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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, how great You are. Today, lead our lawmakers in their work. May they be messengers of unity and hope.

Lord, make them productive servants who strive to honor You. Remind them to act with justice, love, mercy, and humility. May they speak words that bring life as they seek to live with integrity.

Sovereign Lord, strengthen our Senators to seize opportunities that bring peace, hope, and freedom.

We pray in Your great 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.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, the Senate has continued to make headway in the personnel business. This week, we are confirming a number of President Trump's thoroughly qualified nominees to important vacancies in the Federal courts and in the administration.

As I have said, it is unfortunate for this institution that our Democratic

colleagues have made it their routine practice to require not just rollcall votes but cloture votes as well on non-controversial nominees for lower profile positions—regular cloture votes on district judges, cloture votes on Assistant Secretaries, and, later this week, a cloture vote on an Assistant EPA Administrator.

These are the sorts of important but lower profile positions the Senate used to quickly process on a voice vote. When these sorts of people were qualified, they were voice-voted by Senates of both parties for Presidents of both parties. That was the norm.

New partisan hurdles will not deter the Senate from doing our job. We will continue to spend the time it takes to put impressive, impartial men and women on the Federal judiciary and give the President—more than 2 years into his administration—finally, more of his team in place in the executive branch.

Yesterday afternoon, we voted to advance the nomination of Daniel Bress to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Mr. Bress comes with strong credentials, the academic pedigree, the legal experience, and, most importantly, a demonstrated commitment to the rule of law.

I am glad we voted to advance his nomination yesterday, and I urge our colleagues to confirm him later today.

Next, we will consider three district court nominees: T. Kent Wetherell to the Northern District of Florida, Damon Leichty to the Northern District of Indiana, and Nicholas Ranjan to the Western District of Pennsylvania.

After them, we will confirm several nominees to serve in the administration: Robert King to be Assistant Secretary of Education, John Pallasch to be Assistant Secretary of Labor, and Peter Wright to be Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

In each of these cases, the President has presented us with thoroughly well-

qualified individuals to serve the Nation in these very important roles. This week, the Senate will give them the straightforward consideration and confirmations they deserve.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, Fourth of July celebrations weren't the only thing for American families to smile about last week. We received even more positive news about the strong U.S. economy that American workers and job creators are building with a big assist from Republican policies.

More than 200,000 new jobs were created in June alone. The economy is overflowing with opportunities. American workers are in high demand and more and more previously sidelined individuals are getting to clock back in.

The last administration's so-called recovery disproportionately helped a few major metropolitan areas, but it left whole communities and whole regions of our country more or less in the dust. Not these days. The results have been very different under Republicans' pro-growth, pro-opportunity policy agenda. Now we are seeing a real all-American recovery.

As the New York Times reported last week, "Only recently have the economic gains filtered down to Black and Hispanic workers, those with less education, and others who face discrimination or other barriers to employment."

So it is all kinds of American workers, all kinds of families, all kinds of small towns and farm counties and smaller cities and suburbs. This all-American recovery is benefiting our whole country with job opportunities, wage growth, net investment, and new optimism.

Two and a half years ago, Republicans started out with a pretty simple philosophy. It goes like this: The American people can accomplish great things and build prosperity for their

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



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families if Washington mostly stays out of the way.

We needed the Federal Government to stop creating so many economic headwinds and start creating a few tailwinds. So we achieved historic tax reform, major regulatory reform, and all kinds of economic policies geared toward helping workers and middle-class families earn more and then send less to the IRS.

The way Republicans see it, these ideas are actually no-brainers. So as long as you believe in the promise and potential of American workers and small businesses, this is clearly the way to go, and the results continue to speak for themselves.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Daniel Aaron Bress, of California, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PARK SAFETY

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, if you are a baseball fan, and many of us are, this is a big day—the day of the All-Star game.

I would like to spend just a few moments reflecting on an important issue for the fans of baseball across America.

Thirty-five million people every year enjoy one of America's great summer experiences—seeing a game at a Major League Baseball park. Fans join their friends and family to eat hot dogs, nachos, peanuts, and so much more. We sing the national anthem together at the start of the game and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” at the seventh inning stretch, a tradition started by a man named Harry Caray in a place called Wrigley Field.

Some—the more dedicated fans—keep scorecards of home runs, RBIs, and earned run averages. Sadly, there is another statistic that has been seeing more and more attention lately—injuries to fans.

