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Senate

The Senate met at 3 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.

Our Father in Heaven, we sing of Your steadfast love and proclaim Your faithfulness to all generations.

Today, strengthen our Senators to walk in the light of Your countenance. Abide with them so that Your wisdom will influence each decision they make. Lead them around the pitfalls that bring ruin, as You empower them to glorify You in all they think, say, and do. May the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts be acceptable to You. Lord, purge our lawmakers of self and fill them with Your peace and poise.

We pray in Your wonderful 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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last week, President Trump gave his first major address to the Nation. The week before, President Obama gave his last. These are different men. They come from different parties, but their speeches were more similar than you might think, and there were some com-

mon themes: The world is dangerous, our economy isn't living up to its potential, Americans are divided, worried about their futures and don't feel like Washington is listening.

Here is one quote:

Too many families, in inner cities and in rural counties, have been left behind—the laid-off factory worker; the waitress or health care worker who's just barely getting by and struggling to pay the bills—convinced that the game is fixed against them, that their government only serves the interest of the powerful—that's a recipe for more cynicism and polarization in our politics.

That was former President Obama at the end of his term. It is obvious the situation today for many families simply isn't sustainable. As my friend the Democratic leader said in his speech on inauguration day, "We live in a challenging and tumultuous time." Our economy, he cautioned, leaves "too many behind." Our politics, he warned, is "consumed by rancor," and we face threats "foreign and domestic."

Americans are reeling after 8 years of grand promises and diminished dreams, leftwing experiments and heavy-handed overreach. Small businesses are literally drowning in regulations, bigger employers, as well. College graduates are struggling to make it and too often simply move back in with their parents. The middle class feels under assault, as kitchen tables pile ever higher with health care bills, energy bills, and paychecks that fail to keep pace. Americans feel like they don't have a say in what is happening either.

So let us not underestimate the challenges President Trump is inheriting. They are indeed formidable. There is a lot to fix, but we can move forward if we work together. The first thing we have to do is move beyond this us-and-them mentality that has so often characterized the last 8 years. Our goal should be to give confidence to everyone, regardless of race, religion or income, regardless of where someone lives or whom they voted for. We are

all in this together. We rise and fall as one.

When I applied for the job of majority leader, I vowed to open up the Senate for a reason. I thought it would give more Americans a voice again. I thought it would give both sides skin in the game again. I thought it would bring us closer to durable solutions, and it has—on education, on transportation, on the fight against cancer, on so many other issues we passed meaningful legislation that can positively impact millions. The way we did it was simple—really simple, actually. We set the slogans aside. We listened to each other. We listened in good faith. We kept our focus where it truly belonged, on areas where both sides can agree. Wouldn't you know it, it turns out we actually agreed on a lot. It turns out we all want to give our kids a better future, turns out we all want better roads and infrastructure, turns out we all want a country that is healthy. It seems obvious, but we can forget these things in the midst of a divisive campaign. We can get lost in the politics and lose sight of our common humanity.

The campaign is over. The time for governing is upon us, and we face huge challenges. Many of these issues President Obama sought to solve. Sometimes his policies moved us forward. More often, they moved us backward or created new problems altogether. This is not an attack on the sincerity of his aims. It is a critique of the efficacy of his means.

REPEALING AND REPLACING OBAMACARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, we have seen quite clearly over the last 8 years which policies do not work. We now have the opportunity to try policies that can work. ObamaCare offers a great example. Democrats came into office in 2009 with a promise to unify the country and big majorities that allowed them to ignore half of it. They

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



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made their choice with partisan, highly ideological laws like ObamaCare that divided us further—and often made things worse. We have seen how ObamaCare, in particular, has hurt the middle class. Choices are dwindling, costs are skyrocketing, and too many middle-class families don't know how much more they can sustain.

This is why we promise to repeal and replace ObamaCare, and this is why we will meet our responsibility to do so. ObamaCare came into this world on a party-line vote and a flurry of Executive actions, and it can leave the same way. What repeal presents is a fresh canvas where we can start over with durable, lasting reforms that both parties—if they choose to engage—can take credit for.

I hope our Democratic friends choose to engage. I hope they join in the hard work of improving health care for the American people because, let us remember, this should not be about winning or losing. It isn't about scoring points. It is about replacing a law that doesn't work with reforms that can. It is as simple as that. You can hardly accuse President Trump of being a rigid ideologue. He is interested in health care that actually works. Americans are interested in health care that actually works. All of us are.

