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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, during this season when we celebrate peace on Earth and good will, we pause to thank You for the gifts of Your blessings. Thank You for the blessing of Your presence that brightens this day, restores our faith, and fills us with peace. Thank You for the blessing of friends who support, encourage, and sustain us. Lord, thank You for the blessing of families who nurture and forgive and undergird us with love.

Thank You for the Members of this body for their love of liberty, for their desire to make a positive impact on our world, and for their commitment to You. Lord, guide them today so that Your will may be done on Earth, even as it is done in Heaven.

We pray in Your sacred 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, December 6, 2023.

To the Senate:

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

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WELCH 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.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

REMOVING EXTRANEEOUS LOOP-HOLES INSURING EVERY VETERAN EMERGENCY ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 30, H.R. 815.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to H.R. 815, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements relating to the eligibility of veterans to receive reimbursement for emergency treatment furnished through the Veterans Community Care program, and for other purposes.

ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, later this morning, I will join my Democratic colleagues on the floor to ask

unanimous consent to pass the assault weapons ban, among other gun safety legislation. I will have more to say before the unanimous consent request, but right now the scourge of gun violence in America is a national crisis.

I hope my Republican colleagues stand with us to take action that Americans demand.

MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. President, now, on Senator TUBERVILLE, yesterday, 10 months of pain and uncertainty finally came to an end for hundreds—hundreds—of military nominees and their families. Senator TUBERVILLE, after months of obstruction, stubbornness, and reckless disregard for military readiness, withdrew his blanket holds on over 400 generals and flag officers, and, in the span of just a few minutes of floor time, the Senate unanimously confirmed nearly every single one of them to their posts. Thank God, these military officers finally got the promotions they so rightfully earned, but it should not have taken so long.

If there is one word that underscores why we prevailed on Senator TUBERVILLE, it is persistence. For months, I said it would be up to our Republican colleagues to talk some sense into Senator TUBERVILLE and get him to relent in his holds. Senators ERNST and SULLIVAN stepped up to the plate and deserve a lot of commendation for their courage, for their strength.

And, as I predicted, the frustration and pressure on the senior Senator from Alabama eventually won out. We were persistent and persistent and persistent and held the line that military nominees should never, never become pawns to push a partisan agenda.

So let this be a warning. No one—no one—should attempt blanket holds on our military ever again.

After all the damage he caused, Senator TUBERVILLE has nothing—absolutely nothing—to show for his obstruction, except for the harm done to our military and the pain caused to

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



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military families. His reckless strategy did not succeed, and if, in the future, others try to hold up military appointments to get their way, they, too, will fail. Again, let this be a warning that no one should ever hold up military appointments again.

We cannot cave to any single Member's views, no matter how strongly felt. I don't doubt that Senator TUBERVILLE feels the issue very strongly opposite of what I feel, but when our military families are at stake, we should not use these strong feelings to hold them hostage. What the senior Senator from Alabama did through his holds was bring the Senate to a new low, and, in the end, it was all for nothing.

I want to thank my colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, who spoke in defense of our military families. I want to thank particularly Senator REED, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and Senator KLOBUCHAR, the chair of the Rules Committee. I also want to thank Senator SINEMA, who was instrumental in creating bipartisan support for our resolution. On the Republican side, I want to, once again, thank Senators ERNST and SULLIVAN for their courage in helping to break the logjam after so, so many months. Because Senators on both sides persisted and held the line, this sad chapter in the Senate is finally over.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. President, now, on the supplemental, the question before the Senate today is simple yet momentous: Will Senators agree to begin debate—just a debate—on legislation to defend America's national security on an issue so important it goes to the actual preservation of Western and democratic values in the world. Are we willing to hold a discussion, here on the floor, about steps necessary to safeguard democracy, stand up to autocratic brutes, and respond to our adversaries with strength, or will Senators prevent us from moving forward over extremist border policies? Because, this afternoon, the Senate will hold a vote on whether or not to move forward on a national security supplemental.

At stake is America's safety, the safety of democracy, and the future of the war in Ukraine. As we have done throughout our history, the Senate should rush to the defense of democracy and stand up to autocratic brutes.

And I have promised my Republican colleagues that if they agree to move forward, I will give them a vote for a border package entirely of their choosing—no conditions. This is a golden opportunity for Republicans to present whatever border policy they want, and our side will not interfere with the construction of that amendment in any way.

It has been reported that Senate Republicans will make another attempt to craft a border proposal and share it with Democrats, because the last proposal was so far away from what any-

one could accept on our side. Well, I have a suggestion for my Republican colleagues: Vote with us to begin debate, and then bring that proposal to the floor as an amendment. We can debate it right here, right here on the Senate floor.

