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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Pastor Eddie Edmonds of Moler Avenue Church of the Brethren from Martinsburg, WV.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Creator God, we give You thanks and praise for the phenomenal country in which we live, move, and have our being. Our thanks also for the men and women You have called to serve in this government and specifically the Senate. Our prayer is that You will equip, empower, and encourage each individual Senator as they work to answer the call to serve the people of this great Nation. Their decisions impact the lives of not only those they serve but also people the world over. Help them to remember those who have little, need much, and are challenged each day of their lives. Give each Senator strength to make wise decisions and the courage to stand up in the face of adversity, doing the right thing, first time, every time, putting others first in each decision rendered. May Your peace fill the lives of each Senator and those they serve until You come again to claim Your Kingdom.

We pray in the Most Holy Name of Christ Jesus our Lord. 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.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 483 and S.J. RES. 8

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there are two measures at the desk due a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the title of the measures for the second time en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 483), to enact into law a bill by reference.

A bill (S.J. Res. 8) recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, in order to place the measures on the calendar under provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The measures will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last night, our colleagues Chairman SHELBY and Ranking Member LEAHY filed the final text of a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agreement. For the past couple of weeks, in conference with their House counterparts, they have worked in good faith to reach a compromise to address urgent priorities, including funding for our Nation's border security.

The product of this work is a compromise that no side will view as a perfect deal. For instance, I am frustrated by House Democrats' cynical opposition to including commonsense extensions of the Violence Against Women Act and other important items. Nevertheless, this agreement is something

both sides should view as an important step, and today, I hope we will vote to advance it.

When the Senate votes on the agreement, we will be voting to avoid a second partial shutdown and provide the certainty of a fully functioning Federal Government. We will be voting to deliver another downpayment on the President's commitment to securing our Nation's borders and keeping American communities safe. And we will do it free from the influence of poison pills that sought to derail progress and stifle compromise.

To be sure, in recent months, we have seen the radical left go out of its way to try to gum up the works. Even the Speaker of the House threw her support behind wild assertions that tried-and-true methods of securing sovereign borders were now immoral. They said there wouldn't be more than one dollar for border barriers. They said there should be fewer tools for the men and women who enforce our immigration laws. Fortunately, none of that nonsense has carried the day.

So here we are, with a solemn deal in front of us. As the Senate prepares to vote later today, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Chairman SHELBY, along with Ranking Member LEAHY and my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee. This legislation will mark success for our bipartisan process by finalizing all the regular appropriations bills for the fiscal year. Thanks, as well, to Shannon Hines and the entire Appropriations staff, whose hard work made this agreement and all of last year's progress possible.

Later today, I hope each of my colleagues will join me in moving forward with the agreement produced by this hard work, and the President will sign it into law.

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



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S1337

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the cloture vote on the motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 1 occur at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, 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 to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of William Pelham Barr, of Virginia, to be Attorney General.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

HONORING THE MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE SENSELESS AT- TACK AT MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, a year ago this afternoon, I was sitting in my office in the Russell Office Building when a news report began to flash about a shooting at a high school in South Florida. I was the father at the time—in the case of one of my two oldest children—of a child who was still a high school student in South Florida. You would normally be interested, just in being a Senator from the State, but you would be most particularly interested as a parent. As it turns out, the incident and the shooting took place at a school that was about 50 miles—about 50 minutes—from my home, and we all know of the story and of the lives that were lost in this terrible tragedy.

On a personal level, it is clearly an issue that has affected me, first, because I am one of two Senators who represent the State. Every person who was impacted—every victim, everyone who was wounded—is a constituent of ours. Yet, as I have also pointed out, my two oldest children are the same ages as the victims. When you see the pictures and you hear the stories, you can't help but recognize the stories and the pictures, maybe just not individ-

ually. I didn't know any of the victims personally, but the stories are familiar. They are the stories of my children and their friends, who are of the same age and are at the same times in their lives.

