



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2017

No. 82

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable LUTHER STRANGE, a Senator from the State of Alabama.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, the Reverend Bruce Scott, pastor of Pentecostals of South Lake, from Merrillville, IN.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Precious Lord, Creator of the heavens and the Earth, and all that dwells therein, we honor You from a grateful heart, knowing all of our blessings that we enjoy every day come from You.

Heavenly Father, as the Senators assemble in this Chamber today, let them come together in unity to build a stronger and better America. Thank You for their dedication and commitment, as they labor together with You for what is right and acceptable in Your sight. This Nation was founded on biblical principles. Lord, I pray that You would grant to them wisdom to make right decisions. The Old Testament prophet declares it is not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, saith the Lord. Bless their families at home with peace and safety.

Lord, bless our military all over this world. Just as You paid the ultimate price for our freedom on Calvary, our brave military men and women are willing to give their all so we may live in freedom today. Strengthen and encourage each family as they wait for the safe return of their loved one. Bless and protect our first responders, police, fire, and EMS personnel.

It is true that God has shed His Grace on us. Lord, surround this Chamber with Your presence.

We pray in Jesus's Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The assistant bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 11, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable LUTHER STRANGE, a Senator from the State of Alabama, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. STRANGE thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT LIGHTHIZER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will take a cloture vote on the U.S. Trade Representative nominee, Robert Lighthizer. We know the task before Mr. Lighthizer is an important one. I appreciate his willingness to take on this challenge, and I look forward to working with the administration on pro-growth trade policies moving forward.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, over the past 8 years, the American people struggled in an economy that too often failed to meet its potential. Many struggled to pay bills. Many struggled to make the mortgage. Too many couldn't find a job at all.

Yet, time after time, when Americans looked to the Obama administration, they got tired leftwing ideology instead of serious solutions. When Americans asked for policies that would allow the economy to grow again, the Obama administration gave them just the opposite: a highly aggressive regulatory rampage that sometimes veered outside congressional authority, that often hurt the economy and job creation even more, that nearly always empowered unaccountable Washington bureaucrats at the expense of the American people.

Of course, not all regulations are bad regulations. Many are necessary and even beneficial, but what the Obama administration seemed to forget in its fit of ideological pique is this key point: Regulations are not issued in a vacuum. They can harm the middle class. They can kill jobs. They can raise prices. They can depress wages. They can reduce opportunity.

No matter how well-intentioned, regulations can have undesirable, often unexpected, impacts—and in this regulatory avalanche of the last 8 years, we saw another example of the consequences of putting leftwing ideology over the lives of real people.

It is one reason why Americans decided to go in a pro-growth direction last November. They elected a new President who, as one of his first acts, ordered the elimination of at least two existing regulations for every new one issued. He called for a regulatory budget to cap regulatory costs. He and his administration took a number of actions that are already helping to turn the regulatory tide back in favor of growth and jobs.

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



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The American people also reelected a Republican Congress that wasted no time in providing regulatory relief to Americans and restoring legislative power where it rightfully belongs, with the people through their elected representatives right here in Congress.

We have a tool that has proved incredibly helpful in this regard. It is called the Congressional Review Act. It is the brainchild of a bipartisan group of legislators, including former Democratic Leader Harry Reid, and what it allows Congress to do is overturn regulations issued over the last 60 days with a simple majority vote.

From its inception in 1996 until this February, it had only been used successfully one time. From February until today, it has been used successfully 13 times—with the 14th soon to be signed into law; namely, to overturn a number of Obama administration regulations rushed through at the last minute.

Getting this done hasn't always been easy, and we have met a lot of obstruction along the way. Although the Democrats once championed the CRA, a tool that is "fair" in the words of former Leader Reid, our current Democratic colleagues seem to take a very different view. They have fought against our efforts to deliver relief to the American people, just as they have blocked and punted and forced unnecessary procedural hurdles on the President's nominees for months, and that, remember, was mostly for the sake of unnecessarily taking up valuable floor time, knowing full well it would not change the end result. Regardless, despite those obstructionist tactics, we have continued our regulatory relief efforts because we knew it could make a positive difference for our country.

This congressional action we have taken already, in coordination with key administration actions, is estimated to result in more than \$67 billion in regulatory cost savings. Let me say that again. The actions we have taken so far, coupled with key administrative actions they have taken on their own, result in more than \$67 billion in regulatory cost-savings and about 56 million hours' worth of paperwork reductions.

