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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, as bombs fall in Syria and refugees seek safety, may all who are oppressed look to You. In spite of our world's turbulence, we continue to proclaim Your greatness for Your sovereignty will prevail. Free us from fear. Answer when we call. Shelter us from disappointment.

Bless our Senators. Lord, fill them with the Spirit of Your wisdom, making them equal to challenges of this difficult season of our national and world history. Open their minds to comprehend Your wisdom, their ears to hear Your guidance, and their hearts to obey Your biddings.

Lift the light of Your countenance upon all who seek You and give them Your peace.

We pray in Your mighty 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). The majority leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY AND SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS AND VETERANS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, with each passing day, the American

people are reminded of the peril attached to the Obama administration's inflexible determination to conduct foreign policy based on campaign promises made in 2008. These goals—unilaterally withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan based on fixed deadlines, ending the war on terror and some of the critical tools used to pursue Al Qaeda, closing the secure detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, withdrawing from our deployed forward presence, slashing investment in our conventional armed services, and pursuing nuclear agreements with Russia and Iran at any cost—have remained constant, although the world has changed right in front of our Commander in Chief.

Yesterday we saw the Obama administration threaten to veto the national Defense authorization bill, which recently passed the Senate by a large bipartisan majority of 71 to 25. It passed the House by a big bipartisan margin as well.

This is the legislation that sets out military policy and authorizes funds for our military each year. It is always one of the most important bills we consider every year, but it is especially important right now.

The number of threats currently facing us is truly staggering. The last month and week have brought glaring reminders. We are now seeing Russian forces deploy to Syria to preserve the Assad regime. Although Moscow may try to call this some kind of counterterrorism campaign, let's be perfectly clear: Russia's offensive is designed to protect Assad's Alawite stronghold and Russian military installations, while driving out the moderate opposition and compelling coordination of Syrian airspace with the coalition. Russia aims to forcefully insert itself into the middle of coalition operations to gain insights into the plans of the United States and, of course, to secure a seat at the table. Meanwhile, our moderate Syrian allies stand appalled that the

United States has ceded its leadership position in the broader Middle East.

Of all the promises made by this administration, withdrawing from Afghanistan by a date certain seems to ignore the attack upon Kunduz by the Taliban and the efforts of President Ghani to secure the gains of the coalition and his country's future. How can the administration be pondering a withdrawal of the force when the Taliban's offensive persists and the campaign against Al Qaeda has not yet achieved its defeat?

So many threats face us—from Russia, Iran, Syria, ISIL, and even China—as do so many different means of attack: conventional, cyber, or terror. And now the Obama administration is talking about vetoing America's national defense bill. They are talking about vetoing the national defense bill in the wake of all of this.

I will have more to say about the national defense bill in the coming days. But this is about more than one bill; it is the latest in an increasingly worrying pattern. Just last week, Democrats voted again to block funding for our military. Democrats had voted for that military funding bill in committee. They issued press releases praising the bill they had supported in the Appropriations Committee, but then they blocked the Senate from even debating it. Now they appear ready to give the same treatment to our veterans. Democrats voted for the veterans funding bill in committee. They issued press releases praising the bill. But now they seem prepared to block the Senate from even debating this bill too. It is all part of some half-baked Democratic scheme to get more money for the IRS and for Washington bureaucracies. It makes no sense, it is extreme, and it needs to stop.

The veterans funding bill before us would do right by the men and women who have given everything to protect us and who have suffered so much

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



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