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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 PRESIDING OFFICER. Our guest Chaplain, Rabbi Mendy Deitsch, the Director of Chabad of the East Valley from Chandler, AZ, will open the Senate in prayer.

The guest chaplain offered the following prayer:

God of Heaven, Master of the world, please grace this distinguished, exalted United States Senate. Give blessings upon these distinguished individuals, chosen by so many who have entrusted them with the responsibility of legislating for the well-being of their constituents and families.

While each of us may come from different backgrounds, we stand here united with a shared vision and purpose, with conviction and determination, with love and strength, to ensure that each day is better than the day before.

As my revered teacher, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, said: Though humanity's origin began in a perfect world, human shortcomings led to its failings. Yet it is through human goodness and kindness that we can reveal G-d in this beautiful world, his dwelling place on Earth with the redemptive time of the coming of Moshiach.

Almighty God, may those gathered here remain mindful of Your presence as they work to enact just laws, the process of which itself is one of the seven Noahide Laws given to You and all mankind, and align it with Your will to foster a peaceful and harmonious world.

Please let us see more peaceful days soon, with the safe return of those being held hostage as well as the dedicated men and women of our Armed Forces battling evil at this time. Bestow upon them wisdom, justice, grace, and empathy.

Bless our leaders with good health, compassion and joy, enabling them to bring honor to the United States and to Your Name the blessings to mankind as they fulfill Your divine will. 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 25, 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 Gretchen S. Lund, of Indiana, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Indiana.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Constitution of the United States, the consensus of our Nation's Founders, and the weight of exhaustive historical precedent give the President the clear authority to use military force when American lives and interests are under attack. The Commander in Chief does not lack authority; rather, he is failing to sufficiently exercise the authority that he has.

Right now, every day, enemies of the United States are engaged in a campaign of brazen aggression that threatens American servicemembers, our interests, and our allies in the Middle East. This campaign is hardly new. Year after year, the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism trains, equips, finances, and coordinates efforts to drive America—the "Great Satan"—from the Middle East and to wipe Israel—the "Little Satan"—off the map.

When President Biden took office, Senate Republicans warned him not to go soft on Iran. We urged him not to abandon maximum pressure, not to obsess over restoring a failed nuclear deal, and not to ignore Iran's relentless—relentless—campaign of terror.

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



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But the President failed to heed this advice. He ignored the 80-some attacks on U.S. troops over his first 2 years in office. He failed to recognize the killing of an American in an Iran-backed drone attack in Syria last March as a wake-up call. Instead, his administration slept through glaring indications that Iran-backed terror was actually reaching a tipping point.

So, today, America and our allies face an adversary profoundly undeterred. Iran's proxies are responsible for more than 150 lethal attacks—and counting—against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria since October 7 and for persistent strikes against U.S. warships and civilian vessels in the Red Sea, including just yesterday.

But we have yet to see signs that the administration understands how to compel Iran and its proxies to stop. Even with the world's strongest military at the ready, the Commander in Chief has failed to deter Iran and its proxies. Instead, a fear of escalation has only invited more aggression from Tehran to Moscow to Beijing.

For nearly 2 weeks, the President has hesitantly and intermittently directed strikes against low-value Houthi terrorist targets. He has played Whack-A-Mole against warehouses and launch sites but has left the terrorists' air defenses and command-and-control facilities intact. The same is true over in Iraq and Syria, where the U.S. response to Iran-backed terrorist attacks has been to impose limited damage on proxy storage and training facilities. Yet the administration has refused to impose meaningful costs on Tehran itself—on the architects of this entire regional conflict.

Tehran is happy to fight until the last Houthi, Hamas, or Hezbollah terrorist. That is literally why they use proxies—they are expendable. Until Iran feels that its own interests and its own IRGC officers across the region are threatened, attacks on U.S. forces will continue.

Now, while the President hesitates to use his constitutional authority, some of our colleagues seem to argue he shouldn't have this authority to begin with. They are profoundly mistaken. Exercising the right to defend against imminent threats to our Nation and servicemembers is a central responsibility of the Commander in Chief. His authority is enshrined in the Constitution, and its application dates back more than 200 years.

