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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM BANKS, a Senator from the State of Indiana.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, we belong to You. Thank You that our government has reopened.

Give our lawmakers the wisdom to discontinue repeating the same actions while hoping for different results. Lord, empower them to find ways where no one will go hungry, thirsty, sick, or shackled because of the legislative process.

Use our Senators to set the captives free. Reveal to our legislators resources of power adequate to make them more than conquerors.

We pray in Your powerful 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 legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,

Washington, DC, November 18, 2025.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM BANKS, a Senator

from the State of Indiana, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BANKS thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2026—Motion to Proceed

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 136, H.R. 4016.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 136, H.R. 4016, a bill making appropriations for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, after 43 days, the longest government shutdown in history is over. Shellshocked government employees are getting paid again. The air travel situation is im-

proving. Nutrition programs are back on a secure footing. But the damage remains.

How many of those government employees now getting paid again are staring at credit card debt taken on to cover necessities during the month and a half they worked without pay? The newly restored salaries don't contain extra to cover the interest on that debt.

How many small businesses are struggling, thanks to the hit that their business took during the shutdown?

How long is it going to take to catch up on the 43-day backlog in government services the shutdown created?

The pain the shutdown caused was immense, and all of it—all of it—could have been so easily avoided.

Republicans offered Democrats a clean, nonpartisan funding extension. We did not make a single demand. We didn't ask for a single partisan policy. We didn't add a single partisan policy rider. We simply asked Democrats to extend current funding levels for a few weeks so that we could continue bipartisan work on appropriations.

Instead, Democrats chose to plunge the country into chaos because the far left of their party demanded a showdown with President Trump. That is right. All of this pain, all of this profound financial stress, all of this economic damage is because the far left demanded a showdown with President Trump. And Democrats fell in line.

It is disturbing enough that the Democrat party was willing to shut down the government for 43 days—by far the longest government shutdown in history—but what is even more disturbing is the fact that a number of Democrats were prepared to let this shutdown continue even longer. Even as lines stretched around the block at food banks and air travel grew evermore precarious, progressive Democrats pushed to embrace the shutdown forever, as far as I can tell.

• 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 senior Senator from Vermont published an op-ed calling for a continued shutdown and continued opposition to President Trump, even though the President had exactly nothing to do with the clean funding extension that Republicans were proposing.

And the junior Senator from Connecticut spent the last week of the shutdown advocating for continuing it and fretting that ending it would damage Democrats' "brand." That is right, Democrats' "brand."

Neither Senator seemed to spend a minute seriously considering the incredible damage their shutdown was doing to hard-working Americans and to our country. Indeed, as we know from their own words, a lot of Democrats saw the pain of working people as leverage for Democrats in this shutdown, a useful tool to be deployed to advance the Democrats' political goals.

I am grateful that we finally got eight Democrats to join Republicans to reopen the government and spare the American people from further pain. But the fact that a month and a half into the shutdown 39 Democrats still voted to keep the government closed remains deeply disturbing.

Are Democrats going to continue hamstringing the necessary work of government at the behest of the far left? Are their partisan politics going to continue to obstruct the government's functioning?

We have a lot of work left to do, starting with the need to fund the government for the remainder of the fiscal year beyond January 30. And there is a lot more we could accomplish, too, from improving our healthcare system to passing a farm bill, but not if the vast majority of the Democrat party continues to put partisan politics above the well-being of the American people.

I hope Democrats will be content with their recordbreaking 43-day shutdown, and they will now be able to turn back to the business of the American people. The American people deserve better than the past month and more of Democrat-imposed misery.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

JEFFREY EPSTEIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, the House of Representatives finally voted to demand that the Justice Department release the Epstein files. The American people have waited a very long time for this.

The margin in the House was overwhelming. In fact, every single Member

of Congress except one voted yes, and that now brings the focus to the U.S. Senate.

As soon as the House sends us the Epstein bill, the Senate should move, without delay, to pass it unamended and send it on to the President's desk to be signed into law. We should pass this bill as soon as possible, as written, and without a hint of delay.

