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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. 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.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us today. You are a God of might and power, and our times are in Your hands. Forgive us for sometimes forgetting to trust Your prevailing providence, as You increase our faith through the power of Your Holy Word.

Lord, thank You for our lawmakers. Remind them that they are appointed by You and are, therefore, accountable to You for their work. May they not forget that they are servants of Your Kingdom as You motivate them to be faithful in what they think, say, and do. Provide them with Your wisdom, empowering them to fulfill Your purposes for their lives.

We pray in Your strong 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. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

SPEAKER RYAN'S RETIREMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning, Speaker RYAN announced to his colleagues that he will be departing the House at the conclusion of the 115th Congress.

Two and a half years ago, PAUL RYAN was drafted by his colleagues to lead

the House through a new era. Like a true leader, PAUL stepped up to the plate. He answered his colleagues' call with exactly the earnest, selfless, and focused approach that has defined his entire career in Congress. The results have been beyond impressive.

Capping off a remarkable 20-year career in Congress, PAUL's speakership has yielded one significant accomplishment after another for his conference, his constituents in Wisconsin's First Congressional District, as well as the American people.

True to his career-long reputation as a champion for pro-growth economics, PAUL helped lead the way on last year's once-in-a-generation rewrite of the Nation's Tax Code. Thanks in large part to his personal passion and expertise, reform became a reality, and our economy is charting a new course toward greater prosperity and greater opportunity.

On its own, this generational accomplishment would secure the Speaker's legacy as a transformational conservative leader, but, of course, it is far from the only fruit of his speakership. His leadership was vital to securing everything from the largest year-on-year increase in defense funding in 15 years to the remaking of the way we treat and find cures for rare diseases. What is more, PAUL has paired that ambitious agenda with infectious good cheer and an unflagging commitment to serve all Americans. Amidst all the stresses and pressures of leadership, PAUL's optimism and energy never waned.

It has been a sincere pleasure and a real inspiration to work alongside this humble servant and happy warrior. I am glad we can count on his continued leadership through the rest of this year because our work together is far from finished. I look forward to collaborating closely these next months to implement more of the inclusive, pro-growth, pro-opportunity agenda the American people are counting on us to keep advancing.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now on another matter, yesterday the Senate confirmed the first of six nominees slated for consideration this week, Claria Horn Boom to serve as district judge for the Eastern and Western Districts of Kentucky. She was confirmed 96 to 1. There was just one Senator in opposition.

This is the kind of uncontroversial nomination the Senate could typically dispatch by a voice vote, but not these days. Over and over again, we have had to file cloture and exhaust floor time on amply qualified nominees who then soar through their confirmation votes by lopsided margins.

Since President Trump took office, the Senate has had to hold 82—82—cloture votes on judicial and executive nominations. In the first 2 years of President Obama's administration, there were only 12 such cloture votes—12 for President Obama, 4 for George W. Bush, 8 for President Clinton, and already, just a few months into President Trump's second year, there have been 82. The numbers speak for themselves.

Today we will have the opportunity to confirm yet another qualified nominee for a critical post. John Ring's nomination to serve on the National Labor Relations Board is an important next step to continue cleaning years of regulatory rust off of the American economy. It is a natural addition to the progress we have made scaling back unhelpful regulations that make it harder for American businesses to create jobs and make opportunities for American workers more scarce.

Mr. Ring's confirmation will give the country a fully staffed NLRB once again and turn the page on the previous administration's efforts to remake this bipartisan Board into a one-sided political weapon. Even in a short amount of time last year, we saw just how much good a fully functioning NLRB can do for American workers when it calls balls and strikes fairly instead of bending over backward to

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



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meet Big Labor's every demand. Today we will have the chance to get things back to normal for the long term.

Mr. Ring has a distinguished record in labor negotiation. I would urge my colleagues to join me in voting to confirm him today.

After Mr. Ring, the Senate will turn to the nomination of Pat Pizzella to serve as Deputy Secretary of Labor. The fact that this Cabinet agency has gone 15 months without its No. 2 official is yet another testament to the historic obstruction visited on this administration by Senate Democrats. He has been sitting on the calendar for 6 months despite his ample qualifications. I would urge all of my colleagues to vote to finally advance Mr. Pizzella's nomination.

TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, this week we have been discussing the stark difference between the Obama administration's agenda and the policies that President Trump and this Republican Congress have implemented.

During the Obama years, the overwhelming majority of all the limited new growth and new jobs went to the biggest and richest urban areas. Times were good if you happened to live in New York, San Francisco, or a few other places, but if you were one of the millions of Americans in our Nation's towns, smaller cities, suburbs, or rural areas, they were not so good. According to one estimate, between 2010 and 2016, 73 percent of all the employment gains in the country went to metro areas with more than 1 million residents. Practically everywhere else, Americans either treaded water or started sinking.

