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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we praise Your greatness, might, and majesty. You own all that is in Heaven and Earth. Both riches and honor come from You. Your compassion never fails. Today, use our lawmakers as instruments of Your purposes. Lord, give them the wisdom and courage for the living of these challenging days. May they find encouragement in the knowledge that the full harvest of their labors is yet to come. Unite them in the common endeavor of making America a beacon of freedom for our world. May their thoughts, words, and actions honor You.

We pray in Your sovereign 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 (Mr. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 20, 2015.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable TOM COTTON, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COTTON thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it has been 164 days—164 very long, long days, especially for a woman by the name of Loretta Lynch. Her nomination is languishing here in the Republican limbo that they have created. For 6 months Senate Republicans have looked for any and every reason to push back confirmation of this good woman to be Attorney General.

Does anyone know why? Can a single Republican Senator tell us why? The answer is no. Her qualifications are impeccable. She has some bipartisan support. But again, for unknown reasons, Republican support seems to be disappearing. Is there a single Republican Senator who can come here to the Senate floor and give an explanation that does not absolutely smack of political foolishness?

Republicans do not know why Loretta Lynch has not yet been confirmed—just listen to what Congressman PETER KING said. By the way, PETER KING is a Republican from New York.

All you've heard from our party for a very long time is how much contempt they have for Holder. Now they're presented with Loretta Lynch, who is by far the best attorney general they could ever have expected this President to appoint, and they still hold the thing up. . . . And for what? Because they think it scores them a few political points? With whom?

That is the irony of it all. Republicans have held Ms. Lynch's nomina-

tion hostage for nothing more than political purposes. Here is something I will read to the people within the sound of my voice, which is a direct quote from the New York Daily News editorial.

The Republicans in the Senate, the meanest and most narrow-minded among them occasionally acting as if they want the Democrats to have the White House into the next century, need to free Loretta Lynch this week.

They need to stop using abortion language in an anti-trafficking bill for cover, they need to stop using Lynch's support for President Obama on immigration as cover, they need to stop insulting Lynch the way they have for months as they have delayed a vote on confirming her as our next attorney general for the simple reason that they can.

The issue here was never Loretta Lynch's policies, always about President Obama's. They have used her to get at him, because to the end they remain obsessed with getting at him. No wonder Jeb Bush stood up for Lynch in New Hampshire. Bush didn't just show grace in doing that, he also showed more common sense than his brother showed in eight years as President.

Jeb Bush has to know that Sen. Mitch McConnell hijacking this process does him absolutely no good, the way it does him no good to have McConnell as an important voice and face of the Republican Party. As long as McConnell is, too many voters completely wide-open about the upcoming Presidential campaign will continue to think the party is still owned and operated by scrubs who think they can push around Loretta Lynch for sport.

“Pushing around Loretta Lynch for sport” is certainly how it seems. How else can you explain the Republicans changing the subject every time her name comes up? Every time Ms. Lynch's confirmation is discussed, they change the subject. Every time when asked, Republicans deflect: “next Congress” or “after Keystone” or “after we try and shut down Homeland Security,” and, of course, the newest, “after trafficking.”

President Obama put it best last Friday when he said:

Nobody can describe a reason for it beyond political gamesmanship in the Senate. I have

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



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to say that there are times where the dysfunction in the Senate just goes too far. This is an example of it.

He said: "This is embarrassing."

It is embarrassing. It is embarrassing for the Senate and for our Nation. Even Republicans—I should say some Republicans—are embarrassed. They know there is no rationale for delaying a vote for America's chief law enforcement officer. There is no reason that we cannot confirm Loretta Lynch today—right now, even. There is nothing preventing the majority leader from coming to the Senate floor immediately and moving the Senate into executive session for consideration of Ms. Lynch's nomination.

Why then is the majority leader determined to make her wait until after the trafficking legislation is approved? Why? We are now spending the first 2 weeks of this current work period finishing two matters—human trafficking and her nomination. These two matters could have been completed months ago. Everyone is aware of what has transpired with the human trafficking bill.

It is sufficient to say that Republicans tried to pull a fast one on the American people. Republicans attempted to broaden a precedent that traditionally prevents Federal funds for paying for abortion, except in cases of rape, incest, and when the life of the mother is at risk. This is commonly known as the Hyde language. The Hyde language has applied to taxpayer dollars. Republicans want to change that to apply to nontaxpayer dollars.

