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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 God, our shelter from the storms, remind the nations that they are merely human. When they trust in their might and power, help them to remember that they borrow their heartbeats from You. Because of You, they live and move and exist, for You are King of kings and Lord of lords.

Today, we are grateful for the religious, political, and social freedoms that bless our lives. Continue to use our Senators to pay the price to protect our freedom.

Lord, provide our lawmakers with the wisdom to depend on Your strength.

We pray in Your powerful 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, September 18, 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 Senator 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, 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 the consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michelle Williams Court, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

RIGHT TO IVF ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday was a sad day in the Senate, as Republicans for the second time this year blocked legislation to protect families' access to IVF. By voting against IVF, Republicans confirmed many Americans' worst fear: Project 2025 is alive and well when it comes to reproductive rights.

Senate Republicans have spent months tying themselves into knots,

claiming that of course they are in favor of protecting IVF, but when it mattered most, when it actually came time to vote, Republicans showed their true colors and voted no.

What made yesterday's vote even worse was that was the second time they blocked IVF protections even though it is increasingly clear many Americans are worried about access. Both times, without hesitation, Senate Republicans caved to the extremists on their right flank.

Look, blocking IVF could have horrible consequences. The hard right has been transparent that now that they have overturned Roe, they are moving on to other targets, like IVF. Just look at what happened earlier this year in Alabama.

Senate Republicans who like to pretend that IVF is not under threat should have a word with the likes of the Heritage Foundation and Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. These organizations are some of the most influential conservative groups, and they are clear about their hostility about any Federal protections for IVF. SBA called our bill "irredeemable" a few months ago and called IVF a "free-for-all." These groups use language very similar to that of their opposition to abortion. So no matter how much Republicans claim IVF is not in danger, extremists on their side say otherwise, and Republicans seem to listen.

By voting against protections for IVF, Senate Republicans confirmed yet again that 2025 is increasingly steering the GOP.

SALT CAPS

Mr. President, now on the SALT cap, in the long 8 years that Donald Trump has been in politics, one thing is beyond doubt: What Donald Trump says and what Donald Trump does are two very different things.

Donald Trump says he fights for working people and then ushers in perhaps the most anti-worker administration in modern times as President.

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



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Donald Trump claims he is a “leader on fertilization, IVF”—whatever that means—but his MAGA Justices overturned Roe and cast women’s reproductive care into chaos.

Yesterday Donald Trump did it again, totally reversing himself, claiming that he will reverse the cap on State and local deductions. But Donald Trump must be suffering from selective amnesia because he was the one who took away people’s SALT deductions in the first place. His tax bill did it—a dagger aimed at blue States that want to spend a little more to help people with housing and healthcare and education and transportation.

All of a sudden, now that he is on Long Island, Donald Trump’s selective amnesia kicks in, and he totally reverses himself on SALT. But we know Donald Trump. We know what his MO is. He is going to do nothing. He is simply trying to escape the anger of many families he upset when he placed those caps, which affect so many middle-class people, particularly in higher cost areas like Long Island.

So he shows up in Long Island. Oh, he says he has changed his mind. And we know he will do nothing about it. Then, when some of his more rightwing people go to him and say “You can’t do it,” he will say “OK.”

So this is not only an empty promise, but it shows the hypocrisy of Donald Trump. For Donald Trump to pretend he has found religion on eliminating the SALT caps 2 months before an election, speaking in Long Island, is comical, is unserious, and it shows the lack of integrity that this man has. His promises carry about as much weight as Monopoly money.

Remember, the SALT cap was one of the key parts of Donald Trump’s own tax law. Congressional Republicans pushed the cap; he signed it. Donald Trump’s own Treasury Secretary, Steve Mnuchin, called SALT a subsidy for States like New York, even though for decades New York paid tens of billions more in taxes than we received from the Federal Government. To this day, SALT caps remain in place because extreme Republicans have blocked any attempt to fix this defective policy.

I have been a loud proponent of eliminating the SALT cap from the start. As long as I am leader, I will do everything in my power so that when these caps expire at the end of next year, they will not come back.