Republicans must not try to change this bill or bury it in committee or slow-walk it in any way. Any amendment to this bill would force it back to the House and risk further delay. Who knows what would happen over there.

The American people have waited long enough, and they cannot take the risk.

We have an opportunity to get this bill done today and have it on the President's desk to be signed into law tonight. We should seize that opportunity. That is why later today, I will ask unanimous consent for the Senate to hold a vote to pass the House Epstein bill.

The Epstein victims groups have made it clear they do not want amendments to the bill. In fact, just this morning, Epstein survivors stood right in front of the Capitol demanding that Congress pass this version of the bill.

The House has now spoken in an overwhelming fashion, and Senate Republicans must step up because the public is fed up with waiting around to get to the bottom of the Epstein files. Americans are fed up with Donald Trump's lies, they are fed up with the coverups, and they are fed up with Republican leaders who keep siding with Donald Trump instead of siding with the American people, who demand transparency when it comes to Jeffrey Epstein.

There is only one right answer for the Senate: Pass this bill as written today.

Let me say something else. This could not have been possible without the courage and advocacy of Jeffrey Epstein's survivors. They made this vote possible. They risked their safety coming out of the darkness to share their stories and tell the truth. We thank them. We thank them and everyone who has pushed for transparency.

Let me also add this: This will go down as one of the most damaging moments of Donald Trump's Presidency. In trying so hard to hide the truth, Donald Trump has provoked the fiercest rebellion he has ever faced among his own supporters, both in Congress and around the country. All the lying, all the broken promises about transparency, all the bullying and threats to Members of Congress who wanted these files released—it has all blown up in Donald Trump's face. His usual methods of intimidation and dishonesty have failed spectacularly in this instance.

But make no mistake, today's vote is just one step. Once the Senate sends this bill to the President's desk, Donald Trump must obey the letter of the

law and ensure full transparency regarding the Epstein files. No "We will give you some of this but not that"; "Maybe you should see this"; "There is a reason you can't see that." Anything less than full transparency will be unacceptable in the eyes of the American people. If the President tries to manipulate his way into releasing just some of the Epstein files while deliberately hiding others, the public will see right through it, and their frustration, their distrust in Donald Trump will grow even worse.

Before we get to that step, the Senate must finish this job first. We must pass this bill unamended as soon as humanly possible.

I yield the floor to my colleague Senator MERKLEY, who has been a great partner as we have pursued finding full transparency with the Epstein files.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I join my colleague the minority leader from New York in noting that principles matter. Equal justice under law matters. In fact, it matters so much that it is carved into the facade of the Supreme Court. If you go out these doors down the hall, under the big staircase descending to the plaza, and you look out, you are square center of the Supreme Court—"Equal Justice Under Law." It is a powerful concept. It goes to the sense that everyone should be accountable for their crimes here in the United States of America no matter how much money you have, no matter how much power you have, no matter what large office you hold.

Mr. President, 427 to 1. That is what the House said, 427 to 1. The House just voted to say that equal justice under law matters, and they are standing behind that principle. But is it a principle this U.S. Senate will stand behind?

Let's look at what has happened. Back in July, a bipartisan group of Senators that included two of my Republican colleagues introduced legislation to release the Epstein files—the same bill that just passed the House of Representatives 427 to 1. But we only had two colleagues across the aisle join us in demanding justice.

In September, on the Defense Authorization Act, we had a vote on this bill as an amendment put forward by the minority leader, leading the charge to say that equal justice under the law matters. My colleagues across the aisle—did they follow the example of the House, or did they express the same spirit as the example we saw moments ago? No. They tabled the amendment. Only two colleagues across the aisle, only two Republicans stood for the principle of equal justice under law.

So there we have it—a bill introduced with only two colleagues; a bill voted on as an amendment led by the minority leader—only two colleagues from across the aisle, but every Democrat saying this matters.

