

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.

Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence therefore it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest guided by justice shall counsel.

Why forgo the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor, or caprice?

It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world—so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it, for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to existing engagements (I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy)—I repeat it therefore, let those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But in my opinion it is unnecessary and would be unwise to extend them.

Taking care always to keep ourselves, by suitable establishments, on a respectably defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand: neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things; diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce but forcing nothing; establishing with powers so disposed—in order to give to trade a stable course, to define the rights of our merchants, and to enable the government to support them—conventional rules of intercourse, the best that present cir-

cumstances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied, as experience and circumstances shall dictate; constantly keeping in view, that it is folly in one nation to look for disinterested favors from another—that it must pay with a portion of its independence for whatever it may accept under that character—that by such acceptance it may place itself in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favors and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish—that they will control the usual current of the passions or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations. But if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good, that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism—this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare by which they have been dictated.

How far in the discharge of my official duties I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public records and other evidences of my conduct must witness to you and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

In relation to the still subsisting war in Europe, my proclamation of the 22d of April 1793 is the index to my plan. Sanctioned by your approving voice and by that of your representatives in both houses of Congress, the spirit of that measure has continually governed me, uninfluenced by any attempts to deter or divert me from it.

After deliberate examination with the aid of the best lights I could obtain, I was well satisfied that our country, under all the circumstances of the case, had a right to take—and was bound in duty and interest to take—a neutral position. Having taken it, I determined, as far as should depend upon me, to maintain it with moderation, perseverance, and firmness.

The considerations which respect the right to hold this conduct it is not necessary on this occasion to detail. I will only observe that, according to my understanding of the matter, that right, so far from being denied by any of the belligerent powers, has been virtually admitted by all.

The duty of holding a neutral conduct may be inferred, without anything

more, from the obligation which justice and humanity impose on every nation, in cases in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity towards other nations.

The inducements of interest for observing that conduct will best be referred to your own reflections and experience. With me, a predominant motive has been to endeavor to gain time to our country to settle and mature its yet recent institutions and to progress without interruption to that degree of strength and consistency which is necessary to give it, humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes.

Though in reviewing the incidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.

Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it which is so natural to a man who views in it the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several generations, I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat, in which I promise myself to realize without alloy the sweet enjoyment of partaking in the midst of my fellow citizens the benign influence of good laws under a free government—the ever favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors and dangers.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

UNITED STATES, 19th September 1796.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in the wake of the horrific shootings at Stoneman Douglas High School, the deadliest school shooting since Sandy Hook, there has been a broad national conversation about the epidemic of gun violence in this country. It is being led

by a group of brave high school students, the friends and classmates of the fallen, whom I will be sitting down with tomorrow. Their passion and eloquence have been a moral course for change.

Thank God for these students. They are urging us now to have a debate in Congress about something very straightforward: What can we do to stop very dangerous guns from getting into the hands of very dangerous people? How can we keep Americans safe at our movie theaters, at night clubs, at concerts and churches, and above all, at our schools?

We need to get something real and significant accomplished. The problem of gun violence in this country is too immediate for another delay, too severe for half measures.

President Trump has been talking about comprehensive background checks. We are glad to hear that. We are glad that folks are finally starting to talk about the real issues of gun safety again. Democrats believe that, at the very least, in the wake of Parkland, we should strive for comprehensive background checks—closing the loopholes that allow anyone, regardless of a violent history or a history of mental illness, to walk into a gun show or go on the internet and purchase a gun. More than 90 percent of Americans and the vast majority of gun owners support comprehensive background checks. What are we waiting for?

There seems to be a discussion about a more limited proposal, the Fix NICS bill, sponsored by Senators CORNYN and MURPHY, which improves the existing background check system in a few ways. I support the bill and I am a co-sponsor, but the Fix NICS bill is not what President Trump has been talking about this afternoon and at other times when he says “comprehensive background checks.” Fix NICS was written to address one specific issue that was brought to light after the horrific shooting in a church in Sutherland Springs, TX. It is a proposal to address that specific problem, but it leaves unaddressed a host of crucial gun safety issues, including, and especially, the loopholes in our background check system. If we only pass Fix NICS, we will be right back here after the next shooting in nearly the same place. If all Congress does in response to the Parkland shooting is to pass Fix NICS, we will not be doing our job. We must do much more than that.

