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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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:

Eternal Lord, the fountain of wisdom, thank You for Your mighty love. Give our lawmakers the will and strength they need to meet the challenges of these times. May they bend their ear to Your Spirit's voice and follow Your leading. Lord, activate their conscience as You motivate them to live with honor. Keep them vigilant to look for redemptive possibilities in each of life's seasons, finding wisdom in Your precepts. May they hear the murmur of Your truth so they will not deviate from Your path.

Father of life, fill the precious hours of this day with Your presence.

We pray in Your majestic 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. PAUL). The majority leader is recognized.

NORTH KOREA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, North Korea's determined effort to field a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile threatens the United States and our allies. By all appearances, Kim Jong Un has broken from a predictable cycle of escalation dem-

onstrated by previous leaders by which the regime takes a provocative action, draws the United States into a negotiation, and extracts concessions. Instead, Kim appears willing to risk the disapproval of the U.N. and our regional allies by undertaking a breakneck testing program.

The President has made clear that a North Korea that is armed with a nuclear-armed missile—a capability they have yet to test—is unacceptable to us and threatens our vital national security interest. Thus, in order to allow the Senate to better understand this threat, I asked the administration to brief all Senators on the issue, and the President graciously offered to hold the meeting down at the White House. I encourage all of our colleagues to attend this afternoon's meeting on North Korea down at the White House.

NOMINATION OF ALEXANDER ACOSTA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, I am pleased that the Senate voted yesterday to confirm Rod Rosenstein to serve as Deputy Attorney General, despite the unnecessary delay, and I look forward to advancing another nominee today.

For the past 8 years, burdensome regulations put forth by the Obama administration have held back our economy and taken a toll on too many hard-working Americans. Fortunately, we now have an administration that has already proven its commitment to easing the regulatory burden on our economy and advancing policies that actually promote economic growth and job creation.

The Department of Labor nominee before us today, Alexander Acosta, shares that commitment, and he has just the right experience to address these issues. He was previously confirmed to three positions by voice votes here in the Senate, meaning not a single Senator of either party recorded a

vote in opposition, so it is no surprise that he has earned a host of bipartisan support for his current nomination as well. We should confirm him without delay. The sooner we do, the sooner he can advance labor policies that put American workers, businesses, and our economy first.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on one other important matter currently being discussed here in the Senate, conversations are ongoing about the way forward on a government spending bill. Our friends on the other side of the aisle sent me a letter that asked for this bill to reject poison pill riders. I would suggest that if they take their own advice, we can finish this negotiation and produce a good agreement that both sides can support.

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

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE CONGRESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, with the media and others looking at the first 100 days or so of this new administration, and looking at this new Congress and the Republican majority, I think it bears reflecting on the last couple of months in the Congress under the new Trump administration and looking at some of the accomplishments that have been made on behalf of the American economy and the American people.

We are committed to helping job creators do what they do best; that is, innovate, create more jobs, and employ

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



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more people, and not force those same job creators to waste time dealing with onerous rules and regulations that bear no relationship to public safety. With a like-minded President, we have been able to deliver some real relief to the American people.

One of the ways we have been able to do that is through a mechanism known as the Congressional Review Act. The Congressional Review Act was created to give Congress an opportunity to do away with regulations with which it disagrees. It allows Congress to act as a real check.

The problem with regulations is, it is really a substitute for lawmaking. Of course, when Congress acts and passes laws, the President signs them, and then we are held accountable by the voters for the laws we pass. That is not so when it comes to the bureaucracy that writes regulations. Bureaucrats don't stand for election. Bureaucrats are not accountable to the people. So that is why it is really important for us to have a mechanism like the Congressional Review Act to act as a check on runaway regulation.

By using this mechanism, the Congressional Review Act, with an ally in the White House, we have started undoing some of the thousands of burdensome rules and regulations created by the Obama administration—rules and regulations that add up to a hefty pricetag for our country. By one estimate, the costs of these Obama-era regulations add up to more than \$1 trillion. That is a tremendous wet blanket on the American economy. If the job creators have to pay somebody to help them comply with these onerous rules and regulations, they obviously are not paying somebody to grow their business and to be productive. By one estimate, the cost of these Obama regulations adds up to more than \$1 trillion and more than 700 million hours of paperwork, but fortunately we have been able to chip away at them by working with the White House and focusing on bringing regulatory relief to the American people.

