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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.

Sovereign Lord, You are our refuge and deliverer. We look to You for strength. Send to our lawmakers the power and grace they need today to glorify Your Name in all they think, say, and do.

Lord, give them the purity of heart that will shut the doors to all evil. Keep their feet in the path of integrity, that they may walk securely. Develop in them a perseverance which refuses to leave any task half done. Empower them with a diligence to offer You no less than their best.

And, Lord, be with the families of the two National Guard members who were shot. Comfort these loved ones during this season of distress and grief.

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. 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 for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Iowa.

2026 IOWA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, as I travel in Iowa throughout the year, I meet some very special people. Last month, in Sheldon, IA, at the high school, I had the honor of meeting Stephanie Pritts, who was recently named Iowa's 2026 "Teacher of the Year."

Now, it goes way back to 1958 that Iowa started the "Teacher of the Year" award, honoring an exceptional Iowa teacher each year. There is very tough competition each year among Iowa's many outstanding educators to find the one who best represents student learning through evidence-based instruction, empowering students with multiple pathways to postsecondary success; the teacher who learns from and invests in other fellow educators and, at the same time, serves students in partnership with their families.

The annual program is sponsored by the Iowa Department of Education, and it is funded by an appropriation of the Iowa Legislature.

Now that she is 2026 "Teacher of the Year," Stephanie will serve as an ambassador to schools, an ambassador to higher education, and an ambassador to various communities across the State.

I would like to congratulate Stephanie, again, and thank her for her service to our State. Iowans can be very proud that teachers like Stephanie call our State their home.

I visit about 10 to 12 high schools a year to have a Q&A with young people because they never come to my open town meetings. One of the surprises that happens at a high school is meeting Iowa's "Teacher of the Year." This year, that was Stephanie Pritts, and I congratulate her for a second time.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this morning, I was informed by New York law enforcement of multiple bomb threats made against my offices in Rochester, Binghamton, and Long Island. The bomb threats against my offices came with the email subject line "MAGA" and from an email address alleging the "2020 election was rigged."

Local and Federal law enforcement responded immediately and are conducting full security sweeps, and investigations are ongoing. Everyone, thank God, is safe, and I am grateful for the quick and professional response of Federal and local law enforcement to ensure that these offices remain safe and secure for all New Yorkers.

As I have said many times, these kinds of violent threats have absolutely no place—no place—in our political system.

No one—no public servant, no staff member, no constituent, no citizen—should ever be targeted for simply doing their job.

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on Venezuela, Donald Trump has turned the Caribbean into a dangerous tinder box. Today, we have more troops off the coast of South America than we have had in decades. U.S. forces have struck at least 20 alleged drug boats with zero independent evidence, no transparency, and no concrete legal justification.

On Saturday, Donald Trump proclaimed that the airspace above and surrounding Venezuela to be closed in its entirety. What does this mean? We have no clue because Donald Trump said a few hours later not to "read anything into it."

• 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 erraticness of his foreign policy is dangerous in itself—saying one thing one day and one thing the next. So Americans are right to wonder, what on Earth is Donald Trump planning in Venezuela? Is Donald Trump nudging America into another war? Is he seeking regime change for Maduro? Will he put U.S. troops in harm's way? Nobody knows. All we have is a bunch of contradictory statements from Trump.

Donald Trump seems to be planning a war totally in secret—without congressional authorization, without any transparency, without any explanation for what his goals even are. And all it takes—all it takes—is one mistake, one miscalculation, one lapse in judgment from either side, and suddenly our troops could find themselves in armed conflict with Venezuela. Lives could be lost. American security could suffer.

So I want to be very, very clear. If Donald Trump proceeds with his plan to conduct strikes against Venezuela, Senators KAINE, PAUL, and I will immediately file a War Powers Resolution to force congressional action to block the use of troops in Venezuela. The power to declare war lies in the hands of Congress, and we intend to exert that authority should the need arise.

Now, I urge my Republican colleagues to work with us to advance this resolution if it becomes necessary because the thought of another forever war makes Americans sick to their stomachs. Americans are tired of seeing troops bogged down in one country after another. Americans do not want a pointless war in Venezuela.

Donald Trump does not have the authority to send our troops into harm's way without authorization from Congress. Should Donald Trump proceed, the Senate will immediately respond. Should a strike occur, we will force a debate in Congress and force a vote to prevent the U.S. troops from being in hostilities against Venezuela. Our troops' safety and our national security are at stake.

I urge both sides to stand ready to assert the powers of Congress on matters of war and peace should the need arise because the rules of the Congress allow us to require a vote on this issue should the need arise.

