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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable EDWARD J. MARKEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, ultimate judge of the universe, You have been our dwelling place in all generations, and we are sustained by Your steadfast love. Today, surround our Senators with the shield of Your favor as they labor to keep America strong. Lord, teach them to be obedient to Your commands, doing Your good will as Your presence fills them with joy. Manifest Your power through their labors so that this Nation will be exalted by righteousness. Help our Senators to put their trust in You and to recapture their trust in one another as Your angels guard them in all their ways.

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. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, January 29, 2014.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable EDWARD J. MARKEY, a

Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL SERVICES AND BENEFITS TO VETERANS—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 297, S. 1950.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 297, S. 1950, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was happy to move this on behalf of Chairman SANDERS, who has put together this bill which is supported by 25 different service organizations.

Following my remarks this morning and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with the majority controlling the first half and Republicans the final half.

Following morning business, the Senate will begin consideration of S. 1926, the flood insurance legislation.

We were able to reach an agreement for several amendments. All amendments must be offered by 3 p.m. today.

Multiple rollcall votes are possible today. Senators will be notified when these votes are scheduled.

OUR ECONOMY

Mr. President, over the last 45 months America's private sector has

added more than 8 million jobs. We heard that from the President last night. The stock market has soared. Productivity has never in the history of our country been higher, and Americans have even started building and buying homes again. But while the economy is gaining momentum, for far too many Americans the hopeful headlines don't match the grim reality.

For the last decades middle-class Americans have seen their paychecks shrink even as corporate profits climb and the wealthiest are doing better and better. As the President said last night, there is nothing wrong with people making money. We are all happy they are doing well. But the average CEO's income is multiplied 250 times, and the people who work for that CEO are making less and less every year. That has happened during the last years. The richest 1 percent have had their wealth increased by three times while during that same period of time the middle class has had its earning capacity drop 10 percent. Average Americans are working even longer and harder than they were 30 years ago and receiving less in the way of remuneration.

The difference is this. Their hard work isn't paying off the way it used to. We must change that, and we can change that. It is not too late to ensure that Americans' success is determined by the strength of their spirit instead of the size of their bank account.

Fifty years ago, in his first State of the Union Address, Lyndon Johnson declared unconditional war on poverty. We have seen a lot of news accounts on that anniversary during the last month or so. But here is what Lyndon Johnson said 50 years ago:

Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope . . . because of their poverty. . . . Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity.

Thanks to the innovative programs created five decades ago, including Medicare and school lunch programs,

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



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the poverty rate has fallen 40 percent since the 1960s. But there is so much work to do.

The 67 richest Americans' net worth increased \$2 billion on average last year. But during that same time, 1 million more American children dropped into poverty.

So there is much more to do. Too many American families still live on the outskirts of hope, struggling to survive, and falling well short of the American dream.

Last night President Obama laid out a plan to breathe the new life into this country's struggling middle class. The President charted a course to build on the economic progress we have made over the last 45 months and to guarantee that progress is felt by every hard-working American. He challenged us—the Congress—to work with him to replace despair with opportunity. President Obama called for common-sense investments in our future—investments that have been deferred for too long.

If America hopes to rebuild and maintain a world-class economy, we must build the 21st century infrastructure to support that economy and a cutting-edge energy supply to power it. We must prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs by ensuring a higher education is within reach for every promising student. We must give small businesses and manufacturers the support they need to thrive, and we must ensure every American earns a living wage during their working years and has the opportunity to retire comfortably.

I support the President's action to raise the minimum wage for private contractors who do work for the government, such as janitors, food servers, dish washers, and construction workers. But no American working a full-time job should live in poverty, and Congress must act to raise the minimum wage for all our Nation's workers.

A strong middle class—and an opportunity for every American to enter that middle class—is the key to this Nation's prosperity.

Last night the President also asked us to renew our commitment to the principles on which this country was founded—the principles which made this country great: Fairness—basic fairness. We must make certain that every American, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race or income, has the opportunity to a full and equal participation in the workplace.

There are no guarantees in life. Not everyone succeeds. But every American deserves a fair shot at that success.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to say a word this morning about the President's State of the Union speech. Let me say that I think Con-

gresswoman McMORRIS RODGERS did a great job representing our party and the people of Washington State's Fifth District last night.

Frankly, I wish the President had laid out an agenda half as hopeful as the one she did because the State of the Union address is always an important moment for our country. It is an opportunity for the two parties to come together with the President, members of the Supreme Court, and other government officials to show a kind of unity even in the midst of the great debates we have here every single day. It is a worthy tradition.

