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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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MCCAIN, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee. His commitment to our Nation's heroes is unfailing, which is why, amidst his own battles, Chairman MCCAIN has returned to the Senate to manage this bill and see it through passage. We are all proud to have him with us now.

As we begin considering this bipartisan defense authorization, Members from both sides will have opportunities to work with Senator MCCAIN and to offer amendments. Ultimately, we will keep working to find consensus so that we can pass this critical defense legislation without further delay.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, 16 years ago today, my city, our country, changed forever. On September 11, 2001, our country was attacked; the World Trade Center towers fell; the Pentagon was in flames; and the smoke rising from an empty field in Pennsylvania reminded us that as cataclysmic as the attack was, the conspirators had planned even greater destruction.

It was a day of fear and helplessness, of phones ringing endlessly—when they worked—husbands calling wives, wives calling husbands, folks in search of brothers, sisters, neighbors, and colleagues.

I will never forget the next day. President Bush provided a plane so that Senator Clinton and I could fly back to New York. The smell of death was in the air. Lined up outside before you entered into the grounds where the Twin Towers were, were hundreds of people with little signs with pictures: Have you seen my father Jim? Have you seen my daughter Mary? That will stay with me forever.

More than 3,000 souls were taken from us—a guy I had played basketball with in high school, a businessman who had helped me on my way up, a firefighter with whom I had done blood drives. It was one of the bloodiest days on American soil since the Civil War.

On September 12, 2001, I called on Americans to wear the flag in a sign of solidarity. Every day since, I have worn this flag in remembrance of those who were lost and those brave souls who died rushing to the towers to find those who still might be alive. God willing, I will wear it every day of my life for the rest of my life.

September 11 was one of those before-and-after moments. Nothing has been the same since. We awakened to a new manner of evil that had previously been beyond our imagination.

But on this day, as we solemnly remember those who were taken from us, let us also remember what that day revealed about us. "On a normal day, we value heroism because it is uncom-

mon," wrote Nancy Gibbs of Time Magazine 3 days after the attack. "On Sept. 11, we valued heroism because it was everywhere."

Firefighters and police and union workers searched, undaunted, through dust and smoke, through fire and ash, for citizens who might still be alive, trapped in the rubble. Average Americans pulled the wounded to safety. Folks from coast to coast lined up for blood drives and pooled their money for donations.

I will never forget the picture of a man who owned a shoe store two blocks north of the towers and was giving out shoes to everyone because they didn't have theirs on as they rushed to get out of the towers—just a small act of charity and selflessness. It was repeated over and over again because those kinds of acts are deep in the American soul.

This morning I came from the 9/11 Memorial in New York City. Where once there were mighty towers, now there are two deep scars in the Earth. But all around the memorial, New York City is alive and thriving.

In the days after, they wrote it off. They said that no one would live south of Canal or Chamber Street, companies would flee, and New York's greatest days were over. But we New Yorkers are a tough breed. We rebuilt. We came back stronger.

On this day, we should always remember that beside our distinctive spirit of independence, resilience, and uncommon heroism are essential parts of the American character.

I do have to say how proud I am of my city. Downtown is bustling, and 50,000 people live there who didn't live there before. Businesses have relocated. It is a new "in" area. Bin Laden is gone. The evil men with him are gone. We thrive.

God bless America.

HURRICANE IRMA DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as Hurricane Irma continues to buffet Florida, our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Florida and the rest of the Southeast that is in the storm's path. The Democratic caucus and I stand ready to work with the majority leader and his caucus, members of the administration, and officials in Florida to provide them with the resources and aid they need.

Just as we were able to speedily pass an aid package after Harvey, I expect we will come together to support rescue and recovery efforts in the wake of Hurricane Irma and in some of the other disasters, particularly the fires out west.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this week we will begin consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act, as

we do each year. As usual, there are hundreds of amendments that have already been filed and a whole lot of tough issues to consider. We Democrats want to work in a constructive and productive manner to process as many of these amendments as possible and work through even the most difficult of issues.

I know that Chairman MCCAIN and Ranking Member REED have an excellent working relationship, as well as a great deal of respect for one another. I hope they can build a strong managers' package that will be acceptable to both sides.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 2810, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 175, H.R. 2810, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, when we finish this period of morning business, which is open to speeches and statements on many different topics, we will then go to the Defense authorization bill. Our process in the Senate is to authorize spending and then to appropriate the money for the actual spending. Occasionally, those two things are in sync, but many times they are not. I am afraid that what we face today is uncertainty.

Senator MCCAIN, who is the chairman of the defense authorization committee, will bring his proposal to the floor, but it is at a spending level that is not allowed by current law. The Budget Control Act will not allow Senator MCCAIN or the Senate to spend at