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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Holy One, Light of Light, You continue to reveal Yourself to us. Because You know our thoughts before we think them, we lay before You our lives to be purified and strengthened by the power of Your Spirit. Lord, prepare us to absorb the fragrance of Your forgiveness, as we trust You to keep us from stumbling or slipping.

Today, use our lawmakers for Your glory. May they be salt and light to this generation. Give them the knowledge and wisdom to startle the world with the confidence of their hope in You and with the generosity of their love.

We pray in Your sacred 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 (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate advanced the nomination of Robert Wier to serve on the Eastern District Court of Kentucky by a vote of 90 to 1. This was a needless delay, but I look forward to confirming this well-qualified nominee later this morning.

Next, the Senate will turn to Fernando Rodriguez, Jr., the President's selection to be a U.S. district judge for the Southern District of Texas. Mr. Rodriguez is a graduate of Yale and the University of Texas. He earned recognition for his tireless efforts to combat human trafficking. His peers praise his work ethic and his knack for tackling complicated issues.

President Trump continues to send us impressive judicial nominees with sterling qualifications. I would urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting to promptly confirm this slate.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on another matter, Madam President, the Senate took a major step forward on behalf of our national defense. After years of harmful spending caps undermining the combat readiness of our armed services, we brokered a 2-year spending agreement that included the largest year-on-year increase in defense funding in 15 years. This significant accomplishment laid out a roadmap to deliver on the promises we make to our warfighters. Now it is time to take the next step and authorize the programs that are most needed. That is why the Senate will soon be turning to the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act.

Each year, reviewing the President's budget request provides an opportunity to hear directly from our Nation's military leaders about their needs. Months of hearings and markups allow Congress to direct resources and authorize programs, equipping our brave service men and women to confront emerging challenges.

The Armed Services Committee should be commended for their earnest, bipartisan work this year. The legislation they have produced is strong.

Following our agreement that eliminated harmful and arbitrary caps on

defense spending, this legislation will add to the process of untying our commanders' hands. It authorizes \$716 billion for national defense, enough for the Department of Defense to implement the national defense strategy and replenish and modernize America's fighting forces—as long as we meet our overall responsibility and pass the Defense appropriations bill later this year.

This authorization would expand our capabilities on the sea and in the air, provide long-term certainty and support for our All-Volunteer Force, renew oversight efforts, streamline personnel management, modernize acquisitions, and eliminate duplicative and wasteful programs. It sends a clear message that we have our warfighters' backs. How fitting, then, that it is named for our colleague, Senator McCain—a stalwart champion for our service men and women if this Chamber has ever seen one.

I look forward to discussing this legislation at length in the coming days.

JOB CREATION AND THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, on a final matter, Madam President, I spoke yesterday about the new job opportunities flooding into the U.S. economy. It is all thanks to the ingenuity of American workers and job creators, with an assist from Republican policies.

Just this year, more than 1 million new jobs have been created, more than 3 million new jobs since January of 2017. The unemployment rate has sunk to 3.8 percent. It hasn't been that low in 18 years. In a big shift from the deeply uneven Obama era, communities all across America are getting in on the action. Rural areas led the whole Nation in relative job creation last year. Let me say that again. Rural areas led the whole Nation in relative job creation last year. Republicans are proud of the historic tax reform and

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



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