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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Elder D. Todd Christofferson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Father who art in Heaven, we bow before Thee this day, the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and remember with soberness and humility the sacrifice of so many who have offered their lives to preserve our liberty. We pray that Thou wilt bless their descendants and sustain the vital institutions of our government that this precious liberty may be preserved through the generations to come.

We ask Thy blessing upon the U.S. Senate and each of its individual Members this day and in the days and months ahead. Grant them the wisdom and judgment they seek in the disposition of all matters that come before them. Honor their desire to contribute to the well-being of the people of this Nation and indeed those of all nations who may be influenced for good by their decisions.

We thank Thee for Thy abundant mercy and constant blessings upon us. In the Name of Jesus Christ, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PAUL). The majority leader is recognized.

LEGISLATION BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the continuing resolution was filed in the House yesterday. As we wait for the House to take the next step, I encourage all Members to continue reviewing the legislative text, which has been available for some time.

The Water Resources Development Act legislation has been filed in the House as well. This is bipartisan legislation that will strengthen our Nation's infrastructure and commerce while investing in the safety and reliability of our drinking water. As colleagues know, it includes, let me repeat, aid for families in Flint.

As we wait for final passage in the House, I encourage Senators to keep doing our part to ensure that we can bring WRDA and its assistance for Flint over the finish line as soon as possible.

On another matter, I am pleased the 21st Century Cures Act bill will pass this afternoon with significant support from both sides of the aisle. This medical innovation bill will help foster solutions when it comes to heartbreaking illnesses such as Alzheimer's, opioid addiction, mental health disorders, and cancer—heartbreaking illnesses that affect our families, friends, and constituents. This is one of the most meaningful bills we will pass this year, and it would not have been possible without the hard work of colleagues such as Chairman ALEXANDER, Senators CORNYN, HATCH and CASSIDY, and of course along with Ranking Member MURRAY.

Let us also again recognize Vice President BIDEN for his work on the Cancer Moonshot initiatives, which

have fittingly been renamed for Beau Biden in this legislation. I will have more to say about the Vice President when he joins us again this afternoon, but for now I look forward to passing the 21st Century Cures Act today.

On another matter, we will have another important vote this afternoon. It is a vote to move forward on the national defense authorization conference report.

We all know the world the next administration will inherit is a difficult and dangerous one. There are many threats. There are numerous national security challenges, and there is much to be done to better prepare our military and the next administration to deal with them. That is what this bipartisan national defense legislation aims to do. It will help strengthen our military posture. It will send clear messages to both our allies and our adversaries, and it will provide more of the tools our servicemembers need to be successful. It makes clear that we must also pass the continuing resolution that includes funding for the war against ISIL and for our forces in Afghanistan.

We have already seen the consequences of failing to take the necessary steps to confront our national security challenges. It is another reason we need to move forward and pass this defense legislation so we can take forward-looking steps now to help take on these challenges and support our men and women in uniform.

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Of course, Mr. President, it is fitting that we are talking about the bravery of our servicemembers on December 7. Today marks the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a date that FDR rightly predicted "will live in infamy." It is a time when we reflect on the meaning of this day for our country and for our

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military, a time when we remember all those who sacrificed on our behalf, and a time when we recognize the men and women in uniform currently serving to keep our country safer.

Through the years, one of my greatest experiences has been the opportunity I have had to meet with distinguished Kentucky veterans as they visit Washington through the Honor Flight Program. I know many of our colleagues do the same thing when veterans from their States come to town.

Today I ask our colleagues to join me in remembering all those who served and sacrificed so much and in thanking our men and women in uniform who are stationed around the world this holiday season.

TRIBUTE TO KELLY AYOTTE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, “God gave us two ears so we would listen more than talk.”

It is a simple phrase that many of us have likely heard before, but to Senator KELLY AYOTTE, it is the best piece of advice she says she ever received, and it is a proverb she has lived by during her time in the Senate. In fact, it is how she got her start here in the first place.

As New Hampshire’s first female attorney general, KELLY listened to the concerns of those around her. She heard their concerns about the direction our country was going, about the numerous security threats facing our Nation, and about out-of-control spending. She could have just sat on the sidelines as these problems escalated—it certainly would have been the easier choice—but she chose to jump in the game and work to solve them instead. From day one, Senator AYOTTE rolled up her sleeves and got to work. As the most prominent New Hampshire newspaper put it, she has never been a “freshman back-bencher,” she has been a dynamo from the start.

I can’t say I was surprised. I still remember the first time I heard about KELLY. It was from our former colleague Judd Gregg, who told me about this rising star in New Hampshire. Boy, was he right. It didn’t take long for everyone to reach a similar conclusion.

