

H.R. 1

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on a totally different matter, earlier this week I began discussing H.R. 1. This is the House Democrats' marquee bill for the new Congress.

I have stated this week that it really adds up to one big expensive partisan power grab, an effort to centralize more control over America's speech and America's voting here in Washington—the "Democratic Politician Protection Act." I am pleased that people are beginning to pay attention to this monstrosity—a monstrosity.

Today I want to focus on how the power grab would affect our elections because when Washington politicians suddenly decide their top priority is grabbing unprecedented control over how they get elected and sent to Washington in the first place, alarm bells should start ringing all over this place.

After all, article I, section IV of the Constitution clearly gives—clearly gives—State legislatures primary responsibility for "the Times, Places, and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives."

There are times in American history when it has come to that. There have been times when our Nation has needed the Federal Government to get involved to expand and protect the franchise or to respond to a national emergency, for examples, bills like the Voting Rights Act, which secured the franchise for African Americans, or the Help America Vote Act, which provided guideposts—guideposts—to prevent a crisis like the Bush v. Gore recount from occurring a second time.

So what is the alleged crisis now? What is the alleged crisis now, in 2019, that has House Democrats calling for an unprecedented Federal takeover of elections across our country? Why is this Democratic bill—which would create more Federal Government mandates over the minutia of the election process than has ever been done in the past—necessary now?

The year 2016 saw the most ballots ever cast in a Presidential election in American history. Now, with population growth, that isn't entirely surprising, but the turnout rate was the third highest since 1968. So people are voting in great numbers.

Let's look at the 2018 midterms—the highest midterm turnout in 50 years. People voted in the midterms.

Listen to what Americans themselves had to say about their experience. After the election, 92 percent—92 percent—of surveyed voters told the Pew Research Center their voting experience was "very easy" or "somewhat easy"—92 percent—very easy or somewhat easy to vote. Regardless of when they voted and how they voted, huge majorities communicated that they had no real trouble—no real trouble—casting their ballots. No trouble.

My Democratic friends seem to be implying there is a supposed crisis here that conveniently is not rooted in the facts or in the opinions of American voters.

There is no objective basis for the sweeping Federal takeover of elections that House Democrats have dreamed up. There is no emergency. It is just a Washington power grab for its very own sake.

Decision after decision that our Constitution properly leaves to the States just melts away in this proposal. Practically every variable of any consequence to American elections gets a top-down mandate written by whom? Why, the Democrats, of course.

Could States require a signature to vote under the Democrats' bill? Only if they accept a computerized mark, making that signature requirement about as serious as clicking one checkbox on a website.

What if States and localities want to make sure that ineligible voters under the age of 18 don't end up on the voter rolls or decide whether or how convicted felons have their voting rights restored? Well, under the "Democratic Politician Protection Act," States have no choice in the matter.

How many early days of voting should there be? Do polls need to be open on Sundays? What is the best way to make absentee ballots available? When can early voting take place, and how long and where should the polling places be located?

Different States and communities have come to different legitimate judgments on all of these questions. It is a core part of our constitutional system, and the decentralization of our election process leads to a more democratic system with more direct impact on the elections of those decision makers.

The United States of America has never been about centralizing all power in Washington, and Washington should not get to micromanage the processes that determine who comes to Washington.

But, alas, House Democrats don't seem to care if their partisan power grab upsets this constitutional balance. These Representatives even—get this—want the Federal Government to dictate to States how their very own congressional districts will be drawn. They want the Federal Government to tell the States how to draw their congressional districts.

Right now, there is a competition of ideas among the States about the best way to handle this. Different places arrive at different answers.

Naturally, House Democrats have a different idea. They want to force every State to use a commission that is designed by them—by Washington Democrats. Every State will have to use a commission designed by Washington Democrats whose structure and procedures are prescribed, of course, by Washington Democrats. If a State doesn't know how to bow to their will, then the DC Federal court will make the decisions that have been reserved for the State legislatures going back to our Nation's founding.

I know it is not fashionable on the far left to praise the wisdom of our

constitutional structure. It seems to be out of fashion. I am sure that in some corners I will be derided for referencing the Constitution at all. They will say: How could it still be relevant after all these years?

Of course, this thinking shows exactly why our founding principles are so important.

Our Constitution is there to protect our liberties and protect our form of government from the whim of whoever happens to be currently in power. These guardrails exist to stop things like a narrow partisan majority in the House of Representatives grabbing control of election laws just to benefit themselves politically. We need to stand with Alexander Hamilton and our Constitution, not with the House Democrats' partisan power grab.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ACT OF 2019—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1) to make improvements to certain defense and security assistance provisions and to authorize the appropriation of funds to Israel, to reauthorize the United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and to halt the wholesale slaughter of the Syrian people, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell amendment No. 65, to express the sense of the Senate that the United States faces continuing threats from terrorist groups operating in Syria and Afghanistan and that the precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from either country could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for S. 1.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant 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 Calendar No. 1, S. 1, a bill to make improvements to certain defense and security assistance provisions and to authorize the appropriation of funds to Israel, to reauthorize the United

States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and to halt the wholesale slaughter of the Syrian people, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Pat Roberts, Shelley Moore Capito, Mitt Romney, Richard Burr, John Cornyn, Rick Scott, Mike Crapo, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Michael B. Enzi, Kevin Cramer, Mike Braun, John Boozman, Steve Daines, James M. Inhofe, Thom Tillis, Joni Ernst.

