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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon 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.

Infinite Spirit, maker of Heaven and Earth, we experience peace because of the knowledge that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. May we continue to find rest and peace in You as You continue to be our help in ages past and our hope for years to come. Loose us from the changes that create cynicism, pessimism, and despair. Remind us of the foolishness of seeking security apart from You.

Lord, bless the Members of this body. Help them in the making of laws to execute justice for the oppressed and to set the captives free.

We pray in Your merciful 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., of Florida, to be Secretary of Commerce.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

(The remarks of Mr. HATCH pertaining to the introduction of S.J. Res. 24 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

ORDER FOR RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 2:55 p.m., the Senate stand in recess subject to the call of the chair to prepare for Washington's Farewell Address.

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

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

PRESIDENT'S JOINT SESSION ADDRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I welcome the majority leader and everyone back after the first district work period of the year. Tomorrow night, the President will give his first address to a joint session of Congress. I will have more to say later this afternoon at the National Press Club about the first

month of the Trump administration and what we can expect from the speech. For now, I will just say that if past is prologue, the President will come to Congress with a populist message in an attempt to cloak what has been a hard-right, anti-working person administration.

His words are populist. He talks as though he favors the working men and women of America, but his actions are straight out of the hard-right playbook, which makes it easier for the special interests and puts greater burdens on the backs of the working class and the middle class.

Every American should be looking at what this President is doing, not saying, because, thus far, the two have been vastly different.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Now for the ACA, Mr. President. This past week, Republicans across the country in both Chambers were greeted in townhalls by angry constituents who waited in long lines and packed high school gyms, auditoriums, and community centers wall to wall to question their Republican representatives about their plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Americans are speaking loudly and clearly that their jobs, their hospitals—particularly rural hospitals—and their health care is on the line and want to know how Republicans plan to replace the law. On Friday, we saw the outline of the Republican plan. Like every single draft plan that Republicans have come up with, the outline we saw on Friday would raise costs and provide fewer benefits to average Americans and put the insurance companies back in the driver's seat. Average Americans under this Republican plan will get less, and they will pay more.

Today, President Trump is meeting with the insurance companies about this plan. What happened to the President we saw on the campaign trail railing against the special interests? It

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



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turns out that the special interests are getting their way at the expense of working Americans—less coverage, higher premiums, fewer sick people insured.

My Republican friends listened to the outcry from their constituents: Don't repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with a threadbare health insurance plan that puts insurance companies back in charge. Keep the law and work with Democrats on reasonable fixes.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Finally, Mr. President, I want to comment again on the Cabinet. The three nominees the Senate will consider this week are similar to the rest of the President's Cabinet in the number of conflicts of interest they possess, their lack of confidence and expertise, and their hard-right ideology. The Cabinet confirmation process has been like an assembly line of the least qualified and most conflicted nominees I have seen in my time in the Senate.

Just yesterday, the nominee to be the Secretary of the Navy withdrew his name from consideration because he couldn't disentangle himself from his massive personal business interests. He may have more integrity than some of the others who continued through the process with conflicts of interest hanging over their heads. The Secretary of the Navy nominee is 1 of 14 relatively high-level administration officials who have left, resigned or withdrawn their nomination in just the first month of this Presidency. That list includes the nominee for Secretary of Labor, Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy, and the principal National Security Advisor.

It is clear the Trump administration did not properly vet or carefully select these picks. With that in mind, the Senate should carefully scrutinize the nominees this week on the floor and vote their conscience.

I yield the floor.

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

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, since Inauguration Day, the Senate has been slow making its way through confirming Cabinet Secretaries. Democrats, it seems, have used just about every trick in the book to try to slow down the process. There are Democrats in the Senate who are delaying things even when other Democrats in the Senate support the person who has actually been nominated by the President. (Mr. YOUNG assumed the Chair.)

Remember when President Obama took office, Republicans were far more willing to let the President have the

team he wanted. He had won the election and was entitled to his Cabinet.

We are now 39 days into President Trump's term, and the Senate has confirmed now 17 of his nominees—17 over 39 days. President Obama got 20 of his people confirmed in the first 9 days. It does seem the more the Democrats delay, the more the American people will see the Democrats are just being childish and spiteful.

