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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.

Eternal God, today make our lawmakers instruments of Your grace and goodness. Teach them how to be patient with themselves and each other. Forgive them when they permit impatience to lead them astray, preventing them from seeing the wonder and majesty of Your purpose for our Nation and world. Lord, renew in them the joy of belonging to You as they yield their hearts to You in trust and love. May no duty be left undone and no constructive words be left unsaid.

We pray in Your holy 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.

PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT— MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 345, S. 2199, the Paycheck Fairness Act.

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

The bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 345, S. 2199, a bill to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to victims of discrimination in the payment of wages on the basis of sex, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in morning business until 12:30 p.m., with the time equally divided and controlled. The Senate will recess from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. for our weekly caucus meetings, as we always do on Tuesdays.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 2575

Mr. President, I understand that H.R. 2575 is at the desk and due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2575) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to repeal the 30-hour threshold for classification of a full-time employee for purposes of the employer mandate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and replace it with 40 hours.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

EQUAL PAY DAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Ralph Waldo Emerson said this: "America is another name for opportunity."

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Today this body, the Senate, should put Emerson's words to the test as we turn attention to the question of equal pay. For working American women, millions of whom are primary wage earners for their families, the Paycheck Fairness Act represents a unique opportunity, a chance to better provide for themselves and their families.

It is unconscionable that American women currently take home an average of 77 cents for every dollar their male colleagues earn for doing the exact same work. Wage disparity is true regardless of whether a woman has a college degree, what job she holds or how many hours she spends at the office or factory or wherever it might be.

Consider this just for a brief moment: For a woman to make the same salary as a man in 1 year for doing similar work in America, she must work not only that year but also an additional 3 months and 8 days. That is why today, April 8, the eighth day of the fourth month, is Equal Pay Day. It represents the extra work American women have to put forth to provide for their families. This is an injustice and should not be permitted to take place in America. While President Obama and Democrats have made significant progress toward helping women achieve equal pay, there is still much for us to do.

Five years ago the very first law President Obama ever signed, the first act he performed in the Oval Office, was to sign the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Remember, this is the legislation based on the good woman who found out—after having worked at this place for so many years, having additional responsibilities than all the men—they were all getting paid much more than she. She was the boss getting paid less than the people who worked for her. Why? Because she is a woman.

The Lilly Ledbetter legislation is the biggest step Congress has taken on behalf of women to help them with their wages since the Equal Pay Act of 1963. The bill provides that the statute of limitations doesn't begin to run until someone finds out they are being cheated by their employer. The legislation helped address the pay gap, but women still suffer from discriminatory wage disparity.

The Paycheck Fairness Act goes a step further by providing protections for women in the workplace. This legislation addresses unequal wages by empowering women to negotiate for equal pay and giving employers incentives to obey current law.

I was happy to hear all the news accounts that I was able to be briefed on—along with those I listened to on public radio while I was doing my exercises—the detailed accounts about how

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



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women are not treated fairly. The legislation we are working on enables women to fight against wage discrimination while also preventing retaliation against employees who discuss salary information. Before Lilly Ledbetter and even today if you discuss what someone else makes you can be fired. That is the way it is in most places in America. It would finally give much needed assistance to victims of gender-based pay discrimination.

Simply put, the Paycheck Fairness Act gives American women the fair shot they deserve. Unfortunately, efforts to address this issue have not been well received by Republicans. A similar bill addressing equal pay—despite a Republican filibuster—passed Congress and the Congress before that. Let's hope the third time is a charm for American women. Let's hope Republicans will finally do what is right.

In any other circumstance Republicans would be up in arms with this type of economic discrimination—I would hope. They should be up in arms in terms of equal pay for women also. Why is it that so many Republicans are content to allow women working the same hours in the same job to make less money than their male coworkers? It is hard to comprehend, since women make up nearly half the U.S. labor force and more than half of the people enrolled in college. We are finding that the majority of students enrolled in professional schools, law schools, medical schools are women. Is it reasonable to assume that women should be treated unfairly? Is it reasonable to assume that Republicans in this body have wives, daughters or sisters who are or will be affected by this wage disparity and shouldn't we do something about it?

I urge my colleagues to keep those loved ones—people such as my daughter and my many granddaughters—in their minds and in their thoughts when considering the question of equal pay for women. We will have the first vote the day after tomorrow. We will have this vote. To do otherwise would simply be unfair.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP KUDOS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to take a minute to congratulate the Kentucky Wildcats for an extraordinary season. My home State has held on to the NCAA national championship trophy for the past 2 years, with the Louisville Cardinals claiming it last year and the Kentucky Wildcats winning it in 2012. John Calipari's young Wildcats started five freshmen who played like seasoned veterans and made an incredible run that captivated both our State and the Nation.

While the Commonwealth will now relinquish the trophy to Connecticut, I only ask that my colleagues, Senator MURPHY and Senator BLUMENTHAL, see to it that the trophy remains in pristine condition—pristine condition—as

my State will undoubtedly reclaim it next year.

JOB CREATION SOLUTIONS

Mr. President, America's middle class is struggling. They need serious job creation solutions, but that is not what they have been getting from the President. He seems more intent on staging campaign-style rallies to bemoan an economy he has been presiding over for the last 5½ years, not to offer solutions but more to do what he does best, which is to shift the blame to others.

Meanwhile, yesterday in the Senate Republicans were hoping the majority leader would finally work with us to pass a job creation package that contains ideas from many of our Members—legislation with provisions several key Democrats support as well—but that is not what the majority leader chose to do. Instead of focusing on jobs, he launched into another confusing attack on the left's latest bizarre obsession.

Think about that. The percentage of Americans in the workforce is almost at a four-decade low, and Democrats chose to ignore serious job creation ideas so they could blow a few kisses to their powerful pals on the left.

At a time when so many Americans are desperate—desperate for a good job, at a time of fewer opportunities, people are hurting, college graduates cannot find a job, working families cannot afford to pay their bills—what Americans need right now are real job creation solutions, not some tone-deaf, blame-deflection rally or some daily bout of shadow boxing on the Senate floor.

Some say this is all embarrassing, but there is one positive side to the Washington Democrats' never-ending political road show. It throws the divide between the two parties into stark relief. On the one side we have a Washington Democratic Party that simply has run out of ideas. When it comes to fixing the economy, they have tried just about everything their ideology will allow: taxing, regulating, spending, stimulating, you name it, and none of it has worked. So at this point they have basically dropped any pretense of doing anything serious on the economy. That is why we heard them essentially admit that their governing agenda is actually a political document drafted by campaign staff, that the proposals it contains are basically just show votes designed specifically not to pass. So that is one side of American politics: a party that is out of ideas, campaign-obsessed, and utterly beholden to the far left.

On the other side we have a Republican Party that is committed to getting our economy working for the middle class. We believe in the power of ideas, and we know that with the right forward-looking policies we can and will break through the stagnation of the Obama economy. The Republicans' focus is on offering more opportunity to the middle class and those who aspire to it. Our focus is on offering inno-

vative ways to generate the kind of stable, well-paying jobs that Americans actually want. We also know we can get more done as a country if both parties can work together to see these policies through and leave behind the sterile campaign theatrics that have been on daily display in the Senate under the Democratic majority.

I am asking our Democratic colleagues to consider dropping all the show votes, the blame deflecting, and the perpetual campaigning. What I am asking is for them to consider shifting from policies that don't work—in other words, what they have been trying for the last 5½ years—to ones that will. Every Senator was sent here to get things done for our constituents, and we can. We can pass a positive jobs agenda for the American people. All we need is for Washington Democrats to work with us for a change.

I have one other item. This morning IRS Commissioner Koskin will testify before the Finance Committee. I am sure Members will be reminding him of this, and I know several sent a letter yesterday too. But I would like to underline the point. Commissioner Koskin led Congress to believe that his agency will not be imposing anti-free speech rules before this November's election. It is a point he basically reiterated again just the other day, so Congress plans to hold him to what he has been leading the American people to believe.

Honestly, what he really needs to do is to stop the IRS from stepping on the First Amendment all together. He needs to stop this proposed regulation just as the Secretary of the Treasury told us he could do if he wanted. In fact, the House of Representatives recently voted to halt it too.

Remember, tens of thousands of Americans made their opinions known directly to the IRS about this regulation. It was an unprecedented response and nearly all of the comments were opposed. The comments came from straight across the political spectrum.

Commissioner Koskin needs to live up to what we told the Senate when we confirmed him when he led us to believe he would be an independent voice for reform. As I said before, Commissioner Koskin has a choice. He can be a hero—like the IRS commissioner who stood up to President Nixon—or he can be another pawn of this administration. Both Congress and the American people expect him to make the right decision.

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, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to