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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. 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.

Everlasting God, who commanded light from darkness and divided the waters into sea and dry land, great and wonderful are Your works.

By Your power and might, sustain our lawmakers this day. Lord, give them the courage to embrace the good and avoid the evil. When they are fainthearted, strengthen them. When they are weak, support them. When they feel doubt, infuse them with faith in Your power, mercy, and grace. Lord, transform their work from anything mundane into an expression of their worship of You. Help them to make a renewed commitment to excellence in thoughts, words, and deeds.

We pray in Your amazing 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 (Ms. LUMMIS). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume

consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Reed Rubinstein, of Maryland, to be Legal Adviser of the Department of State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, yesterday, I stood here opening the Senate and kicking off the 64th annual National Police Week. That is a week dedicated to brave men and women who protect us and keep us safe.

Tonight, as part of this week's celebration, marks the 37th annual candlelight. Each year, hundreds of officers killed in the line of duty are recognized and memorialized at this vigil. The name of each man and woman who gave their life will be read aloud.

I encourage everyone to join me in recognizing their sacrifices. Honoring those who have made the ultimate sacrifice helps ensure that their contributions and legacies are preserved for generations to come.

I encourage folks to visit the national law enforcement memorial. The memorial contains what is called "pathways of remembrance," where the names of these courageous officers are engraved on the walls.

While walking the pathways, visitors will notice the sculpture of a lion with an inscription below that reads:

It is not how these officers died that made them heroes; it is how they lived.

These words are so very true, especially today, as the new officers' names are engraved on those walls.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER
The majority leader is recognized.

ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, the month of May is a special time to celebrate the Americans who serve our country in uniform. May is Military Appreciation Month.

On Saturday, we celebrate those currently serving on Armed Forces Day, and toward the end of the month, on Memorial Day, we honor those who gave their lives in defense of our country.

South Dakota has a rich heritage of military service, and I am proud to represent the men and women carrying on that heritage in the South Dakota National Guard at Ellsworth Air Force Base and serving in our military around the globe.

South Dakota is proud to support our troops. Our State is home to two major military installations that are fixtures of their communities. But 20 years ago, South Dakota was at risk of losing one of these bases.

On May 13, 2005—20 years ago—the Defense Department announced that it was recommending South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base for closure.

I am not the only one for whom this was a gut punch. Ellsworth is a point of pride in the Black Hills. It has been a national security asset since World War II, and it is home to the 28th Bomb Wing's squadrons of B-1B Lancers, which were performing a critical role in the Global War on Terror.

But, at the time, Ellsworth was a single-mission base, and the Air Force saw savings in moving that mission elsewhere and closing the base.

In May 2005, I was a freshman Senator, 5 months on the job, but now my State faced a major test. Losing the base would have been devastating to western South Dakota and a significant loss, I might add, to our national security. So failure was not an option.

But Ellsworth faced long odds. Past rounds of the Base Realignment and

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



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Closure Commission suggested we had a 12-percent chance of keeping the base open. Some, at the time, were ready to write Ellsworth's obituary, knowing it would take a miracle to save the base. Some thought it would take a political deal, and they doubted that South Dakota had the clout to pull that off.

We knew we weren't going to save Ellsworth through politics, and we weren't going to wait around for a miracle. Instead, we did it the South Dakota way. We worked hard—harder than we ever had. There were just over 100 days from the announcement in May to the financial decision in August, and saving Ellsworth consumed that entire summer.

My staff and I called everyone we could think of. I am sure the BRAC Commission was tired of seeing me that summer, but I was determined to drive home the case for keeping Ellsworth open. We poured through reams of data to make that case.

It was a team effort. Bob Taylor, in my Washington office, and Qusi Al-Haj, in my Rapid City office, didn't see much of their families that summer. The rest of the South Dakota delegation was involved. Then-Governor MIKE ROUNDS was involved as well. Retired Air Force officers like Gen. John Michael Loh and Col. Pat McElgunn lent their voices and expertise to the cause. And countless local officials, community members, and, of course, the 11,000—11,000—South Dakotans who came to the BRAC hearing in Rapid City that June were all part of that team.

In the end, Ellsworth was not saved by miracles or politics. It was saved because we proved that Ellsworth was too valuable to close. Moving all the B-1s to another base was supposed to save money, but we proved that wouldn't actually be the case.

Plus, we demonstrated the Pentagon's analysis failed to account for a number of other factors. Consolidating the entire fleet of bombers in one place was a major vulnerability. An attack, extreme weather, or any issue at that base could ground the entire fleet of B-1s. And consolidation risked overwhelming maintenance and training capacity at that base.

