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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KEVIN CRAMER, a Senator from the State of North Dakota.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm has bound the restless waves, we praise You for Your magnificent love that awakens us each day.

Thank You for lawmakers who strive to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. Lord, continue to guide their feet and teach them Your paths.

In these complex times, show yourself strong on behalf of those who love You. Solve the riddles that confound us. Confuse those who seek to hinder the unfolding of Your loving providence.

Lord, bring sanity to a world that often seems to spin out of control. Nothing is impossible for you, so transform our dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

We pray in Your strong 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. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 1, 2019.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KEVIN CRAMER, a Senator from the State of North Dakota, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this week the Senate is continuing to make progress in consideration of the President's nominees. By the end of this week, three more executive branch and five court vacancies will have been filled with thoroughly qualified individuals.

Already, these uncontroversial nominees have earned overwhelming bipartisan support. Yesterday, more than two-thirds of the Senate voted to confirm William Cooper to serve as general counsel for the Department of Energy. Mr. Cooper's expertise and energy policy was evident to Chairman MURKOWSKI and our colleagues in committee who voted by voice to report this nomination to the full Senate. Now we have put a sharp lawyer on the job at DOE.

Later in the day, we confirmed two more well-qualified executive branch nominees to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation and the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs by even wider margins. Each received bipartisan support in committee. So, again, I am glad to see a similar degree of swift, reasonable consideration here on the floor.

I might add that these are the kinds of nominees who, a few years ago, would have been approved on a voice vote. Today the Senate will turn to a slate of judicial nominees with their own impressive trail of credentials—things like prestigious clerkships and strong reviews from the American Bar Association. Most importantly, all have demonstrated their commitment to the rule of law.

Celebrating small wins for comity in the personnel business is, of course, only necessary in the wake of, literally, years of unprecedented partisan obstruction. But I will readily express my hope that in the coming days and weeks, we will continue to work toward clearing the Executive Calendar backlog and confirming more well-qualified nominees.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, while the Senate may be writing a new chapter of bipartisan productivity, the same cannot be said for the House under Democratic leadership. On this side of the Capitol, we have passed timely legislation to address real, urgent policy priorities. S. 1, for example, helps fight back against anti-Semitism and attends to several other pressing matters with respect to American foreign policy in the Middle East.

The Senate debated the bill and passed it by a wide bipartisan majority. We sent it over to the House, and now it is just sitting there, gathering dust. It is gathering dust because Democratic leadership is more interested in making flashy political points and picking fights with the President than in making meaningful bipartisan progress.

House Democrats are uninterested in our important foreign policy legislation. What has captured their energy and attention instead? This week they are giving prime billing to a scheme

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



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that would snatch away the private health insurance plans that more than 180 million Americans rely on and jeopardize the Medicare coverage counted on by tens of millions more. That is what they are up to this week.

The House Rules Committee, and by extension the Democratic leadership, have officially granted a platform to this proposal, which could best be described as Medicare for None. That is not just some cute phrase. It is literally what the plan would usher in—an end to the Medicare Program as American seniors have known it for generations. Democrats want to take the program that seniors have paid into, which we ought to be shoring up and stabilizing, and, instead, pile every other American into it—one size fits all. That is what it is: End Medicare as we know it; reuse its name for a new sort of built-from-scratch, government-administered plan, and make sure the resulting Washington nightmare is the only game in town by outlawing choice and competition from the private sector. That is what they want to do.

To the 60 million seniors on Medicare, most of whom like things the way they are, Democrats say: Too bad. To the 180 million-plus other Americans who rely on private health coverage from their employers, many of whom like their own plans, our Democratic colleagues say: Too bad. All of these things that American families count on, I guess my Democratic colleagues want to wipe them all away in favor of this untested government takeover—completely untested.

In Congresses past, this kind of far-left proposal would have been unlikely to even receive a hearing. Democrats would have taken one look at this socialist steamroller and run away from it like the plague. Jeopardize current health coverage for nearly all Americans—one way or another—for the sake of leftwing ideology? Who would go for that?

