

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

WELCOMING PASTOR ANDREW BRUNSON

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President and those who were watching during the opening prayer, that was Pastor Andrew Brunson from North Carolina. This month marks a year since Pastor Brunson was released from a Turkish prison. Norine, his wife, is in the Gallery as well. They were swept up in what I considered to be an overreaction by President Erdogan and the Turkish regime in their imprisoning thousands of people after the coup attempt in Turkey. I actually found out about this first as casework. Pastor Brunson was from North Carolina. Then, slowly but steadily, diplomacy wasn't working, and he found himself in a Turkish prison—at one point in really what we would consider to be despicable circumstances. He was in a prison cell that was designed for maybe 8 or 10 people that had had more than 20 in it, and none of them spoke the English language.

Pastor Brunson was a missionary in Turkey for almost 20 years. He had a church in Izmir, and all they tried to do for those who wanted to hear the Word of God was to speak it. For that, he was ultimately incarcerated and accused of being a part of the Turkish coup attempt. It was about a year later that they issued an indictment for him. It was a 62-page indictment that read like a horrible, fictional novel and had some of the most absurd allegations you could possibly imagine. Certainly, they were things that wouldn't keep you in jail overnight in the United States but were things that were potentially going to have Pastor Brunson convicted and spending 35 years in a Turkish prison.

We got word back that after the indictment was issued against Pastor Brunson, he was afraid that the American people were going to believe it, that we would simply move on, and that he would be left there at the fate of the Turkish judiciary. When I heard that, the first thing I told my staff is that I had to go to Turkey. I wanted to go to the prison that Pastor Brunson was in, and I had the opportunity to meet Norine, his wife, the day before. I went there, and across a table that was about as wide as this desk, I told Pastor Brunson that we were not going to forget him and were not going to stop until we got him released from prison.

In a series of efforts here, for which I have to really compliment all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, more than 72 Senators signed on to a letter that encouraged Pastor Brunson's release. More than 100 House Members signed on to a similar letter. We did everything we could diplomatically to get Pastor Brunson released.

I decided I wanted to see how the court case was going, so I went back to Turkey a few months after I had first

met Pastor Brunson in the prison, and I sat through 12 hours of so-called Turkish justice. I saw this man stand before a dais of three judges and a prosecutor, where basically you were assumed guilty until you proved innocence. His defense attorney was as far away from him as is that wall. That is Turkish justice. That is not anything we can imagine in this country, but that is what this man was subjected to.

Over the course of several months and in working with the President, Secretary Pompeo, the Vice President, and a number of other people, we were able to get President Erdogan to recognize that this was a political exercise, that it was not an exercise in justice, and that he needed to be released.

A year ago this month, he was released, and now he is opening the Senate in prayer. I thank Pastor Brunson for his perseverance. He went through things that most of us cannot imagine, and Norine was his strongest advocate.

I see the Parliamentarian looking at me as if I am not supposed to recognize the fact that Norine Brunson is in the Gallery, so I will not recognize that fact because that would be a violation of the rules.

They are a sight for sore eyes, and I am so glad to have them back in this country. I know they are going to continue their missionary work wherever they can. I thank them for their leadership and their deep faith.

Thank you for opening the Senate today.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

IMPEACHMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Congress is returning to Washington for a work period that will be filled with important to-do items, but we already know what will top the agenda in the House of Representatives: House Democrats are finally indulging in their 3-year old impeachment obsession, full steam ahead.

Many of us remember the Washington Post headline that was literally published on Inauguration Day in 2017. Here is what it said: "The campaign to impeach President Trump has begun." And, sure enough, House Democrats have been at it ever since.

One prominent House Democrat called this Presidency illegitimate before it had even begun. One of Speaker

PELOSI's committee chairs whom she has tasked with leading this process promised years ago that she would find a way to impeach the President.

Now that Speaker PELOSI has finally crumbled and allowed her leftwing impeachment caucus to dictate the House's actions, I don't think many of us were expecting to witness a clinic in terms of fairness or due process. But even by their own partisan standards, House Democrats have already found new ways to lower the bar. This is about the most consequential process the House of Representatives could possibly engage in: overruling American voters and nullifying an election.

Surely, any such process must be conducted with the utmost fairness and transparency. It must be held to the most exact of standards. Yet House Democrats have wasted no time throwing fairness and precedent to the wind. Already, they have denied their Republican counterparts certain minority rights, like equal subpoena power, which Republicans provided Democrats in the Clinton impeachment.

Already, they have made clear that President Trump's counsel will not be allowed to participate in hearings, present evidence, and cross-examine witnesses—all-important rights that Republicans provided to President Clinton.

Already, one House chairman has been caught publicly mischaracterizing his committee's handling of the whistleblower inquiry on which this whole investigation hinges.

For all the public hyperventilating over institutional norms that we have heard from House Democrats in recent years, it appears they have no intention of letting norms, precedents, or basic due process stand in their way as they seek to cancel out a Presidency.

In the meantime, in the Senate we will keep our focus squarely on the substantive work we need to complete for the American people. In the coming days, we will confirm another slate of President Trump's well-qualified nominees. For starters, later this afternoon, we will advance the nomination of Barbara Barrett, the President's choice to be Secretary of the Air Force.

Speaking of our Armed Forces, Congress can waste no more time in getting our appropriations process back on track and delivering a funding that our servicemembers need. Just 2 months ago, the President and the Speaker of the House produced an agreement to guide the appropriations process. The White House and congressional leaders set top-line funding targets for defense and nondefense and agreed to forego poison pills. Last month, unfortunately, our Democratic colleagues went back on the deal. Routine funding negotiations were again subject to poison pill threats, and urgent resources for the operations of the Pentagon were withheld for the sake of politics.

We need to put these political games aside. Democrats need to stop filibustering a pay raise for our troops and