If Republicans vote no today and reject the opportunity to offer a border amendment, then what the heck is going on? Republicans said they want border. It is they who have injected border into the Ukraine issue, even though the two are unrelated. And now they are getting a golden opportunity to offer border at 60 votes. If that is not good enough for them, then what are they doing?

Let's not forget, Mr. President, that it was the Republican leader and others on the Republican side in the House and Senate, mainly from the hard right, who demanded that border and Ukraine be tied together. Well, we are willing to give them an amendment—that is what they have asked for—and now they are spurning that offer. Why hold up Ukraine aid if they can't even present a border package that can pass the Senate?

We are asking ourselves this question: Has border been nothing more than an excuse for the hard right to kill funding for Ukraine and too many other Republican Senators, who are not part of the hard right, are going along? I hope that is not true.

I hope Republicans vote yes and take up our offer on a border amendment at 60 votes because we don't have much time to keep negotiating off the floor if all we will do is go around in circles, which is what has happened over the last 3 weeks, despite the good will of negotiators. Democrats have spent 3 weeks in negotiation in good faith, trying to get somewhere on the border, to no avail.

We believe we should do something on border. In fact, the President's proposal, which is the base bill—which I am making the base bill—has very significant border provisions in it, particularly those talking about stopping the flow of fentanyl into this country by providing much more help at the ports of entry. We want to reach a middle ground with Republicans on border. It is important. But we cannot waste time on something like H.R. 2, which every single Democrat voted against, which could never pass the House, while the clock is ticking to get Ukraine the help it so desperately needs.

Now, I understand that this is frustrating for some of our Republican colleagues. I appreciate that the hard right may feel boxed in and be feeling the pressure that they can't come up with a package that can get only 11 Democrats if all of them vote for it. But the only way anything on border gets done is with votes from both sides of the aisle. That is how the Senate works.

So, again, I hope our Republican colleagues do the right thing for our coun-

try and vote in favor of debating the supplemental. I hope they take this free opportunity, this golden opportunity, to make a real, serious proposal on the border—though, in reality, they can propose whatever they want—and see if it can get the 60 votes that is always required in this type of legislation in the Senate.

If they make a serious offer on the border and it gets 60 votes, then the Senate will have spoken. If they cannot get 60 votes on a border proposal, then that should not prevent us from giving Ukraine the aid they so desperately need.

Let me repeat that again. If Republicans, who injected border into this whole debate, now can't come up with an amendment that can pass the Senate, they should not prevent us from giving Ukraine the aid it so desperately needs.

The world is watching. The world is watching what the Senate does today. You can bet, my colleagues, Vladimir Putin is watching. Hamas is certainly watching. Iran, President Xi, North Korea—all of our adversaries are closely watching. Let us do the right thing and move forward today.

AI INSIGHT FORUMS

Mr. President, now, today, on our AI Insight Forums, we will continue our work with our eighth and ninth bipartisan AI forums. The morning's Insight Forum will begin at 10:30 a.m. and focus on long-term risks associated with AI and how we can guard against AI doomsday scenarios.

This afternoon's Insight Forum will begin at 3 p.m. and focus on one of the most critical and urgent areas of AI national security. We will discuss the opportunities AI presents to bolster our national security and the risks if we fall behind the Chinese Government. It is in the Kennedy Caucus Room.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Mr. President, finally, on the FTC investigation of Exxon, last month, I wrote a letter, along with 20 other of my colleagues, urging the FTC to investigate Exxon's \$60 billion blockbuster merger with Pioneer, one of the largest mergers in the energy industry in two decades. Having the largest oil company merge with the largest oil producer in the Permian Basin is only going to do one thing: raise prices for the average consumer.

Well, I have good news. The FTC heeded our warning and announced yesterday that the FTC will closely review Exxon's proposed acquisition of Pioneer. It is welcome news for the American people because if the merger were to proceed, it would result in higher gas prices for families across the country. Profits for these big oil companies would soar, fueling stock buybacks, while everyday Americans struggle to fill up their tanks.

So this merger between Exxon and Pioneer has all the hallmarks of harmful anti-competitive effects, and I am glad the FTC is moving forward.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, later today, Senate Republicans are going to deny cloture on a bill that fails to address America's top national security priorities in a serious way. As we have said for weeks, legislation that doesn't include policy changes to secure our borders will not pass the Senate.

The situation unfolding at our southern border on President Biden's watch is a crisis of historic proportions. It is glaring, it is acute, and it is undermining America's national security.

President Obama's DHS Secretary used to say that 1,000 border crossings a day "overwhelms the system." Today, they are reporting encountering over—listen to this—10,000 people a day down at the border—a large town's worth of illegal aliens each day. Thanks to a broken asylum and parole system, the vast majority of them are admitted into the country before their legal status is even determined.

