

Boys Town, these coins can act as good reminders of those who once helped us. I hope they also serve as encouragement to improve our communities and think about those who are less fortunate.

I wish Father Boes continued success going forward. We in the Senate are all rooting for him. Boys Town exemplifies the spirit of America, and it is the prize of the State of Nebraska. I am honored to be its Senator.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

THANKING THE SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA AND THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to thank our colleague from Nebraska and our guest this morning for reminding us of the wonderful story of Boys Town. We were discussing the movie from the late 1930s starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney, as well as learning what has happened to Boys Town since then.

Thank you so much, Senator FISCHER and our guest, for bringing us up to date on the latest on Boys Town.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2199

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2199) to authorize appropriations for border infrastructure construction, to provide conditional resident status to certain aliens, and to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to include grounds of inadmissibility and deportability for alien members of criminal gangs and cartels, and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

NOMINATION OF JOSEPH BALASH

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in addition to our important work on tax reform and to fund the government, this week the Senate is also continuing our efforts to confirm President Trump's nominees to his administration.

Soon the Senate will consider the nomination of Joseph Balash to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management.

Through his career in both State government and as the Alaska commissioner of natural resources and his service here in the U.S. Senate, Mr. Balash has shown his talent and passion for affordable sources of energy and environmental protection.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources manages one of the largest portfolios of land, water, oil, gas, renewables, timber, and minerals in the world. Mr. Balash's leadership of the department required collaboration with many diverse stakeholders and a dedication to the protection of Alaska's natural beauty. He worked closely with the Interior Department and the commissioner, and he has the skills necessary to fulfill this leadership role at the Department.

As the Assistant Secretary, Mr. Balash will be responsible for many of the Interior Department's critical functions, including the management of all Federal lands and waters, the management of their associated resources, and the appropriate regulation of surface coal mining. I look forward to working with Mr. Balash on many of these issues, especially those important to the coal miners in my home State of Kentucky.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this nomination.

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on another matter, yesterday the Senate formally voted to join our colleagues from the House to consider our tax reform bills in a conference committee. It is another important step toward delivering much needed relief to the men, women, and families we represent. Now the committee members will reconcile the differences between the bills. When they finish their work, Members of both Chambers will have the opportunity to pass this tax reform legislation and send it to President Trump.

As I have said before, tax reform represents the single most important thing we can do right now to grow the economy and boost middle-class families. It will also incentivize businesses to bring investment and jobs home and keep them here. We want a tax bill that works for hard-working American families, one that can bring opportunity, help create new jobs, and keep more money in workers' paychecks. That means a typical family of four earning a median income could see a tax cut of approximately \$2,200.

This tax reform plan is our way of helping families get ahead and plan for their future. It has taken a lot of hard work to get to this point, and I wish to thank my Senate colleagues and our friends in the House and in the Trump administration for their efforts to fundamentally rethink our Tax Code.

I look forward to the conference committee's report so we can complete our efforts and deliver relief to those who need it most.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, the Senate must act before the end of the week to pass a clean, short-term funding bill to maintain critical operations of the Federal Government. Our colleagues in the House will send us the non-controversial provision soon, and then we will have an opportunity to consider it. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to pass it. This short-term continuing resolution will provide us with the time we need to complete discussions on a long-term solution. It will also provide certainty to States to continue funding the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Later today, Speaker RYAN, Leader SCHUMER, Leader PELOSI, and I will meet with President Trump to continue discussing an agreement to fund the Federal Government. I look forward to working together with colleagues in a serious, bipartisan way to address a number of the priorities of our Nation in the coming weeks. I hope all Members will join me.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ISSUES BEFORE CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I first would like to talk today about year-end business.

Congressional negotiators are making good headway on a budget deal that would meet our commitments to our military and also our urgent priorities here at home. I hope this progress continues this week.

Unfortunately, the progress in Congress is in stark contrast to the rhetoric coming from the White House.

President Trump again suggested yesterday that a “shutdown could happen.” If a shutdown happens, as the President seemed to be rooting for in his tweet earlier this year, it will fall on his shoulders. His party controls the Senate, the House, and the Presidency.

Nobody here wants to see a shutdown. We Democrats are not interested in one. That is why we are working with our Republican colleagues in good faith to resolve all of the issues we have to solve before the end of the year, and it is in this spirit that Leader PELOSI and I will go to the White House this afternoon to discuss all of the issues before us.

It is no secret that one of the major sticking points—if not the major sticking point—in the negotiations is funding levels for programs that invest directly in economic growth and a social safety net for the middle class. Democrats are pushing for sorely needed funding to combat the opioid crisis, to shore up pension plans, to support veterans’ health, to relieve student loan debt, and build rural infrastructure.

Without a budget agreement that lifts spending caps on both defense and economic development in a fair and equitable manner, programs I have mentioned, and so many others—medical research comes to mind—could see their funding cut. Our veterans deserve better. People seeking recovery from opioid addiction deserve better. Hard-working pensioners deserve better. We must do both things—support the military and programs that create jobs and growth here at home—in equal measure. Both are very important.

