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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JOHN BOOZMAN, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, our hope for years to come, we offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving. We thank You for Your steadfast love that sustains our lawmakers every hour. We thank You for surrounding our Senators with Your presence that permits them to dwell in peace.

Lord, we are grateful for the joy we all receive by observing the works of Your hands, finding pleasure in the beauty of the sunrise and the glory of the sunset. We gaze with wonder at the majesty of the butterfly and the soaring eagle, knowing that the same hands that guide them in flight desire to direct our steps.

Generous God, we celebrate Your love that provides redemption for humanity. You sacrificed Yourself for our salvation.

Lord of all, to You we raise this our prayer of grateful praise.

We pray in Your bountiful 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, November 15, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN BOOZMAN, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the need for tax reform has been obvious for a long time now. Many Republicans have said it. Many Democrats have said it. We certainly hope Democrats will continue to stand by their strong statements in support of tax reform today, because while the occupant of the Oval Office may have changed, the need for tax reform certainly hasn't.

Indeed, after many long years of an Obama economy that so often failed the middle class, its effects continue to be felt across the country for many: for single parents who still struggle to make ends meet; for moms and dads who still struggle to find a way to send their kids to college, make a car payment, or save for retirement; and for small business owners who still find themselves frustrated when they try to hire more employees, reinvest in their business or pursue their dreams.

There are many obstacles to tackle—an out-of-control regulatory state, for one. We have taken significant action to tame that already, and we will continue to do so.

Another huge factor is our seriously outdated Tax Code. Filled with complicated schedules, worksheets, deductions, and loopholes, the code is easy for the wealthy and well-connected to game and almost impossible for almost anyone else to understand. If you are wealthy, you hire accountants and lawyers to navigate a complicated process. But the young, small business owner starting out can't afford a team to do her taxes and bring on a new employee or raise wages.

Moreover, the Tax Code actively punishes those small businesses and the middle class with rates that are too high, provisions that are clearly outdated, and incentives that are just plain ridiculous—like the fact that it actually encourages the shipping of American jobs and businesses overseas. Our Tax Code actually encourages that. That is why this Congress, in conjunction with the White House, is working hard to pass tax reform.

Today the Senate Finance Committee will continue to examine its tax reform proposal under Chairman HATCH's leadership. Members are continuing to discuss the best path forward to deliver relief to the men and women we represent. This week's hearings are just the latest in a years-long process to write a tax code that supports the middle class. In fact, since Chairman HATCH has been the top Republican on the Finance Committee, it has hosted 70 hearings in the last 6 years. Each one of those hearings considered how to improve the Tax Code to make it work better for all Americans.

The committee has made numerous serious efforts to engage across the aisle to get this done. Members on both sides agree that a pro-growth tax plan will move our economy forward, help create more jobs, and help families keep more of their hard-earned paychecks, or at least our Democratic friends used to, seemingly, until President Trump came along.

The plan before the committee fulfills important goals that all of us

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



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should share. It aims to make taxes for families lower, simpler, and fairer. According to the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation and recent news reports, the “Middle Class [are the] biggest winners in [the] Senate tax plan.”

It also aims to make it easier for small businesses to grow, invest, and hire. For Kentucky’s small businesses and for those across the country, this proposal will help to do just that by creating incentives to bring investment and jobs home and keep them here.

The plan before the Finance Committee fulfills our main goal for tax reform, which is taking more money out of Washington’s pockets and putting more money into the pockets of the middle class.

Last evening, the committee released a modified chairman’s mark that, among other important elements, will effectively repeal ObamaCare’s individual mandate tax so we can provide even more tax relief to low- and middle-income families. In short, the goal is to repeal an unpopular tax from an unworkable law in order to provide more tax relief to middle-class families.

Now, as the committee continues its legislative markup through an open process, it will explore further ways to improve this good legislation. Both Republicans and Democrats have offered hundreds of amendments. Chairman HATCH is setting aside full days for the committee to consider them. Once the Finance Committee completes its work and reports its proposal to the Senate floor, all Members will have the chance to offer their amendments under the regular order.

