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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You are our rock and fortress. Keep us from disappointing You.

Help our lawmakers to walk in Your precepts so that they can remain within the circle of Your protection and blessings. Lord, turn their ears to listen to Your admonition as You infuse them with the courage to obey Your commands. We have trusted You since the birth of this land we love. That is why we will declare Your glory all day long. Lord, as our Senators strive to please You today, we declare that You alone are our hope.

And, Lord, continue to be with those who battle the catastrophic wildfires in Southern California.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARSHALL). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The President pro tempore.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I would like to speak for 2 or 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISRAEL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the Jewish people have faced many libels

and many libels over their history—in their case, for millennia. Today, the Jewish State faces the dirty libel—can you believe it?—of committing genocide, all while defending themselves from Hamas.

Remember, Hamas has pledged to destroy the Jewish people in their homeland. Now, that happens to be real genocide. Israel's accusers cite large civilian casualty numbers traced to Hamas's self-reporting. As we know, Hamas has a history of inflating numbers, of not distinguishing fighters from civilians, and of listing male soldiers as women or children. A recent report by the Henry Jackson Society confirms that the widely cited Gaza casualty statistics suffer from all forms of falsifications.

Still, as we would all agree, any civilian death in Gaza is a real tragedy. While Israel goes out of its way to issue warnings to civilians, Hamas actually encourages civilians to ignore evacuation warnings while embedding in schools and hospitals to use civilians as human shields. Hamas officials are on record that they seek civilian casualties for propaganda effect.

The definition of "genocide" in the United States and also under international law focuses on the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnic, racial, or religious group.

A very recent Amnesty International report adopts a new definition just to tar Israel with that disgusting libel. Amnesty International Israel was not involved in the report and, as you might expect, rejects its central claims.

So I want my fellow Senators to know that I, too, reject this bias and this misleading report, and I say: Shame on them.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

LAKEN RILEY ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, it is more than 1,000 miles from El Paso, TX, to Athens, GA, yet a man who crossed the border illegally near El Paso was able to wreak havoc in Athens.

Last February, an illegal immigrant murdered nursing student Laken Riley while she was out for a morning run on the Athens campus of the University of Georgia. This was a tragedy, and it was preventable. The man who killed Laken Riley should not have been in the United States in the first place. He definitely shouldn't have been on the streets after previously being involved in two crimes, but he was. It is, unfortunately, just one example of how the Biden border crisis has made every State a border State.

Like many illegal immigrants whom law enforcement encounters at the border, Laken's killer was released on parole into the interior of the United States. He made his way to New York City, where he was arrested and released before a detainer could be issued and he could be turned over to immigration authorities. Then he went to Athens, GA. He was cited in Georgia for shoplifting. Once again, he was released, and now we know what happened next.

Laken's killer is now serving a life sentence for murder, and while her family can perhaps take at least some comfort in the fact that justice has been served, Laken Riley should be alive today.

The truth is that what happened to Laken Riley could have happened anywhere. That is why the Senate is currently considering Senator BRITT's Laken Riley Act. This bill would help reduce the chances of another tragedy like this one by requiring that illegal immigrants be detained when they are charged with theft-related crimes like the one for which Laken's killer was cited less than 5 months before he killed her. If this bill had been law then, Laken Riley might well be alive today.

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



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I hope to see this bill become law, and I hope that my Democrat colleagues are as committed to making it law as we are on this side of the aisle. This is not a comprehensive bill, but it is an important step toward keeping Americans safe, and it should be an easy “yes” vote for every Senator. We have had strong bipartisan votes for this bill in recent days, and I hope that will continue.

We are going to have an amendment process here on the floor, the type of amendment process that has been lacking in recent years. We will push for votes on amendments that make this bill even stronger.

One of the amendments that would do that is Senator ERNST's amendment known as Sarah's Law. Like Laken Riley, Sarah Root was killed by an illegal immigrant. Soon after graduating from college in 2016, Sarah was killed by a drunk driver who was in the country illegally. The driver was arrested, but he posted bond and fled shortly after the crash that took Sarah Root's life. The Root family didn't get justice. So Senator ERNST's amendment would require ICE to detain illegal immigrants accused of a crime that resulted in death or serious bodily injury.

Every Member of the Senate should be able to agree that illegal immigrants who commit a crime that kills or seriously injures another person should, at the very least, be detained.

In the coming days, the Senate will have a serious debate about this and other amendments and about the Laken Riley Act. That is the Senate's role. We will have a debate, and we will aim to produce the strongest bill that we can pass into law. That is our goal, and I hope our Democrat colleagues are as interested in making a law as we are.

