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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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.

Eternal Father, in whom we live and move and have our being, from whom we come and to whom we go at last, in this quiet moment of prayer, we praise You for Your providence that undergirds our Nation and its leaders. Let Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Today, give our lawmakers grace to distinguish between that which is nation-serving and that which is self-serving. Make them committed to serving You by serving others. Give them the wisdom to separate the important from the unimportant, the big concern from the trivial contention. Use our Senators for the betterment of this Nation and the building of Your Kingdom.

And, Lord, we thank You for the wonderful work of our pages.

We pray in Your great 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.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate will continue its work on the

National Defense Authorization Act today. Both the Republican and Democratic bill managers have called for Senators on both sides to get their amendments offered so we can get the process moving. I urge all of my colleagues to do so.

OBAMACARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, we have heard a lot about the Supreme Court's imminent decision on ObamaCare and its latest problems. No one can say for sure how the Court will rule, but one thing we do know is this: ObamaCare is a mess. It is a law filled with broken promises, one that has been plagued by failure and one that has caused costs to skyrocket for millions after the supporters of this law promised the costs would actually fall.

I speak to you in the wake of a bombshell revelation from the administration that many insurers are now requesting to raise premiums by double digits all across the country. For instance, numbers for Kentucky just came out yesterday, and most of the insurers on the Commonwealth's ObamaCare exchange are looking to raise premiums. Some of the proposed increases are as high as 25 percent, and some Kentuckians may now face double-digit premium increases for the second or even the third year in a row. This is more bad ObamaCare news for the people I represent.

In some States, the proposed increases are even more alarming, if you can believe it. Kentuckians can look next door for proof of that, where some Hoosiers could be hit with a 46-percent jump in their premiums, or if they look south to Tennessee, they will see that premium hikes of 36 percent have been proposed.

These are huge numbers, and they affect real people. We have seen the truth of that statement in the stories we hear from constituents about how

ObamaCare's massive cost burdens affect all of them. Take the Kentucky small business owner who wrote to say that his plan is now being canceled thanks to ObamaCare. Here is what he had to say: "My monthly premium will increase from \$610 to [approximately] \$1,200," he said, "and this is with very high deductibles." Or take the constituent of mine from Floyd County who recently wrote to say she can no longer afford her silver ObamaCare plan after the monthly premium spiked by more than 75 percent. "I was forced to take the Bronze Plan," she said, "which isn't worth the paper or ink to print it on."

These are the kinds of stories that have become all too familiar in the age of ObamaCare. They are compounded by a continual drip, drip of bad news about this law, such as the recent report that showed how ObamaCare's multibillion-dollar attack on hospitals in Kentucky is expected to result in a net loss of \$1 billion over the next few years—a net loss of \$1 billion to Kentucky hospitals.

This is after ObamaCare already compelled taxpayers to shell out billions for Web sites that never worked, along with some pretty sad and desperate but expensive taxpayer-financed marketing campaigns that often just directed users to some technological nightmare, not affordable health care. Take Oregon, for instance. Taxpayers spent over \$300 million on that State's exchange, only to have it taken over by the Federal Government and then, along with the ObamaCare exchange in Massachusetts, placed under Federal criminal investigation. Look at Hawaii, which received more than \$205 million to establish its exchange. We learned just last month that the Hawaii exchange is planning to shut down operations by September 30 since lawmakers couldn't decide on a path forward to pay for it. And then there is Vermont. This morning, the New York Times reported on the spectacular

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



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crash of Vermont's even more ambitious version of ObamaCare. Many on the left thought Vermont's experiment would light the way forward on health care. In the end, it turned out to be a remarkable failure and, as one Vermonter put it, "an unending money pit." The State's top health official now says that ObamaCare's exchanges "just [weren't] set up for success." That is in Vermont.

ObamaCare is hitting small and midsized businesses, too. These are the engines of job growth in our economy, but too many of them are now facing premium hikes of nearly 20 percent because of ObamaCare. One 54-person company in Connecticut is facing up to \$100,000 in new costs. Its owner says that ObamaCare "punishes companies for hiring new, younger workers," and, indeed, the uncertainty is causing her company to hire temporary workers rather than create permanent jobs.

So while it is possible that ObamaCare will survive its latest crisis, that is not going to change the grim reality of this law. It won't change the broken promises, it won't change the repeated failures, and it won't change the fact that ObamaCare has led to skyrocketing costs for taxpayers, the small businesses that drive the American dream, and, most importantly, for middle-class Americans who work hard every single day and play by the rules.

It is about time the President and his party worked constructively with us to start over on real health reform that can lower costs and increase choice instead of hurting the middle class the way ObamaCare does. That is what the American people deserve.

