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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a Senator from the State of Illinois.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Lisa Wink Schultz of the Senate Chaplain's Office here in Washington, DC.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God of all comfort, we thank You that Your steadfast love endures forever. Today, we offer our thanksgiving for Your word that counsels us, for Your Spirit that guides us, and for prayer that sustains us.

Give our Senators grace and wisdom to fix their eyes on You and to meditate on all Your ways, knowing that Your testimonies are better than silver and gold. As we anticipate the end of Advent and look forward to the wondrous beginning of Christmas, we ask You to come light our world.

We pray in Your mighty 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 assistant bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,

Washington, DC, December 16, 2024.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a Senator from the State of Illinois, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. DUCKWORTH 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.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WILDLIFE INNOVATION AND LONGEVITY DRIVER REAUTHORIZATION ACT—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 5009, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany H.R. 5009, a bill to reauthorize wildlife habitat and conservation programs and for other purposes.

Pending:

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill.

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill, with Schumer amendment No. 3317 (to the House amendment to the Senate amendment to the bill), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 3318 (to amend amendment No. 3317), to add an effective date.

Schumer motion to refer the message of the House on the bill to the Committee on Armed Services, with instructions, Schumer amendment No. 3319, to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 3320 (to the instructions (amendment No. 3319) of the motion to refer), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 3321 (to amendment No. 3320), to add an effective date.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, as is typical this time of year, the Senate's attention is focused squarely on a long list of business, with deadlines fast approaching. Extending government funding by Friday is our top priority. Shutting the government down is a one-way ticket to needless disruption of important functions. It has never been a winning proposition, and this time is no different.

Delivering urgent disaster relief is a nonnegotiable. As communities across the country continue to pick up the pieces from a devastating storm season, they are watching closely for the Senate to deliver on the promise of a much needed helping hand.

And after months of unnecessary delay, the Senate will finally vote on the National Defense Authorization Act. The Armed Services Committee reported this year's NDAA 6 months ago by an overwhelming bipartisan vote. The fact that it has only reached the floor a week before Christmas is really inexcusable; so is the absence of a vote on defense appropriations legislation. And the blame for this neglect will rest squarely on the outgoing Senate majority. Ranking Member WICKER and our colleagues on the committee tried mightily to ensure that the final bill—Congress's main annual opportunity to shape national defense priorities—backs tough talk on growing threats with the tools required to meet them.

But the NDAA, like all major legislation, is a compromise product, and the absence of the Senate-backed increase

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



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to topline investments will go down as a tremendous—tremendous—missed opportunity. Artificial budget restraints mean that major bill provisions, like a pay raise for enlisted servicemembers, will come at the expense of investments in the critical weapons systems and munitions that deter conflict and keep them safe.

For all the talk about growing threats to America's national security, it is past time for an honest conversation about the military requirements to meet those needs. And if this NDAA offers any valuable lesson, it is that we have a tremendous amount of work to do.

TRIBUTE TO MIKE BRAUN

Madam President, on an entirely different matter, my earliest participation in politics was wearing an "I like Ike" pin on school picture day. But, last month, the State of Indiana was chanting: "I like MIKE."

MIKE BRAUN's fellow Hoosiers like him so much, in fact, they have decided to steal him back from Washington to be their Governor. And if I know anything about Indiana's junior Senator, he is probably looking forward to trading in the trappings of this institution for a job a lot closer to home. But I would like to say just a few words before he goes.

Years ago, a local reporter asked MIKE BRAUN about his approach to life and work. He told them:

You live like you are going out of business every day, and it makes you healthy.

For a spry, former three-sport athlete like MIKE, that much checks out. But, needless to say, in the process of keeping him young, our colleague's mantra also brought a fair bit of political success.

Sure, a cushy, white-collar gig and a predictable corporate ladder would have been the natural next step for a high achiever fresh out of Harvard Business School. But where is the fun in that? For MIKE, in order to live like you are going out of business, you have to run a business yourself. You have to build a team and take risks. And what better place to do that than in your own hometown.

Most of us are familiar with at least some of what came next for MIKE and his high school sweetheart Maureen. The life and professional lessons of MIKE's dad Amos, a decorated World War II vet; steering a 15-person operation through the aftermath of the 1980s farm crisis and turning it into a national team spread across 38 States; for years, running that success, with sleeves rolled up, from a trailer office; and raising four kids along the way, three of whom have found their own callings in the family business—as I understand it, we have Maureen to thank that this incredible story of hard work and entrepreneurial spirit took a turn into politics in the first place. When friends around Jasper tried drafting her to run for the school board, she offered MIKE instead. And so began two decades and counting of life in politics.