Now, the Department of Justice didn't need a law to release the Epstein

files; they could have just done so. In fact, when President Trump was campaigning, he kept saying that these files are going to be released when he is President. Well, he has been President for 10 months. Where are those files? They haven't been released.

President Trump, why haven't you released the files?

In fact, not only has he failed to release the files, he has fought the release at every possible moment. It was widely reported that back in May, Attorney General Pam Bondi informed President Trump that his name appeared in the files. Oh, his name appears. Well, now he has doubled down on making sure they are never released. The Attorney General herself said she had the full file on her desk, and then she said, well, she didn't.

At every level, this administration has sought to thwart equal justice under law.

Powerful men—the President of the United States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives—have fought to make sure these files are never released.

How long was the House on vacation in the middle of the legislative year? A full 7-plus weeks of abandonment, missing in action, nowhere to be found in the middle of the legislative year. The entire House of Representatives shut down for over 7 weeks and into an 8th week, vacationing around the world to avoid voting to release the Epstein files.

That is how much powerful people at the very top of our government were fighting to make sure these files never see the light of day. But across this great country, people said: Hell no. People on the right side of the aisle and the far-right side of the aisle, people on the left side of the aisle and the far-left side of the aisle all demanded that justice be served because this particular case is one that involves such egregious conduct.

Jeffrey Epstein was a monster who groomed, abused, raped underage girls and facilitated the ability of other powerful men to groom, abuse, and rape underage girls. He trafficked these women to rich and powerful men. He destroyed the lives of hundreds of young women. That is why, from every corner of this Nation and from every part of the political spectrum, there is a demand to release these files.

The Senate Finance Committee, led by my colleague from Oregon Senator RON WYDEN, had been investigating the financial network that facilitated this national and international crime, and the Biden administration cooperated fully with the Senate investigators in this case. The Finance Committee, under President Biden, went to Treasury to see the Epstein files suspicious activity reports. They proceeded to put together an incredible database of how money was spent to facilitate this network.

The Biden administration echoed the demand for equal justice under law.

Trump campaigned saying he would release these files, but then he is in office, his name is in the file, and he does everything possible to stop their release.

Now the House voted powerfully for sure—427 to 1—but a bill doesn't get enacted into law unless it is passed in this Chamber. That is why the minority leader Senator SCHUMER said he would return today after the bill has been sent over to the Senate to ask for unanimous consent.

If the House—427-strong—can call for equal justice—the release of these files—certainly the Senate can stand up and say 100 to 0 that we also stand for equal justice under the law.

The truth must not be buried.

We know how nervous the administration is. They responded by saying: We are going to release information about how those files affect powerful people who are Democrats.

Let me tell you, President Trump, that does not stop one of us because this is not a partisan affair. This is about a horrific crime on hundreds of underage girls whose lives were destroyed, hundreds who were groomed, hundreds who were abused, hundreds who were raped. So the chips must fall where they may no matter what the political party of the actors may be.

So, President Trump, you think you are doing something clever and you are going to intimidate Democrats from supporting this by making this partisan? I tell you, President Trump, hell no. There is nothing partisan about the principle of equal justice under law.

Now, we know why the President is so nervous. A few days ago, a trove of emails was released from the Epstein estate. They made clear in Jeffrey Epstein's own words that President Trump "knew about the girls," and he called President Trump "the dog that hasn't barked."

Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted pedophile, even wrote:

I've met some bad people. None as bad as Trump. Not one decent cell in his body.

Well, I don't know what President Trump's role was, and President Trump says he wants to see others investigated, including former Presidents who were Democrats. I don't know whether they were involved, but I do know this: It is time for the truth. It is time to end the coverup. The Epstein coverup is morally wrong; it is legally wrong. The victims deserve justice. The victims and the American people demand not just justice but transparency. The American people demand accountability.

It is the right thing to do no matter how rich or famous an individual might be who is mentioned in those files. And they may be mentioned in those files with no connection to the crimes committed. There is no knowing until we see what the files say. That is the point.

