



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2017

No. 35

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.

Wonderful God, Your promises are sure. Provide us with the will to be productive citizens of Your Kingdom. Fill our lawmakers with Your Spirit so that their ordered lives will provide evidence of Your power. Lord, give them a sure confidence in Your love and a faith to tackle the challenges of our time. May they grow daily in Your grace and in the knowledge of Your will for their lives. Help them to be humble, gentle, patient, and generous as they seek to do Your will on Earth, even as it is done in Heaven. Provide them with the wisdom to claim their true identity as Your children, who have Your image engraved upon their hearts.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The majority leader is recognized.

OBAMACARE AND THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the past 8 years have not been easy for America's middle class. Americans labored under an economy that failed to

deliver. They have fought against red-tape that threatened their jobs and small businesses. When they looked at Washington, they saw an administration that repeatedly put its leftwing ideology ahead of middle-class interests.

Kentuckians understand this better than most. They watched as the last administration launched a war on vulnerable families in coal country. They watched as the last administration launched a direct attack on the middle class in the form of ObamaCare.

Kentuckians were promised that health insurance premiums would go down, but they soared by as much as 47 percent just this year. Kentuckians were promised that health choices would increase, but they plummeted down to just one exchange provider in nearly half of our counties. Kentuckians were also promised they could keep their health plans, but many continued to find themselves forced into insurance so expensive, insurance that so few of their doctors will accept, it is basically useless.

ObamaCare has pushed Kentucky's insurance market to the brink of collapse, and now Democrats want to throw a victory party. I am not sure how else to interpret their choice to respond to the President's address tonight.

The absolute ObamaCare disaster that Governor Beshear presided over continues to harm Kentucky today, even after he has left office. Kentuckians have since repudiated that legacy in election after election. They replaced him with an anti-ObamaCare Governor and legislature. They voted for a President who listened to them and promised to repeal and replace ObamaCare. They sent Republicans back to the Senate and House who listened to them and promised to repeal and replace this partisan law as well.

Former Kentucky Governor Beshear was correct to note that "the American people by their votes don't agree

with [Democrats]." So maybe he will agree it is time to finally listen to Kentuckians and families around the country and move on from this disastrous law.

What I am talking about here is, he is doing the response tonight. The former Governor of Kentucky is the poster child for ObamaCare and doing the response to the President tonight. We are going to move forward. I hope that is the message Governor Beshear can find within himself to deliver tonight, but I will not hold my breath. I am sure it is a message President Trump will deliver, however.

In November, the American people elected a new President who offered a new direction. He will now have an opportunity to talk about how we can make that change. We already know what needs to be done. We need to leave ObamaCare in the past and replace it with commonsense reform so we can bring relief to the middle class.

We need to make regulations smarter so we can get the economy moving. We need to make taxes simpler so we can create more jobs. I look forward to hearing what the President has to say on all of these matters.

I also hope he will provide more thoughts on how we can help our veterans and strengthen our military. Getting even one of these items achieved would be a win for our country. Getting all of them done would be a significant undertaking.

Congress may hold the key to getting many things done, but the executive branch has important authority as well. The President and his Cabinet Secretaries have already taken critical action to move us forward on many of these issues. It is another reason the rest of his Cabinet needs to be confirmed as soon as possible. The Senate is working hard to get that done.

The Senate is also working hard to confirm another of his nominees, an outstanding jurist named Neil Gorsuch. He is going to make an exceptional Supreme Court Justice. It is a sentiment

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S1457

you hear expressed right across the political spectrum. The President made a brilliant choice with Judge Gorsuch.

We are all looking forward to what the President has to say tonight. It is a big moment for him. More importantly, it is a big moment for our country. Americans are ready to move forward. They are ready to get our economy moving. They are ready to leave the failures of the status quo behind, such as ObamaCare, and move toward a more hopeful future. After 8 long years, believe me, it is something we can all use.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill 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 ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this evening, the President will give his first address to a joint session of the House and Senate. We look forward to hearing from him. Tonight's speech from the President will be far less important than past Presidential addresses for one very simple reason, this President has shown throughout his campaign for the Presidency and now his first month in office that there is a yawning gap between what he says and what his administration actually does for working Americans.

