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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by Pastor Ken Carney, First Church of the Nazarene, Hot Springs, AR.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come before You today asking You for a new touch of grace to fall on all of our elected leaders. You told us in Your Word to ask for wisdom. I humbly ask today for everyone who governs and makes decisions concerning our great country to be filled with Your divine wisdom. Please, Father, remember mercy for those who are weak and struggling.

I close my prayer by asking that You protect all of our elected leaders and their families from harm and danger.

This I pray in Your Holy and Matchless Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, July 23, 2015.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. HELLER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

THE HIGHWAY BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, there are a lot of tired clichés about not giving up after an initial setback. I won't subject our colleagues to any of those this morning, but I will say that last night's vote represents an important first step toward passing a multiyear, bipartisan highway bill. It is the first step on a much longer road but, in my view, a worthwhile one.

This bipartisan bill will fund our roads, highways, and bridges for longer than any transportation bill considered by Congress in a decade, and the highway proposal will do so without increasing taxes or adding to the deficit. That is no small achievement.

Just consider what the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget had to say about the bill we voted to move forward on last night. It is "refreshing," they said, to see Congress focusing "on a multi-year solution instead of just another short-term patch." In general, their overall view was that this is "a fiscally responsible bill that relies on some pretty solid offsets." That is from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. They called it "a fiscally responsible bill that relies on some pretty solid offsets." Positive comments such as those echo the kinds of things I continue to hear from Members of both parties.

I would like to thank the Senator from California and the other Members

on her side who worked with us to help prepare this bill and then voted with us to advance it last night. I hope we will continue to work together to finally deliver a fiscally responsible, long-term highway bill for the American people.

OBLIGATIONS UNDER IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT REVIEW ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday I joined Speaker BOEHNER, Senator COTTON, and Congressman POMPEO in sending a letter to the administration with a simple request: that the administration meet its full obligations to Congress under the terms of the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act—a law both parties supported overwhelmingly just this spring. The law gives Congress the right to review all of the elements of an agreement struck between the White House and Iran and then take a vote on it.

The law is clear, but the administration has not submitted the side agreements between the International Atomic Energy Agency and Iran to the Senate, withholding the text from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress. And since the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act was signed into law prior to the completion of the negotiation in Vienna, Secretary Kerry was fully aware—fully aware—of the requirement in law to submit the side deal to Congress.

Congress cannot properly carry out its obligation to the American people until the administration fulfills its legal obligation to the American people and to Congress, so we are calling on the administration to do that immediately.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

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



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SUPPORTING OUR NATION'S VETERANS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we can tell a lot about how a Senator feels about our veterans by seeing how they vote on issues dealing with veterans. We can tell a lot about a Senator by how he or she treats our Nation's veterans. Are they committed to giving our veterans the care and help they deserve and need or do they see American servicemembers as political footballs to be used for partisan fights?

I was disappointed yesterday to see my Republican colleagues try to actually manipulate a good veterans bill, a noble bill, and it was done for political purposes.

The senior Senator from Washington, who has worked so hard on veterans issues for years now in the Senate, crafted a bipartisan piece of legislation to help veterans to do a number of things—basically, to help with their families. It is a tragic reality that thousands of veterans and servicemembers struggle with issues related to reproductive health, including fertility, some as a result of injuries sustained in combat. Senator MURRAY's bill would give the Veterans' Administration the resources it needs to attend to our veterans' reproductive health. The legislation would also help facilitate adoptive services for wounded veterans who want a family of their own.

Senator MURRAY's bill was to be marked up. That means it would be finalized in committee before it was reported from that committee to the floor. That is one of the opportunities we have to get legislation on the floor. But in a cynical, duplicitous move, a handful of Republicans on that committee were determined to manipulate the legislation. Instead of working with Senator MURRAY and others on the committee to pass a good bill as is, the junior Senator from North Carolina and other Republicans tried to attach so-called poison pill amendments to the bill. Senator MURRAY, to her credit, saw immediately what this charade was all about as a political stunt and requested that the chairman pull her bill from consideration, which did happen. The Senator from Washington didn't want a good, bipartisan bill hijacked by a few Republicans looking to get their names on FOX television.

