



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 165

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2019

No. 197

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, the center of our joy, bless our lawmakers with the peace and wisdom needed to lead in our challenging world. Give them eyes to discern and understand the intricate complexity of this turbulent season. Lord, guide our Senators to the right paths. Lead them beside still waters. Restore their souls. Let them lack nothing, for You can keep them whole. Overflow their cups with gentleness, care, and understanding for the people they represent. Let them fear no evil and take courage in adversity, for You continue to lead them with Your all-knowing right hand.

We pray in Your everlasting 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, December 10, 2019.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable CINDY HYDE-SMITH, a Senator from the State of Mississippi, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, as we enter the final weeks of 2019, two things seem to be true here in Congress. No. 1, our Democratic colleagues, particularly over in the House, seem eager to pour the vast majority of their time and energy into their 3-year-long journey to impeach the President the American people elected. As a consequence, No. 2, Congress has yet to fulfill a number of its core governing responsibilities for this year.

At this late date, several crucial, must-pass bills remain undone. For months, my fellow Republicans and I have been stressing the need for productive, bipartisan cooperation on these pressing subjects: funding for the Federal Government, Defense appropriations—the money for our troops—and the National Defense Authorization Act. Yet, for months, our calls for the Democrats to join us in serious negotiations have gone largely unanswered as the Democratic leadership has opted for a different political playbook—to obsess over impeachment and obstruct this core business that we must do every year.

Earlier this year, the House Democrats pushed through what we believe was their first purely party-line NDAA that either Chamber has ever passed in the 58-year history of the legislation. This is the legislation that puts forward Congress's priorities for equipping, training, and maintaining the greatest fighting forces in the world. It has never been used before as a purely partisan weapon—that is, not until this year. Reassuringly, the past few days have finally brought an end to bipartisan talks and produced a compromise NDAA. The end result should be able to pass both Chambers and earn the President's signature. Believe me, it will not come a moment too soon.

The NDAA authorizes resources to keep crucial military installations—like Fort Campbell, Fort Knox, and the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky—running smoothly. It is similarly important to facilities in many of our colleagues' home States as well. Nationally, of course, it directs readiness efforts, prioritizes research and development programs, and enacts vital reforms at the Pentagon.

I look forward to sending the final, bipartisan product by the conference committee to the President for his signature soon. In addition to that authorizing legislation, Congress, of course, needs to actually appropriate funds for our national defense and for all other functions of our Federal Government.

Just a few months ago, when leaders on both sides put their names to a bipartisan-bicameral roadmap for the appropriations process, it looked as though we might keep partisan disputes out of this process and finish up the appropriations with time to spare. Unfortunately, our Democratic colleagues decided that picking fights with the White House was a higher priority, and we spent the autumn being mired in disputes over exactly the kinds of poison pills and Presidential authorities the Speaker and the Democratic leader had previously promised

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



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