBIN, a Senator from the State of Illinois.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Merciful God, you hear us when we call. You guide us with Your precepts, enabling us to honor You with our lives. As our Senators work to permit freedom to ring in our Nation and world, may they find joy in showing with their lives what they profess with their lips.

Lord, use these lawmakers for Your glory, as You illuminate our world through their witness. May they fearlessly contend against evil and make no peace with oppression, as You enable them to permit justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

And, Lord, thank You for the trail-blazing legacy of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

We pray in Your great 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 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 RICHARD J. DURBIN, a Senator from the State of Illinois, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. DURBIN 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 Christopher Charles Fonzone, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Senate Democrats and Republicans understand there is more work to do to pass legislation protecting America's security and the security of the Western World. We have made important

progress. But negotiations have not been easy, and it is going to take more time.

But no matter how long it takes, we must succeed because the stakes are high—for America and for our friends in Europe, the Middle East, and around the world. We must send more aid to Ukraine to defeat Vladimir Putin. We must help our friends in Israel prevent another terrorist attack like October 7. We must send critical aid to innocent civilians in Gaza.

Republicans and Democrats must also continue negotiations on an agreement for securing our southern border. As the past few weeks have made abundantly clear, Democrats have always been willing to engage in good-faith, realistic negotiations about border security. We agree the border must be fixed, but not at the expense of our values.

Finding common ground on the border has been difficult—in fact, one of the most difficult issues Congress has faced in a good while. The details here matter immensely, and this is not a topic that Congress has tackled at this level in many years. While we have made important progress over the past week on border security, everyone understands that we have more work to do, and that it is going to take more time.

Later today, I will meet with colleagues at the weekly Democratic caucus lunch to give an update on border and supplemental negotiations.

Now, I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working without rest on the supplemental package. I also thank staff from both sides who have been working morning, noon, and night to push us forward.

Again, we still have more to do. It is not going to be easy, and everyone understands it is going to take more time to figure this out. But we must—we must—succeed. Democrats remain committed to working with our Republican counterparts to reach an agreement.

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



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NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on another matter, it will be a busy day here on the floor with votes on three highly qualified nominees to serve in the administration and on the Federal bench.

For the information of Senators, we will hold votes today on the nominations of Christopher Fonzzone to be Assistant Attorney General, Sara Hill to be U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Oklahoma—a member of the Cherokee Nation, Ms. Hill would make history as the first-ever Native American woman to serve as a Federal judge in the State of Oklahoma—and, finally, Elizabeth Richard to serve as President Biden's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, a position that has the rank of Ambassador at Large.

Before the Senate adjourns for the holidays, we must also pass a temporary extension of FAA funding or else funding will run out on December 31. A funding extension for the FAA is critical for minimizing chaos during the holiday season. So Congress must get this done as soon as we can.

MILITARY NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, finally, before we leave for the Christmas holiday, the Senate will also finish confirming the last of the military nominees held up by Senator TUBERVILLE. A few weeks ago, the Senate finally confirmed the vast majority of officers and military nominees who were on hold.

And at the end of last week, the Senate unanimously passed legislation providing for backpay for all military personnel affected by these damaging holds. Providing backpay for these military families was the very, very least the Senate could do to right this awful wrong. I am glad we did it.

But we are not done yet. There are still 11 nominees who are awaiting confirmation. We will not leave town until every last one of these delayed nominees is confirmed. I hope we can do so quickly.

NEW YORK

And, finally, Mr. President, one of the things I am best known for in New York is my commitment to visit all 62 counties every year. This year, we celebrated our silver anniversary—the 25th year of visiting every one of the 62 counties. And I love it every bit as much today as I did my first year. We finished our tour yesterday morning at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Columbia County.

When I visit the counties, I learn so much. I talk to people. I listen to their needs. When you are up close with people, you see their hopes and their joys, as well as their fears, their desires—so many different things. And when you sit up close with someone and talk to them and learn from them, it makes a huge bit of difference. You can't do your job as a Senator unless you are actually in touch with people, not simply talking on the telephone or reading something. And so I do it, and I love it. And I commit to the people of New York that I will visit every one of the

62 counties next year, at least for the 26th time.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as the Senate convened this week, our colleagues negotiating on border security were still at the table making slow and steady progress. They are chipping away at years of failure to enact basic commonsense border security policy. Reaching an agreement that can pass Congress and become law is easier said than done.

