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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.

God, our Lord, You are the light of the world. In Your light, we see our lives and know our poverty. Illuminate our path with the brightness of Your abundance. Supply our needs from Your celestial bounty.

Bless our Senators. Lord, You know their lives, hearts, and thoughts. Give them the wisdom to refuse to deviate from integrity. Equip them with strength and spirit to trust You, even when they don't understand Your providential guidance. Guide their words so that those with whom they work will seek common ground for the good of our Nation and world.

And Lord, surround the United States Senate page spring class of 2018 with the shield of Your Divine favor. Thank You for their faithful service.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF KENNETH MARCUS AND THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, today the Senate will consider the

nomination of Kenneth Marcus to serve as the Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. His resume includes degrees from Williams College and the California Berkeley School of Law, and his career has spanned private practice and public service, with considerable experience in government. I look forward to voting to confirm Mr. Marcus later today.

Then, the Senate will resume consideration of the John S. McCain 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. It is the result of serious bipartisan work over the past several months.

Our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee have engaged in candid discussions with our Nation's top military leaders. They have heard about the pressing needs of the men and women who serve in harm's way: greater readiness, enhanced weapons capabilities in the air and on the seas, simpler processes for acquisition, and more support for military families.

This week we have already discussed the array of global challenges that face our Nation at this critical moment. This NDAA will help to equip our troops with the latest training and the best technology to confront those challenges and to keep us safe.

It is also important to reflect on all that this legislation will do for our warfighters and their families here at home. It will increase base pay for servicemembers by 2.6 percent, the largest annual raise in nearly a decade. It authorizes new resources for family housing construction, improved care for servicemembers' children with severe disabilities, and programs to better manage opioid prescriptions in the military health system.

It will authorize continued operations at military posts across our country that build up our Nation's security and form the backbone of local communities.

The servicemembers who serve at Kentucky's Army installations and in the Kentucky Air and Army National

Guard are critical to our overall national defense strategy. I am proud to represent them here in the Senate.

Fort Campbell is home to the 101st Airborne Division and a number of Special Operations units. In recent years, many of these servicemembers have seen a near-constant cycle of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The NDAA ensures that they are not forgotten. Fort Knox hosts the Army's Human Resources Command and Recruiting Command, where the NDAA will help to modernize officer personnel management, and this year's legislation paves the way for new construction projects at both these facilities.

In Madison County, the Blue Grass Army Depot is responsible for storing and demilitarizing conventional and legacy chemical weapons. It is a top-of-the-line facility, integral to our national security. Passing this NDAA will help to ensure that it can continue safe and effective operations.

It is my privilege to represent the men and women of the Kentucky Air and Army National Guard, including the 123rd Airlift Wing. This legislation will reaffirm our commitment to these citizen soldiers and airmen who are always ready to respond to emergencies at home or threats from abroad.

Kentucky is indeed proud of our men and women in uniform. When I vote for this Defense bill, I will be casting my vote for them.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, 16 months ago, President Trump and Republican majorities arrived in Washington with clear instructions from the American people: Get the Federal Government out of the way. A decade of Democratic control meant that taxes were too high, regulations were too burdensome, and America was too difficult a place to start a small business or hire more workers.

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



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