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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Holy God, all Your works do praise Your Name on the Earth, in the sky, and on the sea. Great is Your faithfulness. Stir Your edifying spirit among our Senators, liberating them from shortsightedness, as they work diligently for the freedom and justice of all. Lord, make them citizens of Your kingdom, so that Your will may be done on Earth even as it is done in Heaven. Help them to draw near to You with true hearts and the full assurance that their times are in Your hands. Thank You for the liberties You have given America and help us to remember that eternal vigilance is the price for freedom.

We pray in Your merciful 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

MINIMUM WAGE FAIRNESS ACT— MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 250.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 250, S. 1737, a bill to provide for an increase in the

Federal minimum wage and to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend increased expensing limitations and the treatment of certain real property as section 179 property.

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 1 hour, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans the final half.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3979, the legislative vehicle for the unemployment insurance extension legislation.

The Senate will recess, as we do every Tuesday, from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m., to allow for our weekly caucus meetings.

KOCH BROTHERS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I went about my business in the Senate yesterday, I was informed the Koch brothers are at it again. We know they are at it, but now they are at it in Nevada, among other places.

I am told one of their puppet organizations is going to run commercials against me in Nevada. That is quite interesting. As I understand it, they had focused on places where there is an election. They may not know it, but I am not running for anything for a few years, until my 6-year term is up.

What issues will they raise in those ads they say they are going to run in Nevada? That by my criticizing the Koch brothers, I have attacked their freedom of speech. The gall of these two brothers is staggering.

Keep in mind, they are the fifth richest people not in whatever State they live in—they have lots of different homes in America—but they are the fifth richest people in the world. These two mogul multibillionaires are so eager to force their will on the American people that they will do it even in the face of their own hypocrisy, which we have already established some time ago.

I am beginning to think April Fools' Day arrived 1 day early. See, it is a fool's errand for the Koch brothers to think they can use their money to frighten me or to brainwash Nevadans or the rest of the country. They are spending lots of money to try to do that. People of this Nation trace their freedom of speech back to the Constitution, not a bank account which has lots and lots of zeros at the end.

The Koch brothers are trying to use their immense wealth to buy their way around the laws and regulations of this Nation to make themselves even richer. Everything they do is so selfish, so self-centered in an effort to make them—I guess the sixth richest is not good enough, the fifth richest isn't good enough. They want to be the richest because they are into making money and as much as they can. There is nothing wrong with that, except what they are doing with their money.

I know they say: Well, we gave money in—I think—New York City to cancer research. But what they have done to damage the National Institutes of Health is not possible to measure.

Here are the rules the multibillionaire Koch brothers want to play by: They should be allowed to say false and misleading statements about the Affordable Care Act, but we are not allowed to criticize them for it.

Just listening to the news, and I haven't heard anything from the White House directly, but I am told that yesterday, in 1 day, more people signed up for ObamaCare than the previous 3 months. People are anxious to have health insurance. They are anxious to have health insurance. I have been very satisfied that I and Members of my caucus and people around the country have been standing up to these moguls and their false, misleading, fearmongering ways.

It should be no surprise that these multimillionaire, billionaires, very, very rich, fifth richest people in the world have decided: What we will do is

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



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try to frighten REID. There have been times in my life when I have been a little afraid, but I am not afraid of them. I understand they have spent \$30,000. Let them spend \$300,000 in Nevada. I don't care—and I truly don't.

These oil barons have commissioned a group—one of their many organizations. As I have said on the floor, most of the ads we see we think have come from Americans for Prosperity. That is their name. But they funnel money through many organizations—the chamber of commerce. What does the chamber do with those ads? Run ads against Democratic Senators because the chamber of commerce is a Republican-oriented organization, and it is good to get money from the Koch brothers because they can hide under the chamber of commerce.

This organization they are now floating around that is going to run these ads, against me I am told, is called American Encore. It was previously called the Center to Protect Patient Rights. I guess that didn't work so well, as well more than 10 million people have now signed up for ObamaCare, people who didn't have the opportunity before. I guess they decided running ads against me is more important than protecting patients' rights, so now they came up with another catchy name, American Encore.

No matter what they call their organization or the myriad of organizations, they all have one stated purpose, to make these oil barons even richer. If anyone needs further proof—and I am not sure anyone does—take a look at the legislation they have influenced with their money. In recent years, the tea party-driven House of Representatives has never missed a chance to funnel more tax cuts to the wealthy by raising taxes on the middle class.

The vast majority of wealthy people in America are willing to do more. They have spoken to my friend the Presiding Officer. There are a lot of rich people in the State of New Jersey. Even though the Presiding Officer has worked with people who are badly in need of help, people in New Jersey have walked up to the Presiding Officer and said: I am willing to pay more—and the same in Nevada. But every time we try to do something to get a few more resources to build roads, bridges, highways, dams, water systems, sewer systems, Republicans in the Congress say no.

The Republicans in Congress do not represent mainstream Republicans in America today. They don't even represent mainstream rich Republicans around the country. They are driven by and they are afraid of the tea party.

