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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARSHA BLACKBURN, a Senator from the State of Tennessee.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, supply the needs of our Senators. Meet them with new insights for the good of our Nation and world. Lord, provide them with fresh strength so they will not become weary in doing what is right. Give them the long view of their work. Inspire them with the vibrant belief that it is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail. Strengthen them this day with the positive assurance of Your eternal presence.

We pray in Your loving Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 22, 2019.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARSHA BLACKBURN, a

Senator from the State of Tennessee, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. BLACKBURN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

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Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on Monday, I introduced legislation to raise the national minimum age for purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21. I walked through the long history of our Nation's complicated relationship with this major cash crop. I laid out the challenges facing tobacco farmers in Kentucky and in other States and the new opportunities some of them are actually turning to. I explained why, as we see signs of a new public health crisis of nicotine addiction in the younger generation, now is the time to take decisive new action.

Together with Senator TIM KAINE, who represents another State with a very long history of tobacco production, I was proud to introduce the bill that builds on the existing structure that is already in place and simply raises the minimum age to 21. Rather than reinvent the wheel here in Washington, it would set one national standard for enforcing new age-21 restrictions. It is a bill designed with States in mind, and it would allow States to take measures even more restrictive than Federal law if they choose.

Senator KAINE and I have been grateful to see—already, even in just the past few days—substantial support and recognition from public health advocates that our approach is the right way to address this pressing issue.

Already, our legislation has earned the support of leading voices like the American Cancer Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Cardiology, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the American Osteopathic Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, the Kentucky Hospital and Medical Associations, and many others. Here are just a few things these supporters of our bill had to say:

One advocate called it a “critical step forward that will profoundly improve the health of our children and future generations.”

Another stated our legislation “will be instrumental in stemming the epidemic of vaping that is afflicting children as young as middle school.”

Yet another said our bill could potentially “save hundreds of thousands of lives.”

This should be an area where we all lock arms to get results. I am proud this body will have a chance to take action and stem the tide of addiction among our Nation's youth. I am proud to be standing with Senator KAINE. I hope each of our colleagues will recognize the opportunity before us, avoid making this important issue any kind of partisan football, and join in supporting the Tobacco-Free Youth Act.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, since President Trump took office in 2017, the Senate has confirmed 41 well-qualified individuals to serve on our Nation's circuit courts. No. 41 was Daniel Collins of California, whom we confirmed yesterday to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. As I have noted already, Mr. Collins came before the Senate with every conceivable indicator of a brilliant legal mind and an impeccable professional record. I was proud that the full Senate followed up

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



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the Judiciary Committee's favorable report with a majority vote here on the floor.

But our work this week is just beginning. Yesterday, the Senate also advanced four more nominees—these to serve on district courts across the country. Today, we will vote to confirm all four.

The first, Howard Nielson, has been nominated for the District of Utah. As I mentioned yesterday, Mr. Nielson has clerked for both the Fourth Circuit and the Supreme Court and has assembled an impressive record at the Department of Justice and in the private sector.

Next will come the nomination of Stephen Clark for the Eastern District of Missouri. Mr. Clark is an accomplished litigator with nearly three decades of experience in practice.

The third nominee is Carl Nichols, the President's choice to serve as district judge for the District of Columbia. You will start to detect a pattern because he, too, is a thoroughly impressive nominee—clerkships for the DC Circuit and for the Supreme Court for Justice Thomas, service at the Department of Justice, and recognized excellence in private practice.

Finally, we will vote on Kenneth Bell, nominated to serve in the Western District of North Carolina. Mr. Bell has under his belt nearly two decades of service in the Office of the U.S. Attorney—distinguished by national honors for his accomplishments as a prosecutor—as well as extensive experience in the private sector.

So if I am sounding like a broken record, it is because the White House continues to submit one extremely well-qualified and highly impressive nominee after another to sit on the Federal bench. These are men and women who are bright, talented, well-regarded, and committed to applying what the text of our laws and our Constitution actually say.

