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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the Heavens speak of Your wonders, and the skies declare what You have done. Let Your everlasting grace and compassion encompass our Senators today. Lord, give them such grace that they will be faithful in each task, striving to honor You in their work. May the work they do help provide for the security and well-being of our Nation and world. Protect them and those they love by the power of Your loving providence.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 15, 2013.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COWAN thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m. The Republicans will control the first half, the majority the final half. Following morning business the Senate will resume consideration of the Water Resources Development Act. There will be up to seven rollcall votes to complete action on this bill, and we will start the voting at about 10:30 this morning.

Mr. President, there is a lot going on here—committees meeting—but I want to alert all Senators, Democrats and Republicans, that we have a lot of votes to do and we are not going to wait around while someone strolls in. The first vote will be the regular 15-minute vote, and after that it will be 10 minutes. I am alerting everyone that we are going to close the votes as quickly as we can so we can finish.

The Republicans have an important meeting beginning before 1 p.m. today, so we will move through these votes as quickly as we can.

We also expect votes today on confirmation of Marilyn Tavenner to be Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and we may get to see if we can finish the Orrick nomination to be a judge for the Northern District of California.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 953

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am told that S. 953 is due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 953) to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to extend the reduced interest rate for undergraduate Federal Direct Stafford Loans, to modify required distribution rules for pension plans, to limit earnings stripping by expatriated entities, to provide for modifications related to the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. I object to any further proceedings on this bill at this time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the great Albert Einstein defined insanity as follows: “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” That is what Albert Einstein said. If his definition is true—and I am not going to argue with Einstein—the House Republicans have truly lost their minds. This week the House of Representatives will vote for the 37th time—the 37th time—on exactly the same thing. What are they voting on? They are voting to repeal the landmark constitutional health care reform bill known now as ObamaCare—and I say that proudly.

After last year’s election, Speaker BOEHNER conceded that ObamaCare is here to stay. Here is what he said:

It’s pretty clear that the president was re-elected. Obamacare is the law of the land.

I think that is a pretty fair statement. Again, the Speaker said it is pretty clear President Obama was re-elected and ObamaCare is the law of the land. So no matter what he said then, this is now, and he has changed his mind. The House will waste yet another week on another dead-end repeal vote. Perhaps Republicans think the 37th time is the charm, but 37 times on the exact same thing?

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



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S3437

Tea party extremists bullied the Speaker into holding yet another vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act and roll back benefits for tens of millions of Americans.

This is what the Speaker said last week:

We've got 70 new Members who have not had an opportunity to vote on the President's health care law. . . . Frankly, they've been asking for an opportunity to vote on it.

This political kabuki has tied up the floor of the House of Representatives for weeks and cost the American taxpayers \$52.4 million and counting. These are figures compiled by CBS News of the time wasted on those 37 votes—all the House staff and all other personnel who have responsibilities for making sure that place runs as well as it does. That money—\$52.4 million—is enough to restore funding for 19 million meals for homebound seniors or 6,900 children dropped from the Head Start Program.

But while the vote may be political theater, it does have one benefit: The American people will know where the freshman class of House Republicans stands. I think we know, but we will get another opportunity to see this. Do they stand with millions of Americans who are already benefiting from ObamaCare—we know that answer—or do they stand with insurance companies? We know that answer.

The insurance companies would like nothing better than to have things the way they used to be and to once again deny coverage to sick children, impose lifetime caps on care, and discriminate against those with preexisting conditions. Since President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, insurance companies can no longer put profits ahead of people.

One of the provisions in this bill says that, of premiums paid to insurance companies for health care, 80 percent of those premiums must go to patients. No longer, as once happened, will 50 percent of the premiums go for salaries and bonuses and other perks for insurance executives—no longer. Insurance companies can no longer discriminate against children with preexisting conditions. They can no longer raise rates for no reason. They can no longer drop coverage if someone gets sick. But that is what happened. Yet this week, for the 37th time, House Republicans will try to change all that.

Here are a few of the other benefits already in effect that House Republicans would eliminate. In Nevada alone—and we are not a heavily populated State such as Massachusetts or California or New York, but we are getting bigger, we have about 3 million people—tens of thousands of seniors have saved tens of millions of dollars on medicines because the Affordable Care Act closed the gap on prescription drugs. That means millions of seniors across this country have more money in their pockets for food, gas, and electric bills.

