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Senate

The Senate met at 3:05 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, in a turbulent world, our eyes look to You. Today, give our Senators Your grace and wisdom. Because of Your grace, may they find such inner peace that it will prompt them to reach out to one another and accomplish great things for Your glory. Because of Your wisdom, may they face today's challenges with confidence, knowing that You order the steps of good people.

Lord, give all who work on Capitol Hill a special discernment to know and do Your will. Remove their strain and stress, and let their ordered lives confess the beauty of Your peace.

We pray in Your magnificent 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 executive clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 9, 2024.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO 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 CALENDAR

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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 read the nomination of Tiffany Rene Johnson, of Georgia, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Georgia.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

WELCOME TO SENATORS-ELECT ADAM SCHIFF AND ANDY KIM

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today, two of our newest Senate Democratic colleagues will take the oath of office: the Senator from California, ADAM SCHIFF, and the Senator from New Jersey, ANDY KIM. I congratulate and welcome Senators-elect SCHIFF and KIM to the Senate.

Today, the Senate Democrats add two high-ranking caliber leaders who

already had great reputations in the House, where they got a whole lot done.

Senator-elect SCHIFF brings to the Senate an impressive record as a leading voice among House Democrats, where he was known for his piercing eloquence, his thoughtfulness, his unwavering support of democracy, and his courage.

As former chair of the House Intelligence Committee, he brings deep expertise and knowledge that will make him just a great Senator.

And Senator-elect KIM is no different. He is one of the most respected and admired Members of the House Democratic caucus, where his talent was only matched by his decency. He boasts an impressive record of service as a national security expert and diplomat, and spent every day in Congress putting families first.

And today will go down in history. Senator-elect KIM's parents came to America without knowing a soul, and today their son becomes the first Korean-American Senator ever. That makes you proud to be an American.

So to our new colleagues, we say welcome. We are excited to work with you. We are ready to help you. And as you find your bearings, we urge you to never lose sight of the great responsibility you carry as a Member of this body.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on judges, this week, the Senate will continue working on and off the floor to confirm more of President Biden's judges. This afternoon, we will hold a confirmation vote on Tiffany Johnson to be a U.S. District judge for the Northern District of Georgia. We will continue the week with additional votes for other nominees. We have some more judges right now awaiting confirmation votes, and we are working to schedule their confirmation votes this week.

We had a really good week last week by confirming an additional eight

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



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judges, and we want to keep that going as much as we can this week and next.

TRIBUTE TO JON TESTER

Madam President, now, later this afternoon, Senators will convene on the floor to hear farewell remarks of a beloved colleague. Someone we will dearly, dearly miss, someone who for all the days he served in this office, never forgot who he was, never forgot what he stood for. That Senator, of course, is my dear friend Senator JON TESTER of Montana.

There are a lot of labels that come to mind when JON's name is mentioned, so many of them: Interesting, decent, good, fine are these adjectives and labels. Most people around here know JON is a third-generation farmer. He still grows organic lentils and barley and grain, even after all these years in office.

He lost three of his fingers working a meat grinder as a 9-year-old, a turning point in his life.

I used to talk to JON when he was thinking of starting his organic farm out there in Montana. He was so smart, so able to see around the curve. He knew that organic types of grains and lentils were going to start selling, and it takes a long time before the field is eventually purely organic. But he does.

And he loves farming so much that he is one of the rare people—I think Senator GRASSLEY may be another—who goes home each weekend to tend to his farm. When I would call him up—I know his old phone number by heart; I know his new phone number by heart—he would often be on his tractor. He would say: Hey, I am on my tractor.

He was a happy man when he was on that farm, and he is going to continue doing that farming as he goes home.

Most of us know how proud he is of Montana, how he so often shared with us thoughts about what Montanans think. He embodies that State in every way: the way he talks, the way he thinks, the way he works, but unless you are actually from Montana, unless you have seen JON TESTER in his own backyard, working the dirt, talking to his neighbors, butchering a cow or greasing a combine, it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp how important home is to everything he has done.

And JON still lives and works on top of the very same soil his father and grandfather worked for over a century. It has never been an easy existence. JON says some years it was hard for him and his wife Sharla to make even \$20,000.

