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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chaplain of the House of Representatives, Father Patrick Conroy, will open the Senate with prayer.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Righteous God, deliver Your people from evil. Set our lawmakers on safe paths, protecting them from dangers. Preserve them and their loved ones, keeping them from stumbling.

Provide our Senators with counsel, even in the night sessions where they may prevail against the evil that seeks to destroy our Nation and world. As they trust Your loving-kindness, may their hearts rejoice in Your salvation. Lord, deal bountifully with them and the members of their staffs.

We pray in Your marvelous 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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAWLEY). The Senator from Iowa.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 582 AND H.R. 748

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, first, I have a duty to perform for the leader.

I understand that there are two bills at the desk due a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the titles of the bills for the second time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 582) to provide for increases in the Federal minimum wage, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 748) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to repeal the excise tax on high cost employer-sponsored health coverage.

Mr. GRASSLEY. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask to speak as in morning business for 1 minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNITED STATES-MEXICO-CANADA TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, passing the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement means more market access for our farmers and businesses and more protection for our workers. This agreement includes new commitments in critical areas such as customs, digital trade, services, environment, and labor that are crucial to bringing higher wages and more jobs to American workers.

Of course, enforcement is key to a strong and durable trade agreement that will deliver all of the benefits that I just listed. We need enforcement measures that work for all aspects of this agreement.

It is time to bring NAFTA into the 21st century, and that is what the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement will do. The time for USMCA is now.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF MARK T. ESPER

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, the Senate's first order of business this week will be confirming a thoroughly well-prepared nominee to a post of vital national importance. Later today, we will vote to advance the nomination of Dr. Mark Esper to serve as Secretary of Defense, and we will vote on his confirmation tomorrow.

When Dr. Esper was nominated in July of 2017 to serve as Secretary of the Army, he already possessed an impressive record that spanned public service, the private sector, and, of course, his distinguished service in uniform. As a student, he excelled at West Point. He served honorably in combat during the Gulf war as an infantry officer with Kentucky's own 101st Airborne, the Screaming Eagles. He then later obtained a master's degree from the Kennedy School at Harvard and a Ph.D. from George Washington University.

In the years since, Dr. Esper has continued to serve his country, compiling an outstanding record in public service. He has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Pentagon; as a Senate-appointed member of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission; and, of course, as a trusted staff expert right here in the Capitol.

As a result, many of our colleagues have been familiar with this nominee for more than a decade. Members on both sides remember Mark Esper from his time on staff with our former colleague Chuck Hagel. Some knew him during his tenure with the Foreign Relations Committee or with what was

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



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