



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 169

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023

No. 105

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

God most high, Your faithfulness endures through all generations. Hear our prayer. You desire truth and justice, and You are true to Your promises. Let Your presence be felt today on Capitol Hill.

Lord, open the hearts of our lawmakers to the guidance of Your Spirit as You empower them to serve with faithfulness. Dwell in them and those who support their labors, making them productive for the glory of Your Name. May our Senators hear Your call to rise and follow where You lead as You inspire them to be obedient to Your perfect will. Lord, give them patience with those who oppose them, and may they trust in Your perfect love, which never fails.

We pray in Your glorious 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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 1615

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, a little housekeeping.

I understand there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1615) to prohibit the use of Federal funds to ban gas stoves.

Mr. SCHUMER. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceeding.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

TAX REFORM

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, 6 months into the 118th Congress, the tale of two parties continues.

This week, House Republicans advanced a massive tax package, showing precisely where their loyalties lie—in helping large, multibillion-dollar corporations, Big Oil polluters, and those at the very, very top.

Today, the President is reminding the American people where Democrats' loyalties lie—with ordinary families who want to lower costs and who have had it with junk fees that nickel and dime people every single day.

President Biden used his State of the Union Address to call out companies that exploit consumers through surprise fees on everything from credit cards, bank overdrafts, hotel resort purchases, and air travel. Today, he is holding a roundtable discussion with companies at the White House on the progress they have made in eliminating surprise fees.

I cannot tell you how many times people have come up to me in New York, exasperated by junk fees, often-times at the last minute. Many times,

they know nothing about them until they are asked to pay them. It is precisely the kind of abuse that frustrates Americans to no end and which the Federal Government can address.

It is why, in the House, I authored legislation to protect Americans from surprise expenses on their credit card bills by requiring credit card companies to clearly break down all fees and interest rates. They call it the "Schumer Box"—a nickname I am proud has stuck.

And junk fees are everywhere. You want to switch your cell phone company? A termination fee can cost you \$250 or something exorbitant like that. Many people think the phone companies ask for it so you don't switch even if you are dissatisfied with their service.

You want to book a hotel room listed at \$300? Good luck. You will get the bill and discover the real price is much higher. More than a third of hotel guests have reported paying some kind of hidden fee.

The kind of abusive behavior from some large companies is exactly what Americans want to focus on, and it is the major difference between the two parties.

Republicans think it is best to spend time on cutting taxes for the very largest, billion-dollar corporations—that often don't pay their fair share—and on stoking the fires of the culture wars.

But Democrats want to focus on things ordinary families have to deal with every single day. We can all relate to the frustration of hidden fees. We can all relate to driving to work on dilapidated roads and crumbling bridges. We can all look out the window and see that wildfires, flooding, and extreme weather events are getting worse and harming our communities. These are the issues Democrats have legislated on over the past few years, and we are going to keep going.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S2105

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, on nominations, well, it has been a busy week for nominations here on the floor. This morning, the Senate will confirm Nusrat Choudhury, whom I was proud to recommend to President Biden to serve as district judge for New York's Eastern District.

When President Biden listened to my recommendation and nominated Ms. Choudhury, she made history as the first Bangladeshi American ever to be nominated to the Federal bench, and, today, Ms. Choudhury will make history as the first Bangladeshi American ever to be confirmed to the Federal bench. Ms. Choudhury will also be the first Muslim American woman and only the second Muslim American ever to serve as a Federal judge. It shows she is a history maker in more ways than one.

Ms. Choudhury is also a shining example of the American dream: the daughter of immigrant parents, a graduate of Columbia, Princeton, and Yale Law School. Ms. Choudhury has dedicated her career to making sure all people can have their voices heard in court.

It is a great day for our country. Our courts are at their strongest when they mirror the diversity and dynamism of our democracy. We have a vibrant Bangladeshi community in New York and in the United States. I am confident Ms. Choudhury will make an excellent judge.

Yesterday, the Senate also confirmed another excellent judge, Dale Ho, whom I was proud to recommend to be district judge for the Southern District of New York. As voting rights continue to come under attack, it is only fitting that we elevated one of the country's top voting rights experts to the bench to safeguard our democracy and preserve our most fundamental right as citizens.

