

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

WELCOMING NEW SENATORS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as we open the 2nd session of the 115th Congress, I am pleased to welcome my colleagues back to the Chamber.

I would like to extend a particular welcome to our two new Senators, who were just sworn in. First, Senator DOUG JONES of Alabama will have big shoes to fill. His State has sent very distinguished legislators to Washington, including our Attorney General, Jeff Sessions. Senator JONES brings a background in law enforcement, having served as a Federal prosecutor in the Northern District of Alabama. We welcome him.

We also welcome Senator TINA SMITH. For 3 years, she has served the people of Minnesota as their Lieutenant Governor. Now she will join Senator KLOBUCHAR in representing them here in the Senate.

I congratulate both of these new Senators. I look forward to working with them in the months ahead to make bipartisan progress and to find common ground on behalf of the American people.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. The Senate will need to tackle a number of important issues this year. It is my sincere hope that we can do so in a renewed spirit of comity, collegiality, and bipartisanship. I know that colleagues on both sides of the aisle share this hope, and it is urgent that we make it a reality. Congress must reach a spending agreement by January 19 to ensure uninterrupted funding for the Federal Government.

Among several key priorities, it is vital that our agreement provide sufficient resources for our all-volunteer Armed Forces. Under the Budget Control Act, America's military has been stretched thin by disproportionate cuts that have harmed our combat readiness. Since 2013, defense cuts have outpaced domestic spending cuts by \$85 billion. I am going to say that again: Since fiscal year 2013, defense cuts have outpaced domestic spending cuts by \$85 billion. To fix this, we need to set aside the arbitrary notion that new defense spending be matched equally by new nondefense spending. There is no reason why funding for our national security and our servicemembers should be limited by an arbitrary political formula that bears no relationship to actual need.

So let's come together across the aisle and construct a funding agreement that gives our men and women in uniform the tools and the training they need.

IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on another matter, Mr. President, over the last week, one of the often overlooked costs of Iran's regional aggression has come to light. Iranians have taken to the streets in protest, demanding that Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rouhani do more to expand the domestic economy. Iran's actions in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq and its support for proxies such as Hezbollah have diverted resources away from economic reform and investment. While the government has prioritized payments to the military and security elites and clerical institutions, the people throughout Iran have suffered. Now their discontent is fully evident.

As part of our overall strategy toward Iran, which should be focused on ending Iran's malign activities across the Middle East, we should hold accountable any officials behind a crack-down on these protests. The coming days will be noteworthy as we wait to see if hardliners use these protests as an excuse to promote more aggressive policies against the West and to tighten their grip further on the country and its economy.

TRIBUTE TO ORRIN HATCH

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on one final matter, Mr. President, yesterday a very distinguished Senator announced his intention to retire at the end of this Congress. For more than 40 years, Senator ORRIN HATCH has served the people of Utah in this body. He is not only our President pro tempore, but, as we celebrated last year, Senator HATCH is also the longest serving Republican Senator in the history of the United States.

During this historic tenure, Senator HATCH has chaired three key committees. He has amassed deep expertise across all manner of policy issues, and he has built a truly remarkable resume of accomplishments on behalf of the American people.

Senator HATCH has defended our national security and our religious freedom. He has fought to protect Americans with disabilities and to shepherd fine judges onto our courts. Just last month, as Senate Finance Committee chairman, he played an integral role in passing the most significant tax reform law in more than 30 years.

Senator HATCH's colleagues here will be sorry to see him retire. I will miss his friendship, but I know his wife Elaine and his beloved family will be glad to welcome him home.

Fortunately, it is not yet time to say farewell. This institution and the American people will benefit greatly from the Senator's wisdom and famous work ethic for one more year before his retirement.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2274

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2274) to provide for the compensation of Federal employees affected by lapses in appropriations.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

WELCOMING NEW SENATORS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, as we begin the 2nd session of the 115th Congress, I welcome all of my colleagues back from the holiday break and wish them a happy new year, and I wish our country a wonderful 2018. I was also very gratified to see two of the best former Vice Presidents we have ever had on the floor today for the ceremonies. I am glad to see former Senators Mondale and Biden—former Vice Presidents Mondale and Biden—as feisty and as strong as they have ever been and giving us their opinions.

It is also very exciting to welcome two new Members to this body who will be joining the Democratic caucus, TINA SMITH from Minnesota and DOUG JONES from Alabama. In joining this esteemed body, both bring a wealth of experience and individual passions.

Former Lieutenant Governor TINA SMITH brings with her several years of experience serving at the highest levels of State Government, where she focused on economic development and expanding access to rural broadband and affordable healthcare, issues she will continue to fight for here in the Senate. In that work, Governor Dayton praised her as "extremely intelligent, quick to learn and always open to hearing others' views." She was also dubbed the "velvet hammer" by the mayor of Minneapolis for her ability to work across the aisle but also to get tough when she needs to be. Those are precisely the kinds of qualities that make an effective Senator. The people of Minnesota are lucky to have Senator SMITH, and we look forward to welcoming her in our next caucus.

We also look forward to welcoming Senator DOUG JONES—the first Democrat from the State of Alabama in a quarter century. He, too, represents

the very best of public service, the very best of America, and the things we aspire to in this country. One story from his biography stands out. As a second-year law student, DOUG JONES skipped class to attend the trial of the Klansman ringleader of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, an event that shook the conscience of our country and helped launch a mighty movement for civil rights. That day a young DOUG JONES was moved by the disposition of justice, but he was left with the impression that other members of the conspiracy had escaped the reach of the law. So 24 years later, when DOUG JONES became the U.S. attorney for the State of Alabama, he pursued charges against two more Klan members involved in the bombing, winning their conviction and delivering a long-delayed but righteous justice. With his work, justice rolled down like a mighty stream. He will continue to fight for civil rights and many other issues here in the Senate. I know he cares deeply about the CHIP program, which covers 150,000 young Alabamians. I hope we can get that done for his State and this country very soon.