NOMINATION OF RYAN ZINKE

One of the most recent people whom the Democrats have been delaying is Congressman RYAN ZINKE. He has been nominated to be Secretary of the Department of the Interior. We have all heard about his qualifications for the job. His time serving the people of Montana in the State senate and in the House of Representatives is something that people hold up as to why he is qualified for this job. He is a Navy SEAL. He is an adopted member of the Fort Peck Tribes. He is a westerner. As a westerner, RYAN ZINKE understands the importance of the position he has been now nominated to fill.

Don't take my word for it. Listen to Senator TESTER, Democrat from Montana, who came to the confirmation hearing for Congressman ZINKE and he said so. He said: "I believe it is very important for someone who knows the West to serve as Interior Secretary."

He was full of praise for this nominee. Senator TESTER took the time to come to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and tell all of us on the committee about his support for Congressman ZINKE to be Secretary of the Interior. He actually said: "I am honored to introduce Congressman Zinke to this committee." He went on to say: "I trust that this Navy SEAL will shoot straight as they always do."

The Department of Interior manages an incredible amount of acreage and water resources. It is responsible for protecting thousands of species of animals and plants. The person who heads up this Department has a very big and important job to do. We need someone in this job who can work with the people who are most invested in the good stewardship of our natural resources, and that is the people who actually live on the land. I believe that Congressman ZINKE will do exactly that. He will work with States and with communities to find solutions that work for everyone, because America's natural resources actually belong to all of us.

He understands that Washington does not always get the answers right, and he certainly knows that when Washington comes up with a one-size-fits-all approach, it can do real damage. During Congressman ZINKE's confirmation hearing, I asked him about some of the policies that we have seen over the past few years that have been restricting American energy production. He said he thinks the correct policy on energy development is "all of the above."

Well, I agree. Do Democrats really object to using all of our options for creating the energy that we need to power our economy and our country?

We should be trying to make American energy as clean as we can, as fast as we can, and do it in ways that don't raise costs for American families. I think Congressman ZINKE understands this. I think he will do all that he can to make sure that we achieve what we need, which is the right balance.

Democrats on the committee actually think so as well. His nomination was reported out of the committee on a strong bipartisan vote of 16 to 6. That is a significant bipartisan show of support for the nominee. But the obstructionists on the other side should listen to their colleagues and give up the delaying tactics and senseless obstruction that is ongoing.

NOMINATION OF RICK PERRY

There is one other nomination I would like to mention today, and that is the nomination of Gov. Rick Perry to be Secretary of Energy. Once again, we have a nominee who is totally qualified to lead the Department. Democrats have no real objection to the candidate. They just want to delay. We need to have an Energy Secretary in place as soon as possible. Again, this was the nominee who drew bipartisan praise in his confirmation hearings. For his nomination, again, there was a bipartisan vote in the committee—a strong vote of 16 to 7.

Senator JOE MANCHIN, a member of the Democratic leadership, actually introduced Governor Perry at the hearing. He said that Rick Perry is "uniquely qualified to hold this position." Senator MANCHIN praised the nominee's ability to work across the aisle to get things done. That is important. It is important in a Cabinet Secretary, and it is important for all of us here in the Senate. I appreciate Senator MANCHIN and the other Democrats who reached across the aisle and have supported Rick Perry's nomination. They are willing to put aside the petty calls for gridlock that some of the other Members of their party have been making.

I mention the importance of having a responsible all-of-the-above energy policy. This includes energy sources such as liquefied natural gas. The problem right now is that the Energy Department has a very large backlog of permits to export this gas. These are permits where all of the environmental reviews have already been completed. Still, permits haven't been issued. The Energy Department has just been sitting on the permits. Bipartisan majorities in Congress have said that we need to speed up this permitting process. It is time for us to have a new Energy Secretary in office today to start tackling this backlog. That is something we need this Department to do. There is no need or reason for delay.

Governor Perry knows how to get this Department focused, how to get it moving, and how to make sure it is doing its job. There are reasonable and responsible Democrats here in the Senate who agree that doing the job is more important than just trying to run