This episode says a lot about today's Republican Party. This is an attack on families, it is an attack on the health of women, and it is an attack on our veterans.

Every servicemember who puts on the uniform of the United States armed services deserves everything we can give them because they take an oath to defend our Nation. It is not a pledge taken lightly by these men and women who serve. They understand what is being asked of them. They know that at any given time they may have to sacrifice everything for this country.

We here in the Senate take a similar oath when we are sworn in to office, but we also make an unspoken, yet

equally solemn, vow—to do everything in our power to support these veterans. We aren't called upon to make the ultimate sacrifices they are, but we have to recognize that they need our help. That means we do anything we can to give them the care they deserve. That means we always put their well-being above partisan politics.

The Republicans in this ploy yesterday put FOX News ahead of the welfare of the veterans community. This is, in fact, a reality. It is too bad for the veterans community.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROUNDS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015— MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 22, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 19, H.R. 22, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first let me say it is important that we fund the highway trust fund and that we have a long-term commitment to the infrastructure of our country—the jobs, the economy, the neighborhoods.

I see the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma coming to the floor. He leads the committee that oversees transportation. He and my friend from California have put forward a 6-year authorization on policy that I think we should commend them for. I am proud to be a part of the group. Certainly Democrats have been united in saying we need a sense of urgency, we need to get beyond month-to-month highway trust fund renewals, and we need to make a commitment to a long-term approach, just as every other country has done in a global economy, so that we can continue to compete and win as it relates to our roads, bridges, ports, rails, and all of the other parts of our infrastructure.

What concerns me about the bill in front of us, though, is that, while we are on the one hand wanting to make sure we have good infrastructure for our communities, including safe roads, safe bridges, and other investments, one of the ways it is funded in this bill—and I believe strongly that we need to fix this before it moves forward, and I will do whatever I can to make sure we do, along with colleagues on both sides of the aisle who care about this—is a small provision that actually takes money away from communities and neighborhoods working very hard to come back from blight.

We have communities all across Michigan—this is called the Hardest Hit Fund. There are communities all across Michigan. I don't have the full list in front of me right now, but I will do this off the top of my head. We have Detroit, Pontiac, Flint, Saginaw, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. Here is the list: Highland Park, Jackson, Inkster, Ecorse, Muskegon Heights, River Rouge, Port Huron, Hamtramck, Ironwood, and Adrian. These are all communities that are working very hard, through public sector and private sector efforts, to rebuild neighborhoods, to take down drug houses on a block where children are walking by on the way to school, and to rebuild with a new park or new housing.

This is a program that has worked. In one of America's great cities that have gone through a lot of challenges called the city of Detroit, there is a huge effort going on right now, including public sector and private sector foundations. We have CEOs running towards the city of Detroit. It is really an amazing thing to see, what the private sector is doing. They are engaged in an effort to save and rebuild neighborhoods that can be saved by going into neighborhoods where the majority of houses are where senior citizens have lived for generations. Young couples have bought a house, but maybe there are two or three houses on a block that are empty and that are places where crime is occurring, such as drug houses. We take those down. What is happening in the city of Detroit is that home values are going up and things are beginning to turn around because of this strategy.

Unfortunately, in this bill, monies that have been allocated to cities across the country in States across the country—I believe we have a list of States. States across the country have been allocated funds to fix issues, to fix houses, to rebuild neighborhoods. In this bill, money we are counting on, money that has been allocated for this purpose will be taken back. Can my colleagues imagine that?

Here is the way this works. We have construction going on. Let's say they are removing asbestos from a home or taking houses down. The contractor does the work, and the city pays the contractor and then turns the bill in to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. They are counting on the fact that