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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 27, 2018, at 12 noon.

Senate

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2018

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.

O Lord, our God, how excellent is Your Name in all the Earth. We continue to be astonished that You have chosen us to work for Your Kingdom. Give us the wisdom to strive to ensure that Your will is done on Earth even as it is done in Heaven.

Lord, we are grateful that You have surrounded us with the beauty of the Earth and the glory of the skies. We praise You for the opportunities to spend our lives for causes greater than ourselves.

Today, direct the steps of our Senators, opening doors that no one can shut and closing doors that no one can open, according to the wisdom of Your loving providence.

We pray in Your great 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KYL). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, Members of Congress are making their way back to the Nation's Capital after celebrating Thanksgiving with folks at home, with their friends and their families. To me, this holiday offered a little bit of respite and time for reflection—a time to pause with our families and to think about what we have to be grateful for.

This year, I am particularly thankful for the organizations I met with when I was home in Texas that donated a lot of their most valuable resource—their time. Thousands took time out of their family celebrations to provide meals and assistance to those less fortunate. I had the opportunity to join the ranks of some of my other volunteers, like

Mayor Steve Adler of Austin, with whom I served meals at the H-E-B Feast of Sharing in Austin. I also donned an apron and gloves to help prepare turkey for the annual Raul Jimenez Thanksgiving Dinner in San Antonio, where more than 50 companies and 4,000 volunteers partnered to cook and serve meals. In 1979, Raul Jimenez, who is famous in San Antonio for his contributions there and has now left us, started this dinner with the goal of feeding 100 of San Antonio's elderly families and those less fortunate. Thirty-nine years later, his daughter and grandson, Raul Jimenez III, carry on this tradition and serve meals to feed 25,000 hungry San Antonians.

During the holiday season, we all have a chance to express our gratitude by extending a helping hand, providing a meal, or maybe simply offering words of encouragement. I was grateful I was able to join with some of the remarkable and selfless volunteers doing just that when I was back home. I want to make sure we bring that same attitude back to Congress, where I have the privilege of representing 28 million of my fellow Texans—not only the attitude of gratitude for the great privilege of living in a country such as ours but also feeling the weight of responsibility to actually produce results for them.

My discussions with my constituents when I was back home ran the gamut of possible topics, but what I keep hearing is that they feel as if they are doing much better economically. They see an economy that has been invigorated, and, yes, they have a little bit

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



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more money in their pockets to spend on holiday gifts.

When I enter the beltway in Washington, I don't read a whole lot about how well people are doing, the confidence and enthusiasm they have in their station in life and their prospects for the future. Mainly what we see on cable TV and on social media is how Congress is fraught with divisiveness and burdened by partisan politics that paralyzes us from getting anything done. We see this narrative splashed across headlines and picked apart on cable news shows.

When I go back home, I find that most of my constituents aren't particularly concerned with who is up and who is down in the purely partisan politics they see going on in the Nation's Capital. They are concerned about making their lives and their families' lives better, putting food on the table, and enjoying the fruits of their labor. They want to see their elected officials likewise doing the same and solving the real issues that affect their lives.

I think it is important to reflect on what this Senate and this Congress have been able to do over the last 2 years under this new administration. I think our record is pretty clear, and, of course, Americans responded by giving us an even greater majority—the Republican leadership in the Senate—next Congress.

In the last 2 years, we promoted policies to foster economic growth and job creation and opportunities for all Americans regardless of their station in life. By doing that, we made historic gains, and I want to mention a few of those now.

Let's start with the Tax Code—the first time in 31 years the Tax Code has been tackled and reformed. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act lowered tax rates across the board for every tax bracket, doubled the child tax credit, and helped American businesses become more competitive in the global economy.

The savings created by these reforms have been real for Americans across the country. They mean an extra tank of gas each month, more food on the table, or a month's worth of rent. For parents, they mean that textbooks for their kids and school supplies are well within financial reach and saving a little bit more for that college education is now possible.