This week, the Democratic caucus will discuss what policies we believe will most effectively curb the uniquely American epidemic of gun violence. We will propose them and work with our Republican colleagues to perfect and, hopefully, enact them. I sincerely believe we can make progress even on an issue as fraught as this one, but it will require our Republican friends to break free from the iron grip of the NRA.

Our Republican friends face a simple choice: Do something real on guns or please the NRA. Doing both is impossible.

The NRA’s No. 1 goal is to make sure nothing meaningful on gun safety ever happens. When there are national issues, when there are horrible shootings, they make a feint as if they might try to do something, but then they pull right back because they want nothing to be done.

As an example, after the shooting in Las Vegas, Senators tried to do something here in the Senate about bump stocks, the modification that allowed the perpetrator to automatically fire his arsenal of assault weapons. The NRA and many Republicans said that they would be willing to work on it, but then what? The NRA pushed the weakest possible measure—a simple review of the issue by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, which had already said that they couldn’t do anything about the bill. And then what happened? Nothing.

Now the NRA has pushed the House Republicans to attach the Fix NICS bill—the Cornyn-Murphy bill, a very modest improvement focused on one issue that happened in Texas, but it was not relevant to what happened here in Parkland. They tried to attach that to the NRA’s No. 1 legislative priority, concealed carry reciprocity, a bill that undermines our existing gun laws, defeating the entire purpose of the legislation.

Even when it comes to the most modest improvements to gun safety laws, the NRA always finds a way to stand in the way of progress. If we are going to get something significant done to keep our schools and our kids safe from gun violence, for the first time in a very long time, President Trump and congressional Republicans will have to buck the NRA.

It is our hope that Republican leaders will work with us in a bipartisan way to pass legislation that makes a real difference—not half measures, not baby steps, and certainly not attaching good legislation to legislation that would make the overall problem even worse.

We hope Republicans will work with us to pass serious changes to our gun laws, whether the NRA supports them or not. That is the only way we will make progress on an issue that has frustrated Congress and the vast majority of the American people for far too long.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on another matter, last week the Republican-led FCC formally published a rule reversing net neutrality—the legal infrastructure that kept the internet free and open to all Americans. The FCC’s rule will give the ISP—the internet service providers—the authority to restrict customers’ access to their favorite websites by forcing consumers to buy internet packages, such as cable, and pay more for premium access.

In this new universe, big companies that can pay to play could get faster

internet service while startups and everyday Americans are stuck in the slow lane. It will mean the end of the free and open internet as we know it. The way the internet has driven innovation and entrepreneurship and the way it has provided unprecedented opportunities for Americans to learn and connect with one another could all change, with a profit-making organization at the toll booth deciding who pays what.

We have an opportunity to save the internet by undoing the FCC’s ruling through the Congressional Review Act. All 49 Democrats have already signed on to the bill, and one Republican, SUSAN COLLINS, has joined us. We now need only one more vote, one more Republican, to reverse the FCC’s ruling here in the Senate.

When we force a vote on this bill, for the first time, Republicans in Congress will have the opportunity to right the administration’s wrong and show the American people whose side they are on—the average consumer or once again side with big corporate interests. Are they on the side of big internet service providers and corporations, or are they on the side of consumers, entrepreneurs, startups, and small business owners?

Tomorrow there will be a net neutrality day of action here on the Hill that I hope will focus the Senate’s attention on the issue. We have 60 legislative days to pass the CRA, and I urge every single one of my Republican colleagues to join us and help save the internet.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Elizabeth L. Branch, of Georgia, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO MARIAN BENTON TASCO

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate Black History Month and to pay tribute to a Pennsylvanian who has dedicated her life to public service.

Today, we honor former Philadelphia councilwoman Marian Benton Tasco, whose 50-year career in public service has improved the lives of countless people in our State. Throughout her career, Marian Tasco consistently fought for the people of her community. From her first days as a typist working in the city of Philadelphia to the end of her seventh term serving on