Here in the Senate, MIKE's "going out of business" approach to public service made an early impression. Careful observers ranked him, at one point, the most effective freshman in the Chamber. He dove head first into legislation that mattered to him and to Indiana. He advocated passionately for farmers and for families impacted by rare diseases. He fought for outcomes, and he stood on principle.

But Hoosiers will be proud to know that he still doesn't like dressing up here on the Senate floor. And who can blame him? By MIKE's own admission, most of what he likes to do—tend the farm, fish, and hunt both animals and mushrooms—he can do within 60 miles of Jasper. So it speaks to MIKE's commitment to his neighbors that, even though he is leaving Washington, he is not quite going home just yet, nor will he be able to hang up the coat and the tie.

The trust of the people of Indiana is rightly a great source of pride for our colleague, second only to his pride in the family he and Maureen built, and I know he can't wait to get to work for all of them in Indianapolis.

So I know I speak for our colleagues when I thank MIKE for his service these past 6 years. We wish him all the best in his next chapter.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Illinois.

BITCOIN ATM FRAUD

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the next time you are checking out at your local grocery or convenience store, take a look around. There is a good chance you will see a kiosk marked with the letter B with two vertical lines running through it. It looks like the form of a dollar sign. It is the symbol for Bitcoin. And what you are looking at is a Bitcoin ATM.

Take a closer look. Is there somebody using the machine? Are they on their phone while they are using the machine? Do they seem stressed? If so, they might just be one of the growing number of victims of Bitcoin ATM fraud.

These scams, which frequently target elderly Americans, start with a phone call. A criminal calls his target and claims he is from their bank, the IRS, or some Federal Agency. He tells his victim that their bank account has been hacked or that they are late paying their taxes and explains that they need to go to their bank immediately and take out money—sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He directs his victim to a local business that hosts a Bitcoin ATM. He might even order them an Uber driver to pick them up. From there, he walks them through, step by step, how to deposit their money into the machine; how to use it to buy Bitcoin; and how to transfer the Bitcoin to a digital wallet controlled by the criminal himself.

In a matter of minutes, the money is gone, lost to the anonymity and irreversibility inherent to cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

Bitcoin ATM scams like these have exploded in recent years. According to the data released by the Federal Trade Commission, the amount consumers report losing in this form of fraud increased nearly tenfold between 2020 and 2023, from \$12 million to \$114 million. In the first half of this year alone, victims lost a staggering \$65 million.

A disproportionate number of these victims were elderly Americans. In 2023, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center received nearly 2,700 Bitcoin fraud complaints from individuals aged 60 and older—more than all other age groups combined.

Earlier this summer, the Illinois Times reported that a small business owner in my hometown of Springfield, IL, stepped in after he witnessed a Bitcoin ATM in his store repeatedly being used by elderly individuals to deposit large sums of money at the urging of fraudsters. He explained to the Illinois Times:

One hundred percent of the time that we saw somebody at the machine they were being scammed. So I was like, this machine has to go. I'm not going to be a part of that.

He wisely removed the Bitcoin ATM from the store.

In Texas, a good Samaritan called 9-1-1 after she, in her words, "noticed an elderly lady feeding thousands of dollars into the cryptocurrency machine" at the urging of a criminal. She tried to stop the victim from feeding more and more of her money into the machine but was unsuccessful. Only when the responding officer arrived and intervened did the victim finally understand that she had been scammed.

Scenarios like these are playing out all across America. While we should applaud bystanders who step in and stop—or at least limit—the damage caused by these criminals, relying on good Samaritans is not a solution to this growing problem.

That is why I led six of my colleagues in sending letters to the 10 largest Bitcoin ATM operators this last September. We wanted to understand what they were doing, if anything, to prevent fraudulent use of their machines. The responses we received were not reassuring.

While some safeguards, such as warning screens and ID checks, were employed by all responding companies, other commonsense measures, like analyzing transactions and digital wallets to identify and stop fraud, were not.

Other best practices, such as setting maximum transaction sizes, were left to the vagaries of State law, leaving too many Americans at risk in too many States.

That simply isn't good enough. A company should meet certain specific antifraud measures before dropping one of their machines into our communities. That is why I am going to introduce legislation in the next few weeks that establishes a Federal antifraud baseline for Bitcoin ATMs.

And as I start to develop this bill, there are a few things that strike me

as absolutely necessary. First, Bitcoin ATMs should have daily transaction limits, particularly for new customers. As these machines are increasingly used to perpetrate fraud, we should limit potential losses.

Second, any transactions initiated by a new customer should be held for some reasonable period of time before it is processed. This will allow new customers to cancel their transactions—particularly if they learn that they have been victims of fraud.