Robert from Wylie, TX, wrote me recently to say that he and his daughter have been “pleasantly surprised” by the increases in their paychecks. Robert said that he “appreciate[s] the effort put forth by the current administration and look[s] forward to more being done to help the average American worker.”

American workers are the ones who have been left behind in the past and told to expect the new normal of stagnant economic growth and slow wage growth, but they are exactly the ones who are being helped the most now by these changes in tax and regulatory policies. It started with the tax reform

legislation, and I think the regulatory reforms we have been able to enact have made a big difference as well.

The Texas Workforce Commission announced recently that our State hit record-low unemployment in October, while the Department of Commerce announced that the State's economy grew 6 percent in the second quarter. That is a red-hot, growing economy. These were monumental leaps forward that were felt in all corners of our State.

Confidence in the economy across the country is at its highest level since 2004; small business owners—the primary engine of job creation in our country—confidence is at record-high levels; and optimism among U.S. manufacturers has soared to an alltime high. Is this a coincidence? I don't think so. Is this a result of policies produced years ago during a previous administration, as some people would claim? I don't think so. But we have done some important things on a bipartisan basis, together, such as removing some of the burdensome Dodd-Frank banking regulations so that we can expand access to capital, which means more loan money available for small businesses and families and particularly for farmers and the farming community.

We took important steps to reduce the regulatory burdens on all employers and job-seekers alike by giving States the tools to remove barriers to certain professions through occupational licensing reform. Some of the occupational licensing requirements in our States are basically nothing but incumbent protection, trying to freeze out people who wanted to learn a new skill, only to learn that it was uneconomical to do so or that the licensure requirement made that burden too high.

We also worked to help provide for our veterans—a noble undertaking in and of itself—and those who make the transition from military life to civilian life. One bill we passed, called the Jobs for Our Heroes Act, makes it easier for veterans to get commercial driver's licenses, and the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act makes sure veterans get hired by local law enforcement agencies when they come out of the military with the very skills that are needed by our police agencies that are working to keep our communities safe.

In each of these cases, we tried to listen to what my constituents and our constituents were telling us so we could implement targeted changes meant to improve the lives of the people we are honored to represent.

Particularly around Thanksgiving but year-round, I am reminded of how grateful I am for the sacrifices made by those who have served our country in the past and those who presently wear the uniform of the U.S. military. Many times, they are the very ones who spend their holidays deployed overseas in places far away from their families.

I am proud of the historic effort we have made on a bipartisan basis to pro-

vide support to those who are currently serving our country and those who have previously served. That started with the Veterans' Administration, which was past due for reforms. This is an immense bureaucracy of more than I believe 330,000 employees. We needed to pull that agency into the 21st century to better serve the veterans under its charge.

I am sure GEN Omar Bradley, who led the VA after World War II, would not recognize the system in place today, what we have transformed the VA into, but he would have recognized it as it previously existed because it basically was the same system that had been in place since World War II. Now we have taken important steps, such as passing the historic VA MIS- SION Act, which modernized the veterans' appeals process and the electronic healthcare system. We reformed veterans' healthcare benefits and improved accountability within the VA, and we provided the largest funding increase in history for veterans' care and services.

When it comes to other institutions that help provide safety and security for the American people, we were able to provide for the men and women of the Coast Guard with bipartisan support. Our bill ensures that the Coast Guard can continue to protect our ports, stop illegal drugs from reaching our borders, and save lives.

Earlier this year, we made the greatest investment in our military in history with the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for the 58th consecutive year. This was appropriately named for our friend and colleague Senator John McCain. The Defense bill supports our men and women in uniform by providing the tools and resources they need to keep our country safe and includes the largest boost to servicemembers' pay in 10 years.

