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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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.

O God our shield, we rejoice in the beauty of Your salvation. Let the people of the Earth look to You with reverential awe. Lord, look with favor upon our Senators today, delivering them from fear and guiding them around the obstacles that hinder their progress. Unite them for the common good of this great land. Manifest Your purposes to them, making clear Your plans and guiding them with Your love. Give them the wisdom to have confidence in Your power, as You inspire them to use their talents as instruments of liberation and healing. Enable them to go from strength to strength, as they fulfill Your purpose for their lives.

We pray in Your merciful 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, February 26, 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.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 2 hours. The Republicans will control the first half, the majority the final half.

Following that morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1982, the veterans benefits bill postcloture.

I hope we can reach an agreement to begin consideration of amendments on the bill today. I will have more to say about that in just a minute.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, over the last many months millions of Americans have signed up for affordable health insurance, many for the first time ever, many for the first time in many years.

Millions of young people have stayed on their parents' insurance plans while they pursue higher education to start their first jobs.

Millions of senior citizens have saved money on prescriptions—these prescription bills, they average about \$1,200 they have saved, each senior—and tens of millions of women have access to free preventive care.

Across the country, Americans who were once denied insurance because

they suffered from something like cancer or something as simple as acne were able to buy affordable, quality health insurance they could afford and they could trust.

Despite all that good news, there are plenty of horror stories being told. All of them are untrue, but they are being told all over America.

The leukemia patient whose insurance policy was canceled and would die without her medication—Mr. President, that is an ad being paid for by two billionaire brothers that is absolutely false; or the woman whose insurance policy went up \$700 a month—ads paid for around America by the multi-billionaire Koch brothers, and the ad is false.

We heard about the evils of ObamaCare, about the lives it is ruining in the Republican stump speeches and in ads paid for by oil magnets, the Koch brothers.

But those tales turned out to be just that—tales, stories made up from whole cloth, lies, distorted by the Republicans to grab headlines or make political advertisements.

Mr. President, these two brothers are trying to buy America. They not only funnel money through their Americans for Prosperity, they funnel money into all kinds of organizations to do the same thing that they are doing. They are trying to buy America. I do not believe America is for sale. But we will see. But do not take my word for all this. How about taking the word of a Noble Prize-winning economist who wrote last week in the New York Times:

What the right wants are struggling average Americans, preferably women, facing financial devastation from health reform. So those are the tales they're telling, even though they haven't been able to come up with any real examples.

Paul Krugman writes, Republicans are "just making [this] stuff up." It is easy to do if you have billions of dollars to spend and you are trying to buy America.

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



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But, Mr. President, we have our own stories to tell—true stories—true stories of average Americans whose lives have changed for the better because of the Affordable Care Act, true stories of families that can rest easier knowing insurance companies can never again put profits first and people second.

Take the story of a couple from Henderson, NV. I went to high school there. Their names are Jane and Brett Thomas. These are real stories. This story is true.

Jane wrote to me recently to say she is “ecstatic”—that is her word—to be saving \$1,200 every month on a top-of-the-line family insurance plan thanks to ObamaCare.

For years Jane was locked into her job as a school teacher because she, Brett, and their two teenage children needed guaranteed health insurance, and it cost a lot.

But Jane was able to quit her teaching job to spend more time with her children and help her husband at the family small business. Jane says the Affordable Care Act has literally changed her life and the lives of her loved ones. This is what she wrote:

Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt.

An editorial comment from me: Koch brothers’ lies.

I will go back and start over:

Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt, but I thought I should share our joy. The best part is our insurance covers so much more and pays better on every front. . . . I can’t thank you and your colleagues enough for fighting for people like me and my family.

Republicans may need tall tales and outright lies to convince people that ObamaCare is bad for them, but Democrats do not have to make things up. We have the support of lots of people, including a Nobel Prize-winning economist, not “OilCare” magnets who are trying to benefit their businesses by spreading lies about things that do not matter to them.

Millions of real Americans, like Jane and Brett Thomas, are benefiting from ObamaCare every day. Their premiums are lower. Their prescriptions are cheaper. They cannot be denied a policy or discriminated against. Their benefits cannot be cut off because they get sick or reach some arbitrary cap that some insurance executive dreamed up. They are no longer locked into jobs they do not love or do not need because they cannot get insurance anywhere else.

