

leave the post open, not for another week, not for another day, not for another hour. America's enemies will not pause in plotting, planning, and training simply because the Democrats refuse to vote. The American people expect more.

Earlier today, the Director and Deputy Director of the CIA resigned. They left. They are gone. The Director's job is open and unfilled. We need to confirm a new Director today. We need to confirm the rest of the Cabinet as quickly as we can.

Republicans treated a newly inaugurated President Obama's nominees fairly, and our Democratic friends should do so now. Our country is counting on it. I am told we want to have some debate about this. We will have as much debate time, starting right now, as our Democratic colleagues would like, but at the end of the debate, today—not Monday—we should install a new CIA Director.

THANKING FORMER PRESIDENT OBAMA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to offer a few words regarding our outgoing President. I had a chance, as some others did yesterday, to receive a call from him, which I appreciated. I want to say farewell to President Obama. I think it is worth, once again, reflecting on the significance of his election and the historic achievement it represented in terms of our country's past. That is something both he and our country should be very proud of.

It is no secret that the President and I and other Members of my party have not always seen eye to eye. Over the years, we have pursued totally different legislative priorities. Everybody around here knows that. The American people know that too. It is a big country. We have different views about what ought to be done.

Let me say this. I think I speak for all Americans when I thank our former President for his tremendous service to our Nation. As can be said of all First Families, he and his family have made many personal sacrifices over the past 8 years. Through it all, they have done so with dignity and with grace.

To our 44th President, I wish to say, for your leadership, we are grateful. We wish you, Michelle, Malia, and Sasha all the best as you embark on this new chapter of your lives.

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

NOMINATIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the statement by the Republican leader on the floor, and I am hoping we can reach some agreement later today as to the nominations to be considered this day and very quickly next week. I will, for the record, make it clear that the seven nominees who moved through on the

first day of the Obama administration were people who had their ethics statements filed on time, had filed all the legally required papers on time for review.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for all of the nominees by the new Trump administration. Some of them bring to this nomination some extraordinarily challenging financial data, and because of their companies, because of their lifestyles, because of their wealth, it takes longer to go through these documents than it does for people of modest means. When we proposed, by the Obama administration, Penny Pritzker, of Chicago, to serve as Secretary of Commerce, it took 6 months to clear the paperwork on her financial background. The more complex the financial data, the more difficult and challenging it is for the committees of the Senate to do their work and to do it properly.

We want to make certain we don't cut any corners. We don't want to create any advantage for any single nominee. They have to be held to the same standard as the nominees under the Obama administration. I am hoping we can move on it with dispatch on some of these nominees, and I don't quarrel with the Republican leader's premise that there are some noncontroversial nominees who would be easier to handle than others.

Let me quickly add, for those who have forgotten the record of the Republicans in the Senate when it comes to delaying nominations, exhibit A will continue to be the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. For the first time in the history of the United States of America, the Republican majority in the U.S. Senate refused a hearing and a vote on a nominee to fill a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. That went on for the entire duration of the Obama Presidency. Some 11 months, that position on the highest Court in the land remained vacant because of the specific political strategy of the Republican leader on the other side.

He said: We will keep this open in the hopes that a Republican President will be able to fill it. He had a grin and a smile and, I guess, a feeling of accomplishment on election day when a Republican was elected President. That vacancy continued for political reasons, regardless of the fact that it created at least a hardship and some confusion on the highest Court of the land. It went on for 10, 11 months, and it continues to this day.

I might also remind him that the nomination of Loretta Lynch for the highest law enforcement position in America sat on that Senate calendar for months, with no objection stated by any Member on the other side. They refused to call her name and allow a vote for the Attorney General of the United States of America. Similarly, an Assistant Secretary of the Department of Treasury, a key position to deal with terrorism financing, was held on that calendar, I believe, for a year or more

with no controversy. They had the power to do it, and they did it. So this notion that we slowed things down really negates and ignores the reality of the record before us.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. SCHUMER. 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.

Mr. SCHUMER. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER AND HOMEOWNER INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today we celebrate one of our democracy's core attributes: the peaceful transfer of power. It is remarkable. I am always amazed how voters, on a cold November evening in my State, come home from work—they would like to serve dinner to their kids or sit in their favorite chair and watch their favorite TV show, but in quiet dignity, they wait in line and wait their turn to cast their vote. Then everyone awaits the decision. And the next morning, we all abide by it. It is an amazing thing about this democracy. There are no riots and tanks in the streets. It is a great thing. And although I regret the outcome of the election obviously—deeply—I still am awed by how the wellspring of democracy continues to work for 225 years after the Founders put together the remarkable document, the Constitution.

Now it falls to us—Senators from both parties—to promote and defend these principles, as we must every day: the rule of law, equal protection for all Americans under it, and freedom of speech, press, and religion. We must also endeavor to expand opportunity and increase prosperity while broadening the circle of Americans who share in it. The peaceful transfer of power occurred, and our work starts now.

President Trump said in his inaugural address this afternoon:

For too long, a small group in our Nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished—but the people did not share its wealth.

