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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our hope and guide, during this season where each day seems to bring news we find difficult to believe, we continue to trust Your sovereignty. Look with mercy upon our Senators in these challenging times. Draw them close to You and each other in humility so they will sincerely seek to find common ground.

As they seek to confront history's surprises, may they not lean only on their abilities but put their ultimate trust in You. Lord, prepare them to expect and celebrate the healing intervention of Your powerful providence.

We pray in Your magnificent 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 (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 2, 2023.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR EN BLOC—S. 1395 and H.R. 2811

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, a little housekeeping: I understand that there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time, en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1395) to temporarily suspend the debt limit through December 31, 2024.

A bill (H.R. 2811) to provide for a responsible increase to the debt ceiling, and for other purposes.

Mr. SCHUMER. In order to place the bills on the Calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings, en bloc.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the Calendar.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, yesterday, Treasury Secretary Janet

Yellen released a letter warning that the U.S. government will likely default on its obligations as soon as June 1, only 30 days away.

Rather than listen to reason, Speaker MCCARTHY has caved to extremists. By passing the "Default on America Act," he has handed the keys over to the House Freedom Caucus, many of whom are more than happy to let the United States default if they don't get every last cut and every last unrelated, hard-right policy that had been added to this bill chockablock. Every one of them they want. As one House Freedom Caucus Member said plainly, Speaker MCCARTHY "cannot get to 218 with changes to this deal."

Let me read that again so everyone hears it. This is where we are at. A House Freedom Caucus Member—each of whom, as we know, has great power in the House because they didn't change their rules—as one Freedom Caucus Member has said, plainly, Speaker MCCARTHY "cannot get to 218 with changes to this deal."

But, as is obvious to just about anyone who looks at this, the "Default on America Act" has no future in the Senate. Consequently, Speaker MCCARTHY has created a situation where he knowingly passed an extreme bill, has been boxed by his Republican colleagues into a corner, and now has little room to maneuver, lest he provoke the ire of the House Freedom Caucus.

McCarthy is giving us two terrible options: Either default on the debt or default on our country, with steep, severe, devastating cuts to things like law enforcement, veterans, families, teachers, kids, even cancer research. The only real option that does not hurt the American people is a clean, bipartisan bill to avert default.

As Americans look at the "Default on America Act," which the House just passed, they will discover that it reads less like a plan for averting default and more like a House Freedom Caucus manifesto.

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



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The “Default on America Act” would tear at the fabric of American society, imposing dramatic cuts to our public security, cutting law enforcement dramatically at a time when we need help from them; the cruel abandonment of veterans when we should be defending our veterans; terrible job losses at a time when this last Congress, under Democratic control, started bringing jobs back from overseas to America, on chip fab, on manufacturing, on batteries, and so many other things; blocking access to affordable healthcare—over 21 million Americans could lose the healthcare gains that we have made over the last while—and brutal attacks on working families across the board.

In fact, nothing about the “Default on America Act” has been on the level.

Let me quote something that Speaker MCCARTHY said right after becoming Speaker. This is a quote from KEVIN MCCARTHY:

I want to give all Americans a personal invitation, you are welcome to see this body at work. No longer will the doors be closed, but the debates will be open . . . from the committee rooms to this floor, we commit to pursue the truth passionately and embrace debate.

Well, let’s go over that one. No more closed doors? Give me a break. The “Default on America” bill was written entirely behind closed doors, without a shred of transparency. This bill, which so dramatically and deeply and harmfully hurts America, was done entirely behind closed doors.

Debates will be in the open? How many committee debates did the House GOP hold on their “Default on America Act”? How many expert witnesses were invited? How many amendments from the Democratic side were allowed to be presented?

Again, the truth is, “Default on America” is an extremist bill that would never have a shot at passing muster with the American public on its own. As such, everything about this bill was rushed, was secret, was the antithesis of open and transparent. McCarthy’s words ring hollow. The American people deserve better.

