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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.

Eternal Father, You are our hope for the years to come. In this sacred moment, we turn our thoughts to You. We think of You because You have promised that no weapon formed against us will prosper. We think of You because You have given us mercy and grace to help us face life's difficulties. We think of You because You have guided this Nation through seasons more challenging than we face today. We love and depend on You, so continue to use our lawmakers as instruments of Your peace.

We pray in Your great 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 10, 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 Sen-

ator 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, 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 Karoline Mehalchick, of Pennsylvania, to be United States District Judge for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

UKRAINE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, here on the floor yesterday, I warned that the administration's efforts to deter Iranian-backed Houthi threats to international shipping and American credibility were grossly insufficient. Just hours later, the Houthis proved my point with a significant escalation in the Red Sea.

Tehran's proxies fired more than 18 suicide drones, along with anti-ship cruise missiles and ballistic missiles,

into one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. At great cost, American and British Navy vessels launched expensive interceptors to defend against these relatively inexpensive Houthi weapons.

On January 3, America and coalition partners warned that "the Houthis will bear responsibility for the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, or the free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways." Well, the Houthis crossed that redline. The question is now whether President Biden will finally impose sufficient consequences on the Houthis and their patrons in Tehran. The world is watching.

But American credibility and security isn't just on the line in the Red Sea; our Nation is facing the most serious array of national security challenges since the fall of the Soviet Union. The Senate's responsibility to address them remains unfilled.

Take the first major land war in Europe since 1945. On one side of the war in Ukraine is a free world that recognizes sovereignty; on the other is an autocrat with imperial ambitions that extend beyond Ukraine's sovereign borders.

With assistance from a nuclear-armed, rogue state—the most active state sponsor of terrorism—and a friendship without limits with America's top strategic adversary, Russia has spent a decade trying to subjugate Ukraine militarily.

Putin is waging a war of torture and brutality. In some cases, his forces' crimes—like those of the Hamas terrorists responsible for October 7—are documented proudly by the perpetrators themselves. And Moscow has mobilized a war economy, ramping up military production while also tapping into the industrial capacity of its axis partners in Beijing, Tehran, and Pyongyang.

The war has clearly jolted our European allies out of a holiday from history. Producers in Norway are racing a

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



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streamline production of critical air defense systems. Governments like Poland and Germany have announced major increases in defense spending. Denmark, for example, has resurrected an entire dormant industry to contribute ammunition. But even these historic, overdue investments have not yet turned the tide. This conflict has also exposed the glaring shortcomings of America's own arsenal and supply chains for critical capabilities.

As I have explained repeatedly and in great detail here on the floor, our supplemental appropriations to support Ukraine included heavy investments in expanding our defense industrial base and purchasing the cutting-edge weapons that our own forces need to deter our biggest adversaries.

The legislation we are considering this month would do even more to help meet urgent requirements of our own Armed Forces. It will increase procurement of critical munitions, long-range fires, and air defenses, and invest in our own defense industrial capacity.

This is essential for long-term competition with China and Russia. America and our allies still face serious shortcomings, and they extend well beyond the war in Ukraine. By one recent tally, Russia and China's arsenal of land-based air defense systems far exceeds the combined stockpile of the United States, Europe, and Japan combined. The West is outgunned in critical capabilities.

So let's not waste time indulging the misconception that standing by our European allies is an obstacle to competition with China. Let's give no credence to the idea that America should cut and run from our own allies and partners—precisely as our adversaries work closer and closer together.

With continued American leadership, European allies are shouldering more and more of the burden of collective security on the continent. There is just no question that our NATO allies are building military capacity and taking on more responsibility for restoring and maintaining the sovereignty of America's closest trading partners.

But America is a global superpower, and retreating from our leadership of NATO before seeing the job through won't make competition with China any easier. Handing Russia a victory in Ukraine on account of a waning attention span will only shred America's credibility, weaken critical alliances, and force us to contend even more directly with two major adversaries at once. I honestly can't think of a more shortsighted strategic gamble.

Only time will offer a full accounting of the missed opportunities of the past 3 years, but it is already clear that hesitation and self-deterrence on the part of our Commander in Chief cost Ukrainian lives and chances at swift victory over Russian aggression.

