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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the fountain of every blessing, we praise You for Your loving kindness and tender mercies. We are astounded by Your wonderful works to the children of humanity. Lord, we are incomplete without You. Fill our thirst for the knowledge of the sacred with Your Divine wisdom.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to do Your will. May they bring love where there is hate, light where there is darkness, and hope where there is despair. Lord, use them to transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows and to bring harmony from disharmony. May they rejoice because of the blessing of sins forgiven, striving to glorify You in all they do.

And Lord, stay close to those affected by the bombing in Manchester, England.

We pray in Your great 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. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

MANCHESTER ATTACK

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, before I say anything else this morning, I

want to say this: What we saw in Manchester last night almost defies description. It was, in the words of Prime Minister May, a “callous terror attack” that stood out “for its appalling, sickening cowardice, deliberately targeting innocent, defenseless children and young people, who should have been enjoying one of the most memorable nights of their lives.”

Although we will continue to learn more about what happened, this much is very clear: Many have died, many more have been injured, and, as the Prime Minister told us, many of them were children. It is hard to imagine the pain the families of these victims must be feeling today. On behalf of the Senate and our country, let me express our heartfelt condolences to the victims, their families, and to the British people, who have been our friends and allies through many challenges.

The Senate also recognizes the many first responders, medical professionals, and citizens who stepped in to provide help.

As I speak, I know that the intelligence professionals from both of our countries are already working to discover whether this was the result of an individual attacker or directed by ISIL. In either case, the people of America will stand with our allies and provide any assistance we possibly can.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET AND TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as colleagues know, it is once again the time of the year when Congress gets to work putting together the next budget. One of the initial steps in the process is typically for the President to send up a blueprint of his own laying out his priorities, as Members continue to work through conversations here as well.

The President's budget is being released this morning, and here are a few things we should know about it already: It builds on the progress made

earlier this month on defense, prioritizing more of the resources our servicemembers need. It builds on progress made earlier this month on border security, calling for investing in more of the infrastructure and technology our law enforcement officers actually need. And, unlike any of President Obama's budget blueprints, this one actually achieves balance.

The provisions I mentioned are encouraging to see. I am sure they will serve as guideposts for Chairman ENZI and the Budget Committee as they move forward on this matter.

I also appreciate the President's commitment to slowing the growth of mandatory spending, which, if left unaddressed, could eventually limit our ability to invest in nearly anything else as the debt—and the interest we have to pay on it—increases and crowds out spending on other major priorities.

This Thursday, Treasury Secretary Mnuchin will testify in front of the Finance Committee on the budget blueprint and, with it, the administration's interest in tax reform. I know we are all eager to learn more from him and look forward to working with the administration to make our Tax Code simpler and fairer for the American people and American businesses.

Over the years, our tax system has grown only more complex and more punitive, putting both individuals and employers at a disadvantage, while also inadvertently incentivizing American companies and jobs to leave this country to go overseas. It is evident that we need serious reforms to our Tax Code, the type that will help families keep more of their hard-earned money, while also helping businesses put more Americans to work.

By implementing tax reform, we can again encourage investment in our country, allowing American businesses to expand, hire more workers, improve wages, and offer better benefits. In turn, families will have access to more

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



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opportunities and will be better positioned to actually get ahead.

It has been over three decades since we passed comprehensive tax reform, and it is past time we do something about it. Fortunately, we now have an administration that shares this interest in finally improving our tax system instead of making it even more convoluted and constricting—and without demanding \$1 trillion in new taxes for the government.

Easing the burden on the middle class and getting the economy moving again are top concerns here in the Republican Senate. We understand that for the past 8 years, too many families struggled under the weight of an economy that failed to reach its potential, too many took home wages that didn't meet their needs, and too many saw opportunity slip away. We understand that these families deserve a change in direction and expect each of us to do what we can to get the economy moving again soon. That is why we passed legislation to provide relief from Obama-era regulations that stifle growth, and it is why we will keep working to advance more legislative solutions to help hard-working Americans. Tax reform is one way we can do just that.

This is an area where Republicans and Democrats have been able to find some common ground in the past, and I am hopeful our friends across the aisle will join us in working toward comprehensive tax reform one more time. Either way, the Republican Senate remains committed to enacting tax reform so we can help encourage American investment, boost job creation, and promote wage growth all across our country.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume

consideration of the Sullivan nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of John J. Sullivan, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11 a.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 54, Courtney Elwood to be General Counsel of the CIA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Courtney Elwood, of Virginia, to be General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Courtney Elwood, of Virginia, to be General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mitch McConnell, John Barrasso, Mike Crapo, Jerry Moran, Michael B. Enzi, James M. Inhofe, Richard Burr, Roger F. Wicker, Pat Roberts, Shelley Moore Capito, Thom Tillis, Orrin G. Hatch, Marco Rubio, John Boozman, John Cornyn, John Hoeven, James E. Risch.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume consideration of the Sullivan nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

If no one yields time, the time will be charged equally to the two sides.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

MANCHESTER ATTACK

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, the Senate's thoughts and prayers go out to everyone in Manchester, England. Such violence is particularly heartbreaking when it happens, as it did in Manchester, at a concert with so many young people there to enjoy.

We mourn the families of the victims of last night's terrorist attack. We hope the perpetrators are quickly found and brought to justice. I saw on TV a mother waiting, trying to email and text her daughter. She got no answer. She was wondering where her daughter was. It brought back the horrible memories for me after 9/11, the day after, when I went up there and saw hundreds of people holding up signs: "Have you seen my wife Evelyn?" "Have you seen my son John," not knowing if they were alive or dead. Most of them ended up being dead.

We hope and pray that mother, and all the other mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters who are waiting for news that maybe their child, their relative, is alive, will find them alive. Our prayers go out to them.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. President, now, on another matter completely, last night, it was reported in the Washington Post that President Trump attempted to enlist the Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats, and the Director of the National Security Agency, Admiral Rogers, in helping the administration push back against reports in the press about an investigation into the President's campaign and its potential ties to Russia.

According to the same reporting, White House staff may also have "sounded out top intelligence officials about the possibility of intervening directly" with the FBI and Mr. Comey to get them to drop the investigation into General Flynn.

If these reports are accurate, it is another piece of now-mounting evidence that this White House has no interest—no interest—in allowing the Russia investigation to proceed without partisan interference, and the White House seems to have little respect for the principles of the rule of law. We have not quite seen anything like it in a very long time.

Such allegations only reinforce the correctness of the decision to appoint Special Counsel Mueller to oversee the investigation and should strengthen our resolve to ensure that he is insulated from interference from this White House. Such allegations also strengthen, again, the need for an independent, nonpartisan FBI Director.

With all these reports of attempts to interfere with the investigation, we cannot have an FBI Director who has a political background, who doesn't seem right down the middle, who doesn't