It turned out that Ellsworth was just what the Air Force needed. That is the argument that we made. As Colonel McElgunn put it to the BRAC Commissioners, "Ellsworth has operational advantages to make it the ideal base for the 21st century." And as General Loh testified, "closing Ellsworth will deny the Pentagon a valuable base for future missions."

Ultimately, in August, the BRAC Commission agreed, and it voted 8 to 1 to keep Ellsworth open. And since then, those predictions have proven right. Ellsworth's B-1s have been a consistent asset to our national security.

In 2011, B-1s left Ellsworth to strike targets in Libya, marking the first time a B-1 fleet launched from the

United States to strike overseas targets.

Last year, Ellsworth B-1s conducted a CONUS-to-CONUS mission, taking a continuous 31-hour flight to the Indo-Pacific and back without landing.

And we have continued working to demonstrate Ellsworth's value and to ensure its future will never again be in jeopardy.

In 2007, the Air Force Financial Services Center arrived on base. In 2012, the 89th Attack Squadron came to Ellsworth to control MQ-9 Reaper drones from ground control stations in South Dakota.

In 2015, after a decade of work, we expanded the Powder River Training Complex, nearly quadrupling its size and making it the largest training airspace in the lower 48.

And in 2021, the Air Force announced that Ellsworth would officially be named the first operating base for the new B-21 Raider, a sixth-generation long-range strategic bomber.

From BRAC to B-21, and the story continues.

Madam President, 20 years ago, Ellsworth was said to be a liability. Today, it is very clear that it is a national security asset, and I am working to make sure the base and the surrounding community have what they need to continue to play a key role in our national defense for generations to come.

NOMINATION OF TROY MEINK

Madam President, before I close, I want to speak briefly about Troy Meink, a native South Dakotan, whose nomination to be Air Force Secretary will be considered this week.

Dr. Meink grew up in Lemmon, SD. He graduated South Dakota State University on an ROTC scholarship and met his wife Jean during their time in Brookings.

His service encompasses the breadth of the Air Force's mission. He began his career as a navigator and instructor on a KC-135 crew. He flew 100 flights during the first Gulf war, including 8 combat missions. In the Air Force Reserve, he was the lead test engineer for ballistic test missiles.

Then, in 2013, he became the Deputy Under Secretary for Space. In 2020, he was appointed the Principal Deputy Director of the National Reconnaissance Office.

And in all his spare time, he has coached his kids' competitive robotics teams.

Madam President, Troy Meink is someone who has the experience to lead the Air Force into the next frontier, and I look forward to seeing him take the Air Force to even greater heights once he is confirmed to this position.

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 Democratic leader is recognized.

QATAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, news of the Qatari Government gifting Donald Trump a \$4 million private jet to use as Air Force One is so corrupt that even Putin would give a double take.

This is not just naked corruption. It is also a grave national security threat.

So in light of the deeply troubling news of a possible Qatari-funded Air Force One and the reports that the Attorney General personally signed off on this clearly unethical deal, I am announcing a hold on all DOJ political nominees until we get more answers.

Here are some questions that must be answered. First, I call on the DOJ's Foreign Agent Registration Act Unit, or the FARA Unit, to do its job and disclose all activities by Qatari foreign agents inside the United States that could benefit President Trump or the Trump Organization.

Since Attorney General Bondi took charge, the Department of Justice has not been doing its job when it comes to FARA. The FARA unit needs to enforce the law and inform the public of all activities, not just on this luxury plane deal but all deals involving foreign countries in the Middle East and President Trump, his family, and the Trump Organization.

Second, with regard to this half-a-billion-dollar private jet deal, the American people deserve to know the facts. President Trump has told the American people this is a "free jet." Does that mean the Qataris are delivering a ready-on-day-one plane with all the security measures already built in?

If so, who installed those security measures, and how do we know they were properly installed? Why would we take the risk of trusting any foreign country to do this sensitive work?

If not, what security modifications would be needed to ensure a foreign-sourced Air Force One is safe to use?

If this is, as President Trump promised, a "free jet," will the Qataris pay for those highly sensitive installations, or will the American taxpayers cover the cost?

How much will those modifications cost American taxpayers? Hundreds of millions of dollars? Billions of dollars? How much will they cost?

If the American taxpayers are forced to pay for this temporary plane, does it mean the U.S. Government will cancel the contract for the future Boeing plane?

If so, how much will that cancellation cost? And if not, why are American taxpayers being asked to spend hundreds of millions of dollars or more on a plane that will only be used for a year or two?

Additionally, who in the Trump administration was responsible for this crooked deal? What are the parameters