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. I move to proceed to Calendar No. 7, S. 47.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion to proceed.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 7, S. 47, a bill to provide for the management of the natural resources of the United States, and for other purposes.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk on the motion to proceed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant 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 motion to proceed to Calendar No. 7, S. 47, a bill to provide for the management of the natural resources of the United States, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Pat Roberts, Shelley Moore Capito, Mitt Romney, Richard Burr, John Cornyn, Rick Scott, Mike Crapo, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Michael B. Enzi, Kevin Cramer, Mike Braun, John Boozman, Steve Daines, James M. Inhofe, Thom Tillis, Joni Ernst.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls be waived.

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

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

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

S. 1

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I am pleased the Senate is finally debating S. 1 after three inexplicable Democratic attempts to filibuster the bill. This package of Middle East policy bills, all of which have bipartisan support, addresses a number of key issues.

For starters, this legislation will further strengthen our relationship with our closest ally in the Middle East, Israel. It authorizes 10 years of mili-

tary support funding to Israel. It reaffirms the U.S. commitment to ensuring that Israel has better weapons and equipment than its enemies. It will also foster increased technical cooperation between Israel and the United States to support the security of both of our countries.

The legislation also strengthens our relationship with another close ally of ours in the Middle East, the Kingdom of Jordan. The Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Tuesday was a timely reminder of the importance of investing in our alliances. Senior intelligence officials testified that China and Russia are becoming increasingly aggressive in seeking to increase their influence, not just in their own regions but in other parts of the world. Russia's support in the Syrian regime is a prime example.

Now, more than ever, it is vital that we maintain close relationships with our allies. The legislation before us also contains the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. This legislation will help hold accountable individuals who have supported the atrocities of the Assad regime. It directs the Treasury Department to investigate whether the Central Bank of Syria launders money for the Syrian Government.

The conflict in Syria has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and driven literally millions of Syrians from their country. While the United States cannot solve every conflict around the world, it is vital that we make it very clear the United States will not tolerate those who have contributed to the brutality of Bashar al-Assad's government.

Finally, the legislation we are considering today will protect the right of State and local governments to decline to do business with entities that have chosen to boycott Israel. As I said, all of the bills in the legislation before us today have bipartisan support, and I hope the Senate will pass this legislation with a strong bipartisan majority.

AMENDMENT NO. 65

Madam President, I also would like to take a few moments to talk about an amendment the leader has proposed. As I noted, this week, our intelligence community leaders gave a frank assessment of the threats we face to our national security and to our interests, from ISIS and al-Qaida to the danger posed by a growing alignment between Russia and China, to Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East. As intelligence officials made clear, the U.S. faces numerous persistent threats, and we should be wary of letting our guard down or becoming complacent about our strength. For that reason, I would like to state my support for Leader McConnell's amendment to express the sense of the Senate that we should be cautious about any premature withdrawal of our troops from Syria and Afghanistan.

We don't have to look back very far for a reminder that prematurely withdrawing our troops can create a power

vacuum that terrorists and others will step in to fill. Our too-hasty withdrawal from Iraq, on a timeline we announced to our enemies, created the circumstances that allowed for the rise of ISIS. We need to be wary about allowing something like that to happen again.

Terrorist groups are not the only entities we have to worry about. Adversaries like Russia and Iran are already trying to flex their power in the Middle East and would be more than happy to take advantage of an early U.S. withdrawal to strengthen their foothold in the region.

While I understand and respect President Trump's desire to bring our troops home and to end these protracted wars, we must do so in a way that ensures enduring stability and protects our interests and those of our allies. The leader's amendment is an important reminder of the need for caution and reflection as we consider troop withdrawals and would reassure our allies that the United States does not intend to abruptly leave them in the midst of the battle.

I hope all my colleagues will support the leader's amendment when we vote on it later this afternoon.

USS "SOUTH DAKOTA"

Madam President, before I close, I would like to mention the commission of the Navy's newest Virginia-class attack submarine, the USS *South Dakota*, which will occur this Saturday, February 2, 2019, in Groton, CT. Designated SSN 790, the USS *South Dakota* will be the 17th submarine of her class, pushing the envelope of U.S. maritime technology and undersea dominance.

We are proud the State of South Dakota will once again be represented in the fleet by this engineering marvel, which will project America's strength and protect our national interests throughout the maritime domain and beyond.

In March 2012, I led the South Dakota delegation, which then included Senator Tim Johnson and Congresswoman Kristi Noem, in writing Secretary of the Navy Mabus to request that the Navy name its next attack submarine the USS *South Dakota*. I join them and all South Dakotans in saying we are excited to see this honor come to fruition.

The *South Dakota* will build off the legacy of her forebears, a Pennsylvania-class armored cruiser that served as a troop escort in World War I and a battleship that was one of the most decorated battleships in World War II. The battleship *South Dakota* was a proud representative of the 68,000 South Dakotans who answered their country's call to serving the war, earning 13 battle stars in the Pacific theater.

The *South Dakota* led with her nine 16-inch guns in the battles of the Santa Cruz Islands and Guadalcanal, which earned her a reputation as a fighting machine by defending U.S. aircraft carriers and disabling the enemy's.