



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 170

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

No. 19

Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BEN RAY LUJÁN, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Listen to our prayer, dear Lord, for You are our mighty fortress. When we feel overwhelmed, we place our hope in You. When we feel doubt, You fill us with Your faith. When we feel afraid, You continue to be our light and salvation. Thank You for keeping us safe.

Lord, guide our lawmakers. May they give You their burdens as they seek to do Your will and live for Your glory. Use them to help heal our hurting nation and world. Let faith, hope, and love abound in their lives.

We pray in Your loving 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, February 1, 2024.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BEN RAY LUJÁN, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. LUJÁN 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 Lisa W. Wang, of the District of Columbia, to be a Judge of the United States Court of International Trade.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, it is not often that the U.S. Senate is called to act on a multitude of national security issues all at the same time. But right now, that is precisely the task at hand.

Vladimir Putin has waged war against Ukraine and against Western democracy for nearly 2 years. Israel suffered its bloodiest day last fall at the hands of the terror group Hamas, and millions of innocent Gaza civilians are in desperate need of aid. The Chinese Communist Party threatens to increase tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

And our southern border is in urgent need—in urgent need—of fixing.

These are daunting challenges. They are time-sensitive challenges. And in the era of divided government, the only way—let me repeat—the only way to pass a national security supplemental is through bipartisanship—bipartisanship.

Over the course of this week, Democrats and Republicans have continued serious negotiations on the supplemental package. But there are still some pieces remaining to be settled.

Democrats have been exceedingly clear that we are willing to treat these negotiations with the seriousness they deserve. We have worked with Republicans on border security and on a vast range of issues and on coming to an agreement, and we want to finish the job.

The negotiators' tasks have not been easy because the more progress they make, the louder voices get on the outside who want to kill these negotiations in their tracks. There are always going to be some who prefer to exploit the issue of the border instead of fixing it. So the real question is whether Senators can tune all of that noise out and focus on reaching an agreement. Opportunities like this one are extremely rare when it comes to border security, so we owe it to the American people to seize this opportunity, and that is what Democrats want to do.

Senate Democrats remain committed to seeing this bipartisan process through. For the sake of our friends in Ukraine, for the sake of security on our border, for the sake of the future of Western democracy in the 21st century, we will keep working to get the job done.

THE ECONOMY

On the economy, Mr. President, the reports are in, the results are clear: Americans are feeling better and better about where the economy is headed under President Biden and congressional Democratic leadership. When

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



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S325

you pass an ambitious agenda like the ones Democrats have passed under President Biden, it can take some time for the effects to take hold. But now we are starting to see these benefits gain momentum.

Americans are starting to notice. As a Washington Post headline read this week:

Falling inflation, rising growth give the United States the world's best recovery.

American citizens have noticed. The University of Michigan shows that consumer sentiment surged by nearly 30 percent over the last 2 months—the biggest 2-month increase in over 30 years.

Earlier this week, another survey by The Conference Board showed American consumers are more optimistic about the economy today than they have been in over 2 years. Let me say that again. According to a new survey by The Conference Board—very well-respected—American consumers are more optimistic about the economy today than they have been over the past 2 years.

The chief economist at The Conference Board credited the surge in consumer optimism to “slower inflation” and “favorable employment conditions.”

Look, a year and a half ago, when Democrats passed legislation investing in the American people, like the Inflation Reduction Act, the hard right predicted America would sink into recession. Instead, the opposite has happened. Jobs are up, the economy is up, wages are up, and inflation has cooled down. None of this happened on its own. It is a result of Democrats choosing to invest in infrastructure, invest in manufacturing and scientific innovation, lowering prescription drug costs, and more.

We are seeing big progress across the country. One year ago this week, I stood with President Biden to announce historic investment in one of the most important infrastructure projects in the country—the Gateway Tunnel. Just this morning, we learned that manufacturing investments—something that has plagued America for quite a while—is near an all-time high, more than double its highest point during the previous administration.

Look, Republicans know the Democratic agenda is working. It is why so many Republicans in Congress are openly taking credit for our achievements. All over the country, you see Republicans bragging about projects and jobs that they actually voted against in Congress. The hard right knows they have no real agenda to tout. As one Texas Congressman said on the House floor:

I want my Republican colleagues to give me one thing—one—that I can go campaign on and say we did.

