



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 162

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

No. 139

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.

Creator of life, You are from everlasting to everlasting. We lift our voices in thanksgiving, for You satisfy humanity's spiritual hunger. Today, we remember Your guidance that we do not live by bread alone but by Your Words that nourish and sustain us.

Feed our lawmakers with Heaven's bread. May their labors produce a harvest of faith, hope, and love. Lord, give them the grace to cherish and cultivate the virtues and values tested and confirmed in the cubicle of life's daily struggle. Nourished by You, may the earthly labors of our Senators fulfill a Heavenly purpose.

We pray in Your sacred 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PAUL). The Democratic leader is recognized.

MOVING OUR COUNTRY FORWARD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, by now most Americans are well acquainted with Donald Trump but especially Donald Trump's head-scratching slogan "Make America Great Again." He has his little hat he wears when he doesn't want his hair to get messed up. That

slogan offers a peek inside the minds of Donald Trump and his Republican followers in Congress. These Republicans want to believe our country isn't great. They want to believe this Nation is foundering. They don't want to listen to the facts; they just want to follow Trump.

Earlier this year Speaker RYAN echoed Donald Trump when he said, in criticizing President Obama, "We think that the President's policies aren't working. . . . We have flat wages."

Why do Republicans spend so much time rooting against economic growth and ignoring millions of newly insured Americans' access to health care? Why do they root daily against America? Because they say anything to convince their radical base that President Obama is failing, even though the facts are contrary.

Despite what Donald Trump and the congressional Republicans say, we know that America is great already, and because of Democratic policies, we are improving it every day, in spite of the obstacles—filibuster, filibuster, filibuster, obstacle, obstacle, obstacle.

Let's look at the facts. Yesterday the Census Bureau reported that median household incomes grew by 5.2 percent last year. That is the single largest annual income gain ever recorded—ever recorded. Isn't America great? Every major income bracket in our country saw an increase in earnings, with the lowest 10th percentile seeing the biggest gains. This is real progress for all Americans. Really, isn't America great? These remarkable income gains hold true across racial lines as well. In just 1 year, Hispanics saw a 6.1-percent increase in earnings. African Americans experienced a 4.1-percent jump in income. Isn't America great? This is the kind of wage growth we should celebrate, but Republicans have been totally silent because they want America not to be great. They can all start wearing the hats when they want to cover their hair.

For the first time since 1999, we are moving in the right direction on income, health care coverage, and poverty indicators. Household incomes are rising and the poverty rate is falling. That is good. Isn't America great? We are finally regaining the ground we lost during the great recession, which was at the end of the Bush administration. It really started a couple of years after he became President. In 2015 the official poverty rate dropped more than a full percentage point. That means 2 million Americans were lifted out of poverty. Real average weekly earnings have risen at their fastest pace in 15 years. Isn't America great? Yes, it is.

These incredible statistics show how much progress we have made in spite of the obstacles, the filibusters, and they show how much Americans would have to lose from a Trump Presidency that works solely for the rich and completely ignores the middle class because daily Donald Trump is rooting for failure, as are his Republican adherents.

Yesterday's census data also corrects Republicans' false narrative on the Affordable Care Act, on ObamaCare. Because of ObamaCare, more Americans have health insurance than ever before in the history of this country. According to the Census Bureau, the uninsured rate has plummeted in virtually every State. California saw the biggest drop, with a decline of 8.6 percent of those uninsured. Nevada was second, with an 8.4 percentage point drop. Really, isn't ObamaCare great? If other Republican Governors would follow the lead of the Republican Governor in Nevada, they would have the same statistics.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, the Republican leader's home State of Kentucky had the third largest reduction in the number of uninsured people—a decrease of 8.3 percentage points. Isn't ObamaCare great? The Republican leader loves to come to the floor and bash ObamaCare. He was here

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S5681

yesterday doing just that. It is curious how the senior Senator from Kentucky picks and chooses what he says about ObamaCare. He refuses to acknowledge the newly insured Kentuckians who have access to health care because of this law. Kentucky has 4.4 million people, and 500,000 of the Republican leader's constituents have health insurance because of ObamaCare. That is more than 11 percent of his State's population. ObamaCare is great.

The Affordable Care Act is helping the people of Kentucky and the people of America, regardless of what Republicans say here on the Senate floor, and they are rooting for failure.

To no one's surprise, this new census data also shows that the States that refused to expand Medicaid are the ones falling behind in health care. There are 19 Republican Governors doing just that. States that expanded Medicaid have insurance premium rates that are 7 percent lower than States that rejected Medicaid expansion. The States that did not expand Medicaid—States with Republican Governors and Republican legislatures—have an uninsured rate nearly twice as high as States that used ObamaCare to expand coverage. This is no coincidence. We know these policies work, but Republicans simply refuse to listen.