The bill that was passed in the House—the bill almost word for word identical to the bill introduced here in

the Senate—says that "no record shall be withheld, delayed, or redacted on the basis of" any of the following: "embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity, including to any government official, public figure, or foreign dignitary." Nothing withheld, redacted, or delayed because some powerful man or group of powerful men is afraid of what is in that file.

We did say in this bill to protect the victims and underage witnesses by redacting the personally identifiable information, any depictions of abuse or information that would jeopardize an active Federal investigation or national security. Protect the victims, but don't protect the perpetrators.

Let all 100 Senators come up the staircase outside, in order to enter this Chamber, and on the way up those stairs, look back—turn around—at the principle "Equal Justice Under Law," carved into the facade of the Supreme Court, and carry that principle in your heart.

And when the minority leader from New York comes to this floor and asks to pass this bill with unanimous consent so that it will be endorsed 100 to 0, echoing the cry for justice from down the hall, let not one voice of objection be raised. Let all 100 of us stand with the victims and stand for accountability and stand for justice.

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. DURBIN. 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.

RECOGNIZING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if you put me on the spot and ask me how many times I have flown from O'Hare to Washington during the course of my congressional career, I couldn't guess. I am going to take a wild guess and say 2,000—2,000 flights in and out of O'Hare.

This morning, I had a press conference there, and it was important for those who count on that great airfield to know what I learned. I met with the air traffic controllers. Turns out that O'Hare, at this point, is the busiest airport in the world if you combine both passenger and cargo air traffic. It is also the case that, for more than 10 years, they have been understaffed when it comes to air traffic control. They don't have enough air traffic controllers. They have been working 6 days a week, 10-hour days, for at least 10 years and in the foreseeable future.

They are concerned about it. I am as well. They are doing their job and doing a great job in the process, but they are under pressure unlike anything most of us can imagine. They literally have the lives of ourselves and our families in their hands when they are directing air traffic around O'Hare.

Recently, when we had a government shutdown, there was a question raised as to whether or not we were going to reduce the number of air flights in America as a result of it. It was not an unreasonable suggestion because, when you consider that we need 14,000 air traffic controllers nationwide, and we have around 10,000, we already start off with a problem. Fortunately, the reduction in air service only lasted a brief period of time.

I met with those air traffic controllers today and told them that I voted to reopen the government, thinking of them and thinking of the recipients of the SNAP benefits and food stamp benefits across America.

But that isn't enough to be concerned about it. We need to do something on a bipartisan basis to solve this problem. We need more air traffic controllers. There are ways to do this, and I want to pursue those. We also need the very best in technology and equipment when it comes to the work that they do, and that can be improved. There seems to be a bipartisan feeling now that we should do something. Let's seize this moment and seize this opportunity and move forward in making sure that we have the safest and most modern air traffic control in the world.

I thank the men and women who continue to do their jobs so well at O'Hare and across the United States, but they have a burden that most of us don't even appreciate in their 6-day weeks and 10-hour days.

OPERATION MIDWAY BLITZ

Mr. President, on a separate topic now, for nearly 3 months, the city of Chicago has lived under the shadow of President Trump's Operation Midway Blitz, a cruel campaign that has swept up innocent American citizens, legal residents, and immigrants who pose no threat to public safety.

The Trump administration justifies this campaign by saying they are targeting "the worst of the worst." Oh, you heard him give the speech over and over again. We are going after those illegal immigrants in this country who are rapists, terrorists, murderers, criminally insane—"the worst of the worst," as he says over and over again.

But the situation on the ground, the reality of the situation, paints a dramatically different picture. As part of these immigration raids, agents, ICE agents, and others have baselessly rounded up and disappeared people on the streets and in homes across the city, almost all of whom had no prior warrants or criminal history.

Terrorists? That is not the case at all.

