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## Senate

(Legislative day of Tuesday, September 16, 2025)

The Senate met at 11 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the Honorable JAMES C. JUSTICE, a Senator from the State of West Virginia.

### PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, thank You for Your sanctifying truth. Use our lawmakers to live Your truth for the glory of Your Name. May Your truth enable us to strive to have a strong faith, a pure love, and a focused obedience. Lord, empower us to submit to You with our bodies, minds, and spirits. Make us all vessels of honor; prepare for every good work. And, Lord, as the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana, approaches, may all people of faith chase the fruit of Your mercy and grace. Lead us to reflection, repentance, and renewal.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

### APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,

Washington, DC, September 19, 2025.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JAMES C. JUSTICE, a

Senator from the State of West Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,  
President pro tempore.

Mr. JUSTICE thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

### RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, what I am going to say is, remember the history of Putin saying 20 years ago that the breakup of the Soviet Union was a geopolitical disaster of the 20th century and that Putin's goal was to reestablish the Soviet Empire; and we see that going on every day with how he is destroying Ukraine.

So everyone interested in religious freedom in Russia and Ukraine should read the recent report by the Free Russia Foundation. The Free Russia Foundation is an organization of Russians who wants a "free, democratic, peaceful and prosperous Russia reintegrated into the international community as a constructive and positive actor."

This organization's recent report, entitled "The Russian Orthodox Church and the War," demonstrates how this church body supports the ongoing invasion of Ukraine through propaganda, rituals for the invaders, diplomatic manipulation, and espionage. Now, doesn't that seem very odd for a church—any church—to have that as goals?

The Russian Orthodox Church is also actively engaged in suppressing and persecuting other Christian denominations, including Orthodox believers who do not answer to Russia.

It seems shocking to me to see Russians talk about the main Christian denomination in Russia in this way, but remember this: After initially persecuting Orthodox believers, dictator Joseph Stalin co-opted the Russian Orthodox Church to support the Soviet state. At that time, the Russian Ortho-

dox faithful outside of Russia broke all ties with the Soviet-installed patriarch. Today's Russian Orthodox Church is dominated by leaders who came of age under the KGB-controlled church structure. Now understand this: The current patriarch of Moscow was a KGB agent, so it is no wonder that he is close to Putin.

The Free Russia report documents the Moscow patriarch's blessing of the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine. It quotes the patriarch's September 2022 sermon:

Anyone who dies in the performance of military duty sacrifices himself for the sake of others. Therefore, we believe that such a sacrifice washes away all sins previously committed.

Now, as a Christian—and, I hope, for any Christian—I find that shocking. So does the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, the first among equals in the Orthodox tradition.

He said of the Moscow patriarch's support for Putin and his war:

It is damaging to the prestige of the whole of Orthodoxy because Orthodoxy doesn't support war, violence [or] terrorism.

There has been a lot of propaganda claiming that the Russian Orthodox Church is somehow a victim of religious persecution in this war. In fact, it is a leading perpetrator of the persecution of fellow Orthodox believers, evangelicals, and other churches. I had a chance to meet a year ago with 30 church leaders from Ukraine who told how this persecution was going on.

Don't take my word for it, though. Read this report that I have quoted from by these pro-democracy Russians. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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.

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



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The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

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#### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

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#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the House has just passed a short-term, clean, nonpartisan continuing resolution to fund the government for a few additional weeks while we continue bipartisan work on appropriations bills, and, today, we will be voting on that clean, nonpartisan CR as well as on the CR the Democrats introduced Wednesday night.

On the floor yesterday, the Democrat leader said: The contrast between the Republican bill and the Democrat bill is glaring.

Well, he has got that right. The contrast between the Republican bill and the Democrat bill is glaring. The Republican bill is a clean, nonpartisan, short-term continuing resolution to fund the government to give us time to do the full appropriations process, and the Democrat bill is the exact opposite. It is what you might call not a clean CR—a dirty CR—laden down with partisan policies and appeals to the Democrats' leftist base.

When I became majority leader, I made it very clear that I wanted the Senate to return to the regular order consideration of appropriations bills. I was not and am not interested in funding the government through last-minute, backroom deals. The right way to fund the government, whenever humanly possible, is through regular order here in the Senate. That means taking appropriations bills through committee, where Republicans and Democrats alike have a chance to make their voices heard, and then bringing those bills to the Senate floor for more debate and amendment. That process is good for Senators of both parties, to say nothing of being best for the American people.