He promised to combat that trend, but in one of his first acts as President, President Trump made it harder for Americans to afford a mortgage. For working-class Americans, struggling Americans, now it is harder for them

to get a mortgage. What did he do? He reversed a recent decision by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to reduce annual insurance premiums that many borrowers pay, saving new homeowners an average of \$500 per year. What a terrible thing to do to homeowners. President Trump, with a flick of the pen, ended that new policy, making it harder for Americans of modest means to obtain their piece of the rock, the American dream: their own home. It took only an hour after his positive words on the inaugural platform for his words to ring hollow. And actions speak louder than words. One hour after talking about helping working people and ending the cabal in Washington that hurts people, he signs a regulation that makes it more expensive for new homeowners to buy mortgages—1 hour later.

I ask the American people—because we Democrats are going to do this. We are going to hold the President accountable. Look at what the President said and then an hour later, look at what the President did. Again, actions speak louder than words. The words on that inaugural platform in relation to this new action ring hollow.

Democrats agree with President Trump on this: The working men and women of America do not need more promises, they need policies that give them a leg up, help them succeed, help them afford a home, for instance. We urge President Trump to reverse this decision and give new homeowners across America their \$500 back.

CABINET NOMINEES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on another matter—nominations—Senators on both sides of the aisle have expressed support for the President's key national security nominees. This evening, we expect to be able to vote on General Kelly and General Mattis, and we look forward to beginning the debate on Congressman POMPEO in the hopes that he can also receive a quick vote, but from there, we intend to have a full and rigorous debate on the President-elect's remaining nominees.

My friends on the other side of the aisle did not want to have a full debate on the merits of these nominees in committee, so they should be prepared to do so on the Senate floor. Over the last several weeks, Republicans have made a mockery of the Cabinet hearing process, trying to jam through nominees in truncated hearings—nominees with serious conflicts of interest and ethical issues unresolved—without giving Senators and the American people a fair chance to question and hear from these nominees.

If ever there were a group of Cabinet nominees who cry out for rigorous scrutiny, it is this one. I have never heard such a parade of potential ethical violations. The President-elect's Cabinet is a swamp Cabinet, full of billionaires and bankers, loaded with conflicts of interest and ethical lapses as far as the eye can see.

Congressman MULVANEY failed to pay taxes on a household worker—the exact same issue that has caused past nominees to withdraw.

Congressman PRICE is facing serious scrutiny for trading stock with one hand and pushing legislation to boost that stock with the other.

Rex Tillerson has refused to recuse himself from matters relating to ExxonMobil for the length of his term.

Just yesterday we learned that Steve Mnuchin tried to hide his holdings in the Cayman Islands from the Senate Finance Committee.

And, of course, at the top of the list is Betsy DeVos. Her ethics paperwork just came in after the hearing was completed. Did she not want to answer any questions on it? It shows that she was invested in multiple education companies, including companies that have millions of dollars of contracts with the Department of Education to collect on student debt. Senators have not been given an opportunity to question her about these investments because we only got the information after the hearing. Sadly, the list goes on and on.

The President-elect isn't draining the swamp with his Cabinet picks, he is filling it up. It is no wonder that the American people have expressed discontent with how this transition period is going.

These issues that I mentioned, and many others, deserve to be thoroughly and rigorously reviewed by the Senate. If Senate Republicans will not let that happen in hearings, it will happen right here on the floor.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of the following nominations received today: James N. Mattis to be Secretary of Defense; and John F. Kelly to be Secretary of Homeland Security. I ask consent that there be 20 minutes of debate on the nominations, equally divided in the usual form, and that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the nominations in the order listed with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I renew my unanimous consent request that I previously stated.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATIONS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of James Mattis, of Washington, to be Secretary of Defense; and John F. Kelly, of Virginia, to be Secretary of Homeland Security.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, let me just, for the information of all Members, point out that after we vote on Mattis and Kelly, we will turn to the Pompeo nomination, begin that debate, and hopefully finish it at some point tonight.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, there is not a lot of benefit in being around here for a long period of time, but I remember very well in January of 2009, when the new President of the United States and, in a spirit of enthusiasm and bipartisanship, the Senate, on the first day of the inauguration, approved of seven Cabinet members, seven—not two, as we are presently contemplating, but seven. All of those individuals, as I recall, had some degree of concern about them, had some degree of controversy—some more, some less. But the fact is, we moved forward and almost unanimously voted in favor of these Cabinet members for the simple reason that the American people had spoken, and we had a new President of a different party, and we ought to give that President the team that he needed in order to get his job done.

Now, the one difference between what I have seen here in 2017, since 2009, is that the world is on fire. Look at the world today, and look at a map of it in 2009. There weren't 6 million refugees out of Syria. There weren't 400,000 people murdered by Bashar al-Assad with the assistance of Vladimir Putin and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. We didn't have Russians using precision-guided weapons, striking hospitals in Aleppo, slaughtering innocent men, women, and children. We didn't have the Chinese acting in the most belligerent fashion in the South China Sea, asserting their sovereignty over an