We have a budget proposal coming out today from the House of Representatives. The person who ran for Vice President the last go-around on the Republican ticket is the chairman of the Budget Committee and he is coming out with a budget. It is a blueprint for a modern "Kochtopia." In fact, call it whatever one wants. We might as well

call it the Koch budget because that is whom they are protecting, the Koch brothers.

I am fascinated by this. These proposals are called the Path to Prosperity. It is a path to prosperity for some people—the rich—because that budget would end Medicare as we know it. Similar to the last budget the chairman of the Budget Committee in the House came out with, it would slash education funding while expanding tax loopholes for the megarich.

Whose prosperity is being plotted in these schemes? Today, as we get closer to the new Ryan budget, we will have to see how much of the Koch brothers' agenda is reflected in this year's budget. We don't have to be a fortune teller to know the similarities are extensive.

To any and all groups that wish to attack me on behalf of multibillionaires, fire away. I am very happy—I am even proud—to be targeted by those attacks and will gladly endure them in order to call attention to the unscrupulous acts of these two barons. But don't expect Americans to go along with their attempt to rig our democracy and hand it over to a couple of power-hungry tycoons—I guess from Kansas. I know they have homes in New York, and one of them lives near here.

The country will be watching but not fooled by the Koch brothers' attempts to purchase influence for whom—for the Koch brothers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Republican leader.

IGNITING THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Washington Democrats have controlled the White House and the Senate for years now. They have tried just about every tool in the liberal toolbox to turn the economy around. Yet according to the latest Gallup tracking poll, just 19 percent of Americans think the economy is doing well. Millions are out of work, and close to 60 percent of Americans say things are getting even worse.

By basically any objective standard, we would have to say the Washington Democratic approach hasn't worked. We would have to say it is time for a change, to do something that can work, and that is what Republicans are proposing again this week.

While Senate Democrats dust off the same poll-tested ideas for papering over the symptoms of malaise, Republicans are proposing concrete ideas aimed at igniting the economy and giving people real hope for something more, something better than what they have been getting for the last 5 years, something which speaks to their hopes and their potential. In other words, the other side is doubling down on the status quo while Republicans are offering change.

Specifically, we will be proposing numerous jobs-related amendments which have one unifying purpose; that is, to break through the stagnation of the Obama economy and kick domestic job creation into high gear.

Our approach is simple: Let's give free enterprise and private initiative a chance. Let's use the tools we know can lead to the creation of the stable, well-paying 21st century jobs our constituents want and deserve.

Too often it seems our friends on the other side are single-mindedly focused on treating the symptoms of a down economy rather than actually providing struggling Americans with positive, meaningful paths to a better life. They can't seem to get their minds around any legislative proposal that puts ordinary Americans and private initiative in the driver's seat instead of the government. To me that largely sums up the difference between the parties. But it goes even further than that, because Washington Democrats are not just reluctant to embrace any idea that doesn't emanate from Washington; they don't even want to hear about it.

If we are going to get this country back on track, that needs to change, and that is what Republicans are arguing for this week. What we are saying is, if all you want is subsistence-level relief, then that is what the party of government is going to give you. But if your goal is to help those who want to truly aspire to join the middle class, if you want to really help people maximize their potential and build a better life, it is time to start looking beyond Washington.

Deep down I think our Democratic friends understand this too. I think they understand that pushing big government legislation with words such as "jobs" or "affordable" in the title isn't the same as actually creating jobs or actually making things more affordable. It is like handing someone a menu instead of serving them a meal. The tragic effects to this approach are clear: from an Affordable Care Act that turned out to be anything but, to a stimulus bill that seemed better at stimulating late-night punch lines than good paying jobs. But despite all the evidence, Washington Democrats remain stubbornly attached to the same old playbook. If you need proof, just take a look at the poll-tested, campaign-crafted agenda they rolled out this week—an agenda packed to the brim with base-pleasing show votes and few if any real solutions for the middle class. In fact, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office tells us that one of their proposals could cost up to a million jobs—cost jobs, not create jobs.

Look, this prioritization of party-pleasing show votes over actually helping grow the middle class is a tragedy for our country. The American people really deserve two national parties that are serious, and it is long past time for Democrats to start engaging with us in a serious effort to help Americans who struggle so much in the Obama economy.

The good news is they will have their chance this week. The Republicans are filing amendments on a whole range of

job-centered policies, amendments that deserve not just a vote but bipartisan support. For example, an amendment from the junior Senator from South Carolina would eliminate ObamaCare's 30-hour workweek rule, which is hurting Americans' take-home pay in our already depressed economy.

One of our Members from Utah is putting forward an amendment to repeal ObamaCare's job-destroying medical device tax. A good number of Democratic Senators have joined us in the past to get rid of this job killer, and they deserve the opportunity to help us eliminate it once and for all.

The senior Senator from North Dakota has an amendment that would speed approval of the Keystone Pipeline. This is a project that would create thousands of jobs right away, and it is just a no-brainer. Senate Democrats need to join Democrats across the country who have already endorsed this commonsense initiative and help us pass it.

