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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Redeemer, provide our lawmakers with Your grace, mercy, and peace. By Your grace, may they forget the challenges behind them. By Your mercy, may they reach for the opportunities that beckon. By Your peace, may they possess an equanimity of temperament during life's fluctuating intricacies.

Lord, give them a passion for truth and a reluctance to major in minors. Use their exemplary lives to inspire people to live with faith, purpose and power.

Remind us all that though we may plan, You determine what will finally happen.

We pray in Your Great Name. 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAWLEY). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 1 minute for morning business.

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Although promising vaccines for the coronavirus are on the horizon, it is more important than ever to stop the surge. Countries across the world are seeing cases explode.

It is critical for Iowans to step up their personal responsibilities to stay

safe and healthy for themselves and their loved ones. And that, of course, includes our tireless healthcare professionals—those on the frontlines, working to save lives.

This virus is hitting rural and urban areas alike. No community is immune. I ask every Iowan to continue to do their part to keep their family and neighbors safe: Wash your hands; limit your activity outside your household; social distance; wear a mask.

We are going to get through this together, but we need everyone to do their part.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, once again, this morning brought two different sets of headlines on the pandemic we have been battling for the last 9 months.

On one hand, rates of infection and hospitalization are rising rapidly nationwide. We must all continue taking smart precautions, such as wearing masks and practicing social distancing.

But at the same time, we continue to receive hopeful signs that victory may actually be on the horizon.

This morning, the American biotech firm Moderna and our National Institutes of Health announced that early trials suggest the vaccine they are jointly developing may be both safe and more than 94 percent effective.

This follows Pfizer's similar announcement last week. As former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb summed it up this morning, "when the full data comes out, we may have two highly effective vaccines against COVID."

If these results hold, we are told the first doses of a vaccine could be admin-

istered to certain vulnerable people as soon as next month, with wider distribution by next spring. This is a remarkable testament to American ingenuity: to bright researchers and brave test participants, to bold commitments from the private sector, and historic support from smart public policy like Operation Warp Speed from the Trump administration and from this Senate.

As Moderna's CEO said this morning, "I want to thank our partners at BARDA and Operation Warp Speed who have been instrumental in accelerating our progress to this point."

Operation Warp Speed spent billions in funding to expedite research and development. It provided a streamlined regulatory environment and prepurchase agreements to reduce risk. It has mobilized the compilation of the basic supplies—things like needles and swabs—that need to travel with the vaccine itself.

We have every indication that this historic public-private partnership is on track to deliver a scientific miracle and help us defeat the virus in the months ahead.

Certainly there is no time to waste. Kentucky just announced our highest ever weekly count of new positive cases. The numbers are troubling in places all across our country. So, for now, our job is to continue doing all we can to stay safe and slow the spread.

MILITARY WITHDRAWAL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on a totally different matter, the last several days have brought renewed speculation about the prospect of rapidly withdrawing all U.S. military forces from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Here in Congress, a small minority in both parties seem to think it is in America's power to unilaterally remove conflicts by simply walking away from them.

Let me say that again. A small minority in both parties seem to think it

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



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is in America's power to unilaterally resolve conflicts by simply walking away from them.

Of course all wars must end. The question is now how they end and whether the terms on which they end are favorable or unfavorable to the security and interests of the United States.

And nothing about the circumstances we face today suggests that if we lose resolve, the terrorists will simply leave us alone.

Over the last 4 years, the Trump administration has made tremendous headway in creating the conditions that will secure the enduring defeat of the terrorists. This President and his policies have strengthened America's hand in multiple Middle East conflicts while reducing the risks and costs to our country. The ISIS caliphate has been shattered, and millions have been liberated from their brutal rule. We have removed master terrorists like al-Baghdadi, Soleimani, and senior al-Qaida and ISIS leaders from the battlefield.

