



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 170

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

No. 51

Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, a Senator from the State of Maryland.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, thank you for filling our lives with blessings. We praise You for the daily miracles of light and shadows, work and rest, life and love. We even thank You for the blessings of disappointments and failures that humble us, and for pain and distress that remind us of our need for You.

Lord, we are grateful for the women and men of the U.S. Senate who strive to keep freedom's torch burning. Awaken in them a deeper appreciation for Your loving providence, as You give them a heightened sense of the special role You want them to play in the unfolding drama of world history.

And, Lord, we thank You for the life and legacy of Pat Collins, the mother of Senator SUSAN COLLINS.

We pray in Your sovereign 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, March 22, 2024.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, a Senator from the State of Maryland, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN 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 consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Ernest Gonzalez, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Texas.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, at about 12:01 a.m. tonight, about 70 percent of the Federal Government will run out of funding if Congress does not act. Democrats and Republicans have about 13 hours to work together to

make sure the government stays open. That is not going to be easy. We will have to work together and avoid unnecessary delays.

This morning, the House will move first on the funding package. And as soon as they send us a bill, the Senate will spring into action. To my colleagues on both sides, let's finish the job today. Let's avoid even a weekend shutdown. Let's finish the job of funding the government for the remainder of the fiscal year.

There is no reason to delay. There is no reason to drag out this process. If the Senators cooperate on a time agreement, if we prioritize working together—just as we did 2 weeks ago—I am optimistic we can succeed. But if individual Senators resort to partisanship and stonewalling and dithering, those individuals will almost guarantee that we shut down, and the process could drag into Saturday, Sunday, and possibly beyond.

Now, this appropriations process hasn't been easy, but I am glad that after months of hard work, we have arrived at a funding package that both sides can be pleased with. The funding package will go a long way to supporting American families, strengthen our economy, safeguarding our national security. It increases funding for childcare services, boosts disease research and prevention, and funds school mental health programs and suicide prevention—something we so desperately need. We are strengthening border security. We are protecting our elections, and, most importantly, we will have avoided most of the draconian cuts and poison pills that the hard right has pushed for months.

And once we fully fund the government, we will also avoid the terrible scythe of budget sequestration that has been hanging over Congress since last year.

We are not done yet, but I would like to once again thank my colleagues—Chairwoman MURRAY and Vice Chair

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



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COLLINS—for their outstanding work here in the Senate. I want to thank all the appropriators for their work. I want to thank all their staffs, especially my own staff, too, because I greatly appreciate the remarkable work they do every single day.

Getting things done in divided government is hard; getting things done in this divided government is even harder.

But both sides have come up with a strong funding package that ignores extremism and puts the needs of the country first. That is a credit to leadership on both sides, and I thank them for their work.

REPUBLICAN STUDY COMMITTEE BUDGET PLAN

Mr. President, now, on the Republican Study Committee's budget. Earlier this week, House Republicans released a hard-right wish list masquerading as a budget plan. The Republican Study Committee's new budget can be summarized in two words: dangerous, disastrous. This Republican Study Committee's budget plan is dangerous because it double downs on the hard-right's war on women. It endorses a national ban on abortion with zero exceptions for rape or incest, which remains the ultimate goal of the hard right, should they come to power.

If anyone is asking what would happen if the Republicans kept the House, took the Senate and the Presidency, on abortion, just read this Republican Study Committee's budget: A national ban on abortion with zero exceptions for rape and incest. That is the goal of the Republican Party should they gain power and are able to do it.

We will do everything we can, of course, to stop them.

The RSC budget plan also rolls back access to mifepristone, a safe, reliable, and widely available medicine that millions of Americans have used for over 20 years. The RSC budget plan would critically endanger access to IVF. As much as Republicans have tried to recently sound moderate on IVF, when they have to put their pen to paper and say what their proposals are, their radical agenda is blowing up in their faces.

And all you have to do is read the RSC budget plan to see they haven't moderated one iota on women's health. Whether it is abortion, mifepristone, or IVF, the Republican Study Committee, which represents the vast majority of House Republicans—it reads like a hard-right, radical, anti-women document.

But that is not all. The RSC budget is disastrous because it proposes a stunning \$1.5 trillion in cuts to Social Security while raising the retirement age for millions of hard-working Americans. That is crazy.

