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## Senate

The Senate met at 11 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.

Eternal Lord God, in whose life we find our life, today hold our Senators within Your providential hands. Lord, guide them when they feel perplexed and empower them with faith to meet every obstacle. Infuse them with courage and keep them close to You.

As they seek to represent You, fill them with Your peace. Do for them what they cannot accomplish in their own strength. Give them a new delight for mundane matters, a new patience with difficult people, and a new zest for unfinished details. Let Your spirit rule in their lives.

We pray in Your merciful 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. SHEEHY). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Pamela Bondi, of Florida, to be Attorney General.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President pro tempore.

#### CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak about the nominee for Secretary of Veterans Affairs that we will be voting on in a couple of hours.

I have long considered myself a friend of veterans. The men and women who have put themselves in harm's way to serve our country, they deserve our full support, and they have mine. Too often, I hear from veterans in Iowa that the Department of Veterans Affairs makes it difficult for them to access healthcare and the services that we honor them with because they have defended our country.

Whether this is expecting them to drive an unnecessary distance for their initial disability exam or making it more difficult to seek the care that they choose outside of the VA system, our veterans deserve much better. The VA needs to do better, which brings me to former Representative Doug Collins, President Trump's nominee to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Representative Collins, a veteran himself, recognizes the challenges veterans face with the VA.

During his time in the House of Representatives, he was a supporter of giving veterans the choice on where to seek healthcare. He and I agree that the VA needs to do better by our veterans and taxpayers alike.

This became more obvious to the public last year when the VA misled

Congress by claiming the Department was going to face a shortfall in funding but, in fact, ended the fiscal year with a surplus—can you believe this?—in the billions.

When I heard about this alleged shortfall, I joined my colleagues, led by the junior Senator from Alaska, to work to bring more transparency to the VA budget process. As I shared with Representative Collins, I will continue to do so.

When we first met in my office, I gave Representative Collins my advice that I give to every nominee coming to the office because these people come before the committee, and one of the questions they are asked: Will you answer our letters? And they all say yes. But we know, as a matter of fact, that doesn't happen as often as it should.

So I suggested to him that maybe instead of saying "yes," he say "maybe" so he wouldn't turn out to be a liar ever, unlike the former Secretary of VA who did not feel the need to respond to even a bipartisan letter that I sent in October of 2024, alongside three of my colleagues, before that Secretary departed from his post. Now, Representative Collins understands the importance of being accountable and forthcoming to Congress because he has been a Member of Congress.

So I thank Representative Collins for his service to our country, and I will look forward to voting positively on his nomination.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative 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 majority leader is recognized.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will vote on the

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



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nomination of Pam Bondi to serve as Attorney General. Ms. Bondi is an experienced prosecutor who has earned a reputation as a tenacious lawyer who is tough on crime.

In her 18 years as a State prosecutor in Florida's Hillsborough County, Ms. Bondi worked with law enforcement, visited crime scenes, and spent countless hours in the courtroom.

Those who know Ms. Bondi have spoken of her toughness and her skill as a prosecutor. They have also spoken of her character, of her willingness to work with anyone to solve a problem, and of her deep commitment to the victims of crime and their families.

In 2011, Pam Bondi became Florida's first female attorney general. At that time, so-called pill mills were a major problem in the State and a major contributor to the opioid crisis.

On the campaign trail, Ms. Bondi would hear heartbreaking stories of addiction and loss, and families would give her photos of the loved ones lost to the scourge of drugs. As attorney general, she filled her office with those photos and got to work.

She worked with the Florida Legislature to pass a bill to crack down on the pill mills, which our colleague, then-Governor RICK SCOTT signed into law.

And that was just the start. She tracked issues like human trafficking, and she worked with her counterparts in other States, regardless of party and politics. She also worked to keep politics out of the important work of enforcing the law in Florida, something she is committed to doing at the Department of Justice if she is confirmed.

In recent years, many Americans have lost faith in the Justice Department. They have seen Federal prosecutors go after pro-life activists while attacks against churches have gone unprosecuted.

There was Attorney General Garland's infamous memo targeting parents who attended school board meetings and another infamous FBI memo suggesting traditional Catholics could be violent extremists.

