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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Great God, eternal Lord, long ago, You gave us this land as a home for free people. Lord, show us that there is no law or liberty apart from You, and lead our lawmakers to serve You with faithfulness, integrity, and humility.

Lord, use them to challenge the cruelty that divides and wounds humanity. May they be Your instruments to draw people together in order to accomplish Your purposes. Use these efforts to enable America to be a light to nations, leading the way to Your promised Kingdom.

We pray in Your awesome 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. BUDD). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Iowa.

CENTRAL TEXAS FLOODS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, 32 years ago today, I joined President

Clinton, Governor of Iowa Terry Branstad, and members of the Iowa congressional delegation to tour catastrophic flood damage in my home State. The great flood of 1993 ravaged nine States in America's heartland.

This reminds me of a poster we in the Midwest showed at that particular time, and I was hoping I could round it up and show it again to the Senate. But it had a picture of the Great Lakes in the satellite, and then it had a picture of the flooded areas of the Midwest. And the blue that shows up where the water is was almost as blue in the Midwest that was flooded along with the same color of the Great Lakes.

Flooded tributaries at this time of the 1993 flood overtopped levees, devastating communities, businesses, and the livelihoods connected to those businesses. More than 15 million acres of farmland were underwater. Barge traffic on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers stopped for 2 long months. A quarter of a million residents in Des Moines went without running water for 11 days. At least 54,000 people were evacuated.

The 1993 flood amassed the largest financial loss from flooding in modern history. The second costliest flood swept the Midwest 15 years later in 2008.

Of course, the loss of life is the most significant tragedy of any natural disaster. Fifty precious lives were lost in the 1993 floods. Iowans know firsthand the anguish and despair caused by natural disasters. So, on behalf of my home State, we mourn the loss of life in Texas Hill Country from flash flooding along the Guadalupe River on July 4 of this year.

As the road to recovery gets underway, Iowans stand with Texans. The grit and resilience we have in the Midwest runs just as deep in the State of Texas.

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. 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the appropriations process is officially underway here in the Senate.

Last week, the Appropriations Committee held its first markup of appropriations bills for fiscal year 2026, and I am pleased to report that the committee referred two bills to the floor with bipartisan support. Today, I want to talk about one of the bills that came out of last week's markup, and that is the Agriculture appropriations bill.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of our country, and in places like my home State of South Dakota, farming and ranching are a big part of our way of life. I know how hard American farmers and ranchers work to deliver food, fuel, and fiber to America and to the world, and I know this work can be challenging and, at times, unforgiving.

In recent years, farmers and ranchers across the country have faced some pretty fierce headwinds. Higher input costs and depressed commodity prices strained their budgets, and higher interest rates made financing more difficult. Then there were the supply chain disruptions; natural disasters and drought; and things like bird flu, African swine fever, and the New World screwworm that threaten livestock.

Just 2 weeks ago, Republicans passed a reconciliation bill that addresses many of the challenges head-on by bolstering programs that farmers 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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ranchers depend on. But as I said then, farmers' and ranchers' priorities are going to continue to be a priority here in the Senate, and the Agriculture appropriations bill is an example of that.

Our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee have reported a bill that provides robust funding to support America's farmers and ranchers. It provides important funding to the Farm Service Agency, including support for \$10.5 billion in capital access for farmers and ranchers. And it supports efforts to track foreign-owned land to prevent our adversaries like China from buying up America's farmland.

It also makes investments in rural development programs at USDA. In South Dakota, that money goes far in supporting water programs, electricity, and broadband programs in rural areas.

This bill also invests in conservation programs, and it advances efforts to help farmers and ranchers get their products to the market. I am glad to see support for processing capacity for meat, poultry, and egg products. And I am pleased that this bill also promotes programs that help State-inspected plants operate across State lines, which provides producers with more options for their products and supports smaller processors.

The bill also includes funding for the Agricultural Marketing Service to help facilitate greater access to international markets for American agriculture products. And the updated market data that will result from investments in this bill will help farmers and ranchers make better decisions about their businesses.

In just the past year, the threat to our food supply posed by diseases and pests has been national news. I am glad to see the Trump administration's actions to address bird flu and its effect on the egg supply have had a positive impact. And the Agriculture appropriations bill continues efforts to combat bird flu as well as other potentially devastating threats like chronic wasting disease and the New World screwworm.

Nutrition is another important part of agriculture policy, and the bill that has been reported out provides robust funding for programs like WIC and SNAP, and I appreciate Senator HOEVEN's work to find offsets for increased spending on these programs.

