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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.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.

Father in Heaven, Holy is Your Name. You brought light from darkness and order from chaos. You can bring order to our Nation and world. Use our lawmakers to fulfill Your purposes. May they become Your merciful hands to reduce the pain and discord in our world.

Lord, use their daily experiences of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, victory and defeat for Your glory. Protect them with Your shield of love as You fill their hearts with Your peace. May they not let evil talk pass their lips but strive to speak the truth in love. Infuse them with the spirit of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

REPEALING AND REPLACING OBAMACARE AND THE NOMINATION OF SEEMA VERMA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, last year, Bill Clinton called ObamaCare “the craziest thing in the world.” Over

the weekend, former Obama Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said President Clinton had a point.

Of course, ObamaCare is crazy. Premiums are spiking across the country by 25 percent nationwide and as much as 47 percent in Kentucky for individuals. Choices have fallen from coast to coast, with about one-third of the counties nationwide and nearly half in Kentucky having only a single insurer to choose from on the exchanges, and healthcare markets are teetering closer to the edge of collapse. The ObamaCare status quo is simply not an option.

We have an obligation to the American people to repeal and replace ObamaCare. We have a three-pronged process to get there. The first is the legislation. House committees are currently considering the specialized piece of legislation that allows us to repeal ObamaCare and implement some, but not all, of the important replacement reforms we want to make.

Another is an additional replacement reform that goes even further in making healthcare more affordable and accessible. The remaining prong is Executive action. There is much the administration can do to help bring calm out of chaos from Obama’s broken promises. Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price has already taken steps to do just that, and the nominee before us, Seema Verma, who has been nominated to head the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, can take important steps as well.

Ms. Verma is extremely qualified, with a health policy background and a record of success. She is committed to protecting Medicare and modernizing Medicaid so the programs deliver the best results for those who need it. She also understands the challenges that ObamaCare has created for families.

Remember, ObamaCare raided funds from Medicare. Remember, ObamaCare dramatically enlarged Medicaid beyond

its core focus without improving health outcomes in States like mine. Now is the time for creative thinking to increase access and to lower costs. Now is the time for a CMS Administrator with the right experience as we repeal and replace ObamaCare. I know this nominee will strengthen the vital programs she has been tasked to lead because she has a history of doing just that. I look forward to confirming Ms. Verma later today so that she can get to work immediately developing solutions to the crisis of ObamaCare.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the endorsements for Supreme Court nominee Judge Neil Gorsuch keep rolling in from across the political spectrum. As I noted last Thursday, more than 150 former Columbia University classmates joined that extensive list recently. Those classmates represented a variety of backgrounds, home States, faiths, and political views. But they all agreed on one thing—that Judge Gorsuch is extremely well-qualified to be our next Supreme Court Justice.

On Thursday, I also noted that we could expect more supporters with sterling reviews of the judge in the near future. Sure enough, that very evening the American Bar Association awarded Judge Gorsuch the highest possible rating: unanimously “well qualified,” meaning no one on the reviewing panel found him other than “well qualified”—unanimously “well qualified.”

The Democratic leader and the former Democratic chairman of the Judiciary Committee have called the ABA “the gold standard by which judicial candidates are judged.” So on the gold standard, Neil Gorsuch got a unanimous “well qualified.” There is no higher score. And today, it is a group that believes Judge Gorsuch is “well qualified” to be a Supreme Court

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



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Justice based on his integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament. That is high acclaim from an organization that our colleagues on the left have long considered, as I said, the gold standard. It is the type of acclaim we keep hearing from Democrats and Republicans in the legal community.

Judge Gorsuch has an impressive resume and impressive credentials to match. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia in just 3 years and got his law degree from Harvard, and he is an Oxford scholar to boot. The Senate confirmed him to his current position on the circuit court without a single vote in opposition. He is the right jurist for the job.

As we move forward with his nomination later this month, we should give him the fair consideration, debate, and up-or-down vote that he deserves, just like we did with the four Supreme Court nominees of Presidents Clinton and Obama after they were first elected.

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. 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.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 2:09 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 2:24 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. KENNEDY).

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

WISHING THE STENOGRAPHER A SPEEDY RECOVERY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, let me thank the attending physician for quickly coming to the aid of one of our stenographers. They all do an amazing job. They are the unsung heroes, and we wish the stenographer a speedy recovery.

TRUMPCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as the House continues to rush through its plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, I just want to point out once again how different this bill is from what the President has promised. For a while now, I have spoken about

how the President talks like a populist and promises one thing but governs from the hard right, delivering something entirely different.

President Trump talked tough on Wall Street but appointed Wall Street insiders to his administration and started to try to roll back Wall Street reform. He said he would stick up for working people, but just about an hour after his inaugural address where he said that, one of his first actions as President made it harder for average families to afford a mortgage.

The President plans to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, and that is the most recent and most glaring example of this trend where the President speaks one way and does another. There is a stunning gap between how the President talks about healthcare and what his bill TrumpCare would do. The bold promises of better care for everyone at lower costs come from an alternative reality to his legislation, which studies show will cover fewer people at higher costs—higher costs, less care.

Like much of his administration thus far, TrumpCare is another game of say one thing, do another: Say you will protect the working people of America and then go forward in ways that hurt them and hurt them severely.

Let me offer a few examples about TrumpCare and how the words the President has stated are so different from the reality. During the campaign, the President said he was not going to cut Medicaid “like every other Republican.” He tweeted that he was “the first and only potential GOP candidate to state there will be no cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.” These are President Trump’s own tweets.

He said on his tweet that he will be the first and only potential GOP candidate to state there will be no cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid; however, directly contrary to the President’s promise during the campaign, TrumpCare takes an ax to Medicaid, which covers 68 million Americans. Instead of having the Federal Government match a percentage of each State’s Medicaid costs, which can rise and fall according to how much the State actually needs, TrumpCare would give States only a fixed amount of money per enrollee each year. If costs are higher than expected, TrumpCare wouldn’t cover the gap. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, this change would amount to a \$370 billion cut to Medicaid over 10 years. The President said he was the first and only GOP candidate to promise not to cut Medicaid. His bill cuts it by nearly \$400 billion.

Nearly two-thirds of Americans in nursing homes rely on Medicaid. This cut goes right after seniors and could make it more difficult if you are a 45- or 50-year-old with a parent in a nursing home. You would be faced with a horrible choice: Take your parent out of the home and not give them the care

they need or shell out huge amounts—thousands and thousands of dollars out of your own pocket, which you may not have. So much for the President not cutting Medicaid; it is a broken promise to so many poor people, elderly people in nursing homes, and their children.

The President also said we are going to have a much better healthcare plan for much less money, but studies have shown that if you are in the middle class, TrumpCare will cost you about \$1,500 more a year. If you are an older American between 55 and 64, your costs would increase by over \$5,000 a year. The 55- to 64-year-olds may be the most vulnerable. Their healthcare costs tend to be higher than others, and their costs would go up by \$5,000 a year. That is another promise by President Trump broken when it comes to TrumpCare.

The President also said: “We are going to have insurance for everybody.” Those are his words, not mine. “We are going to have insurance for everybody.” Some estimates of TrumpCare suggest that it will kick roughly 15 million Americans off the insurance rolls. The CBO will likely have a more definitive estimate this evening, putting an exclamation point on what we already know: TrumpCare will cost millions of Americans their health insurance—another promise by Donald Trump broken.

The President spoke repeatedly on the campaign trail about expanding treatment for Americans suffering from opioid addiction, but TrumpCare would end the Affordable Care Act’s requirement that addictive services and mental health treatment be covered under Medicaid in the 31 States that chose to expand Medicaid. The President promised more help for those suffering from opioid addiction. The President’s action in TrumpCare cuts it.

Even on drug prices, the President says one thing and does another. Just a few weeks ago, he stood in the well of the House of Representatives and said: “We should work to bring down the artificial high price of drugs and bring them down immediately.” So you would think TrumpCare would have something that does that. Unfortunately, it does not. TrumpCare does absolutely nothing to address the high cost of drugs. In fact, drug prices might start going up faster.

TrumpCare eliminates a current requirement that insurers actually give patients the value of the health insurance they are paying for. This is a blank check to insurers to cover less and charge more out-of-pocket for a whole host of services. Most experts agree that insurers could charge much more for prescription drugs or even ration care. So that is another Trump promise broken. He was going to work on getting costs lowered immediately, but not in his bill he introduced a few weeks later. It might, indeed, raise prices for the cost of drugs for average Americans.