KELLY is tough, she is a problem solver, and she is a fighter. Senator AYOTTE doesn’t view the challenges of this job as obstacles either. She prefers to call them opportunities. She says: “It’s how you react to those bends in the road that will make the biggest difference in your life.” During her 6 years here, she has clearly made a difference in the lives of a lot of others as well.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as a champion for jobs and as a champion for the economy. As someone who has helped start a small business, she knows firsthand how regulations can stifle growth. She fought to cut through the redtape and the burdensome rules. She cosponsored a law to help small businesses expand and re-

finance, and she worked to strengthen manufacturing and support job training.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as a leader on combating opioid abuse. As a former prosecutor who has been among the loudest voices drawing attention to this horrible epidemic, she knows how devastating it has been in her State and across the country. She worked with first responders and families to figure out how to address this heartbreaking challenge. She sponsored and helped pass comprehensive legislation that will help us tackle it. Now, in no small part because of her efforts, we will pass critical funding this very week that will help our communities begin to heal.

Like New Hampshire, my home State of Kentucky has been among the hardest hit by this epidemic. It has been a privilege working with my friend to help do something about it.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as an expert on national security issues too. This military spouse didn’t need someone to tell her what it means to serve nor what it means for veterans and their families. She mastered the issue almost overnight. She fought for language in the VA reform legislation to expand choice when it comes to veterans’ health care. She helped prevent dangerous Guantanamo terrorists from being moved to U.S. soil, and she has long spoken out about the threat posed by Iran. She just voted to extend some critical sanctions against the regime last week, and Senator AYOTTE has helped lead efforts to counter its ballistic missile program for years.

It is clear she has been a leader on national security issues right from the start. I was proud to have Senator AYOTTE join me and other colleagues on a congressional delegation I led to the Middle East not long after she took office. It was evident then what a difference she would make on these important matters. She has regularly joined in efforts with two other leading voices in our conference on defense, too, Senators MCCAIN and GRAHAM. Together, they are the “Three Amigos” or, as our former colleague Joe Lieberman might point out, we should really call them the “Three Amigos 2.0.”

Either way, here is what is clear. It is an equal partnership, one of mutual respect and trust, one that has strengthened our conference and defense policy, and one that I am sure Senators MCCAIN and GRAHAM would tell you has enriched both their Senate work and their lives. I am sure many other colleagues feel exactly the same way.

Senator AYOTTE set out to make an impact. She clearly made one on her State, her country, for her constituents, and her colleagues, but I know Senator AYOTTE would tell you the most cherished moments of her life aren’t those spent in classified briefings or on congressional delegations, they are the ones spent with her fam-

ily—with her husband Joe and their two children, 9-year-old Jake and 12-year-old Kate. They have always been her biggest fans. They are a constant source of comfort and support. Sometimes they like to jump in on the action themselves.

In fact, Kate recently made a cameo—alongside her mother—in an ad featuring the two shooting hoops and practicing layups. From what I hear, Kate may even have her sights on a future in politics. She once advised her mom not to run for President.

Senator AYOTTE was taken aback. She said she wasn’t planning on it but wondered why she would ask in the first place. Well, Kate replied: “Because I want to be the first woman President.”

I guess it is true what they say, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. It is not surprising when you consider the example KELLY AYOTTE has set, not just for Kate but for so many others as well. If anyone can do it all, it is KELLY AYOTTE. From sports practices and Lego competitions to 5Ks and trips to the largest lake in New Hampshire, the time with her kids is what truly brings KELLY joy.

As all of you know, this job can make you appreciate the little things even more. It is why you will never hear her complain about waiting in the pickup line at school. It is why she enjoys spending her weekend grocery shopping at the Market Basket, probably picking up the ingredients for Grape-Nuts pudding—whatever that is. Apparently, it is one of KELLY’s favorites. I will just take her word for that.

I wish to acknowledge what a privilege it has been getting to know Senator AYOTTE and working with her over the past few years. Her impact has been immeasurable, her friendship indisputable. I know she has made her family proud as well.

I want to conclude with a mantra that KELLY and Joe rely upon when facing a challenge: “Brush the dirt off and get back in the game.” It is a good reminder for each of us. I feel confident in saying that Senator AYOTTE will be back in the game, looking out for her State and making our country stronger and safer no matter where her next journey leads.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, finally, as each session of Congress comes to a close, both leaders traditionally pay tribute to the retiring Members of their own parties. This year is a bit different, of course, with the retirement of the Democratic leader. So in addition to what I will be saying about him tomorrow, I figured I might shake things up just a bit more, just this one time. I figured I would tell my colleagues about two colleagues from across the aisle who have made their own mark on this Chamber for many years.