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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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If that is our guiding principle, then I know we can make this session a success. It is what will allow us to get the appropriations process moving, for example. We can set the pace now by working toward a smooth nomination process.

I ask our Democratic friends to remember the consideration we showed President-Elect Obama's nominees in 2009. We approved seven—seven—members of his Cabinet unanimously within hours of his inauguration. Seven nominees for President Obama's Cabinet were approved unanimously within hours of his inauguration.

Now, some nominations will be more contentious. I am sure that will be true, of course, of the Supreme Court. It has been clear throughout that the next President would name the next Supreme Court Justice. I maintained that position even when many thought a President of a different party would be taking the oath this month. Now the President who won the election will make the nomination, and the Senate that the American people just re-elected will consider that nomination.

But not everything need become so contentious. We will have many opportunities to cooperate. I have mentioned several already. We will see many more in committee. Shortly, we hope to see an example of that in the Intelligence Committee, where Chairman BURR will lead Members of both parties in a serious, comprehensive, and responsible review of any Russian involvement in our elections. Leader SCHUMER will join the committee as an ex-officio member and will be able to review the reports of the intelligence community. The Armed Services Committee will review how best to tie our cyber capabilities to our warfighting doctrine.

It is just this type of issue—something both parties say is too important to become a partisan football—where we often see the hard work of legislating and oversight transcend party. We saw it last Congress when, for instance, Members of both parties came together—and held together—on highways, on efforts to cure incurable diseases, and on providing TPA authority to both the current President and the next one. I hope we will see similar cooperation on many issues to come.

The American people are watching us. They are hurting. They are calling for a change in direction. It is now our united responsibility to move forward with their needs and their priorities as our guide.

Let me again welcome every new Member of the Senate. I want again to congratulate the Democratic leader, and let me again acknowledge President-Elect Trump for an impressive victory. He heard the voices of Americans in every part of the country in ways others have not. He now carries a heavy burden.

We will work with him to help the American people feel confident again—confident in themselves and confident in their futures.

We look forward to the inauguration in just over 2 weeks. There is now much serious work to be done. I look forward to working with each of you to achieve it.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the motion to proceed to S. Con. Res. 3 occur following the remarks of Senator SCHUMER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2017—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to S. Con. Res. 3.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 1, S. Con. Res. 3, a concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2017 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2018 through 2026.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. 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. Mr. 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.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I apologize to my good friend the Republican leader. I couldn't be here for his remarks. I intended to be, but our President stayed longer and then I was meeting with the Vice President-elect. I apologize for that.

I also wish to recognize the distinguished majority leader and reiterate what I said yesterday: I sincerely hope, just as I heard he hopes, that we can find common ground in the Senate. While we at all times inevitably disagree on the right way forward for our country, I know he is a patriot who

cares deeply about this institution. That matters a lot to me. I learned that through a meeting set up by my friend from Tennessee. We had a dinner, and I walked away convinced that Leader MCCONNELL cares a lot about making the institution function. That matters, and that can maybe help us through some of the rougher times. We know it has grand principles, grand practices, and a grand tradition in our national life, something we both want to preserve.

Yesterday, in my opening remarks as a Senate leader, I did remind our Republican majority and the President-elect that there would indeed be places where we can work together, and I named a few of them, but let me be perfectly clear, kicking millions of Americans off their health care and throwing the entire health care system into chaos is not one of them.

I am deeply troubled that the Republican majority and seemingly the President-elect are plotting, as one of their first campaigns in the new Congress, a full-scale assault on the American health care system, not just the Affordable Care Act but Medicare and Medicaid as well because they are inextricably bound. Those are the pillars that support the American health care system, but as its first order of legislative business, the Republican majority has decided to put forward a budget resolution to repeal health care reform. Although he promised not to cut Medicare in the campaign, the President-elect has nominated a man who spent his career strategizing health care's demise, and he chose him to be Secretary of HHS. I don't think that is something a vast majority of Americans or even Republicans believe in.

It is too clear that President-Elect Trump and the Republican Congress are intent on making America sick again. Republicans seem determined to create chaos, not affordable care, for the American people.

Today, I would like to focus on the budget resolution on the Affordable Care Act. I understand why the majority thinks they have to do it. Over the past 8 years, they promised every group—conservative group and audience in the country, they would repeal the law, “root and branch.”

For a long time, it has been only a conservative fever dream. Republicans knew they could make extreme promises about replacing it with something better without ever having to consider the consequences or even come up with a reasonable plan to replace it because they knew the Democrats or President Obama would ultimately block their attempts to roll back the law.

Now things are different. The consequences of repealing the Affordable Care Act are real. I sincerely urge my colleagues to deeply consider the consequences. It is no longer just a game or a political line to say “repeal” because now you have to replace. So far, it has been 5 years of repeal, repeal, repeal; not one replace plan has garnered