The Trump administration has brokered diplomatic successes that should help bring long-term stability and more economic opportunity to a troubled region. The Abraham Accords are a geostrategic game changer.

The last 4 years have also brought increased skin in the game from our allies and our partners. Our friends in Europe and elsewhere have a shared interest in stopping safe havens for terror. Today, in Africa, our limited American presence supports a multinational initiative led by France to combat radical Islamic terrorists.

Likewise, in places where American forces continue to play roles in ongoing conflicts across the broader Middle East, Secretaries Mattis and Esper worked hard and successfully to secure renewed contributions from European partners and to transition our posture more and more toward a supporting role.

Our local partners are demonstrably shouldering the lion's share of the burden in the fight. In neither Afghanistan nor Iraq nor Syria are American combat forces playing a primary role.

We have scored major battlefield successes by supporting and working with and through local partners, such as the Afghan National Security Forces, the elite Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service, and the local Kurdish and Arab fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

So the situation we face today is totally different than what we faced 10 years ago. We do not have hundreds of thousands of soldiers engaged in combat abroad.

We do not have hundreds of thousands of soldiers engaged in combat abroad. We are not an occupying force.

Today, our limited American military presence in the Middle East is supporting local forces and enabling multinational efforts.

We are playing a limited—limited but important role in defending Amer-

ican national security and American interests against terrorists who would like nothing more than for the most powerful force for good in the world to simply pick up our ball and go home.

They would love that. That is why, last year, 70 Senators—a bipartisan supermajority—voted for an amendment I authored that acknowledged the progress made in Syria and Afghanistan, identified the risks that remain, and cautioned that precipitous withdrawal would create vacuums that Iran, Russia, and the terrorists would be delighted—delighted—to fill.

There is no American who does not wish the war in Afghanistan against terrorists and their enablers had already been conclusively won. But that does not change the actual choice before us now.

A rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan now would hurt our allies and delight—delight—the people who wish us harm. Violence affecting Afghans is still rampant. The Taliban is not abiding by the conditions of the so-called peace deal.

The consequences of a premature American exit would likely be even worse than President Obama's withdrawal from Iraq back in 2011, which fueled—fueled—the rise of ISIS and a new round of global terrorism. It would be reminiscent of the humiliating American departure from Saigon in 1975.

We would be abandoning our partners in Afghanistan, the brave Afghans who are fighting the terrorists and destroying the government's leverage in their talks with the Taliban that are designed to end the fighting.

Our retreat would embolden the Taliban, especially the deadly Haqqani wing, and risk plunging Afghan women and girls back into what they experienced back in the 1990s. It would hand a weakened and scattered al-Qaida a big, big propaganda victory and a renewed safe haven for plotting attacks against America. And it would be welcome news to Iran, which has long provided arms and support to the Taliban and explicitly seeks our retreat from the Middle East.

A disorganized retreat would jeopardize the track record of major successes this administration has worked hard to compile. A number of former officials and Ambassadors recently stated: "The spectacle of U.S. troops abandoning facilities and equipment, leaving the field in Afghanistan to the Taliban and ISIS, would be broadcast around the world as a symbol of U.S. defeat and humiliation, and a victory for Islamist extremism."

President Trump deserves major credit—major credit—for reducing U.S. forces in Afghanistan to a sustainable level, scoring major victories against terrorists across the region, and ensuring the Afghans themselves are at the front of the fight.

That same successful approach should continue until the conditions for the long-term defeat of ISIS and al-Qaida have been achieved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 505, H.R. 6395.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6395) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the Inhofe substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to and that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time.

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

The amendment (No. 2682), in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to as follows:

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

Mr. McCONNELL. I know of no further debate on the bill, as amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 6395), as amended, was passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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 legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF JUDY SHELTON

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, tomorrow, the Senate will vote on the nomination of Judy Shelton to serve on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. Judy Shelton's views are breathtakingly extreme and retrograde. She actually seems to prefer the economic policies that foregrounded