It is especially noteworthy that this year will mark the first time in about a decade that the Defense Department will not operate under a temporary spending measure, known as a continuing resolution. That is important. Because of bipartisan support, we have funded roughly 75 percent of the government so far—we still have more to do—on time and through regular order. In fact, we passed the most on time appropriations bills in 22 years.

In addition to these historic strides, we also passed landmark legislation to combat the drug addiction crisis that has plagued every corner of the country. This bill is designed to help stem the tide of drugs flooding across our borders but also help those who are suffering from drug addiction get the recovery support they need. We also continued to support communities by passing first-of-its-kind legislation to make our schools safer and stop online sex trafficking.

I think each one of these successes is worthy of mention because the legislative record of this current Congress—this 115th Congress—is pretty remarkable, one of the most productive since

my time in the Senate. It has meant unprecedented victories for American workers and families and communities, as well as our servicemembers. We still have a mission, though—we need to finish out the 115th Congress as strong as we began it, and we only have a few weeks left to do that. That starts by continuing our historic pace of confirming the President's judicial nominees, which already total more than 80, with 2 Supreme Court Justices confirmed in the 115th Congress in the last 2 years.

In the coming weeks, we will continue our work on the farm bill to provide support for our Nation's ag community. In my home State, one out of seven working Texans gains their income from working in the agriculture sector. Everyone has heard the saying "Thank a farmer three times a day." It is the farmers and ranchers in the Lone Star State whom I think of when I hear that. Texans know as well as anybody the unpredictability of Mother Nature, which can ruin a crop or an entire season in the blink of an eye. That is why passing a farm bill is important—to give our farmers and ranchers the predictability and the certainty they need and deserve insofar as we can since we can't control Mother Nature.

As you can see, we have our work cut out for us in these remaining weeks. I mentioned earlier that Americans chose to send Senate Republicans back to Washington with an even greater majority, but Americans also chose a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives. Leader MCCONNELL recently called the Senate "fertile soil for bipartisan work," and that is true. It is the way the Senate is constructed and built with our unique rules when it comes to considering and voting on legislation. We are ripe for the possibilities of solving some of the biggest legislative question marks facing our government and facing our Nation.

But now our friends in the House, with Democratic majorities, need to make a choice. They can either choose to make noise or they can choose to join us in making law and improving the lot of American citizens.

I am confident of what we will choose on this side of the aisle because we will do exactly as we have done over the last 2 years—continue to make substantial progress for the American family.

But we will want to make sure that we extend a hand to our Democratic colleagues in the House, and they can make their decision, I hope, to join us in continuing to make progress on the part of the American people and not just create more chaos and confusion and accentuate the divisiveness that we know already plagues our political system and our country.

It is important that we in Congress demonstrate that we are up to the challenge and that we are worthy of the trust of the people we represent—the American people.

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.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NOMINATION OF THOMAS FARR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first let me welcome everybody back from Thanksgiving, which I hope was a joyous one for everyone here today.

On a subject not so joyous, the majority leader has indicated that the Senate will move to the pending nomination of Thomas Farr to the Eastern District of North Carolina. I have been in the Senate long enough to see a whole bunch of questionable nominees, frankly, from both parties, but Thomas Farr is unquestionably one of the worst. It is hard to believe President Trump nominated him. It is even harder to believe Senate Republicans are considering him again.

This is a man who stands for disenfranchisement of voters, particularly minority voters. That is what he stands for. You can try to parse it any way you want, but that is what he has done. That is not America.

In addition, he has spent his long legal career working against the rights of unions, but he has demonstrated to be a dyed-in-the-wool partisan with particular hostility to voting rights. We all know North Carolina has done more to hurt voting rights than just about any other State. That is an ignominious title for a State that is trying to be more progressive and forward-looking. We all know that.

We also know Justice Roberts will go down in history as one of those who worked to take away voting rights when he authored the Shelby decision and more or less stated that he didn't believe discrimination existed any longer so we wouldn't need section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. That allowed people like Mr. Farr and those in North Carolina to do a wholesale taking away of voting rights, particularly those of minorities.