I want to speak to you about one of the incidents that I ran across when I went back home last week. Two weeks ago, a viral video showed agents, Federal agents, storming through the doors of Rayito de Sol daycare and preschool center in the North Center neighborhood of Chicago. These ICE agents, in their camouflage uniforms and with masks on their faces, were

dragging out a teacher while she screamed and cried: "I have papers," in Spanish. That teacher's name is Diana Santillana, but her students—little girls and boys between the ages of 6 months and 6 years—know her as Miss Diana.

According to school officials, Diana had an authorization to work, and agents did not present a warrant when they entered the building.

This is the "Meet the Teacher" file for Miss Diana that is posted in the classroom of Rayito de Sol. This was the woman that the ICE agents went into the school and daycare center and arrested. The flyer describes Diana's love of early education and working with kids because "it is one of the most rewarding experiences," in her words, and she likes to "nurture and leave a mark on young ones."

Does this look like one of the rapists, murderers, terrorists, criminally insane that President Trump has reminded us of over and over again? Of course not.

Thankfully, Miss Diana was released from detention after a judge ruled her mandatory detention was illegal.

They swooped her up out of this daycare center. She disappeared, and no one could find her, not family and friends—no one could find her. And then she turned up in a facility, I believe, in Indiana, and they released her from there.

What was this all about? Well, I will tell you what it was all about. It was about the reign of terror which Operation Midway Blitz is visiting on the city of Chicago.

Following her release, Diana said:

I love our community and the children I teach, and I can't wait to see them again.

Does that sound like a terrorist rant?

I know they can't wait to see her. They love Miss Diana.

This incident has rattled this community in Chicago, especially the kids who attend Rayito de Sol who range in age from, as I mentioned, 6 months to 6 years.

This past week, I visited with the parents of some of these students, about 12 of them. They, of course, expressed concerns for her because they love her. Miss Diana is well-loved by all of these kids. They also worried about the impact of this incident on their kids—the questions and the nightmares that followed as these little ones were forced to see and hear the administration's brutality in full view.

In an interview later after the incident took place, one of the parents, Tara, said the families were "traumatized." The "children were crying." And the scene was one none "of us have ever witnessed before and will ever forget."

It is outrageous that children are exposed to this, but the Trump administration basically doesn't give a damn. There used to be a time when ICE didn't cross certain lines. DHS had policies against enforcement at schools and churches for this very reason—not

anymore. They have got to go after "terrorists" like Miss Diane so they have to break all of the rules that have been established.

President Trump has touted Operation Midway Blitz as a resounding success. These raids aren't targeted. The administration is sweeping up people off streets while they are dropping off their kids at school or heading to work for simply looking Hispanic—good enough to be arrested and deported.

Don't take my word for it. Listen to what U.S. District Court judge Jeffrey Cummings said. In a lawsuit challenging warrantless immigration arrests in Illinois, Judge Cummings read from a summary he and his law clerks compiled of more than 150 pending immigration cases in which arrestees challenged their deportation. The judge said the circumstances of the arrests show that Operation Midway Blitz is not targeting hardened criminals, not targeting the worst of the worst. In that case, the Trump administration provided a list of more than 600 individuals detained during Midway Blitz. By their own data—their own data—just 16 of the 1,600 detainees have any criminal history that poses a high risk to public safety.

Do you know what percentage that is? Less than 3 percent. Terrorists, rapists, murderers, criminally insane—less than 3 percent have any criminal background.

All of this confirms what we have been saying for months. What is happening in Chicago with Midway Blitz is a political theater to spread fear, not reduce crime.

Oh, they struck fear in the hearts of the kids at this daycare center. They may never forget what they saw that day when the agents came in, in their camouflage and their masks, and whisked this poor woman out to deport her and started off by sending her to Indiana and then releasing her.

It made no sense whatsoever. This is political theater at its worst. Chicago deserves better. America deserves better.

Reports indicate Border Patrol Chief Greg Bovino is leaving the city of Chicago. Let me tell you, he couldn't leave too soon from my conclusion. However, we expect immigration raids to continue in the city.

And Mr. Bovino has already taken his administration's brutal tactics that they have been practicing in Chicago to Charlotte, NC. In just one weekend, DHS agents raided a church and arrested at least one U.S. citizen simply because he looked Hispanic.