With Mr. Ho and Ms. Choudhury, we will have confirmed 21 Asian Americans to the bench. Let me say that again. With these two new nominations, we will have confirmed 21 Asian Americans to the bench, a demographic that has been historically underrepresented in the judiciary.

I am proud of this majority's record of increasing both the demographic and professional diversity on the bench. This is how we strengthen the public's trust in our judiciary. And our work will continue.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Nusrat Jahan Choudhury, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MENENDEZ). The Republican leader is recognized.

GERMANY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I have discussed all week, the war in Ukraine has forced some of America's closest allies to sober up and start investing more seriously in their own defense.

Germany is exhibit A. Yesterday, Germany's Government released a comprehensive security strategy—an other important step forward for a key member of the transatlantic alliance—but, as I mentioned at the Munich Security Conference, questions remain about whether the encouraging changes in Germany will be sufficient or enduring.

Some of these questions are being answered. Germany's national security strategy is an incremental shift. It is the product of a rather divided government, like our own, reaching difficult consensus, except with three different, sometimes internally divided political parties rather than just two.

But just consider where our German allies were before Putin's escalation. Europe's most powerful economy had let a major portion of its military fall into literal disrepair. German military spending reached barely halfway—halfway—to NATO's member target of 2 percent of GDP. And the country's precarious reliance on Russian energy was actually only increasing.

But as Ukraine dug in for a fight last February, Germany changed course. In the last 18 months, Berlin has made major contributions of key lethal capabilities to the Ukrainian cause and is on track to provide even more. The new German security strategy is clear-eyed about the Russian threat, and in light of hard-learned lessons, it prioritizes reducing dependence on foreign energy and integrating economic and security policy.

As Foreign Minister Baerbock put it this week:

We paid for every cubic metre of Russian gas twofold and threefold with our national security.

None of us should want to make the same mistake when it comes to Beijing, and in this regard, Germany's strategy indicates incremental progress toward a more realistic understanding of the challenge a revisionist power and systemic rival like China poses not only to neighbors but to the West as well. Germany's governing coalition continues to debate its approach to the PRC, and answers to how Germany plans to manage it are still forthcoming.

The world will want to know how Germany will balance growing realism about Beijing's behavior with its stated desire for economic partnership with China. They will want to know what Germany is prepared to do to assist vulnerable Asian countries that are the most threatened by the PRC's military aggression, espionage, and economic or diplomatic pressure. Of course, these same questions can still be asked about our own government's approach to the PRC.

More broadly, I am encouraged that Germany's strategy explicitly recognizes robust defense as a pillar—a pillar—of German security.

I have criticized Germany's slow pace of defense spending to meet urgent needs, but I am encouraged by Germany's new Minister of Defense, Boris Pistorius, who has a focus on rebuilding Germany's military and cutting through its calcified military procurement bureaucracy. To be successful, he will need cross-party political support and sustained defense spending above 2 percent of Germany's GDP. This new strategy does not necessarily guarantee such a commitment.

Ultimately, the biggest question for our German allies is whether their strategy sufficiently defines the priorities of their government and whether it provides the resources necessary to execute it. The very same question still applies to America's own national security strategy.

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. President, now on a totally different matter, in the coming days, the Supreme Court will rule on President Biden's plan to impose student loan socialism on millions of working families across America. The Court's decision will settle whether the President is allowed to use two-decade-old "emergency" authorities dating back to the early days of the War on Terror to put \$430 billion in debt on the American taxpayers without congressional approval. But the American people don't need to wait for the Supreme Court to explain to them why letting wealthy people dine and dash doesn't make sense; they know the Biden administration's plan adds up to a raw deal.

Almost a third of all student debt in America is held by the wealthiest 20 percent of households. Only 8 percent—8 percent—is held by the bottom 20 percent of households. Sure enough, one prominent analysis found that more than 70 percent of President Biden's so-called loan forgiveness could go to the top 60 percent of earners. It is no surprise when you consider that the median annual income of young college graduates is 55 percent higher than folks working with high school diplomas. In some cases, Americans who choose to go to college already have an extra leg up. More students at the Nation's most elite colleges have parents among the top 1 percent of earners than the bottom 50 percent.

The facts are so clear—so clear—that even a former top Obama administration economist has admitted that