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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, strong to save, empower our lawmakers to serve You today, to solve problems, and to remove impediments. Give them Your higher wisdom as they seek You, the source of their strength. Lord, surround them with the shield of Your divine approbation so that no weapon formed against them will prosper.

Almighty God, provide our Senators strength for the adventures and challenges of these hours, inspiring them with the courage to oppose falsehood in all of its forms. May Your truth, love, and power fill their hearts.

We pray in Your great 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. MORENO). 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.

HONORING SPECIALIST SARAH BECKSTROM AND STAFF SERGEANT ANDREW WOLFE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, last week, two members of the West Virginia National Guard were tragically shot here, while on duty, in Washington, DC. They were attacked by an Afghan national, brought here under the Biden administration. Sadly, Specialist Beckstrom has passed away, and Staff Sergeant Wolfe continues to fight for his life.

May God bless both of them. Our prayers and mine are with them and their families.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, also last week, an Afghan evacuee was arrested for threatening to bomb a building in Texas. The terrorists entered our country as part of a program called Operation Allies Welcome in the aftermath of the Biden administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Since 2021, I have warned the Biden administration, my congressional allies and colleagues, and the American public about the failure to vet Afghan evacuees. Unfortunately, the Biden administration was not honest with the American people about the program's vetting vulnerabilities.

I asked then-Director Wray about the program's national security, and I asked the same, this year, of Director Patel of the FBI.

This year, Director of National Intelligence Gabbard told my office an important data point: Of the more than 100,000 Afghan evacuees, as of August 2022, 1.6 percent had links to terrorism or other derogatory information. So, when you take that 1.6 percent, that is over 1,600 people who at the time of Biden's disastrous evacuation posed a potential threat to our homeland and to the American people.

On July 8, 2025, I came to the Senate floor and urged the current FBI and

the intelligence community leadership to aggressively investigate evacuees. In September of this year, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Noem told my office that, as of August 12, 2025, thousands of Operation Allies Welcome parolees were potential national security threats.

As we have tragically witnessed, the Biden administration's failure to properly vet Afghan evacuees has serious consequences and probably consequences we haven't seen beyond the killing last week.

I think we should thank the Trump administration's efforts—and I thank them—for responding to my oversight requests and their efforts to fix the Biden administration's failures.

This Senator's oversight work will continue.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I want to begin with a truly disgusting and alarming piece of news the American people got this morning. This morning, the former President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, was released from prison after Donald Trump gave him a pardon.

We all know Donald Trump does a lot of hypocritical things. Almost every day there is hypocrisy oozing from the White House. But pardoning one of the world's biggest drug traffickers is egregious, shameful, and dangerous, even for Donald Trump.

It would be bad enough on its own for Donald Trump to pardon this horrible drug trafficker, but for him to pardon this drug lord while putting a quarter of our military in the Caribbean, right nearby Honduras, to fight drug trafficking makes an utter mockery of

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



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Donald Trump's supposed desire to root out all drug trafficking.

Let's be clear of the facts: The person Donald Trump just pardoned was convicted of helping move 400 tons of cocaine to the United States, all the while Trump blows up alleged drug boats to prevent drugs from getting to America and risks leapfrogging the United States into war with Venezuela.

You can't have it both ways, Mr. President. You talk a big game about hunting down drug traffickers and getting drugs off our streets and then turn around and free a dangerous, convicted drug lord. That sends a message to other criminals: Suck up to Trump, and you will get a pardon, no matter how many boatloads of drugs you pump into our streets.

Even one Trump adviser admitted that "how we justify this is really hard."

Trump's pardon reeks of hypocrisy; it reeks of corruption, which is the MO of the Trump administration.

The failure of the leadership at the Department of Defense is also a national embarrassment. The mess Secretary Hegseth creates regularly shows the consequences of picking an inexperienced FOX News host to lead a massively complex life-or-death Federal Agency. Donald Trump is learning it the hard way: If you pick a FOX News cable host to lead the largest, most complicated Federal Agency of all, you get burnt, and Hegseth is just way beyond what anyone would imagine in how bad he is at that Department.

In the past few days, more questions have arisen about Hegseth's order to attack alleged drug trafficking vessels off the coast of Venezuela. It is possible those strikes—which may have included verbal orders from the Secretary of Defense to "kill everybody" on those boats—violated the law.