This is the attitude which led to Trump: Republican leaders insisted that no matter what President Obama suggested, it wouldn't work. And we have the filibusters to show that.

We know the truth. Thanks to the policies of President Obama and Democrats, we have emerged from the terrible recession. We are seeing record wage growth. We are making a great nation even greater. We don't hear about the successes as much as we should. Unfortunately, the press is oftentimes more interested in something more scandalous. As all this census data shows, we have moved our country forward, and we did it despite lots of Republican opposition. It is a shame that Republicans didn't help. They were too interested in opposing President Obama on everything. If they helped a little, America would be even greater.

We still have a lot to do. We need to do more for the middle class, more to give Americans a livable wage, and more to ease the burden of student loan debt. We need to work together to improve upon the many successes of the Affordable Care Act. If we had a token of an effort from Republicans, we could make the health care law even better and stronger. We must address the issue of gun violence and take steps to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists and criminals. We must do something about campaign finance reform. We must protect America from those who would turn America into a Russian oligarchy.

I hope my Republican colleagues will take this opportunity to stop being the party of Trump. The party of Trump,

whose pal is Putin—and he has even gone so far, obviously, as to suggest that maybe we should be an oligarchy also. I hope my Republican colleagues will take this opportunity to stop being the party of Trump, to stop being the party of no and work with us to build on the progress we have already made.

Mr. President, I ask that the leader time be reserved, and I ask the Chair to announce what we are going to do the rest of the day, or perhaps I should just suggest the absence of a quorum, which I will do until the Republican leader gets here.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein until 11 a.m., with the time until 10:30 a.m. under the control of the Democrats, and the majority controlling the remainder of the time until 11 a.m.

GETTING OUR WORK DONE

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, once upon a time, there were elections and the people of this country, in their wisdom, decided to send a different party to the U.S. Senate as a majority. At that time, to much fanfare, the leader of the Republican Party announced that it was going to be a new day, that there was going to be regular order, that there was going to be a budget. There would be no filling the tree. We would do individual appropriations bills. Most notably, the leader said we were going to put in a full day's work. In fact, my colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think he even talked about working on Fridays in Washington.

Now, let me hasten to add that I know every Member of this body, when they go back to their homes in their States, they work. We have a lot of meetings to go to and people to see, so I don't mean to say that when we are not in session we are not working. But the American people were told that we would be putting in more work in Washington.

By the way, it is not as if we don't have work to do. I remember month

after month after month, all FOX News talked about was where was the budget. We had no budget. The law says you have to pass a budget. The Republicans over and over and over again, on this floor, on television: Where is the budget? Where is the budget?

Well, I ask that question now. Where is the budget? It hasn't been mentioned by my colleagues across the aisle lately. My colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that the budget is required by law to be done in the spring, not during football season and certainly not at Christmas time.

The individual appropriations bills haven't worked out so well, either. The only ones they have been interested in doing are the ones that don't tackle the tough problem of balance; that is, the balance between our homeland security needs and our defense needs, the balance between the needs of educating our kids and making sure that our soldiers are well equipped.

But probably the thing that is most amazing is that in light of no hearing on Merrick Garland, in light of no budget, in light of no spending bills—in light of all of these things—we are working fewer days in Washington than we have in 60 years.

I showed this calendar to people at home, and they thought I was kidding. This is the calendar of our work schedule.

Now, let me also point out that we have heard this week that the leader of the Republican Party doesn't even want us to work these three days—October 4, 5, and 6—so mark a line through those, and the entire month of October is black. That means nothing is happening on the budget, nothing is happening on the Supreme Court vacancy, nothing is happening on oversight hearings, nothing is happening on appropriations, nothing is happening on Zika. Nothing is happening in Washington. I am just going to pause for a minute so anyone who has the C-SPAN bug can just look at this calendar. All the blacked-out days are days that we are not in Washington. A full week plus in January, a full week plus in February, almost two weeks in March, another two weeks in May, another almost week in June, almost 2½ weeks in July, the entire month of August. We didn't even work the full month of September. Now we are told we may not work any days in October. The calendar shows just a handful of days in November. There is a lot of business that has to be done by the end of the year, and obviously it looks like there are only a few days in December that we are working.

I think there are like 240 work days that most Americans work every year. By my estimate, I think we are working about 110 of those. No wonder the American people are angry. No wonder the American people don't get it. It is very simple. Not only is the Republican Senate not doing its job in terms of setting a history of not having even an up-or-down vote on the Supreme Court