Of course, the brazen violence of Iran's terror network reminds us that this weakness and timidity is contagious. We cannot let them spread. We

cannot let shortsightedness govern our approach to the strategic competition that will define the next century of American history. We cannot give China any more reasons than this administration already has to doubt America's resolve to stand with sovereign democracies and to vigorously defend our interests.

In the very near future, it will be time for the Senate to demonstrate that we understand what time it is.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS

Mr. President, on a different matter, this year, two of America's most elite universities are in the market for new chief executives.

What makes for good leadership in higher education might once have been common sense, but if the past 3 months have taught us anything, it is that the virtues of a college president might need to be spelled out in a bit more detail.

For starters, the prerequisite for campus leadership should be a personal scholarly record that models academic rigor—prolific writing, publication, and an excellence in one's field.

I am not an Ivy Leaguer, but it would seem to me that someone who had produced fewer than a dozen peer-reviewed articles might not usually meet this standard at a place like Harvard. It may once have gone without saying that university presidents should also model the codes of academic conduct and integrity to which they should hold their students.

An academic record riddled with plagiarism should disqualify any candidate. And perhaps, more importantly, a university president must be committed to ensuring that the culture of speech on their campus—however far it might diverge from the protections enshrined in our First Amendment—is administrated fairly.

Suffice it to say that Harvard did not wind up dead-last in a watchdog ranking of free speech of American campuses for nothing, which made its former president's free-speech justifications for anti-Semitic hate laughable.

Over the past several decades, our country's most elite universities have let intolerant leftist dogmas, like DEI, replace the robust exchange of ideas as ordering principles on campus. One Harvard professor and former dean recently noted that the words "white supremacy" and "intersectionality" appear more frequently in the Harvard course catalog than the term "scientific revolution." These course offerings seem to indicate a drift from Harvard's stated motto "Veritas," Latin for "truth."

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. Hundreds of American universities outside the dusty confines of the Ivy League aren't showing any signs of abandoning their rigorous pursuit of truth for woke madness.

Places like Harvard and Penn would be well-served by a leader who takes an approach like our former colleague Ben

Sasse has taken as president of the University of Florida. As he put it recently:

Universities must reject victimology, celebrate individual agency, and engage the truth with epistemological modesty. Institutions ought to embrace open inquiry . . . More curiosity, less orthodoxy . . . Engage the ideas. Pull apart the best arguments with the best questions.

By all accounts, the heads of the leading universities in my home State of Kentucky—President Kim Schatzel of the University of Louisville and President Eli Capilouto of the University of Kentucky—aren't finding it especially difficult to foster campus climates of integrity and academic rigor.

I don't envy those tasked with finding new leaders to right the ship of the Ivy League. Restoring the tarnished reputations of our Nation's most elite universities will be no small task. But maybe they will have some luck if they look beyond their northeastern bubble and trade in the meaningless jargon of postmodernism for the simple wisdom of their mottos.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic whip.

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, having experienced legislative efforts of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, it would be a surprise to many people to learn that many Members come to the floor to address issues of personal importance to them, something that happened in their lives that motivates them to take up an issue, introduce a bill, try to create a new law.

That happened to me in the House of Representatives many, many years ago when I first confronted the tobacco issue. I lost my father to lung cancer when I was 14 years old, and it was a profound experience, as you might guess, in my life.

And I remembered what he went through in the last 100 days of his life, fighting lung cancer and, eventually, succumbing to it.

And so I took on the tobacco issue in the House of Representatives on a personal basis as well as a public basis, trying to reduce the power which the Big Tobacco lobby had in the House of Representatives. And when I arrived there in 1982, they were the most powerful lobby in Washington.

We were warned as new Members of Congress on both sides—Democratic and Republican—don't touch the tobacco issue. It is an issue that is very important for us to maintain our majority, and you shouldn't bring it up.

Well, I ignored that advice and introduced several ideas on reducing the power of the tobacco lobby on Capitol Hill. The one issue that I pursued with success had a profound impact on this country—much more than I ever imagined. I introduced the first bill, successful bill, in the House of Representatives to ban smoking on airplanes.

It seems so obvious today that it would be a fiction to suggest that there is a smoking and nonsmoking section