



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2015

No. 120

Senate

The Senate met at 11 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.

Most gracious God, we rejoice in the visible manifestation of Your love. You save us from ourselves, opening to us paths of deliverance from narcissistic detours. When we go astray, You see and save us. You came to our world to free us from sin's shackles, providing us with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Great and marvelous is Your love.

Lord, permit our Senators this day to reflect Your love. Use them to bring Your light and truth to our Nation and world. May they do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. Inspire them to dwell so fully in the mystery of Your heavenly love that they will love others as You have first loved them.

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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The majority leader is recognized.

ORDER FOR RECESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess from 12:30 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. today to allow for the weekly con-

ference meetings; further, that the time during the recess count postclosure on the McConnell amendment No. 2266, as modified.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE HIGHWAY BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, the Senate continues to move closer and closer to passage of a bipartisan, multiyear highway bill. The legislation we advanced again last night is fiscally responsible. It will not raise taxes by a penny. It will give State and local governments the kind of stability they need to plan longer term projects for America's roads and bridges.

The bill couldn't have advanced as far as it has already without a lot of very hard work from a lot of dedicated Members. I want to thank each of them. Doing the right thing for the American people has meant taking some bruises. But the American people sent us here to do some challenging things. They deserve our best efforts on their behalf. I am proud to see the Senate continue along this difficult but promising road.

Success was never assured at the beginning of this process. It wasn't assured even yesterday, and we are not done yet. The important thing is that the Senate is now on the verge of passing a multiyear highway bill. The Senate is now positioned to pass another important piece of legislation for the American people. With cooperation, the Senate may still be able to consider more germane ideas to improve the bill even further. But the bottom line is this: If Republicans and Democrats resolve to keep working hard for the American people, we will get this done.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BLACK WOMEN'S EQUAL PAY DAY

Mr. REID. Madam President, in the western part of the United States, it is now 8:05 in the morning. I am sure as one of these young girls is rushing to go out to school—let's assume she is an African-American girl—she is telling her mother, her dad or her teacher what she wants to be when she grows up. Maybe she wants to be a veterinarian, a teacher, a nurse, maybe even President of the United States or maybe run some company.

The little girl is going to be shocked if her parents said: You can do it—any of those jobs—but remember that you will have to work twice as hard—at least twice as hard—to earn the same amount of money that your male colleagues do or your brother does or Billy, the neighbor, does. How would that little girl respond? She would probably exclaim: That is not fair. She would be right. It isn't fair. It is an injustice.

Earlier this spring—April 14 to be exact—we recognized Equal Pay Day, marking how far into this year the average woman has to work to earn what a man, for the exact same job, earned last year. This pay disparity between men and women doing the same work is known as the wage gap. On average, an American woman makes 77 cents for every dollar that their male colleague makes for doing the exact same work. As bad as that is, the wage gap is even much worse if you are a woman of color.

Today is Black Women's Equal Pay Day, a day that symbolizes how far into 2015 African-American women must work to earn what their male counterparts earned in 2014. What this means is she worked all of last year and now up until this day to basically

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



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earn the same that her male counterpart did.

Let's think about that for just a second. A woman must work a full year plus an additional 6 months and 28 days just to make what her male coworkers made in 1 year. That is 208 days more than a man must work for the exact same salary.

The average African-American woman working full time year-round will make 64 cents for every dollar that her White male counterpart makes. It is unconscionable that in the 21st century we have not resolved this income disparity.

For millions of African-American women struggling to make ends meet to put food on the table, the wage gap puts the American dream out of reach. To give these women a fair shot—an equal shot—at prosperity, Congress must take action.

We have to ensure that all women, African American and otherwise, are empowered to ensure that they are receiving equal pay for equal work. But that is not all. We should raise the minimum wage.

I could do a quiz in this room, and I think everyone would miss it by quite a long mark, of how many Black women are earning minimum wage, what percentage of Black women are earning minimum wage in this country. Of 100 percent of people earning the minimum wage, what percentage is Black women? Almost 25 percent. Black women are almost 25 percent of everyone drawing the minimum wage. To be exact, it is a little over 23 percent.

An increase in the Federal minimum wage would mean more money for their families. It would be maybe to buy groceries or for an extra pair of shoes for their children—or a pair of shoes for their children—or maybe to help with their education in some way, and importantly, for more time to spend at home.

