



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 170

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

No. 4

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.

Our Father in Heaven, bless the citizens of this great Nation. Give them favor as they face the challenges of life's seasons, enriching their lives with wisdom, love, and truth.

Lord, we ask that You would also inspire our Senators. Make them great enough in spirit, good enough in heart, and genuine enough in purpose to refuse to deviate from integrity as they strive to live for Your glory. May each lawmaker become Your channel for justice, courage, and peace in our Nation and world.

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, January 9, 2024.

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 John A. Kazen, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as the Senate begins our work in 2024, three things are true. First, there is a lot we have to do at the start of the year, including funding the government, working towards a national security supplemental, confirming more nominees through the Senate, and much more.

We made good progress on many bipartisan bills last year, which we

would like to bring to the floor this year.

Second, the only way we are going to get anything of consequence done is through bipartisan cooperation.

Third, the Senate is off to a good start.

A few days ago, I announced, alongside Speaker JOHNSON, that congressional leaders have reached a significant milestone for government funding. We have agreed to top-line funding numbers for fiscal year 2024. This now clears the path for appropriators to begin drafting the 12 appropriations bills.

Yesterday, I spoke with Chairman MURRAY, and then I met in my office with Leader MCCONNELL, and we are all on the same page that we want to move as quickly as we can to finish the appropriations process.

We have only 10 days until the first deadline on January 19. So both parties must continue working together to minimize the risk of a government shutdown.

Now, it wasn't easy to come to an agreement on top-line numbers, but Democrats are very pleased with the ultimate outcome. From the beginning, Democrats had one goal in mind, our North Star, to keep nondefense funding levels at \$772.7 billion, the exact same number we agreed to in June of last year when we avoided default.

Many on the hard right, particularly those in the Freedom Caucus, wanted to see that number brought down significantly, and that would have made certain devastating cuts to all sorts of programs that help millions of Americans. But Democrats, who control the Presidency and have a majority in the Senate, said no, no, no to draconian cuts. We told the hard right that they cannot bully or threaten their way to getting the kind of draconian cuts that the vast majority of Americans and many, many Republicans oppose.

You hear it when Republicans go home to their districts and brag about

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



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some of the very things that these hard-right people want to cut.

So we held the line, and, as a result, we have successfully protected vital priorities, like housing programs, veterans' benefits, healthcare, nutrition, small business support, the NHS, and funding for Federal law enforcement.

Hard-right Republicans wanted to use the appropriations process to gut Democrats' clean energy investments that we passed in the IRA. Those too will be absolutely protected. And even though the hard right is always obsessed with starving the IRA of resources, this agreement protects important funding the IRS needs to hold ultra-rich tax evaders accountable.

This work will not be undermined. The IRS has made great progress, brought in lots of money that always should have been there, but because very wealthy people are able to hire lawyers and accountants to evade taxes, they got away with it—no more. All in all, this top-line agreement is a good outcome for the country and a strong start to the year.

Now, certainly, there is more work to do. Agreeing to a top-line number is important, but so is the next step: translating that number into 12 appropriations bills that can pass the Senate, pass the House, and reach the President's desk.

None of us want to see a government shutdown. So we will do everything possible to ensure we avoid one in the coming weeks.

If Republicans in the House follow the approach we have taken in the Senate—the bipartisan approach where Democratic and Republican appropriators have worked collaboratively, despite our disagreements—then we can minimize the risks of a shutdown. But if House Republicans bend to the insatiable whims and demands of their hard-right flank, if they corrode the appropriations process with poison pills and extremist policy proposals, then they will be responsible for moving us closer to a shutdown. I hope that does not happen, but we will not be bullied by a few hard-right radicals.

Now, on the supplemental, Mr. President, as the new year begins, Senate Democrats remain committed to working with our Republican colleagues on passing a national security supplemental package. This work has not been easy, but it is a matter of the highest national urgency that we act. At stake is the security of our country, the security of our friends, including Ukraine and Israel, and nothing less than the future of Western democracy.

We must address these issues. Negotiators have been hard at work for weeks and worked straight through the New Year's break in hopes of reaching an agreement. The keyword in these negotiations has been persistence—persistence—and I remain hopeful that we are going to get something meaningful done.