Remember, the Republican Study Committee isn't some arcane offshoot of the Republican Party; it represents 80 percent of the Members in the House, including all of their leadership. For all intents and purposes, the RSC budget plan represents the Republican agenda.

And what is the Republican agenda? Aside from cutting back dramatically on women's rights, a national ban on abortion with no exceptions, it also is cutting Social Security and raising the retirement age.

What is the Republican agenda? It is also repealing \$35 insulin for seniors on Medicare and repealing its authority to negotiate cheaper drug prices.

What is the Republican agenda? It is trillions of dollars in tax breaks for the ultrawealthy and trillions of dollars in budget cuts to the Children's Health Insurance Program and the ACA.

These are just some of the terrible things in the RSC budget plan. It is awful. It is cruel. But amazingly, it is what the overwhelming majority of House Republicans endorse.

JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

Mr. President, on judge shopping, yesterday, I sent a letter to the Judicial Conference urging them to defend their new, commonsense policy reforms limiting the practice of judge shopping.

I also sent a letter to the chief judge of the Northern District of Texas, where judge shopping is running rampant, urging the district to apply the reforms of the Judicial Conference as quickly as possible.

The bottom line is this: Judge shopping jaundices the fairness of our entire legal system. When hard-right plaintiffs, often funded by hard-right groups that just hire the lawyers, when they can pick and choose which judge hears their case—which is what has happened, for instance, in the Northern District of Texas in Amarillo, where cascades of cases are being filed by rightwing groups across the country—when this happens, when hard-right plaintiffs can pick and choose which judge hears their case, it distorts the system and causes the American people to lose faith in our courts.

Judge shopping is precisely what led to the terrible case in the Northern District of Texas, where anti-choice extremists handpicked a MAGA judge—the only one sitting—to revoke FDA approval of mifepristone nationwide. This one judge, extreme right—known as extreme right before he became a judge and after—gets to choose for the whole country because of forum shopping.

It is awful. I applaud the Judicial Conference for taking the initiative to limit judge shopping. I urge the courts across the country to apply these new reforms.

And when my Republican colleagues say they support this, it shows they are not for fairness of a judicial system; they are for outcome determination ahead of time before even cases are argued.

CLEAN ENERGY

Mr. President, on clean jobs, it has not even been 2 years since President Biden and Democrats made historic investments in our infrastructure, clean jobs, and advanced manufacturing, and already we see ribbon-cuttings, factory openings, and a boom in clean energy investment.

But this week House Republicans are pushing a number of bogus and nasty bills that would undo all the hard work we have done to create more jobs in clean energy while doubling down on giveaways to Big Oil.

One bill pushed by House Republicans would force taxpayers to pay more for the mess of oil and gas companies on public lands by repealing an IRA rule requiring companies to pay a fair rate to lease America's public resources.

At a time when Big Oil is seeing record profits and Big Oil is consolidated so there is very little competition, House Republicans want to gift them even more giveaways, while making taxpayers pick up the tab.

A number of other bills Republicans are pushing would outright repeal many of the job-creating investments in the IRA. That is terrible because the law is working so, so well. Last year, we saw \$240 billion in clean energy investment, triple the level of 2019. These investments and these good-paying jobs are what Republicans are trying to take away.

America is leading the world in our transition to clean energy. We are creating lots of jobs, good-paying jobs, along the way. But the MAGA Republicans, fatally beholden to the Big Oil and Big Coal lobbies are pushing to kill clean jobs, kill these historic investments, and extinguish years of future potential prosperity to the communities they represent. Shame on them.

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. 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.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the task before Congress this week, completing annual appropriations, is important work every year. In fact, it is among our most basic, fundamental responsibilities.

But not in decades have the stakes of providing for the common defense been as high as they are right now. For the first time since the Cold War, America faces an era defined by great power competition. Of course, this is not news.

Two straight Presidential administrations have correctly recognized this fact, at least on paper, in their national security strategies. These documents have recognized that challenges from revisionist authoritarians in Russia and China pose the greatest threat to the endurance of American leadership that has defined world politics and economics for decades.

Today, we face major adversaries who wish nothing more than to bleed