After challenging multiple congressional maps drawn by North Carolina's Democrats, Farr vigorously defended the congressional maps drawn by North Carolina's Republicans. Even this conservative Supreme Court, often so insensitive to the voting fairness and rights of minorities—the Supreme Court actually overturned this map for discrimination—not partisanship, discrimination.

Farr defended North Carolina's restrictive voting laws. The law, passed by a very conservative Republican legislature, requested data on the use by race of a number of voting practices. After receiving the data, North Carolina Republicans made five changes to voting and registration, every one of which disproportionately hurt the voting ability of African Americans.

Under the law, even citizens who showed government employee IDs, student IDs, or IDs used to receive public assistance were not allowed to vote.

Here is what the Fourth Circuit said—again, not a liberal court circuit. It said: The law had "discriminatory intent" and "targeted African Americans with almost surgical precision." Farr, as he defended this law, said it was a minor inconvenience for voters. This is despicable. That law is particularly designed to prevent African Americans from voting, and we are nominating such a man to the court of appeals, when he was chief cook and bottle washer for much of the time these laws came about. I don't care what your party is, and I don't care what your political ideology is. How can you elevate this man to the court?

Remarkably, Mr. Farr was involved in another sordid affair regarding the voting rights of African Americans. In 1990, Farr was a lawyer for the reelection campaign of Jesse Helms, during which the Department of Justice alleged that 120,000 postcards had been sent overwhelmingly to Black voters, intending to intimidate them from voting. Isn't that amazing? That man is the man we are elevating.

I believe the Republican Party is going to have huge trouble in the future and will shrug its shoulders or say: Oh, this is political correctness. No, it isn't. It is because they tolerate things just like this—not all but too many. Right now, we only have one person on the other side of the aisle who has said he will vote against Farr. I don't care what the marching orders are, they are wrong.

Here, in response to a question from Ranking Member FEINSTEIN, Farr denied that he had participated in any meetings in which the postcards were discussed before they were sent. However, the Deputy Chief of the Voting Section of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division said Farr's response was contrary to the facts. In effect, that DOJ person was saying Farr did participate. We don't know the exact circumstances of the mail, but at a minimum, it is disturbing that Farr was involved, often directly, in defending multiple attempts by North Carolina Republicans to disenfranchise African-American voters.

As the Congressional Black Caucus said, "Had the White House deliberately sought to identify an attorney in North Carolina with a more hostile record on African-American voting rights . . . than Thomas Farr, it could hardly have done so." It is well said.

I don't care if you are a Republican; I don't care if you are a Democrat or something in between, we should not elevate a person to the Federal bench who has spent a good part of his career defending those who want to undermine the rights of Americans to vote.

Let's look at the circumstances of this nomination. You know, MITCH MCCONNELL brags as to how many seats he has filled. These seats were held

back because we respected the blue slips when we were in the majority, and there were a lot of empty seats. Well, this one is the longest running judicial vacancy in the United States.

Why, you might ask, has the seat remained open for so long?

Republican Senators blocked two Obama nominees, both of whom were African-American women. Let me say that again. Republican Senators from North Carolina—they may not have been, but they were in the circuit—blocked two Obama nominees, both of whom were African-American women. Yet now we put this man in that place—all because Leader MCCONNELL and Chairman GRASSLEY changed the rules and eliminated the last bit of comity by eliminating the blue slip? Either of those women would have been the first African American ever—not just the first African American woman but the first African American ever—to serve in that judicial district, when the population of that district was 27 percent African American. Two women were knocked out by Republican Senators under the tradition of the blue slip—both African American—in a district that was 27 percent African American.

They are not on the bench, and we are nominating this man who has stood steadfastly against the right of people—in this case, Black people—to vote. That is despicable. Considering Farr's record on voting rights—on the disenfranchisement of African-American voters, in particular—his nomination to the Eastern District vacancy is not just a dash of salt in the wound, it is the whole shaker.