SECRETARY HEGSETH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on Hegseth, I want to say a word about Secretary Hegseth. I don't think we have ever seen someone so unserious, so childish, so obviously insecure serving as Secretary of Defense as Pete Hegseth, and that should alarm every single one of us.

Secretary Hegseth loves to look tough. He loves to boast about the lethality of our forces. He wants to be taken seriously, but yesterday he posted a ridiculous tweet of a cartoon turtle firing on alleged drug traffickers—a sick parody of a well-known children's book. This man is a national embarrassment. Tweeting memes in the mid-

dle of a potential armed conflict is something no serious leader would ever even think of doing. The only thing this tweet accomplishes is to remind the world that Pete Hegseth is not up to the job.

But, of course, this is much more serious than memes on twitter. A few days ago, the Washington Post reported that Secretary Hegseth gave a spoken directive to kill all the occupants of the first alleged drug boat struck by U.S. forces. If the reports in the Washington Post are accurate, this may expose those involved to legal consequences.

What we need right now more than anything else is the truth, the facts, which is precisely what Secretary Hegseth has refused to give.

There are tapes in the possession of the Department of Defense that would show exactly what happened during these military strikes. Secretary Hegseth has an obligation to be truthful, so he should release those tapes. He says the Washington Post account is not correct, so why not release the tapes and prove it? If he refuses to release these tapes, it calls into question the truthfulness of his account.

The tapes will show one way or the other what happened and whether Hegseth is telling the truth. If Secretary Hegseth has nothing to hide, he should not fear being truthful.

In the meantime, Republicans in the House and Senate, including the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have promised "vigorous oversight" on these strikes. This is very encouraging, and I thank them for working in a bipartisan way on this matter. But now Republicans in both Chambers must follow through. We need congressional hearings. We need full and transparent briefings from the Pentagon. Most importantly, the committees should continue to demand that Secretary Hegseth release—release—the tapes.

This is such a serious matter that Secretary Hegseth himself should come before the Congress to testify under oath about the nature of his order, the evidence supporting the strikes, and an explanation for what the goals are in Venezuela.

With our troops standing on a knife's edge in the Caribbean, we need a Secretary of Defense who can prove himself to be serious, sober-minded, and someone of high character. Sadly, Hegseth has the opposite of each of these qualities.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, on healthcare, so the holiday season is upon us, and this year, people are wondering how the hell they are going to afford their health insurance. The ACA tax credits the Republicans have refused to extend will expire, and as many as 20 million Americans will see their healthcare costs skyrocket. Many more than 20 million, even if

they have private insurance, will see their costs skyrocket as well.

What are Donald Trump and Republicans doing to solve America's healthcare crisis? Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing. Donald Trump and Republicans seem to be in no hurry at all to prevent tens of millions of people's premiums from skyrocketing.

After waiting until the last minute to even talk about healthcare, Republicans are now in utter disarray. First, Trump said he would finally release his grand plan to fix healthcare. Then Republicans in Congress threw a tantrum and bullied the President into backing down. Now Republicans in the House and Senate can't seem to get on the same page about how they will fix this crisis that has been brewing under their watch.

So while Republicans are in complete disarray about healthcare, Democrats remain united to lower people's premiums and to bring their costs down.

Until Donald Trump and Republicans show they are serious about working with us to solve the healthcare crisis, Americans will continue to see their healthcare costs skyrocket, and they will know it is Donald Trump and the Republicans who are to blame.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

HONORING SPECIALIST SARAH BECKSTROM AND STAFF SERGEANT ANDREW WOLFE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I begin, I want to profess my profound sorrow for National Guard member SPC Sarah Beckstrom. Sarah was one of two National Guard members shot in a targeted attack here in Washington, DC, on the day before Thanksgiving. The other Guard member, SSgt Andrew Wolfe, is hospitalized in grave condition. My prayers are with him and his family, as well as the family of Specialist Beckstrom.

Sarah Beckstrom was just 20 years old. Andrew Wolfe is just 24. They are both at an age when many are quite naturally figuring out their path in life. But Sarah and Andrew chose early, and they chose service—service up to and including the sacrifice of their lives for their country and their fellow citizens. It is a remarkable thing, and may we never forget how much we owe men and women like Andrew Wolfe and Sarah Beckstrom.

Again, my prayers are with the family of Specialist Beckstrom, and I am praying for Staff Sergeant Wolfe's full and swift recovery.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, Thanksgiving is one of the busiest travel seasons of the year. More than 80 million