I know there are some on the far right who say all the jobs programs and economic growth programs are unimportant, but most of us, Democrats and Republicans, believe both are important. The idea that both are important has been the basis of successful budget agreements going back several years, including the agreement we reached last April, where the military side and the domestic job, economic growth side were treated equally.

Unfortunately, it appears that the Freedom Caucus—a rather small bloc of hard-right House conservatives—is trying to derail another successful parity agreement. According to press reports, the Freedom Caucus is pushing for a very short-term extension of funding for jobs and economic development, while pushing for a long-term extension and a large increase for funding in defense. That is a ruse designed to slash funding for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and scientific research—all the things the Freedom Caucus, against the will of the overwhelming vast majority of Americans, doesn’t want the government to fund.

Make no mistake, the Freedom Caucus is gearing up to hurt the middle class on the budget, just like so many Republicans way beyond the Freedom Caucus did with their tax bill—just like on the tax bill. We Democrats are

going to defend the middle class because they need our help, too, and they have been forgotten by our Republican colleagues throughout the year, but this time, the Freedom Caucus’s actions, if they had their way, could lead to a disaster. Speaker RYAN must stand up and tell the Freedom Caucus, no, they cannot be allowed to hold hostage productive bipartisan budget negotiations with outrageous demands that hurt the middle class. If Speaker RYAN lets them have their way, it will cause a shutdown. It will be on the Freedom Caucus’ shoulders, Leader RYAN’s shoulders, and the President’s shoulders because such a bill could not pass either the House or the Senate—we are giving them fair warning right now—not right at the deadline.

DREAM ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, let me say a word about the Dream Act. Earlier this week, my friend, the senior Senator from Illinois, came to the floor to update the Senate on the progress he is making in his negotiations with Senate Republicans on an agreement that would provide a significant investment in border security in exchange for the Dream Act.

As I have said in the past, Democrats support real border security. We will be happy to join with Republicans to pass legislation to secure our border in exchange for the Dream Act. Those talks continue to make good progress. I hope we can reach an agreement soon.

SPECIAL COUNSEL MUELLER

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, a word on the special counsel. Over the past few weeks, I have continued to hear Republican lawmakers and partisan media hosts attack the integrity of Special Counsel Mueller in a shameful display meant to undermine his investigation into the connections between the Trump campaign and Russia. Spuriously attacking Robert Mueller, one of the most respected and trusted civil servants in our country, is the surest route to losing all credibility.

I remind everyone on the right who are trying to muddy the waters on the Mueller investigation that Robert Mueller was a career prosecutor who has served both Republican and Democratic administrations in the most trusted of roles. He was appointed by President Trump’s own Deputy Attorney General. It defies credulity to lambaste him as partisan or biased. He is as straight a shooter as they come. This is bigger than one man. The attacks on Special Counsel Mueller and his investigation erode faith in the rule of law, that bedrock principle at the heart of our civic life.

If independent investigations into matters as grave as foreign interference in our elections succumb to intimidation and partisan slander, we will be no better than a third-world country. Rule of law will be gone, at

least for the President of the United States, which is something Americans have treasured for centuries. What has always defined American democracy is an unyielding faith in the rule of law—its power to check our people, as well as our Presidents. Special Counsel Mueller is the rule of law at work in our 21st century American democracy. Intentionally and spuriously impugning his integrity—not because he has done anything wrong but because they don’t like what he is doing; very partisan, very biased, very one-sided is their view—is not only inaccurate but damaging to a core ideal in our country—the independent and impartial rule of law. We must loudly reject the strident voices who engage in these attacks on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, on the issue of taxes, with the passage of the Republican Senate bill last Friday, the Republican Party has shrugged off its history as the party of tax cuts and become the party of tax hikes on the middle class. The Republican tax bill will end up raising taxes on millions of middle-class families to pay for corporate welfare.

As our Republican colleagues march us toward an enormous corporate tax cut, we have seen numerous companies start to announce plans to buy back more of their stock—not build factories, not create jobs, but to buy back their stock, which, of course, benefits the CEOs because the stock price goes up.

T-Mobile has announced \$1.5 billion in stock buybacks; Mastercard, \$4 billion; Bank of America, \$5 billion. Just this morning, three or more companies announced hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of buybacks. These companies, I would say to President Trump and I would say to my Republican colleagues, are not announcing new investments in their workforce or wage increases, as Republicans promised they would. They are announcing stock repurchasing programs that benefit their wealthy investors.

The tax bill will also saddle the next generation of leaders with larger deficits and debts, limiting our ability to make the kinds of investments we need to be making in education, infrastructure, and scientific research—a far surer path to good-paying jobs and raising wages than giving corporate America, already flush with cash, even more stock buybacks. For the same reason, those increased deficits, Republicans are now coming back and saying that they want to slash Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, making it even harder in America to access affordable healthcare and retire with dignity.

Speaker RYAN admitted it yesterday. He said: “We’re going to have to get back next year at entitlement reform, which is how you tackle the debt and