But Democrats can't take "yes" for an answer, so instead of working with Republicans to fund the government through a clean, nonpartisan continuing resolution so that we can get back to bipartisan negotiations on appropriations, Democrats are yielding to the desires of their rabidly leftist base and are attempting to hold government funding hostage to a long list of partisan demands.

The kind of clean CR Republicans have put forward used to be something Democrats embraced. In fact, Democrats voted in favor of clean CRs no fewer than 13 times during the Biden administration. Yet, now that Republicans are offering a clean CR, it is somehow a no-go. It is funny how that happens.

The Democrat leader has tried to defend his party's double standards by suggesting that this is a special case. Really? Really? Why is it always a special case with Democrats?

The truth is, the only thing special about this case is that Democrats can't stand the fact that the American people elected Donald Trump. So we all have to live with their endless temper tantrum, which apparently may now include shutting down the government.

I could spend some time talking about the measure Democrats put forward yesterday. I could talk about how it would allow noncitizens and able-bodied adults who won't work to stay on the Medicaid rolls, while at the same time ripping away the historic investment in home- and community-based services for Americans with disabilities. I could talk about how it would eliminate a transformational investment in rural healthcare, dilute Medicaid resources for those most in need, and a whole lot more. But suffice it to say that it is a fundamentally unserious proposal designed to appease Democrats' liberal base, and it has zero chance of making it through Congress. And they know that.

I can't stop Democrats from opposing our nonpartisan continuing resolution. If they want to shut down the government, they have the power to do so. But if they think they are going to gain political points from shutting down the government over a clean, nonpartisan CR—something they voted for 13 times under the Biden administration—I would strongly urge them to think again.

The ball is in the Democrats' court. They can vote with the Republicans on a clean, nonpartisan CR to fund the government and allow the Senate to complete additional appropriations work or they can vote for their own partisan CR and move the country one step closer to a shutdown. For the sake of the American people, I hope they will choose to vote with us.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

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#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

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#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, all of America can see the glaring contrast between Republican and Democratic priorities, as shown by the bills each party introduced late yesterday.

Senators will have to choose to stand with Donald Trump and keep the same lousy status quo and cause the Trump healthcare shutdown or stand with the American people, protect their healthcare, and keep the government functioning.

Today, we have a rare moment in the Senate where two bills come to the floor that truly crystallize the contrast between the two parties.

On the Republican side, Americans will see more of the same high costs, especially on healthcare, more of the same failures of the last 9 months or, instead, Republicans can vote to undo the destruction Donald Trump has inflicted on American healthcare and instead work on a bipartisan bill—the only bipartisan bill that can win—to keep the government open. That is what Democrats offer the American people. The choice is clear.

Our Republican colleagues seem to think Americans are happy with the direction of this country. They are voting like they think the status quo is good enough even though they have heard from so many of their constituents about the fear of hospitals closing, of healthcare being diminished, of premiums going way up, hundreds of dollars each month. They have heard that from their constituents, but they stick with Donald Trump, who doesn't give a hoot about them.

Republicans are voting like the status quo is good enough. They are wrong. Americans are tired of the status quo. They are tired of Donald Trump's chaos and inflationary policies.

By not even negotiating, by trying to make this partisan, Donald Trump and Republicans are shutting the government down.

People are paying more for groceries, more for their electric bills, more for rent. Even a cup of coffee every morning has gotten more expensive under Donald Trump.

Healthcare in America has been plunged into crisis. Fifteen million Americans will lose their healthcare. Premiums are set to go through the roof—hundreds of dollars each month, thousands of dollars each year. The American family—average family—can't afford that.

Republicans—what do they say? Well, let's kick the can down the road. Republicans say: Let's put it off. Let's do it later. But for Republicans, "later" means "never."

We should solve this healthcare crisis now. People are already getting letters in the mail saying their premiums are about to go up next year by \$300, \$400, \$500—God forbid, even more.

A new report today showed that if we extend these tax credits, the vast majority of the benefits will go to the working- and middle-class families—the families who need help. That is what Democrats want to do here today.

Also, hospitals from Virginia to Nebraska, from Maine to California, are shutting down right now—not next