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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.

God of might, as we remember Pearl Harbor and a date that would live in infamy, we are reminded that You are our defender. Without Your protection, we are powerless. Hear our prayers as we lift our hearts toward Your throne. Lord, forgive us for our failures and continue to defend us with Your mercy.

Today, bless our lawmakers. Make them instruments of Your peace. Guide and lead them as You have promised. Keep them safe from the traps that bring national ruin, and shelter them from danger. Help them to find the common ground that will bring blessings to our Nation and world.

We pray in Your mighty 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 7, 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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

REMOVING EXTRANEOUS LOOP-HOLES INSURING EVERY VETERAN EMERGENCY ACT—Motion to Proceed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 815, which the clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 30, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday morning, Democrats came to the floor of the Senate to try and pass the assault weapons ban and other life-

saving gun safety legislation. Sadly, Republicans stood in the way of the Senate passing lifesaving legislation to get rid of the scourge of gun violence in America.

Just hours later, we learned of yet another shooting on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Our prayers are with the victims of the shooting at UNLV and their families, our prayers are with the students and staff of the university reeling from this horror, and thanks to the brave law enforcement officers who responded to the shooting and prevented even more deaths. The pain from these shootings in these communities never truly fades.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD MASSACRE

Mr. President, I still remember the pain I felt when I first heard about the Long Island Rail Road massacre which happened in my own backyard.

Today, December 7, marks 30 years since the Long Island Rail Road massacre. It is heartbreaking that the horrors of a tragedy 30 years old still feel like it happened yesterday.

I remember the reports well: the 5:33 p.m. rush hour train from Penn Station, filled with commuters, average working Americans going home after a hard day's work to see their families. Moments later, a gunman unleashed carnage—6 dead, 19 injured. Many more lives were shattered, changed forever.

Among those killed and injured were the husband and son of Carolyn McCarthy, a nurse from Mineola. Following the shooting, Carolyn began to advocate for tougher gun laws. Carolyn understood that something had to change.

So after Carolyn's Congressman at the time announced he would be voting to repeal the assault weapons ban that I had championed—I carried the law in the House—she took matters into her own hands and ran for a seat in the House and won on that issue. She served in Congress for 18 years with me

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



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and many of my colleagues in this building and remained a vocal advocate for stronger gun safety laws.

So now, in memory of those lost and those injured 30 years ago today on the 5:33 p.m. Long Island Rail Road train, I ask for this Chamber to observe a brief moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Now, Mr. President, last night was a sad moment for the Senate, for the country, and for our friends in Ukraine and Israel and around the world. With our values and democracy on the line, Senate Republicans killed a much needed bill with funding for Ukraine, for Israel, and humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza, and for the Indo-Pacific.

If there is a word for what we need now most, it is to be serious. Republicans need to be serious and stop game-playing. It is absurd that we are even in this situation to begin with.

Let me retrace the steps that got us here and then how we can get out and get something done.

First, we all know how important Ukraine aid is. Both sides have long claimed to support it. To quote a recent speech from my friend the Republican leader, Leader MCCONNELL, "helping a democratic partner . . . against an unprovoked attack from a common enemy is obviously in America's interest."

In another speech here on the floor, Leader MCCONNELL added that "now . . . is not the time to ease up" on helping Ukraine defending their sovereignty. Interestingly, he didn't mention anything about the southern border that day.

Second, it was Republicans who threw an unnecessary wrench into Ukraine funding by tying it to the extraneous issue of border. We all agree that border security is important. President Biden included strong border provisions in the proposal he sent us. But we also know it is a complicated issue—very complex—that has escaped bipartisan solution for years.

I am certainly willing to have that difficult conversation. I was a leader of the Gang of 8 that produced the last real border compromise a decade ago. But it is not realistic for Republicans to suddenly hold up Ukraine aid, which they claim to support, and then suddenly demand that we take up border, which has been a problem for years, and then solve it in a matter of days. Nevertheless, we Democrats were willing to give it a try.