JON also taught music at the very same school he attended as a kid. You know, in this day when society—when things move so fast, and we are almost rootless, here is a man with deep roots. And those deep roots in Montana and in the soil and even in the classroom where he taught himself how to play the trumpet showed through every day, and it made him one of the most effective Members of this Chamber.

When he got up to speak, everyone listened because they knew it was com-

ing from the heart. They knew he had the background that very few Senators have, and he was so persuasive in what he does.

And to show you the continuity, he actually owns the very same meat grinder that took three of his fingers off when he was young. On YouTube, there are even videos of JON answering constituent questions while grinding meat.

Now, JON says he doesn't remember the moment his hand slipped on that dreadful day. But what he does remember is everything that happened after: the 13-mile drive in the family station wagon to the nearest rural hospital. He has been a defender of rural hospitals ever since because, in all likelihood, that rural hospital saved his life.

He remembers the intense pressure that his parents felt trying to keep it together in the years after the accident so their son could heal and thrive and grow up like other kids his age.

And when he came to the Senate in 2007, he brought every piece of home with him to Washington, and he was one of the best champions of small farmers in the Senate.

He awakened this body to the idea that rural areas are short of housing; it is not just urban areas that housing is an issue.

He constantly reminded us of one of the reasons meat prices were so high: because of the beef cartels and the combination of the big companies creating even less and less competition.

He brought memories of rural doctors and nurses who saved his life. He brought all these lessons, so much instilled in him in his roots. He is one of the most rooted people I have ever met. And that is why even when adversity hits, whether as a child or now—he didn't win that election and that is a shame because he is such a fine person and he has served Montana so well—but his rootedness, I know, will keep him strong and happy and productive through the years.

JON has always been, in all those years in Washington, a Montanan first, a Senator second, and that is why he has been so effective. One of the other areas about JON is veterans. I don't know of a single voice in this Chamber—everyone talks about veterans. That is a good thing. We all love our veterans on both sides of the aisle. But I don't know a single person who has done more for veterans, who fought so hard for veterans than he did.

JON moved heaven and earth to get the PACT Act done. He never rested. Every week he would get up in our caucus and talk about it. He felt the pain of those who had been exposed to the burn pits and were heartlessly told by the VA that unless they could find absolute, undeniable proof that the exact harm from the burn pits went into their bodies, that they wouldn't get funding, even though everyone knew that is what caused these cancers and other things that they had.

Well, right now, there are millions of veterans who are much better off who

were exposed in Iraq and Afghanistan to the burn pits because of JON.

And he always looked out for other people. He knew my job was a tough one. He always said: I don't want your job. He was that smart to know that, of course, but he always asked me how I felt and what I was doing and what he could do to help.

He had something that very few people have; he had enough strength, enough heart, enough soul that not only could he work on the things he worked on, whether it is farm, the people of Montana, working here in the Senate as head of the Veterans' Committee and now head of the Defense Subcommittee—one of the most powerful committees in the Senate—but he always had enough time to care about everybody else.

This is a deep, strong, wonderful man. Even on the hardest days, he never let the pressures of Washington get in the way of his humor and his decency. You know, everyone knows JON is a friend of the bassist for Pearl Jam, Jeff Ament. A line to one of their songs goes like this:

I changed by not changing at all.

JON, your friends in Pearl Jam could have been writing that song about you. After all these years, all the things you have done, everything you have accomplished, all of the emoluments and praise you have gotten, you haven't changed at all from the moment you entered public life, rooted, strong, caring, effective, someone with all three, a great brain, a great heart, a great soul.

We will miss you. Thank you for 18 wonderful years.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, in a matter of weeks, President Biden will hand off his authority to a new Commander in Chief, and his administration will submit its stewardship of U.S. foreign and national security policy to the judgment of posterity.

Already, the contours of history are coming into focus. On this administration's watch—and, frequently, at its tacit invitation—the gravest threats to America, our allies, and our global interests have grown and aligned more closely.

Senior administration officials insist that the exact opposite is true and that they are preparing to hand off a world that is safer and more stable than they found it. This sort of spin isn't surprising; it is just profoundly untrue. And nowhere is the administration's revisionist gaslighting more blatant or bizarre than in its account of events in the Middle East.

Yesterday's collapse of the Assad regime in Syria was a stunning close to a half a century of authoritarian rule and 13 years of senseless slaughter, torture, and innocent suffering. Bashar