More than 3 million young people, because of ObamaCare, including 33,000

young Nevadans, have benefited from a provision in the law that allows children to stay on their parents' health plans until they are 26 years old. That means no person will have to worry about getting sick while looking for a job that offers insurance or while they go to college.

In my little town of Searchlight, NV, a boy made a decision. Was he going to join the military—he was from a patriotic family—or was he going to go to college? He made the decision that he was going to go to college. His family was not one of means. His mom worked part time in a post office, and his dad worked at a powerplant about 40 miles from Searchlight. They were so happy that this boy was going to go to college. He was the first person in their family to go to college, and he did extremely well.

He finished his first year, and he was in his second year when he started feeling some discomfort. He had testicular cancer. At the time ObamaCare passed, he was 23 years old and no longer could he be on his parents' insurance. So they had no insurance to cover this cancer their son had—their youngest boy. They begged and borrowed and literally—well, I shouldn't say "begged." They didn't do that. They had a very difficult time of it. He needed two surgeries.

Now I guess the Republicans in the House want to go back to that. Maybe the Republicans here—they love voting against ObamaCare provisions—want to go back to a time when that boy, Jeff, would no longer have insurance. That is what they want for these young men and women who are trying to go to college, to get a job—they want to go back to that time. He has 3 extra years now. That means a lot.

Under ObamaCare, hundreds of thousands of businesses that already offer their employees health insurance are getting tax credits for doing the right thing. That means small business owners can spend their capital on growing their firms instead of growing insurance premiums.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies can no longer set arbitrary lifetime caps on benefits, as they once did. What does that mean? It means there was a provision hidden in that policy they sold you that stated that when your benefits reach \$50,000, coverage stops. It didn't matter if you had been hurt in an automobile accident or you had cancer or some other dread disease; it used to stop. Not anymore. Because of the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans are no longer one car accident or a heart attack away from bankruptcy.

Today, children can no longer be denied coverage because they are born with a disease or a disability—a protection that will soon be extended to all Americans. Soon, being a woman will no longer be a preexisting condition. I said that right, Mr. President. No longer will being a woman be a preexisting condition. My daughter has a

preexisting condition. What is it? She is a woman. But no longer. In a few months, 129 million Americans with preexisting conditions, such as high blood pressure or epilepsy, can rest assured they will have access to affordable insurance and lifesaving care regardless of how much money they make or don't make. And soon 25 million more Americans who can't afford health insurance will have access to reasonably priced insurance and quality care. But if Republicans get their way, these benefits and more will disappear. There is going to be a vote in the House of Representatives to repeal everything I have talked about—not change it but repeal it.

President Obama led the charge here, and we were able to pass the Affordable Care Act—the most significant change in our health care delivery system since Medicare all those many, many years ago. It ensures access to quality affordable health care for every American. But Republicans would erase these gains and force millions of American families to once again rely on expensive emergency room care or go without care at all.

Fortunately, the Republicans' latest exercise in insanity, as described by Albert Einstein—that is, their latest repeal effort—is doomed to fail just as it did the previous 36 times.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

THE IRS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, it seems like, with each passing hour, the facts get more and more inconvenient for senior folks over at the IRS.

Yesterday, it was reported that the agency may have gone after a ministry founded by Billy Graham. We also learned that the very same IRS office that admitted to harassing conservative groups also released nine pending applications for tax-exempt status to the liberal investigative group ProPublica.

How did we find out? ProPublica revealed it.

Basically all we have gotten from the IRS, on the other hand, is an attempt to scapegoat some folks out in Cincinnati and a laughable attempt to move past this whole issue with a ridiculous op-ed claiming "mistakes were made."

Well, most folks don't think that ignoring the Constitution is simply a "mistake." I like the fact that one group the IRS targeted, when asked by the agency to provide reading materials related to their mission, mailed them a copy of the Constitution.

Today, I would like to encourage every group that feels like it has been unjustly targeted to do the same. Maybe just underline the First Amendment before you put it in the envelope, because that is what this is all about.