At times, progress has been slow, and, sometimes, progress has been im-

mensely encouraging, but, either way, the important part is we are making progress, and we are closer now than we have ever been to getting an agreement.

Congress has not acted on immigration in a comprehensive way in decades. So it should surprise no one that it is going to take time. Of all the difficult issues we face in this Chamber, immigration is near the top. But regardless of how difficult passing this supplemental is, so much, so much hangs on our success. The world is still watching how the United States will respond this year to the crises in Europe and the Middle East and to the growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

Our friends are watching closely too. Most of all, adversaries like Vladimir Putin are watching.

I recently read in the press that while Ukrainians remain determined to defend their country, they are running out of ammunition. According to one observer, they can fire only one salvo back for every five or so the Russians are firing at them. History will not look kindly on this episode if the United States fails to act.

So getting a supplemental done is important right now—as important as it has ever been. I know my friend the Republican Leader feels the same way, and negotiators are going to keep working until we get this done.

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.

ISRAEL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, 3 months after the massacre of October 7, Israel's Defense Minister observed that his country was fighting "an axis, not a single enemy." He was talking about Iran's terrorist proxies, arrayed to attack Israel on multiple fronts.

But the reality of facing interconnected threats isn't unique to Israel. Around the world, our adversaries are colluding in new and aggressive ways. Authoritarians who disdain the West are arming and underwriting one another's aggression. And, as the Senate continues our work on supplemental national security legislation, we would do well to keep this in mind.

Israel reports that it has succeeded in significantly degrading Hamas's military capacity in northern Gaza. But while the pace of operations may have slowed, Israel continues to face a dug-in Hamas threat in southern Gaza. And their terrorist enemies continue to exploit innocent civilians in their bid for survival. Hamas fighters brazenly steal international aid shipments, use

Gazans as human shields, and hold more than 130 hostages, including Americans.

So Israel's operations will continue because the threats to Israel remain. As I have said before, Israel needs the time, space, and support to restore its security.

Unfortunately, that is not what the Biden administration has been providing. In fact, as the left wing of the Democratic Party grows more loudly and stridently anti-Israel, its leaders are second-guessing America's closest ally in the Middle East.

Administration officials have taken to anonymously and shamefully accusing Prime Minister Netanyahu of seeking conflict with Hezbollah for domestic political reasons. Of course, reality is quite the opposite. For decades, it has been Hezbollah that seeks conflict with Israel and the West. It is the terrorists with Israeli and American blood on their hands who have chosen violence regardless of the current governments in Israel or the United States.

And Hezbollah's attacks against Israel have only grown since October 7. It is not Prime Minister Netanyahu who forced tens of thousands of Israelis to evacuate their homes in northern Israel. It was Hezbollah threats.

By now, we all know about Hamas's terror tunnels. Well, Hezbollah has built them too. I led a delegation to Israel, and we saw them with our own eyes—efforts to infiltrate northern Israel for the same purpose that Hamas struck in Israel's south. And it is not a myth conjured by the Prime Minister. It is a real and growing threat that even his leading political opponent and fellow member of Israel's war cabinet Benny Gantz also warns about.

Rather than sniping at Israel's war cabinet for taking Hezbollah seriously, the administration should tell Congress and our ally how it proposes to change the murderous calculus of Iran and its proxy.

So the best way we can help our friends is to restore our own credibility in the region and take bolder steps to respond to our common aggressor Iran.

The Biden administration has work to do to repair the damage done by 3 years of retreat. The first thing they could do is admit they have a problem. Instead, they are busy patting themselves on the back. Last week, an administration spokesperson declared with pride that the President was taking a proactive approach to threats from Iran-backed terrorists. Honestly, nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead of aggressively targeting the launch facilities and Houthi terrorists responsible for harassing global shipping and U.S. naval assets or sinking the Iranian spy vessel reportedly facilitating Houthi strikes, President Biden's passive policy means the Navy is expending million-dollar missiles to swat away thousand-dollar drones—million-dollar missiles to take out