I plead with my Republican colleagues. After an election in which voting rights and voting suppression were major issues in States like Georgia and Florida and at a time when our President always says elections are fixed and that Americans should have faith in the wellspring of our democracy—the right to vote and to have votes counted and correctly tabulated in a fair way—what message does the Senate send if it approves Farr's nomination?

This is our democracy. For the first time in the history of America, nasty creatures are gnawing at its roots. The tree could fall down. I hope it will not. It is a strong tree, but it could fall down, and it will be aided and abetted by those who put people like Mr. Farr on the bench. I vociferously oppose his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

ACTING ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mr. President, one other point on Whitaker, the Acting Attorney General.

It has been almost 3 weeks since President Trump tapped Mr. Matthew Whitaker to be the Acting Attorney General. Since that time, I, along with Democratic Leader PELOSI and the ranking members of key committees in the House and Senate, have sent a letter to the Department of Justice, ask-

ing for a formal update on whether Mr. Whitaker must recuse himself from the Russia investigation given that he has had a long history of criticizing. We have not yet received a response. It has been 3 weeks with no response. I have also sent a letter to the Department of Justice, asking its inspector general to look into whether Mr. Whitaker and the White House had any improper or unlawful conversations prior to his appointment—again, no response.

In the meantime, we have learned that before joining the Department of Justice, Mr. Whitaker served on the advisory board of a company that was accused of scamming and deceiving consumers. We learned he received thousands of dollars in campaign contributions 4 years after his campaign ended. They don't seem like campaign contributions, do they? They were something else. Far more evil was at stake, and he got them just before he became Attorney General Session's Chief of Staff. Amazingly, we have learned that he has received \$1.2 million in compensation for unspecified work for a shadowy, conservative, dark money organization that refuses to disclose its donors.

The more the public learns about Mr. Whitaker, the more troubling his appointment becomes. He is hardly the most honorable man given all of this. He is the Acting Attorney General without having had any review by anyone other than President Trump, who has shown that he wants the Justice Department to be his personal arm of attack, not the rule of law—to go after his enemies and lay off his friends.

Beyond the shady business dealings, the most important thing is, Mr. Whitaker will not recuse himself from the Russia probe despite his publicly expressing his bias against the investigation. Clearly, he has shown he is willing to meddle in the investigation. That, in all likelihood, is why President Trump appointed him.

What a sad place we are in. We need to come together in the Senate—Democrats and Republicans—to pass legislation to protect the special counsel's investigation. We already have the bill. It is bipartisan—two Republicans, two Democrats. It passed committee on a bipartisan vote. Chairman GRASSLEY, to his credit, voted for it, and now we have an urgent reason to consider it on the floor. If the majority leader refuses to give it the vote it deserves, the Democrats will push to include it on the must-pass spending bill that we must approve in the next few weeks.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, with the Thanksgiving holiday behind us, we are reminded that this year and this Congress will soon come to a close. The past few years have been a time of historic accomplishments on behalf of the American people: historic tax and regulatory reform, landmark legislation to combat the opioid epidemic, a return to regular order appropriations, much needed reforms and resources for our men and women who wear the uniform today and for our veterans. The list goes on and on.

As the 115th Congress comes to a close, my colleagues will have much—much, indeed—to be proud of. But we aren't finished yet. The Senate still has a full plate of important business that we must complete before the end of the year.

At the top of the list are more nominations—well-qualified individuals that the President has chosen for executive and judicial service. Since the beginning of this Congress, the majority has taken the Senate's role in the personnel business very seriously. We have taken the opportunity to process nominations efficiently and fulfill our responsibility to advise and consent.

Of course, thanks to a concerted delaying effort from our colleagues across the aisle, a number of important offices remain unfilled. Accomplished nominees have waited patiently on the Senate calendar. Important posts have remained vacant while my colleagues on the other side of the aisle slow-walk nominations and force a record-breaking number of cloture votes.