The work of feeding America and the world isn't easy, but I know our farmers and ranchers take a lot of pride in what they do. They know they are not just working toward the next harvest; they are keeping a heritage alive, a way of life that none of us can live without.

I appreciate the work the Appropriations Committee has put in to support our farmers and ranchers and, in particular, the leadership of Chair COLLINS and Senator HOEVEN. And to America's farmers and ranchers, we will continue to have your back.

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. 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.

CENTRAL TEXAS FLOODS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we continue to pray for the families of the 132 people now confirmed dead in Central Texas. We continue to pray for everyone still missing. We thank our heroic first responders who risked their lives to save those trapped in the storm.

Now, in the aftermath of the tragedy in Texas, some of us asked very necessary questions about how to prevent something like this from ever happening again: Did Federal funding cuts hinder rescue efforts? Did staffing shortages make it harder to respond?

Of course, Donald Trump didn't like these questions. He threw a fit, a tantrum. He called them lies. He said they were inappropriate. That is how he talks.

We know now why he threw a fit and acted so defensively—because, sadly, we may well have been right. Donald Trump and Kristi Noem have spent months attacking FEMA, calling for its elimination, slashing its budget, and hollowing out its workforce. And, now, their own chaos is catching up with them in the worst, worst way.

Now, they are trying to change their tune, saying they don't want to get rid of FEMA. A few months ago, they were all for getting rid of it. Now, they say they just want to change it. But there aren't enough walk-backs or pivots in the world to erase the truth. Their actions have unnecessarily harmed America's disaster response ecosystem.

Last week, I demanded an investigation into what role, if any, the administration's staff cuts to local and National Weather Service stations played in this tragedy. It is now clear that the administration fired key FEMA personnel during and, sadly, after the tragedy. So, today, it is very clear: This is a systemic problem that exists in Texas, extends beyond Texas, beyond the National Weather Service, and across FEMA.

Here are the facts about FEMA: A day after the Texas flooding, FEMA laid off workers—hundreds of call center workers. On July 7, the Agency received 16,000 calls and only answered 2,000 of them, around 16 percent.

Secretary Noem, meanwhile, issued a directive on July 11 saying that all DHS contracts of over \$100,000 had to be personally approved by her, accord-

ing to the New York Times—including, according to the New York Times, deployment of search and rescue teams. Every one of them had to be signed off.

This is not efficiency. This is adding redtape in the midst of a crisis, authored by Kristi Noem herself. Experts say this ill-advised decision very likely hindered recovery efforts.

As it stands today, FEMA is operating with a quarter fewer staffers compared to 18 months ago—one-quarter fewer—including senior-level officials, meteorologists, institutional experts, people who coordinate with public officials and other levels of government to respond to natural disasters.

In the middle of a natural disaster, Donald Trump and Kristi Noem are sowing chaos at FEMA, and their incompetence is putting lives in danger.

They and the DOGE people and so many around them, they have this fanatical dislike of all government, and so they just cut it. They don't even know what the effect will be. They don't even care. Just cut, cut, cut. Cut meteorologists who warn our people, our citizens, our farmers, our businesses of dangers that might come? Cut them? They are not waste.

Their recklessness is hurting rescue efforts. It has hurt the existing ones, and it is going to hurt more in the future, unless they reverse themselves.

We all support making Agencies like FEMA more efficient. Americans support cutting waste. Americans support improving the Federal response. But Americans sure as hell don't support DOGE-like cuts to vital places that can often be the difference between life and death.

The American people do not support this kind of chaos, this chain-saw approach to FEMA, to the National Weather Service, and to government at large. What Donald Trump and Kristi Noem are doing is chaos, and it is going to lead, unfortunately, to even more people getting hurt when the next disaster arrives.

RESCISSIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, on Republican cuts, this week, Senate Republicans are set to push through the Senate a bill that betrays rural communities, harms global health, weakens America's standing abroad, and, worst of all, sets the stage for even more harmful cuts down the line.

The so-called rescissions package continues a destructive Republican pattern: Cut now and ask questions later. The same thing that is happening with FEMA and the National Weather Service is happening right here. Again, use that chain saw; cut, cut, cut—whether it is waste or whether it is sinew and bone—and then later, say: Oh, maybe we shouldn't have done that.

And do you know what? Our Republican Senators, most of them, know this is wrong, but they are so afraid of Donald Trump.