He talks like a populist but governs like a pro-corporate, pro-elite, hard-right ideologue. He promised to be a champion for working people in his inauguration, and then 1 hour later signed an Executive order making it harder for working people to afford a mortgage. He told raucous crowds that he would tear down the power structure in Washington and drain the swamp, but he has spent his first month in office appointing bankers and billionaires and titans of Wall Street to fill his administration. He ran a

campaign against the elites, promising to stand up to Wall Street, but as soon as he was in office, he started to try to roll back Wall Street reform and consumer protections designed to prevent another economic crisis and protect the interests of hard-working Americans.

In his inauguration, he said that Washington and the special interests have enriched themselves while "the people did not share in its wealth." Then, one of the first bills he signed made it easier for large oil, gas, and mining companies to hide payments—potentially bribes—they make to foreign governments.

That is the swamp. He is not cleaning it; he is making it worse. Despite all his talk, he seems to be full steam ahead on a program to help big business, the special interests, and Wall Street. Meanwhile, a massive infrastructure proposal, a centerpiece of his pitch to working America, is nowhere to be found. A program to stop jobs from moving overseas—not just tweeting about a few hundred jobs at Carrier plants staying in the United States—is nowhere to be found.

President Trump ran as a populist and still talks like one, but his first month has been a boon for corporations, the wealthy, and the elite in America and has provided absolutely no relief to folks who are struggling to make ends meet—no relief to the middle class and those struggling to get there. In fact, many of his proposals shift the burden off the backs of the special interests and keep it on the backs of working families. He likely isn't finished yet.

Tonight, the President might discuss his tax plan. He said that every decision on taxes would be made to "benefit American workers and American families." It is another grandiose promise. But every indication we have gotten about the administration's plan is that it would give tax breaks to the wealthy and shift the burden onto the middle class and working class.

So no matter what the President says tonight, we will have to look at the details of his proposal and see who it really helps, and every American should, as well.

Tonight, if past is prologue, the President will use populist rhetoric in his speech, but he won't back it up with real actions. He will use populist rhetoric in his speech to hide what he is actually doing, which is helping the special interests and making it harder to stay in the middle class. He talks like he favors working people, but his actions ultimately desert them.

He will present himself as a President for the forgotten man, but he will forget him the moment it comes to governing. So while I hope the President offers a message of inclusivity and talks about some issues where Democrats and Republicans can perhaps find common ground, his speech tonight will mean nothing the very instant after it is delivered unless he backs up his words with real actions.

His speech tonight will be nothing if his Cabinet of billionaires and bankers, his main advisers who seem to favor the wealthy, and an agenda far away from what America wants, continue to govern from the hard right, which is very far from the American mainstream and even the Republican mainstream. His speech tonight will mean nothing if he continues to do as he has done these first few months since being elected—breaking promises to working people and putting an even greater burden on their backs while making it easier to be wealthy and well-connected in America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

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 bill clerk read the nomination of RYAN ZINKE, of Montana, to be Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the nomination of Congressman RYAN ZINKE to be Secretary of the Interior.

The Secretary of the Interior is one of the most important jobs in the Federal Government and even more so for people in the West. I know the Presiding Officer would agree with that.

The Department of the Interior has an incredibly broad portfolio. It is responsible for managing our Nation's public lands, our national parks, our national wildlife refuges, and overseeing mineral and energy development on our public lands and in our Federal waters offshore, making sure that the taxpayers of the United States get a fair deal for the resources that the public—the public—actually owns. The responsibilities of the Department of the Interior also include ensuring that tribal trust responsibilities are met, as well as attending to our insular affairs. The Secretary of the Interior also manages a large part of water resources in Western States—again, which I know the Presiding Officer knows so well because there are so many issues related to drinking water and hydroelectric facilities that affect millions of our citizens.

So it is a far-reaching and diverse portfolio, and it requires the Secretary