And that is my third point. For 3 weeks, Democrats have sat down at the negotiating table with our Republican counterparts to see if something on the border was possible. We talked for 3 weeks, and, actually, negotiations ended up moving backward after Speaker Johnson said the only thing his Republican caucus would accept was Donald Trump's extreme border policies as embodied in H.R. 2. So Democrats tried to negotiate in good

faith, but after the Speaker pushed H.R. 2, talks remained at an impasse.

Fourth, to work our way out of this morass, we Democrats offered our Republican colleagues a golden opportunity: an offer for a vote on an amendment on any border policy of their choosing. And all they would have needed to pass it were 11 Democratic votes. They rejected our offer.

I must say, it defies credulity for Republicans to demand border, hold up Ukraine because of the border, and then reject an offer to vote on a border amendment of their own crafting here on the floor.

It may well be that Republicans can't even agree among themselves on a proposal. Either way, they rejected our offer and voted down the bill.

So where are we now that that has happened yesterday? Well, we are left with only two paths forward to break the logjam: Either Republicans can take us up on an amendment offer or we can restart negotiations.

Now, if we are to negotiate, it has to be in good faith. Republicans need to show they are serious about reaching a compromise—not just throwing on the floor basically Donald Trump's border policies.

Again, Republicans need to be serious and stop the game-playing. They have been game-playing when they pushed Donald Trump's radical border policies, when they said border is the ransom they want, and when they moved the goalposts during negotiations.

We need to stop playing around and get serious about the immense challenge in front of us. Both sides must accept that we have to compromise on things important to each side if we have any hope of passing the supplemental.

Let me state: We Democrats very much—very much—want an agreement. We are willing to make compromises and concessions to meet our Republican colleagues, as long as they are willing to do the same.

Let me conclude, again, with how important this is and with the warning that the Republican leader issued in recent months that if we aren't willing to invest in the defense of democracy right now, we are going to be forced to pay a much higher price down the line. It is better to defend democracy with American resources today, instead of American lives tomorrow. That is the danger of allowing brutes like Vladimir Putin to win the day. So the time is now for us to show the world we are willing to defend democracy in its hour of need.

Democrats are serious about reaching a reasonable, bipartisan compromise to pass this security package. The question is if Republicans are now willing to do the same.

HANUKKAH

Mr. President, finally, on Hanukkah, Jewish people around the country and around the world will celebrate tonight the first night of Hanukkah. This year, more than most years, Hanukkah

comes at a moment of grief, of trial, and of fear for many Jewish Americans. And, perhaps, for that, it is all the more meaningful. The story of Hanukkah is a story of perseverance—perseverance in the face of unspeakable hatred.

We have been taught about how the Jews of a different age—forced from their land, forbidden to practice their religion, their temple destroyed and desecrated—gathered to pray in secret, banded together in the hills and fields, and fought off their attackers. And once they endured, they set about the hard and slow and painful work of rededicating the temple and lighting once again the eternal flame of hope.

I believe that America should do the same thing right now: rededicate ourselves to that noble promise of being a land of tolerance for all people—all people. Anti-Semitism, frighteningly, is on the rise. Islamophobia is on the rise. Hatred and discrimination remain a festering wound in the soul of our country. We must rededicate ourselves to stand against anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination. We must rededicate ourselves to rebuilding a more perfect Union, one that preserves tolerance and equality for every single American.

I have faith that the forces of intolerance will lose in the end, just as they did in the days of Hanukkah, when Judah Maccabee led the Jewish people against an oppressive majority.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, every single Republican rejected the Democratic leader's attempt to separate border security from national security. As we have said for weeks, that was a futile effort that was doomed to fail from the very beginning. Hopefully, the Senate can now seize a new opportunity to make real progress on legislation that addresses urgent national security priorities both at home and abroad.

So let's establish a few things going forward: It is profoundly unserious to pretend that national security priorities don't include securing our Nation's borders, to warn about borders in jeopardy and not start with the one that is being overrun here at home, to invoke threats facing sovereign nations without a clear plan to uphold America's own sovereignty.

