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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Monday, March 8, 2021, at 12 p.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2021

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Senator from the State of Hawaii.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, You are our rock.

Today, inspire our Senators to safely walk on the path of wisdom. Remind them that reverence for You guarantees a great start for their journey. Inspire them to strive to fulfill your purposes. May they daily express their gratitude for Your bountiful blessings as You continue to direct their steps. Trusting You with all their hearts, may they find in You their strength and shield.

Lord, lead them like a Shepherd. Remind them that You have set apart the Godly for Yourself.

We pray in Your merciful 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. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 4, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Senator from the State of Hawaii, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SCHATZ thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROVIDING FOR AN EXCEPTION TO A LIMITATION AGAINST APPOINTMENT OF PERSONS AS SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WITHIN SEVEN YEARS OF RELIEF FROM ACTIVE DUTY AS A REGULAR COMMISSIONED OFFICER OF THE ARMED FORCES—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 1, S. 11.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to S. 11, a bill to provide for an exception to a limitation against appointment of persons as Secretary of Defense within seven years of relief from active duty as a regular commissioned officer of the Armed Forces.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as the Senate prepares to take up the American Rescue Plan today, I want to remind everyone why we are here. This country is in the midst of a once-in-a-century crisis—not once in a decade, not once in every 50 years—once in a century.

It is a crisis that is still very much with us, and it is deadly—deadly—serious. It has claimed more than 515,000 precious lives across every part of the Nation.

For the better part of the calendar year, businesses have had to close their doors and entire industries teetered on the brink of collapse. The economy has lost 10 million jobs since this time last year. Millions of Americans are thousands of dollars behind on the rent and

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



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on the utilities. Folks are facing eviction. American families have had their water shut off, their heat shut off in the depth of winter, and the power cut during their kids' first days of virtual kindergarten.

Even as the vaccine is quickly making its way into Americans' arms now that President Biden has taken the helm, tens of thousands of Americans continue to get sick every week, and we are racing against the clock to defeat the pandemic and to save American lives.

Now, Congress has come together on several occasions to pass emergency relief in this time of extraordinary crisis. In each case, we saw our economy recover, briefly, before worrying trends took hold again, showing the depth of the economic crisis. It is not going to be quick and easy to get out of.

After the CARES bill passed, our economy stabilized before dipping deeply again in the summer. After we passed another emergency bill in December, the January numbers looked positive before once again slipping in recent weeks. Trusted economists—Treasury Secretary Yellen and Federal Chair Powell, both cautious, careful people—are telling us, plain as day, that the economy is not yet ready to stand on its own; that our recovery is deeply uncertain; that the risk of doing little is far greater than doing too much.

We have also arrived at this moment, about to take up the American Rescue Plan, because we remember what happened the last time our country faced a significant economic downturn. Congress was too limited and constrained in its response to the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, and, as a result, the country suffered a long, slow, painful recovery—a lost decade for many American families, creating anger, pessimism, a sourness in the land that discombobulated our politics.

We are not going to make those same mistakes again. We are not going to condemn millions of working Americans to another lost decade of tepid recovery. We are not going to abdicate our responsibility to help the American people just because we have started to see the first hint that things aren't as bad as during the very worst days of the pandemic.

Our mission—our mission—is to crush the virus now, get our country back to normal, lay the foundation for our economy to come roaring back—roaring back.

That is what the American Rescue Plan is designed to do, and the entire country has gotten behind it. Hundreds of the Nation's top business leaders support the plan. More than 400 mayors and local leaders from both parties—Democrat and Republican—support the plan. The American people support the plan, including a clear majority of Democrats, Independents, Republicans.

It seems the only group that opposes the bill are Republicans here in Washington, and it is confounding. When

Donald Trump was President, they were willing to vote for a total of over \$3 trillion in aid. Now that President Biden is President and the economy is in the same pickle, generally speaking, they don't want to vote for a nickel. I wonder why. I wonder why.

And I have to say, a few of my Republican colleagues are going to some pretty ridiculous lengths to showcase their opposition to a bill The Economist has called "one of the most popular bills in decades," a bill supported by a majority—a majority—of Republican voters, not Republican Senators, but voters.

Yesterday, the Republican Senator from Wisconsin—the same Senator who last summer proudly declared he would oppose even a dime more in COVID relief, the same Senator who spent a Senate hearing on Capitol security reading conspiracy theories into the RECORD and saying that January 6 wasn't an armed insurrection—decided to make himself the face of the Republican opposition to the bill by vowing to force the reading of the Senate amendment to the American Rescue Plan, in full, before we can proceed with the bill.

We all know this will merely delay the inevitable. It will accomplish little more than a few sore throats for the Senate clerks who work very hard, day in and day out, to help the Senate function. And I want to thank our clerks profoundly for the work they do every day, including the arduous task ahead of them.

Still, we are delighted that the Senator from Wisconsin wants to give the American people another opportunity to hear what is in the American Rescue Plan. We Democrats want America to hear what is in the plan. And if the Senator from Wisconsin wants the clerks to read it, let everybody listen because it has overwhelming support. We want them to hear about the direct checks they will get, as promised, to help them keep up with the cost of groceries, medicine, and the rent; about funding to expand testing and support the vaccine; about the resources for schools to reopen quickly and as safely as possible; about the money to keep firefighters, teachers, busdrivers, and first responders on the job; about the dollars to provide rental assistance to keep Americans in their homes; about the help for the hardest hit small businesses to hang on until brighter days return.

Oh, yes, when the clerks read, the American people will get another chance to hear about the tax breaks for low-income workers and assistance for American families struggling with childcare—two measures that help make the American Rescue Plan one of the single largest anti-poverty bills in recent history.

And then, once the American people have heard all over again about the provisions that make this bill so popular, about the support that is going to lift the country out of the crisis, provide millions of vaccines in people's

arms, and set it on a path to strong recovery, the Senate is going to move forward with the bill.

No matter how long it takes, the Senate is going to stay in session to finish the bill this week. The American people deserve nothing less.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

KENTUCKY FLOODING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier this week, I described the terrible flooding across my home State of Kentucky. Rivers reached historic levels. Whole communities are still underwater.

Yesterday, my staff and I spoke with leaders in some of our hardest hit counties. The Estill County judge executive told me that he personally joined crews to help families escape danger. Small business owners in Lee County, who survived one COVID obstacle after another, now saw their life's work literally washed away. The situation in Powell County is so dire that at least one city can only be accessed by boat. Road crews, first responders, and the Kentucky National Guard are doing their best to help out, but they can't get a handle on the full scope of the damage until the water recedes.

Once the assessment is complete, the Governor will formally request an emergency disaster declaration from the Biden administration. As soon as he does, my team and I will do our part to get Federal assistance to these communities as soon as possible.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on a completely different matter, yesterday, our Democratic colleagues had planned to begin ramming through their partisan spending spree, but it seems they have had some difficulty getting to the starting line. After all, Senate Democrats, including committee chairs, are essentially being jammed with text from over in the House. Their own Members have barely been able to read this thing, let alone shape it.

So let's think back to where we were 1 year ago. Eleven-and-a-half months