Minnesota and Connecticut recently passed legislation requiring Bitcoin ATM operators to wait 72 hours before processing a new customer's transaction. This seems like a good place to start.

Third, Bitcoin ATM operators should be required to use analytics to screen for fraudulent or otherwise illicit transactions. Many Bitcoin ATM operators already employ this technology; there is no reason it shouldn't be used across the board.

Fourth, Bitcoin ATMs should be required to provide transaction receipts that include transaction hashes. This will allow law enforcement to more easily trace the transaction, collect evidence of the crime, and maybe even recover the stolen funds.

These are just a few pillars that this legislation will include.

I plan to work with stakeholders to make this the best bill possible. That includes State attorneys general and organizations like AARP, who have been real leaders on this issue.

It also includes Bitcoin ATM operators. In their responses to my letters, many of these companies offered to work with Congress to craft appropriate regulations for the industry. I hope they will come to the table in good faith.

I am not going to stand idly by while thousands of Americans—particularly elderly Americans—are ripped off in Bitcoin ATM scams. My bill will address this problem before it spirals out of control.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

DR. BARRY C. BLACK

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, our thoughts and our prayers are with our dear friend Chaplain Barry Black, who was unexpectedly hospitalized Thursday afternoon. We are relieved and thankful that he is expected to make a smooth recovery.

Chaplain Black is one of the most beloved individuals in the entire Senate. Every day we gavel into session, he is

always here to start us off in prayer, delivered with his profound sense of wisdom, grace, and eloquence.

So we pray for the Chaplain and can't wait to see him back very soon.

DRONE SIGHTINGS

Madam President, now on drone sightings, yesterday, I called on Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas to quickly deploy any available drone-detecting tools to help New York and New Jersey deal with the mysterious drone sightings of the past few weeks. This week, I will also come to the floor of the Senate to seek passage of legislation that will give local officials greater authority to swiftly respond to these sightings.

The reports of the past few weeks have ignited immense anxiety and confusion for millions of people across the Northeast. Thankfully, there is no reason to believe these drone sightings pose a national security threat, but even so, they can be disruptive if they fly over restricted airspace, particularly near airports and bases.

While there is no shortage of reports about possible drone activity, we still have very few answers on where some of these drones come from and who may be operating them. The people of New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and haven't gotten many answers. We know one thing, though: Local officials now don't have the resources nor the authority to get to the bottom of what is happening. This is Federal jurisdiction. But, of course, because drones are so new and there are so many in so many different places, including recreational users, we need to do a lot more.

So to repeat, this week, I will move for the Senate to pass legislation giving local officials the tools and authorities necessary to act quickly and in lockstep with the Department of Homeland Security and other Agencies. Local authorities can do a lot to help answer our questions, but right now, they are not empowered to do so because the Federal Government has total jurisdiction.

In the meantime, I urge DHS to take all necessary action to deploy as many drone-detecting resources as possible. Right now, they have not deployed close to enough, and that is why these questions that so many people have are going unanswered.

Some of the new technology, like the Robin's systems, are 360-degree radar—they can see 360 degrees, not at one beam—and could go a long way to help local officials collect real data about where these drones are coming from. I want to see a flock of Robin-like technology systems deployed across the New York City metropolitan area, so we need the Department of Homeland Security to spring into action.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Madam President, Senate business on the NDAA, the CR, WRDA, and noms: The Senate gavels back into session for a very busy week. We must finish our work on the NDAA, and we must keep

the government open, act on the Social Security Fairness Act, act on WRDA and EDA, and confirm more of the President's nominees. It is going to take cooperation from our Republican colleagues to get these things done in a timely fashion.

First, as I said, we must pass our annual Defense authorization bill, the NDAA. This afternoon, we will take the first procedural vote on the NDAA package sent to us last week by the House. If cloture is invoked, I hope we can find a path to passing NDAA as soon as tomorrow.

This year's NDAA is not a perfect bill, but it nonetheless has some good things that Democrats have worked hard for and that will strengthen military families and boost tech innovation here at home—something very important to me and to the Presiding Officer. To be sure, the NDAA has some bad provisions Democrats would not have included, and there are other provisions that were left out of NDAA which we still hope can get done elsewhere.

I want to thank Chairman REED, Ranking Member WICKER, and all the members of the Armed Services Committee for their good work on this year's Defense bill.

Madam President, on another matter, by the end of the week, the Senate must also pass a temporary extension of government funding before December 20 or else the government will shut down right before Christmas.

Democrats have spent weeks working in good faith with our Republican counterparts on crafting a strong CR that will keep the government open while also providing much needed disaster relief for the American people. We kept working through the weekend on finalizing an agreement, but our Republican colleagues are still sorting through disagreements on their end, and there are many.

