



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2019

No. 15

Senate

(Legislative day of Thursday, January 24, 2019)

The Senate met at 12 noon on the expiration of the recess and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You stand behind life's shadows, keeping watch over those who call on Your sacred Name.

Lord, our help comes from You, and we need Your sufficient grace to bring an end to this partial government shutdown.

Lord, don't permit the weapons formed against America to prosper, for You remain our refuge and fortress. May our lawmakers not be found wanting in this challenging hour of national turmoil. Help them to courageously contend for what is right, as You give them the ability to understand Your unfolding providence.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Please, God, help us.

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.

STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ACT OF 2019—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the announcement this morning that air operations in major cities in this country on the east coast and other places could be delayed or are interrupted comes as no surprise.

This last week, I met with air traffic controllers in St. Louis and in Aurora, IL. We have over 600 air traffic controllers in Northern Illinois because of O'Hare, Midway, and so many other important airports in that region, and, of course, in St. Louis, with Lambert airfield and others. They have quite extensive air operations.

They explained to me what is going on with air traffic controllers. It shouldn't have worried us before the shutdown. It should frighten us at this moment.

Currently, air traffic controllers work 10-hour shifts. It is a stressful job—an important, stressful job. There is hardly any person more on the front-line of public safety than an air traffic controller. They are expected to concentrate—to concentrate exclusively—for 10 straight hours on each shift. Because of a shortage of air traffic controllers, they now are working 6 days a week.

If you can only imagine for a moment what it is like, and, if you have been to an air traffic control tower, you know what it is like—at least from an outside observer's point of view. There they are, with a screen full of dots. In each one of them is an airplane, and in each airplane tens, maybe even hundreds of lives, and they are trying to make certain that nothing terrible occurs.

Imagine the added burden they face now on the 35th day of this government shutdown. As of today, they will have missed two pay periods. The last paycheck came last year. I listened to these air traffic controllers explain what it meant to them. For some of

them, it has gotten down to the basics. In the St. Louis area, one of the air traffic controllers has to drive a long distance each day. They didn't have the cash for gasoline. He sold his plasma in order to fill the tank to go to work.

At another air traffic control meeting in Aurora, one of the controllers came to me and said that one of his colleagues, who had been working for some time, came to him and said that he only had 5 days left that he could continue doing this—working for nothing—and then he would have to go look for other jobs and possibly jeopardize his future in air traffic control.

The stories came to me one after another. There was a young family where a little child of the family is suffering from medical illnesses of a serious nature. Luckily, they still have health insurance when they are not being paid. When it comes to the out-of-pocket expenses and copayments, they don't have money for it.

Those are the realities these men and women face. They are the realities that have to be on their minds every waking moment. We pray, as passengers in these aircraft, that the only thing on their mind is their job. Instead, for many of these people, it is just basically getting by, keeping their family together.

A lady came up to me at the airport at O'Hare and told me that she and a lot of friends run a food pantry in Oak Park, which is west of the city of Chicago, and she said to me: We have problems. The Federal employees who are coming around now are in desperate need of help, and we are running out of supplies at our food pantries.

Has it come to that in America, where we have to rely on food pantries and charity for men and women who are performing such a vital function as air traffic control? That is the reality of the situation.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S667