The New York Times says the efforts we have undertaken represent "a historic reversal of government rules in record time." A historic reversal of government rules in record time. The Washington Post proclaimed it "the most ambitious regulatory rollback since Reagan." Politico calls it "a once-in-a-generation opportunity," and that is exactly right.

In just a few short months, we have turned a significant corner from how things operated under the Obama administration. Instead of going around Congress to push through regulations, the President is working with us to ease the burden. Instead of adding even more redtape to the Federal Register, we are breaking through it. Instead of promoting policies that hinder growth,

we are pursuing ones that actually encourage it.

The actions we have taken can benefit the American people in a number of meaningful ways: Like hard-working families saving for retirement—we made sure Obama-era regulations wouldn't stand in their way. Like students who want to receive the best education they can—we made sure Obama-era regulations wouldn't hold them back either.

After 8 years of an administration which punished coal miners and their families for simply working hard to make a living, we are finally working hand-in-glove with an administration that wants to help mining families instead. Here is an example of what I mean.

In the Republican administration, President Trump used Executive action to order a review of Obama-era regulations that attempted to close existing coal plants and prevent future ones from ever, ever being built. In the Republican Congress, we used the CRA to overturn an Obama administration rule which would have put as many as one-third of coal mining jobs at risk.

Together, Congress and the Trump administration are taking decisive action to support jobs in domestic energy and coal communities. As we do so, we have seen encouraging news as well. According to one report, Kentucky saw a slight, slight increase in coal production last quarter, and Federal projections predict that national production will continue to increase over the next few years. I was pleased to see that news. It is a trend we would like to see continue. I will keep working with the administration and my colleagues in Congress to continue to protect Kentucky jobs and Kentucky families.

These examples, and others, offer yet another illustration of how we can make meaningful and positive impacts in the lives of the people we represent.

Look, we know there is a lot more to be done. We know the scale of the challenge. The growth of the regulatory state has taken a substantial toll on our economy, one that can't be remedied overnight. A recent Washington Post column cited studies saying that "the costs of complying with federal rules and regulations totaled nearly \$1.9 trillion in 2015, equal to about half the federal budget"—\$1.9 trillion in 2015—and that regulations may have shrunk our annual growth rate by as much as 0.8 percent. These regulations may well have shrunk our growth rate by 0.8 percent. As the column pointed out, "A main rap against the administrative state is that, through its aggressive growth, the executive branch has usurped power from other parts of the government, mainly Congress."

With the action we have taken with the CRA, that is beginning to change. Indeed, one reason the Congressional Review Act is so important is because it helps Congress serve as a check and balance on the executive branch. As three former Senators, including

former Leader Reid, put it, the Congressional Review Act can help "redress the balance [between the executive and legislative branches], reclaiming for Congress some of its policy-making authority."

While we can't simply turn back time or completely erase the negative impact that Obama regulations have had already, the CRA has allowed us to stop a number of them in their tracks while also preventing agencies from creating similarly harmful rules in the future.

A lot of time and a lot of effort has gone into seeing these resolutions across the finish line so I thank each of our colleagues who had a hand in that effort. Specifically, I recognize those who introduced these resolutions or the Senate companion of House CRA resolutions.

I thank: Senator INHOFE; Senator GRASSLEY, chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Senator JOHNSON, chair of Homeland Security; Senator MURKOWSKI, chair of Energy; Senator SASSE; Senator ALEXANDER, chairman of the HELP Committee; Senator CRUZ; Senator SULLIVAN; Senator CASSIDY; Senator FLAKE; Senator ERNST; Senator HATCH, the Finance chairman; and Senator BARRASSO.

I also thank Senator TILLIS, who was an outstanding advocate for using the CRA process, as well as Senator CORNYN who worked tirelessly to bring these resolutions over the finish line.

This historic regulatory rollback would not have been possible without their leadership. Because of their efforts and key actions by the Trump administration, we have begun chipping away at policies that have hurt the middle class and prevented economic growth for far too long. Much work remains to be done, but we are going to keep working together to help our economy fully recover from 8 years of anti-growth regulatory overreach, 8 years of missed opportunities, 8 years of dreams deferred, and 8 years of government that left far too many behind.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the dismissal of Director Comey has raised a bevy of troubling questions over the