The American people should be able to trust that the Department of Justice is not targeting Americans based on their political opinions or religious beliefs. Pam Bondi has promised to get the Department back to its core mission: prosecuting crime and protecting Americans from threats to their safety and their freedoms. And I look forward to confirming her later today.

The Senate will also soon vote on the nomination of Scott Turner to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. This is an important role. Our country is facing a housing crisis affecting big cities, rural areas, Tribal lands—literally, every part of our country. Higher construction costs and burdensome regulations have made homebuilding challenging. And what homes are on the market are too pricey for many Americans. Many parts of the country have homelessness challenges. Too many distressed communities are

struggling to turn their fortunes around. And despite a windfall of additional funding for HUD, these problems are, in many cases, getting worse.

Fortunately, President Trump has nominated someone to lead Housing and Urban Development who knows a thing or two about overcoming adversity. Scott Turner grew up in Plano and Richardson, TX, in challenging circumstances, but he was determined to achieve the American Dream.

At age 10, he told his mother he would play professional football. With a lot of determination and hard work, he graduated from the University of Illinois and was drafted to play in the NFL. In the 2003 offseason, a time he could have used to take a break, this NFL athlete was interning in a congressional office.

And since he hung up his cleats, Scott Turner has spent his time working to make a difference. That has included founding an organization to help children in poverty, serving as a Texas State legislator, and helping to lead the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council during the first Trump administration.

The 2017 Republican tax relief legislation did a lot to help revitalize the economy. One of the things it did was create the Opportunity Zone Program championed by our colleague Senator TIM SCOTT. It was Scott Turner who oversaw this program for the White House, visiting opportunity zones across the country in an effort to revitalize America's distressed communities. And I am confident he will bring that same concern for distressed areas to his work as Secretary.

President Trump has made it clear that we are going to be building things in America again. One of those things we are going to be building is communities. It is a big job, but Scott Turner has the grit, the determination, and passion to get it done, and I look forward to working with him on this important mission.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, Elon Musk took issues to my warning that DOGE is operating in many ways like a shadow government. Here is what I said.

I said:

DOGE is not a real government agency.

DOGE has no authority to make spending decisions.

DOGE has no authority to shut programs down or ignore federal law.

DOGE's conduct cannot be allowed to stand.

Congress must take action to restore the rule of law.

His response? Here is what Musk said:

Hysterical reactions like this is how you know that @DOGE is doing work that really matters.

This is the one shot . . . American people have to defeat BUREAUCracy . . . and restore DEMOCracy. . . .

Give me a break. Nothing screams democracy like having a secret squad of company men pull off a hostile takeover of America's Social Security and tax information in the dead of night.

That is democracy? No openness? No hearings? No discussion? No hearing the other side? From a small group of limited people who have limited backgrounds, who probably don't even know about the programs they are cutting and how they actually work.

Whatever DOGE is doing, it is certainly not—not—what democracy looks like or has ever looked like in the grand history of this country, because democracy does not work in the shadows. Democracy does not skirt the rule of law. Democracy does not shun accountability and restraint, does not run away from transparency but welcomes it, and does not give privilege to the needs and even the ideas of a small group of ultrawealthy people at the expense of working people.

They are the only people who seem to be in the room to make the decisions. Working-class Americans are excluded—are excluded.

Now, reform is a worthy cause to seek—no question about it. Everyone agrees and everyone should agree that we should find ways to improve the effectiveness; we should find ways to improve the efficiency of government. But do you know what history shows? When it is done in the dark of night by a very limited group of people of limited experience, it never works. When ideas are not brought into conflict, when people have different views, when there is not debate, when there is not openness, when there is not transparency, things always get messed up. It leads to very bad results. Yet that is just what DOGE is doing. They know better than everybody else. Certainly, they are entitled to have their viewpoint—certainly—but to just do things in the dark of night, to just fire people without even talking to them—what they do, what their needs are—makes no sense and, again, is going to lead to bad results.

We should talk about reform, but we should talk about it in the way it has always been done in America—in the Halls of Congress, in the public forums of the people's government. That is what the Founding Fathers wanted. If the Founding Fathers were to be like DOGE, a small group of them would get together and just dictate what should have been done in America. It didn't. They set up a Congress. They set up debate.

The American people—mark my words—the American people will not