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Senate

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

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by the Reverend Kathryn Pocalyko, Pastor of the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour in North Chesterfield, VA.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God most mighty, O God most merciful, O God our strength and our song, You call these leaders to serve the public, promote justice, and establish peace in our land. We lift before You all who govern and serve our Nation through this body, its Senators, its staff, and its pages. Bless Members with collaboration in this Holy experiment. Give to those whom we entrust with authority the spirit of wisdom and understanding. Guide them with the spirit of counsel and insight. Grant them a spirit of knowledge. Grace them with Your presence. For You show us a vision of a tree whose leaves are for the healing of the Nation. May that tree take root here, bearing fruit in the hearts and work of these servants.

We pray this through Your Holy 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, President Obama regularly calls on Republicans and Democrats to work together to advance the priorities of our Nation, and we certainly agree.

Our top priority is our national security, and Congress worked together on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis to pass the National Defense Authorization Act. So while Americans were surprised to learn the President announced he would veto that bipartisan bill, they must be shaking their heads in disbelief now that they have learned the President will not only veto the bill, he is going to brag about it—not only going to veto the bill, but he is going to brag about it in a photo op today down at the White House.

Remember what it is the President will veto today. This bipartisan bill will attack bureaucratic waste and authorize pay raises and improved quality-of-life programs for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines; it will strengthen sexual assault prevention and response; it will help wounded warriors and heroes who struggle with mental health challenges; and it will equip the men and women who serve with what they need to defend this Nation.

This is the worst possible time for an American President to veto a national defense bill and especially to do so for arbitrary partisan reasons. Republicans and Democrats in Congress worked so hard to pass this important legislation, legislation that authorizes the exact amount—the exact amount—the Commander in Chief requested. So now we will have to work together again, this time hopefully to override the President's veto.

The President should be highlighting his signature on this bipartisan legislation that supports the men and women who defend our Nation. Instead, with our servicemembers facing threats and instability in several theaters, he will

be bragging—bragging—about using his veto pen. Our allies are seeking leadership and stability, not indecision. A partisan veto of this bipartisan bill is simply unacceptable.

CYBERSECURITY INFORMATION SHARING BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Americans know that cyber attacks are attacks on their privacy and their property. No one wants to think about a stranger riffling through their medical records. No one wants to think about a criminal stealing their credit card information. That is why we have this bipartisan cyber security bill before us in the Senate.

This bipartisan legislation will help protect Americans' most private and personal information by sharing information between the private and public sector on cyber threats. Experts say the tools in this bill can help prevent future attacks in both the public and private sectors. It contains important measures to protect civil liberties and individual privacy, and it has been carefully vetted and scrutinized by Senators of both parties. No wonder this bill passed through committee with nearly unanimous bipartisan support, 14 to 1.

The House already voted to protect the privacy of Americans by passing cyber legislation. With a little cooperation, the Senate can as well. That is why I urge all Members to vote today to move forward on this bipartisan bill, which will set up votes on amendments from both parties. With continuing cooperation, we can take an important step toward protecting the privacy of our constituents.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

• 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 DEBT AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the day before yesterday I surprised some by saying nice things about Congressman PAUL RYAN, and they said nice things about him. Since then, a handful of people have demanded to know why we would ever say nice things about a man who has attacked Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, as he has done in recent history. The answer is very simple. Democrats need, our country needs, responsible Republican negotiating partners if Congress is to avoid twin challenges facing us in the coming weeks: avoiding the first-ever default in the full faith and credit of the United States and preventing another government shutdown. We need someone to deal with. We must avoid the self-inflicted wounds that have typified the rule of House Republicans and certainly Senate Republicans.

In spite of our ideological differences, in my view, Congressman RYAN is the only House Republican, whom I am aware of, with real potential to impose a basic modicum of order in the House of Representatives and work with us to avoid default and another government shutdown. He has helped in the past, and I am confident he could in the future if he chooses to.

To my allies, rest assured that I will continue to oppose Congressman RYAN's plans to privatize Medicare and slash Social Security. I have said the Ryan budget would lead to a "Kochtopia," and I believe that to be truer now than ever before.

Congressman RYAN also coauthored the Murray-Ryan budget compromise. That was good work. House Chairman RYAN and Senate Chair MURRAY, Budget chairs, did a very good job. He appears to be supportive of comprehensive immigration reform, and he joined Democrats in saying America's auto industry and financial system should be saved.

Maybe the problems are too deep to resolve any time soon. I hope not. I am concerned that we have already seen Congressman RYAN prove incapable of reining in members of the so-called Freedom Caucus. I hope that is not a sign of things to come, but with the stakes as high as they are, we owe it to the American people to pursue the most responsible path, and that will be it. Now is the time to rebuild a system where "compromise" is no longer considered a dirty word and where Republicans and Democrats work side-by-side to address the challenges our government faces. However, one of the conditions Congressman RYAN has given House Republicans is that he doesn't want to work weekends. Well, if he gets the job, I hope he will not take weekends off until we do something to solve the debt crisis and to fund the government.