Last night the President had a real chance to unite the Nation around a forward-looking agenda. He had a huge opportunity to reach to the middle and chart a new path—at a time when nearly 70 percent of Americans say the country is either stagnant or worse off now than when the President took office—that we are on the wrong path. It could have been a legacy-making moment. Instead, it was the same tired boilerplate we hear year after year.

When you peel back all the adjectives and the anecdotes, all the platitudes and nods to the left, what remains for the middle class? Largely, the same tired policies that led us to this point—the same failed agenda with its legacy of stagnant unemployment, lower incomes, growing inequality, and crumbling pathways to the future. The only difference is that now the President wants to keep doing the same old thing, but without as much input from the people's elected representatives in Congress.

It is basically all of the same policies, less of that pesky democratic accountability. The President didn't talk about embracing a positive new agenda last night. He didn't talk about reforming our Tax Code in a way that would drive private-sector growth and job creation. He didn't talk about finding serious ways to start reducing a massive \$17 trillion debt that threatens to suffocate our economy and crush the dreams of our children. He didn't talk about saving Social Security and Medicare or about streamlining and slimming the size of government or about setting America's entrepreneurs and small businesses free to dream and to succeed.

As for energy, the President plans seems to boil down to more regulation and new taxes on energy production.

For all of his talk of phones and pens, he didn't even mention using his pen to sign off on the Keystone Pipeline. It is the single, simplest action he could have taken to create jobs soon, and it is actually a project which would create jobs right away. It still can, if the President will just lead. Unions support it; powerful members of his own party support it. The American people overwhelmingly support it. But there is one small group that doesn't support it: Special interests on the far left. The special interests on the far left won last night, and the middle class lost.

There is another big issue where the President turned his back on the middle class, and that of course is ObamaCare. The State of the Union was the President's opportunity to finally admit his mistakes and the painful consequences which have affected so many in Kentucky and around the country. It was a chance to call for a fresh, bipartisan beginning and to start over with true health reform that could really help middle-class families. Instead, he simply doubled down on failed policies.

I know he tried to paint a rosy picture of life under this law in his speech, and I suppose that is natural. But he must know it is not a picture that reflects reality. He must know that Americans suffering under this law aren't going to buy the spin, and he must know that trying to sell Kentucky's ObamaCare bureaucracy as some kind of success story is, to the thousands and thousands of Kentuckians being hurt by it—well, it is, frankly, insulting.

It is insulting to the quarter-million Kentuckians who have had their plans canceled because of this law. It is insulting to the families struggling to afford premiums that have on average increased by almost half across Kentucky. It is insulting to the taxpayers who have been forced to subsidize—to the tune of about \$250 million in Kentucky alone—ObamaCare's restricted access to doctors and hospitals. It has a crushing effect on families and skyrocketing costs.

So look. It is clear. President Obama missed the mark last night.

On some issues he actually said the right things, such as on Trade Promotion Authority. That is a place where we can work together to create more American jobs, as long as the President can convince his own party to work constructively with us to do that. What he didn't say last night is that the only thing stopping us from creating more trade jobs is his own party. So we will see if he actually follows through on trade.

But overall, the President mostly refused to budge from his failed policies. He refused to reach across the aisle in a way that would lead to immediate job growth opportunities. That is distressing news for our country. It is especially disheartening for the middle class, and it is disappointing for those of us who actually want to get big things done for our constituents, for those who do want to work with the President, who want to collaborate on smart, bipartisan policies that could finally—finally—get Americans back to work after years of this failed Obama economy. But we cannot do it without President Obama. He has to lead on trade, jobs, energy, the economy—whatever the issue.

We are not going to give up. We are not going to stop trying to help him to see that Americans are calling for a new direction, for a forward leaning agenda that actually puts the middle

class first and leaves tired leftwing ideas where they belong—in the history books. And when the President is ready to work with us, he should know we will be here waiting for him. We have always been here, actually, and many Members of his party, with other helpful ideas, have been here too, waiting for him—Democrats with smart ideas the President has not been willing to consider so far.

All he needs to do is pick up the phone. If he is willing to actually work in a serious way with Members of both parties, we will send him some things to sign with that pen too.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, earlier this month we commemorated the 50th anniversary of President Johnson's declaration of "unconditional war on poverty." That war on poverty was a massively successful initiative. It helped tens of millions of Americans lift themselves out of poverty, reduced hardship, empowered people to build new opportunities for themselves and their future.

