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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TED BUDD, a Senator from the State of North Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Rev. Lisa Wink Schultz. She is the staff resident in the Chaplain's office.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray:

Gracious and merciful God, we praise You that none of Your purposes can be thwarted. You have been our shelter from one generation to another.

Continue to guide our lawmakers along right paths. May they find fullness of joy in Your presence and pleasure forevermore.

Today, equip them with what they need to do Your will, working in them that which is pleasing in Your sight. Help them to live with the sense of accountability to You, understanding that their thoughts, words, and actions are open to Your review.

And, Lord, bring peace to our Nation and world.

We pray in Your sacred 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 executive clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 16, 2026.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable TED BUDD, a Senator from the State of North Carolina, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BUDD 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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Anna St. John, of Louisiana, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the previously scheduled rollcall vote on the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 673, Anna St. John, now occur at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 17.

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

Mr. BARRASSO. I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

SAVE AMERICA ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Americans are watching in horror as Donald Trump bumbles this country into war. The latest job numbers show our economy is even weaker than we thought. But what are MAGA Republicans prioritizing in the Senate this week? They are conspiring with Donald Trump to undermine democracy and disenfranchise millions of Americans by pushing the SAVE Act.

MAGA Republicans want to drag this Chamber down and waste time on a bill that not too long ago was considered fringe but now is part of the Republican mainstream. Not a single Democrat will support the SAVE Act. It is a radical bill, and if Republicans try to burn time on this legislation here on the floor, we will oppose them for as long as it takes.

Donald Trump and Senate Republicans know their numbers are sinking badly. They know the American people are souring on their agenda. They know that with each passing day, their prospects for November get worse. So what do they do? Do they change course? Do they try to work with Democrats to lower grocery costs, stop the Iran war, help lower people's energy bills? No. Instead, MAGA Republicans try to rig democracy and disenfranchise American citizens. That is exactly what the SAVE Act is all about.

Remember, all the election laws that govern how the 2026 midterms will operate were in place during the 2024 election—the election of Donald Trump again. The laws that will be in effect in 2026 were the same laws during the 2024 election. That was the election that Donald Trump won. You don't hear Donald Trump and Republicans complain that the 2024 election was rigged.

But now the main difference is that Donald Trump and Republicans are horribly unpopular. So, suddenly, they want to change the rules. Donald Trump said it himself. He said if Republicans pass the SAVE Act, "it'll

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



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guarantee the midterms." He is saying: Fix the election so that we can win.

This isn't the first time he has tried to do that, albeit in a different way this time.

Think about that. The President of the United States is saying out loud that making it harder to vote will help his party win. That is how an autocrat talks. That is how a thug talks. That is how someone who knows they are about to lose talks.

Now, MAGA Republicans keep calling this voter ID, but the SAVE Act is not a voter ID bill; it is a voter suppression bill. The SAVE Act would make it easier to buy an AR-15 than to register to vote. Republicans won't tell Americans, for example, that under the SAVE Act, States would be required to hand over voter records to be screened through a DHS system rebuilt by Elon Musk's DOGE squad. Do you think that is on the level? No way.

This is not about protecting democracy; this is about giving Trump and his allies more power to decide who gets to vote and who does not. If, God forbid, this bill passed and your State turned over its election rolls and it went through the system that DOGE has imposed at DHS, you could be very easily purged from the rolls through no fault of your own and nothing you have done. But once you are purged, you may not even know that you were purged until you show up to cast your ballot on election day.

Republicans won't tell Americans that their bill would wipe out the most common ways Americans register to vote. No more registering by mail. No more voter registration drives at churches or on college campuses. No more registration when you get a driver's license.

Under the SAVE Act, Americans would be forced to register in person even though only 6 percent of Americans registered in person to vote in 2022, and Republicans want to make this the only option. They won't tell Americans that a driver's license or State-issued ID would no longer be enough to register.

Indeed, many Americans would need additional paperwork like a passport or a birth certificate. Fewer than half of Americans even have a passport. Millions of Americans do not have easy access to a birth certificate. If you changed your name after marriage, you could run into problems too.

And now, Donald Trump says he doesn't even want vote by mail. Tell that to seniors, tell that to disabled Americans, tell that to Americans who live in rural communities far from an election office. Put simply, the SAVE Act is designed to make it harder to vote and easier to steal an election.

Once again, let me just repeat: You can be purged from the rolls. There is no requirement that you be notified that you were purged. You did nothing wrong. You were the same person who voted that way 2 years earlier.