President Thomas Jefferson was hardly an enthusiastic proponent of a muscular executive, but his recognition of the threats to core national interests posed by the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean forged consensus around the appropriate roles of the article I and article II branches in the conduct of war.

Freedom of navigation has been a core national interest of the United States from the very, very beginning. If we aren't prepared to defend the vital searoutes on which our economy

rests, there is really not much point in having a military.

If there is something our colleagues ought to be questioning, it is not our history or our Constitution; it is our President's judgment and understanding of deterrence as well as their own. If they oppose U.S. and coalition efforts to defend the freedom of navigation against Iran-backed terrorists, our colleagues simply should say so.

Just last month, the Senate voted on a resolution to compel the President to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria. That resolution failed 84 to 13. I suspect that even fewer of our colleagues would support a resolution to withdraw the Navy from the coalition we have built in the Red Sea. This is no time for 535 commanders in chief to dictate battlefield tactics from halfway around the world.

Congress can and should exercise the oversight of military operations through our own robust authorities. We can and must keep a firm grip on the power of the purse. But the President does not need additional authorities to deal with this threat.

I will oppose any effort to tie the hands of our military commanders or to limit the scope of their ability to go after terrorists who threaten our servicemembers as well as our interests. As General Mattis counseled a decade ago in the debate over modifying the 2001 AUMF, we must not "reassure our adversary in advance about what we will not do." Instead, it is time for President Biden to reassure America and our allies that he intends to lead with strength.

BIDENOMICS

Mr. President, on another matter, yesterday, President Biden offered an eerily honest assessment of the state of the Union:

We're fundamentally changing the economy in this country, and everyone's getting a little worried about it.

I don't say this very often, but the President is right about that.

The historic inflation brought on by Washington Democrats' reckless spending sent the prices of everyday essentials—from groceries to home heating—literally through the roof. As working families grapple with shrinking dollars, credit card spending and unpaid balances rose last year.

Of course, lower-income households with less of a cushion are the ones most affected by Democrats' inflation. As one analyst put it:

The further you go down in income levels or the further you go down in wealth levels, the cumulative impact of inflation has really taken a toll.

If the high prices on fuel and groceries weren't enough, cities are also facing staggering surges in violent crime. Here in Washington, homicides, carjackings, and robberies surged last year. More people were murdered in our Nation's Capital last year than in any year since 1997.

Just last Thursday, a 23-year-old was shot and killed while he was walking home from an event at a local church.

The young man had moved to Washington to spend a year volunteering with at-risk youth in the community. His friends described him as "a deeply caring guy who always worked hard to understand what people were saying." Now in a city that has lost its grip on law and order, this young man joins the growing list of victims.

Stable prices and safe streets: These are two of the most basic responsibilities of government. But from City Hall to the White House, elected Democrats are literally failing the American people.

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. DURBIN. 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.

AMTRAK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, there are a few things that are more important to a nation's economy than its infrastructure. Most Americans rely on public transport to get from point A to point B. Passenger rail plays an important role in that responsibility. That is why am pleased that Illinoisans have had a voice in one of the largest rail networks in the country, Amtrak.

Something many people don't realize is that despite being a for-profit company, Amtrak is a government entity. Because of this, with the advice and consent of the Senate, the President has the power to appoint members to Amtrak's board. Just this week, we took action in the Senate.

On Tuesday, the Senate voted to confirm the mayor of Normal, IL, Chris Koos, to serve on the Amtrak board of directors, one of only eight individuals appointed by the President at any one time to serve in such a role.

Chris will take the post when the former Macomb, IL, mayor, Tom Carper, departs. When Chris takes the baton from Tom, he will be taking it from a giant in the history of Amtrak.

Tom Carper—same name as our colleague from Delaware—is the longest serving board member in Amtrak history. That is an amazing accomplishment and shows great personal sacrifice on his part to be part of this public responsibility.

First nominated to the board of directors in 2007 under President Bush, Tom Carper joined the board in 2008 and was elected as board chairman from 2009 until his term officially expired in 2013. Tom was then reappointed in 2013 under President Obama, and he served under four different Presidents on the board of directors of Amtrak.

During his tenure on the board, Tom championed issues important to Amtrak passengers across the Nation. He prioritized ensuring service to underserved communities, benefiting local