It is impossible to fully comprehend unless you have gone through the loss of a child—by the grace of God, I have not—particularly under such tragic and traumatic circumstances. Throughout the last 12 months, as we have reached different milestones in my two daughters' lives, whether it was their proms or graduation days, or whether it was dropping off my oldest at college or attending a class ring ceremony for a junior, we have been almost reminded, for just a moment, of the parents who had expected to have been doing the same during this time of the year but have been unable.

I have learned a lot from those parents, many of whom I have gotten to know personally and have worked alongside, in the last year, on a number of issues. In the year that has passed, they have, as have the students, turned their grief into effective activism. The parents, in particular, are the ones with whom I have interacted the most here in Washington on a regular basis, and it is why I thought it appropriate to come to the floor today. I think they would say that the best way to honor the memories of the children they lost is to take actions that will work to make sure that no other parent will ever have to face this again.

Several of the parents have publicly described what happened a year ago today as the most avoidable mass murder in American history, but what was it that enabled this to happen? Why was it avoidable? What could have been done to address it?

In the brief moments that we have here—my colleague from Florida will have additional statements as well—I want to point to some of the things we now know that we didn't know a year ago today or in the days that followed.

From it, not only should that spark outrage, but it should also spark ideas about how to fix those things so never again will any parent have to face what they did and none of my colleagues will have to stand here and give a speech like the ones my colleague from Florida and I have to give today.

At the outset, let me say that the credit for much of what I am about to speak about belongs to the extraordinary journalists at the South Florida Sun Sentinel, who have done a remarkable job over the last 10 months of revealing to the public many facts that would have been unknown otherwise.

At a time when there is so much debate about journalism and its role in our society and in public service and in politics, they deserve tremendous credit for bringing this to light, and I think it is an example of why journalism remains an important institution in our country.

A lot of the attention in this debate has been paid to the issues that we are

familiar with and have been debating long before this tragedy: a ban on certain weapons, universal background checks, taking on what is described as the gun lobby. These issues dominated the national media coverage, and support for these positions is not new. They predate this tragedy.

In our Republic, people most certainly have the right to advocate for this or against it. They have the right to lobby for it. They have the right to vote for candidates who support these positions and to vote against those who do not. They are valid issues to debate on public policy, but at the end of the day, neither go directly to the heart of this particular case and to the facts that led up to it.

At the heart of this is that the killer, the perpetrator of this terrible tragedy, was known to be dangerous for a long time by many people in positions of power and authority at the school district, the sheriff's office, and at the FBI, and no one did anything about it. This is now a documented fact.

Early in the days after this, we saw images of the sheriff and the superintendent lecturing people and talking about what a great job they had done, but the facts will show that it was their incompetence that allowed this to happen, and, then, even worse, they tried to cover it up.

There is an article entitled "Schools culture of tolerance lets students like [the killer] slide," by Megan O'Matz and Scott Travis, reporters at the South Florida Sun Sentinel. I am going to read from it, and then I am going to introduce it into the RECORD. I am not going to read the whole article.

Here is how it opens:

Broward schools have grown so tolerant of misbehavior that students like [the killer] are able to slide by for years without strict punishment for conduct that could be criminal.

The culture of leniency allows children to engage in an endless loop of violations and second chances, creating a system where kids who commit the same offense for the 10th time may be treated like it's the first.

[The killer] was suspended at least 67 days over less than a year and a half at Westglades Middle School, and his problems continued at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

The South Florida Sun Sentinel obtained the killer's discipline records, they reviewed discipline policies, and here is what they found:

Students can be considered first-time offenders even if they commit the same offense year after year.

The district's claim of reforming bad behavior is exaggerated.

Lenient discipline has an added PR benefit for the district: lower suspensions, expulsions and arrests along with rising graduation rates.

It goes on to say:

Many teachers and parents say Broward has created a culture in which teachers are expressly told or subtly pressured not to send students to the administration for punishment so a school's image is not tarnished.

One teacher who taught for 37 years in the district before retiring said she