We are 2 years into this administration. The President deserves his team, and our constituents deserve the government they voted for. So, as we have this entire Congress, we will continue to make nominations a top priority for as long as need be.

The nominees we will consider this week are highly regarded and well equipped for public service. We will begin with Stephen Vaden, who has been nominated to serve as General Counsel at the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Vaden is a graduate of Vanderbilt and Yale Law School. He brings experience from multiple Federal court clerkships and from years in practice in administrative law and appellate litigation.

This nominee was voted out of the Agriculture Committee with bipartisan support, including that of the ranking member. So I urge each of my colleagues to join me in voting to advance Mr. Vaden's nomination this afternoon and to confirm him this week.

Then we will turn to more nominations for the Department of Commerce, for the Federal judiciary, and for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. I look forward to confirming each of them without undue delay.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I intend to be giving a number of speeches over the course of the next couple of weeks to comment on various matters on which I have had the privilege of working.

I want to say, with regard to the election, that things turned out a little differently than Grace and I had expected, but let me say that I have been very, very blessed. That is because I have had the privilege of serving the people of Florida and our country for most of my life, and I don't think anyone could have been more honored by having a lifetime of public service. I was not victorious in this race, but I still wish to strongly reaffirm the cause for which we fought: A public office is a public trust.

First, I want to say thanks to all who have rallied to our cause, both here in the Senate and in Florida. You knocked on the doors, you walked the precincts, you made the phone calls, and you contributed your time and your resources. With an optimistic heart, I wish to say something else: We may have been heavily outspent, but we were never outworked.

To all Floridians, I say to you this, whether you voted for me or for my opponent or you didn't vote at all: I ask that you never give up this fight. A public office is a public trust, and there are a lot of other things that fall under that category of public trust.

You must fight to protect the fundamental right to healthcare and against any attempt to roll back our progress on things like preexisting conditions. Most everybody has a preexisting condition. If it is not required that an insurance company cover you, then either your rate is prohibitively high or else you don't get coverage at all. Out of the 20 million people in the State of Florida, 8 million people have a preexisting condition.

You must continue the fight to preserve the natural wonders of our State, from the Everglades to the pine forests and to the beaches and the offshore waters. Say no to drilling off our coast—not one rig off of our coastline—not only for the sake of our environment but for the sake of our tourism economy and for the sake of the largest military testing and training area for the U.S. military in the world right off of our coast.

As a country, we need to continue to launch rockets and to explore the heavens. I have seen the blue brilliance of the Earth from the edge of the heavens, and I will fight on to save this planet, our homes, and our cities from the spreading plague of greenhouse gases

that infect our atmosphere, play havoc with our weather, and risk the planet our children and grandchildren will inherit.

Every single one of us needs to keep fighting to strengthen Social Security and Medicare for the generations that are yet to come. It is your Medicare. It is your Social Security. You pay into these programs. They belong to you and not to the politicians who are plotting to rob you of your retirement.

I will continue to fight on and on for the inalienable human rights that are the soul and glory of the American experiment: civil rights, women's rights, LGBT rights, and the sacred right to vote. We must end all forms of voter suppression, make it easier for Americans to vote, and honor the ideal that we are governed by the majority and not by minority rule.

There are great decisions ahead that will shape the course and character of America in the 21st century. Yes, I will continue to fight—and to fight hard—for what is right. I will also encourage others to seek common ground with their colleagues and the other side of the aisle. Inevitably, at times that effort will fall short, but we have to try. We have to move beyond a politics that aims not just to defeat but to destroy, where truth is treated as disposable, where falsehoods abound and the free press is assaulted as the enemy of the people.

Whether an institution such as this Congress will be effective in the future depends on whether the people who make up this institution can get along, where we retreat from the tribalism that has captured American politics and where men and women of good will can come together. As the Good Book says, “come now, and let us reason together.”