And in Mr. Bovino's own words, "It wouldn't surprise me to see us in a city near you."

So I ask my colleagues, especially my Republican friends who value liberty and freedom as much as I do: What is stopping this government from deploying tear gas in your home city? What is stopping them from pointing guns at your constituents? What does

arresting your fellow neighbors without cause mean to you in the future?

It is a legitimate question. Don't look the other way out of personal or political loyalty to this President. Look straight in the eyes of the people you represent and tell them you stand for the Constitution and the well-worn history of this country where we have tried to push back on tyrants. It is on all of us to call out these abuses of power and this trampling of civil liberties.

How can we say to Miss Diana, "We are sorry"? We can say it by ending Midway Blitz as fast as possible and by reassuring the families there that we want to have a safe nation without the expense of our basic liberties.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today, I commend First Lady Melania Trump for her leadership on the recent "Fostering the Future for American Children and Families" Executive order, and, obviously, the thanks would go to President Trump for his support of his wife's work. And it wouldn't happen without his signing the order last week. This action is an important step to see that young people who have experienced foster care are supported as they begin to navigate their lives as adults.

For decades, I have worked to shine a light on the challenges that foster youth face. The bipartisan Senate Caucus on Foster Youth that I launched with former Senator Mary Landrieu in 2009 and still cochair today has a particular focus on the challenges that older foster youth face.

Young people who already face constant uncertainty growing up, often compounded with the trauma of neglect and abuse, are then expected to lead the rest of their lives successfully on their own, and that is a hard way to start a life outside of foster care. And, of course, that is just not quite right. They deserve a mom and dad, a supportive and safe environment to grow up and to develop, and to have meaningful connections.

While nothing can replace the things I just mentioned, I find they, at least, ought to have a chance to have some support to pursue higher education and find employment and stable housing, all to help prepare for their future.

I continue to work to find avenues to provide this support for these young people, including exploring ways to increase the awareness of Federal programs that support older foster youth.

I started out by complimenting our First Lady. In her remarks announcing the Executive order, the First Lady said this:

I predict this small spark today will ignite a profound and lasting nationwide movement.

I share her optimism and, once again, thank her for her commitment to improve the lives of young people. I look

forward to working with her and supporting how I can do that here in the United States Senate, both as an individual Senator and cochair of the Senate Caucus on Foster Youth.

IOWA

Mr. President, on another article, on Thursday, in Kossuth County, IA, I completed my 45th annual 99 county meetings. For 45 years in a row, I have held at least one question-and-answer session in all of Iowa's 99 counties.

Now, I have to modify that just a little bit because I remember—and it is not here in print—that in my first term in office, there was one county where nobody showed up, but, otherwise, I have had a Q&A in every county of Iowa—all 99—for the last 45 years.

Last week, I met with welders, students, family farmers, factory workers, and others to hear what is on their minds. I was in two high schools so I could hear straight from the next generation of Iowans about what is most important to young Iowans.

This year, I joined an artificial intelligence workshop in Grinnell, IA, with small business owners. I visited seven hospitals to hear from nurses and doctors about changes to Medicaid and how I am working to strengthen rural healthcare.

I held a roundtable with restaurant and hotel workers about the no tax on overtime and no tax on tips. These were all provisions, as we Senators know, from last summer's tax bill—everything to help working men and women of our country. These workers told me how the tax bill was a big moral boost for their employees and also to help recruit more employees.

Congress legislates and makes policy that impacts Americans. As a part of representative government, it is important to hear from our constituents how this policy is impacting their daily lives.

Hearing from Iowans face to face in my county meetings is the best way to keep in touch, but, as I tell them at that particular time, they only see me maybe 1 day out of 365. There are 364 days in the year that they ought to be telling me what is on their minds. So I encourage all Iowans to write or call my office with their opinions, and I always say dialogue is the essence of representative government. So if they don't see me face to face to have that conversation and they have it by email, they should expect an answer. If you don't get an answer, let me know because if I encourage you to write to me and I say I am going to answer, then I had better give you an answer.

