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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.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.

O sovereign Lord, You alone are God. Thank You for another day to do Your bidding. Lord, You have given each of us the same number of hours and minutes to serve You and humankind. Teach us to seize each opportunity we have to live for Your glory. Deliver us from anxieties about yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Strengthen our lawmakers in their work. Give them understanding and courage to act on their convictions. When they are tempted to doubt, increase their faith. Guide their lives by Your unfolding providence, enabling them to use the gift of time to work so that peace will rule in our world.

We pray in Your sovereign 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today not only will Congress pass a budget for the first time in 6 years, it will pass a balanced budget for the first time in recent memory. This is some-

thing many Americans have been waiting a long time to see. It is something they deserve, and it is just the latest example of a new Congress that is back to work—back to work on behalf of Americans who work hard and expect Washington to do the same.

No budget will ever be perfect, but this is a budget that sensibly addresses the concerns of many different Members. It reflects honest compromise from many different Members with many, many different priorities.

It includes additional resources and flexibility for national defense. It reduces spending, and it balances without raising taxes. That is especially impressive when one considers the type of budget the White House proposed—one that never balanced—ever—but still tried to raise taxes by nearly \$2 trillion.

That White House budget was so unserious that only a single Member of the President's party could be persuaded to publicly support it here in the Senate. Perhaps that is because it proposed to double down on the failed policies of the past: more overspending, more debt, more taxes, and hardly any reform.

So the White House fantasy budget may have made the left happy, but the new Congress believed the American people deserved better. We offered a budget that is more than just balanced; it is also oriented toward growth. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the budget we will approve today contains ideas that could boost jobs and grow our economy.

It would embrace the energy revolution and provide for more environmentally responsible innovation. It would repeal unfair taxes, such as those in ObamaCare, and set the table for more comprehensive reform of our outdated Tax Code.

Because this budget is about embracing the future, it also gives us the tools to leave ObamaCare's broken promises

and higher costs where they belong—in the past—in favor of a fresh start with the opportunity for real health reform.

This budget is also about protecting the vulnerable. It aims responsibly to improve and modernize programs such as Medicare, so they will continue to be there when Americans need them. After all, we know that failing to make commonsense improvements to save these types of programs today will mean allowing draconian cuts to fall on the vulnerable in the years to come.

The balanced budget before us went through the normal committee process. Members of both parties debated it vigorously on the floor. They offered more amendments than just about anyone can count, and then a conference committee met to work out the differences between the version of this balanced budget passed by the House and the one we passed here in the Senate. That is the way the process is supposed to work. That is the way Congress is supposed to function.

The budget reflects a lot of hard work from a lot of individuals. I would particularly like to thank Chairman MIKE ENZI and his counterpart in the House, Chairman TOM PRICE, as well as every member of the conference committee, for their tireless efforts to agree on a framework that can pass.

The balanced budget they produced won't solve every challenge, but it is a measure that will move us further down the path of positive reform. It is a budget that aims to make government more efficient, more effective, and more accountable to the middle class. And it is a reminder that the new Republican majority is getting Congress back to work for the American people.

BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL TRADE PRIORITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, once the budget is approved, we will continue our work on

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



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the bipartisan Iran bill. Then it is my hope to turn to another bipartisan measure, the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act—TPA.

This bill would enhance Congress's role in the trade process while ensuring Presidents of either party have the necessary tools to secure strong, enforceable trade agreements for American workers. Here is why that is important. Without this bipartisan legislation, American workers and farmers, including from my home State of Kentucky, will not be able to reap the rewards of selling more made-in-America goods to places such as Europe and the Pacific.

This is a bill we should all want to support. So it won't surprise anyone to hear this bill has substantial bipartisan support. It even passed the Committee on Finance on an overwhelming vote of 20 to 6—20 to 6.

But of course we have already heard of an attempt to stand in the way of this bipartisan effort to debate this legislation. We have already heard of yet another effort to make a partisan stand against a bipartisan accomplishment that would help grow opportunities for our constituents.

So yes, some may oppose allowing American workers to compete and win in new markets. Some may not be all that excited about selling more products stamped "Made in America" to places such as Europe and the Pacific. But the reality is the American people deserve more opportunities, not more special interest roadblocks.

That is why I plan, with the support of Members of both parties, to turn to the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act once we finish the Iran bill.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CINCO DE MAYO

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the history of Cinco de Mayo is one that is largely unfamiliar to most Americans, but to Mexican Americans it is very familiar. It is a shame we don't know more about it because the story of Cinco de Mayo is one of inspiration. It is the tale of a small military force that was vastly outnumbered but refused to capitulate.