There has been a gathering darkness in our politics in recent years. My hope today can be found in the words of John F. Kennedy, who said civility “can guide us through that darkness to a safe and sane future.”

Thank you all for the privilege of a lifetime of public service. God bless you, and God bless our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I wish to address the Senator before he leaves.

I represent the great State of Georgia, which is north of the great State of Florida. I have had the pleasure of serving with this Senator for a long time in a lot of capacities. He has made a huge contribution to his State and to his country. We worked together on a lot of other interests, like the Prayer Breakfast in the Senate and many other things like that.

I want to commend the Senator for his speech, commend him for his remarks, and commend him for his lovely wife, amazing Grace, whom I love very much. I thank the Senator very much for his service to the people of the

State of Florida and the United States of America. May God bless him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

NOMINATION OF STEPHEN ALEXANDER VADEN

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I rise today to speak in support of Stephen Vaden to be the next General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I know this is a position that you care about deeply as the Presiding Officer. Having been brought up and worked on a family farm that has operated for generations in West Tennessee, Stephen has critical insights into the issues facing the agriculture community. His experience in law and understanding the needs of farmers will be an important asset at the USDA and in Congress's work to help rural America prosper and grow.

Under Stephen's tenure as Acting General Counsel since March of last year, the Office of General Counsel has promoted Department accountability and improved its responsiveness to civil rights issues, and it is my belief that Stephen will continue to do so once confirmed.

I am pleased to see that the Senate is acting on Stephen's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to support his confirmation.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, within a few minutes, the Senate will vote on ending debate on the nomination of Stephen Vaden to be the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I am glad to see that. I am here to strongly support Mr. Vaden and urge my colleagues to support him.

Stephen Vaden grew up on a family farm in Union City, TN, way out in the west end of our State, and he has some academic credentials for this job which are also very strong. He attended Vanderbilt University and Yale Law School. He has had two strong mentors—Judge Julia Gibbons of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, who was once my counsel when I was Governor of Tennessee, and Judge Hardy Mays of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. He practiced with two distinguished law firms in Washington, DC. He has hands-on academic credentials. He has hands-on farming credentials. He has a strong background in legal training.

Mr. Vaden has the strong support of his Congressman, Mr. DAVID KUSTOFF from West Tennessee. This is Davy Crockett's old congressional district in Tennessee.

Tennessee Farm Bureau President Jeff Aiken said that Mr. Vaden “has a passion for agriculture that can't be taught but is necessary” for the job of General Counsel.

Secretary Perdue, Agriculture Secretary, said that Mr. Vaden “has a firm grasp of the legal issues facing American agriculture, and very importantly, understands the breadth and complexity of the regulatory burdens

placed on our producers." The Secretary finished by saying: "Our farmers, ranchers, foresters, and producers will be well served by his counsel."

I know the distinguished Presiding Officer has a strong interest and a hands-on background in agriculture, and so do many other Members of this body on both sides of the aisle. I am happy to strongly recommend Stephen Vaden to my colleagues. I urge a "yes" vote on ending the debate. Once that has ended, I urge a "yes" vote on confirmation of his nomination by President Trump.

Madam President, 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

Mitch McConnell, Johnny Isakson, Mike Rounds, Thom Tillis, Mike Crapo, Pat Roberts, John Hoeven, David Perdue, Tim Scott, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Cory Gardner, Tom Cotton, Jerry Moran, John Barrasso, Roger F. Wicker, John Boozman.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden, of Tennessee, to be General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 49, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 245 Ex.]