BURMA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, several weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting with Shwe Mann, speaker of the Burmese Parliament, on his visit to Washington. It was the third time we met. We had a cordial but frank discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing his country in 2015. There are obviously many issues that fall into both categories.

When it comes to challenges, there is the need for the government to do all it can to protect and assume responsibility for members of a long-suffering religious minority group, the Rohingya, thousands of whom have been forced to take to the high seas on dangerous makeshift vessels to escape persecution. There is the longstanding need for the government to continue its work with other ethnic minorities toward a permanent peace agreement that calls for political settlements in order to end a conflict as old as the modern Burmese State itself. Then there is the need for a constitutional reform to enhance civilian control of the military, along with more progress on efforts to protect liberties, such as freedom of the press, freedom of ex-

pression, freedom of conscience, and freedom of assembly.

Those are just a few of the challenges facing Burma in 2015. But it is also true that Burma has come a long way from where it was just a few years ago. Reform has been offered, change has occurred, and considering the conditions within Burma when reform began, this is no small achievement. That is why there are opportunities as well.

The parliamentary election that will be held later this year represents a clear opportunity to demonstrate how far Burma has progressed. There are some encouraging signs that the election will be more credible, more inclusive, and more transparent than what we have seen in the past in that country. Unlike recent Burmese elections, international election monitors have been permitted to observe. By and large, the work of the Union Election Commission has been encouraging thus far, especially as it relates to serious efforts to modernize the voter roles and to make it easier to run for office. And our Embassy, under the capable leadership of Ambassador Derek Mitchell, has been engaged in the process as well.

These are all positive signs, but it is going to take a sustained commitment by President Thein Sein's government to ensure that as free and fair an election as possible takes place this fall because for all of the positive change we have seen in recent years, it is obvious that Burma still has much further to go. There are signs that its political reform effort has begun to falter, which is worrying for all of us who care about the Burmese people.

It doesn't mean Burmese officials can't turn things around. I believe they can, which is what I indicated to the speaker when I met with him. I believe there is still time before the next critical test of Burma's slow democratic development this autumn.

There may still be time to amend the Constitution, for instance, to ensure that it promotes rather than inhibits Burma's democratic development. It is hard to claim democratic legitimacy with a Constitution that unreasonably limits who can run for President or that effectively locks in a parliamentary veto for the military.

At the very least, the six-party talks we have seen between President Thein Sein, Shwe Mann, opposition leader Daw Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the military, ethnic groups, and others certainly represent progress. They should continue in a sustained fashion.

I also hope to see further progress on the draft national ceasefire reached between the Burmese Government and representatives from 16 ethnic groups in March.

Those of us who follow Burma want the country to succeed. We want it to succeed in carrying out a transparent, inclusive, and credible election on a broad scale. We know this standard goes far beyond simply holding an election without mass casualties or vio-

lence. It needs to be more than just holding an election without mass casualties or violence. It means the lead-up to the election must be transparent, inclusive, and credible, too. It means there should not be political favoritism shown by the state or its media organs. It means freedom of expression of the press and a peaceful assembly must be ensured. It means citizens must be allowed to register and to vote without harassment, and it means they must be granted equal opportunities to organize, to campaign, and to participate fully in the electoral process without fear and violence.

These basic standards of fairness are minimum goals Burmese officials must strive toward. If the Burmese Government gets this right, if it ensures a transparent, inclusive, and credible election, with results accepted by competing parties, that would go a long way toward reassuring Burma's friends around the globe that it remains committed to political reform. But if we end up with an election not accepted by the Burmese people as reflecting their will, it will make further normalization of relations—at least as it concerns the legislative branch of our government—much more difficult.

For example, such an outcome would likely hinder further enhancement of U.S.-Burma economic ties and military-to-military relations. Further, an erosion of congressional confidence in Burma's reform efforts would also make it more difficult for the executive branch to include Burma in the Generalized System of Preferences program or to enhance political military relations.

So these are some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities awaiting Burma in 2015. I noted many of them in my discussion with Burma's parliamentary speaker.

I would close by making it clear that we in the United States will be watching intently to see what happens in Burma in the coming months, and we are prepared to continue doing what we can to encourage more positive change in that country.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BURMA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have watched over the last decade Senator McCONNELL focusing attention on Burma. It is remarkable the good he has done for that country. His vigilance in watching literally every move that government has made has been good for that country and I think good for the world, and I admire and appreciate the work he has done. There has not been a watchdog over any country that I am aware of who has been more intense than the senior Senator from Kentucky, keeping an eye on what goes