Knowing what Iowans care about helps me better serve them. I look forward to more Q-and-A's in the coming weeks.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Nieh nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I yield the floor.

Mr. McCORMICK. Mr. President, 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.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 4405

Mr. SCHUMER. Well, Mr. President, Donald Trump has tried to cover up for Jeffrey Epstein long enough. It is time that the Senate finish the job to finally compel the Department of Justice to release the Epstein files.

A few hours ago, the House of Representatives passed their Epstein bill with as lopsided a vote as you can get, 427 to 1. It is now the Senate's turn.

In a few moments, I will ask unanimous consent for the Senate to pass the Epstein bill as soon as it comes over from the House. My unanimous consent request guarantees that the Senate will immediately pass the Epstein Files Transparency Act without any further action as soon as it comes over from the House. We will pass the House's bill without changes, without delay, and we will finally get this done.

Epstein victim groups have made clear that they support this bill as written, without amendments. We should listen to them and pass this bill quickly. They have worked so hard and long to make this happen and deserve tremendous—tremendous—credit that we have arrived at this moment.

This isn't about Democrats versus Republicans or about Congress versus the President. This is about giving the American people the transparency they have been crying for. This is about holding accountable all the people in Jeffrey Epstein's circle who raped, groomed, targeted, and enabled the abuse of hundreds of girls for years and years.

The American people have waited long enough. Jeffrey Epstein's victims have waited long enough. Let the truth come out. Let transparency reign. And I urge my Republican colleagues: Let the Senate act today.

And so, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives H.R. 4405, the Epstein Files Transparency Act, from the House, the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be considered read three times and passed, with no intervening action or debate, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the stable.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the Senate has now passed the Epstein bill as soon as it comes over from the House.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

JEFFREY EPSTEIN

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, hallelujah. Equal justice under law just took an enormous stride forward in this Senate Chamber.

It was back earlier this year in July when Senator LUJÁN and I introduced the Epstein bill—the same bill that just passed the Senate Chamber after passing through the House—and it had 25 sponsors, but we couldn't get a single sponsor from across the aisle, not one. Twenty-five Democrats said: Let's cosponsor this bill because we need transparency; the victims need justice.

And yet the President, who said during his campaign he was all about releasing these files, blocked them, did everything possible to stop them.

And then in September, under consideration of the Defense Authorization Act, we put forward an amendment. In fact, our minority leader, Senator SCHUMER from New York, put forward an amendment and said: Let's take the bill—the bill that Senator LUJÁN and I had introduced with 23 colleagues—and let's vote on it now and put it in the Defense authorization bill. And my good friends across the aisle again blockaded justice. They moved to table the amendment. And with only Republican votes, they created a 51-to-49 vote to kill justice, kill transparency, kill fairness for the victims of this evil—evil—operation that Epstein headed.

But the fight continued. The publicity continued from every part of the spectrum, politically, from the far right and the near right, left of center, far left of center, all saying: This is wrong. The crime is enormous—hundreds of young women, hundreds of girls, raped by powerful men. Every American knows how wrong those rapes were, how much damage they did to the young women involved, often destroying their lives.

Every father of a young girl thinks about how evil it would be for a powerful man to rape his daughter. And yet Trump's persistence in blockading the release of these files continued until the House came back into session, and there was a withdrawal petition—a discharge petition as they call it in the House—and a majority of the House Members said: We must vote on this.

And the President lobbied the Republicans who were on that discharge petition because Democrat names weren't enough to have a majority. He asked them to get off the petition, and they refused.

So it became clear the House was going to vote, and today they did. And when it came to the question of saying yes or no on releasing these files, it was 427 Members of the House strong, 1 opposed, saying today we stand for justice.

And so, just moments ago, the minority leader, Senator SCHUMER from New York, came to this floor, and he asked the Senate to follow the example set by the House. And just earlier today I said: When that moment comes, let's be 100 Senators strong, 100 strong in

saying yes to the unanimous consent request, saying yes to discharge of these files from the executive branch.

