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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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President of Yeshiva University of New York, NY.

The guest Chaplain, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, bless our chosen leaders, these devoted Senators, with values and vision to guide America toward its purpose: born in liberty, driven by service, called to greatness.

Our merciful Father, there is a hunger in this land, not for power but for purpose; not to take but to give. We are seekers, Lord, yearning for meaning. We all ask ourselves: Why am I here? What is my purpose? Guide us, Lord, with a clarity to hear Your call and the courage to live our answer.

As with King David of old, renew within our Senators the heart and spirit to unite our Nation to rise to this moment, to seize this great awakening so that we each can reach our most noble selves.

May this upcoming Jewish New Year bring prosperity to our neighbors and our Nation, peace to Israel and to all places torn by war; freedom for the hostages and all who are held in captivity. May we each know the feeling of Your love and Your blessing.

May this be Thy will. And let us say, 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). The Senator from South Carolina.

DR. RABBI ARI BERMAN

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, it is my honor to introduce Rabbi Berman, who just gave the prayer and who is president of the Yeshiva University.

Thank you for your blessing this morning.

In his prayer, Rabbi Berman reminded us that America's strength lies not just in power but purpose; not just in might but in our pursuit of the good. He has lived that principle. He is a global faith leader, distinguished scholar, educational visionary who is shaping contemporary discourse at the intersection of faith, ethics, and higher education.

As the fifth president of the Yeshiva University, he has redefined the role of faith-based universities in the United States. He gave the benediction at President Trump's inauguration.

Yeshiva University, for more than a century, has been contributing to the common good and advancing the goals of faith with purpose. It is one of the flagship universities in the entire world for the Jewish faith, and he has brought his aperture there to bring us all together.

Finally, I want to recognize the need to succor. You said: Why are we here? I am here because Anita said I needed to be here to recognize Rabbi Berman. Anita is a fellow South Carolinian. She is a trustee at Yeshiva University, and she has contributed to our State, to the values that serve us in education, that bind us together. Anita called me about you and she was dead right.

Welcome and well done. God bless you.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

RULES CHANGE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as expected, there has been some commentary on the process I initiated Monday—a process to restore Senate precedent and codify in Senate rules what was once understood to be standard practice, and that is the Senate's acting expeditiously on Presidential nominees to allow a President to get his team in place.

I will say that the commentary has felt somewhat muted so far, and I suspect that is because Democrats know they don't have a leg to stand on here. After years of partisanship and slowly eroding the confirmation process, they finally went all the way and broke it, and they have to know that. So it is no surprise that they aren't exactly able to mount a compelling defense of their position or a compelling attack on the Republicans' move to fix the Senate.

On top of that, I suspect it is even possible that some Democrats are secretly relieved that we are restoring Senate precedent. After all, I suspect Democrats would prefer not to reap what they have sowed this Congress. The prospect of the blanket obstruction of every single nominee of a Democrat President can't look that attractive.

Of course, the Democrat leader has made an attempt to attack Republicans' measure and defend his party's historic obstruction, and one thing he is fixated on is his claim that Democrats' historic obstruction is justified because President Trump has put forward "historically bad" nominees. But I would just like to ask, if these nominees are as historically bad as the Democrat leader claims, why are Democrats voting for them in committee or on the Senate floor? Why

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



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have 62 of the 139 civilian nominees the Senate has confirmed so far been confirmed with Democrat support? Why are Trump nominees emerging from committee with bipartisan support? Is the Democrat leader suggesting that his own Members are supporting historically bad nominees?

On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman came down to the floor and asked for unanimous consent to confirm a nominee for U.S. attorney who was reported from committee by voice vote and who has the support of the two Democrat Senators from his State. Is the Democrat leader suggesting that the senior Democrat from Minnesota and the junior Democrat from Minnesota are conspiring with President Trump to put in place historically bad nominees?

I completely respect Democrats' right to dislike some or, for that matter, many of President Trump's nominees and to oppose nominees they consider to be historically bad. I have opposed more than one Democrat nominee in my time. But let's get real here. This obstruction is not about historically bad nominees. The scores of nominees who have emerged from committee with bipartisan support are not historically bad.

