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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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, our shelter and shield, today we remember 9/11. As we recall the tragedy, infamy, and heroism of that day, we better understand that freedom isn't free. We remember how the pain united us so that we knew we were not hyphenated Americans but one people. Infuse us in these contentious times with a similar spirit of oneness, inspiring us to work for the well-being of all people.

Lord, we are grateful for the protection You have provided us for the 16 years since that calamitous day. May we continue to trust You to be our refuge for the future of this land we love. Continue to use our lawmakers as instruments of Your peace as they strive to make justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

We pray in Your strong 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.

MOMENT OF SILENCE IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE LIVES LOST IN THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will observe a moment of silence in remembrance of the lives lost in the attacks of September 11, 2001.

(Moment of silence.)

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11 AND HURRICANE IRMA DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today we opened the Senate with a moment of silence. We remember all those lost 16 years ago on September 11, 2001, the day that changed our Nation in profound ways.

It wrenched our hearts with grief. It opened our eyes to cruel threats from afar. But it could neither extinguish the basic decency that unites us as a people nor the common humanity that defines us as a nation.

It could not stop first responders from rushing toward danger to save others. It could not stop Americans from donating to strangers in need or volunteering their time to help. It could not stop the people of our country from being who they are: kind, caring, compassionate.

It is the same spirit we see again in response to Hurricane Harvey. It is the same spirit that is giving hope to those in the path of Hurricane Irma. Although the full extent of Irma's impact will not be known for some time, it is clear that this intense storm is causing widespread damage, and it is clear that the recovery will require a massive undertaking. Our thoughts are with those in the areas affected by Irma.

We are again prepared to play our role in the recovery. Congress passed a critical downpayment on disaster relief last week. If more assistance is required due to Irma, we are ready to do what is needed.

What is most important, I think, is the knowledge that the American people and our first responders will again be there to reach out to do whatever is needed to help. That is especially true on a day like today.

We will never forget the thousands of innocent lives taken from us 16 years ago. We will never forget the heroism of our first responders and the compassion of our neighbors, nor will we forget the thousands of men and women who have stood guard to protect us every day since.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, our servicemembers voluntarily put their lives on the line to protect us, and, in return, we must keep our commitments to them. Today we will begin debate on the National Defense Authorization Act, the bill that allows Congress to authorize resources, capabilities, and the pay and benefits our men and women need to perform their missions.

For more than five decades, Congress has acted every year to fulfill this responsibility by passing the Defense authorization bill. We will have our opportunity to do so again this week. This legislation, which was reported out of committee unanimously, will signal support for our servicemembers with more of the capabilities they need to be successful against an array of threats all across the globe.

After years of failed defense policy under the previous administration, this year's NDAA will make significant and necessary strides toward keeping America safer. It will do so by authorizing the beginning steps to rebuild our military, to invest in modernization, and to restore readiness; by reforming the Pentagon and reducing waste; by restoring missile defense and responding to cyber threats; and by reviving troop morale with a pay increase they deserve and continued reform of the benefits that they and their families rely on.

I think it is fair to say that no Senator understands the importance of this legislation quite like Senator

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



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