Double taxing hard-working owners on Long Island, in the Hudson Valley, and across New York and many other States as well—largely blue States—is plainly unfair, and it could not have come up at a worse time than the last few years, with so much chaos caused by COVID and the economic turmoil it unleashed.

So for families frustrated by the SALT cap, so many on Long Island—firefighters, police officers, construction workers, who make good salaries—they have Donald Trump and congress-

sional Republicans to thank for their pain.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, now on the shutdown, we have less than 2 weeks now before September 30. If the House and Senate do not act by then to extend government funding, the government will shut down, and there will be no ambiguity that will be a Republican shutdown.

My friend the Republican leader said yesterday that if Republicans shut the government down, “It would be politically beyond stupid for us to do that, because we’d”—meaning Republicans—“get the blame.”

Leader MCCONNELL is absolutely correct. A Republican shutdown would be beyond stupid for Republicans, and they would get the blame because it is only Speaker JOHNSON who is headed in that direction to assuage his hard right, the Freedom Caucus people, who hold his speakership in, shall we say—who say it is questionable whether he should be Speaker if this happens.

Nevertheless, Republicans are no closer to preventing a shutdown today than they were at the beginning of September. For the last 2 weeks, Speaker JOHNSON and House Republican leaders have wasted precious time on a proposal that everyone knows can’t become law. His own Republican conference cannot unite around his proposal.

Today, the House is expected to vote on the Speaker’s CR, and it is expected to fail. I hope that once the Speaker’s CR fails, he moves on to a strategy that will actually work: bipartisan cooperation. It is the only thing that has kept the government open every time we have faced a funding deadline. It is the only thing that works this time too. Bipartisan, bicameral cooperation—that is what works. That is what we are willing and happy to do. And the clock is ticking.

If Republicans keep squabbling and careen us into a shutdown, the consequences will reverberate across the country. A shutdown harms the economy. A shutdown causes costs to spike as supply chains buckle and lending slows down. Federal safety programs could come to a halt, making our people and our communities less safe.

If the Republicans shut the government down, tens of thousands of children across the country could immediately lose access to Head Start. Nearly 7 million women and infants and children could lose nutrition program benefits. Food safety inspections would be jeopardized. Some members of the military could be asked to work without pay. Border security—something very important that our Republican colleagues talk a lot about—could be thrown into chaos, increasing wait times at ports of entry. Frontline border personnel would have to do their jobs without pay.

America does not want another Republican shutdown. America cannot afford another Republican shutdown.

And make no mistake, if Republicans don’t work with Democrats in a bipartisan way, if the four leaders can’t come together because the House Republicans are so adamant, Americans will blame Republicans—particularly those in the House—for shutting the government down.

VBA SHORTFALL

Mr. President, now on the VBA shortfall, last night, the House passed legislation through a voice vote that would ensure that veterans get their well-deserved benefits for October. Passed by voice vote in the House—that doesn’t happen too often on significant and important legislation.

Well, we want to pass it through the Senate quickly. The need for action is urgent. Without this mandatory funding for veterans’ benefits before September 20, the VA will be unable to issue compensation and pension benefit payments to as many as 7 million veterans and their survivors. We can’t let that happen, so we must act, and we will.

REMEMBERING BRIAN GRIFFIN

Mr. President, one final note—a sad note on Brian Griffin. Earlier this week, Senate Democrats lost a longtime member of our beloved family, Brian Griffin.

If you have been around the Senate long enough, you certainly knew Brian. He started his Senate career as a page, worked his way up through the cloakroom—I remember him being there and always being helpful—and served as a top aide for Senator Byron Dorgan.

Many in our caucus came to know Brian well and considered him a dear friend. His family is in our thoughts and in our prayers.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the weeks since Washington Democrats made Vice President HARRIS their nominee, the American people have had their hands full in trying to figure out where her campaign stands on the issues on the top of their minds.

They have got serious questions about her role in everything from the runaway spending that gave them the worst inflation in 40 years to the open borders policies that have invited the worst humanitarian and security crisis the southern border has ever seen. Thus far, they haven’t received many answers.

The problem is that the Vice President doesn’t have a record. She has