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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our rock and redeemer, by Your will we came into being, and at Your command, when the right hour is come, we shall one day leave this world. Do not be silent when we need to hear You speak.

Lord, let Your Spirit lead our Senators. May they increase in self-forgetfulness, in simplicity, in courage, and in trust so that each day they will approach nearer to Your likeness.

Lord, help them to offer themselves afresh to be used in Your service. Show them Your ways, and may they obey Your precepts.

Give wisdom to the perplexed, fresh vigor to the discouraged, and a clearer vision to all who seek Your will.

We pray in Your mighty 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, February 28, 2024.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WELCH 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 Julie Simone Sneed, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Middle District of Florida.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, negotiators in both Chambers continue working to ensure the government will not shut down at the end of the week. We continue to make very good

progress on an agreement, and we are very close to getting it done.

I met yesterday with President Biden, with Speaker JOHNSON, with Leader MCCONNELL, and Leader JEFFRIES; and we all agree a shutdown is a loser for the American people. In a shutdown, costs would go up, safety would go down, and the American people would pay the price.

I am hopeful that the four leaders can reach this agreement very soon so we can not only avoid a shutdown on Friday but get closer to finishing the appropriations process altogether.

If our House Republican colleagues of good will want to avert a shutdown—if they want to govern responsibly, as they say they do—they must resist the centrifugal pull of the extreme hard right who want to burn everything down, who openly use the threat of a shutdown to push their extreme agenda. They are brazen about it. They are brazen.

We know what the hard right has been pushing. They want to restrict women's reproductive freedoms—we saw the case in Alabama. They want to rip apart gun safety laws and reward corporate polluters. Or else, they say, they want a shutdown. This is no way to govern.

If our House Republican colleagues of good will want to do the right thing, they must accept a fundamental truth about divided government: Republicans cannot pass a bill without Democratic support; it takes both sides working together—and ignoring the extremes of the hard right—to get anything done.

I have said this over and over again directly to the Speaker, even in my first conversation with him: The only way we will get things done is by bipartisanship. And I am proud in our Chamber, not just on the supplemental but in bill after bill after bill, we are working in a bipartisan way. I am proud of that record. The Speaker should understand that.

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



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So I am hopeful that soon we will have an agreement for keeping the government open beyond Friday's deadline. We will keep working very diligently today. And I ask my colleagues to stay flexible and be ready to act quickly when the time comes.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, on Ukraine, the meeting I had yesterday with President Biden and congressional leaders over Ukraine was one of the most intense discussions I have ever had—or witnessed—in the Oval Office.

Every single one of us yesterday understood the basic facts: The situation in Ukraine is getting increasingly dire. Russia has made a major advance by taking the city of Avdiivka, which they did simply because Ukraine was running short of ammo and long-range artillery basic equipment. It wasn't the lack of the will of the fighters. It wasn't the lack of plan. It was, simply, that they ran out of ammunition. Imagine being a brave soldier fighting for freedom, fighting for your country, and you no longer have the ammo.

Without more aid from the United States, Ukraine will lose. In fact, one American leader over there told me that he wouldn't be surprised if Russian tanks were on the Polish border if we didn't give any aid. What kind of legacy would that leave for the House Republicans who seem to want to stall that aid? It is not all of them, of course, but too many.

Everyone in the room, with the exception of the Speaker, agreed that Congress must finish the work on the supplemental ASAP because the future of Ukraine and the West is at stake. Speaker JOHNSON said he wants to continue to think it over.

I was candid with the Speaker that I hope he gives it careful thought because the eyes of history are upon him.

I said to the Speaker: If you are the one stopping Ukraine aid, then no matter what the consequences may be in the short term, you will regret your decision 2 years from now and could potentially regret it for the rest of your life, because this will be remembered as a turning point in America for our strength, our credibility on the world stage, for our national security.

If we don't provide this aid, every year the United States could lose out to its enemies: the autocrats of the world, the Putins, the Xis, the heads of North Korea, and Iran. We could lose out economically, militarily, diplomatically, politically because of a shortsighted decision not to provide the much needed aid.