It was a failed political ploy, and it is no surprise, then, that the Republicans are scrambling to save their necks after trying to dupe American women. My Republican colleagues appear to be close to seeing the light on human trafficking, and there seems to be a path forward. But there is no guarantee that we can do it. As of right now, we do not have an agreement in place to put the finishing touches on our work on the bill. But we are working on that goal. The progress we have made is due almost entirely to the good-faith efforts of Senators MURRAY, LEAHY, and AMY KLOBUCHAR.

When are Republicans going to see the light on Loretta Lynch? When will the majority leader realize he continues to obstruct a qualified nominee for absolutely no reason? The Senate should turn to a vote on Ms. Lynch's nomination immediately. Every day that passes without a newly confirmed Attorney General proves once and again that Republicans cannot lead and they certainly cannot govern.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2015

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the

Senate will resume consideration of S. 178, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 178) to provide justice for the victims of trafficking.

Pending:

McConnell (for Cornyn) amendment No. 1120, to strengthen the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act by incorporating additional bipartisan amendments.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 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.

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

LYNCH NOMINATION

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, as we all know, a vote of confirmation for Loretta Lynch to be our next Attorney General has now been delayed 164 days, or 5 months. We have seen this qualified woman waiting for a confirmation vote, and we have had at least 51 Members—a majority—indicating they will support her confirmation.

I remember coming to the floor listening to colleagues during the Bush administration state over and over again that elections have consequences, that Presidents have a right to have their nominees voted on, and that it is our responsibility to make sure, if something comes out of committee, that we vote on a final confirmation.

When we look at the fact that we have seen Loretta Lynch wait for a vote on the floor for a combined length of time that equals more than the last seven Attorneys General, I really do believe, as the President has said, enough is enough.

I remember a time when we had a controversial nominee—John Ashcroft—and many of us did not support that nomination. I did not support that nomination. But we brought it to the floor for a vote. He waited 42 days. At the time, people said that was a long time. He was not blocked. We did not filibuster. We did not require a supermajority. In fact, there were 42 of us who voted no, so we could have stopped it on a procedural vote. But we allowed the nomination of John Ashcroft to come to the floor for a vote.

So we fast-forward. And we have seen this, of course, over and over again, as we look at the President's nominees in the last 6½ years. Now we see this eminently qualified woman, who has been held up as of today 164 days, waiting and waiting to have the opportunity to have a vote up or down on confirmation. If people want to vote no, they have that right, but she deserves a vote.

Today, we are going to vote on the confirmation of a district court judge

in Texas. I think it is good that the Southern District of Texas will have a Federal court judge, but the entire country needs a permanent Attorney General. In fact, the Attorney General's office is the one that actually brings the cases to Federal courts and tries them on behalf of all the American people. So it is really ridiculous that we stand at this point where we are having to ask, after more than 5 months, that there be a vote for Loretta Lynch.

After she was reported out, we saw a very distinguished nominee for Secretary of Defense come out of committee and immediately come to the floor and be confirmed, but Loretta Lynch has waited and waited. We continue to vote on district judges, and Loretta Lynch is waiting and waiting.

We hear all kinds of excuses, all kinds of reasons. We are hearing that Loretta Lynch's nomination to be Attorney General cannot be voted on until we complete another very important bill—the human trafficking bill—that we all want to get done. It has, unfortunately, had a curve ball added because of the politics around choice and abortion that has been interjected into this, and we are having to work our way through that. I have been involved in a lot of discussions, as my colleagues have. I am confident we can address those if people want to get this done on behalf of girls and women in our country. But that has nothing to do with the nomination of Loretta Lynch for Attorney General, other than one thing, which is that as U.S. attorney of the Eastern District of New York, she presided over a very effective antitrafficking program, investigating and prosecuting scores of defendants.

In that sense, again, we need Loretta Lynch—her talent, her expertise, and her experience—to be able to tackle what is a horrible situation that way too many of our girls and women find themselves in. We somehow for too long have thought this was something that was happening someplace else. Yet we saw it in Lansing, MI—where I live, the capital of Michigan—where there was a case in the trafficking situation that the FBI and local officials addressed. What we are finding right now is that as we proceed with confirming other people for other positions—Monday nights we are voting on other positions, we are voting on district judges, and we voted on other people for other positions not held up by human trafficking, not held up by trying to get that bill resolved, but for some reason the Attorney General position has somehow been held up.

I don't buy it. It makes no sense that we would pick one person—one person—not others but one person and decide that this person and this nomination, this confirmation vote will be held hostage to another issue. It is time to stop it. Now, 164 days is long enough; 164 days is long enough. It is time to give Loretta Lynch the respect and the vote she has been waiting for and she deserves.