We see some of the residue of this. Today, food stamps ensure that children do not go to bed hungry at night. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act insisted that all children, regardless of background, can learn and have an equal opportunity for education. Legal Services helps people with limited resources seek protection from exploitation. Low-income families fight poverty in their own communities by helping to lead community action agencies. The war on poverty and the Great Society encompassed a tremendous list of achievements that I cannot even begin to do justice to today.

However, we know we still have more work to do. Too many of those success-

ful programs and policies have been reduced or rolled back under subsequent Presidents and Congresses. What is more, our economy has changed and in fundamental ways, with decades of waste, stagnation, and rising income inequality.

Now we must urgently turn our attention to policies that will ensure that working families can still get ahead in America. We must recognize that tens of millions of working Americans struggle to put food on the table, a roof over their head, and pay their bills every month. This is a fundamental failing of our economy. It is something we not only have a moral obligation to fix but we have the ability to fix. We can do so first by raising the minimum wage, one of our Nation's simplest and most effective means of lifting working families out of poverty.

I am so pleased President Obama has taken the first step in this effort. Last night at the State of the Union, he announced he would issue an Executive order that will require future Federal contracts to provide wages of at least \$10.10 an hour to our Nation's contract workers for the Federal Government. I applaud President Obama's bold step to ensure that the Federal Government is a leader in promoting good jobs that pay fair wages. I think most Americans would agree that taxpayer dollars should not support companies that pay poverty wages. This Executive order is a strong step in the right direction. But now we in the Congress have work to do, to raise the minimum wage for the rest of American workers.

Again, I am so grateful for President Obama taking a strong leadership position, as he did last night, in calling for Congress to expeditiously work to increase the minimum wage.

We need to agree in this country that if you work hard and play by the rules you can earn enough money to support your family, keep a roof over your head, put some money away for a rainy day, have a secure retirement. The minimum wage played a critical role in doing that, which is why Presidents and elected leaders from both parties in the past have supported fair increases in the minimum wage. From time to time, we adjusted the minimum wage on a bipartisan basis to help working families keep up with inflation and the changing economy. But recently we have heard a new and disturbing set of talking points from our friends on the other side of the aisle. They claim that raising the minimum wage does not actually reduce poverty. They argue the minimum wage workers do not come from poor families or that no one stays at a minimum wage job long enough to be trapped in poverty.

Those all sound good on the talk shows, but the facts simply prove those statements are not true. The fact is a majority of people who would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage come from low-income households. Many of them have been trapped in

jobs at or near the minimum wage for years and years at a time. Indeed, when you listen more closely, the offensive underlying premise of all these arguments is that anyone can rise out of poverty if they just work harder.

Tell that to Nereida Castro of Des Moines. She and her husband both work minimum wage jobs in the fast food and construction industries. They have five children to support. But Nereida says they live day to day because of their bills and expenses. She said her family "has to limit many things to give to our kids to only make rent, to cover expenses. We have to limit everything."

A raise in the minimum wage would allow her to "live a life where I don't feel like I'm drowning."

Tell that tale about "you just have to work harder" to Nancy Salgado, 27-year-old single mother with two kids, ages 2 and 7. She worked at McDonald's for the past 10 years but makes only \$8.25 an hour. That is the minimum wage in her own State of Illinois. She struggles to be able to pay for necessities such as milk and shoes for her kids. She recently confronted the president of McDonald's USA, saying:

I'm a single mother of two. It's really hard for me to feed my 2 kids and struggle day to day. . . . Do you think this is fair, that I have to be making \$8.25 an hour when I have been working at McDonald's for 10 years?

For Senators and Representatives sitting comfortably here in Washington to preach to working mothers such as Nancy, struggling hard to get ahead, working 10 years at McDonald's—to tell them they are not working hard enough, that is beyond offensive.

No one disputes that hard work is a big part of the path out of poverty, but you also need a basic foundation of economic security to start building that better life. How are you supposed to pay for a community college course on \$7.25 an hour? How are you supposed to find a better job when you are standing in line at a food bank because your wages won't cover all your household expenses, and neither will your food stamps? How are you supposed to build a better life for your kids when you can't even find them safe childcare while you are at work? They just can't get ahead if their job traps them in poverty.

It has not always been this way. We used to agree that minimum wage works. People who perform some of the most difficult and essential jobs in our society should not have to live in poverty. The minimum wage kept families above the poverty line in the 1960s and 1970s. In today's dollars, a minimum wage worker in 1968—when the minimum wage was 120 percent of the poverty line—took home \$10.71 an hour or \$22,000 a year working full time.

Since the 1980s, the minimum wage has not kept up. Today the minimum wage is about 80 percent of the level of poverty. This is how far we have come down. The same family whose breadwinner worked at a job making minimum wage in 1968—look at where they