YEAS—49

Alexander
Barrasso
Blunt
Boozman
Burr
Capito
Cassidy
Collins
Corker
Cornyn
Cotton
Cruz
Daines
Donnelly
Enzi
Ernst
Fischer

Flake
Gardner
Grassley
Hatch
Heitkamp
Heller
Hoeven
Inhofe
Isakson
Johnson
Kennedy
Kyl
Lankford
Lee
McConnell
Murkowski
Paul

Perdue
Portman
Risch
Roberts
Rounds
Rubio
Sasse
Scott
Shelby
Stabenow
Sullivan
Thune
Tillis
Toomey
Young

NAYS—45

Baldwin
Bennet
Blumenthal
Booker
Brown
Cantwell
Cardin
Carper
Casey
Coons
Cortez Masto
Duckworth
Durbin
Feinstein
Gillibrand

Harris
Hassan
Heinrich
Hirono
Jones
Kaine
King
Klobuchar
Leahy
Manchin
Markey
McCaskey
Menendez
Merkley
Murphy

Murray
Nelson
Peters
Reed
Schatz
Schumer
Shaheen
Smith
Tester
Udall
Van Hollen
Warner
Warren
Whitehouse
Wyden

NOT VOTING—6

Crapo
Graham

Hyde-Smith
Moran

Sanders
Wicker

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 49, the nays are 45.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senate majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

CENTENNIAL OF THE KENTUCKY FARM BUREAU

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my pleasure today to recognize one of the greatest voices for Kentucky's agricultural communities, the Kentucky Farm Bureau, KFB, as it prepares to commemorate its centennial year. With a mission to identify the challenges facing farmers, to improve farm income, and to enhance the quality of life for growers, processors, and all of us who enjoy the fruits of their labors, the KFB has been a force for good throughout my home State. Since its establishment almost 100 years ago, the KFB has done all of this and more. I am so proud to have this opportunity to congratulate the men and women of the KFB on this impressive milestone.

In 1919, a small group of Kentucky farmers gathered in Louisville to form an organization to serve as the "Voice of Kentucky Agriculture." Beginning as a member-based and member-driven

organization, the KFB has proudly kept to its founding vision, striving each day to uphold that same goal.

In the last 100 years, the KFB has grown beyond anything its founders could have imagined. With nearly 500,000 members, the organization maintains a presence in all 120 counties in the Commonwealth. The KFB has developed many service programs to benefit its members and other parts of the agricultural community. These services include providing crop insurance products, Young Farmers development, public affairs representation, and estate planning assistance, just to name a few. As it celebrates its centennial year, the KFB can also be proud of being one of the largest State Farm Bureaus throughout the entire Nation.

Since my first day serving in the U.S. Senate, I have had the opportunity to be Kentucky's champion on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Every step of the way, the KFB has helped guide my work on that committee on behalf of my State's farm families. Through several agricultural bills—and countless fly-ins, the KFB has proved to be a partner I can rely upon to support Kentucky farmers. We have accomplished a great deal, and I look forward to many more projects we can work on together.

One particular event I look forward to each year is the KFB's annual country ham breakfast during the Kentucky State Fair. I make it a point to attend every year possible so I can not only have the opportunity to enjoy the delicious food, but also to spend quality time with the many friends of Kentucky agriculture I have gotten to know over the years. The tradition began in 1964 as a way to showcase our agricultural products during the Kentucky State Fair, and it has grown into one of the Nation's premier agricultural events. Each year, thousands of Kentuckians from across the Commonwealth gather to enjoy some of the best locally sourced food our State's farmers have to offer. The morning culminates in a charity auction of the blue-ribbon country ham. This year, the winning bid was a record-breaking \$2.8 million to be donated to Kentucky charities. While the ham breakfast may be among its best-known public events, it is just one example of the KFB's many accomplishments.

Throughout 2019, I hear the KFB plans to celebrate its century of successes on behalf of Kentucky's farmers. I would like to recognize the contributions of the organization's leadership, in particular Mark Haney and his executive team. They are wonderful representatives of the KFB and proud advocates for farmers. With their guidance, the KFB has a bright future ahead.

I urge my Senate colleagues to join me in the recognition of the KFB, its members, and all who have benefited from its century of service to Kentucky. The organization's unmatched dedication to farmers and commitment to agricultural advancement continues