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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.

Eternal God, You are our rock and salvation. You are our high tower, and we shall not be moved. Forgive us when we forget to trust You to order our steps and direct our path.

Lord, thank You for our lawmakers, who seek to fulfill Your purposes in their labors. Give them the wisdom and courage they need to glorify Your Name as they strive always to live worthy of the mercies You daily bestow. May their work be a delight as they make You the only constituent they always seek to please.

Help us all to remember that You know what is best for us; so please have Your way.

We pray in Your strong 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I have been pleased to see the progress we have made on the FAA Reauthorization Act, and I appreciate the Senators who have worked to process amendments such as those that bolster airport security. Last evening we processed another set of amendments to help make this good bill an even better one.

One such amendment, offered by Senator FLAKE, would help improve communication between the FAA and local airports in order to provide a greater say for local stakeholders in the management of the airspace near their own airports. This will benefit communities and airports across the country, including at Kentucky's own Louisville airport. I appreciate Senator FLAKE's leadership on this issue and was pleased to see this provision included in the overall bill.

I encourage Members who have ideas they think can strengthen the bill to continue working with the bill managers to move this legislation forward. Let's continue working today to take the next steps in seeing this consumer-friendly FAA reauthorization and airport security bill through to passage.

This bill contains a number of important measures to increase security in our airports and the skies. It also takes more steps to look out for airline passengers. Here is how: It will improve information about seat availability and create a standard for information on fee disclosures. It will require airlines to offer refunds to customers whose bags are lost or who have paid for services they didn't receive. It will also maintain rural access and help improve travel for passengers with disabilities.

There are some who think we should go further and reregulate the airline industry, but we know deregulation has helped make air travel more accessible and more affordable for families and business travelers to get from point A to point B. I know there are

some who think Washington bureaucrats should define what constitutes a reasonable fee, but we want consumers to make that choice for themselves. That is why this bipartisan bill includes the important consumer protection provisions I mentioned earlier. We know this bipartisan legislation is a result of months of dedicated work by Chairman THUNE and his counterpart Senator NELSON. It sets new requirements for making sure customers understand what fees they could face for certain ancillary services, and then, importantly, it holds airlines accountable for delivering to consumers.

This is commonsense legislation. It is the product of Senators working across the aisle on behalf of the American people. Let's continue working together to move forward.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last Thursday the senior Senator from Iowa came to the floor to declare that he is feeling no pressure in blocking President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland. However, Senator GRASSLEY's actions paint a far different picture.

On Monday the chairman of the Judiciary Committee took to the Des

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



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Moines Register, the very newspaper that has pointedly and repeatedly criticized his unprecedented obstruction, but the case Senator GRASSLEY made in his op-ed only left Iowans scratching their heads. In effect, the senior Senator from Iowa said it is no big deal that we only have eight Justices on the Supreme Court. It is no big deal that our Nation's highest Court is deadlocking on important cases. With all due respect, that is the type of argument one makes knowing that logic and reason is not on your side, when you know the Constitution is not on your side.

The senior Senator from Iowa seemed to understand the Senate's responsibility to act when a Republican was in the White House. In 2006 he came to the floor and said:

A Supreme Court nomination is not a forum to fight any election. It is the time to perform one of our most important constitutional duties and decide whether a nominee is qualified to serve on the Nation's highest court.

Now he has reversed himself—and that is an understatement. From the time he allowed the Republican leader to seize control of the Judiciary Committee and dictate his actions as committee chair, Senator GRASSLEY has done everything to deflect responsibility on himself personally.

He forced his committee members to sign loyalty oaths. He tried to force the committee to do its work away from the public eye. When Democrats objected, he canceled the meeting altogether. He tried to shut down debate from the Presiding Officer's chair in the Senate, which is unprecedented. He blamed conservative Chief Justice John Roberts for politicizing the Supreme Court. These are just a few of the things.

This morning Senator GRASSLEY finally met with Judge Garland. He met in private, far away from the public eye. These are not the actions of a Senator and chairman who is confident in his decision to block the Supreme Court nominee. This is the behavior of a Senator who knows he is on the wrong side of the Constitution and wrong side of history. Wouldn't it be easier for the senior Senator from Iowa just to do his job?