Here is the tally so far. So far, we have been able to save the American economy \$636 billion worth of regulatory relief. That adds up to 52 million hours of compliance time. Again, when somebody is busy complying with busy work mandated by a micromanaging Federal bureaucracy, they are not doing productive work.

Now, some of these rules and regulations are things that we may not read or hear about in the headlines or the evening news—things like the stream buffer rule, the Bureau of Land Management planning rule, and the Securities and Exchange Commission resource extraction rule. These are not well-known rules and regulations, but they have a real cost on the American economy. There is a real reason why, after the great recession of 2008, our economy has been bouncing along at about 2 percent real growth. That is not enough growth to keep hiring peo-

ple as they come of age and become eligible to work in the workforce. We need the economy to grow faster, and one of the ways to do that is to relieve businesses and the economy of those overly onerous regulations.

As I was thinking about it, I think what has happened to our economy is, it has died a death of 1,000 cuts. Each of these regulations, while they seem rather innocuous, in and of themselves, or people don't know about them, have actually accumulated to cause real damage to the American economy. So we have been able to help those small businesses that would like to hire more people to do productive work, to grow the economy, and to help pay their employees better wages. We have helped them by repealing these regulations to help our job creators and not hurt them.

This has always been, to me, the mystery of Washington, DC. Back home in Texas, we look at the job creator as a positive influence on our economy, as somebody who is going to be creating a real opportunity for someone to find productive work and to pursue their dreams, but here in Washington so often the opposite seems to be true. It almost seemed like the attitude, particularly of the previous administration, was, What other obstacles can we put in the way of businesses? What other burdens can we impose upon the economy in the name of trying to micromanage the economy from Washington, DC? Well, I think what we have seen—the evidence is pretty clear—is anemic growth, and that is something we need to roll back, along with these rules and regulations.

I am hopeful the President will be signing more of these Congressional Review Act initiatives soon. So far, he has signed 13 of them, and we have more in the queue.

As we look ahead to big-ticket items we all want to make progress on, I am committed to continuing to work with all of our colleagues and the administration in doing all we can to help small businesses, family farmers, and entrepreneurs spend more time doing productive work and less time doing busy work mandated by the bureaucrats here in Washington, DC.

One of those big-ticket items is tax reform. We have seen some big ideas floated out there by the House of Representatives and last night and today by the President and his Cabinet as well. I look forward to reviewing the proposal the President has made.

There is no question there is a lot of room for reforming our Tax Code. Our Tax Code is literally a self-inflicted wound which damages our economy. We have trillions of dollars earned by American-based businesses earned overseas that they will not bring back because they don't want to be taxed twice on that money. We know our Tax Code is way too complicated. It is riddled with loopholes, inconsistencies, and provisions that impede job creation. Pro-growth tax reform should be

our goal. It is something that has united Republicans and Democrats in the past, and there is no reason we shouldn't be united again in accomplishing that tax reform.

So I look forward to hearing more about the President's proposal, and I applaud him for making a bold statement about the direction we ought to pursue. Now is finally the time to address it.

All of these efforts—tax reform, rolling back unnecessary regulations and rules, and providing a better environment for businesses to thrive—are vital to getting our economy back on track and away from years of stagnant growth we saw under President Obama.

I should note it is hard to argue with how business-friendly policies—and the promise of more—affect the economy and create an atmosphere conducive to building businesses and helping families get by.

I think what we have seen is a resurgence of public confidence in the American economy. One index by Gallup suggests that business owners are now more optimistic than they have been since the summer of 2007. That is the kind of confidence and optimism that helps them grow their business and create opportunity for the working man and woman in our country, and it is a testament to the sea change we have seen over the last few months since the new administration came into office and the American people chose to retain Republican majorities in the House and the Senate. More family-run businesses are expecting us to keep putting forward policies that empower job creators, not to get in their way.

I know we have only seen the first few months of the new Congress and we have only seen the first few months of a new Presidential administration, but I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish so far; frankly, without much help from our friends across the aisle who have done everything they can to slow-walk nominations and otherwise impede progress. I hope they realize that is bad politics, and it is not serving the interests of the American people very well. Sooner or later, enough Democrats are going to say: We came here not to just say no to every constructive proposal made but actually participate in the legislative process and work for the benefit of the American people.

I look forward to doing even more to help those who want to bring more jobs and more economic growth to our communities across this great land.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.