The Speaker has a legacy-defining decision to make on Ukraine. If he lets this bill move forward, he can go down as a fierce defender of America's core values. But if he shrinks from the importance of the moment, it will be the greatest gift Putin, other autocrats, and enemies of our country could possibly ask from the American Congress.

ALABAMA IVF COURT DECISION

Mr. President, on the Alabama IVF decision, after last week's stunningly

radical decision by the Alabama Supreme Court jeopardizing IVF access, the United States has become an embarrassment to the world when it comes to reproductive freedom.

Even sadder, this didn't happen in a vacuum. The hard-right MAGA Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* opened the floodgates for Republicans to force their anti-reproductive freedom—their anti-women agenda—down the throats of all Americans.

The decision by the Alabama Supreme Court is as cruel as it is enraging. There are countless people today who have the joy of children because of IVF. But now, families have to worry that this option could be taken away.

Make no mistake, Republicans own the consequences of the Alabama Supreme Court's decision. Republicans know it. That is why Republicans are scrambling, desperate, to backpedal and try to sound reasonable and supportive of IVF all of a sudden, because they see what they have done.

Republicans in Alabama—even a conservative State like Alabama—are now trying to save face by introducing legislation they claim will protect IVF providers. Even they know how the American people are reacting to this terrible decision—even in Alabama.

Republicans in Florida are now trying to save face by postponing the consideration of anti-abortion legislation. This is the State that said no abortions after 6 weeks, when most women don't even know they are pregnant. And, by the way, the popularity of the Governor has dramatically dropped after he passed that legislation, because Floridians don't like it.

Even Republicans here in Washington are trying to save face by putting off the introduction of national abortion bans because they recognize the mess they have gotten themselves into.

And, of course, they are not fooling anyone. Republicans are like the arsonists who set the house on fire and then said: Why is it burning? Amazing, confounding, perturbing, and sad.

Let me be clear: Republicans spent decades calling for a national abortion ban. Republicans spent decades packing our courts with hard-right MAGA reactionary judges. So Republicans deserve zero benefit of the doubt now that the consequences of their agenda are sinking in and even spreading.

Republicans can do and say all they want to try and run away from the truth, but the American people are not buying it. They are not buying it today. They won't buy it tomorrow. They won't buy it come November.

Democrats remain absolutely committed to doing everything—everything—we can to protect women, families, reproductive freedom.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BRADY BILL

Mr. President, back when I introduced the Brady bill, I was a House Member representing Brooklyn and Queens. I knew firsthand the terrible toll of gun violence because the streets of my district—and so many other dis-

tricts—were witness to it. So I jumped at the opportunity to work alongside two brave and stalwart people, Jim and Sarah Brady—two American heroes whose lives, of course, were forever changed by gun violence—to help write and pass the Brady Law.

Looking back at the legacy of the Brady bill after three decades, there is no doubt it has saved countless lives. There is no way to count because you don't know who didn't get the gun who would have, but it is going to be a number with many, many zeros. And it paved the way for future gun safety legislation, like the bipartisan bill we passed 2 years ago.

The bipartisan gun safety legislation we passed in 2022, in fact, was the most significant and comprehensive action on gun safety since the Brady bill. And just like its predecessors, it, too, is already saving lives.

But it shouldn't take an assassination attempt against a President or a mass shooting among these innocent children in elementary school for elected leaders to make change happen. Gun violence is one of America's greatest ills. But it shouldn't have to be that way. And so our work, thinking of Jim and Sarah hovering over us, is far from over.

Democrats remain committed to combating gun violence and making our communities safer. And we will keep pushing. We will keep fighting. We will never let the grief of parents and kids and neighbors and teachers—and all of those who have been scarred by gun violence—to recede to the back of our memories.

Again, a salute to Jim and Sarah Brady and what they have done for America.

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.

ENERGY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, it has been a month since the Biden administration announced its de facto ban on new export permits for America's abundant stores of natural gas; 1 month since the President chose to bring growth in a critical sector of our economy, with massive, global consequences, to a screeching halt.

At the risk of understating things, the condemnations of President Biden's decision were swift and full-throated, and it is not hard to understand why. With the stroke of a pen, the President threatened the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Americans, from Texas to Pennsylvania, who produce and transport natural gas.