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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. 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 continue to hear and answer prayers. You have empowered us to catapult daunting hurdles, and we continue to depend on You to strengthen us for the difficulties ahead.

Be near to us during this challenging season, as our lawmakers work in an effort to accomplish Your purposes.

Supply the needs of our Senators, providing them with wisdom to navigate to Your desired destination for our Nation and world.

Do for our legislators more than they can ask or imagine.

We pray in Your holy 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 (Mr. HAWLEY). The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 648

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 648) making appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar on the next legislative day.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, later this afternoon, the Senate will hold its fourth cloture vote on a package of important foreign policy legislation that was introduced back on January 4. For weeks, Senate Democrats have effectively filibustered this legislation and blocked it from moving forward.

At first, my colleague the Democratic leader said his party was simply opposed to considering any other business during the partial government shutdown, but then just a few days later, he actually sought to move ahead with a foreign policy vote of his own. In other words, though Senate Democrats were filibustering this pro-Israel legislation with the thin excuse that they didn't want to take up any other business, it turns out it was just the pro-Israel legislation that was actually off-limits.

While Senate Democrats were filibustering this legislation, by the way, the Democratic House had no problem considering one component of it, which it passed by voice vote.

So I remain curious as to the real reason why the Democrats insisted on filibustering these critical bills. Maybe we will get a better explanation this week, assuming Democrats finally drop the filibuster and allow this body to get back to work. This is an important piece of legislation. It comes at an urgent time.

For the past 8 years, the world has seen a despotic regime wage brutal war upon its own people. The conflict in Syria has taken more than 400,000 lives

and driven more than 5.6 million civilians to flee the country, straining the capacity of nations in the region, as well as Europe, to deal with the refugee and humanitarian fallout. Bashar al-Assad and his cronies have paved the way for the persistent terror of the Islamic State and invited the chaotic influence of foreign powers, especially Iran and Russia.

Of course, this is a region that already contends with persistent—persistent—instability, including Iran's meddling, financial support for terror, and explicit threats against Israel, but the legislation at hand addresses these challenges actually head-on. It tells our ally Israel that our commitment to its security is ironclad. It tells our partners in Jordan that we have their backs as they grapple with the flow of refugees and other ongoing effects of the Syrian crisis. It makes a crystal clear statement to the Syrian regime and those who abet it: Your brutality needs to end.

Here is how the legislation accomplishes all that: It makes sure the United States walks the walk when it comes to supporting Israel by authorizing military assistance, loan guarantees, and teamwork on missile defense.

Another bipartisan provision would preserve communities' rights to combat the destructive BDS movement by ensuring that States and local governments can choose not to funnel taxpayer dollars to companies that push anti-Israel boycotts.

With respect to Jordan, the bill before us reauthorizes legislation to deepen our cooperation with this key regional partner, which has faced grave challenges from the chaos that continues to unfold in its neighbor to its north.

With respect to Syria, this legislation includes the bipartisan Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. As I mentioned earlier, this passed the House on a voice vote just last week.

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



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