A Bloomberg report from 2014 estimated 1,750 fans suffer injuries in Major League Baseball parks every

season. Some are hit by balls; others are injured trying to escape being hit by a ball. This is far too many.

On May 29, a 2-year-old girl was hit by a foul ball at Houston's Minute Maid Park. She suffered bleeding, bruises, and brain contusions from the ball's impact. Her skull was fractured. She continues to suffer seizures.

What makes her injuries even more disturbing is that they likely could have been prevented had the safety netting behind homeplate been extended.

Cubs outfielder Albert Almora, who hit the ball, was so devastated by the little girl's injuries that he could barely speak. One will never forget the image of his head bowed, crying, when he saw the damage that was done to this innocent little 2-year-old girl by a foul ball that he hit.

What did he say afterward? “I want to put a net around the whole stadium.”

In the weeks following, we have seen more injuries in the stands. On June 10, a woman was struck by a line drive at Guaranteed Rate Field in Chicago. Two weeks later, a young woman was hit by a foul ball at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.

A survey by the polling organization FiveThirtyEight found that 14,000 more foul balls were hit in 2018 than 1998, and there is just no way—no way—for fans to entirely protect themselves. Here come these baseballs at 105 miles an hour off the bat. Even if you are watching it intently, you just can't protect yourself or the people you love who are watching the game with you. Bryant Gumbel made that point on his cable TV show on this very subject.

If fans can't do more, baseball teams can. In 2017, after a child was hit by a line drive at Yankee Stadium in New York, I wrote a letter to Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred. I urged the league to extend safety netting at all Major League Baseball stadiums past the home plate to the far edge of each dugout. To their credit, the league did exactly that.

It is now clear, however, that is not enough. The little girl at Minute Maid Park was 10 feet beyond current netting.

In June, the Chicago White Sox became the first Major League Baseball team to announce it is going to extend netting to the foul poles. Let me tip my hat to Jerry Reinsdorf, the owner of the Chicago White Sox, for leading the way with this safety measure. The Washington Nationals, the Texas Rangers, and the Pittsburgh Pirates are all planning to do the same, and the Los Angeles Dodgers are conducting a study before making a protective strategy permanent.

I commend all these clubs for their leadership and commitment to fan safety, but I think we need more. We need a leaguewide standard.

Last month, my colleague from Illinois, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH, and I wrote to Commissioner Manfred calling

on all 30 Major League Baseball teams to extend the protective netting to the right- and left-field corners.

Folks who complain that extending the safety netting to the foul poles will create an obstructed view ignore the obvious—right now, the most expensive seats in baseball are behind the nets, and people don't complain. It is something you get used to, and you can get used to the safety of it as well. We should be reminded that the most expensive and popular seats have been behind netting for decades.

In 2002, a 13-year-old girl named Brittanie Cecil died after being struck in the head by a hockey puck at a National Hockey League game in Columbus, OH. The National Hockey League responded quickly, ordering protective netting behind the goal. Major League Baseball should show equal concern for its fans.

Ensuring the safety of fans at baseball stadiums is a tradition that stretches back to 1879, when the Providence Grays put up a screen behind homeplate to shield fans from the area that was called “the slaughter pen” at that time.

The increasing number of fans hit by balls makes it clear that new safety standards are needed at ballparks.

Today, we will see Major League Baseball's finest players at the All-Star game. Baseball fans deserve the best too. I urge Commissioner Manfred and all baseball teams to extend safety netting at Major League Baseball parks to the foul poles. Let's not wait until next season. Increasing fan safety is a win for everyone.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Madam President, if you ask the American people about issues they truly care about, let them volunteer what they think about, what they worry about, the No. 1 item on the list is the cost of prescription drugs.

We all know the problem. You reach a point where you need a drug or someone in your family needs a drug, and then you face the reality of what it is going to cost. If you are lucky, and you have a good health insurance plan, it covers the cost—no worries—but for many people, that is not the case. They have copays and deductibles or sometimes no real coverage when it comes to the cost of prescription drugs.

Of course, the prices of these drugs are way beyond our control. You go to a drugstore, and you are shocked to learn that what sounded like a great idea in the doctor's office turns out to be a very expensive idea at the cash register. For some people, it is an inconvenience, an annoyance, but for other people, it is a burden they just can't bear. They can't pay the cost. It is just too much.

Some of these drugs are just not minor additions to your life; they may be matters of life and death. In those circumstances, what are you to do?

I am reminded of people I have met across my State of Illinois as I have talked about this issue. One group