I personally plan to file an amendment that would give Congress the ability to stop EPA's back-door national energy tax and would also keep unelected bureaucrats from blocking desperately needed jobs in Kentucky by sitting on surface mining permitting. Remember, this administration's anti-Kentucky policies have helped bring about a depression—that is a depression with a capital D—in many Kentucky coal counties. It is about time they started having a little compassion for the coal families who just want to put food on the table, and that is exactly what my amendment aims to do.

So these are just a few of the many proposals Republican Senators will be putting forward this week. They represent the kind of solutions our country needs right now to finally emerge from this awful economy—real solutions that focus on creating well-paying jobs, increasing take-home pay, training a world-class workforce, and breaking a seemingly endless cycle of chronic high unemployment.

As I have indicated, we have tried the Washington Democratic approach for years now. We know that it just hasn't worked. We know their new agenda isn't serious, that it is nothing more than an ObamaCare distraction strategy. We know this because Democrats actually told us it was created by their campaign committee, that it was designed to appeal to their base.

So if the Democratic majority is finally ready to get down to business and create jobs, this is a moment to prove it. This is the moment to drop the endless campaigning. This is the moment to work with us to actually create jobs and help the middle class, and this is the moment for legislation that would do just that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business for one hour. Senators are permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, and the majority controlling the first half of the time.

The Senator from Illinois.

FILING DEADLINE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the filing deadline for first degree amendments to H.R. 3979, which is the legislative vehicle for the unemployment insurance extension, be at 2:30 p.m. today, April 1.

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. DURBIN. I listened carefully to the statement just made by the Republican leader, Senator McConnell of Kentucky, in which he promised concrete ideas, real hope, change, job-related approaches, free enterprise—giving free enterprise a chance, trying to deal with putting America back to work. Then he gave us three examples.

I might say to the Senator that I am familiar with all three because none of these are new. We have heard them over and over from the Republican side of the aisle. I will not go through each one of them. A couple of them relate to the Affordable Care Act. It is interesting to me that the House of Representatives has voted—I believe 45 times—to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The Senator from Kentucky said we have to get back to free enterprise ideas.

Let me tell you about the free enterprise idea when it came to health care. Before the passage of the Affordable Care Act, the free enterprise idea was this: If you and your family were unfortunate enough to have a sick baby, if your wife was a cancer survivor, if your child had diabetes, the free enterprise answer was: We will raise the cost of health insurance to the point that you cannot afford it or we won't even offer it. That was the free enterprise idea on health insurance for millions of American families.

There was another free enterprise idea out there in health care as well. It said: We are going to sell you health insurance policies that just protect you up to a certain amount of money. If tomorrow you are in a terrible auto accident, if the day after tomorrow you are diagnosed with cancer and face millions of dollars of radiation, surgery, and care before you can get your life back together again, be my guest to pay for it yourselves. That is why medical bills are the number one driver of bankruptcy in America today. That is free enterprise at work. But we said, let's put some sensible rules for the

road in here, so that families who buy health insurance have the promise that they will have peace of mind when they face these life threatening struggles which families face every day.

So we passed the Affordable Care Act and not a single Republican—not one—not a single Republican would join us in that effort. We rejected the free enterprise approach to health care and said let's have something that basically respects families, basically respects the needs we all have to have protection when somebody in the house is sick. Not a single Republican would support us, and they never have since.

The bill we passed isn't perfect. Changes will have to be made. I have said that from the start, although I supported it. But not a single Republican has been willing to sit down and work on bipartisan compromises and changes—not one. It is take it or leave it, and they want to walk away from it.

We are not going back to those old days. I can guarantee them that the American people will never return to their idea of health insurance because it was fundamentally unfair, it was too expensive, and a lot of Americans didn't have a fighting chance to ever have health insurance once in their lives. Things have changed. The reports are in, and the reports are telling us that dramatic things are occurring. As the Affordable Care Act's initial enrollment period closes, at least 9.5 million previously uninsured people have gained coverage. Some have done so through the marketplaces created by law, some through private insurance, others through an expanded Medicaid. Incidentally, Medicaid has been expanded in about half of the States.

Listen to this: The increased coverage from the Affordable Care Act so far amounts to substantial progress toward one of the law's principal goals. It is the most significant expansion of health care coverage since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid 49 years ago.

The Republicans want to return to the "good old days," and they want to tell these people being uninsured is really better for you. It is the free enterprise system.

That is not good enough, I say to my friends on the other side of the aisle. What we have here is an opportunity for families for the first time in their lives to have health insurance coverage.

Has there ever been a moment in your life where you had a sick baby and you were in the hospital waiting room and you had no health insurance? I have. It happened when I was in law school. I remember it to this day, sitting there with my wife and baby with a number in my hand waiting to see who would walk through that door and be the doctor for my baby. You will never forget that as long as you live. That shouldn't happen to anybody. Everyone should have the peace of mind of health insurance coverage, and that is what this bill does. If the Senators on the other side want to return to the