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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAND PAUL, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, help our lawmakers to honor Your Name. Demonstrate Your great power by filling them with Your Spirit and giving them a desire to cultivate spiritual discernment. Lord, sustain them through the power of Your prevailing providence until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. As our Senators draw near to You, experiencing Your Divine guidance, may they be motivated to follow Your precepts as they face difficult challenges.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 7, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable RAND PAUL, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Kentucky, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. PAUL thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGULATORY RELIEF, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 2155, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 287, S. 2155, a bill to promote economic growth, provide tailored regulatory relief, and enhance consumer protections, and for other purposes.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, community banks, credit unions, and other small-scale lenders play a vital role in the U.S. economy.

Research from Harvard indicates that community banks provide more than half of all small business loans. Let me repeat that. A majority of small business loans is handled by community banks. This is even more pronounced in rural areas and farming communities, like those I represent in Kentucky. A whopping 77 percent of agricultural loans come from community banks—77 percent.

In this era of online banking and multinational corporations, smaller institutions remain uniquely able to build community connections. Community bankers get to know their residents and business owners on a personal level. That perspective lets them extend credit to small-scale entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers, and other Americans who might not have access otherwise. So when small lenders close their doors, the effects on communities are very real.

In 2014, an economist at MIT found that, on average, the closing of a single bank cut the number of new small business loans in the immediate area by more than 10 percent for several years. The problem was extremely pronounced in low-income areas, where a local perspective and personal relationships matter even more. In low-income America, a physical bank closure cuts lending to local small businesses by nearly 40 percent.

Long story short, the more vulnerable a community, the more they need local lenders, but since the Federal Government implemented massive new regulations under the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act, our community banks and credit unions have been getting squeezed. Dodd-Frank's imprecise, inefficient, one-size-fits-all framework dropped these small institutions into the regulatory maze that was intended for Wall Street. For 8 years, they have faced a staggering compliance burden that now consumes, on average, 24 percent of their net income. This has forced many to pare down their offerings or close their doors for good. That leaves out to dry would-be entrepreneurs, job creators, and existing small businesses that want to expand.

Fortunately, we have an opportunity this week to begin putting things right. Today, the Senate continues considering a sensible solution that would streamline regulations and give