Today, we can take four more steps in that positive direction. These nominees deserve big bipartisan votes, so I hope each of my colleagues will join me in voting to confirm each of them.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on one final matter, several of our Senate colleagues and their counterparts in the House are continuing to zero in on long-overdue legislation to deliver additional help to Americans all across the Nation who are struggling to rebuild from natural disasters. This ought to have been a fairly straightforward process. We shouldn't need to explain why the need for this relief is urgent, but just for good measure, let's remember the Americans who are counting on us.

In California, last year's string of wildfires included the deadliest and most destructive fire on record. It killed 85 people and burned more than 150,000 acres.

In the Midwest earlier this year, storm surges flooded whole swaths of States and racked up millions of dollars in damages. As one expert recently put it, "We have points in Iowa and Illinois that have been in flood stage for over 30 days"—30 days—"which hasn't occurred since we started keeping records—and some of them go back 150 years."

Across the Southeast and gulf coasts, recent hurricane seasons have left lasting scars. Hurricane Michael, which swept across Florida into South Georgia last October, has itself produced nearly 150,000 insurance claims in Florida alone.

In Alabama, more tornadoes have already been recorded in 2019 than in all of last year. One that touched down in Lee County on March 3 left 23 people dead.

Nearly 2 years after Hurricane Maria tore across Puerto Rico, too many storefronts are still shuttered, too many homes still lack roofs, and power remains too unreliable.

And the list goes on. This is hardly the first time facts like these have been laid out here on the floor. In fact, this legislation has already taken far too long—far too long—to deliver. But now that we are in the home stretch, it is past time to put partisan politics aside, move past any tangential questions, and secure a final agreement that can become law; that is, something that can both pass the Democratic House and earn the President's signature soon. That is how to make a law in this situation.

The Senate will vote on disaster relief this week. The Members of this body will not return home for Memorial Day without taking further action to help these struggling communities, which, by the way, include a number of military installations that need assistance to recover and to rebuild.

It is my sincere hope that we will be able to vote on a negotiated, bipartisan, bicameral solution. That is how we can get to an outcome. That is what affected Americans deserve.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it has been a frightening 2 weeks for tens of millions of Americans who support a

woman's freedom to make her own healthcare choices. Actually, if you believe the polls, there are hundreds of millions of Americans in that category.

Republican legislators across the country have passed some of the most extreme restrictions on a woman's right to choose. With breathtaking speed, they are trying to take us backward, but they have already provoked a fierce reaction among the American people.

Just yesterday, I stood with hundreds before the Supreme Court to speak on behalf of Americans everywhere who believe that women don't deserve to be treated this way by their government. Meanwhile, here in the Senate, the Republican leader is once again stalling—it seems to be his MO—on a bill to improve legal protections for women who are victims of domestic abuse, assault, and stalking. This is VAWA, or the Violence Against Women Act.

VAWA has been a landmark piece of legislation, and it has greatly reduced the abuse of women. Well, there was an improved and expanded VAWA that was passed by the House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis. It got significant Republican votes. It brings much needed updates to existing Federal law. It finally expands protections to women who are victims of violence from domestic partners or former partners, not just current or former spouses. It also says that if you are known to stalk your partner or have a restraining order against you, you shouldn't be allowed to purchase a gun. Thanks to the work of some of my colleagues in both Chambers, it also brings renewed attention to violence against Native American women who are so often overlooked.

I thank Senators SMITH, KLOBUCHAR, and CANTWELL for bringing attention to this bill later today.

Unfortunately, Leader MCCONNELL has indicated that he will not bring the House-passed VAWA bill to the floor, despite these many commonsense reforms. Why not? I hope it is not because the gun lobby reflexively opposes any restrictions on gun purchases—even for convicted stalkers. I hope that is not the impediment here, because as Senator KLOBUCHAR has pointed out, if you are abused by your husband, then, you are protected by VAWA. If you are abused by a boyfriend, you are not. What is the difference? What is the difference?

VAWA is yet another example of how Leader MCCONNELL has turned this Chamber into a legislative graveyard. Even the most commonsense bills, with broad support from one end of America to the other, that are passed by the House—here, a bill protecting women from violence—meet the grim fate at the hands of the Senate's self-proclaimed Grim Reaper.

What a shame. The Violence Against Women Act is precisely the kind of legislation the American people expect the Senate to consider. During a difficult few weeks for women across