Needless to say, times seem to have changed. Now, across the aisle, this level of radical intrusion is the proud rallying cry both here in Congress, and, of course, out on the Presidential campaign trail. One of the major ironies is that Medicare is not even safely on autopilot as things stand right now, let alone herding every other American into the system. As I have noted, the Administrator of CMS herself recently explained that “the program’s main trust fund for hospital services can only pay full benefits for seven more years.” That is the Medicare we have now.

Instead of a serious plan to shore up Medicare or address costs for middle-class families, Democrats are focused on raising taxes massively, trading consumer choice for Washington control, and destabilizing the current system in the process.

Senate Republicans will stay focused on middle-class families’ priorities. We will leave the destructive daydreams to our friends across the aisle.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination J. Campbell Barker, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Texas.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last week we got the first estimate of economic growth for the first quarter of 2019, and the news was excellent. The economy grew at a robust 3.2 percent in the first quarter of 2019, smashing expectations. The news is particularly notable because the first quarter of the year is typically regarded as a weak quarter for growth.

Then, this morning, CNBC reported that 275,000 jobs were created in April—also, far exceeding expectations.

And of course these are just the latest pieces of good news about the economy. The economy is thriving, unemployment is low, job creation is up, personal income is up, wages are up, business investment is up, and much more.

How did we get here? Well, just a couple of years ago, our economy was struggling. Some experts were predicting that weak growth would be the new normal and the economic progress we have made over the past 2 years wasn’t supposed to happen.

At the beginning of 2017, the Congressional Budget Office projected growth of 2.3 percent for 2017, 2 percent for 2018, and just 1.7 percent for 2019.

Actual growth, of course, exceeded those numbers: 2.5 percent for 2017, 3 percent for 2018—a full percentage point higher than the CBO’s projection—and 2019 is clearly off to a great start.

So, again, how did we get here? Well, after President Trump was elected and Republicans took office, we set out to do something about the economy. We knew that Americans were struggling. Recovery from the great recession was long and slow, wages were stagnant, and too many families were living paycheck to paycheck. American families needed relief, and Republicans were committed to giving it to them. That meant getting our economy going again.

If the economy isn’t thriving, then, American families aren’t thriving. You need a strong economy to produce the kinds of jobs, wages, and opportunities that American workers need to flourish.

So we got right to work trimming some of the burdensome regulations that were acting as a drag on economic growth, and we made it clear to businesses that we were committed to creating the conditions that would allow them to create new jobs and opportunities for American workers.

But we knew that while cutting oppressive regulations was important, more needed to be done. So at the end of 2017, we passed a historic reform of our outdated Tax Code. We lowered tax rates for businesses, expanded business owners’ ability to invest in their operations and their workers, and made American businesses more competitive in the global economy.

Now we are seeing the results: a thriving economy that is producing good jobs, better wages and benefits, and more opportunities for American workers.

Importantly, the benefits of this economic growth are being spread far and wide. In March, the Wall Street Journal noted:

All sorts of people who have previously had trouble landing a job are now finding work. Racial minorities, those with less education and people working in the lowest-paying jobs are getting bigger pay raises and, in many cases, experiencing the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded for their groups. They are joining manufacturing workers, women in their prime working years, Americans with disabilities and those with criminal records, among others, in finding improved job prospects after years of disappointment.

That, again, is from the Wall Street Journal.

Getting our economy going again was a huge part of tax reform. We wanted to make life better for American workers, and we knew that a strong economy was the only way to create prosperity for Americans. We wanted to make life better for American workers, and we wanted to make sure that their families and the employees in the workplace all participated in a stronger economy. So we focused on creating the conditions for economic growth.

But that is not all we did with tax reform. We also cut individual tax rates across the board, we doubled the child tax credit, and we nearly doubled the standard deduction. Thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the average family