So we can work together to finally solve big problems like ObamaCare or we can continue to bludgeon each other election after election. Our Democratic friends can crank the faux outrage machine up to 10, claim Republicans are motivated by some desire to make America sick, and get right back to the Hatfield-and-McCoy routine, but that will not solve the problem or move us forward. The moment calls for something more.

The question now is whether we have the courage to begin binding our national wounds. We can fight about the things that divide us forever or we can take a moment to finally move forward as one country.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. One way to begin moving forward is by proceeding with confirmations without delay, especially when it comes to key national and economic security nominees.

Tonight we will vote on the nomination of MIKE POMPEO to be Director of the CIA. He enjoys overwhelming support to be confirmed, just as we know that many other Cabinet nominees command sufficient support as well. So let us confirm them now and never forget the way Republicans worked with the administration of former President Obama to confirm seven members of his Cabinet the day he took office and nearly his entire Cabinet within 2 weeks.

Both parties appear to agree that our economy, our health care, and our politics need fixing so let us get down to fixing them. Let us join hands and move forward. The American people

are ready for solutions, and after 8 long years, they are ready for Democrats to work with Republicans to deliver them.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I would like to discuss five topics this afternoon: the President's remarks this weekend and the lack of Republican reaction to them, his Executive order on Friday about mortgage rates, the continuing nominations process here, the President's withdrawal from TPP, and the Republican alternative to the Affordable Care Act that was announced this morning.

First, the need for Republicans to speak out when President Trump engages in the kind of rhetoric he engaged in this weekend. The first few days of the new administration are traditionally a time for an incoming President to call for unity and to try and bring the country together. Instead, President Trump kicked off a bizarre first weekend in office that alternated between braggadocio and furor. The President quarreled over the size of inaugural crowds, bragged about his election victory in a speech at CIA headquarters, with a wall commemorating fallen American intelligence officers behind him, and then sent his Press Secretary out to hold an emergency briefing to present "alternative facts," as one of President Trump's advisers described them yesterday, about the size of the crowds again.

Whatever your politics, in order to debate, argue, compromise, and get things done for the American people, we have to be able to agree on a base line of facts. Facts aren't partisan. They don't have alternatives. The alternative to fact is fiction. If this Presidency is going to be based on ignoring the facts on the ground, we are going to have huge problems. It is not that important when you are talking about the number of people who attended an inauguration, but what about the facts if Russia is doing something that is very bad or something terrible is happening to our economy or something else? If the Presidency looks away from the real facts, we have trouble. You cannot govern a country like that.

So if the White House is ignoring the facts on the ground and is willing to make up "alternative facts" about crowd size, what else are they willing to stretch the truth about? National security? What Vladimir Putin is up to? The implications are terrifying.

A White House that presents alternative facts needs to be called out for doing so by both parties. The folks who can really help rein in the President are the members of his own party who have a special responsibility to do so,

but they have been silent, totally silent when President Trump has been saying and doing things they know are wrong. They should be speaking out for the good of the country.

I urge my friends on the other side of the aisle to help us hold the President and his White House accountable for the truth; otherwise this country is going to have a lot of trouble. Whether you are a Democrat, Republican, liberal or conservative, you cannot ignore the facts and govern and move the country forward.

MORTGAGE RATES

Mr. SCHUMER. Second, I want to address again the President's Executive action on Friday that would make it harder for Americans to afford mortgages. President Trump said in his inaugural address that "for too long a small group in our Nation's Capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost." He promised to combat that trend, but only 1 hour later—1 hour after that speech—in one of his first acts as President, President Trump made it harder for average Americans to afford a mortgage by reversing a recent decision by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to reduce annual insurance premiums that many borrowers pay, saving homeowners about \$500 a year. These are young families just starting out. They want part of the American dream—a home. There is no need to raise their mortgage rates, which is what was done 1 hour after those populist words were delivered on the steps of the Capitol. Yes, it only took 1 hour for those populist words delivered on the steps of the Capitol to ring hollow. Actions speak louder than words.

So I will just say this. If Dr. Carson wants to earn my support for his nomination to run HUD, he ought to reverse the President's decision and reinstate the policy that makes mortgages more affordable for working Americans.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Third, on nominations, the evidence continues to mount that our Republican friends are trying to ram through the President's Cabinet nominations without a fair and complete vetting process. Totally different, I would say to my good friend the majority leader, than what happened when President Obama took office. As I said, our constitutional duty to advise and consent does not mean ramming through nominees. Here are three instances, just new ones. They pile up. Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson did not adequately respond to our questions for the record, and a number of Democrats still await more complete responses. Secretary of Education nominee Betsy DeVos refused to return to the HELP Committee now that her ethics paperwork is in, even though her ethics agreement gains her