Unfortunately, this Republican Congressman, his options are slim because they don't have much to tell the American people about that they did that was good.

Without real accomplishments on their own, the hard right is trying to take credit for the things Democrats are doing. It is laughable. And the American people, frankly, aren't falling for it.

So make no mistake. We still have a long way to go to make our economy more productive. But Americans can rest assured that under President Biden and congressional Democrats, we are on the right track.

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, the People's Republic of China is the single greatest strategic challenge facing the United States. It poses a potentially existential threat to our friends in the region and a growing threat to our allies in Europe as well.

The PRC is working to undermine the prevailing order that has maintained a major power piece for eight decades. It is useful to think about this challenge from our adversary's position.

President Xi aims to expand China's influence at our expense, to rewrite the rules of the road, and to dominate his neighbors. Each of these tasks becomes easier the more the West is distracted, divided, and deterred. And depending on the choices America and our allies make, our adversaries may succeed without even trying.

Are we distracted? Ask Beijing what it thinks about the Western diplomatic energy expended on unenforceable climate mandates while Chinese industry accelerates its carbon emissions. Our adversaries must scratch their heads at some of the things about which Western leaders obsess.

Are we divided? The PRC clearly hopes that the West's shared values are not as strong as our adversaries' shared disdain for them. Beijing no doubt enjoys watching the United States abandon allies in Afghanistan, second-guess allies in Israel, and initiate trade fights with its closest allies rather than China.

Are we deterred? We are self-deterred. Hesitation and hand-wringing over fears of escalation have become hallmarks of the Biden administration's foreign policy. Right now, you would be forgiven for wondering whether President Biden might take longer to respond to the Iran-backed strike that killed U.S. soldiers in Jordan than he did to finally approve long-range fires for Ukraine.

The administration's public obsession with avoiding escalation at all cost only signals to our adversaries that, indeed, authoritarians can take what they want by force.

Fortunately, Putin's aggression has clarified our allies' thinking. The West is waking up, turbocharging investments in new capabilities, and accelerating the expansion of our own defense industrial base.

Beijing and Moscow are not happy to see war in Ukraine prompt two more highly advanced European nations make historic new commitments to collective defense of the West by joining NATO. They are not happy to see America's allies direct a gusher of historic military investments into cutting-edge American weapons made by American workers. In the past 2 years, Pacific allies like Japan, South Korea, and Australia have been buying American to the tune of tens of billions of dollars. NATO allies have invested \$120 billion of their own in U.S. capabilities. Importantly, they are also investing in expanding their own defense industrial capacities.

Our allies recognize that Russia, China, and Iran are, as Secretary General Stoltenberg put it just yesterday here in Washington, “shaping [an] alternative world where U.S. power is diminished [and] NATO is divided.” In response, they are rejecting division and committing to interoperability and collective defense. In many ways, NATO is now more united than during the Cold War. But this progress is not a given. It depends on American leadership, and it is quite capable of unraveling. President Xi would like nothing more.

There is really no quicker way to make sure we will be distracted from necessary competition with China than by letting Russian aggression in Europe fester. There is no surer path to dividing America from our closest allies than by shredding our credibility and abandoning Ukraine. The PRC hopes that America and our allies will lose our will to stand up to Russian aggression. President Xi hopes for Russian victory but will benefit, too, from a frozen conflict. As they watch Russia fight in Ukraine, what Beijing and Tehran fear is a Western victory.

We must understand that the threats our adversaries pose are connected. China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are making alarming new commitments to support and underwrite one another's aggressive behavior. Our Asian allies know it. They know that leaving Russia undefeated means leaving the PRC undeterred. And their security assistance to Ukraine demonstrates how seriously they take these linked threats.

There is also growing transatlantic agreement that China is a systemic rival and a revisionist power.

When the most successful military alliance in history stands together, it represents fully half of the world's military power and half of its economic power. NATO is a formidable force that inspires confidence and collaboration among an even wider circle of allies and partners, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. But when America and our allies let aggression linger undefeated, this force is spread thin. Beijing wants nothing more than to face a West still consumed by self-deterrence in a conflict halfway around the world.

Europe has woken up. It is outpacing America in direct assistance to