Mr. President, I am not in need of any lectures about the gravity of the challenges facing national security. I don't need any admonishments about what is at stake for America and our allies in Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression. I am well aware that the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism remains undeterred from trying to kill Americans in the Middle East. And I certainly have not forgotten that China, our top strategic adversary, is watching what we do very closely.

Instead, unfortunately, it has been the Biden administration—including our Commander in Chief—who has all too often needed reminders about the responsibilities of a global superpower. From Europe to the Middle East, the administration has reached new heights of self-deterrence.

With Putin's forces massing on the borders of Ukraine, the administration slow-walked lethal assistance. As the Russian offensive unfolded, they held back the most decisive capabilities Ukraine needed out of an unfounded fear of escalation.

And even with further security assistance hanging in the balance, the Biden administration has been slow—very slow—to sell this urgent measure and its massive domestic benefits to our people here at home.

From the outset, the Biden administration resumed the Obama-era efforts to reset relations with Tehran and removed the Iran-backed Houthis from the terrorism list. Also, it is no surprise that Iran has snubbed its nose at these displays of weakness. It is no surprise that U.S. personnel are facing a spike in terrorist attacks from Iraq and Syria to the Red Sea. But the administration continues to pull its punches.

And meanwhile, Republicans have spent years urging the administration to start performing even the bare minimum of its fundamental responsibility to secure our southern border and enforce our Nation's laws.

Right now, the crisis created by the Biden administration's neglect is bringing illegal aliens to the United States at the rate of 300,000 a month. That is roughly the population of Lexington, KY, arriving every month. And thanks to an asylum and parole system that desperately needs fixing, many of them are just brought straight in.

I know many of our Democratic colleagues recognize the urgency of this crisis. I know many of them are ready to help restore sanity at our southern border.

Well, Senator LANKFORD, Senator GRAHAM, and other Republican colleagues are still working hard to do exactly that. There is no time like the present to join them in those efforts.

SYRIA

Mr. President, now, on a different matter, this morning the Senate will vote on a resolution calling for the withdrawal of American military forces from Syria. Passage of such a resolution would be a gift to Iran and its terrorist network. Driving American troops from the Middle East is exactly what they would like to see.

Adopting this short-sighted measure would wreck America's credibility in the region. It would encourage Iran's proxies to open a northern front in the territorial war against Israel. It would invite America's adversaries to challenge our military presence throughout the world.

Back in 2019, as our colleagues may recall, the Senate went on record about

the wisdom of withdrawing prematurely from Syria and Afghanistan. At that time, the vast majority of us rejected such a retreat. And those who didn't have since watched President Biden's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, Putin's escalation against Ukraine, China's growing challenge to international peace and stability, and Iran's glaring threat to America and to Israel.

Today is the 82nd anniversary of Pearl Harbor. It is a day to remember the cost of being caught on our heels. A vote in favor of this resolution is a vote for retreat in the face of terror.

BIDENOMICS

Mr. President, now, on one final matter, working Americans can't seem to catch a break from Bidenomics. Washington Democrats' spending sprees on President Biden's watch have driven inflation up 17.6 percent. And the effects are becoming inescapable.

In my home State, many small business owners have been forced to raise their prices to keep up with the rising costs. One shop owner in Lexington, put it:

I make food and chocolates and all the ingredients have gone up.

I've been battling with increasing my prices which I don't want to do.

Just like in cities and towns across the country, small businesses in Lexington are facing declining foot traffic, which might have something to do with the consumers' shrinking paychecks. Inflation is eating away at people's savings.

By one estimate, the average American family would need an extra \$11,400 a year just to maintain the standard of living they had when President Biden took office. And, needless to say, folks on fixed incomes are among the hardest hit.

One 68-year-old retiree in western Massachusetts summed up his struggle to make ends meet in the Biden economy. Here is what he said:

You get your check and then you have to sit down there . . . like 'What am I going to pay [out]? Am I going to get food or lose my electricity?' . . . I can't spend nothing anymore. I have to pay rent, utilities, food, medicine.

