



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 172

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JULY 27, 2026

No. 122

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.

O God, who has ordained the seasons of our lives, thank You for the steadfastness of Your mercy, grace, and love.

Inspire our lawmakers to open themselves to the gifts of Your presence, power, and peace, remembering that You will never leave or forsake them.

Where there is fear, give courage. Where there is anxiety, give peace. Where there is despair, give hope. Where there is sadness, give joy.

May our Senators joyfully encounter You on a daily basis. Inspire them to hear Your words and obey Your commands.

We pray in Your majestic 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. 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.

PASTOR EZRA JIN

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, all Americans—but I can't speak for all Americans. But I want to thank President Trump for his efforts to release Pastor Ezra Jin after 266 days in Chinese captivity.

Pastor Jin started Zion Church in 2007 to share his love of God, to serve others, and to worship peacefully. Following the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, his church and its community were among the first responders. They even hosted blood drives in Beijing to help those who were impacted by the earthquake.

But on October 10, last year, Pastor Jin was detained with other leaders in the Zion Church.

Now, you might find yourself asking: Why was he arrested?

In communist governments, any belief system that places moral authority and fosters independent communities beyond government control is a challenge to the regime in power. This Senator does not see how preaching the love of Jesus Christ is a threat to any communist government, but they do.

That is why the Chinese Communist Party seeks to control religion through state-run religious organizations. Today, authorities suppress independent churches and target any individuals who worship outside of the state-sanctioned controlled institutions.

Many Christians seeking to practice their faith free of government control have to fear their identity being discovered and then facing punishment or even imprisonment.

This is precisely what happened to Pastor Jin. His only offense was leading an independent Christian congregation and exercising his fundamental freedom to worship without Chinese Government interference.

In November of 2025, the Senate passed a bipartisan resolution that condemned the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of religious groups,

including Pastor Jin and the leaders of the Zion Church.

In March of this year, I joined a congressional letter to President Trump asking that he advocate for Pastor Jin's release in a meeting that he recently had with the Chinese President.

Today, we can celebrate that Pastor Jin is finally free. But our work is not finished. We must continue to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves and stand firmly in defense of religious freedom.

Along this same line—not in China but someplace in Africa—I heard yesterday, in my attendance at the 105th Cedar Falls, IA, Bible Conference, that there has been a pastor in Africa that has been kidnapped, and they wanted us to pray for him. And, hopefully, our government is helping, to some extent, to free him as well.

I don't know his name. They didn't want to give out the name.

But this stuff that happens in China and around the world, you can't understand how it can happen because it seems to me the peaceful approach of Christians is something that shouldn't be challenged or feared by any type of government anywhere on this globe.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the role.

The senior assistant bill 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.

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



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S4275

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027—Motion to Proceed

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 436, S. 4784.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 436, S. 4784, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2027 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE RESOLUTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Executive Calendar No. 6, S. Res. 817.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the executive resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

An executive resolution (S. Res. 817) authorizing the en bloc consideration in Executive Session of certain nominations on the Executive Calendar.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant 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 move to bring to a close debate on Executive Calendar No. 6, S. Res. 817, an executive resolution authorizing the en bloc consideration in Executive Session of certain nominations on the Executive Calendar.

John Thune, John Barrasso, Alan Armstrong, David McCormick, Kevin Cramer, John R. Curtis, Tim Sheehy, James E. Risch, John Boozman, Pete Ricketts, Chuck Grassley, Cynthia M. Lummis, James Lankford, Jim Banks, Bernie Moreno, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Tim Scott of South Carolina.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

NOMINATION OF WALTER CLAYTON

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this afternoon, we are going to move on the nomination of Jay Clayton to be Director of National Intelligence.

Amid a heightened threat environment, having a proven leader in this role is especially important, and Jay Clayton fits this mold.

During the first Trump administration, Jay Clayton served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission for almost 4 years, and under his leadership, the SEC went after financial crimes and fraud and aimed to protect Main Street investors.

He also worked with the intelligence community on national security issues that intersected with our financial system. That included efforts to address Chinese influence and exploitation of our markets.

And, of course, he worked to maintain economic stability after the onset of the pandemic, as well.

So, Mr. President, with that record, it is no wonder that President Trump wanted Jay Clayton to serve in his second administration, this time as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, an important law enforcement post.

And for the past year and a half in that role, Mr. Clayton has been busy. He has supervised the prosecution of terrorists and the drafting of the indictment against Nicolas Maduro on drug trafficking and terrorism charges. Now President Trump has nominated him for a Cabinet post to lead our Nation's intelligence community.

Jay Clayton's record inspires confidence in the type of DNI he will be, and Democrats have previously recognized his abilities. He has earned bipartisan support in the past. The Democrat vice chair of the Intelligence Committee even said after Mr. Clayton was nominated for this position "I have known and respected Jay Clayton for many years and believe he is a capable public servant"—that, again, from the Democrat vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

So one might think that we would be seeing some bipartisanship from Democrats on this nominee, but Democrats are playing the same partisan games with this qualified nominee as they have with so many of President Trump's picks. And it is a funny thing because Democrats have made no secret of their disdain for the current Acting Director of National Intelligence. In fact, Democrats were so worked up over the President's temporary choice for this position that they allowed our Nation's most important counterterrorism tool to go dark for the first time ever. That is right.

Now Democrats have the opportunity to replace that acting official, but they are in no apparent rush to confirm a permanent Director of National Intelligence. They have opposed his nomination in committee. They have delayed things here on the floor, and I don't expect we will see a lot of Democrat sup-

port for him in the final rollcall. It doesn't matter how qualified the nominee or even that Democrats supposedly want to see the current Acting Director replaced. For our colleagues across the aisle, everything—everything—takes a back seat to the political games.

Well, I have run out of words. It is shameful.

We are going to move forward with the Clayton nomination this week. We will have a permanent Director of National Intelligence in place shortly, and I hope this will encourage my colleagues to stop blocking the reauthorization of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

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. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, you often wonder if the speeches you give on the floor of the Senate are heard by anyone. Most of us have spent some time working with staff to prepare remarks to state a position or to make a plea, and you wonder if anyone is listening. Well, every once in a while, something happens which renews your faith that perhaps there are people listening who can make a difference.

Late last week, I had an amazing visit in my office upstairs, here in the Capitol, from China—Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri. He had been jailed for 266 days in a Chinese prison. His crime? He had been operating a church, a Christian church. At least eight of his congregants remain in prison. Pastor Jin's daughter Grace and his 7-week-old grandson—also named Ezra—joined our meeting upstairs as well. Grace worked tirelessly to draw attention to her father's case, and it was a joy to see them reunited. In our meeting, Pastor Jin told me that his prison conditions were very stark. While in jail, in China, he was cut off from communications with his family. His lawyers were harassed and threatened as well.

President Trump raised the case with Chinese President Xi, and here in the Senate, Senator CRUZ and I, on a bipartisan basis, passed a resolution calling for his release and the release of several other political prisoners in China.

I welcome the Chinese Government's release of Pastor Jin, and I call on them to release the remaining eight members of his church as well as the following who are mentioned in my Senate resolution: Dr. Gulshan Abbas, Jimmy Lai, Gao Quanfu, and his wife Pang Yu, and Epkar Asat. All of these people are noted on this poster that I presented on the floor several weeks ago. Here is Pastor Jin with a smile on his face—the same thing in my office