No woman should make less money than a man doing the same exact work. African-American women deserve better. So do my daughters and my granddaughters. That is why I remain committed to ensuring that American women receive equal pay for equal work.

I encourage all Republicans, especially the leader, to take up Senator MURRAY's Paycheck Fairness Act, which would help close the wage disparity for African-American women.

That may be a tall order to expect from today's Senate Republicans. After all, five times in 5 years, Republicans have blocked equal pay for women. How? By filibustering. Five times in 5 years Republicans have told their very own sisters, daughters, and wives that they are not interested in fixing this income disparity. It is unfair. I can't understand it.

Who here can explain the concept of pay inequality to their daughter or granddaughter without shuddering? How do you tell a little girl—a little

girl with big dreams—that in America today her life's work will not be compensated like a man's. It is not right. It is not fair.

Today, as we recognize Black Women's Equal Pay Day, I hope my Republican colleagues will finally understand that it is unfair to continue the way we are, and we should finally come to our senses. I hope that the Republican leader will make the necessary moves to allow us to address this injustice that hurts millions of American families. Twenty-three percent of people drawing the minimum wage are African-American women. All women deserve equal pay for equal work.

Would the Chair be good enough to tell the Senate what the business of the day is.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

HIRE MORE HEROES ACT OF 2015

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 22, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 22) 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.

Pending:

McConnell modified amendment No. 2266, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell amendment No. 2421 (to amend amendment No. 2266), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell (for Inhofe) amendment No. 2533 (to amendment No. 2421), relating to Federal-aid highways and highway safety construction programs.

McConnell amendment No. 2417 (to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 2266), to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 2418 (to amend amendment No. 2417), of a perfecting nature.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

MR. DURBIN. Madam President, the business before the Senate is the construction of highways and bridges and the operation of mass transit and buses across America. How important is that to our economy? I know in my home State it is critically important, but I think it is important across the Nation.

Our infrastructure, our roads, and bridges are critical for business to operate profitably and for people to have good-paying jobs. We all know the tragedies that occur when bridges collapse or are closed, and we know that thousands across this country need repair.

When it comes to mass transit, come on down to the Loop in Chicago in the morning and stand with me and watch the folks streaming out of the train

stations and off the CTA and off the buses, headed to work every day. It is essential to the economy of Chicago and Illinois, the State I represent.

The fact is that on Friday the authorization to build these highways and bridges and maintain mass transit and buses expires. It is the 33rd short-term extension of the highway trust fund—the 33rd. There was a time when we would pass with regularity and predictability a 5- or 6-year highway bill on a bipartisan basis, and we are anxious to do it.

There was a time when Members of the House and Senate knew the needs back home and knew that the Federal Government played a critical role in filling those needs, and so they voted for the highway trust fund reauthorization.

In my State of Illinois, 80 percent of the highway construction is paid for by the Federal Government. When the Federal Government stops paying, folks stop working. You have seen it; haven't you—the potholes, the highways that aren't finished? You wonder why in the heck did they put all those blockades up and slow down the traffic and nobody is working.

The problem has to do with the way we are currently funding our highway program. We are doing it in bits and pieces. My colleague and friend from California, Senator BOXER, draws a pretty interesting analogy. She said that if you were setting out to buy a home and went to the bank, and the bank said that, of course, we will offer you a mortgage, and here is a 60-day mortgage to buy your home, you would say: Wait a minute; I am not going to make an investment such as buying a home if I can only get a loan for 60 days. That is what has happened to the highway trust fund. The expiration of this temporary authorization on Friday is the end of a 60-day mortgage which we have offered to America to build highways.

Well, several Members of the Senate decided to do something unique—not totally unique but unusual, let's say—to try to find a bipartisan compromise that can move this country forward, try to break through some of the rhetoric and debate on the highway trust fund and find something that works.

I wish to especially salute Senator BARBARA BOXER of California for leading this effort on the Democratic side and joining with Senator MITCH McCONNELL, the Republican majority leader, and Senator INHOFE from Oklahoma, who is the chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

This is indeed an odd couple, BARBARA BOXER and MITCH McCONNELL, but they have come up with a plan—a compromise—to solve a problem.

When I go home to Illinois, what I hear over and over from the people I represent is, Senator, when are you folks in Washington going to stop squabbling? When are you going to stop fighting? Can you basically sit down and reach an agreement to solve a