At the Battle of Puebla, 153 years ago, a small Mexican Army force found itself outnumbered two to one by the French. The outmatched soldiers refused to give up. They couldn't. That was not in their makeup. The future of Mexico rested on their shoulders. Unbelievably, in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds, the Mexican Army refused to give up.

That is what we celebrate today—Cinco de Mayo. It is not just Mexican culture and history, but also the resil-

ient spirit that refuses to capitulate. Our United States is better off because of that spirit engendered by millions of Mexican Americans and, indeed, the entire Latino community. It is that same spirit today that injects new life into our communities. It is that same spirit possessed by generations of Mexican Americans that has fueled the economics and vibrancy of communities throughout the Southwest. It is that same spirit that empowers Latino students to push themselves to new heights. And it is that same indomitable spirit that inspires Hispanic Americans to defend our country on the front lines around the world, as they have done for many, many decades.

Hispanic heritage in this country has never been stronger. Now it falls upon us, as Members of Congress, to support Mexican Americans and the greater Latino community to reach the promise of the American dream. We can do that by investing in working American families, not by kicking families off their health insurance, as my friend the Republican leader spoke of in this budget that is balanced in name only. Really, you can keep talking about how balanced something is, but if it is unbalanced, it is still unbalanced.

The Republicans want to repeal ObamaCare for 16.5 million people—and on and on with all the things that are good in that legislation and that have so changed America. In this budget, they want to strip children's financial aid to go to college or cut job training programs—and on and on with what they want to do in this budget.

They talk about this great meeting that took place to come up with this final bill in conference. That conference took about 10 minutes. They knew what they wanted to do, and they did it very quickly. The Republican budget is unfair, it is unbalanced, it is unwise, and, as some have said, it is immoral.

So as we celebrate Cinco de Mayo today, I hope we will remember that unrelenting Mexican spirit that prevailed on the battlefield 153 years ago. But more importantly, I hope we will recognize that the same spirit is among us today, in the homes of Mexican Americans across America.

HIGHWAY TRUST FUND AND FISA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on another matter, the Senate has a lot to do before the recess for Memorial Day. We need to finish the Corker-Cardin Iran legislation. We need to wrap up work on the budget resolution. But in addition to those two important pieces of legislation, there are other pressing needs. Surface transportation expires while we are on recess.

The highway trust fund runs out of money, and the authorization for the Federal highway program expires later this month. There are 63,500 bridges that are structurally deficient, and more than 50 percent of our roads are

in disrepair. That is according to the Federal Highway Administration. Without reliable funding, our highways and bridges will only get worse, and that is an understatement.

Six States already are delaying or canceling important transportation projects because of questions over future funding—Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Wyoming.

The ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, the senior Senator from Vermont, said today that in Vermont—this tiny State, area-wise and population-wise, with about 600,000 people in it—their construction timeframe is very, very narrow. They can't do construction during most of the year. They need to plan way ahead of time, and they can't do that if there is nothing to plan. States need certainty from Washington that they will receive their highway dollars before construction leaders put shovels in the ground.

Nevada needs that certainty. Tourism in Nevada welcomes over 50 million visitors annually, resulting in 17 billion miles traveled over our roads and highways. Nevada has \$47.3 billion in statewide transportation needs. That is just one State.

We must ensure our Nation's highway system has the necessary funds to address the pressing needs, and they are not there. Transportation would be the first easy place to find agreement in Congress, and it is hard to comprehend, but the Republican majority in the Senate has not held a single hearing on this most important piece of legislation—not a single hearing, nothing.

We want to work with Republicans to address our Nation's crumbling infrastructure. We understand the importance of transportation investment for working families across the country. Yet, stunningly, Republicans have effectively put our Nation's transportation system on the back burner. Hearing the Republican leader's statement this morning, I guess that is going to continue. Procrastination is dangerous to American drivers and hurtful to our economy. The U.S. highway system is central to our Nation's economic competitiveness. It is how we move goods and services. It is central to American families who use our roads and bridges each day to go to work and take their child to school. Congress should do more to support these working families and businesses.

For every \$1 billion we spend on infrastructure projects, we create 47,500 jobs. Without strong Federal infrastructure funding, the American Society of Civil Engineers predicts that our country could lose \$1 trillion in sales. That is almost 3.5 million jobs. Putting critical transportation investments on the back burner is not an effective way to govern, and I would hope we can have something done on highways before we go home for our recess. How can we be home in good conscience and say we tried but couldn't get it done?