But this is the problem: The American people still don't know exactly what happened because Pete Hegseth refuses to tell the truth.

Months ago, right after the strikes, Hegseth went on FOX News and bragged that he was present at every moment of the operation. He said on FOX News that he "watched it live." He said the same to us in person.

But then, last night, he tweeted that his admiral was actually the one who made all the combat decisions.

This is so spineless.

Pete Hegseth won't hesitate for a moment to talk a big game and take credit if he thinks it makes him look good, but the minute trouble arises, suddenly Hegseth says someone else was making the decision.

Now, let's be very clear about something: There is a very easy way for the American people to get the truth. Pete Hegseth should release the full tapes of the September 2 attack—both the first and second strike; not a clip, not some edited or redacted snippet. The full, unedited tapes of each strike must be released so the American people can see what happened with their own eyes.

Now, Pete Hegseth says he did nothing wrong. So prove it. If it is true, he should have nothing to fear from the truth. But if he refuses to release the tapes, if he stonewalls, if he keeps hiding the facts, then the question becomes unavoidable: What is Pete Hegseth hiding? What does Pete Hegseth not want the American people to see?

Is it that his story doesn't add up? We don't know because Pete Hegseth is right now hiding the truth. And, sadly, that has become the theme with this administration. When facts are inconvenient, they cover up.

So, Secretary Hegseth, release the tapes.

I also want to commend my Senate colleagues, including the chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Senators WICKER and REED, for working together in good faith in a bipartisan way to conduct oversight of these boat strikes. I support those efforts wholeheartedly.

One of the first things we need is a classified briefing from the DOD—Department of Defense—about exactly what happened during these operations. Let me be clear: Secretary Hegseth must be part of those briefings. We need documentation. We need the tapes.

But we should go one step further: Secretary Hegseth should testify publicly before the committee, under oath, so that the American people hear the facts.

The truth should not be kept behind closed doors. The fresh air of public scrutiny should be let in. The public has a right to know. That is why Pete Hegseth must testify publicly and, most importantly, why he must release the full tape of the attacks.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on healthcare, let me start with a shockingly candid quote from a senior House Republican on their plan to fix healthcare. This senior House Republican, when it came to healthcare, said about the Republicans in the House:

We're nowhere on healthcare.

That is what a senior House Republican said. It is a grim thing to say, but it is the truth. There has never been a clearer divide on what Democrats want on healthcare and what Republicans want on healthcare.

Democrats want to lower healthcare costs for families. We want to make healthcare cheaper, more effective, more accessible. We are united on that issue from one end of the party to the other.

Republicans, meanwhile, are a total mess when it comes to healthcare. Republicans don't know what to do. One day Trump floats a so-called healthcare plan. The next day, Speaker JOHNSON forces him to shoot it down.

Some Republicans say they want to dismantle the ACA—probably a major-

ity of them in the House and a large number in the Senate—just dismantle it altogether. Other Republicans seem more focused on eradicating reproductive care in every State than helping people afford healthcare.

The bottom line is, Republicans are in total disarray on healthcare. And while Republicans continue the infighting, who is paying the price? The American people, the people whose premiums are going up by \$500 to \$1,000 a month. These people know that Trump and the Republicans are to blame.

America, we all know, is in a healthcare crisis, and Republicans are only adding fuel to the fire.

Democrats have been clear from the start: The first step—the first step—to solve this crisis is extending the ACA tax credits. Democrats are ready to do so. We are united, and we are committed to lowering the cost of healthcare.

Republicans, however, by their own admission, are nowhere on healthcare, and that is a disastrous message to send to the American people who are suffering from skyrocketing healthcare costs.

I yield the floor.

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. 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the Democrat leader was just talking about healthcare, and obviously there has been a lot of conversation around that here in these past few weeks and months. In fact, the Democrats shut down the government for 43 days, the longest shutdown in history, allegedly, for healthcare; although, I think we all know that it was Trump derangement syndrome more than anything else that led to the government shutdown.

But I would just say because there is a—you know, sometimes you have to take a walk down memory lane to remind people that facts are stubborn things, and facts are stubborn things.

The Democrat leader implied Republicans are not interested in lowering healthcare costs and that somehow they are. The contrary is actually the truth.

If you look at what has happened since the ObamaCare exchanges went live over 10 years ago, healthcare premiums on the exchange have gone up, on average, 221 percent—a 221-percent increase in healthcare premiums in the