The Koch brothers are spending hundreds of millions of dollars telling Americans that ObamaCare is bad for them. It is easy to do if you have no conscience and are willing to lie, like they are, through the ads they are promoting. But the Koches should stick to what they know—the oil business—the oil business—where they have made their multibillions of dollars. The truth is simply more powerful than any myth, any legend or any false political ad.

GROUNDHOG YEAR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I said I would talk about what we are doing here today. You talk about “Groundhog Day.” This is groundhog year. The Republicans in the Senate refuse to allow anything to take place.

Prior to our noon break yesterday—every Tuesday Republicans meet and Democrats meet—one of the senior Republicans came to me and said: Harry, are you going to have amendments? I said: Of course we are going to have amendments. We have talked about amendments on the veterans bill. I have had Republicans come to me and say: Let’s try relevant amendments. So I said: Fine. Come up with some. They said: How many? I said: I don’t care.

The first amendment is what they have been doing all along. They offer an amendment that has nothing to do with this bill, the veterans bill. It is partisanship at its best. It is obstruction at its best.

We got cloture on this bill. Virtually everybody voted to allow us to start debate on this bill. But that is only a subterfuge. The Republicans obviously have no intent of doing anything for the veterans as outlined in this bill.

The chairman of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee has worked for months coming up with a bill that is good—a bipartisan proposal. Republican proposals are in this bill.

One of the Republican Senators here came and talked for some length yesterday about ways he would like to improve the bill. Offer amendments. He is not going to be allowed to do that.

The bill advanced yesterday should be bipartisan—a measure that would help the veterans who have given so much to defend our country. As I indicated to my friend, the Republican Senator, before their lunch: Sure, let’s look at relevant amendments. Why not? It is the right thing to do. But the first amendment the Republicans demand is an unrelated issue on Iran.

Everyone knows that there are negotiations taking place between the United States, the European Union, and others to prevent Iran from having a nuclear capacity. I have said many times—I will repeat it here today—we will not let Iran have nuclear capabilities. The sanctions that we have put in place have brought them to the bargaining table.

You would think that if there was any validity to what the Republicans are trying to do, the organization that is more supportive of Israel than any organization I know—AIPAC—said publicly they do not want a vote on this now—publicly. They do not always put stuff out in the press, but that is what they said.

The audacity of what they are doing is an effort to stall, obstruct, as they have done. This is, I repeat, not “Groundhog Day,” not groundhog month—groundhog year. The Republicans have been doing this on every issue. It does not matter if it is an issue that 90 percent of the American people support.

Republicans say they want to help veterans—a strange way of showing it. We introduced a bill that would do just that. Republicans immediately inject partisan politics into the mix, insisting on amendments that have nothing to do with helping veterans.

So I am terribly disappointed again—not surprised. What are we doing here today? Nothing, nothing.

Under the rules, they have 30 hours postcloture and they can sit around and do nothing. That is what they do all the time. We have spent months and months sitting around doing nothing because of procedural roadblocks put up by the Republicans.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

IRAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there is a broad bipartisan majority in the Senate that would like to vote on Iran sanctions. The dilemma we have here is that the majority leader does not want this vote to occur. So I would like to start this morning with a few words about an issue that should be of grave concern to all of us; that is, the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the significant foreign policy challenges of our time and one we simply have to get right. That is why a strong bipartisan majority has sought to pass legislation in the Senate that puts teeth into the negotiations that have followed November’s interim agreement. The challenge we have had is the majority leader does not want us to vote on it. It could be that he is afraid it will actually pass. Republican Senators—and hopefully some Democratic Senators as well—are going to continue to press the majority leader to allow a vote on this legislation before these negotiations end.

The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act is a perfectly reasonable bill. This is a Menendez-Kirk bill. It does not disrupt ongoing negotiations. It simply provides an incentive for Iran to keep its commitment under the interim agreement. It says that if Iran does not keep its word, then it will face even tougher sanctions at the end of this 6-month period. In other words, it does not disrupt the negotiations at all, even though the big—sort of the high leader, the Supreme Leader in Iran says he is not paying any attention to these talks. Nevertheless, it does not disrupt these talks, which seem to be going nowhere.

But it does say at the end of the 6-month period: You are going to get tougher sanctions if nothing comes of the discussions. It puts teeth into the talks that are already taking place. It is a recognition of the success we have already had as a result of prior sanctions. After all, there is a good reason