Mr. President, 10,000 arrivals a day would mean a population the size of a middle-sized town in Kentucky every month—every month. The sheer volume has forced officials in the Tucson, AZ, sector, which has recently accounted for nearly 3,000 of those daily arrivals by itself, to shut down one port of entry altogether.

This is the crisis undermining America's national security right here at home, and today, some of our Democratic colleagues are showing just how little they want to do anything about it.

Senate Republicans know this isn't an either-or proposition. We know that national security begins with border security.

I have spent months highlighting the undeniable links between the threats we face in Europe, in the Middle East, and in the Indo-Pacific, but Democratic leadership appears to be telling us today that they are willing to risk each of these urgent priorities to avoid—avoid—fixing our own borders right here at home. Apparently, some of our colleagues would rather let Russia trample a sovereign nation in Europe than do what it takes to enforce America's own sovereign borders.

Now, it wasn't always like this. Democrats didn't always have such a hard time following the logic that national security begins right here at home.

I am reminded of the commission President Reagan set up in the mid-1980s to assess the importance of peace and security in the Western Hemisphere. It was a bipartisan exercise that included everyone from Henry Kissinger to the former chair of the DNC and the president of the AFL-CIO. The commission concluded that America's security in the world "depends on

the inherent security of its land borders" and that our adversaries would reap "a major strategic coup to impose on the United States the burden of defending our southern approaches."

"[A] major strategic coup" for our adversaries. A past generation of Democrats understood the logic implicitly when it pertained to the threat of Soviet influence. Well, that logic applies even more today to the instability, cartel violence, terror, and drugs pouring over our southern border.

But in today's Democratic Party, some of our colleagues appear to be so terrified of their radical base that they are convinced open borders are worth jeopardizing U.S. security around the world, that securing America's borders is less urgent than helping our partners defend theirs.

The Democratic leader has insisted repeatedly that border security is an important issue, but whatever our colleagues want to call the issue, their actions suggest they are not at all interested in actually solving it.

Demanding serious border policy changes isn't injecting an unrelated issue into the conversation. President Biden's own request wanted us to throw billions of dollars at this exact problem. Fixing a badly broken asylum and parole system isn't hijacking the supplemental; it is strengthening it. Securing our southern border isn't extraneous to our national security; it is essential.

I know some of our Democratic colleagues understand this. I know not all of them are beholden to the same radical base that demands open borders at home and supports an intifada abroad. I invite them to work with Republicans on meaningful, lasting border security.

But if today's vote is what it takes for the Democratic leader to recognize that Senate Republicans mean what we say, then let's vote, and then let's finally start meeting America's national security priorities, including right here at home.

COAL

Mr. President, now on another matter, for millions of Americans, expensive heating bills and rolling blackouts are becoming the hallmark of the holiday season under President Biden. So it came as no small surprise when the Biden administration's climate czar, John Kerry, proclaimed this week that no coal plants should be "permitted anywhere in the world"—"anywhere in the world." Goodness. Our former colleague may have bought himself applause from the jet-set crowd assembled at the conference, but his ban on coal would make energy even less reliable and affordable here at home.

As my colleague from West Virginia, Senator CAPITO, pointed out yesterday, many States in Middle America still rely on coal to keep their lights on. Kentucky, West Virginia, Wyoming, Missouri, Utah, North Dakota, Indiana, and Nebraska all use coal to generate over 50 percent of their electricity.

President Biden's handling of the economy is turning in dismal marks from working Americans. But the climate activists in his administration continue to wage war on the most affordable forms of American energy they rely on.

Unfortunately, Middle America is used to footing the bill for Washington's radical climate agenda. For 8 years under President Obama, Kentuckians watched the War on Coal kill jobs and cripple communities across Appalachia. These same communities continue to pay dearly under President Biden. Kentucky coal miner employment has never—never—recovered from the Obama-era coal purge. Hasty plans to phase out fossil fuels only force more miners into early retirement in Kentucky and threaten the livelihood of Middle America.

The sort of power grid failures we have seen in California, Texas, and Kentucky will become even more common if Democrats' full-speed-ahead climate strategy continues. Meanwhile, our top strategic adversary is scaling up coal production. Despite the Biden administration's pleading, China continues to forge ahead with new coal projects and resurrect retired plants. Time and again, the President's climate czar has happily accepted empty climate pledges from our adversaries at the expense of American jobs and job creators.

So Democrats can repeat their tired green energy talking points until the cows come home, but the reality for Americans is all the same: less reliable and more expensive energy this winter.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Nathalie Rayes, of Massachusetts, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Croatia.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 36 years ago, President Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate that separated East from West Berlin. He said to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.

Only a few years after his historic speech, the Soviet Union collapsed,