The U.S. attorney candidate for Minnesota, supported by the senior Democrat Senator from Minnesota and the junior Democrat Senator from Minnesota, is not a historically bad nominee, and the only reason—the only reason—the Democrat leader objected to his confirmation by voice vote Monday, along with the confirmation of a Trump nominee who had previously been nominated by President Biden, is petty partisanship—petty partisanship that is well on its way to turning the Senate from a legislative body into, in the words of the senior Democrat from Minnesota, a “full-time employment agency.”

Before I close, I also want to mention one other complaint from the Democrat leader yesterday, and that is his claim that Republicans' attempt to restore Senate precedent on the en bloc consideration of nominees is somehow going to eliminate transparency.

To hear the Democrat leader tell it, you would think the Senate was going to start approving nominees in the dead of night, behind closed doors in the Capitol basement. I didn't notice the Democrat leader objecting to a lack of transparency when we approved packages of Biden nominees, some of which probably did happen in the dark of night, albeit in the full light of the C-SPAN cameras.

Of course, I should also mention that, before any floor consideration, all of these nominees will have gone through the committee process, which will have provided still another forum for Members to air concerns.

The amendment to the rules Republicans are proposing is an idea with a bipartisan pedigree. It would restore Senate precedent, and it would restore

sanity to a confirmation process that Democrats and Republicans alike have complained is broken.

Despite their historic blockade, I think a lot of my Democrat colleagues are well aware that we can't continue as we are. So I say to those colleagues, many of whom I know do care about this institution: Join us. Let's protect decades of Senate precedent on confirmations and get this institution fully functioning again.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2748 AND H.R. 4553

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I understand that there are two bills at the desk due for second readings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2748) to establish a program to beautify the District of Columbia and to establish the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful Commission, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 4553) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceeding en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard so the items will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 2296, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2296) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2026 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Wicker/Reed amendment modified No. 3748, in the nature of a substitute.

Wicker (for Ernst) amendment No. 3427 (to amendment No. 3748), to require the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on casualty assistance and long-term care programs.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 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.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, it is my honor to welcome my good friend Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman to the Senate and thank him for offering the morning's opening prayer.

Dr. Berman is president of Yeshiva University in New York and a longtime partner in the fight against anti-Semitism. We have worked together over the years to help upgrade Yeshiva's campus to remain a world-class institution. And as we approach the Jewish New Year, a time for renewal and recommitment for Jewish families around the world, I thank him for sharing his words of wisdom.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. President, now, on foreign policy, bad news for you, Donald Trump: The Nobel Prize is slipping away from your grasp. Crises over the last 24 hours have escalated to dangerous levels, and President Trump, you seem to be leading from behind.

Donald Trump promised that he would end the war in Ukraine on day one. He said he would put an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas on day one. It is so easy, he said. Well, it is now day 234, and war rages around the world. In the last 24 hours, we have seen dangerous escalation on multiple fronts. Yesterday, Israel launched a strike against Hamas in the capital city of a key American ally in the middle of cease-fire negotiations.

Despite being handed a cease-fire by the previous administration, 234 days later, a cease-fire deal is further off than ever. Meanwhile, hostages remain in captivity, and innocent Palestinian civilians in Gaza continue to suffer.

In Europe, Vladimir Putin sent drones into Poland, a NATO ally, which required NATO military action to shoot down those drones. What was the point, President Trump, of your meeting in Alaska where you snuggled up to Putin?

And Donald Trump is hesitating now to say any strong words against Putin, even after they did this. NATO safety has been at risk, and it is being put at risk even more so, and Donald Trump is leading from behind.

The latest aggression by Putin should send a shiver down the spines of every American. I warned of this scenario as the Senate debated sending more military support to Ukraine, and I warned at that point that any division, any hesitation of our resolve against Putin would be taken by him as weakness. And I fear Donald Trump's anemic weakness against Putin and other strongmen has only pushed the world closer to the brink of chaos and even war.