This is what the American people are up against. This is everyday life under Bidenomics. Bizarrely, the Biden administration still seems to hold its favorite phrase in high esteem. The White House Press Secretary called Bidenomics "the word of the year."

Well, working Americans feel quite differently. And the President's hometown is no exception. As one resident from Scranton, PA, reported recently:

[E]verything is going up, except for paychecks.

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. THUNE. 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.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, if Democrats were unsure about Republicans' seriousness about including meaningful border security provisions in the national security supplemental, yesterday's vote made it crystal clear. Every single Senate Republican rejected Democrats' collective attempt to bury their heads in the sand and pretend that what is happening at our southern border isn't a threat to our security.

Border security is national security, which is why any national security supplemental that moves through this Chamber must tackle this crisis head-on.

On Tuesday, FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and told Members:

I've never seen a time where all the threats or so many of the threats are all elevated all at exactly the same time.

Senator GRAHAM then asked Wray to comment on the threat environment using the blinking red lights analogy often used about warnings before the September 11 attacks. And Director Wray responded:

I see blinking lights everywhere I turn.

"I see blinking lights everywhere I turn."

It is against the background of this threat environment that Republicans are asking Democrats to finally—and I say finally—help secure our border.

We have endured 3, now, record-breaking years of illegal immigration at our southern border under President Biden, and the situation is only getting worse.

Tuesday saw a staggering 12,000 migrant encounters at our southern border—12,000 in just 1 day. That is 8 people per minute, and that follows 2 days of 10,000-plus encounters. I am not sure how anyone can look at these numbers and not think this is a crisis.

Plus, those numbers don't count any "got-aways"—those are individuals the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend—who may have made their way across the border during that same period. The month of October saw an average of roughly 1,000 "got-aways" per day. That is roughly 30,000 unknown individuals who made their way into our country—30,000 in just 1 month. All told, there have been more than 1.7 million known "got-aways" on President Biden's watch, not to mention an unknown number of unknown "got-aways."

These "got-aways" are not the migrants who are showing up, hoping to be apprehended because they know they can game the asylum or parole system. No—these are individuals bent on avoiding detection, which should concern us deeply.

Anyone who doesn't think bad actors are attempting to exploit the situation at our southern border needs to think

again. During fiscal year 2023, the Border Patrol apprehended 169 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist attempting to make their way across our southern border into our country. That number, by the way, is more than the total of the previous 6 fiscal years combined.

FBI Director Wray noted at that same Judiciary Committee hearing that since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, the threat level has gone to "a whole other level." Abroad, American troops have been attacked nearly 80 times since October 7. It is naive to think that there aren't terrorists out there currently trying to make their way into the United States to attack our country. Why wouldn't any terrorist trying to enter our country take advantage of the chaos at our southern border?

You don't have to take my word for it. The Department of Homeland Security, in its threat assessment released in September, noted the risk that "terrorists and criminal actors may exploit the elevated flow [of migration] and increasingly complex security environment to enter the United States." That assessment was written before—before—the October 7 attack or the many attacks on U.S. troops abroad that followed it.

If there was a risk before, I think it is safe to say that there is an even greater risk now.

This situation cannot continue. The massive flood of illegal immigration at our southern border has to stop, and that is why the national security supplemental must contain real measures to secure the border—not cosmetic fixes, not superficial tweaks, real border security measures.

I believe it is in our national security interests to support allies like Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine, but we cannot support American interests abroad while continuing to sacrifice the security of the American people here at home.

For 3 years, the Biden administration has put out a de facto welcome mat at our southern border. If we want to protect our country, that has to stop, and it has to stop now.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland.

SYRIA

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I understand that shortly we will be considering a motion to discharge S.J. Res. 51 from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and I take this time to urge my colleagues to vote against that motion to discharge.

I understand the concerns of my colleague from Kentucky about ensuring that Congress exercises the appropriate role in authorizing the use of military force. I appreciate the Senator's longstanding interest in these important matters.