Another Senate committee is having an important markup today as well. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee is beginning its consideration of an important proposal to support good jobs, our energy future, and our national security.

So, once again, I commend Chairman MURKOWSKI and the members of the committee for their work on this proposal to further develop Alaska’s oil and natural gas potential in an environmentally responsible way—more American jobs, more American energy, and more energy security and independence. I look forward to the Energy Committee reporting its legislation today.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate continued its efforts to confirm the President’s talented nominees to staff the Federal Government.

We advanced the nomination of David Zatezalo to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health, an important position to the thousands of miners in States like Kentucky. I look forward to confirming his nomination early this afternoon, along with that of Mark Esper, who

will be confirmed to another important position, Secretary of the Army.

Also, we will turn to Joseph Otting, President Trump’s nominee to serve as Comptroller of the Currency. This position is crucial to protecting our national banking system, and Mr. Otting has the experience necessary to excel there.

Then, the Senate will continue our efforts to ensure that our Nation’s judiciary fulfills its proper role in our democracy by confirming two more talented nominees to serve as Federal district court judges. President Trump has continued to nominate individuals who will interpret the law as it is actually written, not as they wish it were.

Donald Coggins has been nominated to serve as district court judge for the District of South Carolina. He has been in private practice in South Carolina for over three decades. The Senate Judiciary Committee reported his nomination by a voice vote. He is a talented nominee, and I look forward to confirming him soon.

Then the Senate will consider the nomination of Dabney Friedrich to serve as district court judge for the District of Columbia. Ms. Friedrich has a wealth of experience, having been in private practice and having served as assistant U.S. attorney in both the Eastern District of Virginia and the Southern District of California, and she has been confirmed twice by the Senate as a Commissioner of the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The Judiciary Committee also reported her nomination by a voice vote. These nominees will respect the rule of law on the Federal bench, and they should be confirmed without delay.

I would like to again thank Chairman GRASSLEY for his commitment to bringing the President’s impressive judicial nominees to the floor. These are both respected nominees who have the support of Members on both sides of the aisle, and I hope we can consider their nominations without any partisan procedural hurdles. We should confirm them soon.

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. 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the 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 and resume consideration of the Zatezalo nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of David G. Zatezalo, of West Virginia, to be Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. THUNE. Thank you, Mr. President.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, on Sunday, Politico offered this headline: “Middle class biggest winners in Senate tax plan, study says.”

The article goes on to say: “Moderate-income people would consistently see the largest percentage declines in their tax bills, according to an analysis released late Saturday by the official, nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation.”

It goes on to say: “In 2019, people in the middle spectrum, earning between \$50,000 and \$70,000, would see their taxes fall by 7.1 percent. Those earning between \$20,000 and \$30,000 would see a 10.4 percent decline.”

This is what we set out to achieve with the Senate tax bill that we released last week—real relief for American families, and that is what our bill delivers.

I don’t need to tell anyone that the American people have had a rough few years. Stagnant wages and a lack of opportunities have left many American families stretched thin. A recent survey found that 50 percent—50 percent—of people out there consider themselves to be living paycheck to paycheck. About one-third of those same people say that they are literally just \$400 away from a financial crisis. Well, real help is on the way.

Last night, Chairman HATCH released a revised bill that provides even more relief for middle-class families. I applaud Chairman HATCH for his work on this revised bill that includes Republican and Democratic amendments and reflects feedback we have received from the whole Republican conference.

Our bill provides immediate, direct relief to hard-working Americans. Our bill doubles the standard deduction. That means, beginning in January, a family making \$24,000 a year or less per year will not be paying any taxes, and families making more than \$24,000 per year will be paying significantly less than what they are paying today.

Our bill also doubles the child tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per child. We all know that raising children is expensive, and this provision provides a significant tax cut for families across the country.