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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BEN SASSE, a Senator from the State of Nebraska.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, our shelter in the time of storms, thank You for Your mercies that are new each day. Lord, through many dangers You have brought us, and we would not be guilty of ingratitude. We are grateful for catastrophes that haven't happened, for the unseen angels who have guarded our Nation and those we love. May our lawmakers remember that all efforts to defend ourselves will fail without Your sovereign will and loving providence. May our Senators not put their trust only in their ingenuity and courage but instead lean on You, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Today, lead our legislators on right paths as they trust You to clear the road on which they travel. Order their steps and direct their way, training them in Your school of humility so that they will strive to bring glory to You.

We pray in Your Holy 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, December 12, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BEN SASSE, a Senator from the State of Nebraska, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

NOMINATION OF DON WILLETT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate advanced the nomination of Mr. Leonard Steven Grasz to be a judge on the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals. Mr. Grasz has sterling credentials and strong support from the Nebraska legal community. I proudly voted to advance his nomination, and the Senate will confirm him soon.

Next, we will vote to advance the nomination of another well-qualified individual, Texas Supreme Court Justice Don Willett, to serve on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Justice Willett respects the rule of law and our foundational legal principles, and he will be a strong addition to the Fifth Circuit.

His story is an inspirational one. Adopted at a young age and raised by a widowed mother in a town of 32 people, he was the first person in his family to graduate from high school. As our colleague Senator CORNYN said at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, "Justice Willett's life [reflects] the best of Texas, and the best of America."

From these humble beginnings, Justice Willett has led a remarkable ca-

reer. After graduating from Duke School of Law, he clerked for Judge Jerre Williams of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, the panel he has now been nominated to join.

He spent a short time in private practice before entering public service in then-Gov. George W. Bush's administration as a legal and policy adviser. When President Bush entered the White House, Justice Willett joined him as the Special Assistant to the President. In that role, he helped shape the domestic legal policy of the Bush administration, especially in the President's efforts to increase charitable activities in neighborhoods across the Nation.

The next year, he became Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy. There, he oversaw both civil and criminal policy initiatives, including what became the PROTECT Act of 2003, which increased law enforcement's ability to prevent and prosecute violent crimes against children.

Afterward, Justice Willett returned to Texas to serve as the Deputy Attorney General for Legal Counsel. As the top legal aide to then-Attorney General Greg Abbott, he advised the office on a wide variety of legal matters.

In 2005, he was appointed to serve as a justice on the Texas Supreme Court. Elected to a full term in 2006 and re-elected in 2012, Justice Willett has served with distinction on the Texas high court now for over a decade. During that time, he has ruled fairly and impartially.

Four of his former colleagues on the Texas Supreme Court wrote a letter to the Judiciary Committee supporting Justice Willett's nomination. They wrote, "His demonstrated belief is that the courts should enforce both constitutional rights and constitutional limitations and uphold the rule of law, but not enforce a personal agenda."

"On occasion," they continued, "we did not agree with each other or with

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



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