But I am very grateful to Senator LANKFORD for sticking with it. Our colleagues' effort to address the glaring national security challenge here at home is the foundation of our broader responsibility to meet the linked threats we are facing around the world, from the Indo-Pacific to Europe, to the Middle East.

Needless to say, it is a particularly dangerous time for nations that care about protecting their sovereignty from totalitarian thugs and savage terrorists. The headlines are filled with evidence that America's most dangerous adversaries are demonstrably not deterred, and it might have something to do with the Biden administration's penchant for deterring itself instead.

America is a global superpower, but far too often, our Commander in Chief has conducted our foreign affairs with hesitation and weakness. Remember his administration's overwrought fears of "escalation" that kept essential capabilities out of Ukrainian hands or the feeble half measures in response to an ongoing surge in attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria.

Reports that the Biden administration now wants to constrain Israel's efforts to destroy Hamas are disappointing but not surprising. Two months ago, the administration was encouraging Israel to slow down its response before entering Gaza. Now, it is telling Israel to hasten its operations and wind them down to a close.

America cannot afford to lose sight of reality. We must not blur the bold-face line between a sovereign democracy that takes great pains to avoid civilian casualties and a terrorist organization that steals humanitarian aid from vulnerable Gazans to fuel its war of hate.

Israel did not choose this conflict. It ended the occupation of Gaza nearly two decades ago, but its policy of seeking to lower tensions was rewarded on October 7 when Hamas unilaterally shattered the cease-fire with rape, torture, terror, and murder: Hamas, the terrorists who diverted mountains of foreign assistance intended for civilian infrastructure to build miles of elaborate terror tunnels instead; Hamas, the cowards who intentionally hide their fighters and weapons in schools and hospitals.

Hamas has repeatedly faced the choice between improving the lives of Palestinians and killing Israelis. Every time, to date, it has chosen violence. And if Hamas survives with its military capabilities and leadership intact, it will make that choice again and again.

This is the reality Israel faces. Its war cabinet knows they must see this fight through. It is the same reality that recent American Presidents have confronted in the fight against al-Qaida and Isis. But for Israel, the determined terrorist threat is on its very borders and its own citizen soldiers are on the line.

So I will repeat what I have said so many times before. Our responsibility as an ally is to provide the time, space, and support Israel needs to finish the job, to condemn shameful attempts at moral equivalence to excuse the genocidal violence of Hamas terrorists and apply double standards to Israel and to offer counsel to our ally in private, not in front page genuflections to the President's leftwing base.

Administration officials and world leaders who care about the Palestinians would do well to focus less on constraining Israel in the short term and more on the challenge of ensuring Palestinian leaders and organizations in Gaza and the West Bank actually care about improving the lives of their fellow citizens in the long term.

Palestinians deserve better than Hamas's cult of death in Gaza. They deserve better than a corrupt and sclerotic Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mr. President, on another matter, on Sunday, Jewish residents of our Nation's Capital were subjected to a disturbing episode of anti-Semitic hate. As a Torah class at a Washington synagogue concluded and attendees began to leave, they were met on the sidewalk by a man who sprayed them with a foul-smelling substance and yelled "Gas the Jews"—all while filming on his cell phone. This is just one example of the reality facing millions of American Jews.

In the same weekend, hundreds of synagogues across the country received false bomb threats, and thousands of incidents of anti-Jewish hatred have cropped up on American soil in the months since October 7, a rise that leading watchdogs say is the worst in more than 40 years.

The brazenness of this hateful deluge is horrifying by itself, but an even more alarming trend is just how dramatically the moral cancer of identity politics is laying the groundwork for a continued wave of anti-Semitism. According to one recent poll, a full two-thirds of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 agreed with the following statement:

Jews as a class are oppressors and should be treated as oppressors.

That is the view of two-thirds of Americans between 18 and 24. This is