Democrats will keep working to finish the job on passing a strong and bipartisan CR. We don't want the government to shut down during the holiday season, and I expect that many, if not most, of our Republican colleagues feel the same way. So let's finish the job.

Besides keeping the government open, the Senate will also vote later this week on reauthorizing WRDA and the Economic Development Administration.

Reauthorizing WRDA, the Water Resources Development Act, is vital for strengthening America's ports and waterways, preventing flood damage, protecting our wetlands, and boosting our economy. Reauthorizing the EDA would provide critical investments in infrastructure, workforce, and domestic supply chains that will help the United States outcompete the rest of the world.

The House passed WRDA and EDA with overwhelming bipartisan support last week. We expect it to pass here with equally robust support, and we will work with our Republican colleagues on finding time to hold a floor

vote. I thank them for working with us to get these bills done.

Madam President, finally, before I get to the Social Security Fairness Act, the Senate will also be working on nominations. Later today, I will file cloture on the nominations of Benjamin Cheeks to be U.S. district judge for the Southern District of California and Serena Murillo to be U.S. district judge for the Central District of California. Members should be ready to vote on and confirm these outstanding public servants as soon as Wednesday. I will have more to say on our outstanding nominees throughout the week.

SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT

Madam President, now on Social Security, this week, the Senate will vote to take up a bipartisan piece of legislation that impacts millions of public retirees and their spouses: the Social Security Fairness Act. I am proud to cosponsor this bill with my good friend Senator BROWN as a staunch advocate for working Americans, and he is a very staunch advocate as well.

The Senate has a golden opportunity to deliver for our retired firefighters, postal workers, teachers, and other public servants who are retired by passing the Social Security Fairness Act this week.

The bill would ensure no public retiree or spouse is denied their well-deserved Social Security benefits by repealing two widely criticized policies that have eaten away at the benefits of millions of people—the Windfall Elimination Provision, WEP, and Government Pension Offset, GPO. Many of these retirees contributed toward Social Security for years but are being penalized because at one point they worked as a teacher, a firefighter, a postal worker, a police officer, or some other public sector job.

The bill has already won immense support from Democrats and Republicans alike. In fact, the House passed the bill with an overwhelming 327-to-75 vote margin. There is no reason for the outcome to be different in the Senate. Senate Democrats are ready to vote yes on this legislation. We hope our Republican colleagues will join us.

Retirees have been pushing for action on WEP and GPO for decades, and this week the Senate is going to act. We will vote, and every Senator will choose. Where are you? Do you stand on the side of public retirees who deserve their benefits or bungle this golden opportunity by blocking this bill?

NEW YORK COUNTY TOUR

Finally, the 62-county tour. Today is a very special day for me because today you can flip one of my favorite numbers, 62—that is the number of counties in New York—and get another very important number, 26. For the 26th year in a row, I have just completed, earlier this afternoon, my annual tour of all 62 counties in New York State.

It is a promise I never fail to keep, not even after being named majority leader, not even during COVID because

it is the best way I keep up with everything New Yorkers are doing, thinking, and saying.

Just as everyone knows here, you sit at your desk, talk on the telephone, it is not the same as being out there. And the 62-county tour makes sure I am out there week in and week out. I am so, so happy that we have completed the tour, and I can't wait in January to start doing it again for the 27th year.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 849.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Benjamin J. Cheeks, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of California.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 849, Benjamin J. Cheeks, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of California.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Tammy Duckworth, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tammy Baldwin, Catherine Cortez Masto, Debbie Stabenow, Patty Murray, Amy Klobuchar, Chris Van Hollen, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Andy Kim, Margaret Wood Hassan, Elizabeth Warren, Christopher A. Coons, Adam B. Schiff, Jeff Merkley.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 850.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Serena Raquel Murillo, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 850, Serena Raquel Murillo, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Tammy Duckworth, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tammy Baldwin, Catherine Cortez Masto, Debbie Stabenow, Patty Murray, Amy Klobuchar, Chris Van Hollen, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Andy Kim, Margaret Wood Hassan, Elizabeth Warren, Christopher A. Coons, Adam B. Schiff, Jeff Merkley.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 5009

Mr. SCHUMER. As if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture vote on the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 5009 be waived.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

OUTBOUND INVESTMENT TRANSPARENCY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, last week, I came to the Senate floor to discuss provisions that would address outbound investment transparency that Congress neglected to put in the National Defense Authorization Act conference report, which we are presently considering.

Well, I am back again, and I wish I had better news to share. As I mentioned last week, no one can claim to be serious about the China threat while turning a blind eye toward outbound investment transparency. Simply put, American investment in Chinese companies is the lifeblood of the Chinese economy. If the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party,