And guess what. You show up at the polling place, and they say: Sorry, Mr.

Jones, sorry Ms. Smith, you are not on the rolls anymore. You had no way of knowing, and then you can't vote because you are just finding out when you show up to the polls to vote on election day. It is outrageous. It is cynical. It is un-American. It is autocratic.

Donald Trump knows that if the election is fair, he could lose. So instead of changing his policies, he and the MAGA Republicans—now, all we see are so many Republicans, too many, seem to be going along, want to make it harder for Americans to vote.

That is who Donald Trump is. He is a bully. He does not know how to persuade. He threatens. He coerces. And now he is trying to do that to American democracy itself.

Senate Democrats will not let Donald Trump ram this bill through the Senate, not this week, not next week, not ever.

IRAN

Mr. President, the Senate's prayers are with the families of the six servicemembers killed in a plane crash late last week in Iraq. Thirteen U.S. servicemembers have now been killed.

We hold them in our hearts, as well as everyone killed and injured in the Middle East, as well as their families.

The war Donald Trump promised would be over quickly is now entering its third week, and no end is in sight. Iran is fully exerting its leverage over the Strait of Hormuz, sending oil prices surging across the globe. Brent crude is once again above \$100 a barrel. Right now, gas is \$3.70 at the pump. Oil executives told the White House last week: No matter what happens next, prices are likely to rise even higher in the weeks ahead.

So what is Donald Trump's plan to bring this economic pain to an end? Sadly, America, he doesn't have one. It is something different every day. No plan. No followthrough.

If you listen to his press conference earlier today, it was obvious: Donald Trump is flailing. Donald Trump claimed he predicted long ago that the Strait of Hormuz would be used as a weapon.

Well, if that is true, then he has done a terrible job planning in advance for how to stop it from being used as a weapon, and he continues to do a terrible job containing the damage that is now occurring.

Trump also claimed today:

They want to make a deal. They are talking to our people.

And then moments later he said:

All their leaders are dead. We don't even know who we are dealing with.

Which one is it? The leaders want to make a deal or we don't know who the leaders are? If you can say those two contradictory things within the same few minutes, something is dramatically wrong, and it is with Donald Trump.

Does Donald Trump know whom he is talking to or not? Are talks even hap-

pening? The Commander in Chief seems totally lost and in over his depth.

Donald Trump now claims that other countries are going to help the United States clear the Strait of Hormuz and bashed our own allies for voicing hesitation about putting troops in harm's way. And so far, no country has publicly said it would step up.

Now, Donald Trump even says his administration has been asking China to help us out in the Strait of Hormuz. China. Are you kidding me? China—relying on China to get us out of a mess that Donald Trump created. They are not going to do that. Fat chance they will do that.

Donald Trump created a mess in the Middle East, and he clearly has no plan for how to end it. That is a huge problem for our country. War—unnecessary, unnecessary, endless war.

ENERGY

Mr. President, lower costs and agenda on energy prices is the next thing I want to address. The war with Iran has only made the cost-of-living crisis worse for American families.

Does Donald Trump care? Of course not.

He says, if prices rise, he says, they rise. Republicans say that people paying more for gas is just a price they should be willing to pay. That is an outrageous thing to say as families struggle to keep their heads above water financially.

Instead of wasting billions on a foreign war, he should be working with Congress to lower energy costs here at home. That is exactly what Democrats are focused on—lowering costs for American families. And one of our focuses is energy costs.

So tomorrow, the Democrats will release a new report laying out Donald Trump's many broken promises on energy costs. Trump promised he would cut people's electricity bills in half by the end of his first year in office. But electricity bills have risen at almost triple—triple—the rate of inflation.

Even as his war with Iran sends gas prices higher, Donald Trump is simultaneously undermining any energy production here at home by killing hundreds of clean energy projects across the country.

Those projects would have provided enough energy to power 14 million homes. When you cut out clean energy—which he did in a vicious, nasty, vindictive way—you raise prices because the cheapest way to get new electrons on the grid is solar, and wind is not too far behind.

He cut them out. He cut them out because of a pet peeve. He didn't like clean energy because windmills were built off the coast near his golf course in Scotland.

Since then, there has been a war on clean energy, not to mention the corruption that the oil and gas industry, under the leadership of Harold Hamm—at least if you read the papers—promised him \$1 billion if he killed clean energy. Well, he has killed clean energy,