BLOCKING NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Congressional Republicans continue to govern

destructively during this 114th Congress. After nearly a year in control of the Senate, what do Republicans have to show for it? Shutdown threats, lapsed laws, vital programs expired, and an abiding sense of uncertainty. Instead of looking for opportunities to govern constructively, Republicans appear to be bent on mayhem. They are doing everything they can to appeal to their extreme rightwing without regard to the consequences.

It seems that every day that is a bad day for government, we have a large segment of the Republican caucus cheering that it is great. Anything that is bad for government is a good day for us, is what they are saying. Instead of looking for opportunities to govern constructively, they are doing everything they can to not do things constructively. They are doing everything they can to appeal to, I guess, the extreme rightwing, to phrase it, without regard to the consequences, but consequences are very significant.

This afternoon we are finally confirming Ambassadors for several African nations, but to view the confirmation of four individuals a success would be a mistake, when we consider that Senate Republicans are doing everything they can to stop these nominees.

Just 2 weeks ago, the junior Senator from Arkansas announced his intention to hold up our Ambassadors to Sweden, Norway, and the Bahamas. At a time when American leadership is needed abroad, these posts sit empty because the junior Senator from Arkansas is blocking them. Why is Senator COTTON blocking these nominees? He has admitted his hold has nothing to do with the nominees' qualifications—nothing. Indeed, all were reported out of the Foreign Relations Committee with bipartisan support months ago. Instead, the junior Senator from Arkansas is holding these nominees hostage until he gets information from the Department of Homeland Security. That is right. He is holding up State Department nominations to get a response from Homeland Security. Blocking important Ambassadors to get information from a completely different agency makes zero sense. That is akin to having two fighters in a ring and one fighter is going for the referee instead of the other boxer. That is about what we have here. The sad part about this is that the junior Senator from Arkansas is not alone in blocking qualified nominees. The Republican caucus is obviously supporting him. Why?

I have spoken before about the crucial need to confirm Gayle Smith as Ambassador to the U.S. Agency for International Development. She would be a good Administrator. I talked to one of my staff yesterday who has a relative who works for this Agency. It is terrible. There is nobody leading the Agency. It has affected the whole department. That is wrong.

Why is this nomination important? The Agency for International Development, better known as USAID, plays a

central role in our Nation's foreign policy. How? By administering humanitarian and development aid to nations of people in need. A person only needs to watch the nightly news to see that help is needed across the globe—the pictures of the huddled masses of men, women, and children now with the weather turning in Europe. There are millions of people trying to get out of Syria, trying to get out of the Middle East because of what is going on there, with blankets—wet blankets—over their bodies. Little kids are being protected by their mothers, as much as they can be, and by their dads. Victims of civil wars, disease outbreaks, and natural disasters depend on the aid and compassion of the American people. To our credit, we try our best to help as much as possible.

Let's take one example: the Syrian refugee crisis. It is the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. That says a lot. Millions—not thousands, millions—of Syrians have been displaced because of the country's civil war. Thousands are fleeing to Europe to escape the violence. Because of that civil war, it is estimated that there are 4 million displaced people in Syria alone. Millions have been displaced in Iraq. The whole Middle East is in turmoil. The United States has an obligation to assist—a humanitarian obligation to assist. We are the single largest donor of humanitarian aid for the Syrian crisis. But how can we help if Senate Republicans are hamstringing this Agency? They are doing that.

Gayle Smith, an experienced public servant, has been nominated to lead this Agency. This good woman can't even get a vote in the Senate. Senator CRUZ has been blocking her nomination for months. Why? Is there anything that is wrong about her? Of course not. The word is it is because he doesn't like the Iran nuclear agreement. Remember what the Iran nuclear agreement was? It was an effort by the international community, including Russia and China, to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. That is what it was all about. I guess Mr. CRUZ, in his attempt to become President—1 of 15 Republicans running for President—thinks this would be a good issue for him, blocking the person this government has chosen to lead this Agency.

Gayle Smith has extensive experience in African affairs. She worked at this Agency during the Clinton administration. She is exactly the type of leader our country needs to confront this crisis in Europe. Even the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, the junior Senator from Tennessee, said he was "glad the executive branch has nominated someone who has the kind of experience [Smith] has." Her nomination has won support from prominent Republicans, including Bill Frist who was one of my predecessors as the majority leader in the Senate, and from Richard Lugar, the distinguished Republican, former chair of the Foreign Relations Committee in