DOUG JONES was an excellent candidate. Like Senator SMITH, he will make an outstanding Senator—she for the State of Minnesota and he for the State of Alabama. The voices of JONES and SMITH will add to the diversity of energy of our caucus. I predict that both will become influential voices in this historic Chamber.

Each of their States had great football victories this weekend, I might add. I watched Alabama win over Clemson—sorry, LINDSEY and TIM. I watched Minnesota, my favorite team outside of the three New York teams, come in second in the whole NFC, and it got a bye week as we moved to the playoffs. So it is a great day for these two States in a whole lot of ways this weekend, and it is very good so far in 2018 with the swearing in of these two Senators.

A NEW DIRECTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in the second half of the 115th Congress now, let's talk a little bit about a new direction. Let the induction of these two Senators this afternoon be the beginning of a new direction for the Senate in the second half of this Congress.

The first half of the 115th Congress was not a year to be proud of. Partisan legislation emerged from the majority leader's office and was dropped on the floor of the Senate, sometimes merely hours before we were asked to vote on its final passage. Procedural gimmicks were used to avoid the Senate's long history of debate and bipartisanship. An economy wracked by unfairness and inequality was made even more unfair and more unequal by the Republican majority, which almost delighted in revoking consumer protections to help big business, installed a pro-corporate Supreme Court, drove up healthcare

premiums, and passed a tax bill dramatically skewed to the benefit of big corporations and the very wealthy. All in all, 2017 was a great year for wealthy Republican donors but a lost year for the middle class and the working men and women of this country.

We Democrats hope this year is different—focused on the middle class rather than the rich and powerful, focused on helping them in the ways we have done in the last decades, with both Democratic and Republican Presidents, rather than this trickle down that benefits the few at the top and does not benefit the very many in the middle.

In these first few weeks, we have a chance to start off on the right foot. We have 2 weeks to negotiate a budget deal that also must address a host of other issues, including CHIP, community health centers, disaster aid and, of course, the Dreamers.

Democrats would also like our country to make a downpayment on urgent domestic priorities like combating the opioid epidemic, a scourge that for the first time helped cause our life expectancy to decline because of the higher death rate from opioids.

We want to improve veterans' healthcare. They served us, and we must serve them. We must shore up pension plans for millions of hard-working, middle-class Americans who put money in every month and, because of the stock market crash and sometimes corporate misdeeds, aren't getting what they put in for. These items are crucial to the middle class.

Take opioids, for example. In 2016, a record 63,000 Americans died of drug overdoses, and two-thirds or more were opioid-related. It is a full-fledged epidemic that strikes the rich, the middle class, and the poor alike. It strikes urban America, suburban America, and rural America alike.

I had a father cry in my arms because his son a had decided to turn himself around and signed up for a treatment program, but the line was so long because the funding is so scarce that the young man died of an overdose before he could enter treatment. The opioid crisis is stealing our youth. We have known about it for years. It is not new. It is heartbreaking how much we know about it, but how little we have done about it.

The American people sent us here to do the Nation's business. That means addressing its greatest challenges. So let's make a real investment in this budget deal and how we treat this scourge. The budget is the right place to start.

A few years ago, we made a promise to hundreds of thousands of children who were brought to the United States through no fault of their own that if they registered with the government, we wouldn't deport them. We said: We want you to be Americans, learn in our schools, work in our companies, serve in our military. So 800,000 Dreamers came forward and did that because,

above all else, they wanted to be Americans. They don't know another country.

Now we are faced with a deadline. In a few months, protections for Dreamers will evaporate. A thousand Dreamers are losing protected status each week. It is time that Congress passed DACA protections into law and fixed this once and for all.

Democrats, including myself, led by our great Senator from Illinois, a member of our leadership team, Mr. DURBIN, have said over and over again: We are ready to negotiate a reasonable package of border security to pass alongside DACA. We believe in border security. We want to make it work. We want to make it real, not just be symbolic; we believe in it. If our Republican colleagues and the President engage in good-faith negotiations without unreasonable demands like an absurdly expensive, ineffective border wall that many Republicans publicly oppose—and privately many more do—I don't doubt we can reach an agreement on DACA that is acceptable to both sides. I would like to thank our Acting President pro tempore for his active involvement in this regard as well.

In contrast to a year of chaos and ineffectiveness—a year in which little was accomplished, and what was done was done for the wealthy and the narrow special interests—I hope this year can be one of bipartisanship, focused on improving the stock of the middle class. They are the ones hurting in America. They are the ones who need help. They are the ones who worry about the future of this grand, wonderful country.

We can start on the budget with opioids, veterans' healthcare, pensions, children's health insurance, and disaster aid. We can resolve the fate of the Dreamers and say to these hard-working kids that America has a place for them too.

Later today, the four congressional leaders will meet with Budget Director Mick Mulvaney and representatives of the White House to begin these negotiations in earnest—I hope—and will work for their success.

FOREIGN POLICY AND PRESIDENTIAL MORAL AUTHORITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, a word on national security. The Senate has a role in conducting the Nation's foreign policy, but as head of state, the President of the United States represents our country to the world. That is a very serious and very sober responsibility that requires restraint, intelligence, sound judgment, and a respect for the moral authority that comes with the awesome responsibility of being the world's sole remaining superpower.

Over the course of the past year, President Trump, unfortunately, has progressively squandered the moral authority that comes with the Presidency