

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the titles of the bills for the second time en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S.J. Res. 58) expressing support for freedom of conscience.

A resolution (H.J. Res. 77) opposing the decision to end certain United States efforts to prevent Turkish military operations against Syrian Kurdish forces in Northeast Syria.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provision of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant 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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING ELIJAH CUMMINGS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, we woke up this morning to learn with profound sadness that our friend and colleague Congressman ELIJAH CUMMINGS, the son of sharecroppers who became the chair of the House Oversight Committee, passed away last night at the age of 68.

It was the first thing I saw when I read the paper this morning, and it hit me like a punch in the stomach.

In his 23 years in Congress, ELIJAH amassed a legacy that will live on long after his sudden passing. He served the people of his Maryland district with selflessness, passion, and grace.

Since it only happened this morning, I can't do justice to the legacy of ELIJAH CUMMINGS, but I would like to share a few reflections, and I know that my dear friend Senator CARDIN was close like this—like brothers—with ELIJAH CUMMINGS, and they had worked together on so many things for Maryland and the country. I know he is here sharing our deep sadness.

Now, truly, ELIJAH CUMMINGS was not just a great Congressman. He was a great man. He had a presence—a commanding presence—when he entered the room, and he could be strong when he had to be, and he had to be strong quite often. But he also was always kind and decent and caring and honorable.

It is a rare combination, that inner strength and that decency and that kindness. ELIJAH had it. If we had lived in happier times, maybe the public would have seen this kind side more

often, but ELIJAH was never one to shrink from the moment.

I talked to him frequently. We would talk about the goings-on in the House or the Senate or the political trivia of the day. Sometimes we would talk about Maryland politics. He was an expert.

ELIJAH was revered by his constituents and indeed by the entire State of Maryland. Liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, Black or White, you went to ELIJAH CUMMINGS for advice. His loss is an enormous one for his constituents, for his staff and, above all, his family. I pray for them this morning, as I pray for our country when people like ELIJAH CUMMINGS of the world are no longer with us.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on Syria, yesterday, the U.S. military carried out airstrikes to destroy what only a few weeks ago had been the headquarters of the American campaign to destroy ISIS in Syria. Nothing encapsulates the failure of President Trump's decision to stand aside for Erdogan more than the fact that we are now bombing our own bases rather than allow them to fall into the hands of Assad, Erdogan, or Putin.

If Erdogan, Putin, and Assad are such great allies or no problem, as President Trump told us yesterday at the White House, then why do we have to bomb our own headquarters after American troops evacuated so it doesn't fall into Syrian or Turkish or even Russian hands? That one thing encapsulates the absurdity, the awfulness of President Trump's lack of policy and erratic, impulsive, and whimsical movements on the Syrian front.

Yesterday the President said this withdrawal was a "strategic move." It certainly is not that because this is not the action of a military that carried out a deliberate withdrawal. It is the action of a military that was given a fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants decision of the President contrary to the recommendations of the commanders on the ground.

Donald Trump has the nerve, the gall, to think he knows more about the military than these generals who have served our country for decades. It is appalling. How does America put up with this? How do our Republican colleagues put up with this? He doesn't consult the generals. What a blunder, and it seems to be the result of the President's inability to say no to dictators. He seems to like a Putin and an Erdogan and even a Kim more than our allies. This is also a clear demonstration of the President's fecklessness and recklessness, both, or as my colleague Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, and one of the President's staunchest allies in Congress, said, "I fear that this is a complete and utter national security disaster in the making."

Yesterday afternoon, congressional leaders went to the White House, at its

request, to meet with the President about the rapid disintegration of the situation in northern Syria. Speaker PELOSI and I talked about it ahead of time, and we talked about it with Senators REED and MENENDEZ as well. We had a serious purpose: to find out if the President actually had a plan to contain ISIS and fix the mess precipitated by his decision to green-light Erdogan's military incursion into Syria.

Alarming—alarming—President Trump had no plan. The greatest insult that occurred in that room was not any of the name-calling that Trump did. A far greater insult to America, to all of us, was the lack of any policy guidance, any policy decisions, any direction from the President and his top national security advisers on how to contain ISIS.

I reminded the President that as two New Yorkers, we probably knew better than most the damage a small band of terrorists can do, even from a half a world away. I asked: What is your plan to prevent ISIS from regrouping and resurging? He didn't have one. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper didn't have a plan.

After we pushed them and pushed them, I said: Who is going to take care of all these prisoners? The President said there were 70,000 ISIS prisoners and their families. Who is going to take care of them, make sure they don't escape, as some have already?

They finally said: Well, the Syrians and the Turks will do that. So I asked the group if they had any intelligence or assurances that the Turks and Syrians would do a decent job. Secretary Esper himself said there was no evidence of that.

This is amazing. Terrorists whom we have spent a decade fighting—we have spent billions of dollars and lost lives to fight them—are finally in prison. The Kurds are guarding them. The Kurds are leaving, understandably, because they have to fight the Turks now. What is the plan? There isn't any, except to rely on Syrians, Turks, who have not even close to the interest we have in curbing ISIS.

Assad is much more interested in gaining back his Syrian homeland. Erdogan is focused on hurting the Kurds, whom he is fanatically against. So they are not going to pay much attention to ISIS.

It was appalling, just appalling. President Trump has stepped aside for Putin, Assad, and Erdogan. Our allies, the Kurds, are being slaughtered as a result of our betrayal. Most importantly, as Secretary Mattis said, "if we don't keep the pressure on [in Syria], ISIS will resurge. It's absolutely a given that they will come back."

The President didn't like hearing Mattis's words, but all of America should. He is one of the most respected military minds, one of the most respected leaders on both sides of the aisle—liberals, Independents, conservatives. Here is what he said, again repeating: