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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon 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.

Eternal Spirit, our guide and strength, we need Your guidance. Show us the path to meaningful life. Reveal to us the steps of faith.

Today, use the Members of this body to do Your will. Quicken their hearts and purify their minds. Broaden their concerns and strengthen their commitments.

Lord, show them duties left undone. Remind them of promises unkept and reveal to them tasks unattended. Lead them, Father, through this season of challenge to a deeper experience with You. Then, send them from Your presence to be Your instruments of good in transforming our Nation and world.

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. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 2 years ago the American people sent a new majority to the Senate. They called for a change in direction. They called for the Senate to get to work. So

we got committees functioning again, we gave Members of both parties a say again, and we put the Senate back to work again and back on the side of the American people.

Because we did, we were able to get important things done with a President of a different party. We put an end to the number of Washington artificial cliffs and punts. We helped make our infrastructure stronger. We helped make our communities healthier and our country safer. We gave our children more opportunities to succeed in school, and we helped ensure that those who suffer exploitation and abuse—whether veterans or the victims of human trafficking—can know more of the justice, hope, and care they deserve.

I am proud of what we were able to achieve in a time of divided government, just as I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead.

We now stand on the horizon of a new era. We seated a new Congress yesterday. We will inaugurate a new President later this month. The challenges ahead are great, and the work to come will be hard, but just as we heard the voices of the American people in 2014, we heard their message this last election as well. Americans called for change from the last 8 years and for hope, at long last. Each of us, regardless of party, has a mandate to help and to play a role.

The first way to begin realizing that hope, in my view, is to remove the things that are hurting families right now. The President-elect will have an important role to play there, especially in addressing overbearing, ideologically driven regulations.

Congress will have its role too. In terms of what we can do here most immediately, ObamaCare is at the top of the list. It is the very first item we will consider this session. We will continue to devote significant time to it as well.

I know some of our Democratic friends would prefer we didn't act—

that we just sit on our hands as premiums jump higher, as more Americans lose plans, and as others continue to struggle with insurance too costly to actually use. That is essentially the message the outgoing President came this morning to deliver. The incoming Vice President came this morning, too, and delivered an entirely different message.

But repeal is just the first step. We know it will take time to undo the damage of this partisan law. We want—and we will need—the contributions of all colleagues as we turn to the development of a lasting, durable reform.

The same is true of our economy. We know the economy over the last 8 years hasn't lived up to its potential—not for working people, not for small businesses, and certainly not for the next generation. We will have disagreements about the best way forward. That is entirely natural. But, if we look, we will continue to find areas of agreement too. There are important contributions for each of us to make. That is the lesson of the 114th Congress.

A more open Senate is a more empowering Senate, but it is also a more demanding Senate. It gives each of us more of a say in the development of legislation, just as it requires more of a responsibility in cooperating. In short, it gives the minority party a stake in governing and thus the obligations that come along with that.

I welcome our colleague from New York in his new role as Democratic leader. The role of leading a party is never easy. He has a tough job ahead of him. I respect him for that. While I know we will often disagree, I am also reminded of his words just before the election. "We have a moral obligation," the Democratic leader said just before the election, "even beyond the economy and politics, to avoid gridlock and get the country to work again."

"We have to get things done," he said.

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



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