Mr. President, time will tell.

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. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ISRAEL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, let me begin by speaking of the recent news of a cease-fire agreement in the Middle East. I have good news. I have just been informed by the administration that a deal has been agreed to. It is welcome news that there is an agreement that will free many of the hostages. A cease-fire is very good news for Israel, for America, for the Pales-

tinian people, and particularly for the hostage families, who have waited so long in agony.

A cease-fire will reduce violence in Gaza and harm to innocent civilians. It couldn't have happened without steadfast diplomacy and until the potency of Hamas was radically reduced. We will not rest until every hostage comes home.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, on the Hegseth hearing, the takeaway from yesterday's hearing on Pete Hegseth is very clear: Pete Hegseth is woefully unfit for the job of Secretary of Defense.

For Mr. Hegseth, yesterday's hearing was an exercise in obfuscation. When confronted about the serious accusations against his character, Mr. Hegseth repeatedly dismissed them as “smear tactics” but refused to respond to how these character issues impact his qualifications for the job.

When asked if being guilty of sexual assault is disqualifying for the job of Secretary of Defense, Mr. Hegseth refused to answer. Imagine if any other American interviewing for any other job refused to answer that question.

Clearly, more information is needed about Hegseth's background. But when Democrats asked to make Mr. Hegseth's full FBI background documents available to all members of the committee, the Republican chair said no.

Why? Why is the Republican chair insistent on keeping relevant information about Mr. Hegseth locked away from committee members?

Perhaps the reason for Republican stonewalling is that the more evidence that is revealed about Mr. Hegseth, the more obvious it will become that he is woefully unfit for the job.

For Mr. Hegseth, when there are serious allegations, to not answer them directly and instead just call them “smear tactics”—especially in such an important job like Secretary of Defense, where people's lives are on the line—is just totally unacceptable, totally inadequate, and, basically, a nominee for a very important position just ducking the most important questions he faced.

Now, let me say a few things about why these hearings are so important for our country and to our side.

By all indications, our Republican colleagues seem perfectly comfortable with advancing Mr. Hegseth through the Senate, despite his lack of qualifications. Many of our colleagues have private doubts about the nominees, but, publicly, they are still willing to embrace them.

Donald Trump's hold on Senate Republicans has become very powerful. Nevertheless, we Democrats will continue to push and pressure and scrutinize each nominee in committee because it is so important to get them on record. Americans need to see that

many of Donald Trump's nominees are simply unfit for the jobs they have been chosen for. Americans need to hear these nominees answer for Donald Trump's harmful policies.

And if some of these nominees are severely unqualified—and many of them are—these hearings are essential for exposing that. Even if they get confirmed in the end, the information must come out. Even if they get confirmed, it is so important to have all these questions asked and to see what the answers, or lack of answers, are.

If the time comes, months from now, that some of Donald Trump's Cabinet members fail on the job, these hearings will have served as an important warning for the American people to see. That is why Democrats are committed to ensuring each nominee is vetted thoroughly and scrutinized during the testimony.

One other point, by the way, on why we think the hearings are important: The hearings are also an opportunity to show whose side each party is on. Are these nominees in favor of tax cuts for very wealthy people? Are they in favor of keeping programs that help working-class people, keep prices down, such as making sure that Medicare can negotiate drug prices, which brings down the price for everybody? Where do they stand?

Where do they stand? The hearings glaringly show that Donald Trump and his nominees are on the side of the very powerful and that we Democrats who are asking the questions are on the side of working people.

And as the hearings wind through and we go through more and more witnesses, it will become clearer and clearer to the American people who is on whose side.

So it is important to have a record of these nominees even if they get confirmed in the end to see who they are and to guard against the dangers that might occur with them in office and to show who is on whose side.

Now, a couple more of today's nominees are very troubling. One is Mr. Vought. Few nominees illustrate what is at stake for working-class families better than Donald Trump's pick for OMB director, Mr. Russell Vought. This is one of the most influential positions in the entire White House, responsible for not only producing the President's budget but also executing the President's agenda across the executive branch.

I will be candid, Mr. Vought's appointment to OMB director would be a nightmare scenario for working Americans. It is difficult to imagine a worse choice to implement White House policy than the chief architect of Project 2025. Let me repeat that, because our Republican friends don't want to talk about 2025, but at the same time, they are likely to vote for someone who was the chief architect of the project in a powerful position to implement it: head of OMB.

You cannot, you simply cannot be proworker and support the nomination