I value having what I believe are critically important debates about when and under what authorities U.S. troops serve abroad. Decisions about

authorizing the use of military force are among the most solemn duties we have in this body. But here, the decision is not so simple as the Senator from Kentucky presents it.

The Middle East is unstable right now. I don't have to remind my colleagues about that. ISIS's territorial caliphate might have been defeated, but it remains a threat to Syrians, Iraqis, and to U.S. interests. Now is not the time to withdraw from the region, but that is what this joint resolution would do without weighing the consequences, without a plan.

Think about what impact it would have. Think about what it would do to the resolve of our NATO allies and Kurdish partners fighting ISIS alongside the United States. We are not there alone; we are part of a coalition. Will they stick it out if we don't?

Think about how this would hurt the Syrian people. Without U.S. presence, civilians would be caught between ISIS and the Assad regime. Think about the ISIS terrorist cells that would have free reign to expand their operations in Syria. They will use it as a base to attack Iraq, where just last week they killed 11 innocent people.

Think about what a gift this would be to the Assad regime, who has committed atrocities, aided and abetted by Russia and Iran. The regime would strengthen its control of Syria, putting at risk the very people who fought side by side with the United States, people who would be subjected to the Assad regime's industrial-scale system of torture and murder.

Then there are the Assad backers—Russia and Iran. Putin wants the Middle East to descend into chaos and distract the world from his war in Ukraine. Iran's longstanding strategic objective has been to push the United States out of the region. We see it in proxy attacks on U.S. facilities and on global shipping.

Not only would pulling U.S. troops out of Syria be a propaganda win for Iran, it would be a strategic victory. It would make it easier for Iran to move weapons through Syria to Hezbollah. Do we want Hezbollah to have more weapons aimed at our ally Israel right now? We don't want to see an escalation of the conflict.

At a time when the administration is working to prevent the Gaza conflict from spilling over, this would be the wrong thing for us to do. The last thing we want is the conflict in Israel and Gaza to expand across the region.

For all of those reasons, I would urge my colleagues to vote against the motion to discharge S.J. Res. 51 if that motion is made by my colleague from Kentucky.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MOTION TO DISCHARGE—S.J. RES. 51

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise today to invoke the War Powers Act. The War Powers Act requires that upon request from a Member of the Senate or a Member of Congress, that there will be a vote on whether or not troops should be put into harm's way or into a conflict without the approval of this body.

Our Founding Fathers felt very clearly on this that we should not go to war without a vote of the legislature. They wanted to make sure that the Executive or the President was prohibited from going to war without the authority of the legislature.

We have drifted away from that. There really hasn't been a valid declaration of war since World War II. We have, at times, taken votes to authorize a use of military force. They call them an AUMF. We did when we went into the Iraq war. So we did the voting properly. It was still a disastrous mistake to go there.

But we never have voted on being in Syria. We never have voted on having troops in the middle of the Syrian civil war in which hundreds of thousands of people have died, millions of people have been displaced. We owe it to the soldiers who are in Syria—the U.S. soldiers, the young men and women in Syria—to have a debate and have a vote.

Now, the Senate doesn't want to do this. They are only doing this under duress because I am forcing them to vote on this issue. I have the power because it is called a privilege vote. They can't deny me this vote or this debate.

This will put the Senate on record: Are you for having troops in Syria? If so, why? What are they doing in Syria? I fear that they are merely a tripwire to a greater war or to a tragedy should a terrorist attack occur. They have become the target for the Iranian proxies. Will we ever learn?

As the fire of war spreads across the Middle East, the Biden administration sends aircraft carrier strike groups into the region without the debate of Congress about whether the United States should be further enmeshed in these region's conflicts. And will there be a debate at all?

For the past two decades, the wisdom of Washington foreign policy, the establishment, has embroiled our country in one war after another, imperious to the catastrophic consequences resulting from this adventurism. Some 7,000 U.S. servicemembers lost their lives in post-9/11 conflicts, tens of thousands more live with missing limbs, burn scars, or are confined to wheelchairs, to say nothing of the mental wounds of war. More than 30,000 veterans committed suicide since Washington's misguided project to remake the Middle East.