I am struck that the language is very full in saying all the details have to be discharged, and none of them can be blocked because of embarrassment or political sensitivity to the powerful individuals who are currently in office or may have been in office or may never have been in office but may have been involved in Epstein's operation. Let the chips fall where they may.

This bill says: Thirty days from a signature being provided by the President, 30 days those files have to be fully released, redacted only to protect the victims' names. So 30 days from now is a long time. And so I say to the President of the United States: You have had plenty of time to have your legal team already redact the names, so release these files now. Release them now. Sign this bill and release the files right away.

Today is a victory, a victory for the voices for justice who have pushed and argued that these two Chambers, the House and the Senate, need to fulfill the vision so embraced by the American people, so powerfully felt in their hearts, their sense of right and wrong, their sense that the powerful should not be able to do evil acts and get away with it, and finally their voices were heard today.

So I thank my Republican colleagues across the aisle. Every one of them decided not to come to the floor and object, which means they are giving unanimous consent. So all 100 Senators, however much they may have obstructed in the past, today did the right thing, and I applaud them for it.

Let's, together, push the President to release these files immediately. They have had plenty of time to redact the names. Let's see no further administrative delays or cleverness and let the chips fall where they may.

May there be justice for the victims. May there be accountability for the perpetrators. Equal justice under law should be served. It is our duty to serve it, and we have taken a powerful stride to equal justice today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. President, I ask consent to speak for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. President, I have come to the floor three times now to call for release of the Epstein files. Earlier today, the House voted to release the full files, and later today, I hope, this Chamber will do the same.

Before we vote, I want us to remember what is really at stake here. This isn't about Democrats versus Republicans. It is about real girls who were hurt, abused, and trafficked by Jeffrey Epstein and the powerful people who surrounded him.

One of those girls was Virginia Roberts Giuffre. She was forced to stay silent for years, but today I want to let her speak in her own words.

Virginia was just 16 when she started working at Mar-a-Lago where she met Epstein's recruiter Ghislaine Maxwell. She writes in her memoir:

Maxwell says she knows a wealthy man—longtime Mar-a-Lago member, she says—who is looking for a massage therapist to travel with him. . . . My lack of experience doesn't concern her a bit. I'm sure you'd be terrific," she insists, looking me up and down. "Will you come for an interview?"

Even today, more than 20 years later, I remember how excited I felt. Could my dreams of becoming a professional masseuse be coming true so quickly? Something about how this proper, well-spoken lady focused on me made that seem possible. I told her I had to get permission from my dad first, but that I really wanted to come.

That wealthy man, we all know now, was Jeffrey Epstein. That moment began years of trafficking and abuse for Virginia.

Later in her memoir, she writes:

I was about to spend more than two years in Epstein and Maxwell's orbit. My job: to do whatever they asked whenever they asked it. There were no bars on the windows or locks on the doors. But I was a prisoner trapped in an invisible cage.

Those are the words of a child—a child who should have been safe from predators like Epstein and Maxwell.

She talks about how Epstein gave her money to rent an apartment so her parents wouldn't question why she had to go to meet Epstein's clients in the middle of the night.

Here is the thing: Epstein did not act alone. He had help. And the men who helped him target and abuse young girls and protected him are still out there walking around like nothing happened. This can't just be another news cycle or another Tuesday. There needs to be justice.

We owe it to Virginia and every survivor of Epstein's to finally get the full truth of how this happened and who allowed it to happen. That is why I am going to, again, call for the full release of the Epstein files. Let's bring this evidence out, stop this secrecy, the coverups, and protecting these elites. The American people deserve the truth, and Virginia deserves transparency, accountability, and healing.

At a press conference earlier today, another Epstein survivor said:

Today we stand in a moment that will decide whether our government belongs to the American people or to those who prey on them.

We owe it to her and every survivor to choose accountability and release the files.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby