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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible You are hidden from our eyes. We are grateful that we can turn to You throughout life's seasons, for You are the source of our hope for the years to come.

Lord, in a world of change and decay, You remain the same yesterday, today, and forever. Strengthen our lawmakers with Your Spirit and inspire them with Your precepts. May they always place their confidence in You, for Your steadfast love and faithfulness sustain us.

Undergird America with a foundation of right living that exults a nation, as You deliver us from the evils that bring national decline. Surround us all with the shield of Your Divine favor.

We pray in Your sacred 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Democratic leader is recognized.

OBAMACARE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this is another day and another report highlighting how ObamaCare is helping Americans.

Today's proof comes from a Gallup poll which finds that 9 out of 10 Americans report having health insurance.

Here are a few excerpts from the Associated Press article about this poll: ". . . underlining a change across the nation, nearly 9 out of 10 adults now say they have health insurance, according to an extensive survey released today."

The Gallup poll "found that the share of adults who lack [health] insurance dropped to 11.9 percent for the first three months of this year, the lowest level since the survey began its tracking in 2008."

Coverage gains from 2014-2015 translate to about 3.6 million fewer adults uninsured since the fall. . . . "The Affordable Care Act had three major objectives: increase coverage, slow the rate of increase in costs, and improve health". . . . "The first one is a clear win. Coverage is increasing; there is no question about it."

"On balance, an estimated 14.75 million adults have gained coverage since the fall of 2013, when the law's first open enrollment season was about to begin."

The survey also found that "Hispanics saw the biggest coverage gains of any ethnic or racial group. At a time when Republicans are very keenly trying to court the Hispanic vote, a large chunk of Hispanics are gaining insurance via the Affordable Care Act."

Recent gains in coverage have benefited people up and down the income ladder. But the most notable improvement has been among those making less than \$36,000 a year, a group that traditionally struggled to get and keep health insurance.

Here is a little short comment on this. When we have people who make less than \$36,000 getting insurance coverage, it saves us money. They are not having to go through their primary care physician—which is an emergency room—the highest cost of health care delivery in the United States. So this is really good news for America. ObamaCare is working, and there is more and more evidence every day. It

is time to stop trying to destroy the law that has been helping millions and millions of Americans.

LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, let's talk a little bit about Loretta Lynch. We have now passed the first 100 days of the Republican-controlled Senate. We all remember the lofty promises made by the Republican leader and his party when they assumed power. But we are still struggling to finish two issues that should have been resolved weeks ago.

The Democrats are ready to move forward on the Lynch nomination and the so-called doc fix. This doc fix, which we are going to talk about a little later, is so important not only for the doctors but also for their patients. Medicare is an important part of our health care delivery system, and it benefits older Americans.

This day marks the 157th day since President Obama first nominated Loretta Lynch as Attorney General. For more than 5 months, Democrats have been ready to take up and confirm the nomination. Back in November of last year, when Loretta Lynch was first nominated, the Republican leader said: "Ms. Lynch will receive fair consideration by the Senate. And her nomination should be considered in the new Congress through regular order."

I am not making this up. This is what the Republican leader said. I quoted him verbatim.

Even though the Democrats were ready to move the nomination before the elections, some Republicans wanted a little more time to look at it. We agreed to that. We based this upon what the Republican leader said—that Ms. Lynch would receive fair consideration by the Senate.

Well, that hasn't happened. January came and went, and Loretta Lynch's nomination never got a confirmation vote on the floor. Democrats were

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



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ready to confirm a new Attorney General, but Republicans weren't and aren't.

February and March flew by and Republicans still aren't ready. Now we are half way through April, and once again, Senate Democrats are ready and willing to confirm a new Attorney General, but the Republicans are not.

Ms. Lynch has a spotless record. No one can question her integrity, her background, and there is no question that she should not have to wait any longer.

SGR LEGISLATION

MR. REID. Mr. President, I have spent a little bit of time talking about the sustainable growth rate—the doc fix—or the SGR. Before the Senate recessed for the Easter break, Republicans were unable to agree on how to prevent the physician pay cut. Democrats were ready to proceed. The last night we were here, we said: When we come back, we want to move this House bill forward. We want three simple amendments.

We still feel the same way. We are willing not only to move forward on those amendments, but we will give a very short time agreement on each one of them.

The Republican leader said when bills come to the floor, he wants to have amendments. We don't want to amend this bill to death. We want three simple amendments. We said that the night we were here when closing the Senate for the Easter recess, and we say it again. I wish Republicans would have joined us years ago in our efforts to repeal this faulty law, but they did not do that.

Regardless of the history, we have an urgent need before us today to get this bill done. Each day that passes without doing this SGR, this sustainable growth rate—to get rid of it is basically what we are doing. It would be a good day for America. It would also be a good day for America when we can confirm Loretta Lynch. Each day that passes without her confirmation and without a doc fix is just another example of Republicans' inability to govern.

Mr. President, would you announce the business of the day.

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 now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

DISAPPROVAL OF SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 8—PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT RECEIVED DURING ADJOURNMENT

On March 31, 2015, during the adjournment of the Senate, a message from the President of the United States was received returning to the Senate the joint resolution (S.J. Res. 8) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the National Labor Relations Board relating to representation case procedures.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the veto message to accompany S.J. Res. 8 is considered as having been read, will be printed in the RECORD, and spread in full upon the Journal.

The veto message ordered to be printed in the RECORD is as follows:

MEMORANDUM OF DISAPPROVAL

S.J. Res. 8 would overturn the National Labor Relations Board's recently issued "representation case procedures" rule and block modest but overdue reforms to simplify and streamline private sector union elections. Accordingly, I am withholding my approval of this resolution. (The Pocket Veto Case, 279 U.S. 655 (1929)).

Workers need a strong voice in the workplace and the economy to protect and grow our Nation's middle class. Unions have played a vital role in giving workers that voice, allowing workers to organize together for higher wages, better working conditions, and the benefits and protections that most workers take for granted today. Workers deserve a level playing field that lets them freely choose to make their voices heard, and this requires fair and streamlined procedures for determining whether to have unions as their bargaining representative. Because this resolution seeks to undermine a streamlined democratic process that allows American workers to freely choose to make their voices heard, I cannot support it.

To leave no doubt that the resolution is being vetoed, in addition to withholding my signature, I am returning S.J. Res. 8 to the Secretary of the Senate, along with this Memorandum of Disapproval.

BARACK OBAMA.
THE WHITE HOUSE, March 31, 2015.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

SGR LEGISLATION

MR. HATCH. Mr. President, I would like to take a few minutes to talk once again about the ongoing effort to replace the Medicare sustainable growth rate, or SGR, formula.

As we know, SGR has been a problem pretty much since its inception. Members of both parties have grown tired of passing temporary SGR patches that have been cobbled together at the last minute behind closed doors. This constant, seemingly unending, cycle has only grown more tiresome as the years have gone by.

That is why a little over 2 years ago a group of leaders from both the House and the Senate set out to fix this problem once and for all. I was part of this effort. I was joined on the Senate side by former Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus. Together, Senator Baucus and I worked with the leaders of the House Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means Committees to craft legislation that would repeal and replace SGR with an improved payment system that rewards quality, efficiency, and innovation.

While many critics deemed our efforts a lost cause, we introduced our bill in late 2013 and got it reported out of the Finance Committee on a voice vote. That same legislation formed the basis of the SGR bill that passed overwhelmingly in the House with 392 votes at the end of March.

Now the bill is before the Senate. It is my hope that we will act quickly to pass this bipartisan, bicameral legislation and send it to the President's desk as soon as possible.

This SGR bill is historic for a number of reasons. First of all, it demonstrates what Congress is truly capable of when Members work together. While that type of cooperation used to be commonplace around here, it has in recent years been in short supply. The bill also represents a step forward in the effort to reform our Nation's entitlement programs. The bill contains bipartisan reforms to the Medicare program, and it is not limited to fixing the broken SGR system.

To go along with the permanent SGR fix, the bill includes a meaningful downpayment on Medicare reform without any accompanying tax hikes. These reforms include a limitation on so-called Medigap first-dollar coverage, more robust means testing for Medicare Parts B and D, and program integrity provisions that will strengthen Medicare's ability to fight fraud.

I am aware that these are not transformative reforms and that much more work will be necessary to put Medicare—not to mention our other entitlement programs—on a more sustainable trajectory. However, any Senators who, like me, have been clamoring for entitlement reform should welcome these changes. After all, for years the idea of bipartisan Medicare reform seemed, at best, farfetched. President Obama and his allies here in Congress have stated repeatedly that, before they would consider changes to our safety net programs, Republicans would have to agree to massive tax hikes. But here we are, just one Senate vote away from enacting meaningful and bipartisan Medicare reforms into law.