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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.

Eternal Father, we rejoice in Your strength. In spite of gathering storm clouds, our confidence in Your love sustains us. Be merciful to our Nation, for You are our hope.

Lord, provide our lawmakers today with the music of Your wisdom, that they may bring hope out of despair and joy out of sadness. Increase their faith, hope, and love, that they may receive Your promises.

Teach us all to celebrate, even in the darkness, because You are the God who saves us.

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, December 12, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the end of the year is fast approaching. There are a number of important items left on the Senate's agenda and little time to address them. We will clear more of the President's well-qualified executive branch and judicial nominees from the calendar. We will consider updated legislation supported by the administration to address criminal justice. We need to pass an agreement to fill the remaining gaps in appropriations, including critical funding for securing our borders.

Fortunately, the Senate took a major step yesterday by passing the farm bill. We got that much closer to delivering a big shot in the arm to farmers in rural communities across our country.

Along with providing certainty to agricultural communities, I am especially proud that the legislation will open a new door for farmers in Kentucky and around the country to explore the full potential of industrial hemp. This is the culmination of a lot of work by a number of us here in Washington, but really the victory is for the growers, processors, manufacturers, and consumers who stand to benefit from this growing marketplace.

American hemp has a long and distinguished history. Some of this very body's notable figures, including Thomas Jefferson and Henry Clay, are

believed to have grown it. During World War II, the Federal Government even encouraged hemp production to support the war effort. Unfortunately, because of hemp's illicit cousin, marijuana, the Federal Government subsequently banned it altogether for generations.

In 2013, Kentucky agricultural leaders showed me hemp's incredible potential for the Blue Grass State. We decided it was time to let America's farmers show everyone what hemp could do.

First, I included experimental pilot programs for States like Kentucky in the 2014 farm bill, and the results have been undeniable. Hemp has quickly become a booming success. Its uses range from food and pharmaceuticals to home insulation and automobile parts. Enthusiastic farmers quickly applied to plant the crop in their fields, entrepreneurs opened businesses selling hemp-based products, and consumers got to enjoy a whole new set of goods featuring American-made hemp. In my home State alone, farmers grew in excess of 3,200 acres of hemp in 2017. This year, the number of acres more than doubled. Estimates show that, once legalized, sales from hemp will soon surpass \$1 billion.

Watching this remarkable success, we knew it was time to take the next step. I introduced legislation to finally and fully legalize hemp. Working with agricultural leaders and law enforcement in Kentucky and here in Washington, we built support.

As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I was proud that the legislation was included in the Senate's version of the farm bill. I was proud to serve personally on the conference committee to ensure that the language stayed in place. Yesterday, the Senate passed the conference report. The House will pass it as early as later today, and this provision and the rest of the farm bill will be on its way to President Trump's desk to become law.

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



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