Now, if Republicans refuse to level with the American people about their bill, Senate Democrats are more than happy to do it. We will show the American people how the “Default on America Act” will decimate Federal law enforcement in this country, erasing nearly 30,000 law enforcement jobs and leaving border security hanging out to dry. We will show how the “Default on America Act” is a direct assault on families. It slashes childcare, cuts Pell Grant funding, and even takes aim at programs as popular and beneficial as Meals on Wheels.

I mean, do Republicans seriously think that is the way to avoid default, by depriving our country from the critical resources to feed hungry Americans?

And we will show the American people how the “Default on America” is

chock-full of totally irrelevant, hard-right goodies that would deregulate fossil fuels, empower the biggest corporations, give tax giveaways to the ultrarich, and impose cruel and unpopular attacks on working families.

We will take the first step to expose these atrocities on Thursday, when the Senate Budget Committee holds hearings on how the “Default on America Act” will weaken our economy and slash hundreds of thousands of jobs. It will be the very first legislative hearing in either House that looks at what “Default on America” does, and there will be more hearings to follow.

If Republicans want to sell their awful agenda to the American people, they are welcome to do so in debates about the budget and the appropriations process. That is where these debates have always happened, not in the middle of a default crisis that now stares us in the face.

As Democrats expose the “Default on America” bill for what it is, our position remains the same, both parties should do what we have done in the past, the last three times default faced us: Both parties should pass a clean, bipartisan bill to avoid default together, before—before—we hit the critical June 1 deadline.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, on Senate business, today will be another busy day on the Senate floor, as we continue confirming more highly qualified judicial nominees to serve on the Federal bench.

Yesterday, we confirmed an outstanding circuit judge to a lifetime appointment for the Ninth Circuit. Today, we will continue to build on our efforts to restore balance to the Federal bench by holding votes on three more outstanding nominees.

The Senate will hold two votes this morning to advance two district court judges, and, later this afternoon, we will have three votes on President Biden’s highly qualified judicial nominees.

And members should be aware that I filed cloture last night on two additional judges, and that moving their nominations forward will be a top priority for the Senate this week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today, Democrats on the Judiciary Committee are holding a hearing that is ostensibly about Supreme Court ethics reform. Really, it is just another chapter in Washington Democrats’ three-decade-long campaign to undermine the Federal Judiciary at any cost.

There were the absurd smear campaigns aimed at jurists like Robert Bork and Janice Rogers Brown. There were the uncorroborated accusations held back with last-minute surprises against the nominations of Justice Thomas and Justice Kavanaugh. There was the silly attempt at a boycott by Democrats on the committee who didn’t want to engage with Justice Barrett.

Washington Democrats apparently find a textualist Court that upholds our written Constitution to be a mighty unappealing proposition. They made that clear for 30-plus years.

And in the last few years, the hostility has reached reckless new highs: a sitting Senator stirring up crowds from the steps of the Court, naming Justices who would pay the price; unhinged activists marching on Justices’ family homes; publishing the locations of their children’s schools; and fueling a frenzy that had one unstable person literally—literally—plotting to assassinate a member of the Court; and Attorney General Garland simply refusing to enforce clear Federal law and stop illegal mob protests at judges’ homes.

Now we have the next raft of silly personal attacks. This time, the left and some of their media allies want the American people to gasp in horror—in horror—that one Supreme Court Justice vacations with his friends, that another one sold his house when he moved, and that Chief Justice Roberts’ wife has a career outside the home.

The Democrats even tried to pressure Chief Justice Roberts to trade the Supreme Court for their kangaroo court and show up in person today to hear them grandstand, a totally inappropriate request, as the Chief’s polite and fact-based reply made clear.

For goodness’ sake, we now have Senate Democrats openly threatening to defund the Court’s budget by the exact amount they need for security to protect the Justices and their families if the Justices don’t reorganize internal affairs the way some Democrats want.

Every 5 minutes, the Democratic Party wants to give lectures about upholding our institutions and protecting democracy. But just as often, they find a way to undertake a reckless attack against the courts and the rule of law.

So look, I am proud of how our Nation’s highest Court has weathered these latest baseless attempts to attack its authority. I believe in the integrity and honesty of all nine Justices—all nine of them. They should pay the partisan grandstanding no mind at all.