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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 30, 2021, at 2 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2021

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

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, who remains the same though all else fades, we praise You for Your graciousness and compassion, rejoicing that You are slow to anger and rich in love.

Lord, thank You for Your presence in the lives of our lawmakers, providing them with clear vision from Your light that leads to truth.

Remind our Senators that everything is possible for those who believe. Incline their hearts to Your wisdom and love, as You keep their feet on the path of integrity.

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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The 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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING ABE SCHUMER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I hope all Senators had a productive and restful Thanksgiving holiday.

This year, I am sad to say, was a painful Thanksgiving season for the Schumer family. Last Wednesday, we all said goodbye to my father Abe Schumer, who passed away after 98 amazing years.

I want to thank all of my colleagues in this Chamber who have reached out with prayers, condolences, and words of kindness in recent days. Their words give us strength. Their prayers give us healing. Their kindness gives us immense comfort. I say the same to so many New Yorkers who reached out as well.

Here on the floor of the U.S. Senate, I want to take a moment to offer a loving son's tribute to the man we lost last week.

My father was the kind of parent every kid deserves, every spouse hopes for, and the sort of American that makes our country great, and as I shared last week:

In so many ways, he personified the greatest generation. He took whatever was thrown at him, no matter how difficult; he did his job and never complained. He was an amazing husband, parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent.

Dad, we love you. We already miss you beyond comprehension. Thank you for the incredible life you led on this Earth.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now, on another subject, Omicron. Over the course of 2021, our country has made monumental and hard-fought progress in our fight against the COVID–19 pandemic.

After the passing of the American Rescue Plan, after getting vaccines into as many arms as possible, and because of the unceasing work of the Biden administration and healthcare workers across the country, we begin the winter of 2021 in a much better place than the winter of 2020.

But as we learn more about the Omicron variant that is spreading abroad, my message to the American people is simple: If you don't want to get sick, get vaccinated. If you are eligible, get your booster shot.

While there is so much we have yet to understand about the Omicron variant, we do know that you are far less likely to be hospitalized or die from the coronavirus if you are fully vaccinated. And for those who are already vaccinated, research shows that boosters are likewise highly effective. Take the words of Dr. Francis Collins, the head of the National Institutes of Health:

Boosters do, in fact, allow your immune system to have a wide range of capabilities against spike proteins it hasn't seen before.

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

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If you needed one more reason, if you're eligible to get that booster right away, this would be it.

Those are the words of Dr. Collins.

By now we know, the longer that eligible people resist safe vaccines, the greater the risk of new variants like Delta and Omicron arising in our midst. These strains—these strains—of variants have largely spread among unvaccinated populations, threatening our families, small businesses, and prolonging the day we put this wretched disease fully in the rearview mirror.

So if you aren't getting vaccinated for yourself because you don't think you need it, then do it for your family, your friends, and your neighbors because the unvaccinated population is where the variants multiply, spread, and grow, and hurt everybody.

So as we enter the holiday season, as we begin attending holiday gatherings and traveling long distances to see families, I urge New Yorkers and Americans everywhere to stay safe, get vaccinated, and get boosted. It is the best thing we can do to protect our families, our communities, and our country.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on NDAA, the Defense Act, we begin an important week for what will be an important final month of 2021.

Later today, the Senate will vote on cloture on the substitute amendment to the NDAA. NDAA has been passed by this Chamber for over 60 years, and there is no good reason why this year should be any different.

Before Thanksgiving, the Senate worked in as bipartisan way as it could to lay the groundwork for advancing the Defense bill. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman REED and Ranking Member INHOFE reached an agreement, a bipartisan agreement, on a package of 18 amendments—let me repeat that; 18 amendments, folks—for the Senate to hold rollcall votes on. Nearly half of those amendments were led by a Republican. That would be more amendments to the NDAA receiving rollcall votes than in the last 4 years combined.

We also agreed to the substitute amendment, which included at least 50 amendments, 27 of which were led by a Republican. Senator INHOFE, the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, agreed to this.

In any other time, this would be considered a very fair and generous compromise. Even though every Member didn't get every amendment they wanted, the leadership on both sides would have made sure that cloture was granted.

Unfortunately, Republicans could not accept this agreement before Thanksgiving, but we hope that Republican dysfunction will not be a roadblock to passing this bill and taking care of our troops and their families.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on government funding, as we all know, by the end of this week, both parties must come to an agreement for funding the government and avoiding a needless shutdown.

At the end of September, Democrats and Republicans worked together to keep the government open through December 3, avoiding many of the fights that tainted so many funding debates under the previous administration. After the House takes action this week, the Democratic-led Senate will move forward to make sure the government remains funded after the deadline.

With so many critical issues, the last thing the American people need right now is a government shutdown, and Democrats are going to work this week to make sure we don't have one this time around. It is important to get it done, and we are working to get it done.

BUILD BACK BETTER

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Madam President, on Build Back Better, before the end of the year, the Senate will also work on President Biden's Build Back Better legislation, which momentously passed the House at the very end of the last work period.

This week, Democrats will continue to meet with the Senate Parliamentarian in order to complete the technical and procedural work required before the bill comes to the floor. Meetings were held over the Thanksgiving week, and we will continue this week and next week as needed.

As I have said repeatedly, once this necessary work is completed with the Parliamentarian, I will bring the President's Build Back Better legislation to the floor so we can pass it as soon as possible and send it to the President's desk. Our goal continues to be to get this done before Christmas.

Build Back Better represents the largest investment in the American people in generations. Under our bill, childcare will be more affordable, pre-K will be more affordable, and raising kids overall will be more affordable for tens of millions of parents.

The bill will take unprecedented steps in the fight against the climate crisis, paving the way for even greater action in the future.

And as scores of economists from across the ideological spectrum attest to, Build Back Better will not worsen inflation—will not worsen inflation—and in the long run help bring costs under control.

So cutting costs, saving parents money, fighting climate change, and creating the jobs of tomorrow—these are the things the American people want; these are the things the American people need; and these are the things that Build Back Better will deliver on once we pass it through this Chamber.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, today's Democratic Party does not make the policy decisions of a party that is serious about protecting our country.

In May, President Biden released a budget proposal that proposed a de facto cut in defense spending, and that was before the President's own supercharged inflation further cut the purchasing power of every defense dollar.

In August, his botched Afghanistan retreat shattered our allies' trust and delighted the terrorists. In 10 months in office, despite naive happy talk from the administration, the threats we face are markedly worse. The vacuum they left in Afghanistan has emboldened terrorists, from Iran's militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to the highest ranks of the Taliban's government.

Their desperation to return to a failed nuclear deal has given Iran the upper hand in negotiations.

For 4 years, my colleague the Democratic leader seemed constantly focused on Putin and Russia. But now, with Putin flaunting his power and Russia engaged in ongoing cyber attacks, weapons tests, and troop buildups? Crickets.

And for all their talk about China's threat, we have seen no evidence that Democrats intend for the United States to keep pace with the PLA's investments in nuclear and hypersonic weapons.

The bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission has made clear that we cannot shortchange our military modernization and have a prayer of competing with the People's Republic of China or even the declining but dangerous Russian Republic.

Our colleagues across the aisle have missed one opportunity after another to right the ship. They have used the reconciliation process to pass trillions in new partisan spending without a cent for defending the Nation.

And despite the strong bipartisan work of our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, the Democratic leader kept this year's Defense authorization bill in limbo literally for months and now wants to block the Senate from a real debate and a real amendment process.