This President and this Republican Congress were sent here to put this right, and because the American people gave us a chance to do so, they now have leaders in Washington who focus on cutting taxes instead of raising them, rolling back overregulation instead of piling on more suffocating rules, and looking out for the best interests of all workers and job creators, not just those in our biggest and wealthiest cities.

The early results from our inclusive opportunity agenda are clear. After years of stagnation, we are beginning to see signs that rural America turned a corner in 2017. One analysis found that last year, rural areas outpaced the rest of the country in job creation, relative to the share of the economy they started out with. There is still much, much more to do, but these early promising signs add up to hundreds of thousands of new jobs. That is a sight for sore eyes in Kentucky, West Virginia, Montana, Maine, and so many other States.

What about our smaller cities? I recently heard from my friend Senator TOOMEY that, because of this historic tax reform we passed last year, Car-

penter Technology in Reading, PA, will invest \$100 million in expanded manufacturing capabilities—\$100 million in our economy and American workers because of tax reform. For this American manufacturer, founded in 1889, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act means a new hot rolling mill to produce the special alloys for aerospace and consumer electronics. They are also investing in 3D printing. This is what happens when manufacturers have the breathing room to bet on the U.S. economy and on their American workforce. Breathing room is exactly what our policy is giving them. Carpenter already employs more than 3,000 Pennsylvanians, and with this kind of major capital investment, I expect they will be competing for future generations of skilled workers as well.

Pennsylvania should be proud of Senator TOOMEY. He is one of the leaders who have helped lead the charge for tax reform. It is a shame his colleague, the senior Senator for Pennsylvania, put party politics ahead of workers and taxpayers and voted to block tax reform right from the beginning.

Fortunately, my Democratic colleagues failed to block tax reform from taking place, even though many now want to repeal the law that has led to new jobs, higher wages, and increased opportunities all across our country.

Stories like these are just the first fruits of tax reform, regulatory reform, and all the other ways this Republican Congress is fighting for every American worker, job creator, and middle-class family.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you, Mr. President.

Before I get to the substance of my remarks, I remind my dear friend the majority leader that the vast majority of the benefits of this tax break, this tax cut, went to the wealthiest of Americans and large corporations. What are they doing with the money? They are using most of it for buybacks. That was a buyback. They buy back their own stock. The CEO—already a rich guy—is making more money. The shareholders, one-third of whom are out of the country and most of whom are in the top 10 percent of America, make more money. The middle class and rural America particularly are left behind in this bill.

We could have done a tax bill where the benefits went to the middle class—not just some—10, 20 percent—but all. So this bill is a bit of a fake. There are small benefits for the middle class, along with harm to their healthcare. The things put in this bill are going to raise many people's premiums far more than their small tax break.

Let's be honest about this. This bill was done for the rich and the wealthy in power, and there were some benefits to the middle class, but it could have been so much better. Our Republican colleagues listened to the wealthy special interests, the large contributors, and that is how this bill came about.

By the way, because it creates a deficit of \$1.5 trillion—and I remind our leader that rural America really cares about deficits—there are a lot of Republicans, particularly the more conservative ones, who say: Now let's cut Medicare and Social Security. How is an elderly person in rural America going to feel about that?

I would simply say that this bill was not the right remedy for America, which is owed a lot better.

SPEAKER RYAN'S RETIREMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Speaker RYAN. I know Speaker RYAN quite well. He is a good man. He is always true to his word. Even though we disagree on most issues, in the areas where we can work together, I find him to be smart, thoughtful, and straightforward. I find him to have a great deal of integrity. We don't agree, but he has deep beliefs, and he is not like some on his side of the aisle who say: It is my way or no way. He is willing to meet you to try to get something done.

So I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Speaker RYAN. I admire him as a human being, as a religious man, and somebody who cares a lot about his family. I understand his frustrations; I do. When you have so many intransigent people in your caucus who say "it is my way or no way," and your job, even though you have deep beliefs, is to want to get something done, it is hard. It is hard.

Now, with his newfound political freedom, I hope the Speaker uses his remaining time in Congress to break free from these hard-right factions that have plagued him so and that have kept Congress from getting real things done. If he is willing to reach across the aisle, he will find Democrats willing and eager to work with him.

I say to Speaker RYAN: Let's work together. You are more of a free man now. Follow your instincts. Your beliefs will not be the same as ours, but you will want to try to come to some kind of an agreement where we can meet somewhere in the middle.

The job may be made harder because Congressmen SCALISE and MCCARTHY are now competing for Ryan's job and the hard right's favor—they are too vital in that caucus—but I believe Speaker RYAN is up to the job and can overcome that problem and work in his last few months here for the betterment of our country.

AVOIDING A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, on the issues of yesterday and last