NATIONAL EQUAL PAY DAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we are 102 days into 2016, but because of wage discrimination, working American women are still stuck in 2015. Today is National Equal Pay Day, a date that symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what their male counterparts earned last year for doing the very same work. That is because, on average, women make only 79 cents for every \$1 their male colleagues make doing the very same job. That means our wives, daughters, and granddaughters have to work an additional 3 months and 11 days to make the same salary their male counterparts make in a single year.

This pay disparity between men and women for doing the same work is known as the wage gap and it is to our national shame. No woman should make less money than a man for doing the exact same work.

Democrats have tried repeatedly to pass Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI's Paycheck Fairness Act, which would provide women with the tools they need to close this wage gap. The Republicans have made it clear they have no intention of fighting wage discrimination. They have stonewalled Senator MIKULSKI's legislation five times in recent years—five filibusters—and when Republicans finally got around to offering legislation they claim will address this important economic issue, it is anemic and devoid of actual reform.

The bills offered by the junior Senators from New Hampshire and Nebraska are a case in point because the legislation does nothing to close loopholes employers use to justify paying discriminatory wages, it does nothing to help victims of wage discrimination recoup lost income, and it does nothing to incentivize employers to follow the law. This legislation is only designed to look good, to say they are trying to do something about this, when in fact it does nothing. Just about the only thing the Ayotte and Fischer bills actually do is make it harder for women to discuss wage discrimination at work. Their respective bills so narrowly define what a woman can and cannot say about wage discrimination that it completely ignores the reality of the situation.

Factually, many women learn of wage disparities through casual conversation at work. In the famous Lilly Ledbetter case, that is how she learned about it. They shouldn't be punished for realizing they are being discriminated against by their own employer. In short, the Ayotte and Fischer bills will not close the wage gap. Where the Republican legislation fails, the Mikulski Paycheck Fairness Act succeeds.

The Paycheck Fairness Act would help close the wage disparity by empowering women to negotiate for equal pay. This bill would give workers stronger tools to combat wage discrimination and bar retaliation against employees for discussing salary information. This legislation would help secure adequate compensation for victims of gender-based pay discrimination. These are commonsense proposals that are supported by the American people—not just women.

Later today President Obama will announce the designation of the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument, which is located a few hundred yards from where I stand. Formally known as the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum, this national monument will honor the work of the National Women's Party founder Alice Paul, who rewrote the Equal Rights Amendment. I think it is important that is done. President Obama says this designation is a reminder of the

many women who have fought for equality.

As we recognize Equal Pay Day, I hope my Republican colleagues will come to their senses and address this injustice that hurts millions of American families. Working women deserve more than just a half measure from Republicans. They deserve our best efforts to right this egregious wrong, because American women deserve equal pay.

I apologize to my distinguished friend from Vermont for having him wait while Senator MCCONNELL and I were having conversations on the floor.

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, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the Democrats controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

NATIONAL EQUAL PAY DAY

Mr. LEAHY. The distinguished Senator from Nevada owes me no apologies. I am delighted to hear what he had to say and I agree with him.

Mr. President, today we Vermonters and our neighbors, Americans across the country, are going to recognize Equal Pay Day, a day that shines a spotlight on the glaring pay disparity between men and women. The United States is often looked to as a leader in the global landscape, setting the gold standard for others to follow. Unfortunately, our country fails to lead when it comes to pay parity. American women continue to be treated unequally and unfairly in the workplace.

On average, women are only paid 79 cents to every \$1 paid to men. It is somewhat better in Vermont, but there is still a disparity of 83 cents to a dollar. Over a career, this means a woman is compensated hundreds of thousands of dollars to millions of dollars less than a man with no other explanation for the disparity than their gender. This practice is unacceptable, and it runs contrary to American values.

The fight for equal pay for equal work has spanned generations and continues to impact nearly every corner of our country. From corporate boardrooms to locally owned small businesses, women have long fought for their right to be treated with the same respect and dignity as their male counterparts.

When I think of this fight, I think of Lilly Ledbetter, a person whom I greatly admire and consider a friend. She